Edith Franke and Ramona Jelinek-Menke (eds.)

HANDLING RELIGIOUS THINGS

The Material and the Social in Museums

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The Material and the Social in Museums

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had to be found in our research methods. Equally, the pandemic has impacted the possibilities of concrete work in the archives, collections, and museums. I would like to thank the BMBF and the Philipps University Marburg for allowing the project to be extended by a total of eight months, which made it possible to compensate for the greatest difficulties. Although we sorely missed face-to-face interaction with each other, we were able to engage in surprisingly intensive exchanges in other ways. In particular, the team around the coordinator Dr Ramona Jelinek-Menke, supported by our secretary Anna Roark, repeatedly paved the way to bring us into a constructive and fruitful exchange.

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A project and a book dedicated to the topic of religious materials in the museum is also heavily dependent on communicative visual material. We are grateful to various people who have supported us with ideas on this level: In particular Heike Luu, who came up with the idea and first photos of the “Procession of Objects”, as well as the professional photographs taken by Georg Dörr.

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The contributions gathered in this volume, by the researchers associated with REDIM, testify to the intensive, far-reaching, and diverse research work in our group. We hope that this volume will fulfil our wish of offering a stimulating contribution to the debate on religious objects in museums, and to the entanglement of the study of religions, material religion and museums. Finally, I would like to thank all the research fellows of the REDIM project: Pardis Eskandaripour, Kea Johannsen, Ferdinand Liefert, Susanne Rodemeier and Leila Tavangar. We look forward to further exchange, even after the formal end of REDIM in March 2022.

Marburg, November 2021

Prof. Edith Franke (spokesperson)

Entering a Complex

Ramona Jelinek-Menke and Edith Franke

Dynamics of Religious Things in Museums: Introduction to a Research Area and a Cooperative Alliance

Entering a Complex

We are entering an area of public controversy: the field of museums. Our focus is on a topic that is equally the subject of much critical reflection in the academic arena: religious things and how they are handled in museums.

Museums are currently receiving a lot of public attention with regard to the material objects they host, and the historical and contemporary handling of said objects. Museums are both places of memory and education, and places of leisure and tourism. According to TripAdvisor, two of the world's ten most popular sights are museums, one of which is closely intertwined with a religious site and institution: the Vatican Museums, with their papal art collection and the Sistine Chapel (ranked third in 2019).[1] Overlap and fluid attributions of meaning between religious places and tourist sites (in this case, museums) are not uncommon,[2] and become particularly evident in the case of museums run by religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church in the case of the Vatican Museums.

There are global public debates about the origins, paths, and futures of museum things/objects.[3] Since at least 2018, with the report on the restitution of African cultural heritage, which Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy presented to the French president, the legitimacy of objects from colonial contexts in museums and collections in the global north has been widely debated around the globe, both in academia and among the general public.[4] In Germany, this debate has

1 "Die beliebtesten Sehenswürdigkeiten der Welt," Travelbook, last modified December 17, 2019, https://www.travelbook.de/attraktionen/beliebteste-sehenswuerdigkeiten-welt.

2 Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2011), 75–104.

3 For our understanding of the terms *thing* and *object*, see the contribution by Franke and Matter in this volume.

4 Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics* (Paris: Philippe Rey/Seuil, 2018); Louise Tythacott and Kostas Arvanitis, eds., *Museums and Restitution: New Practices, New Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jane Milosch and Nick Pearce, eds., *Collecting and Provenance: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) and Jonathan Paquette, "France and the Restitution of Cultural Goods: The Sarr-Savoy Report and its Reception," *CULTURAL TRENDS* 29, no. 4 (2020), 302–16.

mainly been ignited by the repositioning of the ethnological collections in the newly established Humboldt Forum in Berlin.[5] But of course, such objects are not only located in Berlin, and the problem also affects objects of other geographical provenance.

Furthermore, disciplines within cultural studies, including the study of religions, have taken a *material turn*, and now focus on the material, and thus also on museum things.[6] This has brought the material dimension of religion and religious things, including museum objects, into the focus of research in the study of religions. If a little exaggeration is to be permitted, it was, for a long time, not at all clear whether there was such a thing as religious material:[7] The early, Protestant-influenced field of the study of religions conceived of religion as a solely immaterial, spiritual issue; that is to say it was regarded as a concern of belief explored primarily through the philological analysis of written sources. The ritual handling of things, and material expressions of the transcendence that believers and practitioners experience, were seen as distinct from 'true religion', and thus devalued as *superstition*, *fetishism*, *magic* or the like.[8] Such evaluative distinctions have become widespread in academic disciplines beyond the study of religions, and are now sustainably established in society.[9] Consequently, this view is also reflected in the way things are handled and presented in the museum – as some of the contributions in this volume will show. In turn, this reinforces this distinction in the public perception. To a significant extent, the negotiation of the category of religion as a social category of difference was, and still is, thus

5 Daniel Morat, "Katalysator wider Willen. Das Humboldt Forum in Berlin und die deutsche Kolonialvergangenheit," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 16 (2019), 140–53 and Moritz Holfelder, *Unser Raubgut: Eine Streitschrift zur kolonialen Debatte* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag: Berlin, 2019).

6 Birgit Meyer et al., "The Origin and Mission of *Material Religion*," *Religion* 40, no. 3 (2011), 207, see also Gretchen Buggeln et al., eds., *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Peter J. Bräunlein, *Religion und Museum* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004); Susanne Claußen, *Anschauungssache Religion: Zur musealen Repräsentation religiöser Artefakte* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009); Crispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and Crispin Paine, ed., *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion* (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 2000).

7 At this point, we leave aside the discussion, influenced by a postcolonial approach, about the legitimacy of the assumption of religion as a universal category.

8 Of course, counter-examples can also be found. For example, Émile Durkheim (who, however, was not Protestant) stated that material objects can also be sacred things: Émile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 60.

9 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Interpretation von Zeugnissen materialer Kultur: Ku, ein hawaiianischer Gott in Göttingen," in *Religionen erforschen: Kulturwissenschaftliche Methoden in der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Stefan Kurth and Karsten Lehmann (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), 47–48.

conducted with a view to the handling of things.[10] The material religion approach emphasises that religions are not just beliefs and ideas, highlighting instead the inseparable connection between religion and material things. In the course of the *material turn*, the concept of religion undergoes a double expansion: on the one hand, what was previously not granted this status, due to its material aspects, is now subsumed under the category of religion. On the other hand, it is recognised that what was, and is, considered religion is always intimately interwoven with material things. Even if the meaning of materiality is denied for religious or other reasons,[11] it is nonetheless the case that devotees clothe themselves with specific fabrics, use objects in rituals, or gather in buildings made of various materials; the mere existence of religions leaves material traces, all of which could be musealised and made the subject of analyses. Sometimes material things are even left as the only witnesses to a religion's past existence. This approach, focusing on the materiality of religion, also takes into account the dynamic potential of things that express non-verbal, bodily dimensions of religious experience. Moreover, by making material products co-equal objects of research with canonised texts, the domain of analysis is expanded beyond the religion of institutionally established elites of certain religious traditions (*scriptural religion*), and into *vernacular religion*.[12] Thus, those social groups and religions not based on writings are increasingly perceived and their significance recognised. Directing the gaze of academia towards museum inventories, and their taxonomies and presentation, can raise questions and trigger the critical revision of written documentation. Studying materiality can thus open a pathway for potential critique of established patterns in research, historiography, and society, widening our perspective.

It was against this multifaceted background that the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion (ZIR) and the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) of the Philipps-University Marburg, the Museum of the Frankfurt Cathedral, and the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig formed a research network on the topic of *Dynamics of Religious Things in Museums* (*Dynamiken religiöser Dinge im Museum*, REDIM in short).

10 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Interpretation von Zeugnissen materialer Kultur," 47–48; see also Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: Material Religion – How Things Matter," in *Things. Religion and the Question of Materiality*, ed. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 1–23.

11 Manual A. Vásquez, "The Persistence, Ubiquity, and Dynamicity of Materiality: Studying Religion and Materiality Comparatively," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, ed. Vasudha Narayanan (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 5–6.

12 Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, "Introduction: Vernacular Religion, Generic Expressions and the Dynamics of Belief," in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, ed. Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–20.

Figure 1: Entrance to Dommuseum Frankfurt. Photo: Axel Schneider, © Dommuseum Frankfurt.

This cooperative alliance, under the leadership of the ZIR, is based on the common interest in the relevance of religious materials in museums for social transformation, and in how social processes are reflected by material things. In five individual projects, the international and interdisciplinary team of REDIM has analysed the complex interweaving of the social and the material concerning religious things, in various regions around the globe, for almost four years (2018–2022). In doing so, they focused on the project's own three museums in Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig, and Marburg, as well as on museums in Iran and Japan. In addition, associated and advisory board members from various disciplines, working in museums and research institutions in England, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Switzerland, contributed to the project and its research aims.[13] Thus, the alliance provided a suitable framework for international and interdisciplinary comparisons, both in terms of research(ed) objects and academic exchange.

Figure 2: Grassifest in the courtyard of the GRASSI Museum in 2021. Photo: Tom Dachs, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig.

13 "Personen," REDIM – Dynamiken religiöser Dinge im Museum, accessed October 12, 2021, https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/zir/redim/personen.

Figure 3: Discussing religious materials in the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung), Marburg. Photo: Rolf K. Wegst, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Marburg.

Gallery I: Religious Things and Social Contexts – Discovering an Entanglement in the Museum

In this project, and in the contributions to this anthology, museums, their histories, the presentation of their holdings, and the process of musealisation and de-musealisation (e.g. in the context of restitution), are understood and analysed as a reflection of social processes.

On the one hand, museums and (de-)musealisation reflect the historical and global contexts in which things are woven. Susanne Rodemeier's contribution to this volume, for example, shows that tracing the history of an object in the Museum of Religions in Marburg leads to Indonesia. Such histories contain a reminder of the violence of Christian missionaries from Europe in colonial times. The object at the centre of Peter Bräunlein's article was brought to a collection of University of Göttingen from Hawaii via Great Britain, in the contexts of a global expedition at the time of the European Enlightenment, and the global networking of European aristocratic circles and research institutions. Ferdinand Liefert reconstructs the mutual significance of missionary ambitions of the Japanese Tenrikyō religion in East and Southeast Asia, and material (museum) objects originating from the respective corresponding regions, in the period of Japanese colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Leila Tavangar Ranjbar's analysis of a lighting instrument in the museum of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī in Mashhad, Iran, points to relations between Persia and India in the 18th century. Yuriko Yamanaka explains the staging of Islamic objects from around the globe in the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, in contemporary Japan, a non-Muslim majority country.

On the other hand, musealised religious things allow us an exemplary insight into the interplay between the material and the social, as well as its effects. Mirko Roth characterises a museum-based communication and interaction with objects as one that inevitably leads to a change in the interpretation and function of religious things, creating an "extraordinary sphere of reality". He argues for adopting a non-anthropocentric viewpoint, and consequently for dissolving the dichotomies of subject-object and nature-culture. Peter Bräunlein takes up a similar argument, using the example of the Hawaiian god Ku to point out the agency and liveliness of religious things, which bring their own biography, agency, and sociality into the museum as "living things". Accordingly, Kerstin Johannsen argues in this anthology that objects' meanings are created by their contexts in space, i.e. the location and relocation of an object, and the interrelations between objects and architecture. Furthermore, Johannsen states that as actors move objects, locations and relocations of objects in space hint at the actors' understanding, valuation and thus categorisation of objects.

All in all, the contributions show that, in museums, religious things are not merely preserved and (re-)presented as what they once were or how they are, *per se*. Rather, it becomes clear that the things' statuses – as religious items, art or looted property; as passive objects, or as subjects possessing agency – and meaning are related to diverse contexts: religious beliefs and practices; academic research and theories; or trade, politics, museums and exhibitions. The entanglements of people, things, and social practice create and reflect the agency, dynamic meanings, and interpretations of religious things.[14] Birgit Meyer speaks of museum things as "nodes" ("Knotenpunkte"), through which complex entanglements and the interaction of different actors can become, or be made, clear.[15] In a comparable way, Tavangar's contribution shows that, following Giorgio Riello and the

14 Herbert Kalthoff et al., "Einleitung: Materialität in Kultur und Gesellschaft," in *Materialität: Herausforderungen für die Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften,* ed. Herbert Kalthoff et al. (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016).

15 Birgit Meyer, "Wir und die anderen?" *Rotary Magazin für Deutschland und Österreich*, September 1, 2021, accessed October 13, 2021, https://rotary.de/wissenschaft/wir-und-die-anderen-

'history of an object' approach, research on an object generates information not only about that object itself, but also about its relationship to other objects, and to the people who produced, owned and endowed it. Finally, such research can also cast a light on the institution that houses and exhibits the object.

Figure 4: Do academia's etic reconstructions of artefacts form projections of reality, just like the shadows of real things? Photo: Georg Dörr, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Marburg.

As different as the contexts of religion, research, and the museum may seem, they are intimately entangled: Academic research claims to reconstruct religious contexts (emic perspectives) from an outsider's position, analyse them, and eventually make them comprehensible to others. In doing so, researchers create a network of terms and concepts, in order to systematically capture emic perspectives, their conditions, and their consequences, in a way that is academically accessible. Research thus creates its own interpretations of reality (etic constructions).[16]

In the study of religions, the relationship between emic and etic perspectives is primarily discussed in terms of the distinction between a religious (inside) and

a-18679.html?fbclid=IwARP1ekPNC3LLmYPmdcX5DF3OK9Ret4S0e8MmqT1j-sdEOpA6SYpLB-6xEo.

16 This is how we outlined the issue in the call for presentations for the final REDIM conference "Religious Materials: Emic Perspectives – Etic Constructions – Museum Classifications", held online from 3 to 6 June 2021.

academic (outside) perspective. Researchers seek to detach themselves from a religious or theological perspective, in order to be able to discuss religions in general, from a meta-perspective. In doing so, however, they often overlook the fact that academic meta-language is itself shaped by normative internal perspectives, and is thus inadequate for grasping the diversity of religions, especially given its often Christian-influenced conceptual toolkit. Further, it is often the case that marginalised, non-conformist, or even so-called local religious traditions are excluded by conceptual presuppositions as to what religion is, as is clearly illustrated by the above example of material superstition being held as a counterpoint to immaterial religion.[17]

The question of the extent to which a distinction between religious and secular also implies a normative distinction between modern, European, and/or Christian is also debated in the study of religions. In her article, Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler seeks to answer this question, introducing the issue of differentiation through a museum- and object-related example from Islamic Iran. She illustrates the problematic nature of drawing a sharp distinction between sacred and profane spheres, through a historical example: In a building complex in Ardabil, Iran, which includes the tomb of the Sufi scholar Sheikh Safi ad-Din Ishaq Ardabili (1252–1334), the impressive collection (porcelain and writings) of the court is displayed in the *chini khane*. Beinhauer-Köhler also points out that the social practices of actors in modern, secular museums in Europe can similarly be found in historical collections of the Near and Middle East – both of which likely have ancient roots.

It is a shared concern of research on religions and of museum presentations to achieve a more differentiated perception of religions; one that is also aware of intra-religious diversity. Learning and research about religions not only takes place in the religious field, but also may refer to religious objects in the museum. Indeed, research may be initiated or even challenged by such objects.[18] In turn,

17 Kim Knott, "Insider/Outsider Perspective," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnels (London: Routledge 2009), 259–73; George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, eds., *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspective in the Study of Religion* (Sheffield, Bristol: Equinox, 2019); Morny Joy, "Beyond a God's Eyeview: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Religion," in *Gender, Bodies, Religions,* ed. Silvia Marcos (Mexico: ALER Publications, 2000), 19–42 and Till Mostowlansky and Andrea Rota, "A Matter of Perspective?: Disentangling the Emic–Etic Debate in the Scientific Study of Religion\s," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 28, no. 4–5 (2016), 317–36.

18 Edith Franke and Konstanze Runge, eds., *Von Derwisch-Mütze bis Mekka Cola: Vielfalt islamischer Glaubenspraxis* (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 2013) and Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, *The Friends of God-Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP Pakistan, 2012).

museums and exhibitions of religious things make reference to both religious contexts and academic research, as Edith Franke and Anna Matter show in this volume. For example, in determining whether an object is religious and, if so, to which religious tradition it should be assigned (museum classifications), museum staff rely both on observation of everyday religious life, and on analyses and categorisations from research. When reflecting on this, Franke and Matter assert that musealised objects have the potential to question both academic and social perceptions of religion, as they challenge both underlying knowledge systems about the history of religion, and everyday perceptions of religion.

Gallery II: Materialisation of Social Processes – Analysing Musealisation

In her article, Ekaterina Teryukova argues that the inventories of museums of religions not only serve the study of different religions, but can also be a source for reflecting on the history of *the study of religions* as an academic discipline. Using the example of the State Museum of the History of Religion in St Petersburg in Russia, Teryukova demonstrates that the museum's rich collections of books and written documents (including atheistic and anti-religious ones), ritual objects, clothes, and objects from the visual arts reflect the history of academic approaches to religion(s) in Russia across different eras.

Similarly, Kerstin Johannsen draws attention to the fact that a church – which can become a museum-like setting – does not only teach visitors Christian stories and symbolism. Analysing the material of the interior, namely the location of objects in the different areas of a church complex (in this case a painting in Frankfurt Cathedral, by the Flemish painter Oswald Onghers, of St Bartholomew being skinned alive) we discover people's categorisation of things – e.g. as religious or as art.

Also in this volume, Ferdinand Liefert, Peter Bräunlein, Susanne Rodemeier, Pardis Eskandaripour, and Alisha Meininghaus illustrate how museum inventories can become the subject of research, and probe the insights that this research can bring. Both Liefert and Bräunlein emphasise that the mere presence of an object can evoke surprise, or reveal a contradiction, and thus provide an occasion to analyse the relationship a museum, a research institution, or even a religious community has to the understanding of the religious objects on display. Rodemeier shows how the designations of objects change in the process of musealisation, and what conclusions can be thus drawn about the respective understandings of religion. Eskandaripour and Meininghaus deal with the influence that underlying knowledge systems have on the classification and interpretation of both religious things and religion itself, within the museum. What is considered a relevant, representative object for Islam or Judaism? Eskandaripour deals with the socially and politically influential, as well as widely criticised, label 'Orient', as a generalising category under which things coming from the diverse, Islam-dominated regions of West Asia and North Africa are displayed, though the items may not necessarily be Islamic or even religious. Meininghaus explains the lack of differentiation in the perception of religion using the example of Jewish amulets: in exhibitions and catalogues, they very quickly receive the dazzling label or attribution of 'magic', and are categorised with heterodoxy, although they were also a part of religious practice in Orthodox Jewish cultures as a matter of course. Both Eskandaripour and Meininghaus thus touch on fundamental, self-reflective debates in the discipline of the study of religions, about the concept of religion and categories that stand in a delimiting, complementary, or hierarchical relationship to it.

Things, and the way they are handled – that is, their designation and subsequent categorisation, arrangement, and regional and local localisation – serve here to reconstruct facts that are not otherwise visible or brought to language. They thus present an example of the untapped potential of the focus on museum objects for the study of religions. They allow the reconstruction of emic theories of action of persons, and the effectiveness of social structures. Everyday categorisations, academic insights, political conditions, and even financial possibilities are reflected in the way things are handled and arranged. We therefore understand that neither research nor museums are wholly free of individual and socio-politically motivated premises. Religious materials thus always exist in relation to various actors – to those who use them, who research them, who exhibit and view them – and this relation, in turn, results in its own particular dynamics, depending on the context. Exhibitions, in the words of Franke und Matter "not only bear the signature of the curator, but also express existing orders of knowledge, and follow specific intentions as to what visitors should learn about religion. Museums […] are thus not only places of preservation and display."

Gallery III: Social Transformation by Religious Museum Things – Reflecting Museum Mediation and the Social Environment of Religious Things

With their exhibitions and other offerings – such as guided tours, museum educational offers, lecture series, publications, and their use of social media – museums have an impact on society, offering elements of socially interpretative repertoires.[19] "By exhibiting religious objects," Franke and Matter point out, "[museums] create spaces for experience and learning that invite reinterpretation and individual reconstruction of religion. Museums and collections are not places of mere illustrations or distanced descriptions of religions – they intervene explicitly, and in a positioning manner, in the field of 'religion', although they certainly offer space for an analytically reflective examination of the topic of religion." The sensitivity to, and awareness of, the interpretive, commentary, and (de-)constructive effect of the presentation of religion in museums makes it clear, in our opinion, that these processes also play a role in the study of religions, and in the description and analysis of religions and the history of religions. Despite the efforts to maintain distance and value neutrality in the study of religions, this research must also develop an awareness of the fact that underlying knowledge systems are shaped by presuppositions, specific perspectives, and positionings that need to be reflected on more carefully. Studies of material religion in the museum can provide impulses for a critical revision of systematisations in the study of religions. Using the analytical concept of *framing*, Yuriko Yamanaka's analysis reveals conceptualisations and intentions in presenting Islamic material culture to the public, both within and outside the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. This presentation is achieved through exhibitions in different galleries, worksheets and guidebooks, as well as learning kits that schools can borrow. In her analysis, Yamanaka shows how the deliberate arrangement of diverse things of Islamic religious practice opens up differentiated access to an everyday religious world that is rather unknown to the public. In their article, Ramona Jelinek-Menke and Maike Sieler deal with external science communication via the social media platform Instagram, and thus shed light on another way of conveying knowledge of religion to the public, starting from work with religious things in a museum. In their discussion of the ideals and intentions behind science communication in general, they introduce how REDIM used Instagram in particular, and reflect on the chances, challenges, risks and limits associated with this undertaking, from the perspective of the study of religions.

Since the objectives of museums are not limited to merely collecting, conservation, and research, but also include communicating with society,[20] reflection on the means, content, and manner of artefact-related public relations work is an

19 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Material Turn," in *Dinge des Wissens. Die Sammlungen, Museen und Gärten der Universität Göttingen*, ed. Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012) 30–44 and Anke te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2012), 174–75.

20 "Missions and Objectives," About, ICOM, accessed October 12, 2021, https://icom.museum/en/about-us/missions-and-objectives/.

important part of the research alliance, and can be found in the contributions of Yamanaka, and of Jelinek-Menke and Sieler. This work seems particularly necessary, given that we are dealing with plural societies, and a diverse group of visitors and users of museum offerings. Moreover, as Yamanaka shows, the members of these groups are not only confronted with, and part of, plurality on-site, but are also involved in global processes in their everyday lives, in which further plurality comes into play. Furthermore, the museum objects themselves also refer to their global historical contexts.

As already indicated in the above quotation from Franke and Matter, the influences emanating from religious things in the museum are neither subject exclusively to the deliberate control of curators and other museum staff, nor do they concern only a non-religious public. Religious individuals and groups, too, consume academic research, and relate to museums and exhibited things. For some, museums become places of identity and community building; this can be considered positive or negative, but in any case, requires critical reflection on museological practices. For others, museums, and the objects stored in them, are "monuments to the injustice of the past"[21] – or at least not the legitimate or appropriate place for holding certain (religious) things – because of their (religious) significance for a community, or their ritual function, or because they are the human remains of possible ancestors, or simply because of the circumstances under which they came to the museum. Museums, especially ethnological museums, have been confronted with criticism and demands for restitution for decades, as Bénédicte Savoy shows in her book on African art in European museums, published in 2021. Prior to that, in her inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 2017, she pointed out that there has been criticism of the "translocation of cultural goods based on violence" since the 18th century.[22] As is well known, translocation took place on a massive scale. With reference to several African cultural creators such as Aimé Césaire, Paulin Joachim and Nee Kwate Owoo, Savoy notes that this mass looting, and the resulting absence, of material cultural goods has extensively influenced the societies and communities of their former owners. According to these creators, cultural, artistic, and religious traditions in African countries have faced a significant and deliberate campaign of permanent destruction. In the colonising societies that took possession of the looted things, by contrast, these things became a central source of artistic inspiration. Here, one could call to mind Picasso, one of the most important and best-known artists of European classical

21 Niyi Osundare, "Following in 007's Footsteps," *West Africa,* November 3, 1980, 2178.

22 Bénédicte Savoy, *Die Provenienz der Kultur: Von der Trauer des Verlusts zum universalen Menschheitserbe* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2018), 38–40 (translation RJM).

modernism; Emil Nolde, a painter significant for German Expressionism, whose works were inspired by African and Oceanic masks, or Frida Kahlo, who possessed and was inspired by objects from Mexican indigenous groups, which she incorporated into her globally popular art. Furthermore, by displaying and viewing looted objects in museums and World's Expositions in Europe, the colonising societies took possession of, and elevated themselves above, the colonised and looted societies.[23] Additionally, they used these objects to learn about their societies of origin, in order to proselytise and colonise them more effectively.[24] Thus, Owoo points out, "The material they collected in Africa [was] used as propaganda material against Africans and people of African descent".[25]

Comparing the findings presented by Rodemeier and Liefert, the importance of musealised religious things for proselytising in different regions, and by different religions, becomes obvious. These do not seem to have been independent parallel developments, but rather were due to a global influence of European Christian practices. Liefert highlights that Christian mission strategies and museums served as a model for the missionary activities of the Japanese Tenrikyō in the late 19th century.

To conclude, material things and their handling played a decisive role in the hierarchical global social structure that emerged from colonialism in different regions around the globe –the cultural, economic, and ideological effects of which are still painfully relevant today. As Joram Tarusarira puts it: "[…] while colonialism is over, coloniality is not. Coloniality is, rather, all over."[26] Concerning museums, Savoy's historical study shows how, after the independence of numerous African states, European and, in particular, German museums purposefully and

23 The colonisers, argues Sylvester Johnson, denied their embodiment, while taking great interest in the bodies and things of the colonised. The ideological decoupling of the colonisers from the material, and the linking of the colonised to it, was at the same time bound to the basic assumption of the colonisers: that the colonised were so attached to the material, that they could not develop universal values based on reasoning themselves: Sylvester A. Johnson, "Colonialism, Orientalism, and the Body," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, ed. Vasudha Narayanan (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 509–29.

24 For the role of theories of religion, and the conceptualisation of African religious artefacts as "fetishes", see e.g. Valentin-Y. Mudimbe, "Discourse of Power and Knowledge of Otherness," in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, 2nd ed., ed. Roy R. Grinker, Stephan Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner (Chichister: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 55–60.

25 Nee Kwate Owoo, *You Hide Me* (Ghana, 1971), s/w, 16mm, 40/20 min, Regie: Nee Kwate Owoo, 08:53–09:03, quoted in Bénédicte Savoy, Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst: Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage (München: C.H. Beck, 2021), 23.

26 Joram Tarusarira, "Religion and Coloniality in Diplomacy," *Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion & Diplomacy* (February 10, 2020): 4.

successfully secured both their ownership of the objects in question, and their interpretive authority over them, maintaining colonial structures in postcolonial times. Research into the historical provenance of museum objects, as well as the analysis of the influence of colonial actors and networks, has evidently become essential in interdisciplinary research on religion and museums, as highlighted in several of the projects carried out in our research network.

While today there are still large gaps in the material cultural heritage in communities and museums in the global south, museums in the global north face the challenge of overflowing and – due to a lack of funding, which would require the political will to solve – partly dilapidated storage facilities, with multiple ownership of the objects they contain. The museums of our research alliance, which deal with religious things from different regions of the world, once arose out of an attitude of wanting to own materially what was desired to be understood intellectually.[27] This attitude was partly enforced with violence – or, at least, the violent circumstances of their acquisition was wilfully ignored.[28] As such, it is imperative not to close our minds to these historical questions and sociopolitical debates. Indeed, this fact should become a starting point to deal with them persistently, explicitly, and intensively.

As she explains in her interview with Edith Franke and Ramona Jelinek-Menke in this volume, Léontine Meijer-van Mensch meets the challenges emerging from colonialism and coloniality theoretically-conceptually, linguistically, and practically, in museum work that applies the concepts of *communities of implications*, *shared stewardship* and the *liquid museum*. In addition, however, restitution is also a central instrument for handling the material witnesses to a global social structure shaped by colonialism and coloniality. Consequently, the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, which is a REDIM project partner, has already returned a number of objects. Meijer-van Mensch makes clear that, in her view, restitution requests should always be granted, and that museums evidently do not become empty and meaningless buildings as a result of fulfilling these requests. Firstly,

27 Savoy, *Die Provenienz der Kultur*, 22.

28 This is how the historian Götz Aly, for example, describes the situation in detail, in a popular academic book using the example of the island of Luf in the South Seas and the Ethnological Museum of the State Museums of Berlin, on the basis of a large number of historical documents: Götz Aly, *Das Prachtboot: Wie Deutsche die Kunstschätze der Südsee raubten* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 2021). Many years earlier, the journalist Gert von Paczensky had already stated, in a joint book with the then director of the Bremen Überseemuseum, that colonialism was one of the prerequisites for European museums to be able to fill their inventories in the first place: Gert von Paczensky, "Hochmut," in *Nofretete will nach Hause: Europa – Schatzhaus der "Dritten Welt"*, ed. Gert von Paczensky and Herbert Ganslmayr (München: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1984), 55–56.

Figure 5: Objects and their perception in museums are often shaped by colonial attitudes and structures. Baule figure from the Ivory Coast (Ag 196) under the pith helmet of the founder of the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung), Marburg, Rudolf Otto (Va 002). Photo: Heike Luu, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Marburg.

it is never the case that communities reclaim the totality of all the objects they produced and/or once owned and used. Rather, restitution claims only concern a small part of the overall collection of objects. One reason for this might be that communities have an interest in having their stories told globally – even by things which were stolen from them. One could argue that these stolen things contain the possibility of telling the story of this very looting, which has, through force, become part of the history of the colonised and the looted; indeed, a history which connects the looters and the looted. In addition, these objects can, for families with a migrant background, become a point of access to the culture of their ancestors. Moreover, in a sense, a global culture has emerged, in which materials and patterns of interpretation from around the world interfere with each other, as a result of global entanglements – in which colonialism plays an integral part.[29] Thus, whether we like it or not, no matter how we evaluate it, and no matter if restitutions take place or not, the plundering, the being plundered and the plundered items all form part of our culture(s). Secondly, the collections in museums in the global north are so extensive that, even if a large number of objects were returned, the depots would not be left empty. Thirdly, and this is the crucial point for Meijer-van Mensch, museums should refrain from systematically collecting and owning material objects anyway. She argues that the emphasis should rather be on the relationships of the people and communities that come together in museums as a *third space,* as she puts it, referring to a concept introduced by *Homi Bhabha*. According to her, this is the central role of museums for social transformation processes today

29 Savoy, *Die Provenienz der Kultur*.

– and not the seizure or the defence of the possession of material things and the interpretative authority over them.

In her contribution to this volume, Meijer-van Mensch outlines a conceptualisation of an ethnological museum that refers to a fundamental change that has taken place in recent years, in the understanding of the function of museums. While museums in the global north in the 19th and 20th centuries were seen primarily as archivists and preservers of a so-called cultural heritage (*old museology*), to the destruction of which actors from the global north contributed, in *new museology* they are understood as social, fluid spaces that are open to processes of negotiation and encounter.[30]

Final Remarks at the Beginning – Looking Back and Forward

Religious materials, as well as their collection and exhibition, reflect all these dynamics. Franke and Matter argue that research on collecting, preserving, presenting, and perceiving religious objects and religions in museums should take into account the problems of classification, handling, and the manifold possibilities of interpretation that the musealisation of religious objects entails. Nevertheless, it is important to note that religious materials are not simply points of reflection, and hence passive objects. From a religious perspective, materials can be living and active subjects.[31] The scope and relevance of emic and religious (inner) perspectives, which is linked to the problematisation of the object-subject dichotomy, is increasingly taken into account in academic research, and is partly integrated into its theoretical approaches (see Bräunlein and Roth in this volume).[32] In the museum, the question arises as to how to deal with objects that are, from certain perspectives, alive and effective (see Rodemeier and Meijer-van Mensch in this volume). This is also connected to the question of the changing connotation of a museum as a secular or religious place – for example, with the Museum of Frankfurt Cathedral, where, during a workshop, the project members discussed

30 Fiona Cameron, "The Liquid Museum: New Institutional Ontologies for a Complex, Uncertain World," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, Vol. 1: Museum Theory, ed. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 354–61 and Juan Gonçalves, "The 'Liquid Museum': A Relational Museum that Seeks to Adpat to Today's Society," *The Museum Review* 4, no. 1 (2019).

31 For an example see Jennifer S. Hughes, "*Mysterium Materiae*: Vital Matter and the Object as Evidence in the Study of Religion," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion 41, no. 4. (November 2012), 16–24.*

32 See also Sonia Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society* 4 no. 1 (2013): 58–78.

where the cathedral ends and museum begins – or the transformation of a secular museum when religious rituals are performed (see Meijer-van Mensch and Bräunlein in this volume). At the very least, museums that 'exhibit religion' face the challenge of appropriately presenting this perspective – the living contexts of the objects, and the dynamics associated with them – in an apparently static, and often secularly framed, place. This means that museums must deal with both emic and etic perspectives and demands, as well as with the critique of their classification or even against their existence.

The REDIM research network has explored these questions in various research projects, and in close cooperation between museums and universities. The present volume provides an insight into research that is still in progress, and stands as a substantial interim conclusion, on the way to a better understanding of the dynamics of religious objects in museums. We see it as an excellent opportunity to draw conclusions from the research results, for a more differentiated understanding of religion in an interdisciplinary study of religions.

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Edith Franke and Anna Matter

Negotiating Religion in Museums

1 Introduction: Challenges of Religion in Museums

The research network REDIM examines the interactions and relationships of religious things in collections, exhibitions and museums. Our research focuses on the shifting function and meaning of religious things, through the twin processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation in the museum setting. By using the term religious 'things', we follow a broad understanding of Houtman and Meyer, who see facets of material religion not only in images and objects, but also in bodies, spaces and technologies.[1] This approach is based on an understanding of religion, in which material testimonies are part of communication systems through which religious meanings and communities are constituted, instead of reducing them solely to carriers of information and supplements to written sources.[2]

This understanding has two consequences: Firstly, the scope of the material culture of religion – and thereby academic perspectives thereon – is considerably broadened, to include, for example, soundscapes, electronic recitation devices, or the choreography of rituals. Secondly, the arrangement and orchestration of such a range of objects in museums can enable sensory access to religions. Accordingly, an analysis of the dynamics of religious things in museums is directed not only at a broad spectrum of objects, but also at their relationality, the interaction with them, and the intention and reception of their staging. For things that have been included in the museum, we use the more specific term 'objects' or its synonym 'artefacts'. This is to indicate a new status of things as musealised objects, which are now placed in a different network of social relations.

Alongside exhibiting objects, museums commonly communicate through arrangements and staging, combined with various media such as texts, video recordings, sound installations or performances. The exhibitions not only bear the

1 Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: Material Religion – How Things Matter," in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, ed. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 17.

2 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Material Turn," in *Dinge des Wissens: Die Sammlungen, Museen und Gärten der Universität Göttingen*, ed. Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), 34–38.

signature of the curator, but also express existing orders of knowledge, and follow specific intentions as to what visitors should learn about religion. Museums, to which Kohl ascribes the status of "cult sites of modernity",[3] are thus not only places of preservation and display. They are also, and to a large extent, spaces in which controversial interpretations, varying identifications and discussions about religion rightly occur;[4] spaces which Clifford fittingly described as "contact zones".[5] Therefore, we focus on the social practices associated with objects and the actors in this field: not only those working in the museum, but also collectors and donors of objects and, last but not least, the visitors and the objects themselves. We will explore the challenges that arise from collecting, preserving, presenting and receiving religious objects and religion, considering the following:

Classification: Under which circumstances is an object perceived as religious, and to which religion is it assigned? Who determines, and on what grounds, the criteria for whether an object is understood as religious or non-religious? When deciding on the acquisition, what is perceived or understood to be religious is crucial, as it is the knowledge systems (here the understanding of religion) of curators and museum directors that determine whether an object is even understood as 'religious', and then into which of the systematic categories of the inventory catalogues it is subsequently classified. Is a Javanese shadow puppet a religious object and if so, to which religion does it belong?

Handling: To what extent can the original context of an object be taken into account, and, indeed, to what extent should it? In this regard, do museums have to follow religious rules? The process of musealisation is generally understood as an act of secularisation and decontextualisation.[6] Objects considered holy by believers are removed from their previous religious meaning or ritual use: They are decontextualised, classified according to secular knowledge systems and museum taxonomies, and handled according to conservation requirements. Religious meanings are neglected, whether consciously or unconsciously. What does this entail for the semantic content and the possibilities of perception of an object,

3 Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: Beck, 2003), 253.

4 Anke te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2012), 149–88, 184–97.

5 James Clifford, "Museums, Contact Zones and the Internet," *Archives & Museum Informatics* (1997): 59–66, 192; Joachim Baur, "Was ist ein Museum?," in *Museumsanalyse: Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes*, ed. Joachim Baur (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010), 41.

6 Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums: Vom Sammeln* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2013), 84; te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung,* 106, 119 and Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge,* 231, 253–60.

such as an ancient Egyptian coffin, which was meant for eternal rest after death, and is now exhibited in a museum?

Potential for interpretation: What potential for deconstruction and reconstruction of religion do museum presentations entail? Decontextualising objects by including them in a museum is, at the same time, a process of *re*contextualisation: objects are not only categorised according to museum classifications, and thus to particular religious traditions, they are also placed in a new context of meaning within an exhibition. The context in which an object is presented, and what is communicated as religion, is a highly dynamic matter. What does it imply when a Javanese Wayang figure is displayed within an exhibition on Hindu myths, or on leather craftsmanship, or on the religious diversity of Islam? What are the consequences of exhibiting the cult of a deviant saint in a Department of Christianity?

We understand the process of musealisation – i.e. the collection, classification, categorisation and also the exhibition of religious artefacts, as well as an analysis in the field of the study of religion – as a form of secularisation, since in both cases a distanced, reflective meta-level is taken up.[7] Both aim to show the complexity of religious ideas and practices, and to make knowledge accessible, in order to open spaces for a discursive dialogue on what constitutes religion. But museums go beyond this shared basis; by exhibiting religious objects they also create spaces for experience and learning that invite reinterpretation and individual reconstruction of religion.[8] Museums and collections are not places of mere illustrations or distanced descriptions of religions – they intervene explicitly, and in a positioning manner, in the field of 'religion', although they certainly offer space for an analytically reflective examination of the topic of religion.

We propose that musealised objects have a special potential to challenge the academic and social perception of religion in two ways: 1. The preservation of religious objects in museums reflects systems of knowledge, while also challenging knowledge about the history of religion. 2. The staging of religious objects in an exhibition opens up possibilities of deconstruction and reconstruction of religion, as well as a spectrum for (re)interpretation and negotiation of religious ideas.

We explore this thesis through selected objects and exhibition arrangements in the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) and discuss, from the

7 Te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* and Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge.*

8 Te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* 174, 185 and Juan Gonçalves, "The 'Liquid Museum': A Relational Museum that Seeks to Adapt to Today's Society," *The Museum Review* 4, no. 1 (2019), http://articles.themuseumreview.org/tmr_vol4no1_goncalves.

perspective of the study of religion, various factors and problems arising from the handling of objects classified as religious.

2 The Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) in the Context of Discourses in the Study of Religion and on Museums

The Museum of Religions at Philipps-University Marburg is one of the few museums worldwide that is specifically dedicated to religious objects, while centring its conception on the subject of religion. Even more notably, the museum is rare for its explicit focus on the diversity of religious cultures, and an explicitly comparative perspective on religion. Further examples of museums of this kind include the Museum of the History of Religion in St Petersburg, the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow, the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, and the Museum Religio in Olpe. Similarly, research on religion and religious things in museums is still relatively limited, although in recent years an increasing number of publications have been issued. [9]

The Protestant theologian and phenomenologist of religion Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) founded the Museum of Religions in 1927. The earliest items were sourced through being specifically purchased, made on commission, collected during travels, or donated to the collection. The focus was not so much on the artistic or historical qualities or uniqueness of these objects, but rather Otto aimed to create a collection from which visitors could learn about ‘other religions’.

Otto’s fascination with the manifold manifestations of ‘the holy’, which he observed in these objects and writings, as well as in religious practice, pervaded his academic work, most notably in his book *Das Heilige* (1917).[10] Otto established the concept of the *numinous*, a profound emotional experience, forming the es-

9 Crispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Crispin Paine, ed., *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion* (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 2000); Ekaterina Teryukova, “Collecting and Research in the Museums of the History of Religion,” in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 147–53; Peter J. Bräunlein, *Religion und Museum (*Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004); Susanne Claußen, *Anschauungssache Religion: Zur musealen Repräsentation religiöser Artefakte* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009) and Konstanze Runge, “Studying, Teaching, and Exhibiting Religion: The Marburg Museum of Religions,“ in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 155–62.

10 Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917).

sence of religion, which could be encountered by viewing and interacting with religious items or practices.

During this period, material religion played a rather insignificant role in the theoretical developments in the field of the study of religion. Early scholars of the study of religion adopted philosophical-historical methods which classified religious traditions based on scriptural sources. Non-written religious traditions, folk beliefs or popular religions were deemed inferior, and thus widely excluded from academic definitions and research.[11] According to Bräunlein, the material aspects of religion, in particular, had not only gone unnoticed, but had even been devalued, due to the inherent cultural-historical dichotomy of mind and matter. With the emerging 'cultural turn' in the study of religion, that has taken place since the 1980s, more recent approaches seek to grasp religion in its empirical, lived and practised forms, and in its materiality. Thus, research proceeds from an understanding of religion that has to be discursively clarified.[12] Here, in a 'materialised' approach to religion, categories of body (including sensory perception), things, places and practices are analysed in relation to each other and within religious discourses. Materiality is therefore understood to be intrinsic to the social reality of religion.[13]

These cultural and material turns are also reflected in the development of the Museum of Religions. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, under the direction of Martin Kraatz, a historical-critical, contextualising and empirically based approach to the study of religion was established within the collection. This was followed by Peter Bräunlein, who placed emphasis on museum theory and popular religious culture. Since the start of Edith Franke's directorship over the collection in 2006, the exhibition focus has been on specific aspects of religious life, with emphasis on the socio-historical contextualisation and dynamics of religion, from the perspective of the comparative study of religion. Exhibitions such as "From Dervish Cap to Mecca-Cola: Diversity of Islamic Faith Practice" (2013)[14], and "There is No God! Church and Religion in Soviet posters" (2015) show not only historical objects, but also contemporary everyday things. Their topics and conceptions also

11 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Ausstellungen und Museen," in *Praktische Religionswissenschaft: Eine Einführung*, ed. Michael Klöcker (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), 162.

12 Gavin Flood, "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (March 2006): 47–58, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfj012 and Frank Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 185–89.

13 Sonia Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society. Advances in Research,* no. 4 (2013).

14 Edith Franke and Konstanze Runge, eds., *Von Derwisch-Mütze bis Mekka-Cola: Vielfalt islamischer Glaubenspraxis* (Marburg: Diagonal-Verl., 2013).

reflect current discourses in the study of religion on intra-religious diversity, including processes of individualisation and secularisation of religion. Uniquely for a museum, the collection is also a teaching collection whilst simultaneously being integrated into research.

3 Authenticity, Provocation, Differentiation, and Innovation: Examples of Dynamics of Religious Objects in Museums

In museums, social, academic and museological discourses coincide with the activities and perspectives of various actors. These all influence the way in which objects are handled – not only how objects are placed within the order of the museum, but also how they are displayed and arranged, and how they are ultimately perceived and received. Here, academic approaches encounter a subject that is usually highly emotionally charged, and therefore often left unquestioned or unchallenged in everyday conversations or language. The confrontation with religious objects evokes a wide variety of reactions from visitors, as attested to in our guestbooks. These reactions range from surprise, fascination, outrage and anger, to feelings of awe, or even reflection on their own beliefs.

When a new item enters a museum collection, a decision is made as to whether the object in question is something religious that is 'worthy' of acquisition or preservation. Subsequently, an object number is assigned, and the object is classified within museum taxonomies, and thus within the underlying knowledge orders. This museal organising is a communicative practice, in which collections generate meaning through their systems of classification.[15] This becomes apparent, for example, in the dissolution or differentiation of classifications such as 'superstition/folk belief': Historically, this categorisation was used as a demarcation from 'religion', under a conception defining religion primarily as constituting those of scripture or revelation.[16] We will explore material religion and musealisation through analysis of four particular examples, showing the reflection and revision of orders of knowledge, as well as the reconstruction of religion in museums.

15 Gottfried Korff, "Einleitung: Notizen zur Dingbedeutsamkeit", in *13 Dinge: Form, Funktion, Bedeutung*, ed. Gottfried Korff (Stuttgart: Württembergisches Landesmuseum, 1992), –17 and Bräunlein, "Material Turn," 38.

16 See footnote 13.

3.1 Authenticity: An Imperfect Ancient Egyptian Coffin

In 1927, Rudolf Otto acquired an Egyptian coffin for the newly founded Marburg Museum of Religions. Since then, its colourful illustrations, with depictions of the mummification process, have fascinated many visitors, but have repeatedly raised doubts regarding the object's authenticity. However, it is indeed a rare original. The coffin of Iba, as the buried person is called, originates from el-Hibeh (Middle Egypt) and dates to around the 6th century BC. The illustrations provide information on one of the most significant rituals in Ancient Egypt, on the order of gods involved and on concepts of life after death. No information has been found on the whereabouts of the mummy, whose eternity is supposed to be ritually represented and ensured by the coffin. It was not until 2016 that the object was first subjected to proper study, by Egyptologist Gessler-Löhr, leading to its visual language being deciphered.[17] The portrayal of mummification is highly intriguing, not only for historians and Egyptologists, but also for visitors interested in religious history. The illustrations visible on the coffin have some unusual features. For example, some commonly depicted elements are missing entirely, such as the fourth urn, while missing limbs were added to one figure at a later date. Gessler-Löhr proposes that the craftsmen, due to a lack of experience, made repeated mistakes when transferring the motif from an existing template, being unable to adequately estimate the space available. Indications as to the identity of the deceased allow speculation that Iba descended from a family of priests, whose duties included the execution of such burial rites. This creates another, different perspective in the museum: alongside the mythology and gods of Ancient Egypt, the activities and everyday practices of craftsmen and priests come to the forefront.

This valuable and rare object holds a strong appeal for visitors. Its fascination may lie in the permanence of its materiality, in the radiance and brilliance of the colours, as well as in the age of the object. This imperfect coffin demonstrates, on one hand, that the fragmentation of museum objects creates challenges for research and interpretation and, on the other hand, that their authenticity creates an aura of sacredness.[18] This is supported by the staging within the exhibition. The special UV-free lighting makes the gold particularly shine, and the simple functionality of the modern air-conditioned vitrine reinforces a distanced, almost

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17 Beatrix Gessler-Löhr, "EWIGE UN-RUHE. Der Marburger Mumiensarg als Bildkompendium zu Mumifizierung, Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen im alten Ägypten," in *Objekte erzählen Religionsgeschichte(n)*, ed. Edith Franke (Marburg, 2017), 190–220.

18 Te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung,* 106, 122–24 and Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 9, 233, 256f.

Figure 1: Ancient Egyptian coffin, ca. 550–450 B.C. Photo: Georg Dörr, © Religionskundliche Samm-lung Philipps-Universität Marburg (Bh 001a+b).

reverent way of dealing with, and approaching, an antique and seemingly foreign object.

The newly discovered Egyptian and religious-historical significance of this precious item led to its conservational presentation, thanks to a private sponsor who became fascinated by it. Furthermore, the curators initiated additional research on the colonial interrelationships involved in the acquisition of this object.

3.2 Provocation: A Bearded Woman on a Cross

In its early days, the directors of the collection focused their activities primarily on so-called ‘other’ or ‘foreign’ – meaning non-Christian – religions. Consequently, relatively few Christian objects are present in the collection. In a single room, some lesser known and global aspects of the Christian religion, such as a Japanese fumie[19] or a newly invented Protestant prayer bracelet (“Pearls of Faith”) are presented. Of the 72 Christian objects currently on display, 12 are variants of the motif of Kümmernis – also known as Liberata, Vilgefortis (or Wilgefortis), or St Uncumber, depending on the region.

According to the legends found in texts from the early 16th century, the young woman was a ‘pagan’ princess who had converted to Christianity. When her father tried to force her to marry, she refused and prayed for a way out. God answered her plea, and she grew a beard. Her enraged father ordered her to be crucified.[20] Her legend and veneration spread steadily from Flanders to southern Germany, from the early 15th century on, and, in the 16th century, she was briefly included in the Roman Martyrs’ Register. As a saint who was called upon in times of sorrow and adversity, there were numerous periods of strong devotion to Kümmernis. Numerous pictorial representations, sculptures, votive images and prayer cards attest to her popularity and widespread appeal in various regions of medieval Europe. She was, however, increasingly forgotten in the 19th century.[21]

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19 A fumie (“stepping-on picture”) is a likeness of Jesus, onto which Japanese suspected Christians had to step, in order to prove that they were not members of that – from the 17th till the 19th century – outlawed religion. Kevin J. Wetmore, “Missionaries, Martyrs, and Madmen: The Christian as Outsider on the Modern Japanese Stage,” *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance* 4, no. 2 (2007): 57–70.

20 Martin Kraatz, “Die heilige Kümmernis und ihre Erforschung zwischen Legende und Wirklichkeit,” in *Am Kreuz – eine Frau: Anfänge – Abhängigkeiten – Aktualisierungen*, ed. Sigrid Glockzin-Bever and Martin Kraatz (Münster: LIT, 2003), 10, 12–14.

21 Martin Kraatz, “Die heilige Kümmernis und ihre Erforschung zwischen Legende und Wirklichkeit,” 15, 18.

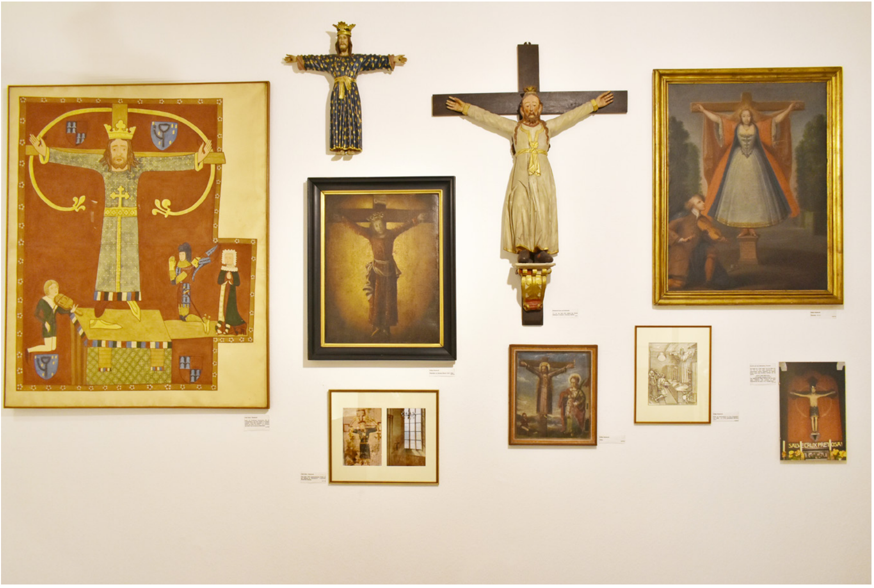

Figure 2: Images of Kümmernis/Wilgefortis. Photo: Anna Matter, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg (B-Ea 76, 78–80, 162, 163, 170–172).

Since 1981, various originals and reproductions of this motif have been exhibited. They originate from different periods and regions, and include related variants such as the Christus triumphans. The Kümmernis collection is therefore a historical testimony of deviant, non-conformist and lesser-known Christian movements. The museum's current extensive archive of Kümmernis depictions was formally established in 2010.

The depictions of Kümmernis are often a stimulus or catalyst for new interpretations of Christian ideas.[22] Feminist and LGBTQ+ movements embrace her as a powerful symbol. The Swedish performance studio Vilgefortis, for example, equips "women and other people"[23] with beards at pride parades. Our exhibition provokes frequent questions, and some visitors even express irritation at the depiction. This didactic opportunity, of confrontation with iconography of a previously unknown and unexpected Christian figure, is made fruitful in guided

22 Alison Jasper, "Theology and the Freak Show: St Uncumber and the Discourse of Liberation," *Theology & Sexuality* 11, no. 2 (2005): 51.

23 Heide Lunabba, "Studio Vilgefortis," accessed December 12, 2020, https://www.heidilunabba.com/studio-vilgefortis.

tours, as a cue to reflect on one's initial understanding of Christianity. The museum thus proves to be not only a place for the preservation of documents of a religious tradition that might otherwise have been forgotten, but also a space for interpretation. In showing provocative objects, it provides an opportunity for revision of knowledge about the history of religion, and for new religious reinterpretation. The museum can thus become a place of negotiation around the plausibility, scope and acceptance of religious ideas. This arrangement of objects also highlights the role of museums as inevitably political spaces, since it is up to the curators to decide what is presented as part of religious traditions – and what is not.

3.3 Differentiation: A Javanese Shadow Puppet in an Exhibition on Islam

The shadow puppet Semar is an item which, when viewed individually, is not immediately recognisable as religious. In the context of the history of Southeast Asian religion, however, Semar is identified as an important figure in the Javanese shadow theatre Wayang. In the theatre's performances of Hindu epics, Semar is considered the most revered of the group of the Punakawan, the clowns and helpers who mediate between the world of gods and the world of humans. At the same time, according to Javanese mythology, he represents the highest divinity.[24] The classification of the object in the museum category Ar (A = local religion, r = Indonesia) is therefore both accurate and, simultaneously, incomplete. There are several arguments in favour of classifying Semar in the object group of Hindu mythology, or alternatively to

Figure 3: Wayang figure Semar, Java (Indonesia). Photo: Georg Dörr, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg (Ar 089).

24 Edith Franke, "The Religious Language of Objects: What Semar Says about the Religious Culture of Java," in *Materiality in Religion and Culture*, ed. Saburo Shawn Morishita (Berlin: Lit.Verlag, 2017), 113, 120f.

label it as part of Islam in Indonesia, as Semar plays a central role in mystically influenced Islam on Java, and is even called "tangible Allah".[25] With the staging of the puppet in an exhibition on Islam[26], the object is, after its decontextualisation from its original location, now able to spark a reflection and reconstruction of what visitors understand as Islam. Therefore, the museum presentations contribute to opening and differentiating the understanding of religion and Islam. This object could have been ignored as a non-religiously classified theatre puppet, or as an expression of a local religious tradition, when designing an exhibition on Islam. That Semar is being shown in an exhibition on the religious diversity of Islam is due to its inclusion in a museum of religions' collection, and its classification according to research in the study of religion.

3.4 Innovation: Materiality of Religion Beyond the Archived Objects

From 2015 to 2018, the special exhibition *SinnRäume* (literally sense spaces) highlighted the plurality and individuality of contemporary religious practice in Germany. Organised and curated by students, and based on a number of case studies, different individuals with varied living circumstances, religious practices, and affiliations were displayed. The presentation of the selected material confronted visitors with a variety of worldviews within their own local neighbourhoods, which, despite the geographical proximity, could clearly differ from their own.

Here, material religion was not exhibited in the form of objects, but rather through the attempt to focus on religious everyday practices and self-understanding. In addition to direct quotations and photographs, multi-sensory exhibition elements were integrated, which also stimulated the auditory and olfactory senses.

Through empirical research, current, highly individual forms of religiosity were made visible in a museal space. The examples shown in the exhibition referred to interviews with family members from the Ahmadiyya, a Jewish student in her shared apartment, a Catholic priest living next to his church, an evangelical deacon anticipating the rapture, a young family of members of ISCON (Hare Krishna Movement), as well as individuals who considered themselves spiritual but not religious, or rejected any form of label. *SinnRäume* used an actor-centred approach that defined religion in a broad sense, through an emic view of the persons portrayed, without stylising them to be representative of particular

25 Franke, "The Religious Language of Objects: What Semar Says about the Religious Culture of Java," 123.

26 Franke and Runge, *Von Derwisch-Mütze bis Mekka-Cola*.

Figure 4: Special exhibition "SinnRäume. Living Religiosity in Germany", 2015–2018. Photo: Anna Matter.

religions. This approach aimed not to stage religion, but rather to reflect on the different understandings of religion, including both the perception of the visitors and academic discourse.

SinnRäume was mainly accessible through guided tours that included participatory elements, used to engage the visitors and make them take active roles in, for example, recognising similarities and differences between the religious models presented. This created lively discussion about interreligious dialogue and tolerance, and on questions of religious freedom. The exhibition concept did not explicitly aim to stimulate such discussions, however; the approach of the curators in the field of the study of religion centred on highlighting religious diversity.[27]

27 Celica Fitz and Anna Matter, "SinnRäume – An exhibition on Contemporary Religion in Germany: Exhibition Practice as a Medium in Religious Studies," *Journal of Religion, Film and Media*, no. 3 (2017): 37–51.

4 Conclusion

The relationship between religious things and museums is framed by the fact that, although the decontextualisation and fragmentation of objects in a museum is an act of secularisation, museum presentations, at the same time, initiate new contextualisation, and can therefore lead to a process of religionisation.[28] The people active in the museum process (researchers, curators, etc.) generate interpretations through the way in which objects are displayed in a museum space. They thereby create not only spaces for the acquisition of knowledge, but also new spaces of experience – for example possibilities of religious identification or new interpretations for the visitors.

With the examples given here, we aimed to show that both the academic and social perception of religion is challenged in various ways:

Knowledge of religion (here Islam and Christianity) is expanded and differentiated by the addition of new facets, for example, by making a local deity, who appears in popular shadow theatre performances of Hindu epics, recognisable as a component of the Islamic culture of Java – or by adding a non-conformist, forgotten variant to the spectrum of venerated Catholic saints.

The preservation and exhibition of religious objects in the secular space of the museum, such as the ancient Egyptian coffin with its distinctive images, enables an approach to unfamiliar religious practices and ideas. This offers new insight, both for academic research and for the viewer, such as a perspective on ideas of the afterlife in otherwise inaccessible cultures.

By looking at everyday religious practices, such as attending Wayang performances, the veneration of a heterodox saint, or individualised forms of lived religiosity, attention is drawn to the relevance of religious ideas and practices beyond religious dogmas.

To summarise: The presentation of religious diversity and of non-conformist, heterodox forms of religion encourages reflection on religious understanding, can dissolve normative limitations, and enables a revision of knowledge about the history of religions. Furthermore, the exhibition of religion in museums can contribute to social debates about the de- and reconstruction of religion. Such

28 Arvind-Pal S. Mandair and Markus Dressler, "Introduction: Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Post-Secular," in *Secularism and Religion-Making*, ed. Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–36.

exhibitions, as places of encounter with religions, assume a scientific and social relevance that should not be underestimated.

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Gallery I:

Religious Things and Social Contexts – Discovering an Entanglement in the Museum

Mirko Roth

"OBJECTion?!": The Concept of Sociomateriality and its Consequences for museumised Objects[1]

In their anthology *Curatorial Things*, editors Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer pose a key question in museology research: "[O]ne of the central questions is what the precise process is, the specific feature of the activation of things or people through things in a curatorial situation . . . "[2] I am of the opinion that the concept of *sociomateriality* might shed light on this question and process; it is this question that forms the core focus of this paper.

In this essay, I will present the approach of sociomateriality introduced by Kalthoff et al.[3] as an interwoven interplay of material things, human actions, and social orders. Sociomateriality is found within the context of *new materialism*, and favours a non-anthropocentric perspective of re-symmetrising 'human – thing – action'. I would like to show that there are different forms of sociomateriality in the various spheres of reality (e.g. in day-to-day life, the field of religion, the museum).

To validate the plausibility of this hypothesis, I begin by providing the theoretical framework on which this line of thinking is based. Building on this, I describe the general concept of sociomateriality. Before the characteristics of a museum-based sociomateriality can be reconstructed, however, it is necessary to address two questions: Firstly, what happens to objects when they are museumised, and what shifts thus take place with respect to the understanding of objects in contrast to ideas in diverging spheres of reality? Secondly, what are the characteristics of museum-related communication? In the subsequent reconstruction of a museum-based sociomateriality, I limit the scope of this essay to "museum things" in an "aggregate state"[4] as exhibits in presentations.

1 This article was translated by Amy Klement.
2 Beatrice von Bismarck et al., "Curatorial Things: An Introduction," in *Curatorial Things,* ed. Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (Berlin: Sternberg, 2019), 12.
3 Cf. Herbert Kalthoff et al., "Einleitung: Materialität in Kultur und Gesellschaft," in *Materialität: Herausforderungen für die Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften,* ed. Herbert Kalthoff et al. (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016).
4 Thomas Thiemeyer, "Museumsdinge," in *Handbuch Materielle Kultur: Bedeutungen, Konzepte, Disziplinen*, ed. Stefanie Samida et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2014), 230.

1 Theoretical Framework

What is meant by the term 'spheres of reality' in this essay? In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann outline a sociology of knowledge that distinguishes between socially institutionalised spheres, e.g. day-to-day life, politics, economics, art, and religion.[5] In each sphere, different circumstances of communication predominate: their autonomous spatio-temporal contexts, authentic rules, processes, and roles, as well as their forms and media. Differences are also found in vocabulary, e.g. the same thing may be named differently in different spheres. As a result of differences in their respective communicative repertoires, experiences are interpreted differently in each sphere, and particular experiences can also be evoked differently. The communication processes are part of (power-political) discourses and ongoing processes of negotiation, meaning that the areas are both altered and differentiated, and that their boundaries are shifted.[6]

Religious communication has to address the reference problem of representing transcendence, and can be used as an example of one of the specific forms of communication from the different spheres of reality: How can the unobservable be made observable? Religious traditions each deal with this issue via culturally specific communication and media strategies: in comparison to communication in the everyday world, religious communication takes place in specific, selected spaces and at particular, defined times (also frequencies and durations). It follows a prescriptive process of its own, conducted by actors with specified roles, who manipulate specific tools in various forms of communication. An attempt is thus made to address various sensory channels in a multi-medially choreographed ritual, to facilitate sensory experience of the invisible extramundane. Once communication has been established in such a way that, as a result of the religious and ritual paraphernalia, unusual entities from outside of day-to-day life are 'truly present' in the conceptual world of religious participants, and their extramundane potentials have been communicated, the religious things become special media of religious communication.[7]

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5 Cf. Peter Berger et al., *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch, 2007).

6 Cf. Hubert Knoblauch, "Transzendenzerfahrung und symbolische Kommunikation: Die phänomenologisch orientierte Soziologie und die kommunikative Konstruktion der Religion," in *Religion als Kommunikation,* ed. Hartmann Tyrell et al. (Würzburg: Ergon, 1998).

7 Cf. Mirko Roth, *Transformationen: Ein zeichen- und kommunikationstheoretisches Modell zum Kultur- und Religionswandel*; *exemplifiziert an ausgewählten Transformationsprozessen der Santería auf Kuba* (Berlin: LIT, 2016), 147–62. This outline of religious communication is ideal-typ-

Objects of the same object class[8] may be found in various spheres of reality, but they generally then have diverging designations, and are subsumed under various meta-terms: a cup can be a commonplace drinking vessel, but, in the religious context, it could also be a chalice for Christian mass – and both are potentially objects that can be collected and museumised. Due to its particular circumstances of, and use in, communication, a commonplace everyday item is a different object to a "sacred object" or a "ritual thing", and, in turn, a different object to a museum exhibit or "museum thing" or *semiophore*.[9]

Based on the theoretical assumptions just presented, my two-part thesis is thus that similar but distinct forms of sociomateriality are present in different spheres of reality, which in turn lead to different concepts of objects.

2 Sociomateriality

The concept of sociomateriality essentially envisions a re-symmetrising of 'human – thing – action'. The role of objects, which experience a marginal existence in many of the humanities, is thus emphasised. Objects are indispensable to our social practices and physical routines, since they form an integral part of these actions, a role which *cannot* be overestimated. With their "obstinacy", they present us with challenges in their handling, provide us with 'offers' (or 'affordances') regarding their use, and are non-intentional 'co-agents in networks' or in a structure of *assemblages*.[10] Even if they have no *agency* of their own, their mere

ical and might be more flexible and fluid, cf. Dorothea Lüddeckens et al., eds., *Fluide Religion: Neue religiöse Bewegungen im Wandel; Theoretische und empirische Systematisierungen* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010).

8 The same objects can change spheres, or their tokens can be found in different spheres at the same time.

9 In the same order, cf. Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: Beck, 2003); Peter J. Bräunlein, "Ritualdinge," in *Handbuch Materielle Kultur: Bedeutungen, Konzepte, Disziplinen*, ed. Stefanie Samida et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2014), 245–48; Gottfried Korff, "Zur Eigenart der Museumsdinge (1992)," in *Museumsdinge: Deponieren – exponieren*, ed. Gottfried Korff et al. (Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2007) and Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums: Vom Sammeln* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2013), 80–85.

10 In the same order, cf. Hans Peter Hahn, "Der Eigensinn der Dinge – Einleitung," in *Vom Eigensinn der Dinge: Für eine neue Perspektive auf die Welt des Materiellen,* ed. Hans Peter Hahn (Berlin: Neofelis, 2015); Karl H. Hörning, *Experten des Alltags: Die Wiederentdeckung des praktischen Wissens* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wiss., 2001); James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); Bruno Latour, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen: Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie* (Berlin: Akad.-Verlag, 1995) and Sonia Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 4, no. 1 (2013): 64–68.

physical presence nonetheless alters the action complexes of the co-presence of ‘human – thing – action’.

Concretely, the influence of things on human beings and their thinking, action, and experience is shown to be a *dispositif* that can only be controlled to a limited extent: as a result of their “obstinacy”, things (from high technology to everyday kitchen appliances) present particular challenges in their handling and use. Equally, they specify particular options for action as a result of their form and ergonomics, for example in the cases of tool handles or chairs. Further, an environment shaped by things channels actions, as movements in space may be confined by spatial arrangements and infrastructures. Finally, some items – heirlooms – may evoke memories, both good and bad, and hence corresponding emotions, linked to their object biographies. Moreover, they present obstacles for us with respect to their temporal dimension: not only when, how many times, and for how long, but also with what frequency we use things is *inscribed* in them. This is evident in the case of toothbrushes, watering cans, or inspection and maintenance work. Equally, things may also bring instructions for their disposal, for their death, along with them.[11] We even use some things, such as hammers, pencils, glasses, hearing aids, or smartphones, as extensions of our bodies and/or our senses, so that they become prostheses embedded in physical routines as fixed components. Without things, many practices would not exist – in any case not in their present form; such things are constitutive of these practices, and form a *dispositif* for, but not determination of, the execution of social action.[12]

The differences between our so-called *cultural performances*[13] and our day-to-day practices are particularly noteworthy in the extent to which they stem from their differentiated forms of communication and their tools. Indeed, it is particularly true of these cultural performances that they could not function at all without material culture. Court proceedings, for example, take place based on a defined procedure, in a building of their own with a specially designed hall. Further, they display a particular chronology, so-called court days, during which judges preside over the court, in the typical regalia of a robe. The same applies, mutatis

11 Cf. Hans Peter Hahn, *Materielle Kultur: Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Reimer, 2014), 26–49; Hahn, “Eigensinn,” 21–54 and Heike Delitz, *Architektursoziologie* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), 74–89.

12 Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, “Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 32, no. 4 (2003): 289–93.

13 Cf. Victor Turner, *Vom Ritual zum Theater: Der Ernst des menschlichen Spiels* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verl., 2009).

mutandis, in the religious field. In Bräunlein's words: "Rituals do not 'function' without things."[14]

Sociomateriality emphasises the inextricable intertwining of 'human – thing – action', and this, in addition to physical and bodily characteristics of objects, that make reference to the context of their use and thus show their functionality, should be considered under additional framing dynamics:[15] 1. 'Contexts of action' assign a situative meaning (*sub-code*) to objects. 2. 'Physical environment' and concrete material contexts (for instance, relative to other things in a room) add further nuances of meaning to objects, as well as altering them, as they become a building block of spatial-visual codes (*parataxis*[16]). 3. 'Institutionalised expectations' attempt to regulate how objects are used, perceived, and received, for which there is generally a more or less comprehensive prescript-code (*protocol*).

Things are thus framed in diverse and dynamic ways, meaning that, despite their physical stability, they remain ambivalent and fluid (i.e., polysemic) from a practical and semiotic perspective. This effect results from both their contexts of action and physical environment, as well as the institutional specifications, being part of ongoing processes of negotiation and transformation. This occurs e.g. through things being shifted to other contexts, their users changing, or the assignation of a different meaning to a thing over time, as a result of, for example, repurposing or wear and tear. During a thing's object biography, its meaning, significance, and value are altered by users, contexts, time, and contemporary events, in which different codes are objectified in an intersubjective way, and thus become conventionalised in society. The 'social' in 'sociomateriality' consists particularly of the execution of a code (how it is applied in interpretation and used in a sequence of actions as well as in conventionalisation), as this is the mechanism by which meanings and relationships are constructed.

In summary, it should be repeated: 'human – thing – action' are co-present in interwoven sociomaterialities of different scales, whereby this concept aims at a non-anthropocentric view. All elements lie equally on one level in dynamic tension. If one element changes, the entire complex changes. This has consequences both for time-honoured theories of subject as well as for handed-down notions of an object: An *object*ion to an outdated dichotomic subject-object relation!

14 Bräunlein, "Ritualdinge," 245.
15 For what follows, cf. Kalthoff et al., "Einleitung," 11–14.
16 Contrasting "syntax" in linear codes.

3 Museumisation

What then happens to things when they are museumised? Museumisation is a twofold act of decontextualisation and recontextualisation: a thing is taken out of the spatio-temporal framework of its milieu of origin, in which it had certain uses and was embedded in particular practices – and thus was part of a specific sociomateriality. As a result, the thing is simultaneously classified within a new spatio-temporal framework and becomes part of a sociomateriality specified by the museum. This can be identified by, for example, changes in the physical-spatial, the systematic, the proximity to other things, and by the differing practices conducted by various actors. The thing is now a *musealia*[17] and a document of both its context of origin and its collection context, within which it is now useless. In this next station in its object biography, it is given a new functional context and assumes a new semantic quality and dimension. What takes place is hence a shift in both the function and meaning of the thing: the shift in meaning corresponds to the fact that its transfer to a collection brings it into the vicinity of other things, makes it – in a certain respect – a unique item, and declares it to be of valuable significance. Moreover, it is transferred from a private or rather narrow range of use and restricted communicative memory, to a different and perhaps wider range of use, as well as to the cultural memory of society. A shift in function takes place corresponding to the fact that – insofar as the *musealia* is exhibited and does not land in depot as an *archivalia* – its primary function becomes being looked at.[18]

As an exhibit, *musealia* are generally presented with three logics of visualisation: 1) art/artwork; 2) example/specimen; 3) testimony/witness to a period of time. Particularly in the case of an example/specimen, which is representative of a type, series, or genre, or in the case of a testimony/witness to a period of time, which additionally makes reference to an (historical) event, it becomes clear that an exhibit is no longer merely an object, but is instead a sign that refers beyond itself to the spatio-temporal framework of its context of origin.[19] For this, the historian of museums Krzysztof Pomian coined the term *semiophore*: Semiophores are

17 A term introduced by Zbynek Stránský, cf. Katharina Flügel, *Einführung in die Museologie* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 2005), 26–27.

18 Cf. Anke te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2015), 170–76; Flügel, *Museologie*, 25–27, 102; Pomian, *Ursprung des Museums,* 79–86; Kohl, *Macht der Dinge*, 253–56 and Thiemeyer, "Museumsdinge," 230.

19 Cf. Te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums*, 68. This logics are not inherent in the things, but instead arise from negotiation processes that are part of the tradition of exhibitions and can change based on the situation, cf. Thiemeyer, "Museumsdinge," 231.

two-sided objects that have both a material and a semiotic aspect: The material aspect is constituted by means of the material, but also by form and colour and so on. It is a semaphore and coordinates its physical relationship to other objects. The semiotic aspect consists of the visible signs on/in the material component of the semiophore, which make reference to an invisible quality. For Pomian, this invisible quality can thus be of many sorts: spatially or temporally absent, culturally alien, or from a different sphere of reality.[20] Considered in this way, exhibits are no longer merely signs, but also media.

Flügel describes the process of museumisation as a drastic intervention with consequences for the corresponding object status: After interrogating the object, identifying its alleged essence and permeating into its structure, one cannot exhibit the same object anymore. "We are only able to communicate the changes we have brought about."[21]

4 Exhibits in Exhibitions: Museum-based Communication

Presentations in museums are unanimously understood as interpretations via mise-en-scène (staging), meaning the arrangement of objects and ensembles of objects in a space. The objects thus form the starting point for the three-dimensional arguments of a curatorial act of communication. As a result, presentations are also addressed as a rhetorical form or, more frequently, as a means of communication and authentic museum media.[22]

Building on the ideas of Jana Scholze, museum communication in presentations takes place in such a way[23] that absent creators of exhibitions strive to impart something about *supposedly* silenced receptacles or mute objects, to visitors who are physically present. However, in doing so, it is not the case that exhibitions reveal information strictly limited to the objects at hand; statements that go beyond the object are also made, whereby the object itself is supposed to stand as proof of the accuracy of the statement. The creators of exhibitions correspondingly develop codes of staging in which the objects and ensembles of objects are organised in a particular spatial arrangement (parataxis). Beyond this, the space

20 Cf. Pomian, *Ursprung des Museums,* 38–46, 84, 95.
21 Flügel, *Museologie,* 97.
22 Cf. Flügel, *Museologie,* 105–9; Korff, "Museumsdinge," 144 and te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums*, 71–72, 190.
23 For what follows, cf. Jana Scholze, "Kultursemiotik: Zeichenlesen in Ausstellungen," in *Museumsanalyse: Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes,* ed. Joachim Baur (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010), 130–32.

and the arrangement are ‘in*form*ed’ by additional means of presentation such as light, sound, photos, films, accompanying texts, multimedia stations, and so on.[24] The exhibition design can thus work with atmospheres that foreground either the material or the medial character of the semiophore. These atmospheres are designed to give rise to particular behaviours, though it is ultimately up to visitors to decide which aspect, if any, becomes the focus of their attention. What is thus formed in the holistic inspection of multimedia exhibitions staged within museum-based modes of communication, which mediate between sense and sensibility, is a sphere of reality outside day-to-day life.[25] The communication media of such a sphere are both the individual semiophores themselves, and the staging of the exhibition as a whole.

According to Scholze, presentation statements are thus found on three levels: the exhibits themselves, the spatial object arrangements, and the general presentation context. It can analogously be argued that visitors decode the different levels by means of denotation, connotation, and meta-communication. Scholze assumes that such codes serve as a *dispositif* and a limitation of visitors’ interpretations, through the targeted steering of attention and perceptions, as well as the staging codes of creators of exhibitions.

On the one hand, museum exhibitions are thus never spaces that are neutral or free of ideology, but are instead complexly coded relationships between signs that constitute a “gesture of showing”[26] and, as a rhetorical form, strive to convince with their statements. Their most important means of persuasion are the exhibits as semiophores. Exhibitions, as museum-based forms of communication, are places and modes for generating knowledge, constructing history, and for constructing worldviews that are typical for the particular time, institution, and society.[27] According to Flügel, new realities are generated in exhibitions, by means of interpretation, staging, and composition: exhibitions are models of reality and the exhibits form parts of this model, as statements and representations of reality. This can result in an experience of meaningful order with exhibitions reducing complexity and contingency.

24 Cf. Flügel, *Museologie,* 122–27.

25 Cf. Te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums*, 57–58, 163; Jana Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung: Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004), 273–75.

26 Bal in Scholze, “Kultursemiotik,” 130–32.

27 Cf. Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung,* 35–39, 269–72 and te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums*, 158–59, 162–66, 180–84.

On the other hand, visitors take their own paths through museum exhibitions, and thus gain their own viewpoints and perspectives on the exhibits. In self-selected rhythms between rest and movement, they decode exhibition statements according to the codes available to them. This leads to their having their own personal experiences with polysemic objects, and thus forming individual and subjective interpretations that may deviate significantly from those intended by the creators of exhibitions.[28] The interpretation offered by the creators of exhibitions via staging, by means of a coded exhibition design, is acted out individually and performatively in the physical, bodily co-presence of viewers as actors. This act fulfils all the criteria of Erika Fischer-Lichte's characterisation of the features of performance, and so can result in the creation of something new.[29]

In this contingent, ambiguous figure, what arises in a mode of communication outside of day-to-day life is a specific, museum-based 'sociomate*reality'*.

5 'Sociomate*reality'* in the Museum

What changes occur as a result of things being presented in museums, as opposed to the sociomateriality of the everyday? Objects become semiophores, which can no longer be *grasped*; they are instead organised into groups with other objects, contextualised using additional means of presentation, and arranged in a space. This thus gives rise to spatial-visual codes as parataxis, about which Korff says: "The museum does not illustrate; it is an illustration in itself".[30] It does, however, form an overall picture, within which visitors can move with relative freedom, with the 'individual pictures' silenced in the display cases or on the wall.[31] Museum things can thus generally still only be inspected and decoded. In a museum context, a visitor's direct physical interaction with, and experience of, an object's affordances, via its treatment and/or *handling*, is generally reduced to a great extent, or even eliminated entirely. In any case, semiophores no longer become prostheses for a physical routine. Does a renitence towards my primary *object*ion occur here, and therefore support the possibility of a subject-object dichotomy after all?

Depending on the exhibition design, the staging can attempt to emphasise either the material or the medial side of an object. Ultimately, however, the individual

28 Cf. Flügel, *Museologie,* 106–9.

29 Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2014); Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung,* note 304 and Scholze, "Kultursemiotik," 131.

30 Cf. Korff, "Museumsdinge," 144.

31 Cf. Flügel, *Museologie,* 109.

object stands, along with other objects and additional means of presentation, as a building block of a code in a parataxis. The question regarding the effects of presentation within a museum-based sociomateriality can perhaps only be answered from the perspective of its recipient: on the one hand, it can be said that the item's object character is intensified by both its need to be inspected, and the elimination of its *handling*, which only allows it to be perceived objectively via the more limited act of recognition. However, this alone does not give the full picture. On the other hand, therefore, when its medial references, in particular, are decoded in a museum-based mode of perception and *habitus*, the thing becomes a semiophore, making reference beyond itself.

Where is, then, something like affordance found in museum presentations? A space of perception of an exhibition, as a physical *habitat* filled with objects, is full of codes, parataxis and protocols, creating a space mediating between sense and sensation. This space can generally still be inspected physically, in that the space and arrangement of the objects channel movement, and the aestheticised groups of objects, along with their additional means of presentation, steer attention, perceptions, and interpretations. This gives rise to a synaesthetic and kinaesthetic experience that is reflected physically and generates habitus. Establishing a closeness to an object, connecting with its material and/or medial characteristics, and linking it to the exhibition topic, necessitates a particular museum-based habitus, practised by repeatedly inspecting diverse exhibitions, and that, when reflected on, can also be differentiated with respect to styles. In the interplay of habitat and habitus, what arises from museum-based communication is a sphere of reality outside of day-to-day life.[32]

As argued above, exhibitions develop gestures of showing that both prompt looking and strive to persuade with coded statements. They can be regarded as rhetorical figures whose arguments are three-dimensional objects and groups of objects in a space. The material and medial character of affordance in museum-based sociomateriality thus shifts, in my opinion, from the object to the exhibition and its spatial-visual codes of parataxis. An important moment of sociality in museum-based communication lies in implementing and applying such codes, since they position the objects, the arrangements of objects and space, and the exhibition context vis-à-vis recipients on the one hand and in a meaningful relationship on the other. Bill Brown seems to concur, when speaking of the "overarching curatorial thing" as an evocation of relations between individuals and

32 Cf. Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung,* 273–77 and te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums*, 15, 163–64, 184–85.

exhibitions.[33] It is here that a clear indicator is found, with respect to the question posed by von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer at the beginning of the paper.

6 Conclusion

This paper has argued that, within the theoretical framework, there are many different sociomaterialities, differing significantly if they are located in different spheres of reality. This concept shifts assumptions regarding object notions, and thus challenges traditional subject-object dichotomies. The characteristics of museum-based communication constitute an extraordinary sphere of reality, within which numerous sociomaterialities are located. Museum things undergo shifts in meaning and function during museumisation: As exhibited musealia they are shown in three logics of visualisation and become 'arguments' and 'proof' for exhibition statements. As semiophores they exceed their object status, to become media of museum communication.

The concept of sociomateriality should evoke some ideas for answering the core initial question, by establishing an ongoing interplay between habitat and habitus. The stated references to Brown and Flügel suggest a differentiation: museum-based sociomateriality, in contrast to the day-to-day, cannot presuppose a wholeness in which everything is interwoven, such as in assemblages or networks. Visitors sometimes see only sections of an exhibition – and this on their own paths and with their own rhythm. Further, they may see only parts of the arrangement of objects, whilst using their own codes for denotative, connotative, and meta-communicative decoding of these object arrangements. The application in museology of the theoretical concept of assemblage to exhibitions is problematic, in my opinion, since this concept calls not only for a non-anthropocentric viewpoint, but also for the dissolution of the dichotomies of subject-object and nature-culture. Exhibitions, as museum-based forms of communication, not only place people, as addressees, as a communicative counterpart, but also take them as the "measure of all things" in the design of the exhibition. The experiential character of exhibitions is perceived self-reflexively by the experiencing subject.[34] Subject-object dichotomies are correspondingly continually reconstructed, and museums thus also participate to a significant extent in the key differentiation between nature and culture. *Object*ion?!

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33 Cf. Bill Brown, "Toward the Curatorial Thing," in *Curatorial Things*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (Berlin: Sternberg, 2019), 92–97.

34 Cf. Brown, "Curatorial Thing," 92 and Flügel, *Museologie,* 106–9, 123.

From a study of religions perspective, one question still remains: What happens to objects from religious spatio-temporal structures and spheres of reality when they are museumised? Building on this paper, I propose an answer to this question on our REDIM-Blog: “OBJECTion?!” – Continuation.[35]

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35 “‘OBJECTion?!’: The Concept of Sociomateriality and its Consequences for Museumized Objects – Continuation,” Religiöse Dinge Blog, posted on March 18, 2021, https://www.religiöse-dinge.de/?p=675.

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Peter J. Bräunlein

A God on Display: On the Agency of 'Living Things' in the Museum

1 'Living Things' and the Ontological Turn

To talk of 'living things' seems paradoxical at first: the word 'things' seems to represent the inanimate, and thus exactly the opposite of living beings. Nevertheless, human encounters with 'living things' are not entirely unfamiliar. Late medieval miracle books are full of stories of weeping Madonnas, crucifixes that move, or speaking figures of saints. We read in missionary reports from the 17th century onwards, that so-called pagans consider certain dead things to be alive, and consequently worship them. We encounter 'living things' in fictional literature too, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816), and popular films, such as John Carpenter's *Christine* (1983) or John Lasetter's *Toy Story* (1995, 1999, 2010, 2019). Anyone watching a child interacting with a doll or teddy bear can immediately see that living things are at play here.

Scholars encountering the paradox of living things – whether from film or literary studies, socio-cultural anthropology, history of religion or child psychology – have explained the phenomenon with concepts such as 'pre-modern magic worldview', 'processes of discursive production', 'symbolisation', 'attribution', 'identity formation', etc. The ontological distinction between dead and living nature, mind and matter, subject and object was thus maintained, at least in the academic world.

In recent years, however, contrary positions have been articulated and are increasingly accepted. Scholars now refer to the autonomy of things, and their influence on the individual, culture, and society. This happens against the background of an ontological turn, which informs a new object theory and thus a new way of looking at both things specifically and the material world in general.

Often cited precursors to this new object theory are the ideas of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff. In the 1980s, Appadurai reconstructed the category of the commodity and reflected on the origin of the attribution of value to things. Here, he focused on things themselves and on the 'commodity situation' of a thing, showing that this is only one phase in the longer social life of a thing. It is not only in pre-modern societies that things possess such a social life; so too do the things of our globalised present.[1] Igor Kopytoff argued that things, like people, have biographies.[2] His person-thing analogy provided impulses for anthropology, archaeology and history to approach things with a new subject-oriented perspective, and to trace their biographies.[3]

Twenty years later, in the course of an evolving new object theory, Esther Pasztory calls for "thinking with things",[4] and Amiria Henare et al. demand a "thinking through things".[5] Consequently, a change of concepts and a fundamental paradigm shift is called for in order to take the 'thingness of things' seriously. Daniel Miller takes a similar line in his criticism of structuralism, Marxism, semiotics, and symbolic anthropology, for the fact that the three-dimensionality and palpability of things have not been taken seriously so far.[6] He elaborates his concept of material culture studies in his book on *Stuff*, which is underpinned by the thesis that things make people as much as people make things.[7] Methodologically, the authors mentioned still assume an ontological separation between researchers and the world of inanimate things. Researchers talk *about* things, not *with* things.[8]

Other scholars go a step further, with a novel approach to the agency of things. Approaches in *Science and Technology Studies* should be mentioned here, first and foremost Bruno Latour's *Actor Network Theory*. The separation between humans and (technical) things is dissolved. Things create, and can at the same time restrict, possibilities for action. A glance into a medical intensive care unit, with its measuring devices and monitors, makes it clear what we mean when we speak of

1 Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

2 Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.

3 Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (London: Routledge, 1988); Janet Hoskins, "Agency, Biography, and Objects," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley et al. (London: Sage, 2006), 74–84 and Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (2010): 169–78.

4 Esther Pasztory, *Thinking with Things: Toward a New Vision of Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

5 Amiria J. Henare et al., eds., *Thinking through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (London: Routledge, 2007).

6 Daniel Miller, "Material Culture," in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Tony Bennet and John Frow (London: Sage, 2008), 271–90.

7 Daniel Miller, *Stuff*, (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2009).

8 Daniel Miller, *Anthropology Is the Discipline but the Goal Is Ethnography* (London: University College London, 2017).

a dependence on things and their agency.[9] Things can be given subject status, or better, they interact with people, according to the actor network theory of Bruno Latour.[10] 'Subject' here is not to be equated with being human, but with the pragmatic competence of "originating courses of action, defining contexts as contexts of some kind, creating meanings and delineating available ways of life. Inasmuch as objects have this competence, they may be considered as intentional subjects."[11] The age-old subject-object dichotomy is abolished here. That things have agency is now a widespread idea in the social sciences and humanities.[12]

Theorists who see themselves as New Materialists are even more radical here. They recognize objects in the material world as possessing a true life of their own, beyond human sociality and language. Karen Barad states: "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers",[13] and in her work *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett insists that things are not passive, they wield a generative power "as quasi agents of forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own."[14] From such a perspective, things are alive, not merely metaphorically or symbolically, but factually. This new vitalism or neo-animism can be considered a general feature of the New Materialists' ontology.[15]

The positions outlined so far do not represent a consistent theory of things, but they do provide the building blocks for creating one. This is helpful for us when we are dealing with (living) things in museum spaces, which transform things, give individual things an aura, and socialise them anew. Conversely, things influence the atmosphere of their environment. In his aesthetic theory, Gernot Böhme calls this the *ecstasy* of a thing. Ecstasy is spatially understood as a stepping out of itself into the surrounding space, and thereby actively generating the atmosphere.[16]

Museum things, however, have yet further potential for agency in their own right. Mobility and historical memory are particularly characteristic of museumised

9 Letizia Caronia and Luigina Mortari, "The Agency of Things: How Spaces and Artefacts Organize the Moral Order of an Intensive Care Unit," *Social Semiotics* 25, no. 4 (2015): 401–22.

10 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

11 Caronia and Mortari, "The Agency of Things," 403.

12 Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) plays a key role here.

13 Barad quoted in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin*, New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 48.

14 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2010), viii.

15 Peter J. Bräunlein, "Studying Material Religion from a Non-Anthropocentric Perspective? Some Considerations on New Materialisms," *Material Religion* 15, no. 5 (2019): 622–23.

16 Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen* Ästhetik (Frankfurt/M.: suhrkamp, 2019), 225–46.

Figure 1: Feather image, Kuka'ilimoku, Hawaii, dating to before 1779. Photo: Harry Haase, © Ethnologische Sammlung der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Oz 254).

items. This also means that a thing, like a person, changes over the course of its history. The objectivity of a thing is by no means its basic characteristic. This depends on its respective contextual embedding, as Nicholas Thomas asserts: “Hence, although certain influential theorists of material culture have stressed the objectivity of the artifact, I can only recognize the reverse: the mutability of things in recontextualization.”[17] The existential state of a thing is paradoxical. Through its materiality, it on the one hand possesses an idiosyncratic thingness, and on the other hand displays mutability and individual history. This makes it more difficult to communicate with things.

The hitherto theoretical discussions about agency, ecstasy, and vibrancy of things will now be illustrated through the example of an artifact from the ethnographic collection of the University of Göttingen: Ku, a Polynesian god.

2 A Hawaiian God in a German Museum

I first encountered this god during a visit to the ethnographic collection of the University of Göttingen. At that point I had no knowledge of this object. In front of the display I had to bend down to look into one of his eyes. A strange and ambiguous feeling befell me. His hairstyle somehow resembled that of a punk. His huge mouth, with almost hundreds of teeth, signalled fierce intimidation, but in an exaggerated form, which to me seemed a grotesque caricature. For a short moment, I was caught between two sensations. Was I facing a punk jester from the South Seas? In this case, one might naturally be inclined to laugh. Otherwise, however, one ought to show respect, and such laughter would definitely be improper. Intuitively I opted for the latter, bowed even more deeply, and read the lettering on the display case: “Image from feathers, Kuka’ilimoku, Hawaii, before 1779.”

2.1 Ku and the Death of James Cook

Ku’s journey to Europe began with a very famous traveller’s visit to Ku’s homeland. The renowned James Cook (1728–1779) reached Hawaii in January 1778, during his third trip to the South Seas (1776–1780). From there, the expedition explored the northwest coast of North America, and, after a year, returned to Hawaii again. On 26 January 1779, the chief Kalani´opu’u delivered four feathered gods, through his priest Kao, to Cook’s crew. In total, eight feathered gods from Hawaii were acquired during Cook’s third voyage. All of them were deliv-

17 Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 28.

ered in a highly ceremonial way. Four of the images have a crest, two of them have hair and one has neither. The feather image in Göttingen's collection "has a crest which makes it a likely receptacle for a war god from Hawai'i island, Kuka'ilimoku", as Adrienne Kaeppler notes.[18]

All 2000 objects collected during Cook's expeditions were either kept in royal possession, privately acquired by scholars, or disposed of on the art market. The scholar Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), who (among others) initiated the first university museum in Göttingen (1773), petitioned for objects from the Cook collection. Due to his excellent relationship with King George III (1738–1840), grandson of Göttingen University's founder George II, his petition was granted. The feathered god, with many other objects, arrived in Göttingen as a royal donation in 1782. These items later became known as the Cook-Forster collection.[19] Ku's voyage from the island of Hawaii to the island of Great Britain, and from there to Göttingen, was facilitated by royal ambitions and scientific objectives. Since the first encounter between the emissaries of the British King and the Hawaiian nobility, Ku has moved in the fields of politics and science. Needless to say, political power and representation are correlated in both fields. Cook's expeditions are the epitome of the exploration of the world in the spirit of enlightenment. This specific Western mission of acquiring knowledge on a global scale as a laudable virtue has nonetheless taken its toll and produced its own martyrs. On the 14 February 1779, James Cook died a violent death in the service of such an endeavour in Hawaii.

Today the causes of this homicide are still not entirely resolved. On the contrary, the reconstruction of the death of Captain James Cook led to a controversy around "how natives think". This debate matched two famous opponents, Marshal Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere.[20]

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18 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Hawai'i – Ritual Encounters," in *James Cook: Gifts and Treasures from the South Seas*, ed. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (München: Prestel, 1998), 243.

19 During his second voyage to the South Seas (1772–1775) Cook was accompanied by the German naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798) and his son Georg (1754–1794). For the history of the collection see Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and Gundolf Krüger, eds., *James Cook: Gifts and Treasures from the South Seas*; esp. Manfred Urban, "Die Erwerbungsgeschichte der Göttinger Sammlung," in *James Cook: Gifts and Treasures from the South Seas*, ed. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (München: Prestel, 1998), 56–85 and Gundolf Krüger, "Rarities from the New Discovered Islands of the South Seas' and the Way to Göttingen," in *Life in the Pacific of the 1700s: The Cook/Forster Collection of the Georg August University of Göttingen*, vol. 2, ed. Stephen Little and Peter Ruthenberg (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2006), 36–48.

20 Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1981) and Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

According to the local myths, Sahlins argues, it is gods who always occupy land and then appoint chiefs as their deputies. The interplay of usurpation and divine-human conquest is cyclical and forms the basis of the legitimacy of power. The cyclical change, as depicted in myth, finds its ritual equivalent in an annual Makahiki festival. The change is visualised in a mock battle, symbolising the transition between the rules of Lono (peace, prosperity, fertility) and Ku (war, destruction, conquest). Hawaiian history is therefore the repetition of this myth. According to Sahlins, when Cook appeared, he was immediately assigned a place in the mythical order of the Hawaiians and was identified with Lono. His arrival coincided exactly with the ritual calendar of the Makahiki festival and his behaviour fitted seamlessly into the logic of the Hawaiians: contact mainly with priests and chiefs, the effort to obtain food, the distribution of iron objects, and kneeling at Ku's shrine. Additionally, the burial of a deceased sailor in Ku's temple, interpreted as a human sacrifice, was seen to initiate the reign of Ku. Having previously left the island on request, Cook's forced return, due to a broken mast, was seen as an attempt at usurpation. This idea was reinforced by Cook's brutal reaction to a theft: to recover a stolen dinghy, Cook kidnapped a chief, whilst another was shot by one of his officers. Hawaiian warriors attacked in retaliation, and Cook was stabbed in the back. Sahlins interprets the event as ritual murder: Cook was killed as god and conqueror Lono, during a Makahiki celebration. Mythical logic prevails and culture gives structure to history. Sahlin's work was initially praised as groundbreaking, since it demonstrated that the Polynesians had their own history. But soon critical voices emerged. Upon re-evaluation of the sources, Gananath Obeyesekere claimed that it was not the Hawaiians who deified Cook, but rather Sahlins who invented a myth. He reduces the Hawaiians to puppets, caught on the strings of their culture. Cook would, Obeyesekere argues, have at best been thought of as Lono's messenger, not his embodiment. Sahlin's reading of a 'different history' could not be proven by the sources. Just as is the case for the British, it is not mythical thinking but 'practical reason' that distinguishes the Polynesians. Cook ultimately failed due to inner-Hawaiian power struggles, claims Obeyesekere. The chief Kalani'opu'u had asked Cook for help against an enemy. Obeyesekere suspects that Cook refused to help. Cook's involuntary return confronted the Hawaiians not with a power-hungry god, but with food shortages caused by the ever-changing demands of foreign seafarers. In addition, Obeyesekere sees Cook as a quick-tempered, even brutal person, who had himself contributed to the escalation of violence.

When we stand in front of Ku's display case, we are in touch with the mythology and cosmology of ancient Hawaii, with its hierarchical aristocratic society, human sacrifice and war. We are also confronted with a historical narrative revolving around the mystery of why James Cook had to die, and ultimately with a dispute about worldviews, Western and non-Western rationality.

2.2 The Social Life of Ku

Ethnographic perspectives on objects like Ku have two dimensions. The first is the cultural context, the ritual use and the symbolic value of this figure. Ku appears here as a meaningful object that reveals its biography through questioning historical documents and anthropological research. The second dimension consists of linking contemporary empirical research and material culture. Ku will show us that a two-hundred-year-old museum object is not automatically condemned to death in the archive and display case, but, on the contrary, is still able to develop a social life today. In Ku's case, such a social life is particularly evident because of his extensive travelling.

An exhibition in 2006 brought Ku and numerous other objects from Göttingen back to their home in Hawaii. The temporary repatriation and presentation of these objects have a political, and above all identity-creating, significance. For the majority population of countries such as New Zealand or Australia, James Cook is a cultural hero, embodying the connection to the British Empire and Western civilisation. On the other hand, in many Pacific countries, indigenous intellectuals have been speaking out against this interpretation since the 1970s, calling for a "return to roots".[21] Due to rapid colonisation and missionary work, their own culture and religion are only available in fragments or through external perception by the colonisers. Artists, writers, and local scholars articulate their "own visions of Oceania and earth".[22] Movements like *Faasamoa*, *Fakatonga*, *Maoritanga* or *Hawaiian awareness* are not only about the right to protect one's own culture.

21 Jocelyn Linnekin, "The Ideological World Remade," in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, ed. Donald Denoon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 397–438. For Hawaiians' perception of James Cook, see Rocky K. Jensen and Lucia Tarallo Jensen, "Geschichte aus unserer Sicht: Die hawaiianische Perspektive," in *James Cook und die Entdeckung der Südsee*, ed. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellunghalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2009), 34–36 and Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, "Ku and the Battlefield of Authenticity. A Hawaiian Feather Image and its Contestation between Empathic and Objectified Authenticity," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 137 (2012): 172.

22 Renate von Gizycki 1995. "'...Our Own Visions of Oceania and Earth' – Zeitgenössische Schriftsteller im Südpazifik (Polynesien) und Probleme kultureller Identität," in *Ethnologie und Literatur*, ed. Thomas Hauschild (Bremen: kea-edition, 1995), 95–114.

Essentially, they centre on the sovereignty of interpretation in matters of their own culture.[23]

Whilst for some, the Cook-Forster collection is a symbol of pride in the European 'civilising' mission, for others it signals cultural loss and destruction, as well as a call to seek identity. Obviously, the perception of Ku within Hawaii varies according to the origin of the viewer, having a different significance for members of Hawaii's indigenous minority,[24] and in particular for descendants of Hawaiian clans of rulers and priests, compared to the significance for the Japanese, Filipino, and white American majority.

When, in January 2006, the pieces of the Göttingen collection were made ready for their journey to the South Seas, an unusual farewell ritual took place in the museum. La'akea Suganuma, president of the Royal Hawaiian Academy of Traditional Arts, and other members of a Hawaiian delegation, performed a highly emotional Hawaiian blessing.[25] Afterwards Ku and other pieces of the Cook-Forster collection were displayed in the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Australian National Museum in Canberra. The director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Stephen Little, emphasised that the exhibition was not a tribute to Cook. "We recognize that the legacy of Cook's voyages included disease and death for many cultures throughout the Pacific – a fact that Cook himself recognized. The purpose of this exhibition is not to glorify Cook but, on the contrary, to celebrate the brilliant cultural and spiritual lives of the indigenous people of the Pacific as they existed prior to the first contact with Westerners."[26] Ku was not displayed as art, but "became a sacred representation and offerings were laid in front of the

23 However, the voices of such revitalisation movements and post-colonial criticism are never uniform and are themselves set within a context of internal power relations. The question of who represents whom, and with what legitimacy, must also be asked here. It is against this background, too, that the controversy over accusations of misrepresentation in the context of the Cook/Forster exhibition in Hawaii must be understood. See Philipp Schorch et al. "Globalizing Maori Museology: Reconceptualizing Engagement, Knowledge, and Virtuality through Mana Taonga," *Museum Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2016): 48–69, and the reply by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, "Beyond Plagiarism: Where Does Scientific Misconduct Begin? Academic Integrity, Misrepresentations and the Cook/Forster Collection," *GISCA Occasional Paper Series*, no. 28 (2020), DOI:10.3249/2363-894X-gisca-28.

24 According to the census of 2010, this minority makes up over a fifth of the population, see "Native Hawai'ians," Minority Rights Group International, accessed October 24, 2020, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/native-hawaiians/.

25 The delegation of Hawaiian representatives escorted Ku back to Hawaii. Hauser-Schäublin, "Ku," 169, describes the ritual in detail.

26 Gordon Y.K. Pang, "Gifts to Cook Come Back to Pacific," *Honolulu Advertiser*, February 4, 2006, http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2006/Feb/04/ln/FP602040330.html.

feather image […]".[27] Ku in Honolulu, as then director of Göttingen's ethnographic collection Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin stresses, "was definitely not simply an 'object', but a 'subject'" and "this feather image also had a divine aura."[28]

One month later, another farewell ceremony took place, prior to Ku's European tour in July 2009.[29] Here, members of the *Mana e Hula Dance Show* presented several dances in honour of the god of war, in front of a very prominent audience at the Göttingen Institute for Socio-cultural Anthropology. The university president used this ceremony to solemnly promise that the building would soon be renovated, namely in 2011.[30] Heinrich Prince of Hanover spoke about the links between the Göttingen University collection and the British royal family. Lower Saxony's Minister of Science emphasised that with the collection "the best ambassador for science, for Göttingen and Lower Saxony (...) is going to travel again".[31] The relationships described show how Ku's social life has an impact in public space. As an actor he affects local politics and, in the case of Hawaii, socio-religious revitalisation movements.

2.3 Materiality and Authenticity

In the course of Ku's world tour in 2006, rumours circulated that the object was a fake. Ku's authenticity was on trial. Comparative pieces from other museums are significantly less well-preserved than the Göttingen specimen, and the remarkably good conservation status of the feathers over a period of more than 200 years seemed suspicious. Speculation that the god of war might have been forged in the 1920s, using coloured chicken feathers, prompted Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, the director of the ethnographic collection at that time, to go on the offensive. The figure was expertly examined, and the results were presented to the public.[32] The strongest arguments here are those based on the materiality of the object. The yellow bird feathers come from the mating plumage of a Hawaiian bird species that has long been extinct. The knotting technique of the feather fastening is extremely complicated and has not yet been understood in detail. Finally, it is well known that, on Cook's third South Sea voyage, the objects

27 Hauser-Schäublin "Ku," 168.
28 Hauser-Schäublin, "Ku," 169, 170.
29 Between 2009 and 2010 the Göttingen Cook-Forster Collection travelled to Bonn and Riehen (Switzerland).
30 Unfortunately, this promise was not kept, with the delayed renovation and reconstruction works currently scheduled for 2021.
31 See the article in the local paper, Göttinger Tageblatt, July 28, 2009.
32 See Hauser-Schäublin, "Ku".

taken on board were treated with arsenic to prevent insect infestation. Ku owes his fluffy plumage to this circumstance, which without poison would have fallen victim to parasites long ago.

The question of authenticity is extremely important as it determines the value of the object. Ku has a cultural and spiritual value for the Hawaiian community, whilst also having a commodity value as a museum object, which is reflected in the sum for which the figure is insured, or its value on the art market. At the same time, authenticity can only be proven through its thingness. Both aspects, the material and the spiritual/political, promote Ku's biography, agency, sociality: in short, his liveliness.

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Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler

Social Practices in Museums: Near and Middle Eastern Historical Dimensions

1 Focus

A modern museum evokes a certain imaginary, with a history going back to private and less systematic collections, such as cabinets of curiosities. Stimulated by European Enlightenment ideas, the modern museum developed into a semi-public institution regulated by modern nation states in the 19th century. Unlike cabinets of curiosities, modern museums exhibit objects in order to convey certain ideas and systems of knowledge.[1] To contribute to the general debate on what makes a museum, this paper will focus on the history of Near and Middle Eastern institutions, considering socio-material practices that are normally thought to characterise modern museums. The paper is inspired by recent studies that have successfully traced certain markers of *modernity*, such as individuality, secularity, or atheism, to pre-modern times and non-European regions.[2]

This paper considers socio-material practices in Near and Middle Eastern institutions through the lens of two cultural studies approaches pertaining to *performance* and *social practices* respectively. These approaches also provide us with some methodological tools, allowing us to better understand patterns within the complex life of both contemporary museums and historical institutions in the Near and Middle East. As part of the material turn, contemporary discussions of both approaches regard objects as being interrelated with human actions.

2 Theory

German discourse about *performance* has been shaped for about 20 years by theatre studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte. Referring to Fischer-Lichte generally means one is working on social activities that can be perceived as being 'staged'.[3]

1 Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 90–99.

2 E.g. Dorothea Weltecke, *"Der Narr spricht: Es ist kein Gott"; Atheismus, Unglauben und Glaubenszweifel vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010).

3 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Center, 1956).

In her recent work, *Performativität. Eine Einführung* (2012), Fischer-Lichte discusses museums and religions in two chapters, “Bildakte – Blickakte” and “Die Macht der Dinge”.[4] Inspired by contemporary material culture studies, Fischer-Lichte’s reflections connect the fields of museums, cultural history, and the history of religions, and thus provide instruments for our own analysis.

Her chapter “Die Macht der Dinge” deals with optional functions of objects in very different situations. Fischer-Lichte distinguishes several types of things, each connected with a way of using and understanding them: *holy things* such as relics, which are treated ritually; pragmatically used *things of everyday life*, which force their owners to learn how to use them; *prestigious things*, which are meant for staging the self, and *waste*, a thing that is no longer valued. Finally, she mentions *things* that are taken out of former social dynamics and, unlike waste, *placed in museums*.[5]

While her concept of religion does seem to be comparatively narrow and focussed on very special examples like orthodox Christianity and indigenous cultures, Fischer-Lichte plausibly points to ways of categorising objects, that could be applied to the historical materials we will explore below. She identifies a) material objects being used in various ways outside a collection, either in religious or in everyday contexts (in contemporary approaches of the study of religions, these are not necessarily distinguished), as well as b) the process of collecting: prestigious or meaningful things are kept, and prevented from naturally ending up as waste. They then become part of collections that might c) be institutionalised. In an institution, the objects are systematically made accessible to a public. In a modern museum this is planned and directed by the responsible curators.

Her chapter “Bildakte – Blickakte” focusses on visual processes. Like John Austin’s *speech act*, Fischer-Lichte describes not *the* meaning of certain, in this case visible, signs and symbols, but dynamic interactions with the visible as one factor in social processes.[6] Her examples from religious fields are again quite traditional, such as kissing or gazing at icons, and reacting to their transformative power. But her general idea is striking, as her aim is to demonstrate that humans’ reactions to objects that they see follow learned codes of behaviour. Fischer-Lichte provides the example of pieces ‘staged’ in art museums, such as that in Houston, Texas, where Mark Rothko’s 14 monochrome paintings, being hung in a way that is reminiscent

4 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität: Eine Einführung* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 147–78.
5 Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität*, 161–78.
6 Cf. Ibid., 147, 149.

of Christian spaces, regularly cause visitors to contemplate.[7] This aspect can be added to the classification above: d) visitors react to or interact with the special displays and arrangements of objects they perceive in a museum or another institution. Section 3 will explore this classification from a) to d).

German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz provides another perspective. He understands established activities of social groups as *social practices* combining communication, body movement, handling of objects and a worldview. A crucial term for Reckwitz is *routine*: "A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood."[8] In a museum, we might think of cultural practices that are necessary behind the scenes, from hygiene to heating, styles and methods of clearing up, constructing gender, etc. This perspective sheds new light on everyday life as well as on the less explicit habitual characteristics of social practices.

3 History

The starting point for our research is the Greek *museion* in Hellenistic Alexandria: scholars are not able to clearly reconstruct this institution, but it seems to have been a place of higher learning and academic knowledge, situated in a complex of buildings connected to the famous Library of Alexandria, and a temple named after the Muses, the Greek goddesses responsible for the arts.[9] During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, the name of this institution was applied to European collections and, in colonial times, it spread around the world.

Given that it is commonly claimed that antiquity is the root of European culture, it might be interesting to see the extent to which this ancient *museion* survived and developed in the Islamic world. It is certainly the case that ancient philosophy, natural sciences, and other cultural practices from the Greeks and Romans did become part of 'Islamic'[10] cultures.

To search for traces of the *museion* complex in Islamic history, we need to examine mosques and their repositories. Like ancient temples, synagogues, churches,

7 Cf. Ibid., 151–53.

8 Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 250.

9 Klaus Meister, *Der Hellenismus: Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2016), 13–20 and Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

10 This term is not meant in a narrow theological sense, but refers to complex cultures in regions ruled by Muslim dynasties.

or temples in Asia,[11] mosques stored and preserved a wide range of things from relics, ritual devices, and scripts, to donated precious objects, as a religious site was recognised as a safe place. Reasons for donating to mosques varied from the social prestige gained from one's donated items being used on public occasions, to the private desire to donate precious items to a reliable institution. Personal belief might have been involved when donations entailed the notion of a 'sacrifice', but belief was not necessarily a dominant motivation when objects were handed over to a mosque or its personnel preserved these things.

In his 19th-century account of visiting the chamber containing Muhammad's grave in the prophet's mosque in Medina, British traveller Sir Richard Burton sees evidence of something that was a common practice at the time:

> [The gate] admits, into the dark narrow passage above alluded to, the officers who have charge of the treasures there deposited, and the eunuchs who sweep the floor, light the lamps and carry away the presents sometimes thrown in here by devotees.[12]

Historically, devotees also threw presents into the Ka^{c}ba in Mecca – once a treasury – and other important sites. I myself observed similar practices at a shrine in Baalbek, Lebanon: through the metal fence protecting the grave of as-Sayyida al-Khawla, a legendary woman from the prophet's family, visitors threw money and prayer beads. French author Yann Richard writes about the Astan-e qods in Mashhad, a major pilgrimage site with the grave of Imam Reza (d. 818). He notes that there is a yearly procedure to close and clean the Imam Reza shrine and collect the objects left by pilgrims, such as money and jewellery.[13] In Reckwitz's sense, the employees cleaning up and collecting the items donated by pilgrims can be seen as an example of social practice behind the scenes, which Reckwitz terms a "routine".

I would distinguish spontaneous donations, in popular religion often connected with a vow, from the shariatic form of a documented *waqf*, an endowment which must legally be of public interest. In Egypt, over centuries, believers dedicated

11 Yui Suzuki, "Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōriyūji's Kudara Kannon and its Great Treasure Repository," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 52 (2007): 128–40.

12 Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1874), Vol. 2, 29–30.

13 Cf. Yann Richard, *Der verborgene Imam: Die Geschichte des Schiismus in Iran* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1983), 79; Suzuki, "Temple", 131 mentions that people visited Japanese temples for aesthetic reasons on *mushiboshi*, the annual day when the temple repository was opened for cleaning.

lamps, oil, and prayer rugs to the al-Azhar and other mosques to support religious life. Those endowments are officially documented in archives.

For centuries, the most common type of material objects donated in the form of a *waqf* were precious handwritten volumes, *suhuf*, of the Qur'an. While the Qur'an is recited in prayers or sermons, religious books have long been and continue to be given to mosques for believers there to read. Historically, such endowments also provided infrastructure for improving literacy. From Cairo, we have several historical accounts, such as:

> Al-Musabbahi wrote: In the year 403 [1012/3 AD] the number of 1298 volumes [*suhuf*] had been transported from the palace [with the ruling calif al-Hakim as donor] down towards the Old Mosque [= mosque of 'Amr]. The Qur'ans' and their chest's inscriptions had been fully made of gold, and the people had the opportunity to read the volumes.[14]

The examples given above indicate a whole range of different activities, some of which fall within Fischer-Lichte's classifications a) and b): 'religious' or other objects had a certain cultural worth for their users, and were handed over to institutions for a variety of reasons. The reasons might be religious, such as to gain merit, or to communicate with god, but in the case of the large donation by calif al-Hakim, public representation and politics also played a role.

For centuries, monasteries of different religions, from Christianity to Buddhism, were places of higher learning and of collections of manuscripts. Monasteries and temples were centres of infrastructure and places of collective memory. Parallels to these complex aspects of the *museion* in Alexandria can also be found in Islamic cultures. For example, mosque libraries resulted from the ongoing donations of Qur'ans and other religious books. Here we find more aspects of Fischer-Lichte's classification: a) things from outside an institution were b) handed over, and c) made accessible to the public.

We have several indications that book donations to larger mosques in major cities during medieval times included other religious and non-religious books.[15] They were all part of *awqaf*, endowments, given by wealthy persons and scholars. The books covered a wide range of topics, including medicine. The library attached to the Shiite shrine in Najaf, Iraq was said to have counted 400,000 volumes, others

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14 A Fatimid historian quoted in al-Maqrizi (14/15th century), translated from Bärbel Köhler, *Die Wissenschaft unter den* ägyptischen *Fatimiden*, Arabistische Texte und Studien 6 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1994), 22. See also Mohamed Makki Sibai, *Mosque Libraries: An Historical Study* (London/ New York: Mansell, 1987), 52.

15 All data below regarding historical libraries connected to mosques, their organisation and librarians: Sibai, *Mosque Libraries*, 87–103, 108–15.

had several thousand texts. That made an inventory necessary, and professionals were needed to catalogue the books. Scriptures were classified according to different disciplines, and interested parties could access the books in separate rooms for reading and copying. Providing a room for copying was ambitious, as it entailed the provision of a free supply of parchment or paper, ink, light and supervision – all costly factors. For long-term preservation, large mosques employed both librarians and individuals who could copy and repair, translate and illustrate manuscripts. Larger libraries were often named after their founder, underlining their distinct status within urban social dynamics.

The classified and catalogued objects represented systems of knowledge and were arranged in special storage or display furniture. In smaller mosques, these were simply shelves somewhere in the prayer area, as is still the case today. Sometimes the books' relevance and their relation to religious knowledge was reflected by the cabinets being positioned close to a *mihrab*, a prayer niche. This was the case in the 15th-century Egyptian mosque of Sultan Hasan[16]. In other instances, the donated books were kept close to a *maqsura*, the prestigious place reserved for a local ruler near the *qibla* wall facing Mecca.

Larger institutions had separate storage areas with shelves, chests or cabinets, sometimes with glass doors, to store the books. A systematic order was used to aid people's search for a particular book, with information about the books' content provided close to where they were stored. This was not unlike the common modern practice of placing information alongside a museum object.

Larger Friday mosques (*gawami*^{c}) were and remain very complex institutions with many purposes. Before the 11th century, and the establishment of the institution of the *madrasa* – an Islamic parallel to the European university – larger mosques were places of higher learning. As such, their libraries were likely frequented by students, scholars and interested parties for centuries. Before universities were established in Europe, European institutions of academic learning were mainly exclusive spaces within monasteries. Mosque libraries, by contrast, were open to the urban public. This setting and social embeddedness could be considered a historical trace of the *museion* and library in Alexandria. Well before public museums opened in Europe, mosque libraries were already providing access to knowl-

16 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250–1517): Scribes, Libraries and Market* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 53 with illustration of this and other book cabinets, sometimes called *khalwa*, 'hidden chamber', 'place of protection'. These cabinets could be compared to the Torah shrines or the *geniza* (treasury) in synagogues. However, unlike the Torah shrine and *geniza*, the *khalwa* is not regarded as a 'sacred' sphere.

edge to a wide audience of interested and somewhat educated individuals, with the funding and administration that such a system would have entailed.

Islamic founders did more than supply collections to mosques. Two competing dynasties, the Abbasids in Bagdad (8^{th} to 12^{th} century) and the Fatimids in Cairo (10^{th} to 12^{th} century), also established academic institutions as meeting points for scholars from many disciplines. Like the libraries described above, these institutes were rulers' foundations (*awqaf*) regulated by shari^{c}a law. The *dar al-^{c}ilm*, 'house of knowledge', in Cairo, was supported by calif al-Hakim (d. 1021), who rented buildings for it in the southern part of the city. The institution had, besides its own administration and servants, a number of employees, such as librarians, professional copyists, etc. It housed thousands of volumes, which were made accessible via catalogues to interested parties who came to the reading rooms to read and copy texts on subjects including Islamic knowledge, history, philosophy, natural sciences, and literature.[17]

Based on former accounts, the historian al-Maqrizi (14^{th}/15^{th} century) described this institution as being frequented by various groups. Key individuals were part of certain 'programmes' that were quite common at courts of that time: scholars discussed interesting topics from their fields of knowledge, probably also with a competing element of entertaining the ruler and his entourage. Just as today's libraries often serve as multipurpose museums, these institutes were part of the intellectual life of the city. [18]

One major element associated with museums, namely the display of objects as the focus of reflections on cultural history, has yet to be identified. For this, we have to turn to different repositories: court collections and treasuries.[19] Alexander and Alexander regard European court collections and treasuries as the link between the *museion* in Alexandria and private collections in Renaissance times. One might think of the Roman emperor Hadrian's villa, or of emperor Nero, a lover of art and architecture.[20] The upper class even cultivated representations of deities as art, independent from temples and religious perspectives. They collect-

17 Köhler, *Wissenschaft,* 56–64; Sibai, *Mosque Libraries*, 4 with an early example from 10^{th}-century Iran.

18 Al-Maqrizi quoted in Köhler, *Wissenschaft*, 60–61.

19 Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, 90–98 considers the parallels between 'temples' and courts, regarding collections.

20 Cf. Edward Porter Alexander and Mary Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Lanham et al.: Altamira Press/Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 4–9.

ed vases or statues with various meanings and displayed them in special interiors of palaces and gardens.

This tradition was carried on in regions dominated by Islamic rulers. In Egypt, Ibn Tulun (d. 884) and his son Khumarawaih (9th century) are known for their impressive architecture following Roman models: a hippodrome said to have been decorated with golden lions, a zoo, a private botanical garden with fountains and a menagerie of birds, and even a golden pavilion with statues of beautiful women, depicting singers and slaves.[21] While this was probably not in line with theological discourse, the upper class did create such places.

Additionally, in the Near and Middle East, as in other parts of the world, collecting and exchanging precious objects with diplomatic contacts was a matter of culture and manners. Before modern economic systems, the wealth of a dynasty was reflected in their belongings. If we continue to follow the traces of the *museion* in Egypt, it was the Fatimids who were known for their excessive treasuries. Indeed, there are eyewitness accounts of their material culture. The archbishop William of Tyre (d. 1186) visited the Fatimid palace on a diplomatic mission, and was impressed by the architecture and decorations. He passed a menagerie of exotic birds and animals, and, in the inner palace, finally reached the ruler residing inside a rich interior.[22]

Other travelogues report impressive parades, processions and public feasts, and we know of the state-run manufacture of various luxury goods. After the end of the Fatimid dynasty, at the end of the 12th century, the Ayyubids opened and partially sold the contents of the Fatimids' chambers, and historians have written long lists of items. Many luxury objects made of gold, crystal, silver and ivory, glass and ceramics, or detailed woodcarvings and fine textiles survive from Fatimid times. Beyond the political implications of impressing others with these objects, we can imagine that Fatimid society or at least the court and upper class must have admired and loved precious objects to a certain degree.[23]

Returning to our guiding ideas and Fischer-Lichte, we find a) luxury and 'exotic' precious objects becoming b) part of collections, which were c) displayed and shared mainly with an elite, as well as their servants who again must have been professionals in the background, with knowledge of how to keep and handle crys-

21 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 5.

22 Wilfried Seipel, ed., *Schätze der Kalifen: Islamische Kunst zur Fatimidenzeit* (Wien: Skira, 1998), 225.

23 Seipel, *Schätze.*

tal jars or silver plates. This last aspect reminds us of Reckwitz's concept of social practices characterised as routines.

Fischer-Lichte's aspect c) deserves closer attention, as it is remarkable that we can find special furniture and elements of interior design with the function of 'staging' objects. Miniature paintings from about 1500 onwards depict the display of precious vases and similar items in niches in the wall as a common element of wealthy households. Such niches are regularly an element of illustrations of palace life. Lots of pictorial examples exist, from Safavid Iran, Mughal India, and the Ottoman empire.[24] The famous wall paintings in the Chehel Sotoun palace in Isfahan from the 17th century depict festivities at the court including such niches containing luxury dishes.[25]

From medieval times onwards, the elite collected porcelain from China. According to art historian Robert Irwin, the term 'china' was also attributed to other items, such as glass vases. Irwin explains that the Fatimids had close economic links with Asia, and that the list of contents of their treasuries included porcelain from China. The Iranian scholar ath-Thaᶜalibi (d. 1038) wrote the following about Arab collectors:

> The Arabs used to call every delicately or curiously made vessel and suchlike, whatever its real origin, 'Chinese', because finely made things are a speciality of [China]. The designation 'china' has remained in use to this day for the celebrated type of dishes.[26]

It is clear that at least the – not only Arab – owners and collectors of porcelain and exquisite tableware appreciated the objects for their style, and enthusiasts knew special codes of aesthetics.

It is not surprising that special furniture was developed to present these pieces. Art historian Ernst Kühnel describes carved wooden niches as a typical way of displaying precious objects, a type of interior that survives in Safavid palaces and historical buildings in Iran.[27] This form can also be found in architecture in other

24 Elke Niewöhner, *Der Sultan im Bade: Bilder und Objekte höfischen Lebens im Islam* (Hannover: Kestner Museum Hannover, 1994), 70–71, 193, illustr. XVIII from an album depicting Shah Jahan, 17th century, or 78–79, 194, illustr. XIX a Mughal princess, 18th century. Niches and vases can be seen in the background.

25 Gholam Hossein Arab, *Isfahan* (Teheran: Farhangsara Yassavoli, 1996), 25.

26 Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art* (London: Laurence King Irwin, 1997), 233 referring to *ath-Thaᶜalibi, al-Lata'if al-maᶜarif*. See also Tim Stanley, "Patterns of Exchange in the Decorative Arts between China and South-West Asia," in *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea*, ed. Ralph Kauz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 107–15.

27 Cf. Ernst Kühnel, *Die Kunst des Islam* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1962), 158 and Arab, *Isfahan*, 31 with Hasth Behesht Palace and 143 House of the Homa'i family.

regions, such as in a 17th-century Christian house in Aleppo under Ottoman influence, or in the Topkapı Serai, the residence of the Ottoman sultan himself.[28] For Egypt, this traditional form of interior design was documented by British scholar Edward William Lane, who lived and worked in Cairo in the middle of the 19th century. In his *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, an early ethnographic account of everyday life, including the way people designed and used their houses, he writes:

> There is, besides, in this and some other apartments, a narrow shelf of wood, extending along two or each of the three walls which bound the leewán, about seven feet or more from the floor, just above the cupboards; but interrupted in some parts, at least in those parts where the windows are placed: upon this are arranged several vessels of china, not so much for general use as for ornament.[29]

The photograph shows such niches on the upper parts of walls in the *chini khane* within a Safavid-era complex in Ardabil, Iran.[30] The octagonal space, with its high ceiling and walls surrounded by shelves, likely hosted the court's impressive collection. It evokes a very special 'aura', was used for political representation, and was located quite close to the building's more 'religious' functions, with the grave of the ancestor of this Iranian dynasty (1501/02–1722), Sheikh Safi ad-Din Ishaq Ardabili (1252–1334), who was a Sufi. This building again exemplifies the difficulty of distinguishing between sacred and profane spheres, as was the case with the *museion*. While the early Savavids were Sufists, and the origin of the complex of buildings in Ardabil is a *khanegah*, a place for gatherings of mystics, a mundane dynasty evolved and the building complex, and especially the *chini khane,* became a place of courtly and political representation. Today, the whole site is a public museum and is registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List, but it remains a location for religious practices such as pilgrimage to the Sufi's grave,

28 Dominique Clévenot and Gérard Degeorge, *Das Ornament in der Baukunst des Islam* (München: Hirmer, 2000), 111, illustr. 159; Julia Gonella, *Ein christlich-orientalisches Wohnhaus des 17. Jahrhunderts aus Aleppo (Syrien): Das "Aleppo-Zimmer" im Museum für Islamische Kunst* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1996), 34, illustr. 31; Philippa Vaughan, "Architektur (Moghuln)," in *Islam – Kunst und Architektur,* ed. Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius (Potsdam: H.F.Ullmann 2015), 465 with a Mughal example and Almut von Gladiß, "Architektur (Osmanisch)," in Hattstein and Delius, *Islam – Kunst und Architektur*, 564 with the Sultan's palace in Istanbul.

29 Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians: Written in Egypt during the Years 1833, –34, and –35* (London: John Murray, 1860), 18 and illustrations 14, 17.

30 Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, *Sheikh Safi Al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil* (Teheran, 2009), 36 with floor plan, https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1345.pdf.

Figure 1: Exhibition in the Sheikh Safi ad-Din complex, Ardabil, 2019. Photo: Leila Tavangar.

and is a place of representation of national identity with the exhibition inside the *chini khane*.

The photograph gives us the chance to reflect on the development of 'staging' the objects. Obviously, the social frame and practices of display changed. The *chini khane* was once a closed space for selected guests at the Safavid court. This allowed for open shelves, but the items in the niches were still protected, above the social gatherings taking place on the ground. Given that there are miniature paintings – as mentioned – that depict similar designs, we can imagine a ruler hosting a reception for his entourage in this space. In such a situation, the treasury and chinaware served to confirm the ruler's power. The *chini khane* later became a semi-public space, making it necessary to lock the showcases and use glass vitrines. Interestingly, the same collection of chinaware is still displayed in Ardabil; it has been moved to the ground level and receives a lot of attention today.

This already refers to the final aspect mentioned above, d) a codified reaction to exposed and 'staged' items of collections. In addition to the representative spaces that were part of court life, there were similar spaces for ambling and observing carefully arranged material items. Medieval Arabic travelogues mention such spaces. For example, Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) visited many mosques in different countries on his *hajj*, and described in detail the marble wall decorations and precious lamps in gold and silver, impressive mosaic displays and artful textiles. His style reveals that his readers were interested in such information more from a perspective of connoisseurs of art and architecture than from a religious perspective. He even describes people admiring the architectural and material details of the courtyard around the Kaᶜba in Mecca.[31]

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is evidence of distinct types of performative activities in pre-modern Islamic collections. In line with Fischer-Lichte's system, a) meaningful things with religious and non-religious uses were b) collected by milieus that were not exclusively or primarily interested in the religious connotations of the artefacts, but also in the systems of knowledge they represented. In addition, c) institutionalised collections were open to the public to spread information. This was more commonly done through books, whereas objects like tableware were long part of exclusive displays. Finally, d) a reflective attitude towards material culture was quite common among art lovers, collectors and travellers.

Referring to Reckwitz and *routine*, one can identify parallels between the cultures, in terms of bodily practices, sensation, meaning, connected codes of behaviour and even emotions. Actors in modern museums and those in historical collections in the Near and Middle East seem to practise similar routines, such as professional inventory, preservation, and the re-arrangement of things in special furniture, as well as maintaining a 'secular' perspective on objects that represent knowledge or are perceived as pieces of art.

Many aspects of 'museums', which are frequently regarded as modern, secular, and European, also existed in historical Islamic regions. This may be because both cultures developed from common roots in antiquity, which lived on in part in Islamic regions and were rediscovered in modern Europe. As with the *museion*, the links and divisions between 'religion' and 'non-religion' in historical institutions in Islamic regions were not always immediately evident.

31 Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, "*Maqām Ibrāhīm* and the Sacred Landscape of Mecca According to Ibn Jubayr," in *Abraham's Family: A Network of Meaning in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lukas Bormann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2018), 458–59. About the interior of the Husain-Mosque in Cairo: Roland Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (Delhi: Goodword Books, 2016, first published 1952), 36–37 describing the interior of the Husain-Mosque in Cairo and 97 the Kaʿba.

This paper has focused exclusively on Islamic regions, but other cultures had similar forms. Japanese temples, for example, are repositories for artefacts.[32] Further investigation of the non-European histories of practices of collection could prove fruitful. Equally, exploring the specific furniture used to stage and exhibit items would likely contribute to our understanding of the historical development of socio-material practices in museums.

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Gallery II:

Materialisation of Social Processes – Analysing Musealisation

Ekaterina Teryukova

Museum Collections as a Research Source for the Study of Religion: From the History of the State Museum of the History of Religion (St Petersburg, Russia)

In the very heart of St Petersburg, at 14 Pochtamtskaya Street, one finds a unique museum, the State Museum of the History of Religion (SMHR), sitting right next to the world-famous architectural masterpieces – the Admiralty and St. Isaac's Cathedral. Today, it is the only museum in Russia – and one of the few in the world – that is devoted solely to the universal phenomenon of religion and the role it plays in human culture. The museum was founded in 1932 by Vladimir Bogoraz-Tan, an outstanding Russian citizen and director of academic institutions. He was a scholar of linguistics, ethnography, anthropology, and history of religion, as well as a poet, author, journalist, teacher, and full member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. For 85 years, the museum has been acting as a research centre, studying religions of the past and present, in addition to playing a significant role in the culture of the city of St Petersburg.

It is hard to place the SMHR within modern museum classifications, in which museums are typically divided into art, history, ethnography, science, technology, etc. Just as the complexity of religion as a phenomenon naturally turns the study of religion into multidisciplinary research, the collection and exhibition principles set out for religious objects at the museum are quite specific: they are multi-dimensional, and founded on a historical and typological approach to the study of religion, and a comparative method of display. Since its foundation, and throughout its history, the museum collection and permanent exhibition have displayed a wide range of religious beliefs, from ancient times to the present day, and outlined the evolution of religion through the diversity of its historical forms.

Today, the museum collection stands just shy of 200,000 artefacts, which are noteworthy for their diversity. In addition to popular, mass-produced and common religious objects and items used in personal worship in everyday life, it includes true rarities, and world artistic masterpieces of undeniable cultural, historic, and aesthetic value. The museum houses monuments of spiritual and material culture from a range of countries, epochs, and ethnic and cultural groups, the oldest of which are dated to the Palaeolithic Era, and the newest of which tell the story of religion today. The greater part of the collection is divided by religious denomination. Philately, fabrics, precious metals, photography and negatives, rare books, and the Scientific and Historical Archives form separate collections, due to storage requirements. The broad spectrum of topics, artefacts and geographic locations, from Oceania to South America, and from Africa to Siberia, makes the SMHR collection a vast pool of resources for the study of religion, which has not yet been fully tapped into. As many collections have links to famous Russian scholars of religion, it could also be used as a source base for the history of approaches to the study of religion in Russia.

The analysis of museum collections shows that they may be subdivided into several large categories of sources: books, photography, written documents, visual arts, ritual objects and clothes.

We can demonstrate a number of examples of this approach to viewing a museum collection as sources to be researched. First and foremost, it is worth highlighting the SMHR Research Library, Russia's largest (more than 180,000 items) secular collection of books and periodicals on religion, comprising publications dating from the 18th to the 21st century. Early printed books dated from the 15th to 17th centuries form a separate Rare Books Collection. Many items in the library collection bear bookplates, autographs, gift and ownership inscriptions, and handwritten notes by famous Russian historical and religious figures. The most valuable parts of the library collection are the Old Church Slavonic books, bibles in several world languages, theological journals published by pre-revolutionary Russian Spiritual Academies and Seminaries, lifetime editions of works by Russia's early 20th-century religious philosophers, and Russia's most comprehensive collection of atheist literature from the 1920s and 1930s.

The book collection grew rapidly in the first decades after the museum's foundation. Books were purchased, received as gifts of personal library collections of Russian historians and religious scholars, or transferred from monasteries, churches, or religious schools closed in the 1930s. Books were brought in from public, religious and governmental societies that were no longer in existence, such as the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the Holy Synod, as well as from field trips to regional museums of local history. A great number of books have found their way to the museum through numerous changes of ownership, and thus bear many different ownership marks. In 1947, a large book collection came to the SMHR from Moscow's Central Antireligious Museum that had closed down.[1]

1 Ekaterina Teryukova, "Central Anti-Religious Museum in Moscow: Historical Landmarks (1929–1947)," *Study of Religion ("Religiovedeie"),* no.4 (2019): 121–27, https://doi.org/10.22250/2072-8662.2019.4.121–127.

The books from the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society is a vivid example of a collection that forms a section of our library in its own right. The Society was established in 1882, and consisted equally of prominent spiritual leaders and representatives of academic science. On the eve of the Russian Revolution of 1917, it possessed an appreciable collection comprising photographs, negatives, books, pilgrim souvenirs, glass lantern slides (‘foggy pictures’), and Russian paintings, drawings and prints, dating from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century. The books (over 10,000 volumes) and photographs (over 7,000 images) from the collection of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society are of particular value and great historical significance. They provide an unsurpassed source of visual and printed data for the study of ‘the Holy Land’ in the late 19th to early 20th century, the history of its research and the history of Palestine studies, as an integral part of Russia’s intellectual history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The museum’s separate Rare Books Collection is also of note. It comprises Cyrillic printed books from the 16th and 17th centuries, 41 incunabula (books published before 31 December 1500), and European books from the 16th and 17th centuries. Their routes into the SMHR were varied. The provenance of some of the early printed books can be established through stamps and notes by previous owners. Some were part of personal book collections belonging to famous Russian scholars and bibliophiles. Nowadays the museum’s incunabula collection is the fifth largest among those in St Petersburg.

The Freemasonry Collection will, undoubtedly, prove a source of many future discoveries, as it includes several thousand artefacts. It is distributed over various of the museum’s collections, rather than forming a separate one of its own. Characterised by typological diversity, it is a perfect example of a museum collection as a historical research source. There are manuscripts, constituent decrees, and diplomas dated between 1760 and 1930, as well as masonic symbols, ritual objects and garments, pieces of art, porcelain figures, and books.

The documents on free thought and atheism in Russia, as well as on Soviet antireligious propaganda between 1920 and 1960, also present a vast potential historical resource. There are collections of antireligious posters (over 300 pieces), antireligious toys, prints, paintings, photography, research archival documents, collections of periodicals and books stored at the Research Library; for example, the now-rare complete sets of *Revolution and Church, Antireligioznik, Bezbozhnik, Bezbozhnik u Stunka, Militant Atheism*, etc.

We would like to provide several examples in which the SMHR collection serves as an information source not only for the study of religious beliefs, but also for the history of the study of religion in Russia.

Between 1947 and 1955, Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich (1873–1955) was director of the museum. By this point, he was known as a revolutionary *Bolshevik*, social and political activist, writer and publicist, human rights defender, as well as a researcher of religious minorities in Russia, who had put together a unique collection of documents on the history of ideological movements among the Russian people.

Bonch-Bruevich became interested in the study of Russian religious minorities while living abroad from 1896 to 1905. An active member of the Russian revolutionary movement, he left for Switzerland in April 1896 after his underground cell in Moscow was exposed. In Switzerland, he joined the community of Russian political émigrés, working with several Russian publishing houses abroad as well as a number of Russian newspapers. It was at this point that he began collecting documents. From 1898 to 1899, while working at Free Word Press, which was set up by V. G. Chertkov, the leader of the Tolstoy movement in London, Bonch-Bruevich organised an archive on the history of, and research into, Russian sects (this term applied to religious minorities in early 20th-century Russian religious legislation). From 1899 to 1900, he accompanied Dukhobor migrants fleeing religious persecution in the Russian Empire. During this trip, he established himself as a researcher. Having collected data on Dukhobor history and folklore, he recorded, and prepared for publication, a book of their religious poetry, "The Book of Life". From 1899, the topic of Russian sects became central to Bonch-Bruevich's research, politics, and writing.

In 1908, his research took a new turn. He concentrated on preparing a series of books on socio-religious movements in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and became the leading academic in the study of popular religion, his project having no parallels in the study of religions in Russia. Having a clear understanding of the significance of the broad sect movement to life in Russia, Bonch-Bruevich's goal was to conduct a comprehensive study of a vast array of Russian sects. He believed that it was necessary to begin by collecting and publishing the many manuscripts accumulated from various public and private libraries, private archives, sect communities, and other such places.

In 1908, the first issue of "Materials on the History and Study of Russian Sects and Schism" was published. It included Bonch-Bruevich's "Programme for Collecting Data on the Research and Study of Russian Sects and Schism". The programme was addressed to a wide audience who could assist him in his research; first and foremost, those called ‘sect followers’, ‘schismatics’, and ‘Old Believers’ in Russia. Assistance meant sending manuscripts and other materials already stored in archives and owned by private citizens in various communities. Bonch-Bruevich hoped that ‘sect followers’ would take up the pen and write down the histories of their communities from their lifetime, or from stories passed down from their ancestors or from family to family. He pointed out that, in describing their lives, it would be necessary to outline a comprehensive understanding of faith and life, and of people’s need to live in accordance with the precepts of their faith; to record their teachings: psalms, prayers, rhymes, legends, tales, and various interpretations; to describe all the events that happened in the course of their lives, especially those in which people or whole communities had to suffer for acting according to their faith. In addition, he encouraged into the project everyone who had had the opportunity to study and observe the life of the populations in question, asking them to make their descriptions as full and accurate as possible, in line with the procedure and the 36-article guidelines proposed by him. He later expanded the guidelines to 39 articles.

Bonch-Bruevich’s project was a success as he received letters from many communities in response to his request. The significance and results of this project are evident in the scope of its output. In 1908–1916, he published six volumes of *Materials.* Each volume contained only a fraction of the records collected during his trips or received by post in response to his *Programme,* which was re-outlined in the introduction to each of the volumes, with small alterations. It is safe to say that the real authors of the journal were the people themselves, who eagerly responded to the request for their participation in publishing materials about themselves.

It has to be noted that, while Bonch-Bruevich did not support the official church, he did not share the beliefs of his correspondents either. However, acting as an “archivist of human errors”, as he described his role, the researcher adhered strictly to the principles of scholarly honesty and impartiality. For Bonch-Bruevich, this meant that research could not be founded on the sources traditionally used for this purpose in the Russian Empire: police investigation records, court indictments, sect texts recovered during police searches, and notes and testimonials from the ‘repentant’ and ‘converted’. His research method required precise and comprehensive study not only of literature but also of the everyday lives of religious minorities, as described in the materials collected from sect members, of their own accord and upon Bonch-Bruevich’s request; that is, from sources he discovered himself.

The project resulted in thousands of pages sent to the researcher and preserved for historical records. Some of them were published, which occurred, in every instance, with the consent of their authors. Bonch-Bruevich considered this to be the deepest indicator of trust in him as a researcher. He wrote that he would like to tell the reader:

> народ теперь доверяет Вам свою душу, свою совесть. Вот они, эти простые, часто загнанные, истерзанные люди, простосердечно, полные любви, говорят вам: вот мы какие, вот все наше святая святых. Вот все, чем и для чего мы живем и как понимаем жизнь. Отнесемся же бережно к этому высокому порыву тружеников земли, живущих там, далеко, в степях и равнинах, в горах и кручах, в болотах и лесах необъятной России.[2]

> The people trust you with their soul, their conscience. Here they are, these simple, often persecuted, tortured people; with a simplicity of heart and full of love, they tell you: this is us; this is our sancta sanctorum. Here is everything we live for and here is how we understand life. Let us treat with utmost care this noble impulse of the workers of the land who live out there, in the steppes and valleys, on the hills and mountains, in the marshes and forests of the boundless Russia .[3]

Some materials remained in his private archives until later finding their way to the SMHR. As the museum's director, he founded the Department of Manuscripts in 1952, which was later renamed the Scientific and Historical Archives. It contains the materials donated by Bonch-Bruevich, which forms Collection No. 2. Today, it includes 9,062 inventory items and comprises tens of thousands of handwritten and typed pages created or collected by Bonch-Bruevich.

Another significant source for the history of the study of religion is the SMHR collection of Chinese popular prints (approximately 1,000 inventory items) that brings to mind the name of academician V. M. Alekseev, an outstanding Russian sinologist. The museum acquired from him not only the art and epigraphic material, but also a part of Alekseev's handwritten archives, which are of infinite research value.[4] A joint Russia-Taiwan research project has made it possible to identify these documents in the museum's Research and Historical Archives, and bring them into research circulation. It revealed that the archives also contain

2 Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, *Materials on the History and Study of Russian Sects and Old Believers* (Saint-Petersburg: Printing-office B.M. Volff, 1911), XX–XXI.

3 Translation by O. Glotova.

4 Ekaterina Teryukova and Ekaterina Zavidovskaya, "The Archive of Academician V.M. Alekseev from the Collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion as a Source for the Study of Popular Religious Beliefs in Late Imperial China," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 23, no. 1 (2017): 61–69.

handwritten notes in Chinese, dated to 1905–1907, commissioned by Alekseev from Chinese consultants. They provide commentary on the prints, their plots, characters, literary sources and clarify the symbolic riddles that these contained. Altogether, the documents from Alekseev's archives and popular prints present a unique source for the study of religious syncretism during the last years of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

Another renowned Russian religious scholar, E. M. Shilling (1892–1953), contributed greatly to the museum's collection.[5] Between 1920 and 1940, he undertook more than twenty expeditions to the North Caucasus, and the collection he gathered there greatly enriched those of several large museums in Moscow and Leningrad. Shilling's material objects collection at the SMHR numbers approximately 130 inventory items that arrived between 1930 and 1938. Just as in the case of Alekseev's contribution, the artefacts are accompanied by documents in the Research Archives. Although they appear fragmented and random at first glance, these documents provide a comprehensive set of field notes from his field trips to the Caucasus between 1920 and 1940, and contain a description of the state of religious beliefs among the residents of Dagestan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh at the time. On the one hand, the cults and beliefs in question had generally remained part of the living tradition in these areas, while, on the other, they had already begun to experience ever-increasing pressure from the new political system. It was this pressure that eventually led to their transformation, and complete disappearance from everyday ritual practice.

I would also like to mention Gleb Snesarev, another ethnographer and researcher of religious beliefs in Central Asia, particularly the Uzbeks, who was also active in the middle of the 20th century.[6] He holds a special place in Russia's mid-20th century study of religion, as every single one of his publications was based on field data. Snesarev visited the region of interest of his research many times, from the 1930s to the 1960s, as part of both ethnographic and multidisciplinary expeditions. Moreover, he was one of the few ethnographers of his time who took his field work methodology very seriously, a fact which is illustrated perfectly in his mid-1950s paper "Some Aspects of Ethnographic Field Research Methodology for the Study of

5 Ekaterina Teryukova and Natalia Alferova, "The Archive of E.M. Shilling from the Collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion as a Source for the Study of Religiosity in the Caucasus Region in 1930s," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 25, no. 1 (2019): 64–72.

6 Ekaterina Teryukova, "G.P. Snesarev as a Collector and Researcher of Central Asian Religious Beliefs (on the Materials of the Collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg, Russia)," *Study of Religion ("Religiovedeie")*, no. 2 (2020): 121–26, https://doi.org/10.22250/2072-8662.2020.2.

Religion and Atheism"[7]. According to Snesarev, the only effective method is the stationary research method, in which a researcher stays in one place for a long time, expands his network of contacts, and wins trust through appropriate behaviour. This approach makes it possible to move beyond recording external aspects of religious experience, to studying deep processes of human consciousness, and to understanding the psychology of a religious person and the reason why vestiges of religion are so persistent. To obtain 'mass data' and make generalised conclusions, Snesarev recommended combining stationary research with themed routes. His personal field research experience in Central Asia demonstrated that various vestiges of religion were rooted in household family life. According to the scholar it was the family, which he considered the most "conservative" societal unit, that should be the main object of religious and ethnographic studies.

During his trips he collected a number of 'material artefacts', and made some significant observations on the strength of 'vestiges of religion', as they were called at the time, as well as on the possibility of eliminating them. Living in the midst of the religious community allowed Snesarev to contradict the theoretical premise that the lack of external signs of religious belief in the Muslims of the region demonstrated that there were no vestiges of religion in their circle. In this regard, he wrote that very often the population remained strongly religious, despite the absence of mosques or religious officials, or even sacred sites such as a *mazar*, a sacred tree or stone. He emphasised that the main environment for the preservation of such vestiges was the female population, the housewives staying true to the custom of wearing paranjas.[8]

One of the issues the researcher focused on in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, was identifying the reasons behind the women's preservation of the custom of wearing these ritual garments. Snesarev wrote in his report:

> Мне приходилось беседовать с женщинами, еще носящими паранджу, и женщинами, снявшими ее. Почти все закрытые женщины выражают горячее желание порвать с этим тяжелым обычаем; большинство отлично понимают какой вред приносит паранджа. Но все в один голос ссылаются на мужей, заставляющих их ходить с закрытыми лицами.[9]

7 Gleb Snesarev, "Some Aspects of Ethnographic Field Research Methodology for the Study of Religion and Atheism," *Ethnographic Survey*, no. 6 (2013): 89–94.

8 Sergei Alymov, "G.P. Snesarev and Field Research of 'Religious and Household Survivals," *Ethnographic Survey*, no. 6 (2013): 73.

9 Gleb Snesarev, "The Report on Expedition to the Central Asia in Spring, 1940 with the Purpose of the Study of Religious Vestiges," in *History and Anthropology of Religion (1929–1946)*, ed. Marianna Shakhnovich (Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg State University, 2019), 236–62.

> I talked to women who still wear a paranja and women who have taken it down. Almost all of the women wearing covers express passionate desire to abandon this difficult custom. Most of them are perfectly aware of the harm the paranja does them. However, they all mention their husbands who make them cover their faces.[10]

At the same time, Snesarev was enthusiastic to point out that, despite the old tradition, a wonderful movement against wearing paranjas now involved a great number of women, some of them religious. His 1940 expedition to Osh coincided with preparations for the International Women's Day celebration. At factories, in offices, and among housewives, there were large demonstrations and meetings. Removing the paranja was one of the central issues at hand. During this expedition, on 7th and 8th March, Snesarev attended several celebratory meetings and photographed the process of taking off the paranjas. At the meeting of the Arbakesh cooperative, three women took off their paranjas and presented them to the Central Anti-Religious Museum requesting that they become part of the museum's permanent exhibition.[11]

Although the information on the SMHR collections provided in the present paper is by no means exhaustive, it clearly demonstrates that the objects stored at the museum, such as documents, manuscripts, monuments of material culture and art, photographs, and printed material, are a unique source base for the reconstruction and museum presentation of various aspects of the religious life of various ethnic and cultural groups, as well as for research into religion and the history of the study of religion in Russia.

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10 Translation by O. Glotova.

11 Snesarev, "The Report on Expedition to the Central Asia in Spring, 1940 with the Purpose of the Study of Religious Vestiges," 256.

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Kerstin Johannsen

Move Objects to Shift Meaning: Tracing the Relocation of a Painting by Oswald Onghers in Frankfurt Cathedral

1 Treasury and Endowment of Frankfurt Cathedral in Church and Museum

For centuries, the Church of St Bartholomew (Frankfurt Cathedral) had a richly decorated interior, and numerous precious objects in the church's treasury. Although many of these items have been lost or destroyed, a selection of the remaining objects is nowadays on display in the two exhibition areas of the Dommuseum Frankfurt or guarded in the museum's storage rooms. These objects are categorised as artworks and handled accordingly. Other objects are still an integral part of the church's endowment – such as the oil painting by Oswald Onghers depicting St Bartholomew, which will be taken as an example in this paper. This painting entered the Church of St Bartholomew in 1678 and is still on display in the church itself. This poses certain challenges with regard to handling art according to museum standards. This article will shed light on how art-historically based categories of valuing an object are applied in all three of the contexts mentioned above – museum, storage room, and church.

The painting, like almost every object from the treasury, has been relocated several times and was even moved to architecturally different parts of the building. Pictorial evidence gives information about at least four different positions which I shall discuss in this article. I read these locations and relocations not only as a descriptive part of an object's biography, but also as presenting different spatial situations in which visitors would see and experience the object. Thus, they hint at ascribed meaning and importance. Moreover, if the objects are later exhibited in a museum, or in fact included in any kind of display, they can only be read in context with known previous contexts of visibility. As such, church interiors always represent a complex system of iconographic references and offer numerous connections between architecture, permanent furniture and movable objects. I will analyse the different spatial situations and elaborate their specific parameters in terms of being a context of visibility for this painting as an exhibition-like display situation.

2 The Object, Pictorial Sources and Different Locations: A Painting by Oswald Onghers

The oil painting by the Flemish painter Oswald Onghers (1628–1706), entitled "Saint Bartholomew", dates back to 1670 (fig.1). It was originally commissioned for Frankfurt Cathedral and is still there. In this oil painting, the saint, who was an apostle, is skinned alive by three men as a reaction against his successful preaching in India. His hands are tied above his head to a tree without leaves. He is almost naked and his view is directed upwards. His face expresses pain and sorrow. One man in the background to the left is holding a rope that binds St Bartholomew's body to the tree; another to the right side of the painting has already started the skinning and parts of St Bartholomew's skin are hanging over his arm. The third man, in the front left of the composition, sharpens his knife, introducing an indicator for time into the scenery: Bartholomew's martyrdom is ongoing as we look at it and there is more to come since this knife is only now being prepared for future action. In this way, the viewer is immersed in the martyrdom experience. Two inscriptions are added to the painting: first, the painter's signature "osw. Onghers Pinx. An° 1670"; second, a family crest memorialising the donor Johann Karl von Franckenstein with his initials I.C.V.F.

The painting is dated to 1670 but its first documented appearance in Frankfurt Cathedral was only in 1678 – as part of the so-called altar of St Bartholomew. In an oil painting by Christian Stöcklin from 1774, this altar dedicated to St Bartholomew is shown in detail located in the southern transept (fig. 2). The altar itself came into the church much earlier, having been donated by 1325. But the painting by Onghers was added in 1678 when Johann Karl von Franckenstein (d.1691), auxiliary bishop of Worms, made an endowment for the renovation of the altar to his soul's merit in heaven. Elsbeth de Weerth argues that Onghers' painting likely entered the cathedral as a panel painting, before subsequently being changed into part of a retable,[1] that is to say that it was (re-)manufactured as an upright altarpiece with rounded upper edges. The motif is painted in a detailed manner. It can be assumed that a contemporary viewer of Stöcklin's painting could easily identify the panel painting by Onghers. This is the first known position of the altar.[2] The earliest photographs of the Church of St Bartholomew,

1 Elsbeth de Weerth, *Die Ausstattung des Frankfurter Domes* (Frankfurt am Main: Bischöfliches Ordinariat, 1999), 181.

2 According to Römer-Büchner, this position is most likely not identical to the initial position that was chosen for the altar in this church: Benedict J. Römer-Büchner, *Die Wahl- und Krönungskirche der deutschen Kaiser zu St. Bartholomäi in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt am Main, 1857), 43–44.

Figure 1: Oswald Onghers, St Bartholomew. Oil on canvas on wooden panel, 247 x 143 cm, 1670. Photo: Axel Schneider, Frankfurt am Main.

taken by Carl Friedrich Mylius (1827–1916) in 1866, show the altar in the same position.[3]

3 (DAF) Domarchiv Frankfurt am Main; Cf. August Heuser and Matthias Theodor Kloft, *Der Dombrand von 1867*, Exhibition Catalogue (Frankfurt am Main: Henrich Druck und Medien, 2004), 34.

Figure 2: Christian Stöcklin, Interior of Frankfurt Cathedral. Oil on canvas, 1774. Photo: Galerie J.P. Schneider jr.

The altar stayed in the transept until about 1900,[4] when it underwent restoration.[5] After restoration, it was moved into the vestibule,[6] and later into the historical cloister. A photograph published in Dillmann 1929 (fig. 3) shows the altar against plain and undecorated white walls in the eastern part of the historical cloister; with stairs and a metal handrail to the left. [7] During the Second World War, the altar remained in the cloister and was severely damaged when the church was hit by bombs in 1944. The wooden frame was destroyed by flames and the painting damaged. After the war, the painting alone was restored. It was turned into a

4 It was replaced by another altar dedicated to the holy kin. Cf. Matthias Theodor Kloft, *Frankfurt am Main: Kaiserdom St. Bartholomäus,* 3rd ed. (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2002), 34.

5 1908 by L. Windschmitt (DAF, IV.22.B. und IV.22.3.).

6 cf. Personal notes by Elsbeth de Weerth, (edw); Source of information not yet verifiable.

7 Josef Dillmann, *Der Dom zu Frankfurt am Main: Ein Führer zu seiner Geschichte und seine Kunstwerke* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Kreuer, 1929), 62–64. Photo: Dr. Paul Wolff.

panel painting. A new frame with a new design was added.

From the 1960s, the painting was displayed on a wall in the church next to the staircase leading to the organ gallery. At some point after 1994, it was relocated once again, and hung on the western wall of the northern aisle (fig. 4) where it stayed to the present day.[8]

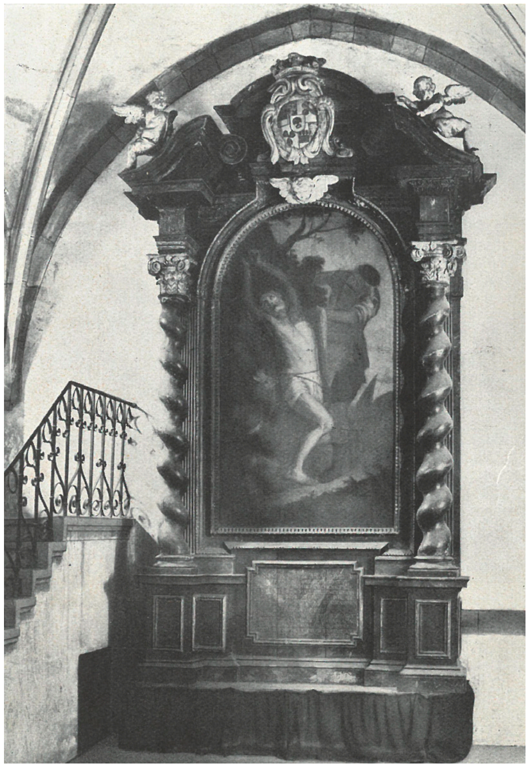

Figure 3: Altar in the historical cloister. Photo by Dr Paul Wolff. Published in Dillmann 1929, annex.

These four positions (altar retable in the southern transept, historical cloister, and panel painting on the cathedral's wall in two different locations) differ significantly in terms of their spatial parameters and the interrelations between the object, and other objects, architecture and visitors. I will now further describe these positions with a special emphasis on reconstructing the structural parameters of an object's visual appearance.

The painting could, of course, not move itself, but was moved by actors. The traceable results of their decisions may give us some idea of the motives for changing an object's position or the way of presenting it. Unfortunately, there are limits in historical research to the amount of additional information available about the different actors. Still, this is a promising perspective and a good starting point for further research that does not fit into the frame of this publication. While keeping the arranging persons in mind, this paper will focus on the arranged – the object.

8 De Weerth, *Ausstattung*, 180.

Figure 4: Frankfurt Cathedral northern aisle in 2020. Photo: Dommuseum Frankfurt/ Johann Kelm.

3 Different Locations in Detail

3.1 Southern Transept: To the Merit of Donors and People

In Stöcklin's oil painting, Onghers' depiction of St Bartholomew is visible as part of the altar. In this reproduction of the painting, the altar itself is shown in a light reddish colour[9] just below the lancet window. The glass paintings as well as the window architecture were directly connected to the altar's aesthetic appearance.[10] In front of this picture-in-picture composition, a stone balustrade limits access to the transept's altars and sculptures. Based on the other staffage in the painting, the balustrade would appear to be as high as the visitors standing in front of it. However, this is unlikely to be the true measurement.[11] Since all figures

9 The red colour of the altar in this painting does not correlate with later photographic depictions, which show a rather dark wooden architecture.

10 Cf. Justin E. A. Kroesen, *Seitenaltäre in mittelalterlichen Kirchen. Standort – Raum – Liturgie*. (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2010), 24.

11 This probably occurred because Stöcklin painted the church interior and architecture, while another painter, Johann Ludwig Ernst Morgenstern, painted the staffage figures.

appear to be too small compared to the church's interior, it is more promising to measure the balustrade against other objects. It seems to be slightly lower than the altar plate itself. Therefore, I assume the altar was fully visible to a visitor standing in front of it – despite what the Stöcklin painting suggests. Onghers' painting, as part of the altar, was visibly approachable while physical access was limited. The view along the right-hand chapel aisle also includes the altarpiece, leading the visitor from the northern part towards the altar. The painting is located between a sculpture of St Mary and an ambry in which the relic of St Bartholomew was kept. Compared with other altars, it was a very important and richly decorated side altar.[12]

Stöcklin's painting shows the interior of Frankfurt Cathedral in the 18th century. Easily visible are the light grey walls, the windows – decorated with patterns in the longitudinal, and traditional pictures in the intersectional nave. The view opens towards the choir section of the church following the visitor's path from the northern part to the high altar. Stöcklin chose to show the two altars to the left and right of the choir stairs as well as the small side chapel dedicated to St Mary. For (parish) priests, vergers and visitors of the 19th century, this all-encompassing ensemble of endowment was the standard method of reading a church interior – rather than focusing on single objects. Objects are placed in relation to other objects in a way prescribed by liturgical needs or to foster iconographic interrelations: In both Stöcklin's painting and Mylius' photograph, the altar is decorated with items such as candles, an altar cross, and a gospel book. The altar's location and the items on it indicate that it was in active use.

The inscription in the painting memorialises the donor Johann Karl von Franckenstein and includes a prayer for mercy on his soul. This reference to the donor was originally strengthened by a stone statue of von Franckenstein,[13] which stood just next to the altar. The epitaph above the statue makes reference to the donation of the Onghers painting to the altar of St Bartholomew. These two objects are therefore visibly connected by multiple layers of meaning. To a visitor wandering around, a third location connects to the altar and the statue – the place where Bishop Franckenstein was buried, in the middle of the intersection of the church's two naves.[14]

12 The term *side altar* should not lead to the assumption that these altars were of minor importance in comparison to the high altar. The term merely describes the altar's position in the church. cf. Kroesen, *Seitenaltäre*, 24.

13 cf. De Weerth, *Ausstattung*, 230–32.

14 cf. Andrea Hampel, *Der Kaiserdom zu Frankfurt am Main: Ausgrabungen 1991–1993* (Nußloch: Rolf-Angerer Verlag, 1994), 104.

3.2 In the Cloister: Discarded with Care

In comparison to the earlier pictures, the photograph by Dr Paul Wolff, published in Dillmann 1929, shows the altar in the cloister with neither altar cloth, nor candles, nor cross – indicating that it was not in use. While the parts of the altar appear to have been reassembled in their previous order, it is noteworthy that there is no altar plate. In the cloister, the altar was not visible to visitors, and no service was conducted at it. It was 'stored' in a very reverent and careful manner, and can be regarded as a passive object within the church treasury.

At that time, the cloister was a common location for storing objects which were considered old-fashioned or otherwise unsuitable for the church itself, yet too old and too *valuable* to be completely discarded. At least one more Baroque-style altar was brought to the cloister at about the same time as well as several stone sculptures and oil paintings.[15]

3.3 Cathedral/Southern Transept: Partly Restored

After the altar was damaged during the Second World War, it was decided that only the oil painting, the former retable part, should be restored. It was converted to a panel painting. The rounded corners were cut again in order to produce a rectangular form suitable for a panel painting, and a very simple frame was added. The original altar framing was inscribed with hints at the donors. These were later destroyed and are lost to today's viewer.

Very little information is available about the first location for this painting as a panel painting after the Second World War. No picture has yet been found in the archives. It was put "next to the staircase leading to the organ gallery".[16] Cathedral inventories mention it among the paintings hanging below the gallery of the main organ.[17] Here, the painting's decorative qualities seem to be the priority for the choice of location as well as the fact that it was a long-term treasury object. As in any case, the architectural structure of the church also limits the choices. Panel paintings need a wall suitable in size for their presentation, and space is limited. It is simply impossible to put all treasury objects on display. The painting was brought back to the church but not reintegrated into liturgical acts. Both

15 Dillmann, *Seine Geschichte und seine Kunstwerke*, 62.

16 According to former museum director Gabriel Hefele, the painting was next to the staircase leading to the organ gallery: "Aufgang zur Orgel Treppe/ Auskunft Hefele 24.2.92" (edw 3.3.3.32/1093).

17 "Nicht in Inv. 1957. Dort Zusatz von 1960: 'Nachzutragen: 2 Bilder, die im Südschiff unter der Orgel hängen'". (edw 3.3.3.32/1092).

facts – the recategorisation of the object as a panel painting and the choice of position – lead us to the conclusion that, in this placing of the object, criteria such as art-historical value were for the first time prioritised over liturgical needs or function within the church treasury.

The corresponding statue and epitaph were treated in a similar manner. The statue was also severely damaged by bombs, underwent restoration and was reinstalled in the church in a different position.[18] However, in their new positions, the connection between the statue and the painting was not evident. Both were treated as individual objects. Their distance from the burial place of Bishop Franckenstein increased.

3.4 Cathedral Nave/ Western Wall: Hide and Seek

Sometime after the extensive restoration of Frankfurt Cathedral between 1991 and 1994, the painting was finally put in its current location – the western wall of the cathedral nave.[19]

Meanwhile, the corresponding statue and epitaph also changed position, again separated from the painting. The small donor inscription in the painting is no longer legible because of the rather dark and high position of the painting on the western wall. In this position, it is unlikely to catch a visitor's eye until they make their way out of the church. For some time until the end of 2019, it was introduced to the visitors with a small white plaque,[20] attached to the wall below the painting. The text read (in German)[21]: "Oswald Onghers (1628–1706)/ Martyrdom of St Bartholomew 1670/ Oil on canvas [...]", and looked just like the explanation plaques in the museum presentation in the adjacent (former) cloister. In 2019, it was the only painting inside the church itself with such a plaque. The

18 Cf. Kloft, *Kaiserdom St. Bartholomäus*, 19.

19 The publication about the restoration, published in 1994, depicted the western wall still without the Onghers painting: Der Magistrat der Stadt Frankfurt am Main, Hochbauamt. *Sankt Bartholomäus-Dom Frankfurt am Main: Innere Gesamtinstandsetzung*, Schriftenreihe des Hochbauamtes zu Bauaufgaben der Stadt Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt am Main Hochbauamt, 1994), 136. A photograph in the personal archives of Elsbeth de Weerth suggests August 18, 1995 as a possible date for the placement in the cathedral. The painting stands on the floor of the church leaning against a wall. (edw 3.3.3.32/ not yet registered).

20 The sign was partly broken and dirty, and therefore removed by the team at the Dommuseum Frankfurt.

21 The original transcription of the plate reads: *"Oswald Onghers (1628–1706), Martyrium des hl. Bartholomäus 1670, Öl auf Leinwand, Stiftung des Johann Karl von Franckenstein für den Bartholomäusaltar".*

presentation was therefore different from other panel paintings in other positions in the church.

4 Conclusion

While Onghers' painting never entered the exhibition spaces of the museum itself, one could argue that it was musealised. It is a good example of museum-like intervention outside an actual museum – even before the actual Dommuseum Frankfurt was founded, and without the object officially entering the explicitly defined exhibition area. As the example of the (removed) plaque illustrates, the Dommuseum Frankfurt also applies its aesthetic principles concerning presentation to objects in the church building itself.

The areas of responsibility are fluid. And so are the possibilities of perception for each visitor. Nowadays one may look at the painting while or after attending a church service and read it as part of the church's interior decoration, the space itself as a place for religious and liturgical acts. Or one may visit Frankfurt Cathedral out of curiosity and see the painting in its current location as a symbol of the historical significance of the cathedral and its treasury. In both cases, the connection between the statue of von Franckenstein and the painting is neither self-explanatory nor evident. This used to be different. In his 1929 guide to Frankfurt Cathedral, Dillmann writes that visitors should bear in mind that the connection was evident in the previous location: "At the stairs on the eastern wall stands an old baroque altar, an altar to St Bartholomew, which used to stand near the burial place of the Franckenstein family."[22]

As the painting and statue are in two separate locations today, the political and social circumstances under which both objects were originally commissioned and produced are obscured. They were both made and placed to symbolise the importance of the donors and their families, to highlight their connection to this particular church and their deep devotion to the faith. Subsequent relocations, and especially the destruction and removal of the original frame, interrupt this layer of representation, which was deeply embedded into a whole iconographic reference system throughout the church. In contrast, in the later locations, the objects have been treated as single objects, which are supposed to stand for themselves. This resembles the museum idea of the 'autonomous piece of art'

22 Dillmann, *Seine Geschichte und seine Kunstwerke*, 62: *"Im Treppenaufgang steht an der Ostwand ein alter Barockaltar, ein Bartholomäusaltar, der früher im Dom bei der Gruft der Herren von Franckenstein seinen Platz hatte."*

even more than one would expect at first sight given the fact that the painting is still displayed in an actual church.

The relocations of the painting also show musealisation as a nonlinear process. One important decision in this process is the categorisation of an object. The painting of St Bartholomew was changed from panel painting to altar retable painting, and back to panel painting again. In order to fit its current categorisation, even the size, thus the display detail, was changed twice. Possible motives for the different locations range from precise embedding into iconographic references to finding just a spot where some valuable/old/arty part of the treasury might fit.

The recategorisation to panel painting after the Second World War meant the painting could be hung inside the church again. This can be read as an act of re-evaluation and upgrading – yet this new value is very different from the painting's previous connection to liturgical ritual, donor's merit and intercession for the soul, with a focus instead on the painting's art-historical background. In this case, the object changes its ascribed category from liturgical architecture to decorative endowment.

It was not the establishment of the Dommuseum Frankfurt that introduced this differentiation. Much earlier accounts hint at the multiple functions of objects as part of the treasury, the liturgy, and as being of art-historical importance. In 1914, Kaufmann wrote: "Easily the room [the cloister] could be effectively used to place some of the sculptures, inscriptions, sarcophagus pieces, etc. which currently are in the city's Historical Museum. The room could as well be decorated with beautiful religious-historical motive paintings – worthy of Frankfurt's great past."[23]

Here three aspects concerning the placement are mentioned: Firstly, the objects that were originally part of the church should be presented in architectural connection to the church itself. Secondly, objects which have been removed from the church can subsequently be presented as artworks. And thirdly, the objects in their interplay with each other and the surrounding architecture should reflect the historical importance of the site.

23 Carl Maria Kaufmann, *Der Frankfurter Kaiserdom: Seine Denkmäler und seine Geschichte* (Kempten und München: Verlag der Jos. Kösel'schen Buchhandlung, 1914), 7. *"Wie leicht ließen sich die Räume zur Aufstellung so mancher jetzt im städtischen historischen Museum befindlichen Domskulpturen, Inschriften, Sarkophagteile usw. wirksam ausnützen, auch malerisch mit schönen religiös-historischen Fresken ausschmücken, wie sie der großen Vergangenheit und dem Pietätsgefühl Frankfurts würdig wären."*

These principles are still relevant in today's placement of objects and lead to a simultaneous multi-layered function: Frankfurt Cathedral used to be and still is a church, a historical site and a museum-like place at the same time. The exhibition parameters for each object vary accordingly and ascribed meaning is frequently shifted between these positions.

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Leila Tavangar Ranjbar

Social History of an Elephant Oil Lamp in the Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī Museum

1 Introduction

The museum of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī exhibits objects from the Imam Reżā[1] shrine. These include objects that reflect a broader cultural history, as well as 'religious' objects. Items from both categories have been gifted to the collection over several centuries, either as private offerings or in the form of religious endowments. The museum is located in the Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī shrine complex (figure 1), which is one of the most important pilgrimage centres for Shiites, situated in Mashhad in Iran's Khorasan Province. The shrine complex currently covers about one million square metres, making it one of the world's largest religious sites, and receives around 28 million pilgrims a year.[2] With an area of 18,000 square metres and 8,000 objects on display, the museum itself hosts about one million visitors a year.[3]

The Āstān-e Quds Museum's 'Rażavī Shrine's History Collection' includes an oil lamp shaped like an elephant, which was made in India, and endowed to the shrine in 1777.[4] It might be considered surprising that a Hindu figure is to be found at an Islamic institution. The figure raises various questions about a museum that is part of a religious institution but which also has links to other aspects of social history and culture. These aspects include the background contexts of collections, international relations with dedicators, and matters of political representation. Besides this elephant oil lamp, the collection contains further objects made in India and Lahore, prompting investigation of the exchange of goods between the regions, and how these objects reached the collection. One might also ask about the role these items played in the shrine, and what happened to them

1 "The eighth Imam of the Emāmī Shiʿites." (765/768/770–817/1818/819) W. Madelung, "ʿAlī Al-Reżā," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed November 30, 2020, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/Alī-al-reza.
2 Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī's tutelage, "Annually 28 Million Pilgrims to the Shrine of Imam Reza," IRIB News Agency, accessed November 8, 2020, https://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/2184896/.
3 Razavi Museum, "An Introduction to Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī Museums," About Us, accessed August 15, 2020, https://museum.razavi.ir/137952/.
4 Research Department and Introduction of Objects, Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī Museums.

Figure 1: The Āstān-e Quds-e Razavī Complex. Aerial view. Photo: Google Earth, accessed November 2, 2020, https://www.google.com/earth/.

once they were no longer in use. This paper will follow the elephant oil lamp's history as a representative example for investigating these questions, thereby bringing to light information not only about the object, but also about the museum.

2 Theory and Methods

The underlying theoretical approaches here are the 'history of an object', and the 'biography of an object'.[5] Giorgio Riello discusses the former in the sense of "historical analysis of the relations between objects, people, and their representations".[6] So, studying the history of this object means following the very special dynamics of the lamp in terms of its relations with other objects; its relations with the people who produced, owned, and endowed it, and its path through the administration of the museum up to its display. While specific information about the oil lamp may be lacking in some of these areas, there is nonetheless a benefit

5 Represented by Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

6 Giorgio Riello, "Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources,* ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2018), 28.

to conducting this analysis. Indeed, the oil lamp may still be considered representative of certain social practices, such as the collection's lighting instruments sometimes being used in ceremonies. As such, analysing the object takes us along paths that help us to answer research questions about the museum.

It is quite common in cultural studies in such contexts to use the metaphor of the 'biography', and to follow the 'life' of an object from its production, through social changes, and perhaps finally to its 'death'. Although it isn't possible to fully reconstruct the 'life' of this lamp, considering the biography of an object can serve "the express purpose of highlighting exceptional features"[7] in order to better focus on probable changes in its use and meaning. While 'biographies of things' are themselves a controversial research paradigm,[8] following the elephant oil lamp's biography might not only offer information on the object itself, but, again, also allow insights into many aspects of Iranian shrine museums and their collections.

Besides reconstructing the 'biography' of the lamp, we can also trace its history through its material form, which will be the starting point of the analysis, in section 3. Such analyses could prove informative regarding the lamp's specific cultural contextualisation, whether in terms of real practices, or symbolic imaginaries.[9] Further information can also be gained from documentation at the Museum Research Department, the two inscriptions engraved on the object itself, and various historical documents. These historical documents are held at 'The Document and Press Centre of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī', which includes archives of old official manuscripts. The centre holds administrative records dating from the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722)[10] to the present day, comprising some 283,000 pages. The historical documents used for this paper are mostly from the Qajar era (1786–1925).[11] In this paper, I have mentioned each document's identification code to refer to the specific source used.

7 Karin Dannehl, "Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2018), 172.

8 Peter Braun, "Objektbiographien erzählen," in *Kulturelle Zyklographie der Dinge*, ed. Ralf Adelmann et al. (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2019), 51–69.

9 Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, ed., *Religion in Cultural Imaginary: Explorations in Visual and Material Practices* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015).

10 Rudi Matthee, "Safavid Dynasty," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, published July 28, 2008, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/safavids.

11 Abbas Amanat, "Historiography viii. Qajar Period," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed July 28, 2020, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/historiography-viii.

3 The Elephant Oil Lamp: Physical Features and Symbolic Meaning

This brass oil lamp,[12] which is moulded in the shape of an elephant (figures 2 and 3), has a rectangular oil storage chamber, and has slight fractures in its spout and in its wick-section. The lamp is 15.5 centimetres wide and 14.5 centimetres tall. The elephant has another spout, which sits under the abdomen. There are decorations on the head, body, ears, legs, and cover of the elephant. The cover is a seat, called a *houdah,* which is positioned on the back of an elephant, and indicates the wealth of the animal's owner. There are also two inscriptions on the elephant's body,[13] which will be described later.


Figures 2–3: Elephant oil lamp at the central museum of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī. Photo: Leila Tavangar Ranjbar 2019.

In Hindu tradition, the elephant has various symbolic meanings. Mythical elephants carry the universe and represent "the fertility that springs from heavenly

12 Inventory number: 920532.

13 Reported from the Research Department and Introduction of Objects, Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī museums.

waters."[14] The elephant is also found among the *vāhanas*, the deities' particular vehicles. These 'vehicles' are animals, which thus become mythical, and symbolically related to their deities. The elephant is paired with gods such as Indra and Srī-Lakšmī[15]. Sometimes the *vāhanas* are given a particular name; for instance, Indra's elephant *vāhana* is called 'Airāvata'. One of the most famous examples of elephants in Hindu tradition is the elephant-headed god, Ganeša. It should be noted, however, that the elephant represented in the oil lamp does not stem from these examples. Nevertheless, these facts indicate the elephant's importance in Indian culture, and its presence in India's everyday life. In addition, the elephant's *houdah* is suggestive of the context and representation of court life; that such an elephant might carry a king or a god is a very positive connotation.

4 The Early "Life" of the Elephant Oil Lamp

To understand something of the historical context surrounding the start of this object's life in the shrine, we first turn to the period of its dedication. One of the inscriptions on this object indicates the *waqf* (endowment) date, which coincides with the reign of Karīm Ḵān Zand in Persia (1751–79).[16] In this period, the region Khorasan, the home of the shrine, was ruled by Šāhroḵ Šāh Afšār (1748–96).[17] His domain further extended to an area between the territories of Karīm Ḵān Zand to the West and Dorrānīs[18] to the East (figure 4).[19] Significantly, the *waqf* occurred not long after Persia, under the rule of Nāder Šāh Afšār (1736– 47),[20] invaded the Mughal empire, defeating it in 1739.[21] The king of India made peace with Nāder after this, presenting him with valuable treasure.[22] A number of these objects were endowed to the shrine of Imam Reżā, including sixty thousand volumes of

14 Anneliese Keilhauer and Peter Keilhauer, *Die Bildsprache des Hinduismus: Die indische Götterwelt und ihre Symbolik* (Köln: DuMont, 1983), 26.

15 Eckard Schleberger, *Die indische Götterwelt: Gestalt, Ausdruck und Sinnbild: Ein Handbuch der hinduistischen Ikonographie* (Köln: Eugen Diederichs, 1986), 178, 186.

16 John R. Perry, "Karim Khan Zand," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed June 15, 2020, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/karim-khan-zand.

17 Ernest Tucker, "Nāder Shah," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed September 10, 2020, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/nader-shah.

18 The Dorrānīs period lasted for about a century, from 1747. See D. Balland, "Afghanistan x. Political History," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed June 15, 2020, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afghanistan-x-political-history.

19 Maḥbūba Tehrānī, *Karīm Ḵān Zand* (Tehran: Ketāb-e Pārsa, 2007), 62–63.

20 Tucker, "Nāder Shah."

21 Stephen F. Dale, "India xvi. Indo-Persian Historiography," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed June 15, 2020, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/india-xvi-indo-persian-historiography.

22 Tucker, "Nāder Shah."

precious manuscripts, some of which still form part of the collection.[23] Although the king's endowment to the shrine was generally in the form of jewellery or valuables, one might consider the possibility that further objects were donated by other members of his corps during the war.

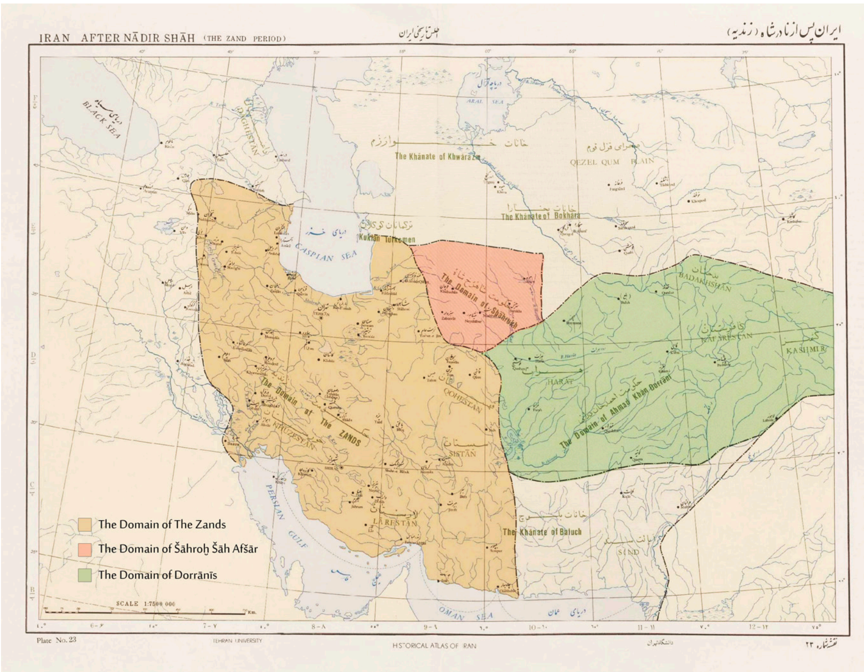

Figure 4: Historical map of the domain of the Zand dynasty. The elephant oil lamp was endowed to the shrine during the reign of Karīm Ḵān Zand. Photo: Nasr, Seyyed Hoseyn/ Zaryab, Abbas et al. (1971): Historical Atlas of Iran. Tehran: Institute of the Geography, University of Tehran. Map No. 23 (The map is edited by Ehmad Chehrghani), © Institute of the Geography, University of Tehran.

Various hypotheses could be posited as to how the oil lamp came to the shrine complex from India: a pilgrim might have endowed it to the shrine, or perhaps it reached a Persian bazaar. There might be yet further possibilities, nonetheless all

23 Mehdi Salah, "The Role of Hindi Captives in the Cultural and Artistic Developments of Nader Shah's Era," *Journal of Subcontinent Researches* 7, no. 23 (2015), https://doi.org/10.22111/jsr.2015.2207.

are underpinned by India and Persia's relations during that period making such transfers possible. As neighbouring countries, India and Persia were connected from their early history. One of the pinnacles of this connection was the Mughal period of India. During that time, with the immigration of several poets, writers, and artists from Persia to India, Persian language and literature spread through India, and a style of Hindu-Persian art was created. After about 700 years of the Persian language and culture's presence in the region, Mughal India developed positive political and trade relations with Karīm Ḵān Zand's government. During this period, some immigrants returned to Persia from India. All these connections illustrate how the transfer of objects between these two regions was enabled.

5 The Object's Path to the Shrine

Two inscriptions are to be found on the cover of the oil lamp, on the body and leg of the elephant, which may aid our understanding of the object's path to the collection. The inscriptions are in Persian, and written in Reyḥān[24] script. Judging by the surface on which the first writing is engraved, one can guess that the writing of this text coincided with the object's creation.[25] Therefore, it is deduced that the lamp was first produced, then someone subsequently decided to endow it to the shrine. The first inscription reads *reʿd ḥalvā-ye šāh*,[26] the meaning of which will be discussed in section 6. Below this, a second inscription[27] was engraved, indicating the dedication of this lamp to the shrine of Imam Reżā by Moḥammad Ḥoseyn Eṣfahānī in 1191 AH (1777 AD).[28] This second inscription mentions the term *waqf*, a popular mechanism for giving objects to the shrine, which will be explained below. Further explanation will be given thereafter, for other key ways objects came to the shrine; namely gifts (*hedīyyeh*), vows (*nazr*), and direct purchase of the lighting instruments pragmatically needed to light the shrine. Sometimes these mechanisms are similar in their operation, but some differences can nonetheless be found between them.

24 A Perso-Arabic style of calligraphy. "This script (also called *rayḥānī*), reputedly devised by Ebn al-Bawwāb" (died 1022–23). Ḡolām-Ḥosayn Yūsofī, "Calligraphy," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed November 10, 2020, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/calligraphy.

25 According to the information on the oil lamp from the Research Department and Introduction of Objects, Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī museums.

26 Research Department and Introduction of Objects, Āstān-e Quds-e Razavī museums.

27 "*Waqf-e Āstān-e Imam Reżā ʿalayha Salām Nemūd Moḥammad Ḥoseyn Sifahānī Sena 191*". Waqif's last name is attributed to Isfahan, a city in Iran.

28 Research Department and Introduction of Objects, Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī museums.

5.1 Waqf

Encyclopedia Iranica describes *waqf* as a charitable endowment.[29] The legal form of *waqf* was very often used to supply required objects, such as light, furniture, or food, to an institution. In our case, it was one of the ways used to give lighting instruments to the Āstān-e Quds. In various historical periods, the shrine's lighting was a matter of particular interest to Muslim kings and rulers, perhaps due to light's symbolic meaning within the religion, and its centrality to Shiite belief. The legal form of *waqf* differs from a more private vow, as "the one who gives something to the shrine as part of the *waqf* process can demand something in return,"[30] for example prayers from the shrine's staff. Additionally, the item is usually endowed with its use restricted to a particular purpose, such as a lamp meant for lighting. Some objects have this function mentioned in their inscriptions, and it is thus forbidden by the *waqif*, the donor, for the object to be used in any other way. In the case of a vow or gift, by contrast, the donor does not submit a request in exchange for their offering to the Āstān-e Quds complex, making it easier to process the thousands of objects reaching the shrine. Since the time of Ayatollah Ṭabasī's shrine custodianship (1980–2015), this has led Āstān-e Quds to consider replacing *waqf* with vows and gifts.[31]

5.2 Offerings and Gifts

Part of the Āstān-e Quds museum's collection has arrived as offerings from kings, commanders, elites, or, indeed, ordinary pilgrims throughout history. In addition to their religious purpose, offerings are also made to show respect to the Rażavī shrine in a social setting. Sometimes foreign rulers or elites give gifts to the collection, mostly with a political purpose of representation, or as part of diplomatic exchange. For example, one of the current collections of the museum is 'The Gift Hall of Ayatollāh Seyyed ʿAlī Ḵāmena-yī',[32] offered to the Āstān-e Quds museum by the current supreme leader of Iran.

29 "Waqf," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed February 7, 2020, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/waqf-crossref.

30 Ḥešmat Kafīlī (The chief of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī museum), interview by the author, December 2019.

31 Kafīlī, interview.

32 Information obtained from field studies and observations in the museum.

5.3 Vows

Lighting a candle is a sacred task in Iran, particularly given light's religious significance in the narrations about the Imams. Pilgrims also vowed candles in exchange for the fulfilment of their wishes. Vows, in this sense, are obligations or promises made in exchange for the attainment of their ambitions. If the wish is fulfilled, the vowed offering is made – the candle is offered and lit. Some pilgrims made a vow with different kinds of lighting instruments. Most of these objects are now available in the treasuries and the museum of Āstān-e Quds.[33]

6 Practices with Lighting Instruments

Our object is described as an "oil lamp" in the museum inventory. Elements of its appearance provide indications about its possible use. Engraved on the object one finds the three-word inscription *reʿd*[34] *ḥalvā*[35]*-ye šāh*.[36] Though the significance of this is somewhat unclear, the first word probably points to a burning plant, the second to a kind of sweet confection and the third is the title of a ruler. At least the first two notions are reminiscent of a ritual in which something is given. It nonetheless remains unknown whether such a ritual would have taken place in India, or outside or inside the shrine, or, indeed, what its purpose might have been. As this object is on display in a collection named "Rażavī Shrine's History", which includes the shrine's former objects, it is probable that the object was used ritually in the shrine. I will reflect further on the displaying of the shrine's ritual objects in section 8.

We can further see an S-shaped curve at the back of the lamp, which indicates that this object was hung with a chain, probably from a ceiling. Perhaps it was meant to provide light, or perhaps, like some of the other objects in the collection, it was an offering preserved to show respect for the one who offered it. We do, at least, know that lighting instruments might have had various functions within the shrine, and that there is a full range of festivities in which light plays a significant role.[37]

33 ʿAzīz-Allāh ʿAṭārodī, *Tārīḵ-e Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī* (Tehran: ʿAṭārod, 1992).

34 Fresh, soft and thin branches. Dehkhoda Dictionary, "Reʿd," Vajehyab, accessed March 10, 2020. https://www.vajehyab.com/?q=%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%AF&f=dehkhoda.

35 A kind of sweet confection. Without a clearer context, this is suggestive of the Hindu god Ganeša holding sweets in his paw (translation by author).

36 King (translation by author).

37 From the archive of "The Document and Press Center of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī".

6.1 Feasts and Illumination

On some occasions, such as the night of the Shiite Imam's birthday (*velādat*), the shrine is illuminated, and light is used to evoke a unique festive atmosphere. Examining the museum's lighting-related documents shows an increase in orders of candles, tallow, wax, and burning oils or other consumables [38] related to illumination on special occasions like Eid-e Qorbān, ʿEid-e Qadīr,[39] ʿEid-e Feṭr, and Prophet Moḥammad's birthday.[40] Another practice that used illumination was the Salām ritual (*majles*). Archived documents inform us that this ritual was, from the Qajar era onwards, held once a year in the Āstān-e Quds complex,[41] showing a simulacrum of Imam Reżā.[42]

Some ceremonies held in the Āstān-e Quds complex probably had more political than religious significance. As this complex was a focus of people's respect and attention, it could provide an appropriate place for political representation. For example, the Qajar documents report the shrine's illumination[43] on the occasion of Nāṣer al-Ddīn Šāh Qajar's (r.1848–96)[44] birthday. Another document shows an illumination in the Āstān-e Quds complex[45] to celebrate Aḥmad Šāh Qajar's (r.1909–1925)[46] birthday. Besides the king's birthday, his coronation was another occasion for illumination,[47] alongside the king's and prince's weddings. Lastly, one of the most considerable illumination occasions is the feast of Nowruz.[48] On this occasion, special programmes were held in the complex, most notably for the moment of entering the new year, which continues to be celebrated with special music.[49]

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38 From the archive of "The Document and Press Center of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī".
39 Document number 21553 (year: 1896).
40 Document number 28829 (year: 1758).
41 From the archive of "The Document and Press Center of Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī".
42 Sālem Ḥoseyn-Zāda, "Negāhī be Anjām-e Marāsem-e Jašn va Sorūr dar Javār-e Bārgāh-e Malakūtī-ye Imam Reżā," *Daftar-e Asnād*, no. 2 and 3 (2007): 252.
43 Document number 15544 (year: 1886) and document number 42444 (year: not clear).
44 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Nāser al-Dīn Shāh," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 10, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Naser-al-Din-Shah.
45 Document number 30567 (year: 1911).
46 M.J. Sheikh-ol-Islami, "Aḥmad Shah Qājār," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahmad-shah-qajar-1909-1925-the-seventh-and-last-ruler-of-the-qajar-dynasty.
47 Document number 18270 (year: 1913).
48 The Iranian new year (solar calendar), which starts with the first day of Farvardīn, the first month of the spring, and lasts 13 days. It is celebrated with special rituals.
49 Special music is played in *Naqāra-Ḵāna* (shrine music building) at the moment of the change of the year.

6.2 Mourning

Shiite religious mourning is also performed in this complex, and also involves lighting instruments. On two nights of the year, special mourning ceremonies take place in the Āstān-e Quds complex: One on the night of *ʿĀšurā*, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ḥoseyn (d. 680), and the other commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Reżā. These rituals, with candles and candlesticks, are still held annually, and involve special presentations and ceremonies.

6.3 The Ritual of Closing and Opening the Shrine Doors

Special rituals for opening and closing the shrine complex's doors have been common since the Safavid dynasty. Until 1921, the shrine was empty at night, and its doors were kept closed until sunrise; though on certain nights of the year, the doors were closed for fewer hours or not at all. The closing and opening rituals involved a special presentation of keys. Lighting instruments also played a central role in this ritual, as a silver candlestick was placed on top of the silver box containing the shrine doors' gold and silver keys. The shrine's staff then kissed the box, and delivered the keys to their superior to open or close the doors.[50]

7 Resting in Treasuries

Like other lighting instruments, the elephant oil lamp was probably transferred to the shrine *ḫazāna* (storage room) when no longer in use in the shrine complex. The *ḫazāna* houses a collection of diplomatic and other gifts, and the objects endowed by pilgrims and travellers. Over time, some shrine objects lost their function but, due to the religious value of having been used in the shrine, they were not thrown away. Other objects had been obtained from excavations or had been bought to complete existing collections during periods of expansion of the shrine complex. When the modern museum was established in the 20th century, objects were brought from the *ḫazāna* to showcases.

50 Moḥammad Eḥtešām Kāvīyānīyān, *Šams al-Šomūs* (Mashhad: Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī, 1975).

8 Being Exhibited in a Museum

The idea of creating a museum in the shrine complex was first introduced during Moḥammad Valī Asadī's vice-custodianship (1926–1935).[51] After several preparatory stages, its construction started in 1937, and it was officially inaugurated in 1945.[52] After the Islamic Revolution (1979), plans were developed to extend the shrine's space, one of the most important of which was the expansion of the Āstān-e Quds museum. Since then, new collections have been launched on various topics, often based on the expansion of endowments. The current collections are: 'Collection of Qurʿans and Manuscripts', 'Ayatollāh Seyyed ʿAlī Ḵāmena-yī Gifts Museum', 'Carpet Museum', 'Stamp and Postal Items Collection', 'Marine Collection', 'Hall of Maḥmūd Farščīyān', Banknote Collection', 'Astronomy Collection', 'Museum of Anthropology', 'Collection of Visual Arts', 'Coin Collection', 'Weapon Collection', 'Medal Collection', 'Dishes Collection', and 'Clock Collection', as well as the central 'Rażavī Shrine History Collection'.

The lighting objects[53] were displayed at the museum on the first day.[54] They are now part of the Rażavī Shrine History Collection, and are one of the most valuable assets of the collection. Only a few of the lighting instruments from the Rażavī Shrine History Collection are on public display in the museum.[55] In general, most of this section's objects belonged to or were used directly in the shrine. So, unlike some other collections that are not religiously affiliated, such as the marine collection, the objects once used in the shrine retain a kind of sacredness for some visitors.

9 Conclusion

By reconstructing the history of the elephant oil lamp, we can identify conceptual changes in various periods. While we cannot determine the lamp's full 'biography', especially as its production and ritual use within the shrine remain unclear, we can see how it was contextualised as part of greatly differing social practices: the object was first created as a lamp, then it was endowed to the shrine. After a possible period of use, it was transferred to the shrine storage rooms, and then

51 Seyyed Mahdi Seyyed Qoṭbī and ʿAlī Sūzančī Kāšānī, "Mūza-ye Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī," *Šamsa,* no. 38 and 39 (Spring and Summer 2018): 6.

52 Seyyed Qoṭbī and Sūzančī Kāšānī, "Mūza-ye Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī," 17.

53 Here, the term 'object' reflects the fact that these items are no longer being used for their primary function, which was lighting.

54 Alī Moʿtamen, *Tārīḵ-e Āstān-e Quds* (Mashhad: Āstān-e Quds-e Rażavī, 1975).

55 Most of them are still kept in the museum catalogues.

it was taken out and displayed in the museum. Referring to Giorgio Riello, certain aspects can be considered characteristic of the oil lamp's social and material interrelatedness. It came from India, a culture where the elephant was an important entity, and arrived in Persia as part of close cultural relations between the regions. It was an object endowed to a shrine, together with thousands of lighting objects, as part of its collection and for use in illumination rituals. Later it became a museum object, contextualised by other lighting objects.

Moreover, focusing on the physical aspects and reading the text on its body provides essential information. For instance, the object's date can be linked to the possible relations between Persia and India in the mentioned periods, including war, trade, immigration, and diplomacy. An inscription on its body also indicates that this object was endowed to the shrine via a *waqf* process.

Historical documents, mostly from the Qajar era, provide a general idea of how the lighting instruments were used or are still being used, beyond their primary function of illumination, in related rituals with special formalities. The elephant oil lamp is to be found in an arrangement that indicates its cultural background in India, forming part of a prominent display of lighting instruments in the current museum.

In summary, the different strands of collecting objects, the foreign and regional connections, the representational function of some objects in the museum indicating respecting other cultures or honouring the donors, and the rituals and ceremonies inside the shrine, all show that the museum and shrine complex form part of a whole network of social relations and practices. The shrine complex is a site of pilgrimage, linked even to international politics, with historic official and court traditions of Persia preserved in the vast institution. The various mechanisms for collecting objects continue to play a role in the complex. Newly collected objects – some of them antique – are currently being added to the treasury, and will perhaps form future museum collections.

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Susanne Rodemeier

An object of real value? Transformation from *Adu Satua* to Idol to Ar 006

1 Introduction

In March 2019, the German Museums Association published "Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts".[1] The association urged museums to research the provenance of holdings originating from colonial contexts, and, based on their findings, to work with communities of origin, e.g. for the exchange of knowledge, joint projects or the return of objects.[2] The guidelines also list a number of points that are of special importance, including missionaries and their activities in colonies.[3] The Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung, RS) at Philipps-University Marburg is a valuable platform for researching such objects because Heinrich Frick, a former director of the RS, explicitly asked Protestant missionaries to donate objects to the museum. From 1931 to 1941, Frick regularly published the *Supplement for Studies on Religions* (*Religionskundliches Beiblatt*, RB), in which he called on both the Rhenish Missionary Society at Wuppertal-Barmen and the Basel Mission to donate "mission art"[4] as well as religious objects that had lost their ritual use after their owners had converted to Christianity. Missionaries around the world reacted by sending objects, photographs, and narratives that they had collected while living in Asia, Oceania or Africa. At the RS, these objects became part of the 'foreign sacred sites' ('Fremde Heiligtümer') collection, a term that was also the title of the first RS exhibition in 1929.[5]

1 German Museums Association, *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts,* 2nd ed. (Berlin: German Museums Association, 2019), https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/dmb-guidelines-colonial-context-2019.pdf.

2 Ibid., foreword to the 2nd ed. 2019, 6–8.

3 Ibid., 131. In 2019, there were several German institutions stressing that missionaries had to be included in that research focus: Minister of State for Culture and the Media and Others, 13 March 2019; Kulturstiftung der Länder 2019; German Lost Art Foundation 2019; German Cultural Council 2019, 17–29; Zimmermann 2019, 17.

4 Heinrich Frick, *Religionskundliches Beiblatt* (Marburg: no publisher, October 1931), 4, 15.

5 Konstanze Runge, "Studying, Teaching, and Exhibiting Religion: The Marburg Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung)," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 155–62.

This article traces the history of an *adu satua* ancestor figure from Nias, Indonesia, which German missionary Johannes Noll of the Rhenish Missionary Society, gave the RS on permanent loan in 1932. Noll lived on Nias for over twenty years, and acquired the figure during his time there. In the following, I will use the RS's archive material to reconstruct the original use of the figure, the circumstances of its appropriation by Noll, and its subsequent inclusion in the RS collection. This provenance research is a helpful prerequisite for establishing contact with the descendants of the object's former owners in order to discuss and implement a plan for what to do with the object, and where it should be held.

2 *Adu Satua* or 'Idol': Dynamics of transition in the context of proselytising activities

On Nias, Indonesia, an anthropomorphic figure carved from wood becomes an ancestor figure (*adu satua / adu zatua*) when the souls of deceased relatives are transferred into it during a death ritual. Being an *adu satua* (literally 'already old person') gives the figure a particularly high ritual value. Johannes Noll, who gave Marburg an *adu satua*, also sent several letters in which he explained his understanding of local concepts of the soul, and associated traditional beliefs. He explains that the "soul (*noso*) is a material something that every individual human being has been assigned by God, as it were, before he was born."[6] Noll's explanation of the connection between *noso* and the ancestor figure *adu satua* also mentions the idea that *noso* can be multiplied by the appropriation of foreign soul material[7] or by sacrifice. It can also be removed and lost through illness and death. He explains that *noso* survives death but people do not know where it goes. One possible residence of the soul of the deceased is the *adu satua* figure. Noll explains that it is in front of an *adu satua* that justice is spoken, oaths are taken, people are wed, and the dignity of a chief is recognised. Conducting these ceremonies in front of an *adu satua* ensures the ancestors are involved in their descendants' decisions.[8]

6 Johannes Noll, *Die Welt und Lebensanschauung der Niasser* (archived: RS Schenkungen m-z, n.d.), (translation: SR).

7 Noll does not explain how the appropriation of foreign soul material took place. He avoids mentioning headhunting.

8 Noll, *Die Welt.*

Noll explained in a further short text[9] that during the death ritual, the 'heart soul' (*mökömökö*) is transferred into the *adu satua* figure. The *mökömökö*, he writes, develops only about four days after a burial and rises from the corpse to the surface of the grave through a tube that is installed for the purpose. Here this 'heart soul' enters a small spider, which runs around in the graveyard. A ritual should take place to collect the spiders and bring them to the house where the *adu satua* are. In the house, the spiders are ritually led into an *adu satua*, thus transferring the souls into a new body, a wooden place where ancestors can stay for generations.[10] This guarantees the physical presence of ancestors of a community, thus giving their living descendants access to strength and power.

Noll tries to describe the ritual in a neutral way, but his displeasure is noticeable. He uses the term 'hocus-pocus' when describing the local priests' dancing and singing while the community is catching the spiders. He exhibits the same feeling of superiority when speaking of an 'idol' (German: 'Götze') rather than an *adu satua* or ancestor figure. 'Götze' is a short version of the term 'Gött-chen' (small god), which stresses not only the small size of the figure, but also suggests that it is meaningless when compared with the 'real' (i. e. Christian) god.[11]

Christian missionaries believed that everything linked to 'idolatry' had to be renounced in order to open the way for Christianity. The ancestor figures were seen as 'idolatry' as it was thought that direct contact with ancestors and deities could be established through them. Noll knew that it was not easy for local people to renounce 'idolatry' and become Christian believers. In his short text on *mökömökö*,[12] he illustrates this problem by referring to the *adu satua* that he donated to Marburg. His text suggests that the local community of Bouso, a village in Northern Nias, did not share his opinion about the insignificance of the figures for Christians. The villagers, who had not long converted to Christianity, did not consider performing a ritual with an *adu satua* to be a contradiction. As Noll reports,[13] the villagers felt obliged to ritually perform the transfer of the

9 Johannes Noll, *Mökömökö die Herzseele (Ein Stück heidnischen Aberglaubens der Niasser)* (archived: RS Schenkungen m-z, n.d.).

10 Noll, *Mökömökö;* Peter T. Suzuki (1958) and Johannes M. Hämmerle (2013) are further publications concerning Nias' local pre-colonial and pre-Christian history, tradition and religion: Peter T. Suzuki, *Critical Survey of Studies on the Anthropology of Nias, Mentawei and Enggano* (The Hague: Koninklijk Instituut voor Tal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 1958) and Johannes M. Hämmerle, "150 Years of Ethnological Interpretation and Misinterpretation on the Example of Nias, Indonesia," *Anthropos* 108, no. 1 (2013): 173–204.

11 Johannes Woyke, *Götter, 'Götzen', Götterbilder: Aspekte einer paulinischen 'Theologie der Religionen'* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2012), 82.

12 Noll, *Mökömökö.*

13 Ibid.

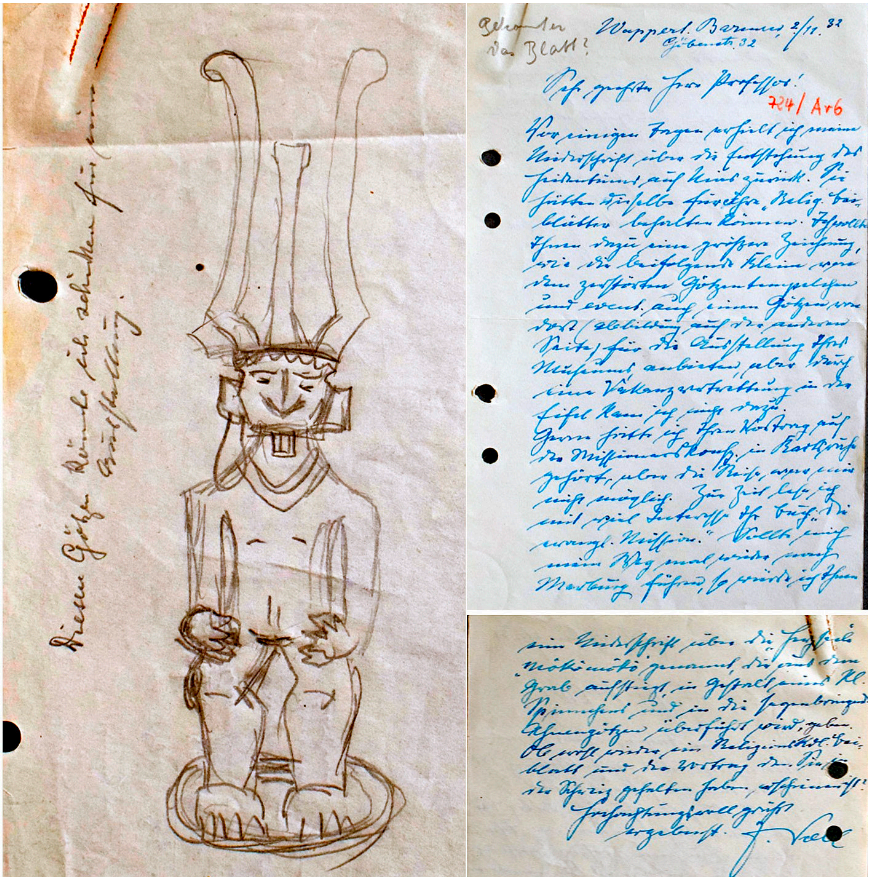

Figure 1: Sketch and letter by Johannes Noll offering to give an adu satua to the Museum of Religions in 1932. Photo: Heike Luu, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg.

mökökökö 'heart soul' into the *adu satua* figure for those relatives who had died before they could be baptised. According to local belief, the souls of the deceased were still near the graves and could not find rest. Only the ritual of their transfer into the *adu satua* figure could free them from that transitional status and unite them with their ancestors. For this purpose, an *adu satua* figure was needed. Therefore, they asked Noll to give them the figure exclusively for this ritual.[14]

14 Ibid.

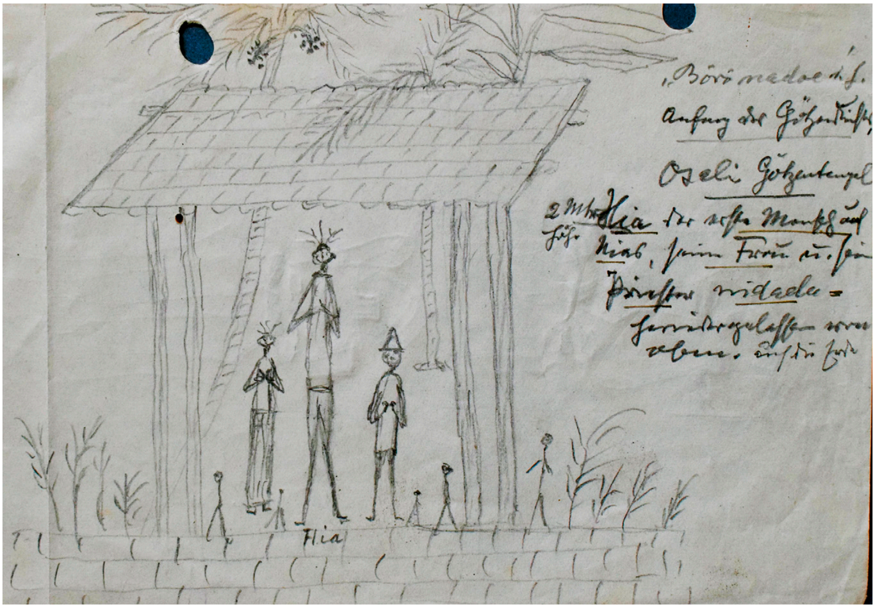

Figure 2: Sketch by Johannes Noll. A man, his wife and his priest being lowered to the ground from above. Photo: Heike Luu, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg.

This request was special as Noll had destroyed hundreds of *adu satua* in front of the local community only a little earlier.[15] Nevertheless, everyone knew that he had kept one and placed it in his home. In his notes sent to Marburg, Noll apologises for not being able to refuse the villagers' request for the *adu satua* to be used for one final ritual.[16] Only a short time later, in 1932, he offered this very *adu satua* to Heinrich Frick in Marburg as a permanent loan.[17]

Noll's letters and notes were difficult to locate as they are not documented in the RS. I had suspected that there was correspondence, because Frick mentioned in several supplements of the RB that letters and objects from non-European mis-

15 Cf. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz who refers to Noll's report to the Rhenish Missionary Society in Barmen. (Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz, "Idols and Art: Missionary Attitudes toward Indigenous Worship and the Material Culture on Nias, Indonesia, 1904–1920," in *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Thomas David DuBois (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 112).

16 Noll, *Die Welt.*

17 Johannes Noll, *Letter 2,* written December 12, 1932 (archived: RS Auslandskorrespondenz).

sion areas had been sent to the RS. I might well have overlooked Noll's letters and notes had it not been for the sketch of the *adu satua* that Noll added to a letter he wrote to Heinrich Frick in Marburg in November 1932.

Noll's letter, written in the old German Sütterlin script, indicates that he held Professor Heinrich Frick in high esteem, and enjoyed reading the RB, which he even regarded as a place to publish his own contributions. In his letter, he mentions a destroyed "idol temple". It remains unclear what this refers to. Perhaps he is referring to his own demolition of ancestor figures in that place. Noll also provided a second sketch that he explains in some text fragments alongside the sketch: *"Börönadu* // start of idolatry // *Oseli* temple of idols // here the first human being, his wife and his priest *nidadu*. Lowered to the ground from above."[18]

A month later, Noll sent a further letter[19] mentioning that he was sending an *adu satua*, another sketch and more writings. So far, I have only located the *adu satua*, which now has the object number 'Ar 006'. In this second letter, Noll writes of "Börönadu: Beginning of idols",[20] which corresponds to Nias people's current understanding of the term *börönadu* as the place where the first inhabitant of Nias came ashore and made the first *adu satua* by planting his boat vertically in the ground.[21] Noll also mentioned *börönadu* in his first letter, as well as *oseli*, which once denoted an ancestor shrine. Today, *oseli* is the local term for a church building. Noll does not mention this directly but one imagines that it was not easy to redefine a local ritual place as a Christian religious place – an appropriation that would ultimately be long lasting. In his explanation of his second sketch, we see evidence of the challenge Noll must have faced in his efforts to convert the people of Nias to Christianity. He explains that the people of Nias believed that "the first human being, his wife and his priest *nidadu*" were created at the same time and therefore constitute a unity.[22]

18 Johannes Noll, *Letter 1*, written November 2, 1931 in Wuppertal-Barmen (archived: RS Schenkungen m-z), (translation SR).

19 Noll, *Letter 2*.

20 I thank Sabine Roark for her help with transcribing Sütterlin.

21 The explanation of *börönadu* and *oseli* is the result of Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz's email communication with a friend at the Nias Heritage Museum. She kindly contacted him when reading my first manuscript.

22 I will not explore the problems Noll raises here in detail: Women are seen as part of the man who is the human being. In addition, there is a three-part unity formed by a man, a woman and their priest. This must contradict the Protestant missionary's worldview and certainly influenced his daily mission work. As my contribution focuses on texts by Noll that are available in the RS, I am not yet able to comment on how Noll dealt with this contradiction.

Johannes Noll's ideas and actions are only one example of a broader current within the Protestant missionary community of his time. There were remarkable varieties in Protestant and Catholic ways of dealing with ritual objects, as well as significant differences in the ways individuals were proselytised.[23] Noll tried to explain his view and behaviour in his note on 'The world and philosophy concerning the life of the Niasser',[24] in which he describes converting local people as an act of humanity. In a short paragraph, Noll mentions the rivalry between local and Christian faith. He was very aware that it was difficult for Christian converts to permanently turn away from their previous faith. However, he saw this as necessary for the individuals to convert to Christianity. Noll decided which elements of local tradition constituted 'idolatry', and determined that the *adu satua* fell within that remit. He would only baptise local people if they first handed their inherited ancestral images to him or destroyed them. Noll regarded this as a way of supporting local people, and not as a demonstration of his power. He also sought to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith over the local faith. It must be noted that Noll did not shy away from excluding converts from the Christian community as a sanction if they turned to the ancestors for help in a crisis, even after baptism. From the content of his letter, it is evident that he took advantage of unequal power relations to achieve his goal of baptising local people. While Noll's primary goal was not the appropriation of heirlooms, ritual objects, including the *adu satua*, evidently were appropriated. As such, the *adu satua* must be regarded as an object that found its way to the RS as a result of the exploitation of unequal power relations.

3 Why an 'Idol' from Nias is now in Marburg

Given the relationship between the Rhenish Missionary Society and the Netherlands, it is remarkable that the *adu satua* was sent to the RS.[25] As Tjoa-Bonatz

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23 Kathleen M. Adams, "Theologians, Tourists and Thieves: The Toraja Effigy of the Dead in Modernizing Indonesia," *Kyoto Journal* 22 (1993): 38–45; Raymond Corbey, *Headhunters from the Swamps: The Marind Anim of New Guinea as Seen by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 1905–1925* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010); Raymond Corbey and Frans Karel Weener, "Collecting while Converting: Missionaries and Ethnographics," *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (June 2015): 1–14 and A. A. van Dalen, *Van strijd en overwinning op Alor* (Amsterdam: H.J. Spruyt, 1928).

24 Noll, *Die Welt*.

25 There are three more *adu satua* in the ethnographic collection at Philipps-University Marburg. The ancestor figures were received as part of 'Nassauische Altertümer', a political connection between the Dutch dukedom Orania and the German dukedom Nassau (personal communication with the curator Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios, June 2020). This connection is also the reason why German missionaries were working in the Dutch East Indies.

notes, Nias has been known in Europe for its material culture since the 19th century, and "especially the skilfully made stone and wooden sculptures were (and remain) highly esteemed among collectors and museums today".[26] Tjoa-Bonatz further explains that in 1918, the Prince-Hendrik Maritime Museum in Rotterdam contacted German Protestant missionaries on Nias directly and asked them to collect ritual objects and send them to Rotterdam. This request was supported by missionary Eduard Fries (1903–1920 on Nias), who, like Johannes Noll (1903–1931 on Nias), was a member of the Rhenish Missionary Society. He passed it on to his colleagues and asked them to ensure that "the Prince-Hendrik Maritime Museum does not have to complain about a lack of 'idols of real value' from Nias".[27] Interestingly, Noll did not follow that request but instead gave the only *adu satua* that he had kept to the RS. I find it remarkable that as a missionary working in a Dutch colony, he did not comply with the wishes of a Dutch museum. Noll would also have had the option of giving 'his idol' to the museum of his mission station in Barmen. The Rhenish Missionary Society collected objects in order to show "concrete material evidence for the successes of the missionary work, their trophies on paganism, so to speak".[28] Noll served this interest in Barmen with letters concerning his missionary successes, rather than sending objects.

Other museums were also interested in a gift of "real value" from mission areas, as the Rotterdam Museum phrased it. Noll's second letter makes it clear that he was aware of these desires in Europe. He wanted to keep the option of lending the *adu satua* to other exhibitions. Indeed, the figure is still on permanent loan to the RS today rather than being a donation.[29]

Why did Noll give the figure to the RS? In one letter, he mentions the RB that Heinrich Frick, a Protestant theologian with a special interest in Mission Theology, circulated several times a year from 1931 to 1941. Frick made it very clear that his main interest was not in collecting expensive exotic objects but in understanding how objects were used in rituals by local people prior to their conversion to Christianity. He thought this knowledge would help missionaries when providing pastoral care and advice, and also be helpful for studies on religions in Marburg. His plan was to open a study centre to prepare missionaries and others for their

26 Tjoa-Bonatz *Idols and Art*, 111. In recent years, auction houses have sold *adu satua* for several thousand euros each (Dorotheum in Vienna 2019: Dorotheum Auction House, "A monumental Nias Adu Zatua Figure, 19th century," accessed September 25, 2020, https://www.dorotheum.com/de/l/6268968/).

27 Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz, "Missionare und Kunst. Ein Spannungsfeld zwischen Kulturzerstörung und Kulturerhalt," *Indonesien Magazin Online* (May 2016): 2.

28 Ibid.

29 The RS inventory states incorrectly that it was a donation.

work overseas. He encouraged Marburg's authorities to open such a centre together with a museum of artefacts from various religions in Marburg Castle. Noll also explicitly supported this plan with his donation and his writings.[30]

In the RB, Frick encourages missionaries to send him objects and texts about pre-Christian customs, and states that he is interested in anything missionaries consider remarkable, regardless of the reason. He also mentions previous donations to the RS in order to encourage others to send comparable objects. He rarely mentions the donors' names, which makes it difficult today to assign certain donations to the references in the RB. From the undertone in letters that the missionaries sent to Frick, it seems they were happy to donate to the RS because Frick appreciated their work. They were happy to be included in a programme that would give future missionaries an insight into worldviews and beliefs that had disappeared as a result of Christianisation. Frick suggested that missionaries as pastors could provide psychological support more easily on the basis of this knowledge. While the missionaries considered themselves to be bringing civilisation to people around the world, they responded positively to Frick's suggestion that knowledge about traditional local beliefs, even if outdated, could help them with their pastoral work.

4 Object Ar 006: Dynamics within the Religionskundliche Sammlung

When the *adu satua* ancestor figure arrived at the RS in Marburg, it was given two numbers: '724' and 'Ar 006', both of which were written on the object. '724' indicates that the figure is the 724th object to arrive at the RS. 'Ar 006' indicates that the item is the sixth object of those collected from local traditions in Southeast Asia, making it of particular value. Today, it is one of more than 10,000 museum objects in a museum collection that is renowned around the world. The value of this object as part of the RS's collection is in no way lessened by the fact that the written documentation about it is very rudimentary. In fact, valuable information about the object can be gleaned if the documentation is read carefully. The museum database contains several notes: the numbers; the object's name ("ancestor figure"); its local name ("*takula*"); its origin ("Nias in the primitive South Seas"); its last owner ("Noll missionary Barmen"); the date the item was acquired (31 December 1932); the fact that correspondence pertaining to the item exists. These notes raise many questions: What is *takula*? Why is Nias regarded as being

30 Noll, *Letter 1*.

part of the South Seas? Where is the correspondence stored? Who was the object's first owner? How did the missionary receive the figure?

I was able to answer a least some of these questions by conducting further research at the RS. Such research always starts with the objects' arrival book. This simply stated that the missionary Noll had donated something from Nias. It did not state what this item was or when it arrived. I then looked at the object's index card (until 2001, all items arriving at the museum were entered on an index card). The index card states that the object is an "idol from Nias" ("Götze von Nias"), which was stored at an "idol temple" ("Götzentempel"). These terms were altered subsequently: "Idol" ("Götze") was crossed out and replaced by "ancestor figure" ("Ahnenfigur"), and the word "idol" in "idol temple" was also crossed out. It is not known who made these changes and when. The changes on the index cards probably occurred when the information from the cards was transferred to the museum's computer program in 2001. By then, the term 'Götze' was no longer being used by scholars. It is likely that this is also why the term does not appear in the digital inventory. The local term for the figure, *adu satua*, is not mentioned in any of the museum documentation. The museum database lists the local word *takula*.[31]

The use of the term *takula* in the museum database highlights a deficiency of the program: Changes can be made on the system which do not include the name of the person making the change, the date the change was made or why it was made. It can be assumed that somebody noticed that *takula* masks closely resemble the face and headgear of the *adu satua* at the RS. Unfortunately, they are not the same. *Takula* is a term used for wooden masks and metal helmets, both part of the ritual dress of a warrior and head-hunter on Nias.

The local term *adu satua* is not noted in the museum records at all. There is also no written description of Ar 006 *adu satua.* The figure's collar is a sign that the man was a successful head-hunter; the shape of its earring indicates the region the figure is from.[32] Its erect penis shows that the *adu satua* is particularly 'potent', like a powerful and successful man. The RS inventory does mention that Ar 006 has a vertical crack. This seems to have been caused by the dry conditions in the RS's storage facility. Noll provides an alternative explanation: He states

31 Traditional *takula gere* mask: "Wooden Mask 'Takula Gere'," Nias Heritage Museum, accessed November 10, 2020, https://museum-nias.org/en/?artwork=wooden-mask-takula-gere. For an image of a warrior's ritual dress, including *takula tefaö*, see "Pakaian Perang," Google, accessed November 10, 2020, https://images.app.goo.gl/ZChzNAoWFdnDXhox9.

32 Anne Richter and Bruce W. Carpenter, *Gold Jewellery of the Indonesian Archipelago* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2012).

Figure 3: Ancestor figure adu satua *now Ar 006 at Religionskundliche Sammlung in Marburg. Photo: Georg Dörr, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg.*

that if an *adu satua* has not been provided with souls of deceased people for a long time, the ancestors are no longer there, which leads to the figure being torn apart.[33] It is not known whether the figure cracked in Marburg or before arriving there.

5 Outlook: Discussing restitution

Before local people converted to Christianity, an *adu satua* was essential on Nias not only during traditional death rituals but also at key moments in life, such as birth, and marriage. Ancestors could be contacted by talking to them in front of an *adu satua*. People sought help from their ancestors in any situation of misfortune, such as sickness or infertility of humans or nature. *Adu satua* were very highly valued. This changed after the local people converted to Christianity and *adu satua* lost their ritual specificity. Local people agreed to the *adu satua* being taken away by missionaries like Johannes Noll. For Noll, these figures were never more than 'idols' that had to be taken away from local people in order to stop 'idolatry' and lead them to Christianity and 'civilisation'. By destroying a large number of ancestor figures, Noll demonstrated that the local ancestors had lost their power as they did not even bring misfortune to the person who had destroyed them or to the descendants of the ancestors who supposedly resided inside the figures. By destroying the figures in public, Noll underlined their insignificance. Despite his disdain for ancestor figures, he accepted that the only figure that he did not destroy but kept in his private home would be used one last time in a traditional death ritual. The *adu satua* regained its unquantifiable high ritual value for a short period. Later, the missionary removed it from Nias for good. Noll probably did not know the exact commodity value of *adu satua* on the international art market, but he knew that European museums and art dealers were interested in adding them to their collections. We can only guess why Noll decided to give the figure to Marburg. There it became part of the internationally renowned Religionskundliche Sammlung, now museumised with the object number Ar 006. After reaching Marburg, the object lost its ties to Nias for several decades. The RS plans to re-establish those ties.

The provenance research presented in this article is a very good basis for re-establishing the ties between the *adu satua* and Nias. The research was mainly carried out at the RS in order to establish what could be learned from the RS's own collection about the object's history. The research considered changes of

33 Noll, *Mökömökö.*

ownership, first from a local ritual community to a Protestant missionary, and then from the missionary to the RS. It also considered the object's change of location from Nias to Marburg.

Having understood more about the object's provenance, we will now endeavour to establish contact between the RS and Nias. Finding the descendants of the former owners of this *adu satua* figure will likely require the support of various institutions such as the city administration, the local church or the Nias Heritage Museum.[34] It can only be hoped that some of these institutions will be interested in working with the RS. The RS plans to discuss the future location and treatment of the *adu satua* figure with all sides in order to find a solution that is acceptable to the descendants of its former owners.

It remains to be seen what, if anything, will come of establishing contact between the RS and Nias to discuss the *adu satua*. Returning the object to Nias will certainly be an option. Regardless of whether the object is ultimately returned, that initial contact could conceivably lead to other forms of exchange, and be the beginning of a varied, long-term dialogue on a variety of topics across national borders on equal terms.

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34 Nias Heritage Museum, accessed September 17, 2020, https://museum-nias.org/en/.

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Ferdinand Liefert

Why are Korean village guardians exhibited in an institution managed by a Japanese new religion? The Intertwined Contexts of the Tenri University Sankōkan Museum

1 Introduction

Tenrikyō[1] is one of the oldest of Japan's 'new religions'.[2] Founded by Nakayama Miki[3] in 1838, its main goal is to establish a joyous life which is granted by the god *Tenri-O-no-Mikoto,* which is believed to have revealed itself to Nakayama Miki. The architecture of the main Tenrikyō sanctuary in the city of Tenri is typical of the Tokugawa period; the music in Tenrikyō services is similar to Japanese court music,[4] and one of Tenrikyō's former leaders promoted Judo.[5] As such, Tenrikyō and its educational institutions certainly engage in Japanese culture, and yet the Tenri University Sankōkan Museum's 2001 catalogue[6] prominently features Kore-

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1 English: 'The Teaching of Heavenly Principle'. For Tenrikyō, see Kasahara Kazuo, ed., *A History of Japanese Religion,* trans. Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 2001), 478–87; Barbara Rossetti Ambros and Timothy Smith, "Tenrikyō," in *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements*, ed. Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 33–49; Nakayama Shōzen, *A Short History of Tenrikyo* (Tenri: Tenrikyō Kyōkai Honbu, 1960); Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Teachings and History of Tenrikyo* (Tenri: Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, 1986); Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Path to Joyousness* (Tenri: Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, 1998) and Tenrikyo Overseas Department, *A Glossary of Tenrikyo Terms* (Tenri: Tenrikyo Overseas Department, 2010).

2 This is a common translation of *shinshūkyō*. For a discussion of the term, see Birgit Staemmler and Ulrich Dehn, eds., *Establishing the Revolutionary: An Introduction to New Religions in Japan* (Münster: LIT, 2011), 1–4.

3 Japanese names will be written in Japanese order, surname first.

4 Pictures of the Main Sanctuary can be found in Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Path to Joyousness*, vi. For an outline of the service, see Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Glossary of Tenrikyo Terms*, 375–82; for the instruments, see ibid., 240–41.

5 Sugai Hiroshi, "Academic and Cultural Exchanges between Tenri University and Marburg University: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Purification*, ed. Gerhard Marcel Martin and Katja Triplett (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 5.

6 The museum's full name is often abbreviated to 'Tenri Sankōkan'.

an pillar statues.[7] Why would a Japanese new religion like Tenrikyō display Korean pillar statues in its museum?

Objects in a museum have been taken out of their original context and placed in a new one. Susan M. Pearce showed with reference to the moon rock exhibited at the National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC, that it is the cultural value applied which makes objects of special interest.[8] Pearce notes that while there is nothing particularly appealing about the moon rock, it is presented in a way that highlights it much more than other exhibited rocks. The rock is also touched frequently by visitors, who are explicitly allowed to do so. Pearce argues that it is the act of selection that gives the rock cultural value. The reason for selecting objects varies. Crispin Paine identifies three ways that curators apply new meaning to museum objects: "as a beautiful/powerful/meaningful work of art, as a scientific specimen, or as an illustration and evidence to a story being told".[9]

To examine the specific cultural value of the Korean pillar statues, and the mode in which they were integrated into the Tenri Sankōkan, I will first explore the beginning of Tenrikyō's overseas missionary work, before looking at the origins of the Tenri Sankōkan. I will then examine the links between the history of Tenrikyō's overseas mission, its educational institutions and its ethnographic collection, which includes the pillar statues. Finally, I will discuss the museum items in the context of colonialism.

2 The beginning of Tenrikyō's overseas missionary work

Tenrikyō's legal status was very uncertain from 1838 until 1945.[10] Initially, Tenrikyō was registered as a branch of Yoshida Shinto. In 1908, it was registered as one of the thirteen Shintō sects.[11] To gain this legal status, Tenrikyō officials were forced to adapt their teachings and practices to fit the state Shintō framework. The authorities kept a close eye on Tenrikyō and put pressure on the congregation on several occasions, sometimes breaking up Tenrikyō assemblies and mak-

7 Tenri Sankokan Museum, *Tenri Sankokan Museum Permanent Exhibition Catalogue* (Tenri: Tenri Sankokan Museum, 2001).

8 Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (London, New York: Leicester University Press, 1992), 5.

9 Crispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 14.

10 Ambros and Smith, "Tenrikyō," 36–38; Kasahara, *History of Japanese Religion*, 483–484 and Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Path to Joyousness*, 56–63.

11 Ambros and Smith, "Tenrikyō," 35–37.

ing arrests.[12] Tenrikyō started its overseas missionary work in 1893.[13] In the third edition of *A Short History Of Tenrikyo*, Nakayama Shōzen states: "The instructions of the Home Office made the mission in Japan difficult to do. And this was one of the motives of our overseas mission work."[14] This is a reference to the Japanese Home Office's 'Directive No. 12',[15] issued on 6 April 1896. According to Nakayama: "The instructions said to the effect [sic] that the police must strictly, supervise Tenrikyō, for it was to be blamed for its destruction of the public morals, its interference with medicine, and its laying the believers under contribution."[16] These difficult circumstances were factor behind Tenrikyō starting missionary work abroad. Tenrikyō always emphasised the need to spread its teachings to all people.[17]

Tenrikyō began its overseas mission in the areas of east and south-east Asia that had been colonised by Japan.[18] Soon, Tenrikyō missionaries also travelled to regions with high Japanese immigration, namely North and South America. The anniversaries of Nakayama Miki's death have always been an important occasion for Tenrikyō. In the run-up to the anniversary, Tenrikyō headquarters announces important tasks or initiates special activities. After the 40th anniversary in 1926, Tenrikyō headquarters worked to further strengthen the congregation's overseas missionary work and launched an associated campaign to double Tenrikyō's membership.[19]

12 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings*, 92–99 and Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Path to Joyousness*, 59–60.

13 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings*, 120.

14 Nakayama Shōzen, *Short History*, 149.

15 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *The Path to Joyousness*, 59.

16 Nakayama Shōzen, *Short History,* 149.

17 The 1986 English version of Tenrikyō's doctrine states: "The appearance of God into this world through Oyasama [honorary title of Nakayama Miki] was intended for the salvation of all mankind." Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings*, 42. This is rooted in the scriptures of Nakayama Miki, ibid.

18 Korean converts were among the first converts overseas. Yamakura Akihiro, "Transnational Contexts of Tenrikyo Mission in Korea: Korea, Manchuria, and the United States," in *Belief and Practice in Imperial Japan and Colonial Korea, Religion and Society in Asia Pacific*, ed. Emily Anderson (Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 165. The school of foreign languages was established in order to teach missionaries the languages that were native to the people in the areas they would be travelling to. However, in the Americas, the missionary activities were more successful among Japanese communities. Susumu Shimazono, "The Expansion of Japan's New Religions in Foreign Cultures," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (1991): 105–32.

19 Nakayama Shōzen, *Short History*, 155 and Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings,* 123–24.

3 The origins of the Tenri Sankōkan Museum

The Tenrikyō Young Men's Association played a significant role in Tenrikyō's early overseas mission.[20] In 1925, the association established the Tenri School of Foreign Languages. Nakayama Shōzen, the second *Shinbashira*[21], was also head of the newly established school.[22] The school's purpose was to teach languages to those who would engage in missionary work abroad.[23] Initially, those languages included Chinese, Cantonese, Malay, Russian and Korean, the latter of which was taught despite Japanese authorities forbidding its use.[24] The Tenri Sankōkan Museum's website mentions that during the first entrance ceremony, Nakayama Shōzen mentioned his plan to run a museum as part of the foreign language school.[25]

From September to October 1926, Nakayama undertook his first inspection journey to the Korean peninsula and mainland China. Several journeys to Korea, mainland China and Taiwan followed.[26] During his trips, he also visited facilities run by Christian missionaries as he was convinced that Tenrikyō's missionary work could benefit from knowledge of Christian missionary strategies.[27]

In his travel account *From Shanghai to Beijing*, published in 1934,[28] Nakayama recalls visiting two Christian missionary institutions in 1930, both of which included museums. These were the *Guangzhiyuan*[29] in Jinan and the *Hoang Ho Pai Ho* Museum[30] in Tianjin. Given his detailed description of the two institutions,[31] we can assume they made a lasting impression on him. Umetani states that the vis-

20 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings*, 157–60.

21 The head of Tenrikyō.

22 Tenri Gaikokugo Gakkō, *Tenri Gaikokugo Gakkō Hen* (Tenri: Tenri Gaikokugo Gakkō, 1935), 10.

23 Nagaoka Takashi, *Shinshūkyō to sōryokusen: Kyōso igo o ikiru* (Nagoya: Nagoyadaigakushuppankai, 2015), 143.

24 Yamakura notes that the Korean Language Department led a precarious existence until 1945. Yamakura, *Transnational Contexts*, 159–60.

25 Tenri University Sankokan Museum, "Tenri University Sankokan Museum," accessed February 28, 2020, https://www.sankokan.jp/english.

26 Nagaoka, *Shinshūkyō*, 131.

27 Ibid., 145–46.

28 Nakayama Shōzen, *Shanhai kara Hokuhei e* (Tenri, 1934).

29 According to Tracey L-D Lu, the *Guangzhiyuan* Museum continued to operate until 1949. Its collection was then transferred to the Provincial Museum of Shandong. Tracey Lie Dan Lu, *Museums in China: Power, Politics and Identities* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014).

30 Today's Tianjin Museum of Natural History, as it became in 1952. Lu, *Museums*, 54.

31 For the *Guangzhiyuan*, see Nakayama, *Shanhai kara Hokuhei e*, 210–20; for the Hoang Ho Paiho Museum, see ibid., 282–85.

its inspired Nakayama to start collecting ethnographic material.[32] The museums were run by British Baptists and French Jesuits respectively. Both organisations established educational institutions in order to reach out to Chinese intellectuals who were seen as influential.[33] The *Guangzhiyuan* was designed to show the merits of Western Christian civilisations.[34] The *Hoang Ho Pai Po* was mainly a natural history museum. Its founder, E. Licent J.S. was actively engaged in biological research.[35] It was these museums, which exhibited items in order to provide practical knowledge, rather than being only a place for art, that informed Nakayama's ideas about Tenrikyō's own museum.[36] He and other Tenrikyō missionaries began collecting what they thought of as everyday items from the areas where they were trying to establish Tenrikyō churches.[37]

An initial collection of Chinese ethnographic items was exhibited in a classroom at the Tenri School of Foreign Languages in 1930.[38] The collection grew, and, in 1934, a Korean house was installed in Tenri as another means of cultural education for future missionaries. In 1938, the museum got its own building. In 1943, it became affiliated with the Tenrikyō Research Institute for Asian Cultures. Following a hiatus, the museum reopened after the Second World War and is now affiliated with Tenri University.

4 Korean village guardians inside the Tenri Sankōkan Museum

Given that Tenrikyō started its overseas missionary work on the Korean peninsula,[39] it is not surprising that materials from the region are among those collected

32 Umetani Akinori, "The Matter and Meaning of Exhibiting the Tenrikyo Overseas Mission," in *Materiality in Religion and Culture*: *Tenri University – Marburg University Joint Research Project*, ed. Saburo Shawn Morishita (Münster: LIT, 2017), 163–64.

33 For the missionary strategies of the British Baptist Mission Society, see H.R. Williamson, *British Baptists in China, 1845–1952* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1957). For the missionary strategies of the Jesuits, see Ku Wei-ying, ed., *Missionary Approaches and Linguistics in Mainland China and Taiwan* (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, 2001), 33–58.

34 Lu, *Museums*, 44 and *The China Journal of Science and Arts* 1 (1927): 633.

35 Lu, *Museums*, 50.

36 Previously, a different idea seems to have been shaped by the Japanese government. Alice Y. Tseng argues that the focus in national museums shifted from promoting industry to art in the mid-Meiji period. Alice Y. Tseng, *The Imperial Museums of Meiji Japan: Architecture and the Art of the Nation* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2008), 84, 91.

37 Tenrikyo Auslandsabteilung, "Tenri-Sankokan-Museum," *Tenrikyo*, no. 4 (2009): 20–30.

38 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Teachings*, 186.

39 Morii Toshiharu, *Tenrikyō no kaigai dendō: "sekaidasuke" – sono dendō to tenkai* (Tokyo: Zepponsha, 2008), 213.

by Tenrikyō missionaries. As noted, Korean pillar statues feature prominently on the cover of the 2001 catalogue. A catalogue published in 1986 to commemorate the centennial anniversary of Nakayama Miki's death has a different cover, but the statues are the first items detailed. They cover the full first side of the section dealing with items from the Korean peninsula. Today, the statues are located on the ground floor of the museum, between an exhibition of items related to the northern Japanese ethnic minority *Ainu* and the exhibition on Korea. They are free-standing and the first objects of Korean origin that visitors encounter at the museum.

The 1986 catalogue gives only a short explanation: "*Chang-seung* (popular name: General posts) or a pair of pillar statues. Wood carvings, each with an engraved inscription of the Chinese characters – "*Syang-weon Jyu Jyang-gun* (上元周将軍)" and "*Ha-weon Dang Jyang-gun* (下元唐将軍)". The Japanese reign era (1914–45)."[40] The 2001 catalogue gives more details: Statues like this were originally erected at entrances to villages and temples as apotropaic statues and annual rituals were performed with them.[41]

The Korean statues are highlighted in the museum catalogues and occupy a prominent position in the actual exhibition. At the same time, they are grouped with other items, such as masks, instruments, and furniture, that represent Korean lifestyles and culture.[42] The setting, first inside a school building, and later in a separate building but outside Tenrikyō places of worship, suggests an educational purpose rather than the possibility of practising rituals with the statues. Today too, visitors are not encouraged to perform rituals but to learn about the statues. The statues are free-standing, placed together against a grey wall with a sign.

Initially, it was believed missionaries could learn about the customs of those who originally used the statues in order to better apply their teachings. Today, they tell both visitors and scholars about practices that are no longer regarded as important in the lives of Koreans.[43] They also tell us about the history of the museum.

Unlike Tenri Sankōkan, treasure museums of Buddhist temples and Shintō Shrines mostly contain objects drawn from their own ritual praxis or those of emic symbolic value.

40 Tenri University Sankokan Museum, *Collection of Tenri University Sankokan Museum: Commemorative Publication for the Centennial Anniversary of OYASAMA* (Tenri: Tenri University Press, 1986), 1.

41 Tenri Sankokan Museum, *Permanent*, 12.

42 The section which displays the *Chang-seung* statues is called "Life and Culture of the world." Tenri Sankokan Museum, *Permanent*, 9.

43 Tenri Sankokan Museum, *Permanent*, 12.

More recently established museums run by Japanese new religions, such as the MoA Museum of Art or the Miho Museum, also exhibit a variety of items from different cultures but in a setting that highlights their artistic value.[44] Both of these museums share their founders' emphasis on cherishing beauty.[45] They are also located in scenic surroundings, the first in the coastal city Atami, the second, in the mountains in Shiga prefecture, and are built in elaborate modern architectural styles.

By contrast, Tenri Sankōkan only started displaying a few Tenrikyō-related items in 2001. The mode in which they are exhibited is more that of *heritage*[46] than highlighting their aesthetic value. The museum is also housed in a former hospital, which is a rather pragmatic choice of location. It is perhaps unsurprising that Tenri Sankōkan shares more similarities with museums established by Christian missionaries, which Chris Wingfield calls "home missionary museums".[47] Looking back at the time when the Korean pillar statues were collected[48], one might say that the museum started as a facility serving mostly Tenrikyō adherents, providing reference material. After the museum opened its doors to the general public following the Second World War, it no longer exclusively served Tenrikyō followers. As the museum[49] now looks back on 90 years of collecting and exhibiting, as well as, more recently, highlighting its own origins in the mission context, it also tells its own story, and in this sense has become even more a Tenrikyō facility. A fieldwork interviewee in Tenri said the museum could be seen as a gate connect-

44 E.g., there is far more focus on individual items than there is in Tenri Sankōkan. In Miho Museum in particular, the lighting is more sophisticated. My own fieldwork, May 2019.

45 Sekai Kyusei Kyo IZUNOME, "Mokichi Okada's History," accessed October 23, 2020, http://www.izunome.jp/en/izunome/history/; "Concept: A Real-World Shangri-La," Miho Museum, accessed October 23, 2020, http://www.miho.or.jp/intro/history.

46 Matthew Francis has described heritage museums of religious groups in Canada. Matthew Francis, "Community-Led Museums Exploring Religious Life in Canada: Abbotsford's Sikh Heritage Museum and Mennonite Heritage Museum," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 129–34. Crispin Paine mentions the categories "heritage" and "religious" when discussing museums that he calls "Rescue Museums" and distinguishes between those categories in Crispin Paine, "Rich and Varied: Religion in Museums," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 216.

47 Chris Wingfield, "Missionary Museums," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 231–33.

48 Nagaoka uses the neutral term "collecting" (he uses the passive form "*atsumerareta*" in Japanese). Nagaoka, *Shinshūkyō*, 143. However, as I explain, the context suggests that the acquisition took place between parties with different power status and might have included highly problematic practices.

49 The museum contains ethnographic as well as archaeological objects.

ing Tenrikyō members to the world and various people to Tenrikyō.[50] A South Korean exchange student at Tenri University who I interviewed said he was surprised to find Korean objects inside the museum.[51] These items may also be and have been displayed to inspire awe.

In addition to a Taiwanese altar, Hindu figures and other material from ritual contexts, they also stand alongside items like boats, musical instruments, etc., embedded in an institution, which is run by a religious organisation, which does not seem to impose its own religious teachings on the objects. It is a place, as the metaphor of the gate implies, which interconnects different contexts. A place informed by religious[52] interests as well as general education and research.

5 The early Tenri Sankōkan museum objects in the context of colonialism

The missionaries obtained the Korean pillar statues when Korea was under Japanese rule. Other museum items were also obtained from Japanese colonies. This raises the question of whether the missionaries' activities in the colonies were driven by the same agenda as the expansion of the Japanese empire.

Religious studies scholar Nagaoka Takashi examines a possible connection between the missionaries' collecting activities and nationalism or imperialism.[53] Analysing Nakayama Shōzen's thoughts on mission work,[54] he first notes Nakayama's sceptical view on entanglement with state authorities based on his study of Matteo Ricci and the Rites affair.[55] Nagaoka also describes what he calls "the violent nature of the overseas mission".[56] He argues that Nakayama's study on the Christian mission in India reveals his bias towards changing local societies' cultures to advance them.[57] Nagaoka also contends that Nakayama had a culturally chauvinistic view on the people of Manchuria and, to various degrees, those of the Korean peninsula.[58] Besides spreading the original Tenrikyō teachings, an

50 Interview with a curator of Tenri University Sankokan Museum, April 3, 2019. I conducted fieldwork in Tenri in April 2019. During this period, I interviewed students of Tenri University as well as a curator of Tenri Sankōkan.
51 Interview with a Tenri University student, April 17, 2019.
52 Here, I refer to the cultural education of future missionaries.
53 My translation of "kokkashugi ya teikokushugi". Nagaoka, *Shinshūkyō*, 144.
54 Cf. ibid. Nagaoka argues that the mission work was the main reason for collecting those objects.
55 Ibid., 146.
56 Ibid., 148–53.
57 Ibid., 150.
58 Ibid., 150–52.

idea of needing to contribute to cultural advancement was adopted. This was in line with the official view of that time.

In a 2017 study, the historian Yamakura Akihiro considers the transnational contexts of Tenrikyō in Korea,[59] and examines whether the mission work was fuelled by the same ideas as the expansion of the Japanese empire. Yamakura explores the work of historians and scholars of the history of religion, and differentiates between three different views on Tenrikyō's missionary work: the *conformity view*, the *façade view* and the *synthetic view*.[60]

Scholars of the *conformity view* point to pro-expansionist statements published in the Tenrikyō bulletin *Michinotomo*[61] as evidence that Tenrikyō's overseas missionary activities before 1945 were informed by the Japanese empire's expansion policy. By contrast, the *façade view* highlights the fact that Tenrikyō mission work started on an individual level in Korea. Scholars of this view stress that missionaries were instructed in the Korean language and the first pilgrims to Tenri from overseas were from the Korean peninsula. The *façade view* regards the pro-expansionist articles published in *Michinotomo* as evidence that Tenrikyō followed the empire's policies – but only superficially. Another important argument for that view is the ongoing persecution of Tenrikyō during the 1930s. The *synthetic* view is a combination of the other two perspectives. According to Yamakura, it can be found in publications by the religious historians Lee Won-Bum and Fujii Takeshi. Yamakura states:

> They agree with the thesis that Tenrikyo overseas missionaries were sincere in their personal interactions with native people, yet also recognize the (ostensible) conformity to the militaristic statism of the empire in their mission efforts, especially after 1937.[62]

One argument for this view is the suppression Tenrikyō followers faced at the hands of the Japanese colonial authorities. Equally, proponents of this view point to the nature of Tenrikyō missionary work, which is based on face-to-face interaction in situations of disease and personal hardships. These scholars point to the difference between Tenrikyō's universalistic approach before 1937 and its particularist approach afterwards as evidence of its conformity.

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59 Yamakura, *Transnational Contexts*.

60 For the discussion of the "conformist view", see Yamakura, *Transnational Contexts,* 163–64; for the "façade view", ibid., 165–66; for the "synthetic view", ibid., 166–68.

61 *Michinotomo* is regarded as one of Tenrikyō's primary publications.

62 Yamakura*, Transnational Contexts*, 166.

In order to evaluate the missionaries' activities during the Japanese occupation of Korea, the third view considers a broader picture, including Tenrikyō's more official acts and publications. It acknowledges Tenrikyō's interactions and mission work before the new religion applied imperialist ideology, as well as the fact that Tenrikyō itself was subject to state suppression. Nagaoka's analysis hints at important points. Nakayama was in the highest position and therefore his thoughts might have had a major impact. However, Nagaoka's strict focus on Nakayama overshadows the fact that Tenrikyō missionary work was carried out by individuals.

I suggest looking at the missionaries' activities in a more differentiated way and recontextualising the objects collected during that time. It is evident that these items were obtained from people who would have been legally inferior to Japanese nationals during the colonial period.[63] The objects may also have been used to construct a certain image of the other from the perspective of the privileged in Tenri. The objects were brought to the centre[64] and the cultures, from which they stem, were previously seen as inferior.[65] Equally, the objects may serve as evidence of an interest in those cultures and interactions between individuals.

6 Conclusion

Korean pillar statues, which previously had apotropaic functions at village and temple entrances on the Korean peninsula, are exhibited among Tenri Sankōkan's many ethnological and archaeological specimens. They were initially selected and given new value by Tenrikyō missionaries in the context of missionary work and, to a certain extent, of Japan's colonial enterprise.

An interviewee elaborated on the unique features of the museum, noting that it does not exhibit models but "real items".[66] This corresponds to Pearce's notion of the power of the "real thing" – items having a real connection to past events.[67] This quality might have been an important reason for collecting objects from the cultural contexts of people who Tenrikyō missionaries saw as potential converts. After the Second World War, the museum became affiliated with Tenri University,

63 Ibid., 162.

64 Here, I refer to the Japanese archipelago, but to be more concrete, also to Tenri city.

65 E.g., Nakayama mentioned that he saw the culture of the Manchurians as inferior to that of the Japanese in Manchuria. He also had a negative view of Koreans, who were broadly adopting Communism. Nagaoka, *Shinshūkyō*.

66 Interview with curator.

67 Pearce, *Objects and Collections*, 24–29.

Tenrikyō's private university, and over the years, the purpose of the exhibition and the context of further collecting activities has altered. The statues, which are prominently featured on the cover of the 2001 catalogue hint at the museum's origins, since they were among the first items collected. Today, the exhibition includes videos featuring various practices involving the statues. As such, these statues illustrate not just one, but a variety of stories. They can be seen as a reference to their original use on the Korean peninsula, to Tenrikyō's mission history and to the history of the museum itself. The metaphor of the gate might describe the character of this museum quite well. It can be understood as an institution that connects a variety of different contexts as well as Tenrikyō followers and non-Tenrikyō followers.

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Pardis Eskandaripour

Dealing with Rose and Romance: Challenges in the Exhibition of Islamic Objects in Ethnological Museums

1 Introduction

The GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig[1] (MVL) has collected around 200,000 objects, of which over 3,500 originated from West Asia and North Africa. The pieces were bought, donated, or bequeathed, and some were added to the museum during the colonial period. By acquiring and receiving donations from private collections, and purchasing objects from world exhibitions – such as those held in Vienna in 1873, and Paris in 1897 and 1900 – the MVL has brought together a wide array of objects from many countries. The MVL does not focus on a particular region or religion. Indeed, the museum's diversity of focus stands in noticeable contrast to other specifically themed museums. The West Asian objects in the permanent exhibition are not displayed under this regional-geographical classification, as in other sections of the museum, but rather in a section titled 'Orient'. My paper highlights the challenges and problems of presenting objects and materials from the various cultures displayed in the so-called Orient Department of the permanent exhibition of the MVL. Discussing the current restriction of Islamic items to forming only part of the generalising 'Orient' section, this paper notes a possible alternative of a presentation in either a special exhibition or a larger section of the permanent exhibition. This would be in line with the MVL's treatment of Buddhism and Hinduism in the Asian section. I will address the curators' task of exhibiting specific religions in the museum, as well as how visitors interact with those specific religions.

In exhibiting religious objects, museum staff and researchers have to process objects identified both as religious and as non-religious. This raises the question of what 'religion' and 'religious' mean. At first glance, this question may seem trivial, but it is the subject of one of the most intense debates in the study of religion, and proves to be extremely difficult to answer in a museum context. This is exactly the situation in the MVL, where I conducted my research on the presentation of religion(s), especially Islam, in an ethnological museum context. Here, the question arises as to how Islam should be defined, delimited, and placed as

1 GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig. Hereafter, this will be abbreviated to MVL.

a religion next to other religions and beliefs, without either losing the claim to adequate representation of inner-Islamic diversity, or insulting the beliefs of the faithful. This challenge is what distinguishes the presentation of Islam in the MVL from that in a museum specifically for Islamic art or culture. Ethnology comprises research on human existence, and on the combination of human material and spiritual life. Lambek "stresses the extent to which religion is interconnected with all aspects of human existence. Religion is embedded in human life because it explains human existence".[2]

2 Presenting religion(s) in an ethnological museum

Neubert poses the question: "What antagonistic opposites to religion can be found?" His response includes categories such as secularity, science, spirituality, magic, sects, fundamentalism, and "'pseudo-', 'quasi-' and other 'not-so-true-religions'".[3] This discourse may initially appear to be somewhat abstract, but it nonetheless has a concrete influence on (the treatment of) material culture. It is reflected in how visitors approach objects in ethnological museums, especially those objects pertaining to ancestor worship, spirits, and magical powers. Such objects have religious significance to some, but perhaps not to others: a belief in spirits, or in other hidden powers in the objects, is not universal.

We can assume that people in certain historical periods associated specific objects with particular spiritual meaning or symbolism. For various reasons, however, this association might disappear, leaving the objects without meaning other than their secular or aesthetic functions. For example, in the course of Christian missions in Africa, objects, which had been used in ritual ceremony, lost their original meaning and function[4]. But when these objects were delivered to Europe, they were labelled as religious-like ancestor and god figures, and ritual objects, of the various peoples to which they had belonged. While they had lost their religious meaning in their place of origin, they thus maintained a religious significance in Europe. Should they still be considered religious in the museum, even though their original cultural context has been lost? Do the curators still have to show the

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2 Michael Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) quoted from Tamsin Bradley, *The Relationships between Religion and Development: Views from Anthropology,* Working Paper Series 5, Department for Applied Sociology (Department for Applied Sociology (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2007), 8.

3 Frank Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2016), 114ff.

4 See Michel Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, trans. Brent Hayes Edwards, originally published as *L'Afrique fantôme (De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931–1933)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934; Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2020).

sacredness and religious significance such objects once had? This raises the question of how to deal with religious objects in the museum. How should religion be defined in an ethnological museum, and how should religions be classified and placed relative to one another? Should the curators distinguish so-called world religions from local religions and faiths? Considering these questions, I start by describing the journey of religious objects into the MVL. Afterwards, I consider how Islam, as a religion, might best be treated there.

2.1 Restoration of religious objects

After their arrival in any museum, objects are categorised, prepared, and, if necessary, restored, after which they are either stored or made ready for an exhibition. Although my research concerns objects categorised as Islamic-Oriental,[5] the particularities of housing and restoring religious objects in museums are perhaps most readily illustrated with *Vaishravana*, a Tibetan Buddhist figure. During the precautionary treatment and thorough cleaning of the object, it was discovered to contain amulets made of paper and wool. These materials can cause damage over time. For reasons of conservation, it was therefore necessary to remove them from the statue. From a religious viewpoint, however, the sacredness of the statue is based on consecration through a ritual filling. Did the removal during restoration put an end to the sacredness of the object? If so, is it appropriate to change the sacral meaning of an object in a museum?

2.2 Recognition of the sacredness of objects

Central scriptures, such as the Qur'an and the Bible, and figures of Buddha or Hindu gods are commonly recognised as religious symbols or material. Although religious significance may be perceived in various ways by different people, there is a consensus that Buddha, Shiva, and certain scriptures are considered sacred by their respective believers – despite others seeing sacredness elsewhere. Muslims, for example, believe visualised figures of God, or the existence of other deities besides God, to be *shirk*,[6] and thus Muslims see no sacred property in Hindu figures.[7] But this does not contradict the attribution of these objects as sacred by

5 These terms are discussed in the following.

6 In Islam, *shirk* directly translates as 'share' and is used to refer to idolatry, polytheism, or the association of God with other deities. In The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Shirk," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 14, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/shirk.

7 See Peter J. Bräunlein, "Shiva und der Teufel – Museale Vermittlung von Religion als religionswissenschaftliche Herausforderung", in *Religion und Museum: Zur visuellen Repräsentation von Religion/en im öffentlichen Raum*, ed. Peter J. Bräunlein (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2004), 55–76.

their devotees. Therefore, the exhibition of these objects will play an important role in providing information on this religious tradition. A further illustrative example comes from the Australia and Oceania section of the MVL, in the attempt to display the primal crocodile's sacred significance to the people of *Iatmul* (New Guinea). To the museum curators or academic researchers, the mediation of the sacredness of the crocodile[8] and the rituals and initiation ceremonies with the memory of the primordial crocodile may seem similar to the mediation of the sacredness of Jesus Christ and church initiation ceremonies. These may nonetheless be incomparable for visitors with different views or religious beliefs. The need to recognise religious qualities from extinct cultures and past local traditions makes the exhibition of such objects and the mediation of their religious meaning more difficult. Having presented the methods used by the MVL and some of the issues inherent to exhibiting religious objects, I now return to the topic of Islam, West Asia, and the challenges behind exhibiting those cultures and religions.

3 Problems associated with the terms 'Islam' and 'Islamic art' in the presentation of Muslim material culture and religious objects

In the relevant literature, Muslim material culture that is discussed under the title 'Islamic art' is usually limited to regions in which Islam is dominant. This masks the social changes and cultural movements resulting from migration. Research in an ethnological museum, with new perspectives and without prejudice, should consider Islam as a global phenomenon, stretching beyond the borders of Islam-dominated countries. Muslim material culture and cultural heritage appear in other regions of the world too. "Most scholars tacitly accept that the convenient if incorrect term 'Islamic' refers not just to the religion of Islam but to the greater culture in which Islam was the dominant – but not sole – religion practiced."[9] An ethnological museum is directly concerned with the culture, in particular the material culture, of groups of people. The continued overlapping of the concepts of Islam and certain regions cause other religions and faiths in these regions to be overlooked in ethnological analysis. From my own experience in the MVL, I noted visitors' surprise when I spoke about the Jews in Iraq or Christians in Iran.

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8 See Jürg Schmid and Christin Kocher Schmid, *Söhne des Krokodils: Männerhausrituale und Initiation in Yensan, Zentral-Iatmul, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea* (Basel: Wepf, 1992).

9 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin* (New York: CAA) 85, no. 1 (2003): 153.

4 The regions 'Orient' and 'Arabic'

In the post-colonial period, scholars have attempted to reflect critically, and leave behind the term 'Orient' as a descriptor for regional and cultural phenomena, following the successful book by Edward Said from 1978. Still, a regurgitation of the concept is evident in newer literature, exhibitions and the academic field in general, with the use of terminology like 'the Near and Middle East', or 'Anatolia', ignoring that these are analogous to 'Orient', sharing many of the same problems. Instead of speaking of west Asian and north African regions, publications often use the phrase 'Arab cultural space', as people in these areas speak Arabic more commonly than other languages. The terms 'Islamic', 'Oriental', or 'Arabic' all inadequately reflect the diverse ethnic and Muslim historical backgrounds. They obscure the colourful ethnic-linguistic culture of Muslims, as well as the region's non-Muslims, making clarification of the different identities of Muslims in various countries difficult.

For museum visitors, Christian or Jewish cultural heritage is related to the religious art, relics, and ritual objects of these religions. Usually, visitors do not also think of the splendour and beauty of baroque and rococo style in French and Prussian palaces. Equally, scholars do not read about the curtains, vases, ceramics, glasses, and carpets of the Bourbon or Habsburg families in books on 'Christian art'. Can the same be said of Islamic art? In a museum, one can deal more effectively with research topics that are limited to a particular region or tradition. It would be preferable to talk of Islamic art only when focusing on religious objects, and to study other, non-religious terms separately within their appropriate subjects, grouped geographically by their origin.

5 Three artistic bowls and the problems of categorisation

How do Islamic cultures differentiate secular and religious objects, places, and concepts? When can an object be called Islamic-religious?

In Muslim material culture it is hard to recognise the borders between the sacred and the secular, though "in the colonial era, new distinctions and differentiations between religious and non-religious spheres gained shape within inner-Islamic discourses, partly as a product of encounters with Western knowledge".[10] One person may view a particular painting, building, garden, or the binding of a book

10 Markus Dressler et al., "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019): 9.

Figure 1: Bowls viewed from above. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00535-WAs00536-WAs00538).

as a secular piece of beauty, but for another, it may enshrine a message from the divine and contain meaning and significance inseparable from their faith. Religious art is what realises and diffuses the goal of religion.[11] Therefore, such artefacts can be decorated with religious symbols and signs without the intention of religious function and meaning. Some non-religious objects can also have a religious function. For example, an incense burner could be considered a religious object when used in a mosque, but may have a non-religious function and meaning in its use in everyday life in the home, or in the past, in the harem (private rooms of palaces). However, in Islam, some objects are nevertheless considered sacred. The relics of Muhammad exhibited in the Turkish Topkapi Palace Museum are an example. While the difference between sacred, religious, and non-religious items is clear, all three are found categorised under the title 'Islam'. To illustrate this point, I highlight three small bowls with different motifs, from the

11 Fatemeh Darjvar, "Study of the Folk Painting of Qajar Period (Based on Religious Terms)," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Islamic Art Studies*, no. 24 (2016): 12.

Figure 2: Undersides of the same bowls. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00535-WAs00536-WAs00538).

MVL's Phillip Walter Schulz Collection. Two of the bowls (WAs535 and WAs536) are inscribed with religious verses, and therefore may be considered religious, whilst the third (WAs538) depicts a woman and a man in love, and could thus be seen as secular. The two religious objects might be placed in the showcase for displaying Islamic religious objects. These two bowls, inscribed with forty *duas* (invocations),[12] were used for bathing or as vessels for drinking water. There was a belief, that *djinn* (spirits, demons) and *pari* (fairies) lived near water sources and bathrooms, and that such bowls were able to remove their negative powers. After

12 Majid Sarikhani, "Analytical Research on the Flaunts of Quran Verses on Iranian Metallurgy during Safavid and Qajar Era according to the Metal Works of National Museum of Iran, PAZHOHESH-HA-YE BASTANSHENASI IRAN," *Archaeological Researches of Iran Journal of Department of Archaeology* (Hamedan: Bu-Ali Sina University) 3, no. 5 (2014): 160 and Majid Sarikhani and Hasan Hashemi Zarjabad, "The Comparative Study of Ghesas Al-Anbia in the Holy Quran and Memoir of Prophets in Context and Images of Jame Al-Tavārīk," [in Persian] *Journal of Negarineh Islamic Art* (Birjand: University of Birjand) 1, no. 3 (2014): 77. Such bowls are often referred to as 'incantation bowls' or 'magic bowls', though the latter designation is not without controversy.

a birth, the mother and newborn baby would take a bath with the bowl, to protect them from evil spirits and death. The third bowl (WAs538), from the *Saqqa khane* tradition, served as a private drinking bowl (*parshali*) for drinking water from public drinking fountains. Rituals concerning the drinking of water have a connection with Shiite faith. Water houses, located in highly frequented places such as bazaars, mosques, cemeteries and in the streets, create blessed spaces for the drinking of water. Among Shiite Iranians they are places of remembrance of Hossein Ibn Ali and his companions who, according to Shiite tradition, were not allowed to go to the watering-place on the Euphrates and were driven to death by thirst. The bowls symbolically carry these religious events within themselves.

The above examples show that curators cannot judge solely from the appearance and objective quality of an object whether it actually has a religious connotation. It is vital to consider the object's hidden subjectivity and meaning, as well as its function and origin. The use of these objects as souvenirs or decorative antiques supplements their original function. Objects might have different functions in their social and cultural context, and these functions are subject to change. According to verses of the Qur'an, humans cannot see God, they can but see his drawings everywhere.[13] This kind of illustration and decorative art can be used for both religious and non-religious purposes.

I have shown with these examples that the religious meaning or subjectivity of Muslim material culture cannot be easily recognised. The existence of religious texts or symbols does not definitely mean that the object has a religious function. In line with Hodgson and Dressler, I label these groups of 'in-between' objects as 'islamicated': "The term Islamicate could be employed to describe things that would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims […]".[14] To recognise the religious meaning of the objects, it is necessary to consider their context, such as their origin, ethnicity, etc. If one only uses the categorisation of Islam and the Orient, how can one recognise the context, history, and artistic heritage behind the objects?

13 The Qur'an, Sure 7:143, and Sure 6:103.

14 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, The Classical Age of Islam, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 59 quoted from Dressler et al., "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," 12.

5.1 Lacquer artworks as examples of transformation of meaning

Objects from the collections of the MVL show further the transformation of their connotation, and of categorisation under the titles Islam and Orient. To evidence this, I have selected lacquered pen cases from the West Asian Collection. One group has a floral and bird motif, another has human motifs in portraits or groups of people in scenes of battles, lovers, hunting, etc.

One can gather useful information about the history and background of the Persian lacquered art in the reports of travellers, scientists, and collectors. For example, Consul-General Arthur S. Hardy wrote in 1899 about paper manufacturing in Persia: "The only special use to which paper (waste paper) is applied in Persia is in the preparation of a kind of papier-mâché for making pen cases, book covers, and a few other ornamental articles."[15] His report from a mission in Iran, one year before the collector Phillip Walter Schulz's donation,[16] makes it possible to understand the importance and high interest in this art in Iran. He wrote:

> A New Testament, which printed in a foreign language costs a dollar, is sold for ten cents, but this latter sum is a day's wages for a laborer. They at times offer to exchange hay or chickens for it. […] One at least cast the Bibles into wells and sold them to be ground into pulp for the manufacture of papier-mâché, and covers to bookbinders. Purchasers have destroyed other volumes or used the paper to cover windows. The agent estimates that perhaps five thousand copies have been destroyed […][17]

It is difficult to make concrete claims as to where this art originated and to thus present its country of origin. Susan Bayani argues that it is possible to see the remains of lacquer technique and material from every historical period since pre-Islamic times. She argues that the word lacquer, in connection with the lacquer beetle and its red colour, is found in ancient Iranian texts.[18] In any case, what survives into the present is lacquer artwork with different motifs and qualities.

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15 Arthur. S. Hardy, *Reports from Consuls of the United States: In Answer to Institutions from the Department of State, Special Consular Reports, Paper in Foreign Countries*, Vol. XIX (Issued by Tehran: Bureau of Foreign Commerce 2, February 1899; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 413.

16 Philipp Walter Schulz was a researcher and collector who travelled to Iran between 1897 and 1899. He donated his collection to the GRASSI Museum in 1900. The collection is shared between the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology and the GRASSI Museum of Applied Arts.

17 Arthur S. Hardy, *Reports from Consuls of the United States: In Answer to Institutions from the Department of State*, 413.

18 Susan Bayani, "History of Lacquer Work: The Importance of Working with Lacquer and Varnish," [in Persian] *Museha Research Journal* (Tehran: Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization), no. 13–14 (1993): 3.

5.2 Flower and bird (Gol-o- Morq) motif

Some scholars recognise the origin of the flower motif in pre-Islamic Sasanian art, on ceramics, mosaics, and silver tableware. The Manicheans painted the motif to decorate religious texts. It was then used in Iran for bookbinding and book ornamentation in the style of the School of Baqdad. In the beginning, this motif had a secular aesthetic meaning in Iranian art, but later adopted a gnostic one.[19] The flower and bird motif can be observed in an art historical perspective in the works of Reza Abbasi in the Safavid period (1501–1722). "He connected this motif with the gnostic principles from the time of Sufism and Islamic Gnostics."[20] During the Zand (1751–1794) and Afsharid (1736–1796) dynasties, lacquer artwork became popular despite the troubled political and social conditions. Gholam Reza Imami, the famous painter from the Qajar period,[21] and Lotf Ali Suratgar worked with the flower and bird motif until the zenith of this artwork. Mohammad Zaman mixed this motif with European rococo flower and bird designs. The gnostic meaning of this motif can be traced back to Islamic gnostic philosophy. In the works of Shahab al-Din Suhravardi (12th cent.), as well as in gnostic poetic works such as those of Attar of Nishabur (12th cent.), *Sufi* (adherents of Sufism) and *Arif* (learned gnostics) were depicted through the symbolism of a bird on a journey to their *maqsud* (goal): reaching God in heaven.[22] The fulfilment of this aim is also seen to signify the attainment of ultimate truth. In later works, the flower was added as a symbol of the beloved, and the bird being thus calmed on its arrival at a flower was symbolic of nearness to the destination. Sometimes the flower is considered the symbol of the mortal world and the birds as symbols of the people who become dependent on this world. However, the flower blooms only for a few days and then dies. The significance here is that one is not allowed to be dependent on the material world, as everything it contains is temporary and unstable. These aspects are also found in Persian gnostic poems, which have a double meaning, as in the poems of Molana (13th cent.) or Hafez (14th cent.), with the implication

19 Hana Jahanbakhsh and Hanieh Sheikhi Narani, "Research on the Role of Flowers and Birds and their Application in Traditional Iranian Art (Zandieh and Qajar Eras)", [in Persian] Tarikhe No, *Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Tarbiat-Modarres University), no. 16 (2016): 130–62.

20 Malihe Hosseini Motlaq, "A Search about the Gol o Morq Painting in the Works of Agha Lotfali Suratgar Shirazi, Naqsh Maye," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2014): 28.

21 See Naser D. Khalili et al., *Lacquer of the Islamic Lands (Part 2).* The Naser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. 22 (London: The *Nour* Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

22 Tayyebeh Sabaghpoor and Mahnaz Shayestefar, "Searching about the Symbol of the Bird Pattern in Qajar and Safavid Carpets, Tehran, Naqsh Maye," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Islamic Azad University-Ray Branch), no. 17 (2010): 40.

Figure 3: Pen cases with flower and bird motif. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs00429-WAs03393).

that the interpretation of God or the divine concept can also be applied to human love. It is also possible to contemplate the motifs of flowers and birds in this regard. The romantic stories are about the time that they spend together in peace. Sometimes, a bitter tragedy occurs and the beloved one dies, as a flower does. Bahar Mokhtarian researched the origins and myth of flower and bird; she pointed out that the theme is a myth shared between cultures, which lives on in the form of poetry, paintings, tragedies, fables, etc. in many cultures.[23] It is interesting to consider the importance of this motif in terms of religious art, as in the bookbinding of the Qur'an, pages of the holy book are decorated with these motifs.

23 Bahar Mokhtarian, "Wandering Nightingale: A Semiotics Research on Bird and Flower Paintings, Name Farhangestan," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Journal* (Tehran: Academy of Persian Language and Literature (APLL), no. 44 (2010): 110–26.

5.3 Portrait of the lovers

In addition to the flower and bird motif, motifs on lacquer also included popular scenes from Persian literature, such as Ibn Al-Muqaffa's 'Kalila va dimna', Jami's 'Haft Awrang', Nizami's 'Khamsa', and Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'. The same can also be appreciated in paintings, scripts, and wall paintings, which were sometimes combined with calligraphy, however "the pen cases were favorite pieces for European guests and travelers in the 19th century".[24] Though they are forbidden in Islam and Islamic art, motifs of love scenes were common in Persian art in the Qajar period. These were often bordered by the aforementioned flower and bird motifs, and were taken from both real life and Persian tales. Some pen cases depict erotic scenes; however, these were likely special works, ordered by individuals with an interest in these motifs, and were part of individual collections. I have not found any literature describing such motifs being produced for the market or as artists' main products. Women were portrayed on pen cases in three ways: Iranian women in traditional styles of Qajar fashion, Iranian women wearing European styles, and, finally, European women wearing European styles. Their male counterparts were portrayed as princes and courtiers.[25] These portraits were impressive for their use of perspective, their realism, and designs that included a detailed background.[26]

In its own time, Qajar art, with its own modernisation and development, was also a new wave in society.[27] One must not forget that in this period, art no longer belonged only to the royal class and royal court but also to the populace, who brought painting into the tea and coffee houses, and combined it with theatre and storytelling. While art in general became very secularised in this period, the religious art in the special iconography of the Shiite saints also became very popular.[28] This divergence in themes highlights the need for care in the classification of such objects. Just as much as the label 'Oriental' is problematic, it would be

24 Ali Naderi Alam and Kazem Chaliba, "Study of the Development of Painting, especially Landscape Design in the Safavid period until the End of the Qajar Period, Negareh," [in Persian] *Scientific Research Quarterly Journal of Faculty of Art* (Tehran: Shahed University), no. 16 (2011): 47.

25 Such as the Khalili Collection.

26 Ali Naderi Alam and Kazem Chaliba, "Study of the Development of Painting, especially Landscape Design in the Safavid period until the End of the Qajar Period, Negareh," 47.

27 See Behnam Pedram et al., "The Importance of Painting in Qajar Dynasty Based on the Sociology Point of View," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* (Karabuk: Karabuk University) 6, no. 3 (2017): 985–6.

28 Sara Shadrokh and Hadi Rahmati, "Reflection of Folk Art of Qajar Period in the Paintings on the Holy Shrines of Lahijan," [in Persian] *The History of Islamic Culture and Civilization Quarterly Research Journal* (Qom: Islamic Knowledge University) 8, no. 27 (2017): 86.

Figure 4: Pen cases with portraits of the lovers. Photo: Nikolai Krippner, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (WAs01018-WAs01430).

overly simplistic to label all the items described here as 'Islamic'. The examples of the flower and bird, and portrait of lovers, encapsulated in my title 'Rose and Romance', show that Islamicate objects in ethnological museums can provide an important point of reflection in understanding the dynamic intertwining of different cultures.

6 Conclusion

In discussing the ways museums deal with 'Islamic' and 'Oriental' objects, I argued that care must be taken when clearly identifying objects as Islamic, and that it is important to reflect carefully on these categories. I demonstrated that both the terms 'Islamic' and 'Oriental' lead to confusion when describing and categorising Muslim material culture in different countries. Before the curators categorise an object, it is necessary to know the definition of the categories. What is the definition of the terms 'Islam' or 'Orient'? Why do some objects belong to Islamic art?

My suggestion in this article is that consideration should be given to the spatial and temporal context, because some objects can be considered religious at one time, but lose their perceived religiosity in another time or space. I criticised the choice of several museums to present a dichotomy between religious and non-religious objects. In particular, I observed this issue with objects from Muslim art: If an object displays Quranic verses, it is perceived as Islamic-religious, whereas if not, or if it has secular decoration such as love or erotic scenes, the portrait is marked as non-religious, and is treated as Oriental because of the existing cliché. I have highlighted the importance of considering the background of museum objects, especially Islamicate items. The lacquered pen cases (as Islamicate objects) are particularly useful for illustrating the dynamics and interdependencies, which characterise both the forms of the exhibitions and the communicative role of the museum. Although it is primarily for their beautiful appearance that the objects, now in a permanent exhibition at the MVL, regularly attract visitors' attention, I have established that the meaning behind the objects' motifs has undergone a complex series of changes and transformations, which also merit appreciation and understanding. For this reason, I assert that the objects should be viewed in their own timelines, as this enables visitors to follow their history, whether artistic or technological, and the ethnic and social context of their origins. It is essential for the exhibitions of an ethnological museum to transmit this information.

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Alisha Meininghaus

Magic everywhere? On the Conceptualisation of Jewish Amulets in Museums

1 The appreciation of *magic*

Magic[1] is a topic that fascinates scholars and curators as well as visitors to museums. The numerous exhibitions on *magic* are an expression of the great academic and non-academic interest in this field. This can be understood in the context of the appreciation discourse ('Aufwertungsdiskurs') on *magic*, which Bernd-Christian Otto ascribes to the present day.[2] Previously, in the course of its 2500-year history, the term *magic* appeared in Greek, Roman, and Christian sources to designate phenomena that were branded as harmful, immoral, fraudulent, or ineffective.[3] Persons defamed as *magicians* were therefore excluded, devalued, and sometimes threatened with the death penalty. It is therefore not surprising that the use of the term as a positive self-designation was the absolute exception until the end of the 19th century.[4] It is interesting to note that for some observers, similar phenomena could be described pejoratively as *magic* when encountered outside of the observer's own context, and yet as *miracles* when found within it. In its beginnings, the study of religion adopted the negative connotations of the term *magic* from its roots in Christian theology and the European Enlightenment. Thus, *magic* as an academic meta-category appeared as the inferior opposite of either *religion* or *science* and was especially attributed to non-European cultures.[5]

By contrast, except for strictly conservative groups, *magic* in today's everyday language is often associated with phenomena that are perceived as fascinating, exotic, and positive. An example of the recent appreciation discourse is the use of the adjective *magic* in advertising. The current dominance, unique in history, of the appreciation discourse is understood by Otto to be a development paralleling

1 Since this article critiques the concept of *magic*, the word is consistently italicised to indicate that the term is not intended to denote a consistent field of phenomena. Instead, the term is used to denote the respective discourses that refer to the term *magic*.

2 See Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und Diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 338.

3 See Otto, *Magie*, 617–20.

4 For historical examples of the discourses of exclusion and appreciation, see ibid., 135–614.

5 For example, in the work of James George Frazer and Émile Durkheim. See Otto, *Magie*, 6f. and 39–134.

changes in the forms of contemporary European religion, such as pluralisation, individualisation, and deinstitutionalisation.[6] The connotations of the term *magic* have also changed in some academic disciplines since the 1960s at the latest, when its ethnocentric and polemical implications were deconstructed.[7] Today, the academic world is highly interested in *magic*, a fascination which even leads to occasional concerns that it could evoke a distorting overemphasis on *magical* phenomena in their respective cultural contexts.[8]

This article sheds light on some of the problematic implications of the appreciation discourse on *magic* for museums, which are an interface between everyday language and academic discourses, and thus require a special sensitivity for language. In particular, the equation of the meta-category *magic* with emic terms from different religious contexts can lead to misunderstandings. This will be illustrated through the case study of five special exhibitions on Jewish *magic*. For this purpose, the various underlying concepts of *magic* will be highlighted. Subsequently, the problems associated with these approaches will be discussed with regard to amulets, which appear in these exhibitions as prime examples of *magical* objects. These considerations lead to a plea for an alternative conceptualisation of amulets, and thus also for a reimagining of their presentation in museums.

2 Exhibiting Jewish *magic*

In recent decades, at least five special exhibitions in Israel, Europe and the USA have been devoted to the subject of Jewish *magic*. Their exhibition concepts and the various notions of *magic* will be described below, based on the respective exhibition catalogues.[9] The exhibitions mentioned are *Magic and Superstition in the Jewish Tradition* (Spertus Museum of Judaica in Chicago, 1975),[10] *1001 Amulett. Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie* (BIBEL + ORIENT Museum in Fribourg, 2010/11; Jewish Museum of Switzerland in Ba-

6 See ibid., 653.
7 See ibid., 110–13.
8 See, for example, Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.
9 It must be taken into account that the catalogues can only partially convey the effect of these exhibitions. For example, the catalogues contain only a few references to the spatial design of the exhibition rooms or their lighting effects. On the other hand, the underlying concepts of *magic* are very clearly reflected in the catalogues. It should also be noted that exhibitions are not homogeneous, but are characterised by the curators' individual, and sometimes divergent, concepts of *magic*.
10 See Marcia Reines Josephy, ed., *Magic and Superstition in the Jewish Tradition* (Chicago: Spertus Museum of Judaica Press, 1975).

sel, 2013/14),[11] *Angels and Demons. Jewish Magic through the Ages* (Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, 2010),[12] *Magie. Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* (Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaisme in Paris, 2015),[13] and *Kabbalah* (Jewish Museum in Vienna, 2018/19; Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam, 2019).[14]

In all five exhibitions, Jewish amulets, among other objects, were presented as examples of *magic.* Furthermore, all of the exhibitions imply a specific chain of translations and associations in relation to amulets: Objects that are traditionally designated by the Hebrew term *kameʿa* (קמיע) are described in translation as *amulets*. Amulets, in turn, are associatively assigned to the field of *magic*, which, in a further step, is equated with the Hebrew verb *khashaf* (כשף) that appears in the Torah and rabbinical texts. The equation of these three words is not based on ancient text sources, since the word *kameʿa* does not occur in the Torah and is therefore not mentioned in connection with *khashaf*.[15] The translation of *khashaf* as 'practising *magic*' is also not based on the Torah, in which the Greek term *mageía* does not appear either.[16] Against the background that *kashaf* is explicitly forbidden in Deut 18:9ff. and Ex 22:17, there is a tension between the recent appreciation of *magic,* and the simultaneous assumption that *magic*/*khashaf* is forbidden in the Torah. As examined in the following, all five special exhibitions follow different strategies for dealing with this tension.

Despite the implicitly pejorative tone that resonates in its title, and although it explicitly interprets Deut 18:9f as a ban on *magic*, the exhibition *Magic and Superstition* nevertheless proves to be part of the appreciation discourse:

> They [*magical* actions, AM] serve to underscore the sanctity and the significance of the occasion. The striking use of amulets and the preponderance of superstitions associated with the life cycle suggest that the greater

11 See Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli, eds., *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie* (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010).

12 See Filip Ṿuḳosavović, ed., *Angels and Demons: Jewish Magic through the Ages* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 2010).

13 See Gideon Bohak and Anne Hélène Hoog, eds., *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaisme, 2015).

14 See Domagoj Akrap et al., eds., *Kabbalah* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018).

15 In later rabbinical writings such as the Talmud, amulets (hebr. *kame'ot*) are mentioned, but also not associated with *khashaf*.

16 Interestingly, in the important early translations of the Torah, grammatical forms of *khashaf* are also not explicitly translated as 'practising *magic*'. The Greek Septuagint translates the feminine participle *mekhashefa* in Ex 22:17 as pharmákos (from phármakon – 'medicine' / 'poison' / 'drug', a word with a semantically similar spectrum to the Greek *mageía,* see Otto, *Magie*, 163), while in the Latin Vulgate the word is translated as *maleficos* ('Evildoer'). Luther chooses *Zauberinnen* ('sorceresses'), see Otto, *Magie*, 281.

> the danger, the more precious the moment. Thus, magic and superstition serve to enhance and affirm life's value. […] Though long denied and often disapproved of, the traditions of *magic* and superstition constitute a fascinating part of a multifaceted heritage.[17]

Magical practices are thus explained as a human need and psychological support in particularly delicate phases of life. In this way, the tension between the appreciation for these practices and the supposed ban on *magic* is reduced, though it is not resolved at the level of religious law.

The same is true for the exhibition *Kabbalah*. *Magic*, although not conceptually in the foreground, is presented as an integral part of cabbalistic practices.[18] Jewish amulets are explicitly associated with forbidden *magic*:

> Magical elements and traditions can be traced back from Antiquity to the present day. Although magic practices were in fact forbidden, the many magic works and amulets provide eloquent testimony to their popularity and acceptance. [...] But did the Bible not forbid magic? In spite of the deterrent warnings, as in Deuteronomy 18:10–12, magic has existed in Judaism in all ages. It even occurs in the Bible itself.[19]

Again, the tension is not resolved.

A different strategy is apparent in the exhibition *1001 Amulett*, characterised by a strong emphasis on the diachronic, cross-cultural approach stimulated by the term *magic*:

> Im überaus zauberkundigen Alten Ägypten nahm das Amulettwesen seinen Anfang und zog den ganzen Mittelmeerraum mit einer Fülle von wirkmächtigen Symbolen in seinen Bann. Samaritanische, jüdische, muslimische und christliche Amulette belegen, dass Amulette unter dem aufklärerischen Einfluss des Monotheismus nicht verschwanden, sondern sich nur wandelten. Eine «vertikale Ökumene» der Magie wird sichtbar, die hineinreicht bis in die säkularisierte Gegenwart. [20]

> In the exceedingly magical ancient Egypt, the tradition of amulets started and fascinated the whole Mediterranean area with an abundance of powerful symbols. Samaritan, Jewish, Muslim and Christian amulets prove that amulets did not disappear under the enlightening influence of monothe-

17 Josephy, *Magic and Superstition*, 2f.

18 See Klaus Davidowicz, "Was ist Kabbala?," in *Kabbalah*, ed. Domagoj Akrap et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018), 20.

19 Klaus Davidowicz, "Engel und Dämonen," in *Kabbalah*, ed. Domagoj Akrap et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018), 159.

20 Herrmann and Staubli, *1001 Amulett*, cover copy.

> ism, but only changed. A ‘vertical ecumenism’ of magic becomes visible, reaching into the secularised present.[21]

With regard to the Torah, Ex 22:17 is understood as a ban on *magic*/*khashaf*. But it is pointed out in the exhibition’s catalogue that, in other verses, the forbidden *magic*/*khashaf* is associated with non-Israelite practices in particular.[22] This implies that Israelite amulets were originally not part of the prohibition. In addition, the catalogue’s authors emphasise the positive attitude of many Jewish scholars towards amulets.[23] In summary, in this exhibition the alleged ban on *magic* in the Torah is specified through a historical-critical text analysis as a ban on non-Israelite *magic,* and thus decoupled from Jewish amulets. Therefore, there is no longer any contradiction in the appreciation of these *magical* objects.

The exhibition *Angels and Demons. Jewish Magic through the Ages* offers another solution to the apparent tension between the appreciation discourse on *magic* on the one hand, and the Torah’s supposed ban on *magic* on the other. Here, the ban is understood as a distinction between aggressive *witchcraft* and apotropaic *white magic*. The Hebrew term *khashaf* is thus translated exclusively as *witchcraft*, distinguishing it from *white magic*, which includes amulets:

> Biblical laws strictly forbid the Jewish people from having anything to do with witchcraft (black magic) […]. However, (white) magic – i.e. defense against the dark arts [...] was not forbidden in Judaism. This is clear both from biblical and rabbinical writings and from many of the preserved amulets, covering various functions, some of which were written by rabbis.[24]

The spatial structure of the exhibition was designed according to this distinction: At the beginning, a section on *black magic* awaited the visitors, followed by four sections on *white magic*.[25] The predominance of sections on *white magic* implies that Jewish *magic* is positive in most cases, reflecting the appreciation discourse underlying the exhibition concept. In this approach, the supposed biblical ban on *magic* is interpreted as an ethical distinction.

The catalogue of *Magic. Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* includes an intensive examination of the theoretical implications of the concept of *magic*. In

21 Translation by Alisha Meininghaus (hereafter: ‘AM’).

22 See Thomas Staubli, “III Amulette in der Levante und in der Bibel,” in *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie,* ed. Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010), 168–74, 172f.

23 See Thomas Staubli, “V Jüdische Amulette,” in *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie,* ed. Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010), 178.

24 See Ṿuḳosavović, *Angels and Demons*, 10.

25 See ibid.

particular, the articles by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Gabriel Hagaï represent three different approaches to the topic.

Bohak refers to the supposed ban on *magic* in Deut 18:10f., but also to the difficulty in adequately interpreting those verses, since many phenomena (including amulets) are not explicitly mentioned. It therefore remains open to interpretation whether any particular phenomenon is forbidden or permitted. He also refers to biblical stories of practices with positive connotations, e.g. by various prophets, which today can be regarded as *magic*.[26] Against this background, he ascribes to the Torah a contradictory attitude towards *magic*, in which what matters is not so much the nature of the respective practices, but rather who carried out these practices.[27] After these considerations, he applies a rather intuitive concept of *magic* to various ancient Jewish phenomena.[28]

Harari, on the other hand, sketches the history of the academic concept of *magic* and deconstructs its implicitly pejorative and ethnocentric undertones, as well as the rigorous dichotomisation of religion and *magic*:

> La magie juive est fondée sur la croyance en la capacité de l'être humain à agir sur le monde et à le modifier au moyen de paroles et de rituels. En ce sens, elle ne diffère guère, dans son essence, du canon religieux juif, lequel place la prière au centre du culte. La magie comme la religion croient en la puissance créatrice de la parole […], ainsi qu'en la capacité de l'homme à l'employer à son profit. L'une et l'autre ont recours au langage et à des rituels pour obtenir des puissantes entités surnaturelles qui règnent sur le monde qu'elles modifient le cours des choses.[29]

> Jewish magic is based on the belief in the ability of human beings to act on the world and change it through words and rituals. In this sense, it differs little in essence from the Jewish religious canon, which places prayer at the centre of worship. Both magic and religion believe in the creative power of the word [...] and in the capacity of man to use it for his own benefit. Both use language and rituals to make powerful supernatural entities that rule the world change the course of things. [30]

26 See Bohak and Hoog, "Anges et demons," 29.

27 See ibid., 30f.

28 This becomes clear in the fact that in the so-called prohibitions of *magic* in the Torah, amulets are not mentioned, which, as Bohak explains, can be interpreted as either their implicit permission or their implicit prohibition. Later in the article, however, he describes the history of Jewish *magic* on the basis of findings of antique amulets, among other things.

29 Yuval Harari, "Principes de la magie juive, croyances et pratiques," in *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive,* ed. Gideon Bohak and Anne Hélène Hoog (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaisme, 2015), 54.

30 Translation: AM.

The only striking differences between *religion* and *magic* to him seem to be in the underlying intention and in the linguistic realm. According to Harari, *magical* incantations are mostly related to the individual, whereas religious prayers are related to the collective.[31]

Of the three authors, Hagaï signals the greatest reservations about the concept of *magic* and refers to its insulting dimension for contemporary practitioners. However, he nonetheless uses the term, both due to the lack of a conceptual alternative and because doing so allows contact with academic tradition:

> Incidemment, il serait simpliste (et presque irrespectueux) de parler de «magie» juive quand les acteurs de ces pratiques eux-mêmes n'emploient pas cette dénomination. Mail il est difficile de trouver en français un terme plus adéquat, qui satisferait l'acribie et la sensibilité juive, tout en restant intelligible. En hébreu, la racine consonantique k-sh-p – qui couvre le champ sémantique de «magie, sorcellerie» – est utilisée dans la Torah justement pour l'interdire […]. Un rabbin écrivant des amulettes, ou prescrivant certaines pratiques mystérieuses, ne saurait donc être traité de mekhashef (magicien, sorcier), surtout lorsque celui-ci etsime que ces procédés appartiennent à la qabbalah ma'assit, kabbale «pratique», considérée comme une «science des miracles» et provenant de Dieu. Toutefois, nous emploierons ici le vocabulaire de la magie […], en adéquation avec le consensus universitaire, faute d'une meilleure terminologie, laissant au lecteur le soin de rectifier à chaque occurrence (en tout cas, de lire en y ajoutant de nombreux guillemets).[32]

> Incidentally, it would be simplistic (and almost disrespectful) to speak of Jewish 'magic' when actors of these practices themselves do not use this denomination. But it would be difficult to find a more adequate term in French that would satisfy Jewish meticulousness and sensitivity while remaining intelligible. In Hebrew, the consonant root k-sh-p – which covers the semantic field of 'magic, sorcery' – is used in the Torah precisely to prohibit it [...]. A rabbi writing amulets, or prescribing certain mysterious practices, cannot, therefore, be called a mekhashef (magician, sorcerer), especially when he believes that these procedures belong to the qabbalah ma'assit, a 'practical' kabbalah, considered as a 'science of miracles' and coming from God. However, we will use here the vocabulary of magic [...], in accordance with the academic consensus, for lack of better terminology, leaving it to the reader to rectify each occurrence (in any case, to read with the addition of many quotation marks).[33]

31 See Harari, "Principes de la magie juive," 54.

32 Gabriel Hagaï, "Savoir et pratiques magiques dans la société juive contemporaine, l'exemple français," in *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive,* ed. Gideon Bohak and Anne Hélène Hoog (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaisme, 2015), 125.

33 Translation: AM.

But is it even necessary to mediate between the recent appreciation of *magic* and the alleged ban on *magic*/*khashaf* in the Torah? Do Jewish amulets necessarily have to be conceptualised and exhibited as *magic*?

3 How *magical* are Jewish amulets?

Indeed, the intuitive and associative equation of the Hebrew terms *kameʿa* ('amulet') and *khashaf* ('magic'), that underlies the exhibition concepts, should not be taken for granted. Firstly, the term *amulet* is usually associated with objects that are worn directly on the body, which does not apply to Jewish amulet prints which were hung on the walls of the birth room. Secondly, the assumption that *magic* is an adequate translation of the Hebrew term *khashaf* should be questioned. The necessity of this becomes obvious when one considers that the term *khashaf* occurs several times in the Torah but is not explained,[34] and its rabbinical interpretations varied through antiquity and the Middle Ages.[35] Whether the semantic field of *khashaf* corresponds to one of the various and often contradictory meanings of the term *magic* remains to be verified. Finally, and most problematically, the equation of amulets with the terms *khashaf* and *magic* directly contradicts the emic perspective. This is demonstrated, for example, in the fact that the ban on *khashaf*-practising women in Ex 22:17 (traditionally translated as 'You must not let a witch live!') is written on many amulets. In the context of these amulets, the Hebrew term *mekhashefa* (traditionally translated as *witch*) refers to the demoness Lilith, who is to be banished by the amulet. Amulets are therefore understood as a protection against *khashaf*, rather than as belonging to this concept.[36]

The assignment of amulets to the abstract category *magic* (instead of the emic term *khashaf*) does not solve the problem, however. The example of German-Jewish amulet prints from the 18th and 19th centuries,[37] intended to protect women in childbirth and their newborns, illustrates the issues with relating Jewish amulets

34 On the possible meanings of *khashaf*, see, for example, Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 107–9.

35 See Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997).

36 See Alisha Meininghaus, "Schrift als Schutz. Legitimationsstrategien für die Verwendung jüdischer Amulette am Beispiel eines Objekts aus der Religionskundlichen Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg," in *Spurenlesen. Methodische Ansätze der Sammlungs- und Objektforschung*, Junges Forum für Sammlungs- und Objektforschung, vol. 4, ed. Ernst Seidl et al. (Berlin: Gesellschaft für Universitätssammlungen e. V., 2020).

37 The considerations presented here result from the research for my dissertation on this topic.

to the concept of *magic*. In the following, as a result, an alternative paradigm for their academic study and their presentation in museums will be suggested. As Otto convincingly demonstrates, the problem with the academic concept of *magic* is that it is ethnocentric, arbitrarily applicable to completely divergent phenomena, and cannot differentiate between *magic* and *religion*.[38] Besides these fundamental theoretical arguments, which need not be repeated here in detail, there are other reasons for not using the term *magic* to describe concrete objects. Just like the term *magic* in everyday-language (which probably forms the basis of understanding for most exhibition visitors), the academic concept also implies that the phenomena it denotes have been branded as heterodox and suppressed by dominant groups.[39] However, this does not apply to Jewish amulets. On the contrary, in the Talmud they appear as an unquestionably legitimate item of clothing.[40] In fact, amulets were criticised at various times and by different Jewish groups,[41] however this criticism never reached the status of a prohibition under religious law. Moreover, German-Jewish amulet prints were also considered legitimate in their religious context in the 18th century, which can be deduced from the fact that they were produced in printing houses where rabbis often worked as proofreaders.[42] After their use, many amulets were stored in *genizot*. These were storage areas, often in the attics of synagogues, which were used to store religious books containing the name of God or Hebrew script in general once these books had become unusable. Because of the holiness attributed to these texts, they were not to be destroyed or thrown away, but had to decay by themselves. In this sense, *genizot* can be understood as the materialisation of concepts of holiness that were permanently negotiated by the Jewish community.[43] Thus, finds of amulets in numerous *genizot* testify that the objects were regarded as legitimate in the Jewish majority and were conceptualised as religious literature in a broader sense.[44]

38 See Otto, *Magie*.

39 See, for example, Sarah Kiyanrad et al., "(Schrift-)Bildliche Magie," in *Bild und Schrift auf ‚magischen' Artefakten*, ed. Sarah Kiyanrad et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3.

40 See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 370.

41 For example, by Moses Maimonides, the Karaites and the Maskilim.

42 For example, in the printing house in Sulzbach, see Magnus Weinberg, *Geschichte der Juden in der Oberpfalz, V. Herzogtum Sulzbach (Sulzbach und Floss)* (München: Ewer-Buchhandlung, 1927), 26, 53.

43 See Andreas Lehnardt, "Die Genisa der ehemaligen Synagoge Freudental. Dokumentation der Funde," *Freudentaler Blätter* (Pädagogisch-Kulturelles Centrum Ehemalige Synagoge Freudental) 11 (2019): 16f.

44 A large number of the German-Jewish amulets, which are exhibited in museums today, come from finds in these *genizot*. In the case of other amulets, records of how they came into the museums are unfortunately missing.

This is also reflected in the 'amulet dispute' of Hamburg, which began in 1752. In the course of this controversy, Jonathan Eybeschütz, Chief Rabbi of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek, was accused of writing and selling amulets that contained the encoded name of the 'false messiah' Shabbtai Zvi (1626–1676). Eybeschütz denied this accusation throughout his life. The controversy caused quite a stir and many rabbinical and political authorities were involved. It is conclusive in this context that the accusations did not refer to the production of amulets in general, but to Eybeschütz's alleged affiliation to the group of Shabbtai Zvi.[45] From this, it can be concluded that the production of amulets in itself was considered legitimate, and could not be used as an accusation in religious conflicts. The designation of the amulets as *magic* in the context of museums, therefore, evokes ideas about the emic interpretations of these objects, which are simply wrong.

4 Alternative concepts

The concept of *magic* not only leads to false associations in museums but also often hinders attaining a deeper understanding of the objects in research. This is because the categorisation of certain objects as *magic* often leads to a comparison with other so-called *magical* phenomena. Thus, in the context of the above-mentioned exhibitions, Jewish amulets from various periods and regions were exhibited together with other objects, e.g. Egyptian scarabs, 'secular amulets', antique Mesopotamian incantation bowls or an inscribed human skull. As it became particularly clear in the case of the exhibition *1001 Amulett,* the concept of *magic* thus often implies a diachronic approach that traces the traditions of *magical* phenomena over long periods of time, in different regions, religions, and cultures. Apart from the discussion about the suitability of the term *magic*, a diachronic approach is worthwhile, as this way, the temporal depth dimension of traditions can be traced.

However, this approach often has the effect of ignoring synchronous approaches that locate the objects in their cultural setting. If we take the emic perspective seriously, the amulet prints are much closer to other objects from the field of religious literature than, for example, a human skull with Hebrew inscriptions. In fact, this approach is already pursued in exhibitions of regional Jewish museums, which, for example, contextualise the amulet prints with further finds from

45 See Sid Z. Leiman, "When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy: R. Ezekiel Landau's Attitude Toward R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz in the Emden-Eibeschuetz Controversy," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press,1989), 179–96.

various *genizot*. One example is the Jewish Culture Museum in Veitshöchheim, where an amulet print is presented together with other *geniza* finds relating to the context of birth and circumcision. These finds are assigned to the exhibition section with the title ‘Life’. Having explained the numerous misunderstandings and unproven associations evoked by the term *magic*, this article can only be concluded with a plea for an end to its use with regard to Judaism in general, and in the context of museums in particular. It would certainly be a gain for all those who wish to convey and experience the multifaceted nature of Jewish traditions, if more curators would have the courage to abandon the enticing but unhelpful concept of *magic* in favour of a contextualising perspective.

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Gallery III:

Social Transformation by Religious Museum Things – Reflecting Museum Mediation and the Social Environment of Religious Things

Yuriko Yamanaka

Dynamics of Religious Objects in *and outside* Museums: How Material Culture of Islam is 'Framed' in Japan

1 Introduction

Representation of Islam in museums in non-Muslim majority countries has become a subject of much debate in recent years. As pointed out by Virginie Rey, museums in the West are experiencing the third major phase of restructuring their Islamic collection displays. The first phase was in the 19th century, when artefacts were collected in the context of European imperial expansion into the Muslim world, and displayed in world fairs and archaeological, ethnological, or decorative art museums under the colonial gaze. The second major phase came in the 1960s and 1970s, when revisionist attempts were made to decolonise knowledge of Islamic heritage. Finally, in the last two decades, we have seen the third *rinascimento,* or growth, in Islamic-related initiatives in museums and renewal of exhibition space dedicated to Islam. Museums have taken up the agenda of defusing the rising tension between Islamophobia on the one hand and radicalisation of Muslim extremists on the other, by serving as a place of learning, and as a forum for intercultural, interreligious dialogue.[1] Muslim communities themselves have also started to play an increasingly active role in creating these new spaces: as curators, donors, source community informants, or participants in dialogue events.[2] Accordingly, there has been a recent boost in scholarly output related to Islam in the fields of museology, material culture studies, and heritage studies.[3] However, most of the existing scholarship focuses on museums and outreach projects in Western Europe and North America, where the Muslim migrant

1 John Reeve, "Islam and Museums: Learning and Outreach," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) and Virginie Rey, "Islam, Museums, and the Politics of Representation in the West," *Material Religion* 15, no. 2 (2019).

2 Mirjam Shatanawi, "Curating against Dissent," in *Political and Cultural Representations of Muslims: Islam in the Plural*, ed. Christopher Flood et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 184–90; Mirjam Shatanawi, "Engaging Islam: Working with Muslim Communities in a Multicultural Society," *Curator: The Museums Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012) and Klas Grinell, "Islam – Ein Aspekt zeitgenössischer Weltkultur," in *Experimentierfeld Museum: Internationale Perspektiven auf Museum, Islam und Inklusion*, ed. Christine Gerbich and Susan Kamel (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014).

3 See Bigelow 2021; Grinell 2014, 2018, 2019 and 2020; Grinell et al. 2019; Junod et al. 2012; Kamel 2019; Kamel and Gerbich 2014; Macdonald 2019; Moors 2012; Naguib 2019; Norton-Wright

population is relatively high. This paper offers a Far Eastern perspective on the subject by presenting a case study from the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan.

In comparison to Europe, North America or Australia, Japan's contact with Islam has been less direct and intense. However, being one of the G7 countries, it is, of course, an active player in global politics involving the Middle East. Additionally, in recent years, there has been an increasingly visible presence of Muslims (especially from Southeast Asia) in Japan. Muslims have come to Japan to study, do vocational training, or work. This trend stems from revisions to Japan's hitherto restrictive immigration policies in an effort to resolve labour shortage problems arising from negative population growth.[4] Although social tension between Muslims and non-Muslims is less acute than in Europe or in North America, it has become increasingly important for socioeconomic reasons for the Japanese to 'understand' and accommodate the needs of Muslims in public spaces – and in private spheres as well, since many Muslim migrant care workers and trainees now provide nursing and hospice services to the elderly.[5]

The surge in publications of various 'introduction to Islam' and 'understanding the Islamic world' books (even *manga* versions!) in Japan reflects this increasing demand. These textbooks and reference books sometimes fall into the trap of generalisations and essentialism, however, leading to another form of stereotyping: that all Muslims adhere to very strict religious observances dictated in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. For many Japanese people, who have neither the opportunity to travel extensively nor personal or professional contacts with Muslims, it is difficult to grasp the various hues of Islamic practices across the globe, according to region, denomination, social class, age, gender, family traditions or simply individual choice.

The National Museum of Ethnology (*Kokuritsu minzokugaku hakubutsukan*) thus plays an important role in informing the Japanese public about Islam through the presentation of material culture. Commonly known by its Japanese acronym Minpaku (henceforth Minpaku), it is the only institute in Japan with a permanent display of everyday objects used by Muslims from all over the world, which also

2019; Reeve 2017; Rey 2019; Rico 2019; Rico and Engmann 2019; Shatanawi 2012a, 2012b and 2019; Tropenmuseum and Shatanawi 2014; Vernoit 2020 and Yamanaka 2018.

4 International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2020* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2019), 79–81, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf.

5 B. Bryan Barber, *Japan's Relations with Muslim Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 41–42.

offers temporary exhibitions and other public outreach programmes related to the Islamic world.

This paper applies the concept of ‘framing’, which Grinell employs to analyse representations of Islam in European museums,[6] and examines the various levels in which Islam is ‘framed’ at Minpaku. The paper presents the different museological frameworks, methods and tools that are chosen to collect, organise, and present the material culture of Islam at Minpaku, with the aim of enabling a comparative perspective in studies being conducted in Europe, and highlighting how a non-monotheistic attitude towards religion might be influencing the representation of religions in a museum in Japan.[7]

2 Material Culture of Islam on Display at Minpaku

2.1 The outer frame: an ethnological museum

On the broadest level of framing, Minpaku is an ethnological museum, or a museum of world cultures, to use a more current term now being adopted in European museums. Although its collection includes skilfully made objects and pieces made by contemporary artists, it is not an art museum. The visitor will not encounter ‘masterpieces of Islamic art’ or archaeological artefacts,[8] but rather objects that represent people’s daily lives. The museum is at the same time an Inter-University Research Institute offering doctoral courses, consisting of about 60 faculty members specialising in cultural anthropology and related fields. In the sense that our exhibitions closely reflect our research and fieldwork, the institution’s structure is very similar to the musée-laboratoire concept of the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.

The conception of the founding of a national ethnological museum was linked to the preparations for Expo ’70, the universal exposition which took place in Osaka in 1970. The National Museum of Ethnology as an institution was founded in 1974, and the museum built inside the former Expo ’70 grounds (which is

6 Klas Grinell, “Framing Islam at the World of Islam Festival,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7, no. 1 (1976): 73–76 and Klas Grinell, “Muhammad at the Museum: Or, Why the Prophet Is not Present,” *Religions* 10, no. 12 (2019): 665.

7 A Swedish Research Council funded project ‘Museological Framings of Islam in Europe’, coordinated by Klas Grinell of Gothenburg University, is surveying and analysing different ways in which European museums are displaying Islam and Muslims (Klas Grinell et al., “Museological Framings of Islam in Europe,” *Material Religion* 15, no. 3 (2019)).

8 The following museums in Japan house Pre-Islamic and Islamic art collections: Okayama Orient Museum in Okayama city http://www.orientmuseum.jp/, MIHO MUSEUM in Shiga Prefecture, http://www.miho.or.jp/, and the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan http://www.meccj.or.jp/museum/ (visit by reservation only).

now the Expo ’70 Commemoration Park in Suita city, north of downtown Osaka) opened to the public in 1977.[9]

At the time of its founding, the museum inherited ethnological collections previously owned by the former Ministry of Education Archive as well as part of the collection of the anthropology department of the University of Tokyo. These older collections included objects which were gathered in the context of Japan’s colonial expansion into Asia and the Pacific, as well as Ainu objects. Thus, the collection is not completely without link to a colonialist past, but it is perhaps linked to a lesser degree than in the case of European ethnological museums founded in the 19th century. The late Tadao Umesao, the driving force behind the establishment of Minpaku and its first Director-General, emphasised the fact that “our ethnology is not an ethnology rooted in colonialist rule. It is rather coupled with Japan’s post-war economic and political expansion into the world since the 60s.”[10] The bulk of the acquisitions are what Umesao endearingly called “*garakuta*” (junk), commonplace objects representing people’s lives and cultures, which have been collected continuously since the 1970s. Currently, the museum holds around 345,000 objects from around the world, and, with a total floor space of 51,225 m^2, is one of the largest ethnological museums in the world.

2.2 The frame within the frame: West Asia, not Middle East

The main exhibition hall consists of twelve regional galleries – Oceania, Americas, Europe, Africa, West Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central and North Asia, and East Asia (subdivided into Culture of the Korean Peninsula, Regional Cultures of China, Culture of Japan, and Ainu Culture galleries) – and two transcultural thematic galleries on Music and Languages.

In terms of ‘framing’, an important factor that must be pointed out is that ‘West Asia’ is used as the regional label and not ‘Middle East’, even though the region is more commonly referred to as the ‘Middle East’ in Japanese media, and the two major academic societies dealing with the area are called the Japan Association for Middle East Studies (Nihon Chūtō Gakkai) and The Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan (Nihon Oriento Gakkai).

The label of ‘West Asia’ reflects the clear geopolitical stance of the founders of Minpaku, who stressed that it was a museum situated in Japan. The region called

9 For a brief history of Minpaku in English, see: https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english/aboutus/history.

10 Tadao Umesao, *Kokuritu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan no Jūnen* (Suita: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), 47.

the 'Middle East' or the 'Orient' from the European perspective is, from the Japanese standpoint, actually in the western part of the Eurasian continent. By making visitors aware of this simple and obvious, but neglected fact, they strived to present a different anthropological paradigm that would relativise Eurocentric scholarly trajectories.

2.3 Interconnecting the geographical frames: Islam around the world

The 'West Asia' gallery consists of four sections which highlight religious practices, nomadic life, women's dress, performing arts, and cultural contacts with Japan. The 'Religion' section of the gallery displays objects associated with Islam, covering the basics, such as the Qur'an, the *qibla* compass, prayer rugs, prayer beads, amulets, and women's clothing. A distinctive piece which stands out is the *kiswah*, a large black cloth with gold and silver embroidering of Qur'anic verses, that actually covered the Kaaba in Mecca in 1386 A. H. (1966–67) and was brought to Japan to be displayed in the Saudi Arabia pavilion during Expo '70, and then gifted afterwards to be used for educational purposes.

Near the *kiswah*, one finds a unique feature of this section: a set of hanging scrolls that were collected in China, with Qur'anic verses in Arabic script but adapted to a Chinese style of calligraphy.[11] The juxtaposition of these scrolls with the *kiswah* is intended to show that while the Arabic Qur'an, praying towards Mecca, and pilgrimage are common factors shared by Muslims all over the world, the religion has taken on local forms wherever it has taken root.

The 'West Asia' gallery is not the only gallery in Minpaku which displays material culture of Islam. Africa, South Asia, parts of China, Central Asia and Southeast Asia are regions in which Muslim presence has had a historical, cultural, and social significance. In more recent decades, Muslim migrant populations have also been growing in Europe and North America. Since a major renovation of the main exhibition hall, carried out between 2007–2017, nine out of the twelve regional galleries also display objects used by Muslims, alongside objects related to other religions prevalent in each region.

For example, the 'Prayer' section in the 'Africa' gallery displays a wooden board from Cameroon, used to practise Arabic writing, and a glass painting from Senegal, depicting a Qur'an school. These objects illustrate this region's distinctive forms of traditional Islamic education. In the 'Europe' gallery and the 'Americas'

11 The galleries can be visited virtually. http://test-minpaku.com/panorama/honkan2018/panorama.html.

gallery, one can find objects that reflect how Muslim immigrants are integrated into a non-Muslim majority society, such as textbooks and guides to everyday life for immigrants in Persian and other languages, or a calendar combining the Hijri (Islamic lunar calendar) and Western dates. The 'Religion – Tradition and Diversity' section of the 'South Asia' gallery includes a wooden door from a mosque in Gujarat, as well as protective charms for Muslims, depicting the Kaaba and the Mosque of the Prophet. These present a contrast to the various images of Hindu gods. In the 'Southeast Asia' gallery, we see a great variety of *hijab,* which are not only proper clothing for devout women, but are enjoyed as fashion items. The 'Central Asia' gallery includes exhibits of carpets, ceramics, woodwork, and miniature paintings, all with exquisite designs showing the influence of Persianate culture, and a revival of traditions that were suppressed during Soviet rule. Clothing related to Muslim rites of passage are also displayed. In the 'Religion and Writing' section of the 'Regional Cultures of China' gallery, there is a hanging scroll with a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in Arabic script, stating "Patriotism is part of religious faith". This artefact reflects the situation of Muslims living under the Chinese Communist Party's religious policy. Finally, in the 'Culture of Japan' gallery, the 'Multiethnic Japan' section features objects representing various migrant communities, including clothing Muslims wear when they attend religious occasions, and learning material for Muslim children.

There was no deliberate or coordinated strategy to include Islam in all these galleries, but rather it was an unanticipated consequence of the 2007–2017 renovation that enabled various manifestations of Islam as a world religion to be shown in different local contexts. During the renewal process, each gallery was curated by a team of researchers specialising in the region or theme. Since each project team was to work autonomously on the selection of materials and the construction of the narrative for each gallery, basic guidelines and key concepts were set out in the 'Basic Exhibition Concept 2007' at the outset of the renovation in order to maintain coherence in the design of the museum as a whole.[12] This blueprint contained core concepts such as 'the museum as a forum', 'glocalisation', 'universal design', 'cultural revival of indigenous peoples', and 'contact with Japan'.

Indeed, through the Islam-related objects in the galleries, one can observe the dynamics of glocalisation, the interplay of cultural homogeneity and heteroge-

12 Sudo, 2017 reflects on the transformation in exhibition style before and after the renovation: Ken'ichi Sudo, "Honkan tenji no shinkōchiku to sono kokoro: yonjūnen buri no kaihen wo oete," *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 41, no. 4 (2017). See also Yamanaka 2017 for the multilingualization process: Yuriko Yamanaka, "Multilingualization of Displays at Minpaku," *Minpaku Antropology Newsletter* 45 (December 2017).

neity.[13] Not only can one note, for example, all the local varieties of amulets with Qur'anic verses, we can also explore the complexities of the global market for products catering to Muslims: a prayer rug used by Muslims in Japan may be manufactured in China, or *halal* instant ramen noodles sold in an Asian food shop in Europe may actually be a Japanese product.

2.4 Take-home material: worksheets and guidebook

For the average Japanese visitor, it may not be easy to grasp the thread that interconnects the objects mentioned above. The Islam-related displays are dispersed through different galleries, and sometimes hidden to the uninitiated eye. An alternative narrative to the regional categorisation was needed to explicitly point out the links.

One medium which Minpaku devised was a worksheet for school children. 'Let's explore Minpaku! Islam edition' (*Minpaku wo tanken shiyō! Isurāmu hen*) is a worksheet for students, with a map of the galleries in the main exhibition hall, showing where objects related to Islam can be found (Fig. 1). The objects are categorised into four main themes, 'prayer', 'education', 'clothing', and 'food', with each theme denoted by an icon, so that the students can compare and contrast items according to category. These worksheets are distributed free of charge to school groups that visit the museum (they can also be downloaded) to guide the students on a 'treasure hunt' to discover these objects. The students answer simple questions or take notes along the way. There is also an accompanying booklet for teachers with more detailed background explanations, as well as a suggested bibliography, so that the teachers can continue the exploration later in classroom discussions.

Another piece of take-home material is the *National Museum of Ethnology Exhibition Guide*, which is the official 230-page guidebook of Minpaku sold at the museum shop. The Japanese edition was published in 2017, and the English edition came out in 2018. The first part of this book is a gallery-by-gallery guide explaining the environmental and historical background of each region, and highlighting the characteristics of its material culture. The second part consists of fourteen essays on seven cross-cultural themes: 'Clothing', 'Food', 'Housing', 'Livelihoods', 'Recreation', 'Rites of Passage', and 'Religion'. These essays invite the visitors to see the exhibits in a transregional framework, such as 'Portable and Mobile

13 For the origin and application of the term 'glocalisation', see Min Han and Nelson Graburn, ed., *Tourism and Glocalization: Perspectives on East Asian Societies*, Senri Ethnological Studies 76 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology and Han/ Graburn 2010), 12.

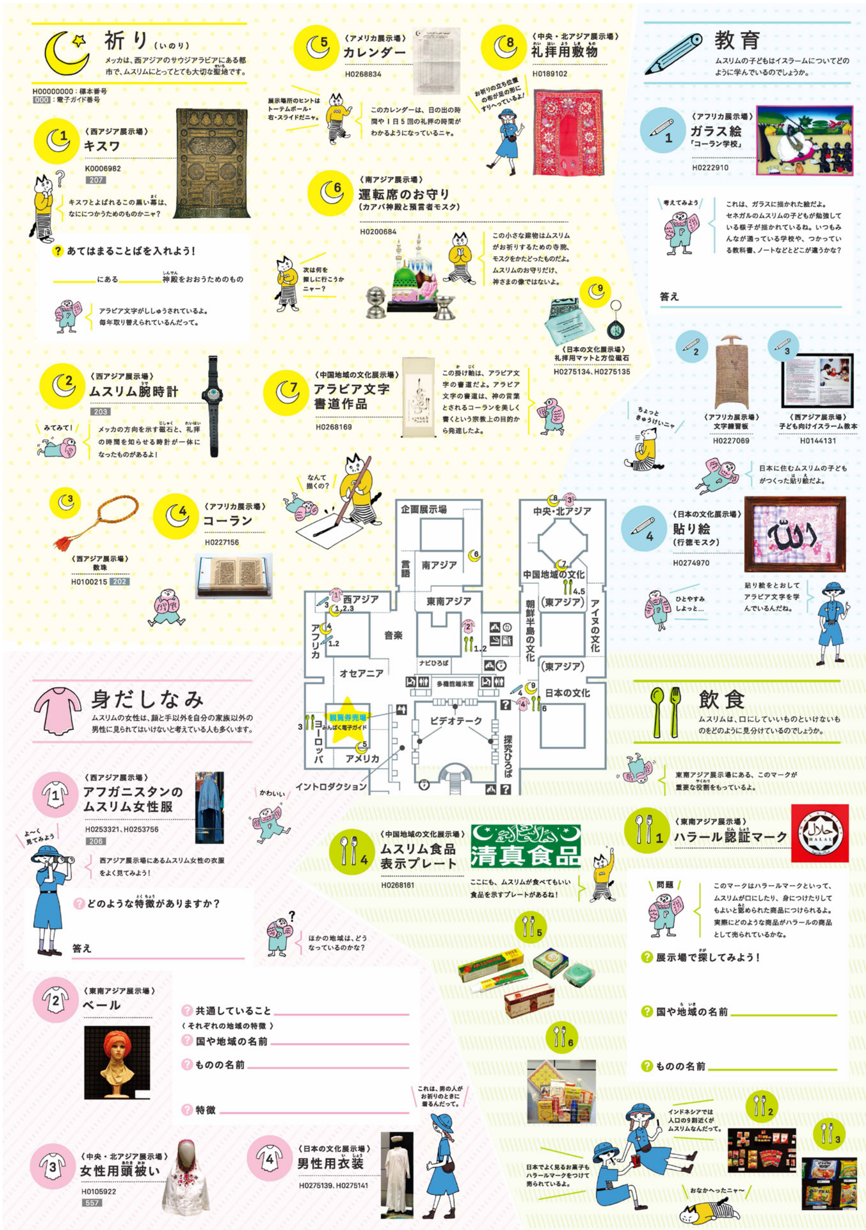

Figure 1: "Let's explore Minpaku! Islam edition" worksheet. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

Dwellings', or 'Why do People Dance?' For the theme of religion, I contributed the essay on 'Islam Around the World', in which I pointed out the regional variation in the Islam-related items in the different galleries as mentioned above.[14]

3 The Mobile Frame: Rental Learning Kit 'Min-Pack'

Finally, I would like to call attention to how this frame is exported outside of the museum in the form of a learning kit, the 'Min-Pack'. This museum-in-a-suitcase outreach programme was developed two decades ago when the 'integrated studies' concept was introduced into the public-school curriculum. Teachers had to devise activities to engage students in civic studies in a proactive, creative, and cooperative manner, to promote a deeper understanding of foreign cultures, ecology, and social welfare. Consequently, the demand from schools for object loans increased. For conservation reasons, however, artefacts from the collection could not be used too freely outside the museum. As a solution, everyday items, such as new garments and musical instruments, were collected from around the world, and packed into separate themed suitcases, together with explanations about the people who use the objects and their cultural background, and information cards for each item in the pack.

School teachers (as well as teaching staff of universities and other educational institutions) can reserve a pack, to be shipped to them through a commercial delivery service. The school only needs to pay the parcel delivery costs and there are no extra rental fees. Unlike most museum displays, the Min-Pack offers a hands-on, multi-sensory experience, and can also reach schools in areas remote from Osaka that do not have access to the museum. After each use, the pack is checked for damaged or missing contents, the clothing dry-cleaned, and, if necessary, pieces are repaired or replaced. A member of staff is exclusively responsible for the daily Min-Pack operation.

Two of the earlier packs that went into circulation with Islam-related themes were 'Islam and the Arab World' (2002, revised in 2012) and 'The World of the Arabian Nights' (2006).[15] The former pack contained clothing, prayer beads and other objects mainly collected in Saudi Arabia (with some later additions from Lebanon);

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14 Yuriko Yamanaka, "Islam around the World," in *National Museum of Ethnology Exhibition Guide*, ed. Yuriko Yamanaka et al. (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2018).

15 The contents of each pack can be seen on the following websites: "Islam and the Arab World," Minpaku, 2012, https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/arab/index and "The World of the Arabian Nights," Minpaku, 2006, https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/arabiannights/index.

the latter pack aimed to familiarise students with Arab history, literature, and the Arabic script, through spices, picture books, and writing tools collected in Egypt, Lebanon, and France.

3.1 Conception of the 'Muslims around the World' packs

The above two packs were in constant high demand over the years. There was, however, a concern that they could be fostering the 'Islam = Arabs' stereotype, whereas the diverse material culture of the non-Arab Muslims of the world had become more visible in the regional galleries of the museum after its renovation. The idea came to me that similar objects representing this diversity could be collected and framed as a Min-Pack, so that students could compare the objects from different countries side by side in the classroom.

In 2016, I launched a two-year project involving fifteen researchers and doctoral students, who worked on various regions around the globe.[16] The first year was dedicated to collecting the objects. In the second year, we deliberated on how to fit everything into a coherent and comprehensible learning scheme, and into the limited space of a suitcase.

Colleagues and students in the project team were asked to purchase objects reflecting the faith of Muslims during their research missions in Japan, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Germany, England, and Senegal.

3.2 Cooperation from Muslim communities

Merchandise commonly available in local shops, such as books, fashion magazines and *halal* products were bought, but the acquisition process also provided an opportunity for various forms of collaboration with local religious communities. Some of the project members had ties to source communities in their field research and were able to acquire items that were less readily available in shops. For example, alms envelopes and incense used in mosques in Xi'an, China, or school uniforms for Muslim girls in Indonesia were obtained through the cooperation of local friends and family. Some of the items were purchased at shops catering to Muslim communities. For example, the educational material and children's games for German Muslims with migrant backgrounds were bought in the

16 The project members were: Hatsuki Aishima, Tōko Fujimoto, Shōta Fukuoka, Hiroyuki Imamura, Takafumi Imanaka, Kenji Kuroda, Minoru Mio, Teiko Mishima, Toshihiro Nobuta, Akiko Sugase, Hirofumi Teramura, Atsuko Tsubakihara, Hiroko Yokoyama, Noboru Yoshioka, and Yuriko Yamanaka.

bookshop run by DITIB (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği* [Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs]), which is associated with the Cologne Central Mosque.

Other items were obtained at our request by local collaborators, and subsequently shipped to us. One such item was a wooden tablet from Senegal, used to practise writing Qur'anic verses, which even came with a bucket full of murky water that turned out to be the ink that had been washed off the tablet. Because it had been used in practising writing sacred verses, the inky water was also considered sacred, and the informant thought it important to include it in the package. Unfortunately, some of the water had leaked during transport and could not be included in the final Min-Pack.

When the educational purpose of the project was explained, the Japanese Muslim community was also very happy to cooperate, and even graciously donated material such as clothing they wear to prayer at the mosque, community newsletters and other material for religious education. These were particularly useful because the information written on them was already in Japanese.

3.3 Designing, editing

Thanks to the enthusiastic acquisition work of colleagues, as well as the generous donations, after a year we had collected a very rich variety of material. In fact, we had accumulated more than would fit into a suitcase. Unlike a museum display, the objects in the Min-Pack are not fixed in a specific physical setting. Once they are unpacked in a classroom, chaos could reign unless handling guidelines are suggested for the teachers, though any such guidelines should nonetheless allow a certain amount of freedom for the users to be creative. It was crucial to thoroughly discuss what to include, how to organise and label the items, what cultural information to provide, and how much instruction to give. The idea of the Min-Pack is to give the basic building blocks, but what to build in the classroom is up to the users. Our goal was not to present an overly detailed scenario or a step-by-step manual, but rather to provide just enough hints and information so that the users could stage their own lessons, workshops, dialogues, or games. These could be adapted to the age of the students, size and structure of the class (individual investigation or group activity), and background knowledge on the part of both the students and the teachers.

After discussions with the project team members, and trial runs with the cooperation of the Minpaku Museum Partners (a volunteer museum support group), we decided to make two packs, each with a slightly different theme, plus a dupli-

Figure 2a: "Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers" Min-Pack. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

Figure 2b: "Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life" Min-Pack. © National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

cate of each to act as a spare in case of high demand; thus, a total of four packs. The two themes were 'Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers' and 'Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life'.[17] (Fig. 2a, 2b)

The first pack, focusing on 'Daily Prayers', contains the Qur'an, prayer mats, prayer beads, clothing, amulets, tools for ablution and other religious practices, Islamic calendars and posters, and materials used in religious education from the twelve non-Arab countries mentioned at the end of section 3.1. The intention for this pack was to show that Muslims around the world share certain common practices (ablution, prayer, pilgrimage, Arabic script, veiling of women, giving alms), but that objects fulfilling essentially the same religious function can vary in material and form, according to region.

The second pack, 'Contemporary Life', aims to instil awareness of the fact that the context of the contemporary world is shared by Muslims and non-Muslims everywhere. The object of this pack, in other words, is to foster a sense of familiarity with Muslims as contemporaries. Among other things, the pack contains items which are made by or used by Muslims living in or visiting Japan: Arabic-Japanese Qur'an, booklets published by major mosques and Islamic cultural centres informing non-Muslims about Islam in Japanese, pamphlets and guide maps in English for Muslim visitors to Japan. Other objects in this pack – such as the fashion magazines with the latest style of wearing the hijab, religious pop music CDs, or a manga-style graphic novel about a teenage Indonesian Muslim girl who decides to express her identity by wearing the veil – imply that Muslim youth in different countries may have interests and concerns that are very relatable to youth in Japan. The pack also contains items which illustrate the global flow of products catering to Muslims, such as various *halal* food packages or Uniqlo hijabs designed by a Japanese Muslim designer. Games and toys (some of them in English or in both English and Arabic) are included that reflect how migrant or convert Muslim children in non-Muslim majority societies learn about Islam, as well as children's books for readers of all faiths which inspire tolerance and coexistence.

As already mentioned, when the pack is unpacked, the objects are like scattered building blocks. The users themselves must find an order or meaning to them. There are two basic ways to categorise the items: one could group the objects according to geographical region, or according to function and form. We tried

17 'Muslims around the World-1: Daily Prayers': https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/muslim1/index
'Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life': https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/muslim2/index.

to indicate these baselines with a set of concise explanatory texts on the history of Islam in each region, and another set of topic essays on certain practices and concepts such as ‘pilgrimage’, ‘*halal* industry’, ‘popular culture’, etc. Each object is also accompanied by an ‘object information card’ (*Mono jōhō kādo*) with a country flag to mark its provenance, as well as several lines of description, and a message from the researcher who collected it. We also included an album of field photos in the pack.

Finding a strategy for labelling and packing all the objects, so that the users could instinctively unpack and repack them without breaking or losing parts of the content, was a challenge as the packs were becoming so dense. A professional display designer, Mariko Ue, who designed the first generation of Min-Packs, was involved at this point to solve this conundrum. She used labels with codes corresponding to each object, which, along with the use of small nets, managed to bring order to the packaging. Special attention is paid to how the Qur’an is packed. In a previous incident reported by a teacher, a Muslim girl had become very upset that her non-Muslim classmates were treating the Qur’an very casually. Since then, we have placed the Qur’an in a box together with white gloves to signal that it should be handled with respect.

3.4 User experience

There have been so many different creative ways that the Min-Pack has been utilised in classroom settings; the topic of user experience could be the subject of a paper in itself. Here are a few examples that are reported on the museum website:[18]

https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/senri03: This is an example of a school renting the ‘Islam and the Arab World’ pack. The school invited a student from Jordan to give a lecture on culture and life in her own country. The Jordanian student talked about differences in food, beliefs, clothing, and language using objects in the pack.

https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/kokagakuen: These are examples of a geography class of 12 to 13-year-olds, and a world history class of 15 to 16-year-olds, using the ‘Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life’ pack to enhance what they had previously studied. Students first observed the objects, and tried things on, before reading the explanations. The

18 The reports are only in Japanese, but there are photos. Those interested can use the auto-translation function of their browser to get a rough idea.

curious first encounter with an unfamiliar culture, eventually turned into recognition of similarities with their own lives.

https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/sc/teacher/minpack/case/kindai: In this example, the lecturer himself was a specialist in Islamic material culture. He used the ‘Muslims around the World-2: Contemporary Life’ pack during his first and second classes of a 15-week university term on ‘Cultural History of the Orient’ as a way to capture students’ interest. Each student chose their favourite object in the first week, researched it, and reported on it to the class in the second week.

Thus, the Min-Pack is a mobile and versatile framework which provides the user with physical, sensory and intellectual contact with objects. It creates a stimulating opportunity for a multilateral learning process through which students (and teachers) can gain an appreciation of the diversity of the material culture of Islam, as well as a sense of familiarity with Muslims as contemporaries.

4 Conclusion

We have seen how Minpaku provides various frames, inside and outside of the museum, for encountering Islam through material culture.[19] In comparing this with Islam-related displays and activities in European museums, one must keep in mind the difference in social backdrop. Most Japanese have little daily contact with Muslims, and coexistence with Muslim communities has not yet become an urgent socio-political agenda for educators and policymakers. Islam is still a remote and abstract concept to most Japanese, whose main source of information on the topic is what they read or see in the media. The Japanese attitude towards religion in general is also very different to that of people who adhere to monotheistic faiths.[20] Except on ceremonial occasions such as funerals, people are usually less conscious of their own religious beliefs or denomination. Perhaps it is precisely because Japanese society is more distantiated from Islam, that a pluralistic presentation of the heterogeneity of its material culture, as described

19 At Minpaku, there are also temporary frameworks, such as special exhibitions and thematic exhibitions, some of which have dealt with the subject of Islam. In this paper, however, I have only mentioned exhibits and contents offered on a permanent basis.

20 For the latest survey on the Japanese attitude towards religion, conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute from October to November 2018, see Toshiyuki Kobayashi, “How Have Japanese Attitudes and Behavior on Religion Changed? From the ISSP Survey on Religion: Survey Results in Japan,” *NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute Japan Broadcasting Corporation*, April 1, 2019, https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yoron/pdf/20190401_7.pdf.

above, is possible. Muslim communities residing in Japan are themselves very heterogeneous, and no group claims more authority than another.

With the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which came into effect in April 2019, the Muslim population in Japan is projected to rise in the immigrant workforce as well as in schools. This will make the role of the museum even more vital, in raising awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about Islam, promoting greater recognition of Islam's diversity of regional cultures and sectarian differences, and fostering a better understanding of its importance in global history and the economy.

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Ramona Jelinek-Menke and Maike Sieler

#Ganeshaontour: The Study of Religions and Infotainment on Instagram

1 Introduction

High above the rooftops of Marburg resides a treasure that many people pass by without noticing: the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) at Philipps-University Marburg. Its employees make steady efforts to attract people's attention, to bring them closer to religious objects, their stories and the study of religions. They offer exhibition catalogues, public tours and talks. However, the way up to the collection is challenging, and there are times when the objects remain alone and their stories untold. As these stories are worth hearing, the REDIM project decided that if the public would not go to the objects, the objects must be brought to the public. And thus, external science communication[1] became a vital element of REDIM's work.

REDIM – Dynamics of Religious Things in Museums is an interdisciplinary project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF). The BMBF requires REDIM to engage in science communication in return for funding[2]. This is no isolated case. Indeed, the Volkswagen Stiftung recently announced a new programme that specifically supports science communication. Its programme description emphasises that science communication is a way to influence public debate and can have a great impact on how education and research is perceived by the non-academic public.[3] As this example shows, science communication is increasingly required as an

1 The term 'science communication' is used to refer to both communication among scholars, and communication between scholars and the public. In this paper, we focus more on the latter, that is, external science communication.

2 In 2019, the BMBF recognised the importance of science communication by publishing a policy paper about the strategy: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF), *Grundsatzpapier des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung zur Wissenschaftskommunikation* (Berlin: BMBF, 2019).

3 "Wissenschaftskommunikation hoch drei – Zentren für Wissenschaftskommunikationsforschung, Volkswagen Stiftung," Volkswagenstiftung, accessed August 8, 2020, https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/unsere-foerderung/unser-foerderangebot-im-ueberblick/wissenschaftskommunikation-hoch-drei-zentren-fuer-wissenschaftskommunikationsforschung.

Figure 1: Profile picture of ganeshaontour. Photo: Georg Dörr, © Religionskundliche Sammlung Philipps-Universität Marburg.

aspect of academic work. In this paper, we argue why and in what way science communication is crucial, including for the study of religions.

As the study of religions is a small discipline, external science communication provides a great opportunity to broaden its reach and societal influence. Additionally, communicating academic research and results to a wider audience, and particularly to those outside the academic community, can be regarded as a democratic ideal. Therefore, in this paper, we show that science communication is in the interest of the study of religions and beneficial to a democratic society. In the following, we first present various arguments for external science communication in the study of religions (Section 2). In a second step, we briefly explain the key elements of science communication (Section 3). We then introduce Instagram as a potential medium for science communication in the study of religions (Section 4), before describing REDIM's work using Instagram (Section 5). In Section 6, we discuss the challenges, risks, and limits of science communication. Finally, we summarise our arguments (Section 7).

2 The Study of Religions and the Public Sphere

The field of the study of religions is a broad one, but the focus of individual scholars' research is necessarily quite narrow. From time to time, academics and institutes of the study of religions are asked to make a public statement on a subject related to religion. In many cases, the interests of the inquirer and the particular expertise of the academic or institution do not entirely align. As a result, scholars are understandably wary of making public statements. Despite this, it makes sense for scholars with expertise on religions to communicate publicly on matters of religion. There are three main reasons why it is desirable for scholars of the study of religions to communicate with the public.

Firstly, scholars of the study of religions are experts in their fields and should communicate their expertise to the public. [4] This is particularly relevant at a time when matters related to religion tend to comprise a large portion of the news. Scholars can contribute to making heated and emotional discussions more objective by offering empirically grounded information and putting facts into perspective with their comparative knowledge about religions.[5]

Secondly, communicating research to the public is a matter of accessibility, fairness and equality. In a democratic and meritocratic society, in which academic research is publicly funded, people have a right to access knowledge, and need this knowledge in order to take an appropriate, fact-based approach to religions. There are at least two ways that academic knowledge and perspectives from the study of religions can be conveyed to the public: through teachers of religion in schools and through science communication. The German Association for the Study of Religions (Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft, DVRW) recognises that teachers of religion in schools are engaged in a serious area of work within the study of religions. To this end, it has established a dedicated working group *Religionswissenschaft und Schule* (Study of religions and schools). In a similar vein, the

4 cf. Edith Franke, "Feministische Kritik an Wissenschaft und Religion," in *Kritik an Religionen: Religionswissenschaft und der kritische Umgang mit Religionen*, ed. Gritt Maria Klinkhammer et al. (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1997), 115 and 119 and cf. Jens Schlieter, "Religion, Religionswissenschaft und Normativität," in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 237f.

5 Birgit Stark, "Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels," *Science Policy Paper* 4 (2019): 4, urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:3-478543.

DVRW has acknowledged the importance of science communication by signing a statement regarding the BMBF's policy paper on science communication.[6] Scholars who engage in external science communication face certain challenges and will inevitably have to leave their academic comfort zone. Given that teachers of religion in schools succeed in doing this every day, we can assume that this is also possible for scholars engaging in science communication.

Thirdly, communication with the public can increase the popularity of academic research in general and of a specific academic discipline in particular. The study of religions is a small discipline, which at some universities has to fear for its continued existence. As such, the discipline should be interested in increasing its own visibility. Through science communication, the discipline can point out the direct social relevance of its research. Furthermore, it can show that the study of religions contributes to the understanding of historical correlations.

Ultimately, by engaging proactively in science communication, scholars can ensure that the relevant and interesting topics they bring to the public's attention are those on which sufficient expertise is available. Scholars then do not have to wait for a journalist to ask a question that they feel competent to answer. Instead, they can talk about matters that they consider important and are able to explain properly in view of their expertise.

3 The Tool: Science Communication

Science communication is a tool that brings academic knowledge and discussion into the public sphere. It is both an autonomous discipline and an established tool for high-ranking scientific institutions, with the overall goal of providing academic content in broadly understandable language for everyone to learn and enjoy.[7]

6 "Positionierung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK) und der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) zum Grundsatzpapier des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) zur Wissenschaftskommunikation," Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK) und Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS), Stuttgart and Essen: DGPuK and DGS, published August 8, 2020, https://www.dvrw.uni-hannover.de/fileadmin/dvrw/Dateien/Beschluesse/Stellungnahme_WissKomm_DGPuK_DGS_2020-1.pdf.

7 Hunter Hines and Sally Warring, "How We Use Instagram to Communicate Microbiology to the Public: Social Media is a Powerful Tool for Science Communication," accessed March 22, 2020, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00493-3 and Nina Janich, "Warum Wissenschaftskommunikation manchmal so schwer ist...Und auch deren Bewertung," *Science Policy Paper* 4 (2019): 11–16, urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:3-478543.

Successful science communication follows two major principles:[8] Firstly, academic content is best published in a conversational manner. Secondly, it is important to publish content that can be referred to as *infotainment*, a term used today to describe media that conveys information in an entertaining fashion. The term *infotainment* was popularised by media theorist Neil Postman in 1985.[9] Postman criticised the use of audiovisual stimuli on television, claiming that information was not absorbed by users as it was undermined by entertaining aspects on the news such as jingles.[10] The perception of infotainment, which today also encompasses social media, has fundamentally changed since the mid-1980s. It is now seen as something positive, and a means of increasing democratic participation. For several reasons, infotainment is a thriving communication strategy: The first and most important reason is that complex facts are easier to comprehend if they are delivered in a relaxed fashion. If the strategy of infotainment is applied, the user is more likely to absorb the information contained in the digital communication.[11]

High-ranking scientific institutions like NASA, MIT, Caltech, and Harvard Medical have been using science communication for years to bring their knowledge into the public sphere, and with good reason. These institutions are taking advantage of what media studies describes as 'always-on-mentality'.[12] According to The Global Digital Report 2019, three-quarters of the German population spend at least three hours online every day. Globally, people spend even more time online: an average of six hours and 42 minutes per day.[13] The report concludes that half of this time is spent on one's smartphone.[14] Today, media access is autonomous and individual; anyone can consume anything anywhere at any time. This allows some information *to go viral*, as digital media is fast and can potentially be seen by a very high number of people. As such, people can learn about new trends and topics within seconds. According to media science scholar Birgit Stark, modern media usage may be as ground-breaking as the innovation of printing was.[15] Aca-

8 See Hines and Warring, "How We Use Instagram to Communicate Microbiology to the Public: Social Media is a Powerful Tool for Science Communication".
9 Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985).
10 Ibid., 122.
11 "Infotainment," Online Marketing Fans, accessed April 20, 2020, https://onlinemarketingfans.de/lexikon-online-marketing/infotainment/.
12 Stark, Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels*,* 2.
13 "Digital 2019: Global Internet Use Accelerates," We Are Social, accessed August 8, 2020, https://wearesocial.com/blog/2019/01/digital-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates.
14 Stark, Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels*,* 2.
15 Ibid., 3.

demic institutions should use this opportunity to convey their knowledge to the public and thus fulfil their public duty.[16]

While communicating academic hypotheses and findings to the public is an abstract, democratic, and moral ideal, it is also true that the consumption of academic research has become quite popular. This is evidenced by the number of followers science communication channels have, as well as audience television ratings – although currently, this is more true for the natural sciences than for the humanities. The popularity of both the natural sciences and the humanities can be confirmed by public tenders that call for science communication. Science communication can also be beneficial to institutions and academics as it can lead to new cooperation and help with professional networking. For example, when another museum became aware of REDIM's Instagram account, it offered some of its objects to one of the museums involved in the REDIM project. The transparency and visibility provided by science communication could also potentially increase scholars' academic reputation and popularity.[17]

4 The Medium: Instagram

For the reasons described above, in March 2019 the REDIM coordination team started trialling science communication via Instagram. There is a whole range of platforms that can be used for science communication. Twitter, for example, is a very popular platform for science communication. The scholar of the study of religions Frederik Elwert (@felwert) and the digital library *Relbib* (@rel_bib) have been using the social media platform regularly for their scientific communication. The *Netzwerk un-sichtbar*[18], which was initiated a few years ago by students of the study of religions at the University of Leipzig and has since expanded to other cities in Germany and Switzerland, uses its website and the app *audioguideMe* to provide audio clips on the acoustic presence of religions in urban space. The network thus offers a very promising variant of scientific communication in the field of the study of religions.

The REDIM coordination team decided to use Instagram, which is primarily used to share photos and videos. Unlike the aforementioned *Netzwerk un-sichtbar*,

16 Ibid., 2.

17 Hines and Warring, "How We Use Instagram to Communicate Microbiology to the Public: Social Media is a Powerful Tool for Science Communication" and Stark, Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels, 3.

18 "Netzwerk un-sichtbar: Religionswissenschaftlicher Wissenstransfer," Netzwerk un-sichtbar, accessed December 4, 2020, https://un-sichtbar.hypotheses.org/.

which deals with the acoustic expressions of religions, the REDIM project explores religious objects that are primarily perceived visually in museums. It is therefore appropriate to use Instagram, which mainly addresses the visual. Instagram users can add text of up to 2200 characters to the photos and videos they post. As such, it is possible to frame the users' interpretation of the pictures, to give additional information, and to build networks by using links and hashtags in the text. The text can provide both an interpretation of the image, and background information that is not contained in the image itself. Instagram's algorithm works like a positive feedback loop: The more users interact with one's content, the more the algorithm proposes it to other users who have not yet interacted with it.[19] A suitable text alongside the content will promote this process and expand the channel's reach as people spend more time reading the text.[20] The medium, which is mostly consumed via smartphone and therefore provides 'content to go', is especially popular among students and young adults[21] but also frequently used by scholarly institutions like universities and museums. For example, the individual project partners of REDIM and the partner museums, have been active on Instagram for some time. The medium is attractive as it relies on catchy (audio-) visual impressions that invite the user to share content with friends within seconds. In other words, using Instagram is a fun way to explore new content, and share memories and new impressions, in a fast and relaxed manner.[22] Ultimately, by being online, the objects researched by the REDIM project can be enjoyed by a far wider public than offline.

To conclude, Instagram is suitable for REDIM's science communication, because the platform can be used to reach a broader audience and has an intuitive user interface. Instagram may well be thriving as a tool for science communication about objects because of its focus on the visual.

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19 Hines and Warring, "How We Use Instagram to Communicate Microbiology to the Public: Social Media is a Powerful Tool for Science Communication".

20 Famous example: @humansofny.

21 "Instagram. Ein Schnappschuss aus dem Leben einer Walfamilie, Reisebilder des Mars-Rovers oder ein Selfie mit Roboter: Instagram eröffnet der Welt einen visuellen Zugang zur Wissenschaft," Wissenschaftskommunikation.de, accessed March 22, 2020, https://www.wissenschafts-kommunikation.de/format/instagram/.

22 Hines and Warring, "How We Use Instagram to Communicate Microbiology to the Public: Social Media is a Powerful Tool for Science Communication".

5 The Channel: Ganeshaontour

Figure 2: The tour information has to be carefully organised. Photo: Ramona Jelinek-Menke.

What exactly do REDIM's activities on Instagram look like? How do we design infotainment for the study of religions and the REDIM project on Instagram?

The name of the REDIM channel is Ganeshaontour. A small metallic figure of the Hindu god Ganesha moderates the channel. The figure visits the various project partners one after the other and interviews the academic staff. In this way, Ganesha becomes the figure that connects the different aspects of the channel and makes it a continuing story. In the permanent posts and temporary stories, Ganesha asks REDIM's partners questions on a specific topic. For example, how did the museums in which research is carried out come to be established? How did things find their way into the museums (18.10.2019–06.03.20, 10 posts)? Stories are also included, covering current topics and information about events related to the REDIM project such as the cleaning of a book by the Batak from Indonesia, and our online colloquium during the COVID-19 pandemic. By publishing these posts and stories, we aim to present our results and work in progress.

The REDIM coordination team write and edit the posts' texts, which follow the aforementioned principles of science communication – being both informative and entertaining. The team's main tasks are choosing a selection of the photos and transforming academic information into broadly comprehensible texts. Both the photos and the information are often provided by the research associates. The coordination team edit and post the content.

The common thread of the channel is provided by a stringent posting plan, which includes at least one post on a two-week basis. The REDIM coordination team constantly analyses its reach with the Instagram tool *Insights* and customises the posts for current target groups. This strategy proved effective in terms of building followers and professional networking.

6 Challenges, Risks, and Limits of Science Communication

In addition to the many advantages of communicating with the public, one should also be aware of the challenges, risks, and limits of science communication. Some key challenges relate to the production of content. Firstly, it is not easy to provide academic content in an entertaining and relaxed fashion. The fact that social media platforms like Instagram only provide a certain number of characters within one post further complicates the challenge.

Figure 3: Ganesha visits all of REDIM's associates. Photo: Edith Franke.

A further challenge is posed by the sheer volume of content that is uploaded to social media platforms, with every post competing for users' attention. To survive in this competition, it is necessary to deliver frequent, new, infotaining, personalised, free content for a diverse community.[23] By contrast, producing good scholarly content necessarily takes some time. It is essential that the texts we intend to post on Instagram always undergo a double fact check. It is our responsibility to only publish accurate content, and fact-checking also ensures that we avoid (justifiable) criticism from the academic community for publishing inaccurate information. It remains a permanent challenge to transform a scientifically accurate text into an infotaining and broadly understandable Instagram post. However, this challenge also has a positive side as you improve your writing skills through the necessity of conveying accurate content within a limited word count in a generally intelligible manner.

Researchers who engage in science communication face the well-founded fear of not being taken seriously by their academic peers and supervisors. There is a risk

23 Stark, Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels, 3.

Figure 4: Researching with curator Dr Susanne Rodemeier in the archives of the Museum of Religions. Photo: Ramona Jelinek-Menke.

that peers and supervisors will confuse generally understandable, entertaining texts with less professional depth. Indeed, Gertraud Kremsner goes so far as to claim that academics have to unlearn how to speak in a generally understandable way in order to be accepted within academia.[24]

Despite these challenges and risks, academic knowledge must find its way into the public sphere for the reasons already mentioned. We maintain that communication via social media is one of the proper instruments for this. Science communication needs competent academics who are willing to share their expertise and are capable of doing so in a generally intelligible manner. When scholars decide to engage in science communication, they should not be rejected by their peers and supervisors for doing so.[25] It is likely that this risk will decrease considerably as we become more accustomed to this media form and its requirements. In a sense, we will have to re-learn to speak. However, all this requires not only goodwill, but also time – and time, as we all know, is money.

Let us now explore some of the limitations of science communication. As we have already stated, communicating ideas in a way that can be understood by a broader audience is a challenge for the academic community. Academic language is usually highly complex and can often only be understood by other academics, or even only by individuals within the same discipline. The use of discipline-specific terminology can even make interdisciplinary exchange difficult. Consequently, only a very small group can understand texts from a particular discipline.

24 Gertraud Kremsner, "Der babylonische Turm und seine Grundfesten: Überlegungen zum Kommunizieren und Artikulieren im Kontext der Konstruktion von 'Anderen'," in *Gesellschaften/Welten/Selbst im [Um]Bruch*, ed. Sabine Krause et al. (Wien: Online Publication by the University of Vienna), 76–79.

25 Stark, Wissenschaftskommunikation in Zeiten rapiden Medienwandels, 4.

Figure 5: Researching in a library with RED-IM's doctoral student Pardis Eskandaripour. Photo: Pardis Eskandaripour.

Of course, dynamics within religions can be very complicated, and a certain vocabulary is needed to convey the correct information in a precise way. The solution certainly cannot be to abandon highly specialised terminology in academic texts. Consequently, procedures are necessary to make academic knowledge accessible to a broad public. It is hard to imagine that an academic who is already juggling research, publications, teaching and administration, could also engage in effective science communication. As we have emphasised, science communication is a very important and demanding task that involves a high degree of responsibility. It cannot be done 'on the side' and can only be carried out adequately by people who have both very good academic qualifications and the necessary media skills.[26] To ensure the public has access to information as is their right, the task of sharing academic knowledge with the public should be placed in the hands of specialists whose focus is entirely on science communication. While individual researchers reporting on their work on social media is most welcome, this cannot be required of everyone. Ideally, dedicated science communication positions would be created within institutes and projects of the study of religions. Given that there are limited funds available for such positions, this will probably remain an unrealised ideal, which in turn means that the advantages science communication would bring to the discipline will be limited.

One limitation of science communication is that no matter how well it is done, it will probably only reach those who are already interested in the topic at hand. This raises the open question of how to attract the attention of individuals who

26 Here, we agree with the statement regarding science communication signed by the DVRW. "Positionierung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK) und der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) zum Grundsatzpapier des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) zur Wissenschaftskommunikation," Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK) und Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS), Stuttgart and Essen: DGPuK and DGS.

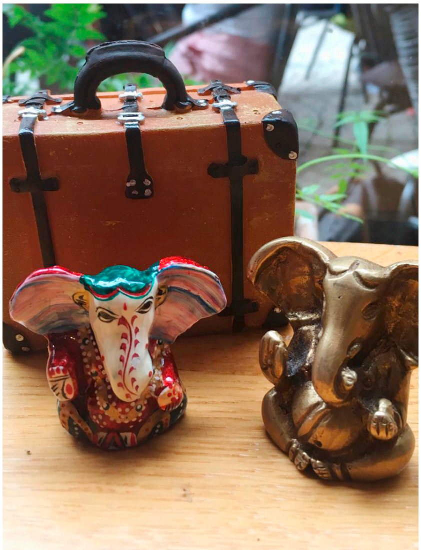

Figure 6: Ganesha interviewing Ferdinand Liefert, a doctoral student at REDIM, and Ganesha from Japan about their research at Japanese museums. Photo: Maike Sieler.

are not already interested in the subject – an issue that by no means solely concerns the study of religions. We must also consider what successful communication on social media entails and how it can be measured. A high number of 'followers' and 'likes' cannot be the only criteria, as less popular content is no less important or legitimate.

A further sensitive issue is the commercial purpose of Instagram and other social media platforms. While anybody can enjoy content on these platforms, the content comes at the price of one's personal data. As the Cambridge Analytica scandal demonstrated, personal data can be stolen and misused for political purposes.[27] When using any social media platform, that is always a risk.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that there are several positive outcomes of science communication. These positive effects not only affect one's own research and the audience that learns about its results, but also the very discipline of the study of religions itself. The humanities, and academics within the humanities, are sometimes seen as an exclusive elite. Some doubt or even do not know that these academic disciplines conduct empirically grounded, comprehensible research that makes important contributions to society. By making our work more transparent, we can change this perception or prevent it from spreading. Science communication also serves to strengthen the democratic basis of our society, and can serve to calm heated debates by introducing empirically grounded information. It is not

27 "Was wir über den Skandal um Facebook und Cambridge Analytica wissen [UPDATE]," Netzpolitik, accessed April 20, 2020, https://netzpolitik.org/2018/cambridge-analytica-was-wir-ueber-das-groesste-datenleck-in-der-geschichte-von-facebook-wissen/.

only possible but also important for scholars to write and talk about topics that fall outside their comfort zone as teachers of religion in schools do every day.

Science communication entails some risks and challenges, including being perceived negatively by one's academic peers, and writing about your academic work in a broadly understandable way without distorting the message. Nevertheless, we decided to give it a try. For the REDIM project, Instagram was the right tool for science communication as it relies on photos, related texts, and an algorithm that can work like a positive feedback loop. The project has received great feedback via Instagram, and communicates with an academic and non-academic community interested in topics of the study of religions. Concluding, we would argue that science communication (on Instagram) provides a great opportunity for the discipline of the study of religions to gain more popularity and to spread its knowledge. Science itself is the epitome of progress. So why not try to hop on this new train of opportunities?

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Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Edith Franke and Ramona Jelinek-Menke

"We don`t collect objects, we collect relationships." An Interview with Léontine Meijer-van Mensch about *Liquid Museums*, *Implicated Communities*, and the *Shared Stewardship* of Religious Objects

Edith Franke: Léontine, as director of the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde, you are responsible for a large and diverse ethnological collection, including numerous religious objects. In our research network REDIM, we have been exploring how museums contribute to the social perception of religion and religious diversity. We would like to talk to you about the social function and obligations of museums in terms of their responsibility for the musealisation and presentation of religious objects and religion. We are particularly interested in learning about your experiences as the director of a museum that plays an important role in the way religion is perceived by society.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: Today, the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde has around 200,000 objects from all continents. Since these objects are no longer in use in the places they originate from, would you say that museums are places for dead things?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: Death and uselessness are metaphors that are often used to criticise museums and encourage them to change. I like working with metaphors, but, of course, they are only true in part. The argument is often made that certain museum objects are 'dead', but it very much depends on what kind of objects we are talking about. Nobody would describe a painting by Rembrandt as a dead object. The discourse surrounding museum objects being dead focusses mainly on objects that are related to kinds of performativity, use or social function that are sort of lost in a museum context, religious objects being one such example. I think that in contemporary museum practice we need to find appropriate ways to respect this performativity, use or social function when we are displaying objects, when we use them in an educational setting, when we restore them, and even when we keep them in storage. This involves questioning the traditional approach to materiality taken in the museum profession. I am intrigued by alternatives to this traditional approach, moving away from the centrality of materiality, and accepting dynamism. If we want to move beyond the metaphor of the museum as a place for dead things, we must rethink all of our museum practices. For museum professionals, this involves thinking about the community or communities behind the objects, including their perspectives, and accepting a sense of ownership of the objects that lies outside the museum. I think that is what the concept of *new museology*[1] is all about. If we rethink our museum expertise – or relearn it – and include the perspectives of the community where these objects have a significance, then I think the objects gain new layers and significances as museum objects, which ultimately enhances the relevance of the museum context.

Edith Franke: We are talking about a museum that is open to community perspectives and in contact with the social reality around it. In *new museology*, there is a debate about the concept of the *liquid museum*, and you have talked about the museum as a place of belonging, or a place of encounters and social relations.[2] What are the consequences of understanding a museum in this way, and what difficulties do you see?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: I see difficulties in the sense that it clashes with some of the traditional core values of museum professionals, but personally, I am convinced that there is a world to gain for museums, especially with regard to their relevance. I see museums as places of encounter. I really like Homi Bhabha´s concept of *third space*, which is, of course, a rather theoretical concept and not entirely uncontroversial, but I think it is important to think about the museum in such a way.[3] A bit more concrete than Homi Bhabha's *third space* is the concept of *third place*. Our home is *first place* and our work *second place*. The *third place* is where we negotiate things, where we gather, in a café, or around the coffee machine. It is the old *agora*. We very much need such places in civil society, but how can museums achieve this role? Here the concept of the *liquid museum* comes in very beautifully because it goes beyond the physical structure of the museum. The concept refers to the museum as space rather than as place. The *liquid museum* is a network that connects with all kinds of people and communities. It tackles issues that are in conflict, and may also try to give voices to the dissonant, including when it is hurtful. In short, the museum is a space for negotiation. For me, the concept of *liquid museum* is very much connected with the issues of

1 Pierre Mayrand, "The New Museology Proclaimed, Museum International," *Museum International* 66, no. 1–4 (2014): 115–18.

2 Fiona Cameron, "The Liquid Museum: New Institutional Ontologies for a Complex, Uncertain World," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, Vol. 1: Museum Theory, ed. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 354–61.

3 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge 2008).

ownership and belonging. There are many forms of ownership and many ways in which the sense of belonging manifests itself. How does this relate to the places where objects are physically kept? Can a museum object which is part of my collection simultaneously be an object which evokes a sense of belonging elsewhere? This is an interesting question in the context of religious heritage, especially when you relate this to the question of performativity. I am very interested in making it possible for a religious object to still be part of the museum collection while functioning in a specific context which is not the museum. This might not necessarily be an issue of legal ownership, but it does challenge the concepts of intellectual ownership, authority, and expertise. I like that the concept of *liquid museum* questions basic principles of how to do museums that I've always wanted to question myself. I don't want to work in a museum context with lots of dead objects; I prefer the liquid context of living objects, i.e. acknowledging the performative power of objects in a variety of contexts and not just as exhibits in a showcase.

Edith Franke: I would like to refer once again to Homi Bhabha's reflections on hybrid, 'in-between' spaces: could a museum function as a *third place* or *third space*? Can it mediate between the different spheres of religion, society, and science? Or should the museum be a clearly secular space?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: It can be an in-between place or, at least, it can shift more easily according to the specific role it needs to play in a specific context. It can sometimes be an in-between place, and sometimes be a secular place. By 'secular space', perhaps you mean a very academic space. I think sometimes it can also be a more religious space. So, it is a sort of shape shifter; it can adjust its shape according to what it needs to be at a specific moment. I like this idea a lot, but of course, it is at odds with the rules and regulations of German public services; administrations struggle to deal with the agile, the unexpected; they think in fixed structures. All of a museum's functions are constantly present, but sometimes one function (and one space) is more important than the others. Who says that a museum always is and should be an academic space? Shapeshifting is part of the liquidity of the concept of museum. We have already spoken of the issue of ownership and authority. We also see it in the architecture of museums. Museums that are being built now have a different look and feel than those built previously. They embrace the outside world more and are more open in both their architecture and their approach. They are not the inward-looking buildings of the 19th and early 20th century. In that sense, I think museum architecture has embraced a lot of the liquidity parameters already.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: I would like to turn now to the objects, and to the contexts that these objects originate from. You spoke in a lecture about *communities of implication*.[4] What is meant by *communities of implication*?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: Maybe I can start by sharing my growing uncertainty about the concept of *source community*. Who is a *source community*? Who belongs to a *source community*? Who doesn't belong? When I was working at the Jewish Museum Berlin, the concept of *source community* didn't feel right. It raised the question of who speaks for the *source community* – a political voice or a religious voice? I felt that the whole concept was too narrow. Of course, in an ethnological museum the concept of *source community* is important, but still here, I feel that it has something about it that doesn't feel right, at least not to me. The museum is a political space and a space where agency is an important concept. For me, Erica Lehrer's concept of *community of implication* is so much more open because it is about people who are implicated by a certain history. In her case, this is very much about memory culture and Shoah. She talks about Jewish heritage in post-Shoah Poland. Lots of people are implicated and have a stake, and I think that this being implicated from different angles and different perspectives is a very interesting concept that brings us further when we talk about the relevance and significance of cultural heritage. But at the same time, the notion that objects may have multiple owners or that they speak many languages, that there is multivocality or polyphony, may make people uncomfortable. The concept of implicated community goes beyond that of *identity*, which I don't think is as valid anymore. I'm not saying that I have rejected the concept of *source community*, but that it is too narrow, and that it can be instrumentalised and serve as fodder for identity politics. We have to be careful about that. We shouldn't be naive about the concept of *source community*. All things considered, I am certainly very intrigued by the concept of *community of implication* because it is much more inclusive, much more heterogeneous.

Edith Franke: When we talk about the polyphony of objects, and the diversity of interpretations and relationships involving objects that are part of a museum collection, we are quite close to the concept of *shared stewardship* and the idea of a *participatory museum*. This extends the idea of liquidity, of the fluidity of the museum even further and invites others, such as believers, to be curators of an exhibition about religion. I think this is a very interesting concept. But isn't it also

4 Erica Lehrer, "Material Kin: 'Communities of Implication' in Post-Colonial, Post-Holocaust Polish Ethnographic Collections," in *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial*, ed. Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius (Leuven University Press, 2020), 289–322.

very complicated? How do you deal with different ideas, interpretations, and intentions when you design an exhibition? Surely there will also be contradictions.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: Definitely. Unfortunately, visitor research has shown again and again that most museum visitors don't want that.[5] They don't want ambiguity; they don't want this multifocality. They want museum experts telling them how things are and what they are. This is something I constantly feel uncertain about and find frustrating. Lots of museum visitors have a rather old-fashioned idea of what a museum is. This has also been my own personal experience with participatory projects. It's difficult. To answer your various questions, I think it all boils down to some basic principles that should be central to museum communication. Museums need to be very transparent about this ambiguity and this polyphony. They need to help people to make their own significance and story lines. It's about embracing the role of mediator or facilitator.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: You say that many museum visitors want an expert to speak for the objects. When we talk about the polyphony of objects, we often mean that there are different points of view concerning the objects and that these should be given a voice in the museum context. In each case, people are speaking about or for the objects, rather than the objects speaking themselves. Maybe that's not so different from this 'old-fashioned idea' that visitors have about museums? In the museum context – even if the polyphony is taken into account – artifact still appear as mere objects. But what about the objects' own voice? For some people, artifact are active subjects. Indeed, this may particularly be the case in the religious context, and some scholars speak about the *agency* of the artefacts in this case.[6] This is increasingly being considered in research. It's the same in the study of religions. How can a museum deal with such "living artifact"?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: Well, maybe you don't put them on museum shelves but let them be museum objects within a certain setting outside the museum's walls. This brings us to the interesting question of whether museums should document more or whether we should continue to collect. I think museums should be spaces where we document, and that we should not collect as much anymore. This is an interesting paradigm shift in general, but it is particularly interesting

5 For example: "Public Perceptions of – and Attitude to – the Purpose of Museums in Society: A report Prepared by BritainThinks for Museums Association," March 2013, https://www.museumsassociation.org/app/uploads/2020/06/03042013-britain-thinks.pdf.

6 Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

when dealing with religion. Going back to the basic assumption that a museum is a museum for all, how does that interact with the idea of respecting expressions of religious culture? Does it work? I think that most of the time it does work and can come together but, of course, it can also create opposing dynamics of division, anger, or rejection, for example. Again, I think it is possible for museums to abandon their position as a secular space and be much more a space where religion is being practised at certain moments, and that they can then go back to being an open space advocating a meta-perspective, and contextualising the event with film, photos or text, or probably a combination of all three. This shifting between perspectives is again part of the *liquid museum* model. But it would mean that sometimes spaces might not be open to everybody. Can we do that? Can we be a space that sometimes is not open to everybody because a specific group wants to perform certain rituals within that space? I think we can as long as we are very transparent and explain that we find it very important for a museum to be open to a group performing rituals, that sometimes we do something other than providing a meta-perspective.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: Is the meta-perspective necessarily the same as the secular perspective? Or to put it another way: Is religious practice necessarily exclusive, while a secular museum constitutes inclusive practice?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: No, but sometimes the performativity of certain rituals that need to be done, for example, in the process of repatriation, are so holy that only certain people can participate, and it needs to be intimate. Is a secular space the same as a meta-space? No, I think it's something different. I am not always sure where the difference lies and maybe that is also something that you can be very transparent about. Museums can say that they don't know how it works and where the boundaries are but that they are trying to work this out and would like help with doing so. I think we can do that within an ethnological space, especially because we have objects that need such an approach. The framing is different from that in a very academic, epistemic approach.

Edith Franke: I also think that it is difficult to deal with these issues. Apart from the question of whether a museum accepts the agency of objects, there is also the question of how to deal with the ritual purposes or uses of religious objects: does a museum have to take into account and respect the ritual and religious prescriptions that were once connected to an object, or is a museum allowed, even obliged, to emancipate itself from this? I like your idea, Léontine, that a museum should be a transparent, open place. But wouldn't it be a better solution to reject ambitions to perform rituals in a museum? There are so many different religious

Figure 1: Cleansing ceremony led by Ngarrindjeri elder Major Summer (left) on the occasion of the transfer of the remains of ancestors from the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde to the aboriginal communities of origin on 28 November 2019. Museum director Léontine Meijer-van Mensch (right) participated in the ceremony. Photo: Andreas Wünschirs, © GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig

beliefs and ritual practices. How could one decide what is allowed for whom and what is not?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: Yes, and who speaks for whom? Who do you give the authority to speak? What kind of expertise do you build on when deciding? There are so many contested voices and in all of them there is something of value. Ultimately, one person has to take responsibility and that's me, as the director. But again, the liquid museum model comes in, in that we make the decision-making process more transparent and make it clear that there are different ways of looking at objects in relation to a museum context. I know that this is not the end of the story but at least it is very processual. I probably leave lots of people with lots of questions. They want expert knowledge or an expert opinion, and I am not giving that to them. It helps of course if you say in your mission statement that you want to be a site of dialogue but whatever you do, you will never do it right. At the same time, that also gives you a lot of freedom.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: You mentioned the important topic of repatriation. Everybody is talking about restitution or repatriation now, and scholars like Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy are calling for full restitution of museum objects.[7] In relation to this, I remember a photo you showed during a lecture, which showed an empty showcase in a museum about Native American culture. In the photo, there was a sign explaining that, as a result of discussions with members of the Native American community, some sacred and sensitive objects had been removed from the exhibition. Objects are returned or should not be exhibited for several reaons. Can there be a museum without objects? Or are we facing the end of the museum as we know it?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: To answer this question, one must first clarify what an object is. Do you need objects for a museum? Yes, I think you need objects for a museum. But the question is: What are objects? And can we rethink the way we define an object? And does an object need to be an object in our collection in our space in order to be our object? I like the opinion that we should rethink collecting because we don't collect objects, we collect relationships. And if we collect relationships, it is also easier to repatriate or to return because we only gain more relationships and deepen our relationships with communities. Museum colleagues and experts all say the same thing: restitution and repatriation don't result in losses, but in gains. If we really embrace that idea, then museums will not become obsolete. Also, I don't think that we will end up with an empty museum if we return lots of objects. Here at the GRASSI museum in Leipzig, we are responsible for a large collection but more than 90% of the collection is not on display. If we continue the process of restitution, we will still have many objects, but we will have also gained numerous new relationships. Moreover, large-scale restitution is not what communities want. They want museums in the global north to tell their stories.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: But how does one stage relationships? A museum is not only about collecting but also about staging, isn't it?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: But wouldn't it be interesting if we started staging these relational aspects – and thus also the relational ethics – in the sense of co-ownership or co-custodianship? That's what I really like. We are thinking

7 Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *Zurückgeben. Über die Restitution afrikanischer Kulturgüter* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2019).

Figure 2: The wedding of the musician Daniel Kahn and dancer Yeva Lapsker in the Jewish Museum Berlin, September 2018. Photo: Stephan Pramme, © Jüdisches Museum Berlin, with the permission of Daniel and Yeva Lapsker Kahn.

about this a lot at the GRASSI because we want to develop as a network museum. The concept of *network museum* connects very much with the concept of *community of implication*.[8] If you show that, and make the relations or the relational aspects visible, then the objects are not dead. For me, it’s about showing the process of opening up perspectives and layeredness that goes beyond expert knowledge of the object. Then the object can have agency, then it is a living thing and not a dead thing anymore.

Edith Franke: I find it appealing that we are returning to the initial question of whether a museum is a cemetery of ‘dead things’ given that we are in the middle

8 The conceptualisation of museums as networks is very much influenced by Manuel Castells’ *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996). Castells wrote about museums as networks himself in Manuel Castells, “Museums in the Information Era: Cultural Connections of Time and Space,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, edited by Ross Parry, 427–34. London: Routledge, 2009. A second source on the idea of network museum is Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory.

Figure 3: The letter 'Kuf' is used to display photos of and information about the wedding in the exhibition "A wie Jüdisch – in 22 Buchstaben durch die Gegenwart" (A is for Jewish – Journeys Through Now in 22 Letters), Jewish Museum Berlin, 26 November 2018 – 19 April 2020. Photo: Yves Sucksdorff, © Jüdisches Museum Berlin.

of discussing how a museum can be a very lively place of encounter and relationships.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: I'd like to mention the wedding we hosted at the Jewish Museum Berlin. I said yes to the wedding because I wanted to show that there are still Jews in Germany, and that Jews still marry and do other things. Hosting the wedding was about embracing the here and now, which I think is enormously important in a German post-Holocaust context. It's not always about Shoah and the Holocaust; it's also about embracing life and showing life and a hopeful future. For me, that was enormously important while I was making the exhibition on contemporary Jewish life. I mean, we could also have documented a funeral and shown Jewish funeral customs, but I preferred the option of a wedding. I understand that maybe some people felt insecure about this. And yes, you could argue that people put their life on display or that it was a sort of 'living Jewish zoo'. I would never have asked people to get married at the Jewish Museum but this couple wanted to get married there. So I think there is an ethical difference. This couple really wanted to get married in the place where they fell in love and that was in the museum.

For them, the Jewish Museum is a sort of secular Jewish space and not a religious space. But it still is a religious space in a way. This is easier in Judaism because you can read the Torah anywhere that you have a Torah and ten people present.

Equally, a Jewish wedding can take place anywhere. This makes it easier than, for example, in Christianity where maybe the church is a different space altogether or the performance pays tribute to a setting in some way. The same goes for the repatriation ceremonies we did in the GRASSI museum. The communities that did the ceremonies in 2019 wanted to do some of them with guests. For them, that was very, very important and who am I to say no? However, film footage of the ceremonies was subsequently used in a documentary, and a few people that saw the documentary had negative connotations of the exploitation of the picturesque 'destination culture'. So, maybe I should be more careful with footage that is being used afterwards in another setting and therefore gaining another layer of meaning. We certainly need to be very transparent about who wants to perform the ceremonies and why.

Edith Franke: Could you imagine there being a request to perform a ritual in your museum which you would refuse because of the content or the intention of the ritual?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: In general, I would say yes to rituals, but there are limitations. When a religious ritual goes against values that we stand for as a museum or is against German law, then I would not want it to be performed. This is why it is enormously important to have a mission statement. Museums are not neutral, and the GRASSI is no exception. A mission statement makes clear what we stand for. The same applies to participatory projects. All contributions are important provided the contributors accept the legal and ethical framework that we have chosen to work within. This also applies to visitors. All visitors are welcome, but we have our principles. If people don't behave appropriately when visiting the galleries or during our museum programmes, they are kindly asked to leave the building.

Edith Franke: Thank you, Léontine. It has become very clear that the task of dealing with religious objects and the topic of religion in a museum context is a highly dynamic, complex, and challenging matter.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: You show very nicely that museums do work with theoretical concepts, but that while we as scholars can sit back and say that we are here to analyse and describe, and to develop some concepts, you as museum directors and curators have the challenge of putting it all into practice, while considering ethical issues, the public and practical matters. I think this is very interesting and also a major challenge, and I would like to express my respect in that regard. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: And of course, I fail every day, as you can imagine. Ethical museum practice is very much about negotiation,[9] being a process with various uncertainties and an unknown outcome. Is it always the *source community* or first owner of the object who is right? And to what extent might that conflict with the fact that as museum director, I am also responsible for my employees and for the museum's funders. I like this new ethics of negotiation because it's so multi-layered and multi-faceted.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke: Through your work in all of this, and the way in which you weigh up all of these different interests, you show that the museum is very much a living place.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch: And not a place of death!

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Contributors

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Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler is Professor of the History and the Study of Religions at Philipps-University Marburg. She was one of the initiators of the REDIM project, and is supervising the PhD projects of REDIM contributors Ferdinand Liefert and Leila Tavangar Ranjbar. She is co-editor of the journals ZfR and JRFM, and a member of the editorial board of various series of books. Based on her studies of Islamic visual cultures (*Gelenkte Blicke. Visuelle Kulturen im Islam* 2011) and religious architecture (*Moscheen in Deutschland 2009*), she has a keen interest in museum spaces. Their material arrangements are entangled with plural perspectives: those of a museum's heterogeneous staff, which become framed by architecture and institutions, intertwined with the worldviews of the visitors who perceive the exhibitions.

Peter J. Bräunlein

Peter J. Bräunlein holds an extracurricular professorship in the Study of Religion from the University of Bremen, and a Master's and a Doctoral degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Freiburg. He has conducted extensive fieldwork on indigenous cosmologies and Catholicism in the Philippines, and has undertaken research on material religion in museums. He has taught at various universities in Germany, and is a senior researcher in the project "The Materiality of (Forced) Migration" in Göttingen.

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Edith Franke

Edith Franke is Professor of Comparative Study of Religions at the Department of the Study of Religions at Philipps-University Marburg. She is head of the university's Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung), executive director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Religions (Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Religionsforschung (ZIR), and the spokesperson for REDIM. Her interest in religious plurality, and the transformation processes of religious beliefs and practice, has fuelled a fascination with the material culture of religion.

Ramona Jelinek-Menke

From 2018 to 2021, Ramona Jelinek-Menke was the coordinator of REDIM. She studied the Study of Religions and Sociology at the Universities of Göttingen and Leipzig until 2014. In 2008, she spent a semester abroad, studying at the Department of Sociology at the University of Ghana in Accra. In 2020, she received her doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Zurich. She is currently working on a postdoctoral project on "Religious Artefacts and Social Difference: On the Materiality of *Religion*, *Gender*, *Disability*, and *Race*" at Philipps-University Marburg.

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Kerstin Johannsen is a research assistant at the Dommuseum in Frankfurt, where she is studying towards her doctorate within the REDIM project. The fascination with objects and images has been central to her studies and her professional activities to date. She studied Islamic Studies at the University of Hamburg, with a focus on the material cultural history of the Arab world, graduating with a Master's degree in 2010. She subsequently undertook a postgraduate degree in Art History at Philipps-University Marburg from 2015 to 2018. She has previously worked as a research assistant at Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

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Ferdinand Liefert is a research assistant at the Department of History of Religion at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Philipps-University Marburg, where he is studying towards his doctorate within the REDIM project. He studied Protestant Theology in Greifswald and Marburg, where he graduated with a diploma in 2014. In his diploma thesis, he examined the representation of Chan Buddhism in a martial arts movie. In the winter semester of 2014/15, he participated in the Interreligious Study in Japan Program (ISJP) at the NCC Center for the Studies of Japanese

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Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch is director of the State Ethnographical Collections of Saxony (i.e. the ethnographic museums of Dresden, Leipzig and Herrnhut). She was previously programme director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, deputy director of the Museum of European Cultures at Berlin, and lecturer on Heritage Theory and Professional Ethics at the Reinwardt Academie, Amsterdam. She is an active member of the boards of several (international) museum organisations. From 2010 to 2016, she was President of the International Committee for Collecting, and, from 2016 to 2020, a member of the Executive Board of the International Council of Museums. She is a regular guest lecturer at various heritage studies programmes throughout Europe. She is supervising Pardis Eskandaripour's research project, which is taking place at the GRASSI Museum.

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Alisha Meininghaus is a doctoral candidate and lecturer at the Department of the Study of Religions at Philipps-University Marburg. She is a fellow of the Leo Baeck Fellowship Programme and the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes). For her dissertation, she has been researching Jewish amulets from German-speaking areas from the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition, she is active at the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) at the Philipps-University. Her research areas include theories of magic, contemporary Jewish life in Germany, and religious artefacts in museums.

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Susanne Rodemeier is a trained ethnologist of religion with a regional focus on Southeast Asia and Oceania. Within this framework, she has a particular interest in local religions, and their engagement with both processes of Christianisation and Islamisation. Since 2018, she has been a curator at the Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung) at Philipps-University Marburg, and has been a team member of the REDIM project since 2018. Her current post-doctoral research focus is on the provenance of objects from colonial and missionary contexts.

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