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## From Museum Objects to Trading Goods: the Ethnographic Doublet

### ABSTRACT

Between 1873 and 1973 the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin deaccessioned about 30,000 objects from its collections. Almost all of the items had been removed as so-called doublets. In relation to the unique character of ethno-

graphic objects this raises questions about a doublet's meaning and the background of this part of museum history. This paper explains how the term 'doublet' was used and why this resulted in a severe loss of unique ethnographic objects.

This article sheds light on the causes, background and genesis of a particular aspect of the collection history of today's Ethnological Museum Berlin. It concerns the disposal of around 30,000 objects, about 6%<sup>1</sup> of the institution's holdings of ethnographic, archaeological and cultural-historical objects from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, which the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, as it was known, deaccessioned as so-called doublets (*Dubletten*) between 1873 and 1973. Some were given in exchange to other museums, individuals, and dealers, such as Arthur Speyer (I 1858-1923; II 1894-1958)<sup>2</sup> or Julius Konietzko (1886-1952), but a considerably larger number were sold.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The total amount of the collection is today given as around 500,000 objects, of which the vast majority was acquired prior to 1914 (<https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/ueber-uns/profil/> 24 December 2021).

2 Markus Schindlbeck, *Gefunden und verloren: Arthur Speyer, die dreißiger Jahre und Verluste der Sammlung Südsee des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin* (Berlin: Ethnologisches Museum, 2012). Martin Schultz, Arthur Speyer – drei Generationen Sammler und Händler, in *Kunst und Kontext* 2 (2016), 5-7.

3 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt als Tausch- und Handelsgegenstand: Zum Bedeutungswandel musealer Objekte* (Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2012), 230ff; Beatrix Hoffmann, Unikat oder Dublette?, in Elisabeth

The discarding of so-called doublets, i.e., objects classified as “*doublet piece[s]*,”<sup>4</sup> is surprising in relation to the character inherent in most ethnographica and archaeologica as unique specimens. This raises questions about the meaning of the term doublet and its interpretation at the time, but also about the background of these disposals. Even today, in exceptional cases, sustainable collection management of a museum may include the deaccessioning of objects.<sup>5</sup> However, such an extensive disposal of collection items through sale and exchange as once practiced by the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin is – from today’s point of view – in clear contradiction to the currently valid and internationally most widely received definition of the museum by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). According to this definition, the museum is “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society [...] which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment.”<sup>6</sup>

The mission of preservation describes the museum as a space through which the material and immaterial cultural heritage of mankind shall be protected from circulation in economic cycles and shall thus remain permanently accessible to society.<sup>7</sup> The transformation into a museum object manifests itself in the uniqueness of an item that stems from its aura<sup>8</sup> and biography<sup>9</sup> in association with the purpose of being conserved.<sup>10</sup> This is tantamount to sacralization.<sup>11</sup> It formally dedicates the museum object to eternity by

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Tietmeyer et al., eds., *Die Sprache der Dinge. Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf materielle Kultur* (Münster/New York/Berlin, Waxmann, 2010), 99-108. See also SMB-PK, EM, IIIb-1-9.

4 Definition: “doppelt vorhandenes Stück”, Duden (<https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Dublette>, accessed 3 January 2022).

5 Deutscher Museumsbund, ed., *Nachhaltiges Sammeln. Ein Leitfaden zum Sammeln und Abgeben von Museumsgut* (Berlin/Leipzig, 2011) (<https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/leitfaden-nachhaltiges-sammeln.pdf>, accessed 3 January 2022); International Council of Museums, ed., *Guidelines on Deaccessioning of the International Council of Museums* (2019) (<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Guidelines-on-Deaccessioning-of-the-International-Council-of-Museums.pdf>, accessed 4 January 2022), International Council of Museums, *ICOM Code of Ethics* (2017) ([https://icom-deutschland.de/images/PDF/icom\\_code\\_of\\_ethics\\_2017\\_eng.pdf](https://icom-deutschland.de/images/PDF/icom_code_of_ethics_2017_eng.pdf), accessed 4 January 2022).

6 ICOM Statute, Art.3, paragraph 1 in the current version from 2007, updated in 2017 ([https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017\\_ICOM\\_Statutes\\_EN.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017_ICOM_Statutes_EN.pdf), accessed 4 January 2022).

7 Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1998); Friedrich Scheele, *Geschichtsmuseen*, in Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*, 71.

8 Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in *Schriften*, vol.1. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), 372.

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

10 Rita Müller, *Technikmuseen*, in Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*, 55. (<https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/leitfaden-nachhaltiges-sammeln.pdf>, accessed 3 January 2022); Friedrich Scheele, *Geschichtsmuseen*, in Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*, 71.

11 Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Dinge* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2003).

keeping it “forever”.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the classification of a museum object as a doublet leads to its profanization. It denies the piece the uniqueness which is a vital part of its identity as a museum object.<sup>13</sup> The items to be given away as doublets were often described as inferior, or at least dispensable – that is, not worth consecrating for eternity (anymore)<sup>14</sup> – or as items “which are no loss to us”<sup>15</sup> or which were “in no way noteworthy”.<sup>16</sup> The profanization of a museum object is most clearly expressed in its conversion into commercial goods, i.e. a re-economization.

## Preconditions for the disposal of museum objects as doublets

The selection of items to be given away was the responsibility of the head of every department. They presented their selection to the museum’s expert committee – a body to which scientists, collectors, and former colonial officials were appointed.<sup>17</sup> Their approval in connection with the confirmation that the objects were dispensable for the museum formed the prerequisite for the deaccession permission granted by the director general of the museum. In addition, the responsible minister had to approve deaccessions with a value of more than 500 Reichsmarks.<sup>18</sup> With few exceptions, the expert commission confirmed all selections of objects to be given away and thus cleared the way for the vast deaccession of objects to be sold instead of preserving them.<sup>19</sup> As a body whose members were not dependent on the museum and were therefore supposed to independently guide the development of a collection, the expert commission failed in its duty. The profit-oriented sales of collections were a mistake that bordered on misappropriation of common property. However, the commission did not raise objections. Already before the official foundation of the museum in 1873, collection items were exchanged with other museums,<sup>20</sup> but the number of items involved was low compared to later years. In preparation for future exchange transactions, similar objects were put aside during the inventory process and documented in a separate directory, the catalog of doublets (*Dublettenkatalog*). After the death of Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the founding director of the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, the procedure for selecting objects for deaccessioning changed. The reasons for this were external factors, above all financial difficulties

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12 Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*, 29.

13 Beatrix Hoffmann, Unikat oder Dublette?.

14 SMB-PK, EM, IIIb-1.

15 Albert Grünwedel (1856-1935) to Roemer-Museum Hildesheim (28.5.1905), SMB-PK, EM, IIIb-1 (E 1012/05).

16 Walter Krickeberg (1885-1962) to Walter Lehmann (1878-1939) (16.2.1932), SMB-PK, EM, IIIb-7 (E 100/32).

17 Markus Schindlbeck, Kolonialwaren und Trophäen. Die Abgabe von Dubletten und das Berliner Museum für Völkerkunde im Kontext des Kolonialrevisionismus, in *Paideuma* 47 (2001), 86.

18 Markus Schindlbeck, Kolonialwaren und Trophäen, 86.

19 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 56f.

20 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 217.

and a considerable lack of space, coupled with a lack of understanding for a collecting practice that was perceived as chaotic.<sup>21</sup>

Instead of providing the museum with an acquisition budget, the general management of the royal museums in Berlin requested in 1906 that so-called doublets be put aside for the purpose of sale to cover the cost of future purchases.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the selection criteria for the removal of an object as a doublet were no longer external or typological similarities to other objects in the collection, but the need for funds and the estimated economic value of an item. Nevertheless, these items were still classified as doublets in order to sell them in accordance with the museum statutes. This prompted a change in meaning of the already vaguely defined idea of a doublet, which ultimately led to its use as synonym. In the end, every object that was to be sold from the collections was classified as a doublet – regardless of whether it resembled other items at least externally or not. The synonym remained attached to the concept of the doublet for several decades. It effectively concealed the actual reasons for numerous disposals from the collection, which soon turned out to be no longer for reasons of financial and spatial difficulties at the museum, but also included individual interests of the curators. The concept of the doublet conveyed the impression that the items were selected as dispensable on the basis of scholarly considerations and the application of systematic criteria.

The timespan considered here began with the foundation of what was then the Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin in 1873. It ended one hundred years later when the UNESCO “Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property” came into force in 1972.<sup>23</sup> This convention explicitly forbids not only the trade, but also the exchange of cultural heritage.<sup>24</sup> Even though further deaccessions were made from the collection of today’s Ethnological Museum Berlin after 1973, they were no longer linked to the concept of a doublet but were based on the objects themselves and their specific character. This was the case, for example, when the European collection was disposed of in the context of the founding of the Museum of European Cultures in 1999.<sup>25</sup> Future deaccessions are to be expected, especially in the context of restitutions to source communities respectively societies of origin.

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21 Glenn H. Penny, *Im Schatten Humboldts. Eine tragische Geschichte der deutschen Ethnologie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2019), 20.

22 Rundschreiben der Generalverwaltung der Königlichen Museen (19 November 1906), SMB-PK, EM, IIIb-2 (E 2077/06).

23 UNESCO ([http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13039&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), accessed 6 January 2022).

24 The agreement was only ratified by the German Federal Government in 2007, but the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin has adhered to it voluntarily as a member of the German Museum Association.

25 Museum der Europäischen Kulturen (<https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/ueber-uns/geschichte/> accessed 3 January 2022).

In 2021 the German Federal Government started negotiations with the state of Nigeria to return artworks from the Kingdom of Benin that are kept in German museums.<sup>26</sup> On 1 July 2022, a joint declaration on the return of the so-called Benin bronzes and bilateral museum cooperation between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Federal Republic of Nigeria was signed.<sup>27</sup> The artworks from the Kingdom of Benin were looted in 1897 by members of the British colonial army during a raid on the royal capital and subsequently sold on the European art market. The Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin acquired several hundred pieces of these plundered artworks which will now be among the first to be returned to Nigeria.

Human remains such as mummies from Peru are likely to be the subject of future deaccessioning. From today's perspective, they too have to be repatriated to their countries or societies of origin. In preparation for this deaccessioning, however, the museum world now has carefully developed guidelines at its disposal.<sup>28</sup>

## The administrative basis for the disposal of museum objects as doublets

A prerequisite for any disposal of items from the collections were the supplementary provisions to the statute of the royal museums in Berlin, established in 1868.<sup>29</sup> They generally allowed a deaccession of museum objects under the precondition that they were doublets. However, this provision did not contain any further explanation of the term, which gave scope to arbitrary interpretation. The lack of a written concept of managed collecting for the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin increased this danger. Bastian had variously formulated the concept of ethnographic collecting and his vision of the ethnological museum as an “archive of mankind” in his writings, but his texts were difficult to read and interpret. He understood ethnographic objects as historical documents and “the

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26 Bundesregierung Deutschland, Erklärung zum Umgang mit Benin-Bronzen, PM 137 (30 April 2021), (<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/bundeskanzleramt/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/aktuelles/erklaerung-zum-umgang-mit-benin-bronzen-gruetters-wichtige-weg-marke-fuer-verstaendigung-und-versoehnung--1902114>, accessed 5 January 2022).

27 <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/benin-bronzen-koennen-zurueckkehren-2058816> (accessed 3 August 2022).

28 Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*; ICOM, *Guidelines on Deaccessioning*; ICOM, *Code of Ethics*.

29 “Bestimmungen über die Stellung der Abteilungsdirektoren und die Verwendung der sächlichen Fonds bei den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin. Ergänzung zum Statut der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin von 1868” (SMB-ZA, D-Slg. 001).

only texts from which the spiritual life of non-scripted tribes could one day be read out again”<sup>30</sup> in order to explore the “history of mankind through space and time”.<sup>31</sup>

Bastian’s younger museum colleagues already deviated from his collecting concept. They followed their own – often vague – ideas and sometimes revealed a serious ignorance about the relevance of the objects to be given away. One example is the classification of numerous *tjurungas* from Australia as so-called doublets, each of which, however, has a highly complex, sacred and identity-forming significance for the respective source communities respectively societies of origin.<sup>32</sup> Last but not least, the museum’s scholars used the classification and submission of doublets to consolidate their professional careers.<sup>33</sup> The concept of the doublet, which is in any case susceptible to misinterpretation, was thus additionally used to assert personal interests.

## Economization of the doublet

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin has offered so-called colonial doublets (*Kolonial-Dubletten*) to other German museums:<sup>34</sup> while they were mostly given away at the cost of transport, they were sometimes also sold at a profit.<sup>35</sup> These ethnographic items came from the German colonial areas, but the museum was not interested in keeping them. It had received them on the basis of a Decree of the Federal Council (Bundesratsbeschluss) from 1889.<sup>36</sup> This decree, adopted at Bastian’s instigation, stipulated that all ethnographic items that were collected in the context of state-funded expeditions in the colonial areas had to be given to the ethnological museum in Berlin. Later the decree also applied to ethnographic objects collected by civil servants<sup>37</sup> of the German colonial administration and members of the armed colonial forces,<sup>38</sup> who had collected during their service and wanted to sell the harvest. According to the Decree of the Federal Council they had to give first refusal of their collections

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30 In German “einzigsten Texte, aus welchen das Geistesleben schriftloser Stämme einstens sich wieder herauslesen lasse”: Adolf Bastian, Ueber ethnologische Sammlungen, in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 17 (1885), 40.

31 Siegrid Westphal-Hellbusch, Zur Geschichte des Museums, in Kurt Krieger and Gerd Koch, eds., *Hundert Jahre Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin*. Baessler-Archiv N.F. 21 (1973), 5.

32 Cf. Markus Schindlbeck, Tjurunga für die Mission: Ethnographika aus Australien, in Markus Schindlbeck, ed., *Expeditionen in die Südsee. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung und Geschichte der Südsee-Sammlung des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin* (SMB-EM Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Reimer, 2005), 43-64.

33 Glenn H. Penny, *Im Schatten*, 21.

34 Initially this term was exclusively for internal use, but soon it became a term for a more general usage (Acta Kolonial-Dubletten, SMB-PK, EM, IB 47, 1-2).

35 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 157.

36 This decree came into force in 1890 (UI Nr. 1043, SMB-PK, EM, SMB-PK, EM, IB 46, Kol. Gen. 1, E 759/90).

37 *Deutsches Kolonialblatt. Amtsblatt für die Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reichs*. Hg. von der Kolonial-Abteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes. II/24 (Berlin, 15 December 1891), 535.

38 *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, VII/21 (Berlin 1 November 1896), 669.

to the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin.<sup>39</sup> However, this order was often circumvented because other German ethnographic museums approached civil servants and members of the colonial troops directly with requests for ethnographic objects.

The subtext to the Decree of the Federal Council were Bastian's efforts to establish 'his' museum as the central ethnographic museum of the German Empire.<sup>40</sup> Bastian wanted to give 'his' museum privileges over other German museums when it came to acquiring collections. Here the fierce competition among German ethnological museums becomes apparent, which led to the explosive growth of their collections at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> By offering the so-called colonial doublets to other German museums, the museum in Berlin generated symbolic capital for itself, since these were deemed to be objects that the museum did not need because it already had better or more beautiful ones. The other museums also recognized this and often considered them as worthless.<sup>42</sup> By distributing pieces as second-rate, the museum effectively staged its claim to a priority position.<sup>43</sup> On a symbolic level, this was an economization of the colonial doublets which continued on a material level. Since museums which took up the offers from Berlin had to cover costs for transport and sometimes also pay for the objects themselves, they ultimately perceived the distribution of colonial doublets as a trade in museum objects. Even if the items on offer were ultimately not museum objects in the strictest sense of the word because they had not been inventoried, trading in doublets became initially *conceivable*, and at the beginning of the twentieth century it became *real*.

## Funding of fundamental museum duties through the sale of doublets

Current guidelines on deaccessioning, which may also lead to the sale of museum objects, emphasize uniformly that the profit must in any case go directly to the collection.<sup>44</sup> When the general directorate of the royal museums in Berlin refused to set an acquisition budget for the Museum für Völkerkunde in 1906 and instead instructed the museum to finance new acquisitions through the sale of so-called doublets, this could still be considered as a borderline case from today's perspective. Financing the future development of a collection is actually one of the fundamental duties of a museum sponsor and should by no means be carried out through inventory sales. Yet the profits from these ini-

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39 *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, XIV/8 (Berlin, 15.4.1903), 169.

40 Siegrid Westphal-Hellbusch, *Geschichte des Museums*, 16.

41 Glenn H. Penny, *Objects of Culture. Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, (Chapel Hill, London: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12.

42 Wolfgang Lustig, "Außer ein paar zerbrochenen Pfeilen nichts zu verteilen ..." – Ethnographische Sammlungen aus den deutschen Kolonien und ihre Verteilung an Museen 1889-1914, in *Mitteilungen des Museums für Völkerkunde Hamburg* 18 (1988), 157-178.

43 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 155f.

44 Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*; ICOM, *Guidelines on Deaccessioning*; ICOM, *Code of Ethics*.

tial sales were used to build up the collection. Nonetheless, they were based on a major change in relation to the valuation of collection items. The decision about the sale of an object was no longer made from itself in relation to the collection. The refusal of purchase funds initiated the compulsion to autogenerate the required funds.

Forcing the museum to overcome other financial hardships by selling its collection objects was a small step. In the 1920s, these challenges constituted mainly the move to a new depot on the outskirts of Berlin and the establishment of a permanent exhibition. Their funding would clearly have been the responsibility of the public sector. However, each of the museum's departments had to raise the funds for the move and for the creation of a permanent exhibition itself. The heads of the African and Asian departments of the museum chose to sell few pieces of high value that would fetch high prices on the art market. As a result, seventeen Benin bronzes and several valuable pieces from the Turfan collection were sold, as were frescoes and head sculptures from the caves on the edge of the Taklamakan desert.<sup>45</sup> The Oceanic and American department opted for a different approach and relied on quantity. To "finance the move and the realignment of the collections"<sup>46</sup>, several thousand objects were selected and sold, for instance to the dealer Arthur Speyer (II) and to the museum in Gothenburg. From the American collection, these were primarily archaeological items, including numerous pre-Columbian textiles, from the collection of the Hanoverian textile merchant Wilhelm Gretzer (1847–1926). The Museum für Völkerkunde had acquired this collection already with the indication that its purchase price of 100,000 Reichsmarks would include doublets at a value of about 20,000–30,000 Reichsmarks.<sup>47</sup>

In 1906, a lack of space and finance coupled with Bastian's misunderstood collecting concept – which in practice had become an almost unmanageable and thus perceived as chaotic 'collecting everything' – gave rise to the arrangement for the sale of doublets. Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), director general of the royal museums in Berlin since 1905, played a major role in this. As an employee of the paintings gallery (*Gemäldegalerie*), he himself had deaccessioned around 1,000 artworks as doublets around 1880.<sup>48</sup> As an art historian, he had little understanding of Bastian's collecting concept which was responsible for the hopeless overcrowding of the museum building shortly after its opening in 1886.<sup>49</sup> The interior of the museum seemed to him like a "desolate depot" and, given that the corridors teemed with objects, he saw a considerable fire hazard.<sup>50</sup> Bode's order to sell ethnographic doublets was the beginning of a process which ultimately led to the loss of many valuable and unique items in the collection of the ethnological mu-

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45 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 261.

46 SMB-PK, EM IIIb-5-6.

47 Max Schmidt (1874-1950) to Wilhelm von Bode (28. 12. 1906), SMB-PK, EM IB 69 (E 2158/06).

48 Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben I*. Textband, ed. by Thomas W. Gaethgens and Barbara Paul (Berlin: Nicolai, 1997), 183.

49 Siegrid Westphal-Hellbusch, *Geschichte des Museums*, 16ff.

50 Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben I*, 227.



seum and was deeply regretted by later curators.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the museum promoted the trade in ethnographic objects, albeit rather unintentionally, and influenced prices. One reason for this was resale to other museums, which was not ruled out when it sold objects to dealers. The Speyer merchant dynasty (Arthur Speyer I and II) lived on the profits they generated as discrete trading partners of ethnographic museums by buying and selling items from museum collections. For example, in 1923/24 Arthur Speyer (II) sold more than 240 pre-Columbian items to the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève. The objects had formerly belonged to the Gretzer collection of the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin and had only recently been sold to Arthur Speyer (II).<sup>52</sup>

## Doublets in the service of professional careers

When the general management of the Berlin museums required doublets to be set aside in 1906, the department heads of the ethnological museum took quite a critical view of this order. To Bode's annoyance, for example, Felix von Luschan (1854–1924), until 1910 head of the African and Oceanic department, repeatedly stated that there were no doublets in the collection in his care.<sup>53</sup> Yet when it came to his professional passion, physical anthropology,<sup>54</sup> he offered items from the African and Oceanic collection in exchange for skulls. These objects had to be declared as doublets in order to be salable in exchange for human remains.

Even thirty years later, the Africanist Hermann Baumann (1902–1972) still refused to select objects from the African collection as so-called doublets. They were intended to serve as illustrative material for the colonial revisionist propaganda of the Reichskolonialbund.<sup>55</sup> For the first time, he put down on paper for the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin what he considered a doublet: “pieces of the same shape from the same tribe ... while pieces of the same shape from different tribes ... are just as important as documents as those of different shapes.”<sup>56</sup> Baumann's assessment of what constituted a doublets, however, turned out completely different when it came to furthering his own career. In connection with the German Fascist ideology and its efforts to expand towards Eastern Europe and beyond, a Eurasian department was to be established, and Baumann succeeded in 1934 in becoming its curator. To strengthen his professional position in

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51 Markus Schindlbeck, *Gefunden und verloren*.

52 Beatrix Hoffmann, Posibilidades y limitaciones para la reconstrucción y recontextualización de la colección Gretzer, in *Baessler Archiv*, 55 (2007), 23-36.

53 Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben I*, 323.

54 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 40.

55 Markus Schindlbeck, *Kolonialwaren und Trophäen*, 92.

56 In German “formgleiche Stücke vom gleichen Stamm... während formgleiche Stücke verschiedener Stämme ... als Dokumente genauso wichtig sind, wie formungleiche.” H. Baumann (30 November 1936), SMB-SP, EM IIIb-8 (E 1053/36).

the museum, he wanted to build up the Eurasian collection as quickly as possible.<sup>57</sup> The ambitious scholar used every means to achieve this, which meant that his colleagues had to remove a total of 317 objects as so-called doublets from the collections of their responsibility.<sup>58</sup> These objects were given to the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne in exchange for almost all of its European ethnographic objects. This exchange was not only viewed critically by Baumann's colleagues in Berlin, but the curators at Cologne later also considered it highly problematic and regrettable.<sup>59</sup> One reason for regret was the fact that the museum in Cologne gave more than twice as many pieces to Berlin as it received in return. All departments were involved in the exchange with the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, including the African one. Shortly afterwards, in 1936, Baumann became responsible for the African collection and stated that there were no objects to be considered as doublets. Yet a few years later this did not prevent him from urging the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin to give an enormous collection including African objects on permanent loan to the university in Vienna. In the meantime he had become the chair for ethnology at the University of Vienna, and once again he instrumentalized ethnographic objects as doublets to strengthen his professional position. At his instigation, in 1941 the Institut für Völkerkunde at the university of Vienna received more than 1,160 objects from Africa, America, Asia and Oceania on permanent loan from the museum in Berlin.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

At present, the concept of the doublet plays no role in the collection policy of ethnographic museums, including deaccessions. However, the term 'doublet' is still encountered in relation to the collections of art museums or museums of the history of technology. These museums keep objects in their collections which are largely identical due to technical reproductions or serial manufacture.<sup>61</sup> The sale of so-called ethnographic doublets from the collection of today's Ethnological Museum Berlin led to the severe loss of numerous valuable pieces. These deaccessions were made possible by the interaction of various unfavorable factors and contributed considerably to the adoption of the doublet as a concept, which ended in a misuse of the term. Adverse factors were initially a lack of space and finances for the museum, but also the personal interests and passions of the museum staff.

The use of the term doublet suggested a non-existing concept of caring for a collection and a scholarly approach to the objects. However, there was no collection concept and

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57 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 142.

58 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 145.

59 Lothar Pützstück, "Symphonie in Moll". *Julius Lips und die Kölner Völkerkunde* (Paffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995).

60 Beatrix Hoffmann, *Das Museumsobjekt*, 149.

61 Deutscher Museumsbund, *Nachhaltiges Sammeln*.

little knowledge about the relevance of the individual items. The context of many disposals rather reveals the serious ignorance about the meaning of the objects to be disposed of, as the example of the *tjurungas* shows.

Today, they are treated as sensitive objects because of their sacred and identity-forming significance<sup>62</sup> and, like the Benin artworks, are the subject of restitution negotiations to the source communities respectively societies of origin. Thus, deaccessions from the collection holdings of the Ethnological Museum Berlin will continue to take place in the future. They are even necessary if the museum is to take its self-image seriously and deal with the legacy and consequences of colonialism.<sup>63</sup> Responsible deaccessioning is a great challenge for the future, because it requires comprehensive knowledge of the objects. An indispensable prerequisite for this is research into their provenance, together with members of the respective source communities respectively societies of origin. Only in this way can the museum, in the context of disposals, fulfill its responsibility for the collections, the cultural heritage entrusted to the preservation of future generations.

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62 Markus Schindlbeck, *Tjurunga für die Mission: Ethnographika aus Australien*, in Markus Schindlbeck, ed., *Expeditionen in die Südsee* (Berlin, Reimer-Verlag), 43-64.

63 Cf. Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Selbstverständnis (<https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/ueber-uns/profil/>, accessed 6 January 2022).