



University of Naples L'Orientale  
Department of Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean

PhD in Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean Studies  
XXXVIII cycle (2022-2023)

**Digital Heritage as Decolonial Practice: The Case of the  
Nias Ethnographic Collection in the Museum of  
Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence**

**Candidate**

Ahmad Ginanjar Purnawibawa  
DAAM/00159

**Supervisor**

Prof. Chiara Zazzaro

**Co-supervisor**

Prof. Antonia Soriente

Napoli, 2025



**Dottorato**  
**Asia**  
**Africa**  
**e Mediterraneo**

**University of Naples L'Orientale**  
**Department of Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean**

**PhD in Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean Studies**  
**XXXVIII cycle (2022-2023)**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

Title:

**Digital Heritage as Decolonial Practice:  
The Case of the Nias Ethnographic Collection in the  
Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence**

**Candidate**

Ahmad Ginanjar Purnawibawa  
DAAM/00159

**Research Director**

Prof. Chiara Zazzaro

**Co-Director of Research**

Prof. Antonia Soriente

**Coordinator**

Prof. Ignazio Tantillo

Academic Year 2025

## Abstract

This research departs from a question of how and what to decolonise from a diasporic ethnographic collection in a museum located in a country that is not directly related to the community of origin through formal colonisation. This thesis, through a case study of the Nias ethnographic collection held at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, Italy, tried to explore the answer. Collected by Elio Modigliani in 1886, the Nias collection, comprising 180 ethnographic objects and 26 human remains, stands today as both a testament to Modigliani's scientific endeavours and as a fragmented record of Nias' cultural heritage before the profound transformations brought by colonialism and missionary intervention.

This research investigates how decolonisation can be performed through digital restitution, focusing on the reactivation of these displaced objects and their reconnection with the Nias communities of origin. It examines how local stakeholders, including museum personnel, scholars, community leaders, and craftspeople, perceive restitution not merely as the physical return of artefacts, but as the restoration of knowledge, access, and cultural agency. Fieldwork conducted in 2023 and 2024 revealed that communities in Nias prioritise visibility and engagement over ownership, emphasising digital reconnection as a meaningful and pragmatic alternative to repatriation.

The findings demonstrate that digital restitution, when conducted collaboratively and ethically, can operate as a decolonising practice, redistributing authority and enabling shared narratives between institutions and source communities. Through the creation of open-access resources via Wikimedia, Sketchfab, and YouTube, this project facilitated both scholarly and community access to the collection, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and the revitalisation of traditional knowledge.

This thesis argues that the Nias collection represents a form of shared heritage, where digital access functions as a bridge for reinterpreting colonial archives and supporting intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. By digitally returning the Nias objects, the project has allowed the community to reclaim their voice and reinterpret their heritage on their own terms. Ultimately, this study shows that restitution, whether physical or digital, is not an endpoint but part of an ongoing process of decolonisation.

*This page is intentionally left blank*

# List of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>List of Contents</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Research .....	1
1.2 Research Problems and Objectives .....	3
1.3 Theoretical Framework .....	6
1.4 Methodology Overview .....	8
1.5 Scope of this Research .....	9
1.6 Researcher Positionality .....	11
1.7 Thesis Outline .....	12
<b>Chapter 2. Italian Museums and the Colonial Collections</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Brief Modern History of Museums in Italy and European Context .....	15
2.1.1 Early Museum Concept in Renaissance Italy (16th - 17th Century) .....	15
2.1.2 The Rise of Public and National Museums (18th - 19th Century) .....	17
2.1.3 Fascist Regime, Colonial Museums and Identity Building (20th century and beyond) .....	23
2.2 Ethnographic Objects as Colonial Legacy .....	26
2.2.1 Ethnographic Museums and Colonisation .....	28
2.2.2 Ethnographic Objects of Colonial Context .....	30
2.3 The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence: The Multifaceted Faces of the Museum .....	38
2.3.1 The Philosophical Foundations of the Museum .....	39
2.3.2 The Fascist and Racial Science .....	44
<b>Chapter 3. Nias Ethnographic Collections in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence: An Introduction to the Colonial Collection</b> .....	<b>51</b>
3.1 General description of Exhibition Rooms .....	52
3.1.1 Introduction Room .....	53
3.1.2 Room 8 - Borneo and Malay Archipelago .....	56
3.1.3 Room 9 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Nias) .....	58
3.1.4 Room 10 and 11 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Mentawai - Batak) .....	60
3.1.5 Room 12 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Batak) .....	61
3.2 The Nias Collections .....	62
3.2.1 Elio Modigliani and the Nias Exploration .....	62
3.2.2 The Collection in numbers .....	71

3.3 Embedded Coloniality in Modigliani’s Collection .....	74
3.3.1 The Story of Who? .....	74
3.3.2 Discussing Decoloniality .....	83
<b>Chapter 4. Restitution as Decolonisation for Ethnographic Objects? .....</b>	<b>89</b>
4.1 Restitution = Decolonisation? .....	89
4.2 International Regulations and Problematic Practices of Cultural Objects Restitution .....	91
4.3 Restitution in the Italian Museums Context .....	101
4.3.1 Restitution Cases from Italy .....	105
4.4 Restitution in the Indonesian Museums Context .....	109
4.4.1 Regulations Concerning Restitution in Indonesian Law .....	109
4.4.2 Restitution Cases to Indonesia .....	114
4.4.3 The Agenda within Restitution in Indonesia .....	125
<b>Chapter 5. Digital Restitution as Decolonisation Tools .....</b>	<b>131</b>
5.1 Digital Restitution: An Introduction .....	135
5.2 Example Cases of Digital Restitution .....	137
5.2.1 Mapping Philippine Material Culture .....	137
5.2.2 Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts & Cultures (GRASAC) .....	142
5.2.3 Digital return of ethnographic collection and value creation by an originating community in Baguia, Timor-Leste .....	144
5.2.4 Several non-physical returns of the Nias collections from the Netherlands .....	147
Pameran Jejak Denmark di Nias (2023) .....	147
Melihat di Balik Wajah Ono Niha (2024) .....	148
Suara yang Pulang (2025) .....	150
5.3 Digital Restitution Channels .....	152
<b>Chapter 6. Digital Restitution on Ethnographic Objects - Case Study: Nias Collection in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence .....</b>	<b>157</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	157
6.2 Museum Workshop - Objects Documentation and Digitisation .....	160
6.2.1 Photography .....	164
6.2.2 Photogrammetry .....	168
6.3 Fieldwork - Ethnographic Research .....	176
6.3.1 Possibility of Physical Restitution of the Nias Ethnographic Collection	181
6.3.2 Nias Ethnographic Objects staying in Italy .....	191
6.3.3 The Possible Use of Digital Restitution .....	192
6.3.4 The Sensitive Collection .....	195
6.4 Sharing Access and Narratives .....	204

<b>Chapter 7. Conclusion - Digital Restitution as a Middle Way .....</b>	<b>225</b>
7.1 Summary of Findings .....	225
7.2 Decolonisation Beyond Repatriation .....	230
7.3 Contributions of the Study .....	232
7.4 Recommendations for Future Research and Practice .....	234
<b>References .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Appendix I.....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>Appendix II.....</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Appendix III.....</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>Appendix IV.....</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>Appendix V.....</b>	<b>295</b>

## List of Figures

- Figure 2.1. Illustration of Ferrante Imperato's Dell'Historia Naturale (Naples 1599). The illustration shows visitors exploring the collection (Anonymous, for Ferrante Imperato, 1599, printed in Venedig 1672).....
- Figure 2.2. The foreign ethnography section in the Colonial Museum, Rome. Photo Archives, Museo Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini" (Lerario, 2011).....
- Figure 2.3. Number of ethnography and anthropology museums and galleries in Italy in 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2024).....
- Figure 2.4. Visual explanation of the gradient of power relations within ethnographic objects of a colonial context (adapted from Van Beurden, 2017).....
- Figure 2.5. The cover of La difesa della razza I (5 August 1938), utilising the source of photographs by Cipriani (Collection of Bologna Biblioteche).....
- Figure 3.1. The Floor plan of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, which has maintained the same layout since its early days (Source: Exhibition Itinerary, University of Firenze, with modification by author).....
- Figure 3.2. Exhibited panel in the first/introduction room in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence.....
- Figure 3.3. The label of the facial plaster-casts making processes, with photographs of Lidio Cipriani.....
- Figure 3.4. One of the cabinets in Room 8 exposes a mixed collection of ethnographic objects from Malaysia and Indonesia.....
- Figure 3.5. One of the cabinets in Room 9, exposing the plaster statue of Kanolo, son of the chief of Hilizihönö, in his war attire.....
- Figure 3.6. General view of Room 10, highlighted by several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Mentawai, a map of Sumatra and a portrait of Elio Modigliani.....
- Figure 3.7. General view of Room 11, including several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Batak and a plaster statue of a Sipora woman.....
- Figure 3.8. General view of Room 12, highlighted by several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Batak and a series of plaster cast faces.....
- Figure 3.9. Elio Modigliani's trip to Nias Island (Modigliani, 1890; modified from Google Maps, 2025).....
- Figure 3.10. The sirih bag taken by Modigliani from the Chief of Bawolowalani, collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, object number 5769 (Photographed by author, 2023).....
- Figure 3.11. The tolögu stolen by Modigliani from a warrior, collection of the

Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, object number 5668 (Photographed by author, 2023).....	
Figure 3.12. The number and provenance of the Modigliani’s Indonesia ethnographic collection in the Museum of Anthropology of Florence, in relation to Table 3.3.....	
Figure 3.13. Diagram of interpretive elements and labels in the museum (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2011).....	
Figure 3.14. Exhibition title label of the Nias cabinet before (top) and during the project (bottom).....	
Figure 3.15. Supplementary label of Nias in the museum, heavily featured on Modigliani’s story instead of the Nias culture.....	
Figure 5.1. Diasporic Institutions housing Nias ethnographic objects in the world. Darker colour signifies that more institutions hold the Nias objects.....	
Figure 5.2. Mapping Philippine Material Culture web page.....	
Figure 5.3. Information on one of the objects in the project.....	
Figure 5.4. The “In Conversation” activity in the project involved. (left) The team is preparing materials to be discussed, and (right) one of the community members is showing his object alongside the museum collection.....	
Figure 5.5. Capture of the GRASAC Knowledge Sharing System (GKS).....	
Figure 5.6. One of the community members, Domingos da Costa, reviews photographs of swords documented in the project, compared to his private collection (Barrkman, 2021).....	
Figure 5.7. One of the sections from the Jejak Denmark di Nias exhibition (taken during the first survey, March 2023).....	
Figure 5.8. S. Boonstra, one of the members of the research in the Melihat di Balik Wajah exhibition in Nias Heritage Museum (TVRINews, 2024).....	
Figure 5.9. The Jaap Kunst collection in the Southeast Asia Hearing platform.....	
Figure 5.10. Example of digital collection in Wikimedia (Sumatra Numismatic Museum).....	
Figure 6.1. The design of this research includes the approaches and expected results of each stage.....	
Figure 6.2. The digitised version of the written record by Mantegazza in 1887 and Mochi in 1904.....	
Figure 6.3. Museum object documentation workflow during the project.....	
Figure 6.4. Moving the objects carefully during the workshop, with assistance from museum staff.....	
Figure 6.5. Diagram of object and camera positions relative to each other during the	

still photography documentation.....

Figure 6.6. Photographs of several Nias ethnographic objects.....

Figure 6.7. The printed postcard-style photographs of the objects were helpful in identification during fieldwork on Nias.....

Figure 6.8. Photogrammetry workflow in this research.....

Figure 6.9. Different configurations for ‘bundle selection’ or overlap images (Hanke & Grussenmeyer, 2002).....

Figure 6.10. Diagram of object and camera positions using the turntable technique (left) and using the handheld technique (right).....

Figure 6.11. Stages of model reconstruction using Agisoft Metashape software on the Nias ancestral statue.....

Figure 6.12. Reconstruction stages of two objects. Object no. 5765 (top) and Object no. 5699. The final stage displays the object's confidence level, with more red indicating lower confidence and blue indicating higher confidence.....

Figure 6.13. 3D-printed miniatures of the model and photographs of them were used to help local communities more effectively identify some of the objects during fieldwork in Nias.....

Figure 6.14. Location visited by Modigliani in Nias Island, traced from Modigliani’s records.....

Figure 6.15. Nias Heritage Museum in Gunungsitoli, Nias, Indonesia, May 2024.....

Figure 6.16. Focus group discussion with educators, researchers and practitioners in the University of Nias Raya, South Nias, Indonesia, May 2024 (courtesy of Zagötö, 2024).....

Figure 6.17. In-depth interview with OF, local informant, in Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024 (courtesy of Fau, 2024).....

Figure 6.18. In-depth interview with HZ (craftsman; left) and NF (tour guide; right) in Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024.....

Figure 6.19. The image of the Bawömataluo village chief in 1936 (de la Varre, 1936) depicts a sword adorned with animal teeth (possibly tiger). This is considered a standard for a ‘beautiful’ sword by the current Nias craftsman, according to HZ. ....

Figure 6.20. The anatomy of the Nias sword, tolögu. Photographed by the author and annotated with the help of Virdolin Manaö (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).....

Figure 6.21. In-depth interview with VM, highlighted potential use of digital restitution (Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024).....

Figure 6.22. Local tourists watching and documenting the Ombo Batu procession (Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024).....

- Figure 6.23. Nias collections page in Wikimedia, within the category Digitalisasi Koleksi Etnografi Nias di Italia.....
- Figure 6.24. The editing process on the Wikimedia information of the Nias collection. This process can be performed and verified by everyone to facilitate democratic knowledge generation.....
- Figure 6.25. Object no. 5749, Adu siraha famahö, a protective charm.....
- Figure 6.26. Object no. 5786, tumba or lauru, a tankard.....
- Figure 6.27. Object no. 5689 (left) Baluse Danga, a great shield and object no. 5752, Bawa Mbekhu or Bekhu Lewuö, a war mask.....
- Figure 6.28. Labels for a group of objects, shown in red squares, in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (photograph taken 23 June 2023).....
- Figure 6.29. Change in an object label, shown in red squares, in the Nias collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (photograph taken 18 October 2024).....
- Figure 6.30. The digital catalogue of the selected Nias objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).....
- Figure 6.31. The 3D models of the Nias collection on the Sketchfab platform.....
- Figure 6.32. The videos related to the Nias collection on the YouTube platform.....
- Figure 6.33. The design of this research includes the approaches, results of each stage and the hosting platforms.....
- Figure 6.34. The image of object number 5668 from the Nias collection is used in a new developed application by WikiNias (courtesy of Laia, 2025).....

## List of Tables

Table 3.1. List of objects in Room 8.....	
Table 3.2. Places visited by Elio Modigliani in Nias Island (taken from Modigliani’s note on geographical records of the Nias Island, 1890, p. 115).....	
Table 3.3. Number of Modigliani’s ethnographic objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, before and after recalculation (Bigoni et al., 2019, p. 12).....	
Table 3.4. Detailed division of Modigliani’s Nias ethnographic objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence.....	
Table 4.1. List of repatriated cultural heritage to Italy.....	
Table 4.2. List of returned cultural heritage from Italy to the respective countries of origin.....	
Table 4.3. List of restitutions to Indonesia from the 1970s to the present.....	
Table 6.1. Checklist of the Object ID database system.....	
Table 6.2. Camera specification comparison.....	
Table 6.3. List of informants in this research.....	
Table 6.4. Views of local stakeholders on the issues regarding the decolonisation of Nias objects in Florence.....	
Table 6.5. Selected cultural objects in the open catalogue of the Nias collection in Florence (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).....	

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Research

The discussion on the restitution and repatriation of cultural heritage has gained renewed momentum in recent decades, emerging as one of the most critical and contested issues within contemporary museum and heritage studies. The return of cultural objects to their countries or communities of origin has become both an ethical and a political duty for institutions, particularly those in the Global North that hold collections acquired during colonial expansion. This global movement represents more than an administrative gesture of return; it reflects a fundamental re-evaluation of museums' moral responsibilities (ICOM, 1986; 2001; 2004). However, as Bennett (2018) and Huff (2022) pointed out, museums are not neutral spaces; museums are recognised as spaces deeply entangled in histories of power, domination, and epistemic inequality. The growing discourse on restitution thus signifies a broader paradigm shift, from museums as authoritative institutions of preservation and display to museums as platforms of dialogue, collaboration, and accountability.

In Europe, this transformation is particularly evident. Countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands have taken increasingly visible steps to confront their colonial legacies. France's *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain: Vers une nouvelle éthique rationnelle* by Sarr and Savoy (2018) was a landmark document that called for the permanent restitution of African heritage objects looted during the colonial period, marking a radical departure from traditional European museological policies. The Netherlands followed with the *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* report (2020), which formally recognised the moral right of former colonies to reclaim their cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> Germany, too, has made notable efforts within the Framework Principles to address collections from colonial contexts.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives collectively reflect a growing willingness among European institutions to address historical injustice through concrete acts of repatriation and institutional reforms aimed at transparency, provenance research, and shared authority. Even though, on the practical level, there

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.colonialcollections.nl/beleid-koloniale-collecties/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2210152/b2731f8b59210c77c68177cdcd3d03de/190412-stm-m-sammlungsgut-kolonial-kontext-en-data.pdf>

are various challenges in the implementation due to domestic legal changes, and museum policies vary due to different institutional contexts and government positions on heritage restitution (Salm & Weller, 2017; Boehme, 2025)

However, Italy stands in contrast to these developments. Although it possessed colonies in Africa, such as Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia, and held influence in parts of the Mediterranean and the Horn of Africa between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, Italy's engagement with restitution and decolonisation has been hesitant and fragmented (Scovazzi, 2009; Visconti, 2021). The Italian heritage system, governed by the *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio* (Legislative Decree 42/2004), defines cultural property as inalienable, thus severely limiting the legal possibility of returning objects once they have entered state collections. As a result, Italy's few acts of restitution, including the return of the Axum Obelisk to Ethiopia and the Venus of Cyrene to Libya in 2008, have occurred under significant international pressure or as gestures of diplomatic goodwill, rather than as a moral or ethical recognition of colonial wrongdoing. Italian museums, moreover, have only recently begun to engage in critical discussions surrounding their colonial collections.<sup>3</sup> Decolonisation, as a concept and as a practice, remains peripheral in Italian cultural discourse, confined primarily to academic debate rather than to institutional policy or public awareness.

Within this context, collections from Asia, particularly from Southeast Asia, occupy an even more marginal position. Unlike African collections, which have attracted substantial scholarly and political attention, Southeast Asian ethnographic objects in Italian museums are seldom discussed in relation to colonialism or restitution. This neglect is partly due to the absence of a formal colonial relationship between Italy and Southeast Asian countries, which has resulted in a lack of political impetus or moral reckoning concerning these collections. Yet, many of these objects were collected during the height of European imperial expansion, often facilitated by colonial networks, scientific expeditions, and systems of knowledge exchange that were themselves embedded in colonial ideologies.

<sup>3</sup> As shown by the Museum Civilisation in Rome, with the agenda such as EUR\_Asia, [https://www.museodelleciviltà.it/en/events/eur\\_asia/?occurrence=2024-10-03](https://www.museodelleciviltà.it/en/events/eur_asia/?occurrence=2024-10-03)

Among these overlooked collections, the Nias ethnographic collection housed at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence stands out as particularly significant. Collected by Elio Modigliani during his 1886 expedition to the island of Nias, then under Dutch colonial administration, the collection comprises a vast array of material culture, including ritual artefacts, weapons, musical instruments, and architectural models. His fieldwork was pioneering for its time, and his approach was direct and fearless in engaging with local communities, in contrast to that of his Western colleagues. Though pioneering for its time, it was deeply rooted in the colonial scientific practices of the late nineteenth century. His publication *Un Viaggio a Nias* (1890) portrays the island and its people in their contemporary context, even with Eurocentric perspectives, and still provides valuable insight into the historical Nias, where the impact of colonisation has since diminished.

Today, Modigliani's Nias collection remains preserved in Florence as part of the museum's Southeast Asian holdings. Yet, despite its ethnographic richness and historical value, the collection has largely escaped critical attention within both Italian and Indonesian scholarship. Within the Italian context, it is treated primarily as a scientific legacy of early anthropology, rather than as part of a colonial encounter that shaped its creation. In Indonesia, awareness of the collection's existence is minimal, whispered about by a limited number of researchers in the fields of heritage and anthropology. The absence of colonial ties between Italy and Indonesia has further contributed to this lack of visibility, leaving the collection in a state of epistemic limbo, legally Italian yet culturally Indonesian, but institutionally marginalised within both nations' heritage frameworks.

## **1.2 Research Problems and Objectives**

This research identifies two main structural problems that hinder the development of decolonial practices between Italy and Indonesia. First, in Italy, the legal and institutional systems governing cultural heritage make restitution particularly difficult. The *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio* (Legislative Decree 42/2004) declares that museum collections are inalienable national property. This law treats cultural objects as part of Italy's national identity rather than as transnational heritage. As a result, museums are prevented from returning artefacts, which has prevented them from openly addressing the colonial or ethnographic

origins of their collections. Many non-European collections, especially those from Asia and Africa, remain under-researched, poorly interpreted, and disconnected from their cultural contexts. Colonial ways of thinking continue to shape how these collections are catalogued and displayed, even if not explicitly acknowledged.

Second, in Indonesia, the country's restitution policy has focused almost entirely on its colonial relationship with the Netherlands. The government's efforts, such as the return of the Nagarakertagama and the Prajnaparamita statue, have emphasised national pride and diplomatic success. However, this narrow focus has produced a form of selective decolonisation, in which engagement with other countries that hold Indonesian artefacts, such as Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom, is largely ignored. Moreover, the restitution process in Indonesia remains under the control of central authorities, particularly the Ministry of Culture. Local museums, universities, and communities, the actual cultural custodians, have little influence. This top-down model mirrors colonial structures and perpetuates unequal power dynamics that decolonisation is meant to challenge.

This research emerges from this neglected intersection between Italian museology, colonial history, and Indonesian heritage. It seeks to address a critical gap in both decolonial scholarship and museum practice: how can restitution, or broader decolonising approaches such as digital restitution, be applied meaningfully in contexts where direct colonial relationships did not exist, yet colonial structures of knowledge and representation persist? By focusing on the Nias collection in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, this study examines how coloniality continues to operate through museum narratives, ownership structures, and access inequalities. It also investigates whether digital technologies can serve as tools for decolonial engagement, allowing displaced heritage to be reconnected with its communities of origin in new and transformative ways.

The research thus has two intertwined aims. First, it seeks to analyse the historical, legal, and institutional contexts that have shaped the circulation and preservation of the Nias ethnographic collection, situating it within broader debates on restitution and decolonisation. To understand the roots of this problem, the research focused on the history of museum development in Italy, specifically the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, to gain insight into its foundation and the

philosophy behind its collecting practices and narrative construction. This research also examined Indonesia's restitution history and agenda, as well as the existing legal system, to understand the government's underwhelming attention to the Nias ethnographic collection in Italy.

Second, it explores alternative forms of decolonial practice through the concept of digital restitution. Digital restitution refers to the creation and provision of open-access versions of heritage objects, such as photographs, 3D models, and online databases. While it cannot replace the original artefacts, it allows communities of origin to reconnect with their dispersed heritage, restoring visibility and agency. By engaging with local stakeholders in Nias, including museum professionals, academics, craftspeople, and community representatives, this research seeks to capture the multiplicity of perspectives surrounding restitution, moving beyond the binary of return versus retention. This approach challenges traditional museum control over interpretation, promoting collaboration and shared authorship between institutions and communities.

To achieve these aims, the research is structured around three interconnected objectives:

1. To critically assess restitution as a decolonising practice, analysing its conceptual, ethical, and practical dimensions within the context of the Nias collection in Florence. This involves examining how restitution operates within broader postcolonial and museological discourses, and how it may challenge or reinforce existing hierarchies of power, ownership, and representation.
2. To understand the perspectives of local stakeholders in Nias, including museum professionals, community representatives, and scholars, regarding the return, representation, and reinterpretation of their cultural heritage held abroad. By foregrounding local voices, the research aims to decentralise the discourse of restitution from state and institutional levels to the lived realities and aspirations of the communities of origin.
3. To explore digital restitution as a viable and ethical alternative for reconnecting communities with their displaced heritage through

documentation, digital access, and shared narrative-making. These objective tests whether digital technologies, when embedded in participatory frameworks, can facilitate decolonial engagement by redistributing access and authority over cultural heritage knowledge.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives from postcolonial studies, museology, and digital heritage. At its core lies decolonial theory, which differentiates between colonialism as a historical condition and coloniality as the enduring matrix of power, knowledge, and being (Quijano, 2000a; 2000b; Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Whereas colonialism refers to the territorial and political domination of one people by another, coloniality persists through epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western modes of knowing and categorising the world. Decolonisation, in this framework, is not merely the political withdrawal of colonial powers, but an ongoing project of dismantling these entrenched hierarchies and restoring epistemic agency to those historically silenced or marginalised.

Within the context of museums, this theoretical stance translates into a critical interrogation of how knowledge is produced, represented, and legitimised. As Bennett (2018) and Huff (2022) have shown, modern museums emerged as institutions of disciplinary power, designed not only to collect and preserve but also to educate and normalise particular visions of civilisation. Through practices of classification, display, and narration, museums historically constructed hierarchical relationships between cultures, positioning the West as the universal reference point and the non-Western “Other” as an object of study. Decolonising the museum, therefore, demands more than repatriating objects; it entails reconfiguring the epistemic frameworks through which those objects are interpreted and shared.

Building upon this, the concept of restitution in this study is informed by both decolonial and ethical museology. Restitution is approached not as an isolated act of returning material possessions, but as a process of rebalancing relationships, a form of epistemic and moral redress that challenges the authority of institutions to define and own cultural meaning. Drawing from the works of previous scholars, restitution can be understood as part of a broader post-museum paradigm, in which museums evolve

from static repositories of heritage into dynamic spaces of dialogue, negotiation, and shared authority (Basu, 2011; Barrkman, 2017). This view aligns with the notion of heritage as a relational process, where meaning is co-produced through ongoing interaction between institutions and source communities.

The study also critically engages with theories of digital restitution, particularly regarding the ethical implications of digitisation and online access. Digital technologies have been widely celebrated for their capacity to democratise access and bridge geographical divides; however, scholars such as Lixinski (2020) and Poske (2024) caution that digital replication can also reproduce colonial asymmetries if issues of authorship, control, and cultural sensitivity are not addressed. This study is meant to borrow from Clifford's (1997) concept of 'contact zone' to explain the digital platform, which is seen as a dynamic space of cultural exchange between the Western view of Modigliani and the contemporary society of Nias on their diasporic heritage. The digital platform is also intended to be a neutral space in which academics, museum professionals, and local communities are equally represented. Thus, it avoids the persistently neocolonial nuance that often lingers in traditional museum practice, as Boast (2011) criticises for its asymmetrical relation and partial portrayal of the contact zone.

Bringing these perspectives together, this study conceptualises decolonisation as the redistribution of knowledge, restitution as the rebalancing of power, and digital heritage as a vehicle for shared authority and participation. These entangled stages and outputs guide both the analytical and practical dimensions of the research. They frame the investigation not as an attempt to "solve" the colonial legacy, but as a means of opening up spaces for dialogue, re-interpretation, and co-authorship between museums and the communities of origin. Ultimately, the theoretical framework positions digital restitution as both a decolonial practice and a methodological experiment, one that tests the possibilities of reconnecting fragmented histories through shared access and ethical digital engagement. It asserts that the decolonisation of museums will not be achieved through the return of objects alone, but through the transformation of the epistemic relationships that those objects embody.

## 1.4 Methodology Overview

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive approach, guided by the principles of decolonial and participatory heritage studies. Rather than measuring outcomes numerically, the study examines how meanings, relationships, and practices related to restitution and heritage are formed and negotiated among diverse individuals and institutions. This approach aligns with the decolonial framework, which challenges traditional, Western-based ways of knowing and values multiple perspectives, particularly those from the community of origin.

The research stands at the intersection of ethnography, critical museology, and digital heritage. Data were collected through primary methods: documentation and ethnographic fieldwork, which were then used to develop a digital platform. Each method addressed specific research goals while operating within a consistent methodological framework.

1. Documentation formed the first stage of the research, focusing on the visual recording of selected Nias ethnographic objects held in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. Conducted in October 2023, this phase employed digital photography and photogrammetry to produce high-resolution two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of the objects. These techniques were chosen for their accuracy in capturing both material detail and form, essential for creating digital surrogates. The documentation thus served a dual purpose: preserving material data and as a core to initiating the digital restitution project. Beyond technical documentation, this stage also functioned as a reflective process, revealing how the museum's curatorial practices mediate the visibility and interpretation of the Nias collection, or as Tucker (2014) refer as "exhibit analysis" to use visual display, reconstruction, labels, and other elements to investigate tacit and overt messages about the items on display and the people who created them and the cultures and epoch they represent.
2. Ethnographic research fieldwork, conducted in Nias in March 2023 and May-June 2024, constituted the second major component of the methodology. It aimed to uncover local perspectives on the Nias collection, restitution,

sensitive items, and the potential of digital heritage as a medium of reconnection. The fieldwork relied on semi structured interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion sessions involving museum staff, academics, local leaders, and artisans. This qualitative approach allowed participants to articulate their views in their own terms (Brinkman, 2014), providing nuanced insight into how restitution is understood within the lived realities of the Nias community. By engaging in open-ended conversations and participatory interpretation of visual materials (including photographs of the Florence collection), the study fostered collaborative meaning-making rather than extractive data gathering.

Platform(s) development represented the third stage and the applied dimension of this research. This phase was realised through collaboration with local communities and GLAM Wikimedia Indonesia, within the framework of the 2024 GLAM Mini Grant. Through these partnerships, digital assets, including photographs, 3D models, video and a co-curated catalogue, were made publicly accessible via Wikimedia Commons and other platforms such as YouTube and Sketchfab under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (CC BY-SA 4.0) licensing. This approach not only ensures sustainability and global accessibility but also reflects a deliberate decolonial strategy: the transfer of knowledge from institutional archives to open, community-oriented platforms. The platform development thus operationalises the theoretical concept of digital restitution, transforming documentation into an act of sharing access and collaborative meaning-making.

## **1.5 Scope of this Research**

This research does not aim to resolve the long and complex issue of physical restitution between Indonesia and Italy. Instead, it examines a preliminary engagement between the Nias community and the Nias ethnographic collection held at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. This engagement was carried out not through the physical return of artefacts, but through digital restitution, the creation and dissemination of digital images and 3D models that digitally ‘bring back’ the collection to its community of origin in Nias. The purpose of this research is not to argue for or against the physical repatriation of the collection, nor to speak on behalf of either the museum or the Nias community. Instead, it seeks to understand

how digital access and visibility can generate new forms of relationship, knowledge exchange, and cultural revitalisation. The central concern is not ownership, but connection: how the people of Nias, particularly those in Bawömataluo and Hilisimaetanö, engage with, reinterpret, and reanimate the collection once it becomes digitally accessible.

This study does not attempt to reproduce Modigliani's ethnographic interpretations or to assess the accuracy of his early anthropological methods. The focus lies on how the Nias community today perceives the objects collected in 1886, how they identify, name, and reinterpret them within their own cultural frameworks. During fieldwork, discussions were guided by local perspectives and avoided imposing colonial-era theories that have little relevance in the present context. Since there was no prior awareness of the Florence collection among the Nias participants, this research represents a movement of knowledge from Florence to Nias, a virtual reunion of cultural heritage that had been separated for more than a century.

As an initial engagement, this case study offers a foundation for imagining future collaborations between the museum and the Nias community. It also raises critical methodological questions concerning digital restitution. What does it mean to 'return' an object digitally? Can digital representations, photographs, 3D models, or video material present on their own? How does the community engage with the intangible meanings activated through viewing and discussing these digital objects? For many participants, the value of digital restitution lay not in the objects themselves, but in the knowledge, stories, and memories that the images evoked, which were narratives about craftsmanship, rituals, and traditions that have gradually disappeared from daily life.

This study does not claim to represent all voices within the Nias community or to fully capture the complexity of their heritage. Instead, it documents a moment of re-encounter, a small but significant step toward establishing more relational, dialogic, and collaborative practices between museums and communities of origin. It proposes that museums should no longer be seen merely as fixed institutions or spaces of preservation, but as networks of relationships and shared responsibilities. These relationships extend beyond institutional walls into the everyday spaces, concerns, and aspirations of the people whose heritage they hold. In this sense, the research

encourages a rethinking of the museum as an active participant rather than a distant custodian of heritage, a partner engaged in shared stewardship, mutual learning, and the co-creation of knowledge that bridges the historical divide between Europe and the communities from which these collections originated.

## **1.6 Researcher Positionality**

This research is conducted from the positionality of an Indonesian researcher and university lecturer currently undertaking doctoral studies within an Italian academic and museum context. My educational training in archaeology and cultural resource management in Indonesia, combined with long-term professional engagement in heritage documentation and museum-related research, has shaped both my interest and my motivation to examine Indonesian ethnographic collections held in Italian museums. Growing up and working in a postcolonial society in which cultural objects are frequently encountered through fragmented documentation, limited access, or their absence from local institutions has profoundly shaped my interest in questions of ownership, representation, and knowledge production surrounding colonial-era collections.

My motivation for this research is rooted in direct professional experience with communities and heritage institutions in Indonesia, where the physical absence of many culturally significant objects, now dispersed across European museums, continues to affect historical understanding, cultural transmission, and educational practices. Rather than approaching repatriation solely as a legal or diplomatic process, my work has increasingly focused on the potential of digital documentation and digital restitution as alternative or complementary strategies for reconnecting source communities with dispersed heritage. This orientation is informed not only by scholarly debates but also by practical constraints observed in Indonesia, including limited institutional resources, bureaucratic barriers, and the uneven distribution of technological expertise.

At the same time, my current institutional position in Italy has provided access to museum collections, archival materials, and professional networks that would be difficult to approach from outside Europe. Conducting research within Italian museums as an Indonesian scholar has revealed both opportunities and challenges:

while institutional affiliation affords access to collections and curatorial discourse, it also entails continuous negotiation of authority, language, epistemic hierarchies, and expectations shaped by long-standing European museological traditions. This dual positioning, as both a researcher originating from a source community context and a doctoral candidate embedded within European academic structures, has directly influenced the formulation of research questions, the selection of case studies, and the interpretative frameworks employed throughout the thesis.

Acknowledging this positionality is essential to understanding how access, constraints, and interpretive choices have shaped the research process. My perspective is neither neutral nor detached; instead, it is informed by the lived experience of postcolonial heritage dynamics and by active engagement with digital heritage practices. This reflexive stance aligns with decolonial and critical heritage scholarship, which emphasises situated knowledge and the ethical responsibility of researchers to make their positionality explicit. By foregrounding personal narrative and motivation within the methodological framework, this study seeks to enhance transparency and accountability, recognising the researcher not as an external observer but as an active participant in the production of knowledge about colonial collections and their contemporary reinterpretation.

## **1.7 Thesis Outline**

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive discussion of restitution and decolonisation through the case study of the Nias ethnographic collection in Florence. Together, these chapters build a coherent narrative that moves from historical and theoretical contexts toward practical application and reflection.

Chapter 1 introduces the research framework. It explains the background, central problem, research objectives, theoretical foundation, methodological approach, and researcher positionality. The chapter also outlines the general structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 traces the historical development of museums in Italy, with a focus on the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. It examines the role of museums during the colonial period and their involvement in 19th-century scientific

exploration and the production of colonial knowledge, showing how early anthropological collecting practices were deeply connected to colonial ideologies and representations of the “Other.”

Chapter 3 discusses the current state of the Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. It reviews the number of objects, exhibition methods, and interpretive narratives, while also analysing the decolonial dimensions of the collection and its presentation.

Chapter 4 analyses the legal and policy frameworks that shape restitution and repatriation in both Italy and Indonesia. It explores how differences in legislation, institutional structure, and national priorities affect restitution processes. By comparing Italy’s strict concept of inalienable cultural property with Indonesia’s centralised restitution approach, this chapter highlights the structural barriers that limit the possibility of more inclusive and participatory heritage management.

Chapter 5 explores digital restitution as a decolonial approach, addressing both its theoretical foundations and practical applications. It discusses several international examples of digital restitution projects and examines how digital technologies can create new forms of access, collaboration, and knowledge exchange.

Chapter 6 presents the core case study and empirical findings. It draws on data from documentation, fieldwork, and collaborative platform development, bringing together perspectives from Nias community members, museum professionals, scholars, and craftspeople. The chapter details the digital restitution initiative developed through Wikimedia, showing how collaborative digital projects can reconnect communities with their dispersed heritage.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings in relation to the research questions. It discusses the theoretical and practical implications, highlights the original contributions to museology, digital heritage, and decolonial studies, and offers recommendations for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter closes with a reflection on the ethical challenges and responsibilities involved in decolonising heritage within a global context.



*This page is intentionally left blank*

## Chapter 2. Italian Museums and the Colonial Collections

This chapter explores the complex relationship between ethnographic museums, their colonial legacies, and the ongoing discourse on decolonisation within the Italian museum landscape. Particular attention is given to ethnographic museums in Italy, with a focus on the *Museo di Antropologia ed Etnologia* (hereafter Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology) in Florence. This museum represents a significant case study in the development of anthropological and ethnological institutions in Italy. Its collections and institutional history are deeply intertwined with broader political and cultural dynamics, serving various functions during key historical periods, including the early stages of Italian unification (*Risorgimento*), the promotion of imperial consciousness under the fascist regime, and, more recently, contemporary decolonisation efforts. While much of the existing scholarship centres on Italy's colonial involvement in Africa, this thesis shifts the focus to Southeast Asian, particularly Indonesian, objects held in Italian museums, thereby departing from the more commonly addressed colonial narratives.

### 2.1 Brief Modern History of Museums in Italy and European Context

#### 2.1.1 Early Museum Concept in Renaissance Italy (16th - 17th Century)

Before discussing the topic further, it is crucial to investigate the modern history of museums in Italy. In early modern history, we have become familiar with expressions such as gallery (adopted from Italian: *galleria*), cabinet (Italian: *gabinetto*), and *wunderkammer* (German: cabinet of wonder). The gallery is a concept of a long, grand hall to exhibit paintings and sculptures. On the other hand, the cabinet is a square room filled with rare animals and botanical specimens, as well as minor works such as medallions, statuettes, artefacts, and other remarkable items. These collections were rarely accessible to the general public and were often held by intellectuals, aristocrats, the wealthy, lords, and kings of the time (Hagen, 1876; Weil, 1995).

In 16th- and 17th-century Italy, the development of museums can be seen as an expression of the Italian Renaissance (Laurencich-Minelli, 1985, p. 19). The

interests of learned elites, princes, and scholars in early collecting centered on natural objects and the pursuit of science. *Studiolo* was created to represent a miniature microcosm of reality or a mirror of nature (Macdonald, 2011), owned by notable figures such as Francesco I de' Medici (Florence), Francesco Calceolari (Verona), Ulisse Aldrovandi (Bologna), Michele Mercati (Rome), and Ferrante Imperato (Naples). Collections in Italy during this period were often intended as didactic and professional resources for intellectuals and professionals. Unlike their counterparts in other countries, studioli (the plural of studiolo) in Italy are frequently opened by their owners to the public or to their pupils. These historical roots shaped museums not as symbolic places but as instruments for the comprehension and exploration of the natural world (Olmi, 1985) for everyone interested.



**Figure 2.1.** Illustration of Ferrante Imperato's *Dell'Historia Naturale* (Naples, 1599). The illustration shows visitors exploring the collection (Anonymous, for Ferrante Imperato, 1599, printed in Venedig 1672).

Several factors influenced the types of objects collected during this period. Social status, economic capacity, academic background, and interest in science were all significant determinants of collections at the time. The collected objects were categorised into two major groups: *Naturalia* and *Artificialia*. *Naturalia* comprised collections related to the natural sciences, such as taxidermy, botanical

specimens, and minerals. Meanwhile, *Artificialia* encompassed objects created by human craftsmanship (Olmi, 1985; Abt, 2011; de Gruy, 2023, p. 30).

The open nature of these early collections in studioli is rather intriguing. This concept is synonymous with public museums, which did not yet exist at the time. Records from Aldrovandi highlight the unusually open nature of his *studiolo*, documenting 1,600 visitors between 1566 and 1605. This figure may be understated, given that he recorded only visits by nobility and those requiring warranted documentation (Findlen, 1996). Many sources also note that large audiences of clerics, scholars, and others began traveling long distances to view these collections (Abt, 2011; see Figure 2.1). These historical accounts suggest that studioli, owned by scholars and serving as precursors to modern museums, were not spaces of power but rather centres for intellectual development.

Aside from the Medici's (Florence) and Mercati's (Rome) collections, most were not associated with the aristocracy. This may have contributed to their openness in displaying their collections to visitors. In contrast, the circumstances and accessibility of collections owned by the ruling elites were markedly different. For instance, the Francesco I de Medici collection was housed within the Florentine governmental centre and the Medici family's residence at the Palazzo Vecchio. This collection was private and inaccessible to the general public. It was curated to symbolically reinforce the notion that the prince could reclaim dominion over both the natural and artificial worlds (Olmi, 1985, p. 5). Subsequently, the collection was relocated to a 'semi-public' space at the Uffizi, making it accessible to Florence's elite and foreign dignitaries (Barocchi & Ragionieri, 1983). However, as Olmi (1985, p. 10) notes, this transition can be viewed as a status symbol and a propaganda tool.

### **2.1.2 The Rise of Public and National Museums (18th - 19th Century)**

By the early 18th century, a significant development was the increasing accessibility of elite collections to the public. The Medici collection at the Uffizi, which had been accessible only in limited capacity since 1743, became more widely available in 1769 (Abt, 2011). As noted by Sheehan (2000) and McClellan (2003:4), the precise reason why the public gained access to monarchs' galleries,

museums, or exhibitions remains unclear. However, as Olmi (1985) and Abt (2011) suggest, the opening of collections to the public may have been driven by the monarchy's desire to demonstrate beneficence toward its subjects, to assert moral authority through association with the works on display, and to cultivate an appreciation for art among the populace. More museums and collections were given to the city, state or country, as was the Medici collection in 1743. The Church followed similar moves by opening two of the most symbolic art collection institutions for the public, the Capitoline (1734) and the Vatican Museums in 1771 (de Gruy, 2023), paving the way for the early concept of a public museum in Italy.

The French Revolution in 1789 also had a significant impact on the museum system in European nations. In France, the people seized the monarchies', churches', and royal academies' art properties before transferring their sovereignty to the people. The selection of these appropriate treasures was then displayed for all to see in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre Palace, newly renamed *Museum Français*<sup>4</sup> (Abt, 2011). As McClellan (1994, p. 12) summarises, the gallery became a place where men and women of the world rubbed shoulders with artists and countryfolk. The revolution and the cultural movements eventually paved the way for museums, making their collections accessible to the public.

Between 1794 and 1813, with the rise of Napoleon and his quest to conquer territory across the European continent, we observed continual changes in the museum landscape. During this period, French armies transported an untold number of artworks, natural specimens, scientific objects, books, and manuscripts from the conquered areas in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Austria, and Spain to Paris. The objects were placed in the Louvre and the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle (Bergvelt et al., 2009). Making the Louvre Europe's artistic crown and symbolising France's cultural and military supremacy. To accommodate the surplus of artefacts collected in Paris, the government established 15 additional public museums. The French authorities also established centralised museums, which were modelled after the Louvre in the regions under their control. Among those are the Galleria dell'Accademia (1807) in Venice; the Pinacoteca di Brera

<sup>4</sup> Now known as Musée du Louvre

(1809), Milan; the Rijksmuseum's early forms in Amsterdam (1808); and the Museo del Prado in Madrid (1809). While the French eventually retreated and gave way to other rulers, they left behind a durable model for public museums, gathering collections (or operating) and using museums as symbols of political and national patrimony (Abt, 2011). The use of museums as sites of national identity formation will later prove crucial for the newly unified Italy in its quest to forge a national identity.

The Napoleonic period's impact on the cultural landscape and on museum practices is an early form of what we discuss in museum decolonisation today. The loot-and-plunder mechanism, as well as the transport of objects to Paris, is no different from that followed by many European nations (and their museums) after the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), the official start of the Scramble for Africa. Some even began earlier, with the Netherlands and Britain establishing colonies in Asia, Africa, and America. McClellan's (2009) investigation also revealed France's pretentiousness in presenting the Louvre as the universal museum, thereby making Paris 'the rendezvous of all Europe.' However, the fall of France in 1814 ensured that a substantial number of artworks returned to their places of origin, thanks to treaties negotiated by England and Prussia (Jourdan, 2009). Only to see the same cycle repeated by the '*Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums*' in 2002. The declaration was signed by major museums in North America and European nations, including the Louvre and the British Museum. The declaration itself was a response to the growing demands of the ex-colonies for the repatriation of their heritage taken during the European colonial period.

Returning to the development of museums in Italy, we note that they serve different purposes in the new historical chapter. After the *Risorgimento*, Italy, newly unified, vigorously sought to assert local and national identities through exhibitions and museums. Before unification, Italians maintained strong regional affiliations, necessitating civic efforts to embed a cohesive national identity. Following the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, several museums were founded to promote this goal. For instance, the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento in Turin was inaugurated in 1878, followed by similar institutions in

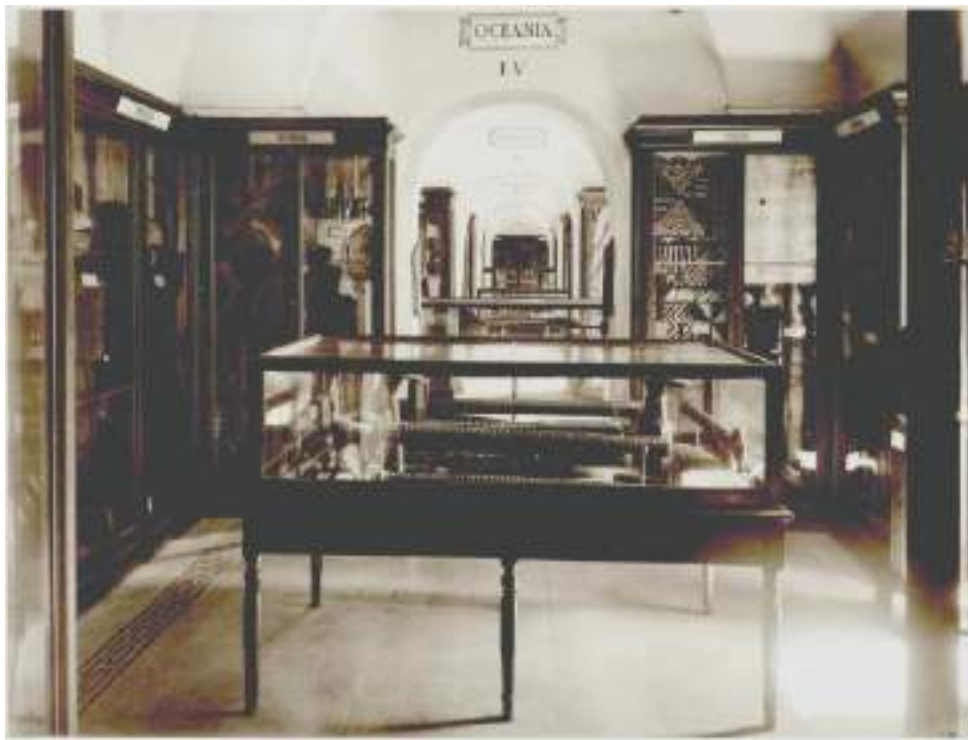
Milan (1886), Bologna (1893), Rome (1911), and Genoa in 1915 (Girardi, 2022). The state also took over the existing museums, such as the Museo Borbonico in Naples, and renamed them *Musei Nazionali* (De Caro, 2003). This superficial museum upgrade, without developing a national master narrative, will later hinder successful Italian nation-building by perpetuating regional narratives (Berger, 2015).

During this period, several ethnographic museums were also established. Archaeological and anthropological museums were deemed central to nationalist agendas. This logic followed Gabriel de Mortillet's argument that French national identity was deeply rooted in prehistoric continuity, ultimately supporting national unification (Richard, 1989; 1992; 2008; Abadia, 2002; 2005). This concept was debated among French and Italian scholars in La Spezia in 1865 during the International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology, leading to the emergence of the 'paleo-anthropology' term. This forum triggered an international competition among nations to assert their superiority through museums and Universal Exhibitions. As Muller-Scheessel (2001, p. 400) notes, the primary motivation behind these international exhibitions was to outshine competing nations.

One significant Italian museum that emerged from these developments was the *Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico*, also known as the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnology “Luigi Pigorini”—founded in 1876.<sup>5</sup> This museum allowed the Kingdom of Italy to compete with other modern European nations (Lerario, 2011, p. 59). This museum was established with an ethos similar to that of the traditional *studiolo*, grounded in scientific principles and positivism. Pigorini's vision for the museum was to provide a comprehensive comparative study of 'primitive antiquities' from various nations and to juxtapose prehistoric artefacts with those of contemporary 'uncivilised' or 'barbaric' societies (Pigorini, 1876, p. 33 in Lerario, 2011). Pigorini divided the collection into two categories within the museum: prehistory and ethnography. The prehistoric section comprised artefacts gathered from across Italy and beyond, systematically arranged according to their chronology and place of discovery. Meanwhile, the

<sup>5</sup> The museum was founded by Luigi Pigorini, hence the name attached. In 2016, the museum's name changed to *Museo delle Civiltà* (Museum of Culture)

ethnographic section consisted of ancient collections and ‘exotic’ materials (Figure 6.2) from various parts of the world.



**Figure 2.2.** The foreign ethnography section in the Colonial Museum, Rome. Photo Archives, Museo Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini” (Lerario, 2011).

Pigorini emphasised the significance of combining prehistoric and ethnographic collections to understand the science of man. In an official note called *Circolare 458*, dated on the 8th of November 1875, Pigorini stated that the study of prehistoric “should not be considered separately from that of the arts and customs of savages or barbarians living”.<sup>6</sup> Lerario (2011, p. 60) added that as these provide an opportunity to look back to “the dark ages of civilisation” and to recover the lost past of contemporary Western societies, tracking evidence relevant to a scientifically reliable reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> Ethnographic objects in the museum were acquired through institutions such as the Royal University of Rome, the Archaeological Museum of Parma, the National Museum of Naples, and other key networks (Lerario, 2011). Pigorini’s efforts to expand the ethnographic collection were not without challenges. Paolo Mantegazza challenged the

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the ethnographic collections

<sup>7</sup> With the evidence taken from the Indigenous societies from all around the world in the museum’s collection

existence of an ethnographic collection in Rome, arguing that Italy should have only one national ethnographic museum, namely the pre-existing institution in Florence.

Before the establishment of the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnology, “Luigi Pigorini” in Rome, there was already a dedicated ethnographic museum in Italy. This institution, located in Florence, is considered the first anthropological museum in Italy. Founded in 1869 as the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, the museum was the brainchild of Paolo Mantegazza, a physician who later transitioned into anthropology. The museum aimed to showcase the manifestations of human diversity across the world, both in the past and present, which Mantegazza referred to as the 'Natural History of Humans'. The museum’s collections originated from various sources, with the primary contributions coming from Mantegazza himself and from donations by members of the *Società Italiana di Antropologia ed Etnologia* (Italian Society of Anthropology and Ethnology), which he founded in 1871. Additionally, many artefacts were acquired by explorers and travellers from the 19th to the early 20th century, and the collection continued to grow over time (Cecchi & Stanyon, 2014). Today, the museum is part of the University of Florence’s museum system, known as the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology.

The Museum of Prehistory and Ethnology “Luigi Pigorini” served as much more than an exhibition place. The museum served as a platform to illustrate Pigorini’s theory, centring on demonstrating the migration of Indo-European communities who later settled in Italy and established Rome. This narrative was essential in shaping a unitary Italian national identity. Pigorini’s approach highlighted cultural similarities across local traditions and regional identities throughout the country (Lerario, 2011, p. 52). Before the *Risorgimento*, people were far more attached to their regional identities. Identifying cultural similarities was crucial to the formation of a young, unified Italian national identity. Today, these local Italian cultural collections are housed in the *Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari*. On a side note, Pigorini’s approach or vision resembles that of the National Museum of Indonesia in recent years, which sought to

construct an Indonesian national identity by emphasising unity in diversity and the richness of local cultural variations.

### **2.1.3 Fascist Regime, Colonial Museums, and Identity Building (20th century and beyond)**

The Italian colonial campaign (then the Kingdom of Italy) was considerably later than other European countries. Italian colonial enterprises were relatively short-lived, from the early occupation of the Bay of Assab in 1869 to the fall of fascism in 1943. However, this brief period of colonialism left many traces in terms of material culture acquisitions (Budasz & Wurzer, 2023). One of them, the Colonial Museum, was inaugurated in Rome in 1923<sup>8</sup> by Mussolini to compete with other European nations for colonial prestige. This museum was expected to rival institutions such as the Congo Museum of Brussels, the Tropenmuseum of Amsterdam, and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero in Paris (Falcucci, 2021).

The Italian museums also experienced changes during the fascist regime. The regime criticised the inadequacy of museums in invoking the nation's past and present glories to foster a strong sense of community and national identity (Troilo, 2010). The regime also highlighted Roman identity and heritage through archaeological excavations, especially in African colonies, to legitimise the fascist colonisation and to narrate the epic of the return to lands once part of the Roman Empire (Munzi, 2001). Focusing on classical archaeology and mythological content has affected the ethnographic collection, as these objects have received less attention (Lerario, 2011).

In 1936, after the proclamation of the Empire, the Colonial Museum was renamed as the *Museo dell'Africa Italiana* (Museum of Italian Africa). Due to difficulties with the inventory data management system, the museum remained closed until 1947, the year Italy renounced all colonial aspirations. The Colonial Museum in Rome is not the only museum with a colonial character in Italy. At least 90 museums across various provinces still house colonial collections

<sup>8</sup> The Colonial Museum was the rebrand of the Prehistoric and Ethnographic Museum "Luigi Pigorini." The fascist regime employed a similar strategy to its predecessor by rebranding itself with minimal funding. However, it requires more attention to a master national narrative.

(Falcucci, 2021). These institutions formed a network of colonial museums that reinforced the narrative of the Italian Empire. They exhibited ethnographic, artistic, archaeological, and anthropological collections brought back by Italians. These objects were displayed in glass cabinets, reminiscent of the cabinet of curiosities, with minimal contextual information; the narrative is often Eurocentric and disregards African perspectives.

Falcucci (2021) emphasises that colonial museums in Italy had one primary objective: to affirm Italians' superiority, morality, and cultural advancement over colonised peoples. This objective was reinforced by making these museums widely accessible through discounted or free tickets (Pinna, 2009), facilitating the dissemination of fascist ideology. Museums strategically provoked emotions by highlighting the heroism of Italian soldiers, missionaries, and adventurers engaged in colonial missions. They also promoted broader themes such as race, civilisation, empire, national progress, and Italy's grand historical legacy (Griffiths & Scarantino, 2008). This aligns with the systematic erasure of colonial histories, wherein the cultural identities of colonised regions were appropriated to glorify Italian identity. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, under the patronage of Lidio Cipriani, gained considerable favour with the regime due to Cipriani's fascist ideology and his strong belief in Italian racial superiority (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

Following Italy's unification, museums played a crucial role in shaping national identity. Fascism used museums as instruments to disseminate the ideology of the Italian Empire across all social strata. As Said (1993, p. 11) noted, 'the imperial enterprise depends on the idea of having an empire'. To support the 'empire consciousness' campaign, the Fascist regime also participated in major international exhibitions, including Paris (1931, 1934), Budapest (1938), and the World Expo (1937). Domestically, grand events such as Mostra Nazionale delle Bonifiche (1932), Mostra Nazionale delle Colonie Estive e dell'Assistenza all'Infanzia (1937), and Mostra Autarchica del Minerale Italiano (1939) further reinforced these narratives before the regime collapsed in 1943 due to World War II.

Once again, the museum changed following the collapse of the fascist regime and the establishment of the Republic of Italy. Italian museums faced radical changes and attempted to erase fascist rhetoric and totalitarian imperialist vision. However, museums were left decidedly marginal in a country struggling with post-war reconstruction (Jalla, 2003). The 1950s and 1960s were marked by an Industrial Revolution, with people leaving the rural countryside for bigger cities. Many aspects of rural life, including agro-pastoral practices, rituals, and traditions, were lost to the new model of mass culture society (Forni, 1999; Bertolino, 2011). In the 1970s, smaller museums started to emerge in many rural areas. People develop an interest in learning about the conditions of life in the past and in restoring rituals and festivals, as Clemente and Rossi (1999) referred to as a society that yearns for the past and commits to an ethnography of recovery. As for the Colonial Museum, at the beginning of the 1970s, it closed its doors again after donating its collection to the *Istituto Italiano per l'Africa* (Italian Institute for Africa).<sup>9</sup>

After the 1980s, the museum experienced more encouraging and dynamic development. The New Museology, conceptualised by Vergo (1989), represents a shift in museology thinking. The museum moves beyond traditional concerns, shifting its focus from institutional practices (such as collection management, conservation, and display) to a greater engagement with the broader social, political, and cultural roles of museums. In Italy, this movement was fueled by cultural anthropologists and demands from civil society, resulting in changes in national and local museums (Russoli, 1981). Museums began to address issues such as public communication, accessibility, and public relations.

In 2002, there was a vague and superficial discussion about establishing a new *Museo della Nazione* (Museum of the Nation). President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi strongly urged the project to promote solidarity and social cohesion in a highly fragmented political context. The project was intended to recover values from a national and patriotic tradition rooted in 19th-century patriotism. However, the project soon failed because it was perceived as utilising cultural heritage for

<sup>9</sup> The Istituto Italo-Africano then merged with Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (Italian Institute for Near and Far East) in 1995 and known as the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Orientale (IsIAO).

nationalistic purposes that were disconnected from ongoing social processes. Ultimately, Italian museums continue to reiterate practices and narratives that are vague and conservative, repeatedly invoking an idea of a glorious past that has never been debated (Troilo, 2011), a tendency that can still be observed in ethnographic museums today.

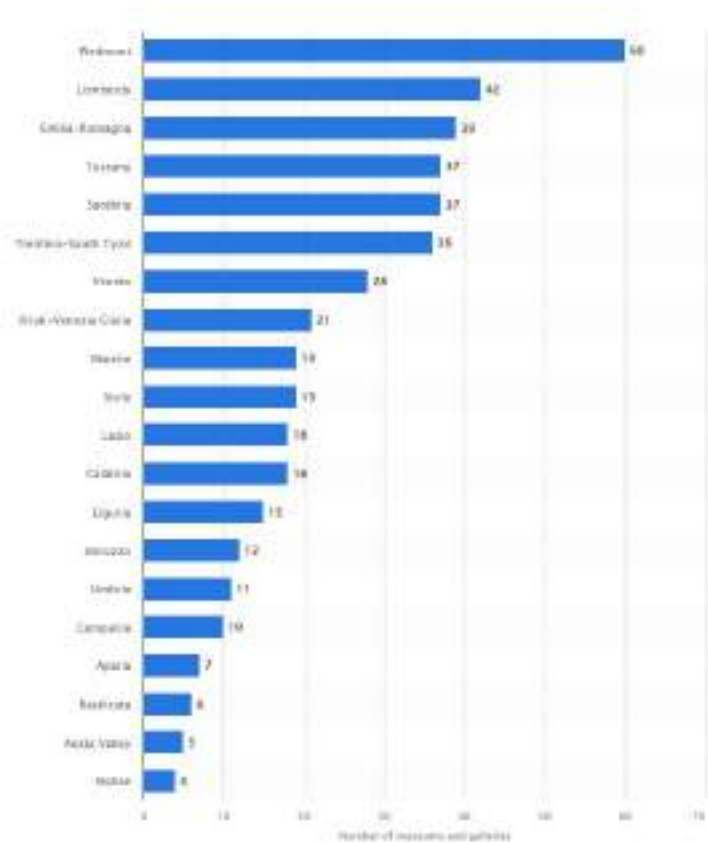
## 2.2 Ethnographic Objects as Colonial Legacy

Ethnography's objective is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience (Ingold, 2008, p. 69). To provide a precise definition, the term 'ethnographic museums' in this thesis encompasses museums that collect and gather indigenous ethnographic collections from outside Italy. Ethnographic collections, including human remains and cultural artefacts, gained significance with the emergence of physical anthropology in the late 19th century. In Italy, this marked the foundation of museums dedicated to documenting human evolution and its development. These ethnographic objects can be found in museums such as the *Museo Nazionale Preistorico ed Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini"* in Rome (1875), the Museum of Cesare Lombroso in Turin (1876), and the first Italian anthropological museum founded by Paolo Mantegazza in 1869 in Florence (Bertolino, 2011). The 'foreign' collections kept in these museums were deliberately brought from across the world to bridge prehistory and human civilisation, serving as a reminder of early, straightforward yet savage, cultures.

The definition needed to be agreed upon first, considering the unique character of the Italian museum landscape and history. The latest data from the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* indicate that Italy has 4,158 institutions that can be considered part of the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector. Among them, 16.6% are dedicated to ethnographical and anthropological collections.<sup>10</sup> Data also indicate that this type of museum is widely distributed across the nation, from the south to the north (see Figure 2.3). The findings from this research, based on a virtual database survey and personal visits to various museums, reveal two distinct characteristics of ethnographic collections within the

<sup>10</sup> Press release of Istat (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica), 20 December 2016. <https://www.istat.it/en/press-release/museums-archeological-areas-and-monuments-in-italy-year-2015/>

Italian museum context. The collections can be classified as ‘local’ or ‘foreign’ ethnographic collections.



**Figure 2.3.** Number of ethnography and anthropology museums and galleries in Italy in 2022  
(Statista Research Department, 2024)

Some of the museums categorised as ethnographic museums in Italy are embodiments of ‘*L’Italia gente dalle molte vite*’ or ‘the many lives of Italian people’ (Bertolino, 2011).<sup>11</sup> These museums preserve *demo-etnoantropologico* (demo-ethnoanthropological) heritage, a term coined by Cirese (1973) to respond to the growth of ‘peasants’ museums in 1960s-1970s Italy. Cirese used the term to explain the plurality of Italian local traditions (Broccolini, 2013). These museums aim to pay tribute to the traditions and way of life of the ordinary people (Forni, 1999), which are important parts of Italian cultural heritage. These demo-ethnoanthropological collections could also be considered ethnographic collections. However, this research focuses on Indigenous ethnographic collections brought to Italy from various regions worldwide.

<sup>11</sup> Words from poet Giosue Carducci used by Lamberto Loria for his project to collecting material evidence of Italian culture.

Ethnographic objects have been described in various terms, including colonial objects (Stahn, 2023), diasporic objects (Basu, 2011), displaced objects (Loumpet-Galitzine, 2009), orphaned objects (Leventhal & Daniels, 2013), and accidental refugees (Appadurai, 2017). Regardless of their designation, these artefacts frequently serve new purposes in foreign contexts, disconnected from their original cultural significance. Some are celebrated as Indigenous art and occupy prominent positions in museum exhibitions, while others languish in storage, lacking context or recognition of their relevance. For the latter, it is not too much to refer to them as dead objects or dead collections.

### **2.2.1 Ethnographic Museums and Colonisation**

During the early period of the Cabinet of Curiosities (Wunderkammer), private collections often emphasised the exoticism of objects from societies considered indigenous, traditional, or even savage. These objects were regarded as essential possessions of the European elite, symbolising their breadth of knowledge, power, and wealth, particularly in colonial nations with ties to Africa and Asia. Over time, many of these artefacts became foundational to anthropological and ethnographic museums established in the 19th century or earlier (Fromm, 2016). Despite rebranding efforts by these institutions to appeal to contemporary audiences and reposition themselves as representatives of "world culture" (Kreps, 2020:6), their displays and underlying structures often retain cultural exploitation, misrepresentation, and exoticism.

In the history of ethnographic museums in the Western world, they share one important event, the Berlin Conference, which started on 15 November 1884 and concluded on 26 February 1885. The conference significantly impacted how ethnographic museums operated, marking the start of European powers' systematic and concerted colonisation of Africa. While museums with ethnographic characteristics already existed before the conference, the conference instilled a different mindset about what was to come. *The Museum für Natur-, Volker-, und Handelskunde* in Bremen (1890); the Imperial Institute, London (1893); the *Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale*, Brussels (1898); *the Koloniaal (Tropenmuseum)*, Amsterdam (established in 1910, but inaugurated in 1926) and the *Musée des Colonies*, Paris (1931, before renamed as *Musée des Arts d'Afrique*

*et d'Océanie* in 1960) were immediately founded after the conference. These museums were dedicated to collecting, researching, and exhibiting exotic products and were strongly influenced by colonial ideologies, policies, and aspirations (Shelton, 2009).

Museums often justify their acquisition of ethnographic collections by arguing that 'primitive' cultures faced extinction due to Western encroachment. At the end of the 19th century, ethnographic collections grew exponentially in Western museums, including the British Museum and the Berlin Museum. An account from O.M. Dalton, the curator of the British Museum, even estimated that in 1898, the collections of the Berlin Museum alone were six or seven times more extensive than those in London. In comparison, others claimed that the collections in Berlin were growing tenfold over twenty-five years (Penny & Bunzl, 2003, p. 1).

After the 19th century, most European museums abandoned the donation-and-purchase model in favour of their own direct collecting expeditions. Adrian Jacobsen led expeditions for the Berlin Museum to the Northwest Coast and Alaska in 1881, then to Siberia (1884-1885) and Indonesia (1887-1888), and subsequently led six other expeditions ordered by the museum to Mexico and Oceania between 1887 and 1915. Meanwhile, their British Museum counterparts funded Alfred Cort Haddon's 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait Islands. Although it was later than its contemporaries in other European countries, France also funded similar expeditions between 1931 and 1933 (Shelton, 2009). Other museums took massive advantage of the colonial system to gather their collections. Museums in the Netherlands, such as the Delft Nusantara Museum, utilise their colonial connections to collect ethnographic objects, particularly those from Indonesia. Museums such as the *Nationalmuseet* in Denmark benefited from Danish people who served in Dutch East Indies colonies in Indonesia, such as Agner Moller, who helped assemble their collections.<sup>12</sup>

In Italy, ethnographic museums have a history predating the Berlin Conference. Museums like the Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence already

<sup>12</sup> Kurt-Nielsen (2003) mentioned that Moller send back approximately 850 Nias objects to the Nationalmuseet Denmark, while Feldman (2016, p. 64) identified 800 objects and 250 photographs.

collecting ethnographic materials brought back by many Italian travellers, such as Carlo Piaggia's Upper Nile collection (1856; 1859), Odoardo Beccari's Borneo collection (1867-1868), Luigi Maria D'Albertis' New Guinea collection (1874-1877) and the materials from Tierra del Fuego (1881 and 1884) brought by Giacomo Bove. These collections complement the earlier bequest of the Medici family's collections (Puccini, 2014, pp. 33-34). Additional collections were assembled after the Berlin Conference from around the world by researchers such as Elio Modigliani (1890), Guido Boggiani (1892-1897), and Lamberto Loria (1897). Meanwhile, Luigi Pigorini collaborated with amateur enthusiasts and collectors to expand his prehistoric and ethnographic collections in Rome. The official note from the museum (Circolare 458) was also published and widely distributed on November 8, 1875, inviting everyone to submit scientific materials to the newly established Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography (Lerario, 2011).

Many more of these ethnographic objects are shrouded in cover as artworks due to the 'museum effect.'<sup>13</sup> Museums such as the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice, the Museum of Oriental Art in Turin, the Civic Museum of Oriental Art in Trieste, and the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art (Genova) exhibit objects from across Asia. The traditional way of presenting these ethnographic objects was typically as representations of people from a specific culture at a particular point in time. The display is often narrated to show a more primitive culture than Western civilisation. However, objects such as Chinese and Japanese porcelain were elevated to the status of fine art and were frequently removed from the context of their creators' actuality. Put on a pedestal as an exotic and unique one-of-a-kind art piece. This tendency remains common in many Western countries' 'Oriental art' museums.

### **2.2.2 Ethnographic Objects of Colonial Context**

We must first agree upon this definition, considering that many ethnographic objects of various origins are housed in Italian ethnographic museums. Historically speaking, Italy's colonial history started after the unification in 1861. This effort was intended not only for economic and political reasons, but also to

<sup>13</sup> Terminology used by Alpers (1991), referred to phenomena where museum turns all objects into works of art. Make object being valued for their aesthetic and craftsmanship, set aside their colonial roots.

create and solidify a new national identity. Apart from the minor territorial possession of Tientsin (Tianjin, China) acquired in 1902 and failed attempts to colonise the Balkans, Italy mainly focused on Northern and Eastern Africa. The Italians acquired Assab Bay in 1869 and expanded to Eritrea in 1890, before subsequently launching military operations into the colony of Italian East Africa, which encompassed Somali, Eritrean, and Ethiopian territories. In 1912, Italy established colonies in Northern Africa, covering Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which were later merged with the broader colony of Libya in 1932 (Visconti, 2021). Considering this history, one can say that Italy only colonised a small part of Africa and China.

However, Italy's ethnographic museums are not limited to housing African collections. While it is true that the African collections are one of the most important and abundant ethnographic collections in Italy, we cannot forget many other regions contributing to the 'richness' of Italy's ethnographic collections. As mentioned above, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence also house many ethnographic collections from America (Inuit, Peru, Amazonian, and other regions of South America), Asia (Hindu Kush, China, Thailand, Japan, and Indonesia), and New Guinea (Cecchi & Stanyon, 2014). At the same time, the Museum of Civilisation<sup>14</sup> in Rome holds collections from the Near and Middle East (Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran), Asia origins such as India, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Tibet, Nepal, China, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Oceania (Ramasso, 2018). Other museums, such as the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice, hold ethnographic objects from Indonesia, China, and Japan (Spadavecchia, 2003).

The three museums mentioned above are only examples; many more museums in Italy house ethnographic objects from all over the world. To simplify these objects as plain 'ethnographic objects' is unacceptable. These ethnographic objects are colonial in nature. Van Beurden (2017, p. 39) defines colonial objects as objects of cultural or historical importance that were acquired without compensation or involuntarily lost during the European colonial era. Van Beurden's definition of colonial objects focuses on the relationship between colonies and their colonisers, specifically how they acquired these objects. Other

<sup>14</sup> The renamed of Museum of Prehistoric and Ethnographic "Luigi Pigorini" merged with other collection from Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci" in 2017.

scholars, such as Stahn (2023), adopt a broader definition, describing colonial objects as material artefacts with cultural significance collected in colonial contexts, including formal and informal colonial situations from the 16th to the 20th centuries. This approach opens the door to interpreting colonial objects more widely without requiring a direct colonial relationship between the collector and the originating society.

We can borrow another author's definition to expand this idea. Lang (2018), in guide for the German Museum Association's classification, distinguishes between three types of colonial objects:

- (i) those acquired under formal colonial rule;
- (ii) those collected outside formal colonial rule but within informal colonial power structures;
- (iii) objects that symbolise colonialism, such as propaganda materials.

Regarding the acquisition ways or how the objects were collected, Keurs (1999), in his observations of Indonesian objects in Netherlands museums, distinguishes five ways of collecting, as follows:

1. Scientific expedition

Expeditions sponsored by the Kingdom of the Netherlands or museums, to gather material related to natural science.<sup>15</sup> Often followed by military expeditions to bring "stability" to the colonies.

2. Individual collecting activities

Civil servants, missionaries, medical doctors, and all personnel associated with colonial power collected objects for various purposes.

3. Colonial exhibitions

The kingdoms collected numerous objects to support their exhibitions in World Exhibitions and Colonial Exhibitions, which then found their way to various museums.

4. Military exhibitions

<sup>15</sup> Including anthropology, especially physical anthropology as cultural anthropology is not yet to be developed.

Military activities were undertaken to strengthen the Dutch control. They laid claim to more areas in colonial territories, which were often followed by looting and plundering local kingdoms or tribes and seizing their treasures.

#### 5. Gifts and small-scale purchases from (non-professional) individuals

Gifts and small purchases were made by individuals who worked in colonies and brought their belongings back to Europe. These were often passed down through generations before being added to the museum's collections.

While Keurs provides a solid foundation for discussing the acquisition methods of colonial objects, he downplays the unequal power between local communities and the coloniser. As he stated:

“Many myths have arisen in discussions on the morality of ethnographic museum collections, but in the case of the Leiden museum, it appears that some ‘sensitive’ objects were, in fact gifts from the Indonesian nobility to the Dutch rulers, and not war booty. A second observation is that the number of objects collected during colonial wars has often been exaggerated. For a long time, popular belief had it that thirty per cent of the Indonesian collection in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde was collected in the course of colonial wars. In fact, when one looks at the three main colonial wars in Indonesia (Aceh, Bali, and Lombok), less than three per cent of the collection is involved (Keurs, 1999, p. 71).”

While it is true that we cannot ignore the roles of local actors, in this case, local rulers (kings or chieftains), we need to address the power imbalance at play. Since the arrival of the first Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) in 1596 in Nusantara, followed by formal colonisation by the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1799, a power imbalance has existed between the foreign power and the local power. No gift from the Indonesian side is without power relations behind it, either to secure favour from the Dutch or to demonstrate cooperation. This tradition of offering tribute dates back to antiquity and serves to demonstrate obedience to more powerful authorities.

Other authors tried to address this issue. Van Beurden, in his monograph *Treasures in Trusted Hands* (2017), distinguished how and the degree of equality

among the stakeholders and colonial actors who acquired the object. This study is the culmination of years of research following the case of the post-colonial heritage dispute between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The struggles culminated in the wave of heritage repatriation by the Netherlands, which started in 2020. The distinction is as follows:

Three ways of acquisition, including:

1. Acquisition by regular purchase or barter at an equal level.
2. Acquisition following colonial legislation, but at an unequal level.
3. Acquisition in violation of legislation and at an unequal level.

Five categories of colonial objects have been identified:

1. Gifts to colonial administrators and institutions

This category includes gifts from local rulers to colonial administrators. As Brinkgreve (2006) describes, certain gifts bestowed by rulers of Java and Bali on colonial administrators were expressions of subjugation. Determining the nature of gift-giving requires provenance research (Van Beurden, 2017).

2. Objects acquired during private expeditions

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the peak of scientific and commercial expeditions by various European countries to Indonesia was reached. The expeditions were highly diverse in nature. Some were often involved in violent collecting, while others received enthusiastic welcomes from locals.

3. Objects acquired during military expeditions

This category encompasses aspects discussed by Kreis previously. Expeditions were a justifiable method for colonisers to crush resistance, while the loot became a welcome additional victory trophy.

4. Missionary collecting

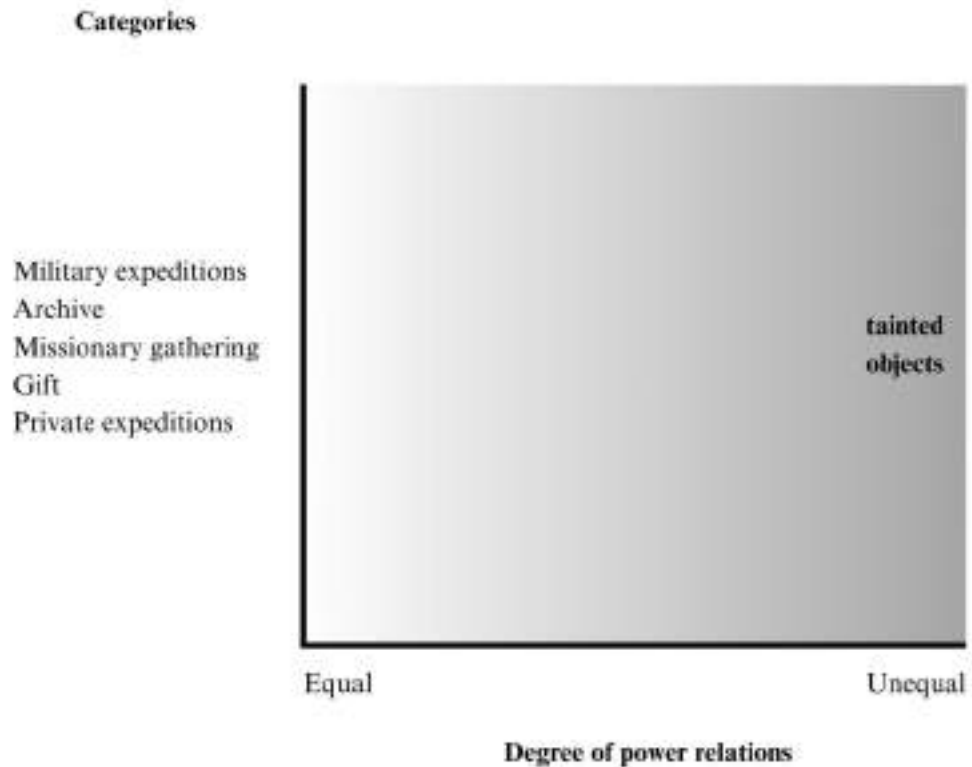
Although not all churches that deployed missions in Indonesia's archipelago engaged in iconoclasm, some local relics, such as totems and ancestral statues, were often deemed unsuitable for the new religion of Western civilisation. Many were destroyed, and many were brought to

Europe as a sign of the triumph of faith over a savage religion. Some missionaries gather collections for their own interest.

## 5. Archives

This category includes records and documents collected by the colonial administration. Archives contain information, aesthetic value and history. Many of these archives, including lontars from Bali and Lombok, as well as those of local rulers and kingdoms, were forcibly taken.

While we can agree that most of these ethnographic objects are of colonial origin, a distinction is necessary. As we learned, colonial objects have a vast spectrum, and not all colonial objects fall into the ‘tainted objects’ category. The definition of tainted objects encompasses all ethnographic objects acquired under conditions of extreme inequality during the colonial period (Van Beurden, 2021a; see Figure 2.4). These objects were acquired improperly; stolen or looted items may be included in this category. Most objects acquired from military expeditions are classified as tainted. An example of this category is the Bali treasures extracted from the Klungkung Palace in 1908 - the sacking of the palace killed over a hundred Balinese. Immediately thereafter, the soldier looted the palace, and hundreds of objects were placed in a box destined for the Netherlands. Specifically, 225 objects were shipped to the Ministry of Colonies in The Hague. Leiden’s museum was the largest beneficiary, receiving 97 items of various precious objects (Wiener, 1994).



**Figure 2.4.** Visual explanation of the gradient of power relations within ethnographic objects of a colonial context (adapted from Van Beurden, 2017)

Many ethnographic objects in Italian museums were acquired by travellers from the 16th to the 20th centuries, not only from Africa but also from other continents, including Indonesian objects that became the focus of this thesis. During the research process, counterparts and colleagues often questioned the ‘status’ or ‘name’ of Indonesian objects in Italy. Those in the Netherlands, England, and France could be easily identified as colonial objects due to Indonesia's long history of colonisation. However, labelling ethnographic objects in Italy as mere ethnographic objects also erases their biography and the processes by which they became part of Italy’s museum context. Hence, the title of this subchapter is Ethnographic Objects of Colonial Context.

As explained in the previous paragraphs, this thesis argues that ethnographic objects in Italian museums are colonial in nature. First, objects were collected in several common ways, as illustrated by colonial collecting during the European colonial period in Indonesia. Second, collectors such as Beccari, D’Albertis, Cerruti, and Modigliani benefited from the existing colonial system in Indonesia.

The fear of locals of the colonial power also facilitated collectors in gathering their desired collections. Hence, a power imbalance existed between all the involved actors. However, not all ethnographic objects are equal, and more in-depth research on their provenance and biography is needed to understand their significance and future.

Beyond the above reason, this thesis examined ethnographic objects within the colonial context, focusing on the unnatural alterations to their 'history.' Appadurai (1986) discusses the social lives of objects in his book, *The Social Life of Things*. They are not static; their value and significance change over time, depending on who owns them and how they are utilised. Now, in Western museums, these objects are used for many functions beyond their natural purpose. Stahn (2023, p. 120) highlights three justifications made by the colonial power to collect these objects, as follows:

- i) colonial subordination and submission, sanctions against resistance and/or exploitation,
- ii) self-definition and display of superiority through othering, racial theories, and display of primitive objects,
- iii) justification of the civilising mission.

In the Italian museum context, as in other Western museums, these ethnographic objects are imbued with colonial thinking. While Western sciences developed through encounters with new regions in Asia and Africa, colonial powers relied on racial science and anthropological knowledge to justify or facilitate colonial rule (Zimmerman, 2003). Ethnographic objects in Italian museums have long been used for such purposes. Pigorini, in his account (1876 in Lerario, 2011), utilised ethnographic objects from Africa, Asia, and Oceania in the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography in Rome to fill the gap in the Italian history of lost primitive civilisations.

Others, such as Lidio Cipriani, the director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, were directly involved in the development of racial science during the fascist regime. His ethnographic works were impressive, covering Zulu, Baila, Tonga, Bushmen and Pygmies, Tuareg and many other African indigenous communities. However, he used the material to support the

regime and was subjectively vocal regarding the inferiority of Africans compared to Italians. Lidio Cipriani's involvement in the regime is also evidenced by his participation as a signatory to the 1938 Manifesto of Race.<sup>16</sup> Cipriani also pushed his theory of the 'inferiority of blacks' to justify the 'right of whites' to exploit Africa, bringing the racial science to the level of applied colonial policies (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

The colonial 'sins' in the museum were built on these ambivalent science and racial prejudices. Although not directly involved in colonisation or violence collecting, museums in Italy played an active role in the structured racism that emerged from the development of science. Museums such as the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, under the direction of Lidio Cipriani, developed a concept of human natural history that was fundamentally based on racial hierarchy. This contributed to the popularisation of scientific racism (Budasz & Wurzer, 2023), which was later used by the Italian authorities to justify European imperialism and colonialism in Africa and Asia. This shows that even though not all ethnographic objects are collected with racial prejudices, their collection and presentation gave up on dominant narratives of cultural superiority inherent in colonial discourse.

Before moving forward with the subsequent discussion, several key points must be clarified. It is undeniable that anthropological and ethnographic museums are direct products of colonialism, and their very existence embodies a colonial legacy. Their structures, operational systems, and collections all serve as tangible evidence of this origin (Maranda, 2021). As many scholars have noted, these institutions evolved from the Cabinets of Curiosities of the 16th and 17th centuries and the industrial exhibitions of the 18th and 19th centuries (Fromm, 2016). Grechi (2021), in *Decolonizzare il Museo*, underscores that most ethnographic museums were founded upon collections obtained through colonial looting. Yet many such institutions remain reluctant to confront the provenance of their holdings or to offer alternative narratives that challenge the colonial knowledge

<sup>16</sup> It declared that Italians were also descendants of the Aryan race. Under the racial laws, marriages between Italians and Jews were prohibited, while Jews were barred from roles in banking, government, and education, and their properties were seized. These laws also discriminated against African populations. The two pamphlets referenced above focus on Italians residing in the newly established African colonies, addressing the challenges of raising Italian children in Africa (specifically aimed at women) and the issue of interracial relationships between Italians and Africans.

frameworks that shape their displays (Montella, 2024). Nonetheless, colonial collections exist along a spectrum; each object carries its own context, history, and degree of entanglement with colonial power. Ethnographic museums, and the objects they contain, are thus inseparable from this complex and often troubling legacy.

### **2.3 The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence: The Multifaceted Faces of the Museum**

To better understand the development and shifts in museum character in Italy, this subchapter examines the history, development, and current state of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence is one of the oldest ethnographic museums in the world and the oldest in Italy. This museum houses hundreds of cultural specimens from diverse communities and backgrounds. The museum collections are divided into eight types: ethnographic collections, anthropological collections, primate collections, faunal collections, paleoethnological collections, photographic archives, document archives, scientific instruments, and plaster-cast collections.<sup>17</sup>

This research primarily focused on ethnographic collections, including anthropological and plaster cast collections. The anthropological collections comprise a diverse array of skulls, including a small group of primate skulls (nearly 100 specimens from more than 20 species). At the same time, Puccioni's (in 1909) observation noted that there were 3400 skulls and 171 skeletal parts. The collection came from all around Europe, whereas the non-European collections came from New Guinea, the Gazelle Peninsula, Indonesia, Tierra del Fuego, Peru, and many other areas (Checchi, 2014, pp. 183-196). Regarding the plaster cast collections, the museum owns approximately 1,200 specimens, including 600 facial masks taken from living individuals. Approximately 154 facial plaster casts originated from New Guinea, Polynesia, Australia, and New Zealand. Researchers such as Giglioli, Modigliani, and Puccioni also contributed to the number of these collections. However, the most significant collection was assembled by Lidio Cipriani, who modelled 350 facial masks during his journey, primarily among African populations.

<sup>17</sup> Official information from the University of Florence's Sistema Museale di Ateneo, <https://www.sma.unifi.it/p350.html>

The museum's primary collection consists of ethnographic objects of diverse origins. The collection covers a wide range of areas from Asia, Africa, Oceania, North America, and South America. The museum displays more than 25,000 ethnographic objects, including clothing, masks, amulets, weapons, tools, and furniture. One of the most extensive collections is Elio Modigliani's collection of Indonesian ethnographic objects. It covers approximately 2,000 objects from the Nias, Batak, Mentawai, and Enggano regions (located on the West Coast of Sumatra, Indonesia).

### **2.3.1 The Philosophical Foundations of the Museum**

To better understand the philosophical foundations of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, we must first grasp the spirit behind its founding. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence was founded in 1869 by Paolo Mantegazza. A scholar educated in medicine, he later expanded his research into physiology to deepen his understanding of humanity. Although Mantegazza had initially been trained in medicine, including the sciences, anatomy, and physiology, he never practised medicine. Instead, he pursued his passion, crossing disciplinary boundaries and increasingly exploring the natural sciences to understand human natural history, including racial morphology, ethnology, comparative physiology, and psychology (Taylor & Marino, 2019).

Mantegazza's interest in the humanities strengthened during his trip to South America after earning his doctorate. During four years in South America, he visited numerous Indigenous communities in Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. He regarded these communities as a 'natural ethnological laboratory' (Roselli, 2016, p. 607). To support his research interests, he established the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence with minimal assistance from the Italian Ministry of Public Education, a symbolic amount of 1,000 Italian lire (Taylor & Marino, 2019). The museum's early collections were acquired through Mantegazza's travels and those of other Italian scientific explorers. Among them are the East Africa collection by Carlo Piaggia, the New Guinea collection by Luigi Maria d'Albertis and Odoardo Beccari, and diverse collections from around the world by Enrico H. Giglioli and Filippo de Filippi (Puccini, 2014).

Mantegazza envisioned the museum as a modern, scientific institution, departing from the old cabinets of curiosities. The museum emphasises scientific collecting, systematic cataloguing, and thematic exhibition. Rigorous cataloguing was primarily conducted on the material gathered by early travellers and explorers, who often collected objects in non-scientific, non-systematic ways. The museum also served as a means for Mantegazza to support his teaching of anthropology at the University of Florence, providing research materials, teaching tools, and showcases. The museum supports his class and publications through the anthropological society he founded, completing his legacy of the *Florentine School of Anthropology* “*Science of Man*” (Taylor & Marino, 2019).<sup>18</sup>

Mantegazza developed his approach to anthropology, with the museum as the centrepiece. Taylor & Marino (2019) highlight Mantegazza’s reluctance to adhere to two mainstream schools of thought at the time. According to his account, French anthropology leaned too heavily toward anatomical studies, especially craniology. On the other hand, English anthropology was overly focused on ethnographic studies. Mantegazza’s Florentine School is grounded on two key characteristics. The first key characteristic of Mantegazza’s teaching includes comparative psychology, social studies, ethnographic collection of material culture, and physical anthropology. Mantegazza envisioned the unified science of anthropology as encompassing both the hard and soft sciences. Roselli (2016) notes that Mantegazza hoped to define the discipline of anthropology as one that breaks down boundaries between ‘sister sciences.’ Mantegazza argued that history, philosophy, linguistics, ethnology, and ethnography, together with the natural and medical sciences, shared the same objective: the study of man.

The second key of the Florentine School was its strong emphasis on conducting fieldwork among non-Western communities. This approach led to the collection of ethnographic materials that didn’t always align with traditional scientific categorisation. This orientation was partly influenced by the school’s early adoption of Darwin’s theory of evolution, which extended to biological species, human physical traits, and social structures (Mantegazza, 1882). Over

<sup>18</sup> School here to be understood as the school of thought, taught by Mantegazza to his pupils in the University of Firenze. Also became the main philosophical foundation of the Florentine Society of Anthropology and its research direction.

time, Mantegazza's own thinking evolved significantly in this regard. Despite years of anthropological fieldwork in regions such as South America, New Guinea, the Pacific, America, Lapland, India, and North Africa, Mantegazza and his colleagues maintained a view of so-called "primitive" peoples that reflected the broader evolutionary thinking of the late 19th century. As Stocking (1968) noted, this perspective often linked savagery with dark skin, limited intelligence, and irrationality, elements commonly associated with the period's depiction of "primitive" humanity.

Another key of the Florentine School was the dictum of 'only individuals exist in nature.' Mantegazza was strongly opposed to the concept of race, species, and any other abstract terms that attempt to categorise individuals into larger groups. He acknowledged that there were variety and difference among individuals. However, that does not justify the concept of race. For Mantegazza, race is a concept that is purely a creation of the human brain (Mantegazza, 1876). In his view, the evolution of culture and differences in the 'stages' of society are the result of human progress through individual choices (the many decisions made by individuals within the population) in response to social and geographical conditions.<sup>19</sup> Because of his approach, the museum directed by Mantegazza was never a supporter of Western colonialism or the idea of a superior race. The situation placed the museum in a problematic position amid the growing wave of colonisation and the spread of Western influence beyond Europe. Nevertheless, the museum benefited from colonisation and exploration by Western travellers, who provided collections for Mantegazza's growing museum (Taylor & Marino, 2019).

Mantegazza's unique perspective also eventually led to the division of anthropology in Italy. Mantegazza's refusal to publish Giuseppe Sergi's<sup>20</sup> article titled "*Le varietà umane: Principi e metodo di classificazione*" (Human Varieties: Principles and Method of Classification) in 1893 drove Sergi to establish *Società Romana di Antropologia* in Rome.<sup>21</sup> In his article, Sergi proposed a new

<sup>19</sup> Similar to the natural determinism and cultural relativism of Franz Boas

<sup>20</sup> Giuseppe Sergi (1841-1936) was one of the most important anthropologists and psychologists of the age of positivism in Italy.

<sup>21</sup> The Society developed with the influence of Neo-Hegelian philosophy, opposing that of the Florentine Anthropological Society. This school of thought in Rome later became the Roman School,

methodological approach to classifying human skulls and ethnic groups, which defined 'natural' and 'morphological.' The method is based on direct observation and analysis of skull shapes, rather than traditional ways using craniometry and measurements (Sergi, 1892-1893). This methodology by Sergi represents a reformulation of the previous classification proposed by Mantegazza in 1875, which relied on descriptions of skull shapes and a few key measurements (Mantegazza, 1875). Mantegazza disagreed with Sergi's method, and many experts from Italy (of Florentine School origin) and abroad mentioned that the technique was not objective and that the terminology introduced by Sergi was too complicated even for specialists (Mantegazza, 1893). In sum, Mantegazza accused Sergi's method of not being a genuine reform and hindering progress in scientific studies (Cerro, 2017).

Sergi's method also received criticism in the USA. Harrison Allen<sup>22</sup> accused Sergi of plagiarism due to many similarities between Sergi's classification and earlier works by James Atkins Meigs<sup>23</sup> in 1866. Allen observed that some typologies proposed by Sergi were too similar to Meigs' and should be judged according to the law of priority of publication (Cerro, 2017). Another criticism was raised by Franz Boas during the First International Eugenics Congress in 1912. Sergi was adamant in his view regarding the fixed nature of cranial forms. On the other hand, Boas stated that the cranial form of race did not remain constant. Cranial shape is affected by changes in environmental and social conditions (Boas, 1912).<sup>24</sup> He confirmed his theory by observing changes in cranial measurements among the second generation of European immigrants in the United States.

Ultimately, Sergi's reform was rejected by Mantegazza, primarily due to personal and academic differences, which ultimately led to both anthropologists breaking ties (Cerro, 2017). Within the Florentine School, Mantegazza and his disciples in Florence maintained that anthropology should be more holistic, multidisciplinary, and cultural, and should be understood as a broad science of

pioneered by Sergi

<sup>22</sup> Professor of Zoology and of Comparative Anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania

<sup>23</sup> American anthropologist, proposed a cranial classification variety in 1866

<sup>24</sup> In general, Boas's approach to cultural relativism and natural determinism is closer to that of Mantegazza's on anthropology.

humanity. Meanwhile, the younger society founded by Sergi in Rome focused more on biological determinism and racism; it later became known as the Roman School. Sergi and his disciples are followers of Neo-Hegelianism, whose Eurocentric model places Western civilisation at the highest stage of historical and cultural progress. At the same time, indigenous and non-Western societies were depicted as primitive. Sergi's most famous work is probably *Mediterraneanism*, or the Mediterranean Race, which explains Italy as a higher civilisation resulting from a mixed population, in response to the narrative of Aryan superiority (Cerro, 2017). However, Sergi's *Mediterraneanism* and the Roman school of thought will later be appropriated by fascist movements in Italy to support their political and racial agenda.

Following Mantegazza's death, the development of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology continued under his disciple, Aldobradino Mochi.<sup>25</sup> Mochi solidified Mantegazza's teachings and thought during his leadership and established a museum that sustains the synthetic study of humanity. He uses the motto "*Humanum nihil a me alienum puto*" to emphasise that museums should accommodate the study of anthropology, interwoven with ethnology, comparative psychology, and palaeontology, to understand the nature of man truly. Another important event during the Mochi direction was the initiation of an extensive collection of Italian ethnographic materials. The effort started in 1902, with Elio Modigliani and Lamberto Loria. Mochi stressed that efforts to gather and study Italian ethnography should be as significant as those to learn about other cultures. He also highlighted the risk of the disappearance of Italian traditional culture due to ongoing transformations (Barsanti & Landi, 2014).

After Mochi, Nello Puccioni took over the museum's direction. Similar to his predecessors, he did not confine anthropology to human anatomy and craniology but enriched the science with ethnology and paleo-ethnology. He dedicated himself to the Laboratory of Anthropology; however, he did not consent to the overuse of photographs of exotic skulls and to the measurement of a few living individuals in his research. Puccioni believed that human studies should be conducted in their natural settings. During Puccioni's direction, the museum

<sup>25</sup> Mochi's role as director started in 1910

enhanced the value of its collection by providing captions, complementary photographs, sketches, and aesthetic design. The museum also moved to its current location, Palazzo Nonfinito, in 1932. King Victor Emmanuel III attended the inauguration, symbolising the reaffirmation of Florence as the centre of intellectual life in Italy (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

### **2.3.2 The Fascist and Racial Science**

During the rise of fascist movements in Italy, the museum and cultural sector were two of the most important agencies used by the regime to imprint fascist identity on the mass population. Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of Education, seized control and practically annexed anthropology societies in Florence and Rome. The strategy enabled him to appoint officers in both Societies, refuse membership to anyone, and control the societies' publications. Later, Bottai also introduced laws collectively known as Racist Policies or *Politica Razzista* (Taylor, 1988).

The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence and the Florentine School did not escape the inevitable fate. Even though philosophically, the fascist view on race was closer to that of the Roman School, the regime apparently paid more attention to Florence for its racial propaganda. They needed the Florentine School for two main reasons. First, the Florentine School and their museum are more general in their anthropological research. They are viewed as a more appropriate channel for fascist rhetoric of *Italiana*,<sup>26</sup> as the Florentine School has a long history of interest in ethnology. The decision was also influenced by the fact that, between the 1920s and 1930s, the Roman School had become more specialised in the physical or somatic aspects of humanity than in the study of individuals or races. The second reason for the regime's concentration on the Florentine School was their intensive study in Africa and the abundance of materials and older museum collections, including skeletal remains (Taylor, 1988). These resources were considered beneficial for the fascist agenda on race.

However, to support their ambition, the regime needed to change the leadership in the Florentine School and society. To facilitate this, they transitioned

<sup>26</sup> Spirit of the Italian people

the museum direction from the Puccioni to the Lidio Cipriani in 1938. The event was aligned with Mussolini's Manifesto of Race, in which Lidio Cipriani was listed as a signatory. Lidio Cipriani, a student of Mochi (Landi & Cecchi, 2014), a scholar educated in anthropology and passionate about African cultures, dedicated himself to fieldwork, creating numerous human facial plaster casts and thousands of photographs. Cipriani was also trained in Roman school traditions (Taylor, 1988).<sup>27</sup> During his research in Africa, he visited and collected materials from communities of the Zulu, the Baila, the Tonga, the Bushmen and Pygmies, the Tuareg, the Toubou and Dauda, the Baria, and the Kunama. Based on his research, Cipriani strongly believed in the physical and mental inferiority of the African race compared to the European race (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

As head of the Florentine Anthropology Society and director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, Cipriani was involved in many critical fascist activities. In 1938, he was involved in organising the Race Office and the editorial of *La Difesa della Razza* (Defence of Race). *La Difesa della Razza* is a new magazine and propaganda organ of the fascist regime to spread their doctrine. The first edition was published in 1938, featuring a cover montage composed of photographs of three heads, representing three distinct identities, separated by a Roman short sword (see Figure 5). The montage is highly symbolic, depicting a hierarchical ordering of races and the separation of Italian identity from other identities. The first is the Aryan identity, represented by the classical statue, probably the Doryphoros of Polykleitos; the second is the Jewish identity, represented by the collection of sculpted faces at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier. The third is an African identity, represented by a black woman depicted in Cipriani's ethnographic photograph from 1932 (Righettoni, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> like many of the fascist leaders of the Florentine School during this period



**Figure 2.5.** The cover of *La difesa della razza I* (5 August 1938), utilising the source of photographs by Cipriani (Collection of Bologna Biblioteche).

The use of Cipriani's photograph in the first edition of *La Difesa della Razza* is not a single occasion. Cipriani's works in Africa have been featured in numerous editions of the magazine, including his photographs and report, which depict the African culture he encountered during his research in a negative light. His hypothesis and view of the inferiority of African cultures were not confined to theory; they were also applied to colonial policies, in which Cipriani invoked the inferiority of Africans to justify Italians' rights to exploit Africa's wealth and natural resources.

As he wrote, "since the continent is an immense deposit of natural resources and the Negro does not seem able to efficiently make use of the exceptional treasures of his land of origin, the white man has the right to exploit the continent" (Cipriani, 1932: 145).

The regime needed applied science that was able to support the superiority of the Italian race, and a character like Cipriani was a fit candidate for supporting aspirations of the regime to 'weaponise' anthropology for their benefit. While

more moderate and liberal professors retreated and conducted more harmless experiments and research, the ones who were pro-fascist became louder and more prominent. Professors such as Cipriani became theorists of the new racial policies, and the Florentine School advocated for their application in society months before they were finally declared law by the regime. Regarding the relationship between fascism and anthropology, Taylor (1988: 57) summarised it as:

“Although the metatheory and assumptions of Fascist anthropology came from the Roman traditions founded by Giuseppe Sergi, that tradition only became a strong political arm of Fascism after 1937, in Florence, where the unified study of man in his biological and social categories of Races and Peoples combined physical anthropology and ethnology into pseudo-scientific basis and justification for the Racist Policies which began in 1938”

Just a little over twenty years after Mantegazza's death, it is clear that most of his work in the Florentine Anthropology Society and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology would not survive. The aggressive involvement of the fascist regime in and the abrogation of the Florentine Anthropology Society limited anthropology to an incomplete science of man. As Taylor and Merino (2019) noted, Mantegazza could not have foreseen the decline of the Florentine Society under Mussolini when he wrote a warning about “a false direction in Italian anthropology.”

As Mantegazza wrote, “Nothing can be more painful to an old man who dedicated almost half a century of his life to the love of one science, than having to recognise that the school of thought he has always followed... is travelling off by another way, which he believes small-minded and false...” (1906, 189).

Cipriani's directorship at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence was brief. Following several controversies regarding academic and ethical disputes, as well as heated relationships with the Race Office, Cipriani was expelled from the academic and Florentine Anthropology Society, and consequently lost his position as the museum's director in 1940. The expulsion of Cipriani marked the end of Mantegazza's line of disciples in the museum's directorship. Cipriani's successor was Giuseppe Genna, physician, and professor of anthropology at the University of Bari. During Genna's directorship, the museum experienced a difficult period, including the Second World War. After

the war, the museum acquired new collections such as skull casts from the Medici Family and the Hokkaido Ainu collection bequeathed by Fosco Maraini in 1948, and the Thai collection from Galileo Chini in 1950.<sup>28</sup>

Paolo Graziosi succeeded Genna as director in 1954. Although educated in Natural Science with Mochi, he decided to pursue his interest in prehistoric disciplines. He formed the Institute of Palaeo-ethnology in 1940 and continued teaching until 1973. As director, he further developed paleoethnological research. For the first time, the museum's direction is shifting towards a greater focus on prehistory. The weakened tradition of the Florentine School's influence within the museum, as foreseen by Mantegazza, led to a progressive decline in the natural study of man in all his components (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

In 1984, the University of Florence decided to reunify the scientific collection and establish the Museum of Natural History of the University of Florence. This system comprises the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, along with other botanical, geopaleontological, mineralogical, and zoological collections. However, due to numerous obstacles, the unification of the collection did not come to fruition. By the end of Curzio Cipriani's directorship, the university, in accordance with the New Code of Cultural and Landscape Heritage, had revised the museum's regulations. The collections were finally managed as a federation of six sections, each with its own funding and staff.<sup>29</sup>

To summarise, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, founded in the 1870s by Paolo Mantegazza, emerged at a time when scientific racism, colonial expansion, and national identity were deeply intertwined. Initially conceived as a branch of the Museum of Natural History, it became a key site for constructing and exhibiting anthropological knowledge rooted in European superiority. The museum's collections were built mainly through colonial networks, scientific expeditions, and donations, including objects from Indonesia during the Dutch East Indies era. During the Fascist period, the museum played a pivotal ideological role, aligning with the regime's racial and nationalist propaganda, most notably through figures like Lidio Cipriani. After World War II, although the museum underwent

<sup>28</sup> From GRASAC Knowledge Sharing Platform, <https://gks.artsci.utoronto.ca/members/institutions/1106-museo-di-antropologia-e-etnologia>

<sup>29</sup> From The rebirth of the museum, <https://www.sma.unifi.it/p482.html>

administrative and institutional changes, it largely retained its colonial-era collections without substantial reinterpretation. Today, the museum stands as a powerful archival site of Italy's colonial past, raising critical questions about the ethics of display, representation, and ownership of ethnographic objects.

Understanding the history and development of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence is crucial for unravelling the broader dynamics of how museums contributed to the construction of colonial knowledge and racial hierarchies. The institution not only functioned as a scientific centre but also as a political instrument that helped legitimise Italy's colonial ambitions and reinforce ideologies of Western superiority. Its collections, presentation methods, and curatorial choices were all shaped by, and helped shape, the dominant worldviews of their time.

*This page is intentionally left blank*

### **Chapter 3. Nias Ethnographic Collections in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence: An Introduction to the Colonial Collection**

Chapter 3 of this thesis focuses on a single collection, the Nias Ethnographic Collection. It presents an overview of the Nias collection and related collections (i.e., Indonesia's and Southeast Asia's collections) within a broader context. The research was conducted within the framework of the Next Generation EU-National Recovery and Resilience Plan, M.D. 351/2022 project based at the University of Naples L'Orientale (UNIOR), with a focus on enhancing and disseminating the Indonesian collections of Italian museums. This research proposes an Italian-Indonesian collaboration for cataloguing the ethnographic materials held in Italian museums, initiating a process of decolonisation, better protection, and enhancement of a rich heritage of objects that remain relatively unknown to the general public. The study aims to publish a digital catalogue and establish a circular cooperation process involving institutions and users.

The collection was gathered before the fascist period of Italian museums by Elio Modigliani (1860-1932), a Florentine anthropologist who visited Nias Island in 1886. The objects are relatively unknown to both the broader audience and researchers due to the lack of international assessments of Modigliani's work, as most of his publications are in Italian and often difficult to obtain (Bigoni, 2023, p. 7). Nevertheless, the objects contained significant cultural and historical value. Following Modigliani's visit in 1886, Nias Island experienced a substantial cultural shift due to the introduction of the 'new religions' brought by the Dutch colonial administration as part of its Ethical Policy in the Indonesian Archipelago in the early 20th century.<sup>30</sup>

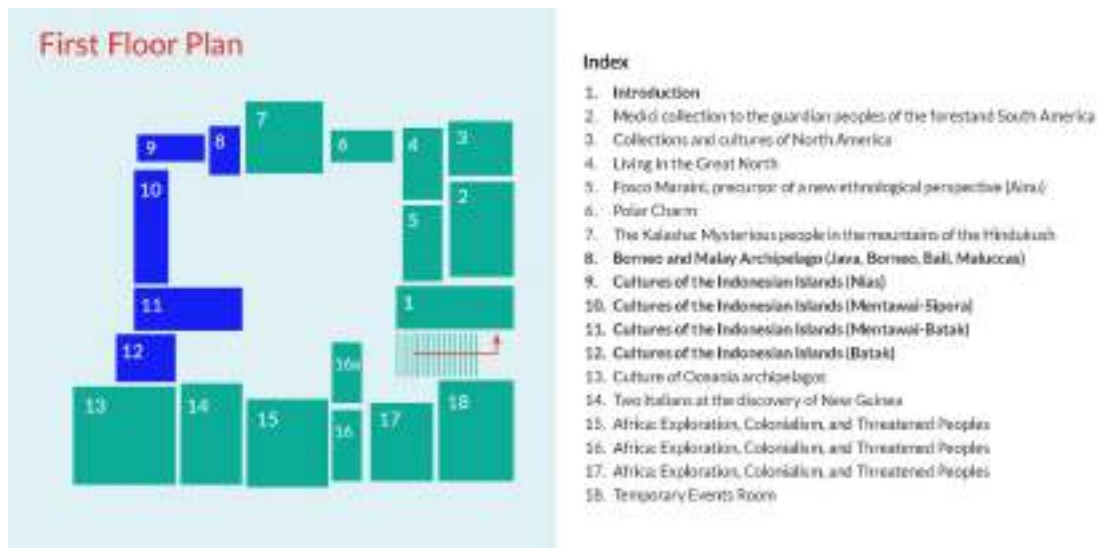
Within the recent broader discussion of the decolonisation of 'indigenous objects', Modigliani's Nias collection also provides an interesting case, as there was never a formal colonial relationship between Indonesia and Italy. These objects, which were taken from 'someone else's colonies,' are often forgotten by both the

<sup>30</sup> The introduction of Christianity by different churches to Nias significantly changed their culture regarding tradition and the use of many artefacts, including the disappearance of many ritualistic and ancestral worship-related objects. See the work of Yamamoto, 1986; Scarduelli, 1990; Bakker, 2004; Tjoa-Bonatz, 2009; Beatty, 2012

country of origin and the adoptive country, as well as researchers, when addressing decolonisation issues. The focus of this chapter is to describe how the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology acquired the collection, how it presents and communicates it to visitors in the post-colonial world, and how these objects, even though they were collected outside formal colonial relations, remain affected by the legacy of colonialism.

### 3.1 General description of Exhibition Rooms

The Nias collection forms part of the broader Southeast Asian collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. To contextualise the research, this section provides an overview of how selected objects, particularly those from Indonesia and Nias, are currently displayed within the museum. The discussion highlights the persistence of outdated museological practices and the museum’s limited engagement with the growing discourse on decolonisation in Italy. Rather than offering a complete curatorial or spatial analysis, this subchapter aims to illustrate how these collections are presented to the public and to underline the need for more inclusive and reflexive perspectives in the interpretation of ethnographic displays (as indicated by the blue blocks in Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1.** The Floor plan of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, which has maintained the same layout since its early days (Source: Exhibition Itinerary, University of Firenze, with modification by author).<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1.1 Introduction Room

The rooms and the layout of the first floor of the museum retain the original design of its foundation, as it was when it was relocated to Palazzo Infinito. Entering the museum, visitors are greeted by the introduction section (see Figure 3.1, number 1). The official name is *Sala 1. Da qui inizia un viaggio tra le culture del mondo* (Room 1. From here begins a journey through the cultures of the world). This area appears designed to introduce visitors to the differences in culture from a Western perspective and familiarise them with how anthropology and ethnology have been applied in the past. The main highlights include the practices of 19th- and early 20th-century anthropologists, as evidenced by craniometric tools and plaster-cast materials.

In this area, visitors are immediately greeted by a row of mannequins dressed in clothing of different ethnic origins. From Modigliani's collection, there is a mannequin depicting a man in traditional Sipora clothing (Roselli, 2014). Sipora is one of the four islands in the Mentawai Archipelago, which Modigliani visited during his last fieldwork in Indonesia in 1893 (Bigoni et al., 2019a; Monaco, 2020, p. 50). The mannequin is adorned with a tribal tattoo covering its body, depicting a mature member of the Sipora community. The statue was created by Giuseppe Felli, a sculptor who graduated from the *Accademia d'arte di Firenze*. In total, Felli created five statues, three of which depict Indonesian ethnic groups, all based on photographs and facial plaster casts made by Modigliani during his trips to Indonesia (Sanesi & Bonfiglioli, 2019). In addition to the Sipora mannequin, there are other mannequins representing diverse cultures worldwide, some adorned with samurai armour and others with ethnic clothing from Southeast Asia.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.sma.unifi.it/index.php?module=CMpro&func=viewpage&pageid=824&newlang=ita>



**Figure 3.2.** Exhibited panel in the first/introduction room in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence.

In the same room, deeper inside the corridor, the room was highlighted by the big text ‘*La diversità è un valore / diverso ... come te!*’ or ‘Diversity is a virtue/ different ... like you!’<sup>32</sup> Surrounded by different facial plaster casts and photographs of various ethnicities (see Figure 3.2). This section can be regarded as part of the lingering legacy of traditional physical anthropology or anthropometry. The display is accompanied by instruments once used to measure human body parts, a world map illustrating the distribution of “races,” and photographs of Lidio Cipriani<sup>33</sup> creating facial plaster casts from an individual of African descent. The accompanying caption describes how early anthropologists used such casts to study ethnic differences prior to the discovery of DNA in 1954. Yet, it is evident that these practices reflect a profound lack of empathy toward their human subjects, the individuals reduced to mere data points in a pseudoscientific pursuit of racial classification. This absence of humanity is also mirrored in the museum’s own caption (see Figure 3.3), as written below:

“From the technical point of view taking facial mask was a rather simple task. The person was put lying down on the ground and liquid gypsum was poured

<sup>32</sup> Introductory label in the Introduction Room.

<sup>33</sup> The director of the museum during the fascist regime and the supporters of racial science. Read the previous chapter.

on the face... The most difficult detail of the entire process was to convince the person to agree to the tedious position that made normal breathing very difficult. A common procedure was to introduce small tubes in the nostrils to avoid suffocation during process. Pain is often evident in the expression of the masks that show grimaces and contractions that are obviously not natural.”<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 3.3.** The label for the facial plaster-cast making process, with photographs of Lidio Cipriani.

Museums in different countries have taken varying approaches to such collections. For example, Johannes Pieter Kleiweg de Zwaan<sup>35</sup> took facial plaster casts of Indonesian origin during his stay in Indonesia between 1907 and 1910. The facial plaster casts, numbering 488 copies from 188 individuals, are now being kept in three Dutch museums. Over the last few years, a collaboration between universities and museums, initiated by the Pressing Matter Project at Vrije Universiteit (Netherlands), has been undertaken to better understand and trace the descendants of these faces, utilising plaster casts as an archive (Lai, 2023). The project also reached local communities in the central and southern parts of Nias, as well as the regional museum in Gunungsitoli, and local scholars

<sup>34</sup> The text is labelled in the panel of “Foto Antropologiche e Maschere Facciali”, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (Section or Focus Label)

<sup>35</sup> De Zwaan (1875-1971) was a Dutch anthropologist working for the Dutch Colonial administration in Indonesia

at Universitas Nias Raya. The Dutch museums have now removed the exhibition of the plaster casts, collaborating to create an exhibition in Nias to ‘bring back’ the faces to their origins, even going so far as to offer the original plaster casts to the descendants of the models (Lai, 2023).<sup>36</sup> The goals of the two expositions on plaster casts in Florence and the Dutch museums might differ. However, the Florentine museum's perspectives and narrative style are considerably behind those of its Dutch contemporaries.

### **3.1.2 Room 8 - Borneo and Malay Archipelago**

The first room, which contains Indonesian ethnographic objects, is Room 8. The official name is the *Sala 8. Borneo e archipelago Malese* (Room 8. Borneo and Malay Archipelago). This room housed a diverse collection of ethnographic objects from various regions of Malaysia and Indonesia, brought by different collectors. Among them are Odoardi Beccari, Giovanni Cerrutti, Enrico Giglioli and Johann Friedrich Riedel. The objects collected span the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries. There is no discernible layout or theme in the selection of objects displayed in this section by the museum. The objects displayed in this section comprise items gathered by various collectors from different periods (see Figure 3.4).

<sup>36</sup>During the 2024 focus group, the project received mixed responses, as many direct descendants requested the return of their relative's plaster face, while others accepted the fact that the masks are now in the Netherlands.



**Figure 3.4.** One of the cabinets in Room 8 exposes a mixed collection of ethnographic objects from Malaysia and Indonesia.

The objects housed in this room comprise a wide variety of items, ranging from weapons and clothing to containers and miniatures. In addition to Indonesia and Malaysia, several additional objects from Thailand complement these collections. The collections housed in three cabinets include some of the following:

**Table 3.1.** List of objects in Room 8

No.	Item	Origin	ID	Collector	Date	Num
1	Wood Quiver	Sakai People, Malay Peninsula, Malaysia	6253	Hugh Low	1866-1867	1
2	<i>Parang Ilang</i> (short sword)	Bugis (Sulawesi), Dayak (Sarawak, Borneo)	1669, 5166, 1670, 5148, 5152	Giovanni Emilio Cerruti	1866	5
3	<i>Tambuk</i>	Dayak Bidayuh (Sarawak,	387	Odoardo	1865	1

	(rice basket)	Borneo)		Beccari		
4	Spear	Dayak Kayan (Sarawak, Borneo)	391	Odoardo Beccari	1865	1
5	Keris	Java, Sulawesi, Mollucas (Indonesia)	5143, 5141, 5144, 5140, 5142, 5145, 5147, 5150, 5146	Giovanni Emilio Cerruti	1866	9
6	<i>Parang Ilang</i> (short sword)	Dayak Kayan (Sarawak, Borneo)	390	Odoardo Beccari	1865	1
7	Bamboo Quiver	Dayak Penan (Sarawak, Borneo)	864	G. Battista Beccari (?)	1865	1
8	Hat	Dayak (Sarawak, Borneo)	393	Odoardo Beccari	1865	1
9	<i>Wayang kulit</i> (marionette)	Java (Indonesia)	17400, 17401	Enrico Hillyer Giglioli	1917	2
10	Boat models	Sulawesi (Indonesia)	854, 855	Johann Friedrich Riedel	1864	2

### 3.1.3 Room 9 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Nias)

Room 9 is the first of four rooms dedicated to Elio Modigliani's ethnographic collection. Elio Modigliani (June 13, 1860 - August 6, 1932) was a Florentine anthropologist who visited Nias Island in 1886. Nias was a little-known island at the time, rarely attracting attention from European scholars due to the perceived danger posed by headhunting practices and the limited influence of the Netherlands in the region.<sup>37</sup> Following his exploration of Nias, Modigliani returned with many objects, now on display in this room at the museum. Part of the collection was donated by Modigliani in 1887, and additional pieces were acquired by the museum in 1904, along with pieces from Modigliani's two other fieldwork expeditions in Indonesia (Bigoni et al., 2019). The objects include war equipment, musical instruments, measuring tools, clothing, jewellery, household

<sup>37</sup> The Dutch colonised the area now known as Indonesia from 1799 to 1945. However, the presence of the Dutch in Nias was very minimal, only after the fall of Bawömataluo Village in South Nias in 1908, the Dutch effectively colonised Nias.

items, guest-welcoming items, ancestral-worship statues, and house miniatures (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).



**Figure 3.5.** One of the cabinets in Room 9, exposing the plaster statue of Kanolo, son of the chief of Hilizihönö, in his war attire.

The Nias objects in this museum hold great importance. These objects, which Modigliani collected in 1886, can be regarded as visual representations of the vanished Nias culture. Almost all of Modigliani's Nias objects are exhibited in this room.<sup>38</sup> The centrepiece is the mannequin of Kanolo, son of the chief of Hilizihönö (see Figure 3.5). Giuseppe Felli created this figure from Modigliani's photographs of the person during his trip. The mannequin is adorned with rich artefacts collected by Modigliani. The room underwent renovation during this project, resulting in a new look and updated captions between September and October 2024. Details of this collection will be discussed in Subchapter 3.2.

### **3.1.4 Room 10 and 11 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Mentawai - Batak)**

Rooms 10 and 11 are the second and third rooms of Elio Modigliani's collection. As there is no clear separation between the room and the collection's

<sup>38</sup> Around 40 objects were given to Enrico Giglioli, now part of Museum of the Civilisation in Rome (confirmed by museum's database and curator Paderni, 2025, through personal communication)

origin, the author decided to combine the description of these two rooms. The museum's records indicate that it housed 460 Batak objects, 351 Enggano objects, and 949 Mentawai objects. Another three Enggano objects, two Batak objects, and 25 Mentawai objects from Modigliani's collection are now housed in the Ethnographic Museum of Buenos Aires, as part of an exchange of objects with the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence in 1910 (Bigoni et al. 2019a, p. 17).



**Figure 3.6.** General view of Room 10, highlighted by several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Mentawai, a map of Sumatra and a portrait of Elio Modigliani.

In addition to the collections displayed in the cabinets, the rooms also provide a visualisation of Modigliani's trip to Indonesia through a map and a painting of his portrait (see Figure 3.6). Room 11 also housed another mannequin created by Felli, depicting a female character from Modigliani's 1893 trip to Sipora. The mannequin is adorned with traditional clothing, complete with a *tutu* (a headdress made of sago bark), a cape, and a skirt made of banana leaves. Similar to the mannequin in the Introduction Room, this mannequin is carefully made, including tattoos.



**Figure 3.7.** General view of Room 11, including several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Batak and a plaster statue of a Sipora woman.

Room 11 (Figure 3.7) also houses the majority of the Batak collection, including the Batak manuscripts. One of the manuscripts has been described and analysed in a PhD thesis discussed at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” in 2020 (Monaco, 2020). Like other rooms, there is no sense of order in the display of the objects in these two rooms. The manuscripts belong with the jewellery, and weapons remain beside ancestral statues. Labelled descriptions are minimal, creating more confusion instead of shedding light on each represented culture.

### **3.1.5 Room 12 - Culture of the Indonesian Islands (Batak)**

Room 12 is the last room of Modigliani’s collection. The room shared a space with an audio-visual facility in the museum. This room is highlighted by cabinets that display sizable artefacts, including miniature houses and ornaments. On the other side of the wall are sets of photographs taken by Modigliani during his 1892 trip to Batak land, as well as facial casts made by Modigliani from living subjects, also from the Batak people.



**Figure 3.8.** General view of Room 12, highlighted by several cabinets containing ethnographic objects from Batak and a series of plaster cast faces.

Also included in this room are sets of musical instruments of different types, totems, fish traps, and other miscellaneous items. As in previous rooms, there is no sense of arrangement or clear order to the display, perpetuating these cabinets as cabinets of curiosities in the 21st century. The screen monitor located in the room plays some older recordings on a loop; however, none of them are related to the collection from Indonesia.

## **3.2 The Nias Collections**

### **3.2.1 Elio Modigliani and the Nias Exploration**

Nias's ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence is among the most significant and well-documented. The collection was assembled by Elio Modigliani in 1886 during his 146-day expedition to Nias Island. Modigliani was an anthropologist from a wealthy Florentine banker's family. He continued his education in law studies at the University of Pisa. However, Modigliani's primary interests were anthropology and the natural sciences. He had an opportunity to learn from prominent scholars such as

Giacomo Doria, Arturo Issel, Odoardo Beccari, and Cesare Lombroso. After consulting Doria, who had previously visited the Malay Archipelago and New Guinea in the 1870s, Modigliani chose to depart for Nias on his first expedition. His goal was to gather skulls for the museum's collection and other ethnographic specimens.<sup>39</sup> During his trip to Nias, he was accompanied by Italian Captain Giovanni Battista Cerruti (November 28, 1850 - June 28, 1914), a collector specialised in indigenous communities of Southeast Asia.

Modigliani made productive use of his time during his expedition to Nias Island, arriving at the port of Gunungsitoli on April 22, 1886. Upon arrival, he immediately began collecting various animal species, which he then treated for taxidermy and sent to the Natural History Museum in Genoa via the Italian consulate in Singapore. His contributions to documenting Nias's biodiversity represent a significant advance in the study of the island's fauna, particularly in ornithological research, where Modigliani is known as the first to collect bird specimens from Nias (Salvadori, 1887; Rheindt et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Modigliani's primary focus was ethnographic research. To achieve his goal, he needed to visit not only the capital of Nias, Gunungsitoli, but also the island's southern regions.

Initially, Modigliani's plan to explore the southern parts of the island was not supported by the Dutch colonial authorities in Gunungsitoli. Controller Van Os<sup>40</sup> repeatedly dissuades Modigliani from going to the south, in the same notion as the Governor General van Rees.<sup>41</sup> He mentioned many difficulties Modigliani might have encountered in the southern Nias, considering the new conflict that emerged between Orahili village and the Dutch administration regarding a dispute on the return of runaway slaves, not to mention the danger of being caught by head-hunters and trapped in cross-fire during the fights between villages, which was

<sup>39</sup> During this period, skulls were regarded as essential materials for the study of physiognomy, which sought to understand human development and character. In 1870, Lombroso examined the cranium of a brigand named Giuseppe Villella, which led him to identify purported anatomical differences between criminals and non-criminals. He theorised that deviance and criminality represented a regression in human evolution, or degeneration (Lombroso, 1876; Ferrero, 1911). Misinterpreting Darwin's theory of evolution, Lombroso characterised the "criminal man" as an ancestral form of humanity, distinct in anthropological features from the "normal man," and consequently advocated the application of anthropometry in criminological studies (Mazzarello, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> A.V. Van Os was a member of the staff of the governor of Sumatra's West Coast. He was mentioned in 1885 as a 2nd class controleur in Sumatra's West Coast (Witkam, 2021)

<sup>41</sup> Otto van Rees, Colonial Governor of the Dutch East Indies (1884-1888)

very common in the South Nias during that time. Van Os went so far as to propose a cruise for Modigliani on a warship to the southern Nias. This offer was rejected by Modigliani, considering he did not want to be seen by the South Nias natives in the same apparatus as the Dutch armies, which could have hindered his goals for gathering as many ethnographic data as possible and blending with the natives.<sup>42</sup>

For his trip, Modigliani gathered various materials, including mirrors, metal buttons, whistles, harmonicas, knives, brass wire, and tobacco. Expensive gifts such as Venetian glassware, cotton and a *gung* (*gong*)<sup>43</sup> were reserved as special gifts for the village chiefs. In addition to gifts and trading goods, Modigliani purchased substantial quantities of food and supplies for himself and his crews. All the logistics were then stocked in a boat that he rented from a Malay shipowner, the boat *pencialang*,<sup>44</sup> and that he could be used as he wished, stopping wherever he wanted and waiting for him when he embarked on a visit to the inner part of the island (Modigliani, 1890, p. 156).

Against the hesitation of the local Dutch colonial authorities, Modigliani set out from Gunungsitoli on May 10th 1886. During his trip, he visited several villages in the southern part of the island. During his initial encounters with the natives, he did not always have the best experiences, as Nias warriors were often wary of Westerners. However, with a gift of tobacco and a promise of additional gifts to the village chiefs, Modigliani secured access to the villages. In many villages, he made productive use of his time to record the habits and daily activities of the local inhabitants and to acquire numerous ethnographic specimens through barter.

<sup>42</sup> From Modigliani's personal records (Modigliani, 1890, p. 146-7)

<sup>43</sup> Well-made metal gong was sought after by the village chiefs, due to their beautiful and loud sound. The introduction of metal gongs also contributed to the decline of Nias' traditional musical instrument, the tutuhao, due to their perceived inferiority.

<sup>44</sup> Pencialang, a traditional boat of Nusantara, made of wood and has three masts



**Figure 3.9.** Elio Modigliani's trip to Nias Island (Modigliani, 1890; modified from Google Maps, 2025)

Modigliani's visit to the southern part of the island also provided an opportunity to offer a more accurate depiction of the island's geographical condition. Before Modigliani, Nias maps were drawn by von Rosenberg,<sup>45</sup> however, his visit and data collection, primarily from a cruise around the island, yielded less accurate results. During his visit, Modigliani made numerous excursions to remote villages and other locations (see Figure 3.9 and Table 3.2). His recordings proved crucial for updating the map of Nias Island, even many years later. Modigliani also noted numerous sites of importance in his records, some of which he had not himself visited. Many of these places were also sources of his acquired ethnographic objects, mainly through a mediator that he met in Hili Nagnea (now known as Sihareo, part of South Gunungsitoli). The mediator,<sup>46</sup> a witch doctor (*ere*), provided Modigliani with several objects, such as a war mask and ancestral statues. However, Modigliani did not provide accurate provenance

<sup>45</sup> Carl Benjamin Hermann von Rosenberg (1817-1888) is a Dutch officer, visited Nias from 6th September 1854 to 11th September 1855, <https://www.nationaalherbarium.nl/fmcollectors/R/RosenbergCBHvon.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Modigliani did not write the name of the mediator, considering the importance of the mediator's role, Modigliani should have written it.

in his records, most likely because he was unable to obtain further information from his supplier.

**Table 3.2.** Places visited by Elio Modigliani in Nias Island (taken from Modigliani's note on geographical records of the Nias Island, 1890, p. 115)

Location <sup>47</sup>	Date(s)
Gunungsitoli	22 April - 9 May
Bawo Lowalani (Bawolowalani)	12 - 21 May
Hili Dgiono (Hilizihono)	22 - 24 May
Bawo Lowalani (Bawolowalani)	25 - 31 May
Sendrecheasi (Sondregeasi)	
Luaha Gundre (Lagundri)	
Hili Simaetano (Hilisimaetano)	1 - 11 June
Luaha Gundre (Lagundri)	12 - 20 June
Sitte Island (Hinako Island)	30 June
Idano Dowu	1 July
Hili Buruarsi	2 - 3 July
Hili Lowalani	7 - 9 July
Hili Simaetano (Hilisimaetano)	11 - 13 July
Luaha Gundre (Lagundri)	14 - 21 July
Gunungsitoli	23 - 28 July
Hili Zabobo (Hilimbawadesolo)	29 July - 31 August, 1 - 7 September

Modigliani amassed hundreds of cultural objects from the different areas he visited, often acquiring them through barter using items such as tobacco, brass wire, gold dust, or weapons. However, some of the objects were also obtained through questionable or manipulative methods. One example, when being received in his first village in South Nias, Modigliani stole one *bola bola*<sup>48</sup> (betel

<sup>47</sup> The names mentioned first are names written by Modigliani, while the second names in brackets are the new names of the exact locations.

<sup>48</sup> In Modigliani's record, being mentioned as *cabe-cabe*

pouch) from the Chief of Bawölowalani during the *fame'e afo* (betel offering banquet).<sup>49</sup> This betel pouch is a special item, luxuriously made of a red cloth called *nukha soyo* and decorated with geometric ornaments from other black-and-white cloths (see Figure 3.10). In the past, this material was reserved for the noble bloodline, due to its price and beauty.



**Figure 3.10.** The sirih bag taken by Modigliani from the Chief of Bawolowalani, collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, object number 5769 (Photographed by author, 2023).

During the fieldwork in 2024, the author found out that the villagers in Bawömataluo Village, one of the villages that still maintains traditional practices in South Nias, recognised it as a *baru luo* cloth. This cloth is currently difficult to find, and when burned, it emits a distinctive odour. The fabric also signifies that the owner belongs to the higher social stratum in the community, given that the fabric is expensive and not easily obtainable. Simply put, during his first introduction to the village, Modigliani stole the Chief's pouch, as he wrote in his book:

*Il dividere con gli ospiti il Sirih è segno di pace e d'amicizia e sempre al primo giungere in un villaggio il Capo mi offriva una borsa spesso molto elegante, che conteneva gli ingredienti e gli strumenti per prepararlo. Io non mi sono mai potuto abituare a masticare quel bolo; perciò restituendo*

<sup>49</sup> In Nias culture and tradition, to respect and welcome guests, the host serves fresh betel, young areca nuts, gambir leaves, betel lime, and, sometimes, tobacco. Stealing the host's pouch was considered an insult.

*tutto il contenuto mi tenevo la borsetta, facendo mostra di credere quella il regalo principale. In qualche posto me la ridomandarono, ma per lo più, ansiosi di ricevere il mio dono, non rilevarono il volontario errore.*

Translation:

Sharing Sirih with guests is a sign of peace and friendship, and always upon my first arrival in a village the Chief offered me a bag, often very elegant, containing the ingredients and instruments for preparing it. I could never get used to chewing that lump; therefore, when they returned all the contents, they kept the bag for me, pretending to believe that it was the main gift. In some places they asked me for it again, but for the most part, anxious to receive my gift, they did not detect the voluntary mistake (Modigliani, 1890, p. 186).

Modigliani obtained several other betel pouches using the same method in addition to the pouch belonging to the Chief of Bawölowalani (Modigliani, 1890, p. 394). Aside from the betel pouches, another problematic acquisition was a *tolögu*, a traditional Nias sword that carries a rich cultural significance. Modigliani expressed deep admiration for the weaponry of Nias warriors, especially the swords (*tolögu*) and knives (*gari*). Throughout his expedition, he acquired 40 pieces of weaponry, including helmets (*takula tefao*), metal moustaches (*bumbewe tefao*), shields (*baluse*), spears (*toho*), masks, swords (*tolögu*), and 17 knives (*gari*). He was particularly interested in obtaining a *tolögu* like those possessed by noblemen and warriors, which were adorned with a decorative rattan ball (*ragö*) at the base of the sheath. These *ragö* often featured elaborate embellishments such as tiger or crocodile fangs, boar tusks, cloth, or miniature figures. Despite being willing to trade their *tolögu* for items like tobacco or brass, the warriors consistently refused to part with the *ragö*, regardless of what Modigliani offered.

Agner Møller, who collected artefacts for the National Museum of Denmark, recounted a similar experience, observing that while the people of Nias were willing to part with ancestral statues and other cultural items for fair compensation, the *tolögu* remained non-negotiable (Kurt-Nielsen, 2021).



**Figure 3.11.** The tolögu stolen by Modigliani from a warrior, collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, object number 5668 (Photographed by author, 2023)

Although Modigliani succeeded in obtaining several tolögu, none featured the distinctive ragö he desired. Ultimately, he resorted to having one of his local assistants steal a tolögu from a warrior during the night. This particular sword was exceptionally ornate, with a handle carved in the shape of a *lasara*<sup>50</sup> head and a ragö adorned with cloth and several small figures resembling *adu* (ancestral statue, see Figure 3.11). The next morning, the warrior was distraught upon discovering the theft, expressing his anguish with curses and deep lamentation. Modigliani covertly smuggled the object out of the village, later recounting the incident in his writings:

*Sono gelosissimi dei coltelli ornati di simili qualità mistiche e non avviene mai che vogliano separarsene spontaneamente; non hanno difficoltà a cedere il coltello, ma tolgono prima la palla per non rimaner privi dei loro idoli. Varie volte dimostrai desiderio di averne uno completo ed allora me lo falsificarono portandomene uno che aveva, e vero, la palla, ma invece di essere ornata con gli idoli non portava che qualche dente di maiale legati intorno. Stimano massima sventura il rimaner privi di questi idoli protettori e dei talismani, perché allora credendosi esposti alla vendetta dei parenti di coloro cui hanno tagliato la testa, o temono che gli spiriti cattivi invocati dalle loro vittime possano farli morire.*

*Non potendo acquistare in nessun modo uno di quei preziosi coltelli completi, e deciso a procurarmene un esemplare ad ogni costo, indussi uno*

<sup>50</sup> Mythical creatures of Nias

*dei miei uomini a rubarlo di notte e poi lo nascosi con gran cura onde sfuggisse ad ogni ricerca. Bisognava vedere il furore in cui proruppe il derubato, udire le minacce che profferiva contro chi gli aveva giuocato quel brutto tiro, per comprendere quanto caro sia il possesso di quegli idoli. Il suo dolore m'incuteva davvero pietà, ma non potei far altro che indennizzarlo con tanto filo d'ottone da ornare non uno, ma tutti i coltelli del suo villaggio.*

Translation:

They are highly jealous of knives endowed with such mystical qualities, and they never spontaneously want to separate them; they have no difficulty giving up the knife, but they first remove the ball so as not to be deprived of their idols. Several times, I showed a desire to have a complete one, and then they falsified it by bringing me one that did, indeed, have the ball, but instead of being adorned with idols, it had only a few pigs' teeth tied around it. They consider it a great misfortune to be deprived of these protective idols and talismans, because then they believe themselves exposed to the vengeance of the relatives of those whose heads they have cut off, or they fear that the evil spirits invoked by their victims may cause their death.

Unable to buy one of those precious knives in one piece, and determined to get one at any cost, I persuaded one of my men to steal it at night and then hid it with great care so that it would escape detection. One had to see the fury into which the robbed man burst, and hear the threats he uttered against the one who had played that dirty trick on him, to understand how dear the possession of those idols is. His pain really filled me with pity, but I could do nothing but compensate him with enough brass wire to adorn not one, but all the knives in his village (Modigliani, 1890, p. 242).

Modigliani provided a meticulous record of his expedition to Nias, documenting in detail the locations he visited, the everyday lives of the communities he encountered, and the cultural artefacts he acquired. His observations were first published serially between 1887 and 1889 in the *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, and later consolidated into his seminal ethnographic travelogue *Un Viaggio a Nias*.<sup>51</sup> Modigliani's fieldwork on Nias concluded on 15 September 1886, after which he returned to Italy and never revisited the island.

His publication remains one of the most significant early records on Nias Island, particularly because it captured a way of life that would soon undergo profound transformation. With the implementation of the Dutch colonial ethical

<sup>51</sup> A Travel to Nias, published by Modigliani in 1890

policy and the widespread Christianisation of the region, the social and cultural landscape of Nias changed dramatically. These shifts were accompanied by iconoclastic campaigns that led to the destruction or abandonment of traditional practices, belief systems, and material culture. In this context, Modigliani's ethnographic records and collections serve as a rare window into pre-Christian Nias society, preserving knowledge about objects and cultural practices that have since disappeared or become marginalised (Purnawibawa et al, 2025).

### **3.2.2 The Collection in numbers**

From his time in Nias (and a brief stop in Sibolga, a small city on the West Coast of Sumatra), he shipped a wide range of specimens: three monkeys, 27 birds, approximately 800 insects, and around 100 butterflies from Sibolga. Specifically, from Nias, he sent several bats, 400 insects, 40 birds, 200 butterflies, 222 ethnographic objects, and 26 human skulls. The natural collection was mainly sent to the Natural History Museum of Genoa. Meanwhile, the ethnographical collection was distributed primarily to the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence and the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography L. Pigorini (now the Museum of Civilisations in Rome). According to records from these institutions, the Museum of Civilisations in Rome houses 42 objects from Nias,<sup>52</sup> while the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence holds approximately 180 Nias cultural artefacts.

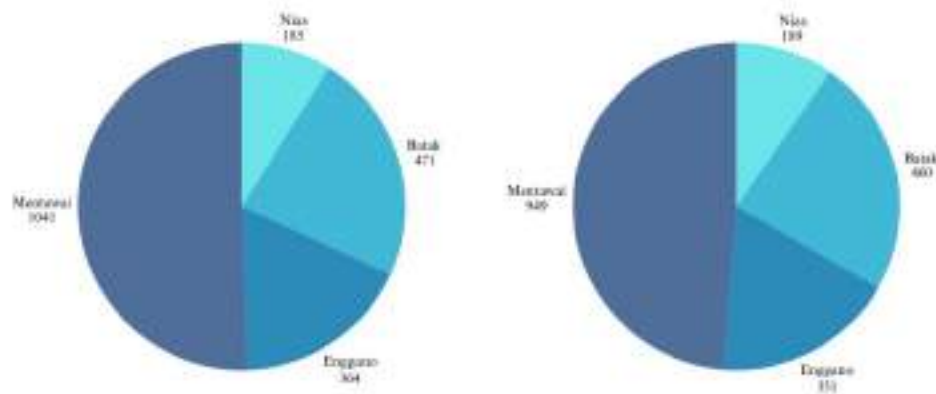
Among the materials he collected were 26 human skulls. Eleven were acquired from the chief of Bawölowalani village: three identified as belonging to warriors from Hili Gheo (Hiligeho), five from individuals of Hili Falago (Hilifalagö), and three from Iraono. These human remains were obtained through barter—specifically in exchange for firearms. An additional 15 skulls were acquired under similar terms from the Fadoro area. All 26 skulls were shipped to the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. Despite their significance, access to these remains for documentation and research purposes has not been granted by the museum.

<sup>52</sup> The Museum of Civilisation's database mentioned these objects were donated by Elio Modigliani in 1887 and Enrico Hilyer Giglioli in 1913 (Giglioli's donation also originated from Modigliani's exploration).

The Modigliani Nias collection was first included in the museum’s catalogue system by Paolo Mantegazza in 1887. The objects recorded were assigned accession numbers from 5652 to 5793, indicating that 141 objects were recorded. The second wave of cataloguing these objects was conducted by Aldobrandino Mochi in 1904, along with other Modigliani objects originating from Batak, Enggano, Sipora, and Mentawai. The second batch of these objects was assigned accession numbers from 9591 to 9635, indicating that 44 objects were recorded during this term. In total, 185 objects were registered. However, during recent archival research, the museum added four more objects to the Nias collection, bringing the total to 189 objects (Bigoni et al., 2019, p. 11). See Figure 3.12 and Table 3.3 below for the details.

**Table 3.3.** Number of Modigliani’s ethnographic objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, before and after recalculation (Bigoni et al., 2019, p. 12).

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Original calculation</b>	<b>Recent calculation</b>
Nias	185	189
Batak	471	460
Enggano	364	351
Mentawai	1041	949
Total items	2034	1949



**Figure 3.12.** The number and provenance of the Modigliani's Indonesia ethnographic collection in the Museum of Anthropology of Florence, in relation to Table 3.3.

However, during the museum's database renewal, the curators added four newly identified Nias objects, designated by the numbers E10009, ESNC/69, ESNC/79, and E32861. Thus, the total number of objects is 189. However, during my research, I found several oddities. For example, item number E10009 does not originate from Nias. A quick check of the museum database shows that the object described as a hat originated from Sipora in the Mentawai Archipelago. The visual comparison of the objects also matched the appearance of the hat worn by the mannequins representing the Sipora people exhibited in the museum. Another notable finding is that items with numbers ESNC/69 and 79 are necklaces and skirts that do not display the characteristics of Nias cultural objects. Only object number E32861, a war helmet (written as *Tracula tesao*), is convincingly a cultural object originating from Nias.

Likewise, for objects listed in the original list under numbers 5652-5793 and 9591-9635, it appears that item numbers are missing in the museum database. The missing and unrecorded numbers include 5669, 5681, 5694, 5728, 5760, and 5776. Based on these data, six numbers from the original collection of 185 cannot be found. Among the four newly identified objects, only one is convincingly identified as originating from Nias. Based on the data described above, only 180 Nias cultural objects can be traced in the museum, not 189 as reported by the museum. Of the 180 cultural objects, the author group them into several categories, including war equipment (40 items), musical instruments (8 items), measuring

tools and scales (7 items), clothing and jewelry (57 items), household equipment (29 items), guest welcoming equipment (15 items), ancestral worship facilities (23 items) and one miniature house, with the addition of human remains in form of 26 skulls that Modigliani acquired, and Vanni Puccioni confirms their existence.<sup>53</sup> See the details in Table 3.4 below.

**Table 3.4.** Detailed division of Modigliani’s Nias ethnographic objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence

Categories	Numbers
<b>Ethnographic Collection</b>	<b>180</b>
- War equipment	40
- Musical instruments	8
- Measuring tools and scales	7
- Clothing and jewellery	57
- Household equipment	29
- Guest welcoming equipment	15
- Ancestral worship	23
- Miniature	1
<b>Human remains</b>	<b>26</b>
- Skulls	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>

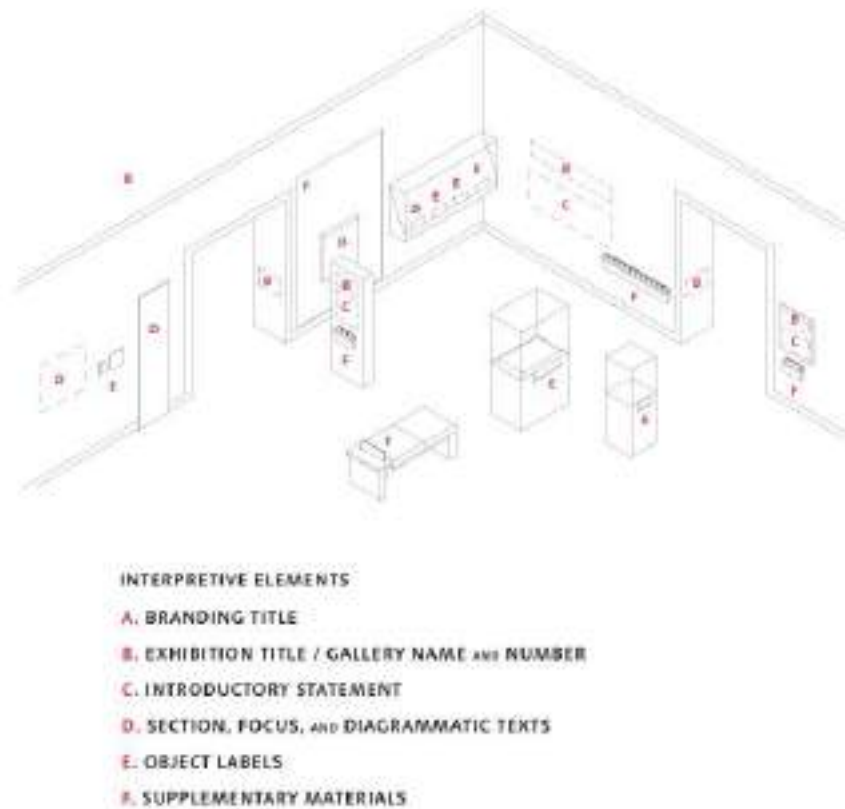
### 3.3 Embedded Coloniality in Modigliani’s Collection

#### 3.3.1 The Story of Whom?

A notable takeaway from the representation of Nias objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology is the information label provided by the museum. Museums will provide labels or captions to communicate with visitors. Museum labels carry information that curators consider essential for understanding and appreciating the objects. Meanwhile, for visitors, the labels provide a range of

<sup>53</sup> Author of “*Tra i Tagliatori di Teste: Elio Modigliani, un fiorentino all’esplorazione di Nias Salatan*” published in 2013. During the object documentation workshop at the museum, the curators repeatedly hesitate to grant access to the skulls and avoid discussing them.

information, from the exhibition title and supplementary details to ‘essential information’ and ‘casual interest’ (Wolf & Smith, 1993; see Figure 3.13). However, a label is not only an empty word. In recent years, records of origin and acquisition, along with labelling, have emerged as a focus of interest, becoming increasingly significant for understanding the history and cultural politics of museum collections (Rassool, 2018, p. 21).



**Figure 3.13.** Diagram of interpretive elements and labels in the museum (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2011)

Museums of ethnography and cultural history have, for some time, posed questions about the labels applied to their objects, as part of increasing awareness of the colonial histories of their acquisition. Sometimes the museum also labels the objects with erroneous attribution. For example, at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, the tribal category “Zulu” was applied not merely to Nguni speakers but also to artefacts from across southern Africa. This misidentification appears to be part of a long and complex history of colonial processes, including trade, conquest, and resistance, which resulted in an ever-

expanding category of “Zulu” and a deepening desire for “Zulu” material culture (Rassool, 2018, p. 22).



**Figure 3.14.** Exhibition title label of the Nias cabinet before (top) and during the project (bottom).

Such error attribution also affected the Nias collection in Florence. During the first survey of the museum in July 2023, as part of preparing this research, the author noted that the exhibition title label for the Nias collection was displayed as “Malesia, Isola Nias” (Malaysia, Nias Island) rather than “Indonesia” (see Figure 3.14). According to the curator, all of the information for the labels was extracted from Modigliani’s book *Un Viaggio a Nias*. In his notes, Modigliani referred to L’Arcipelago Malese, also known as the Malay Archipelago (Modigliani 1890, p. 4), which can be understood as reflecting the contemporary context, when Indonesia was still part of the Dutch colonial empire. Additionally, the Malay Archipelago is often used to refer to *Nusantara*, particularly the western part of modern Indonesia. However, in the museum’s official publication, in a chapter titled “*La Raccolte di Elio Modigliani in Indonesia*”<sup>54</sup> in 2014, Nias and Sumatra were described as Malaysian islands, which is different from the Malay

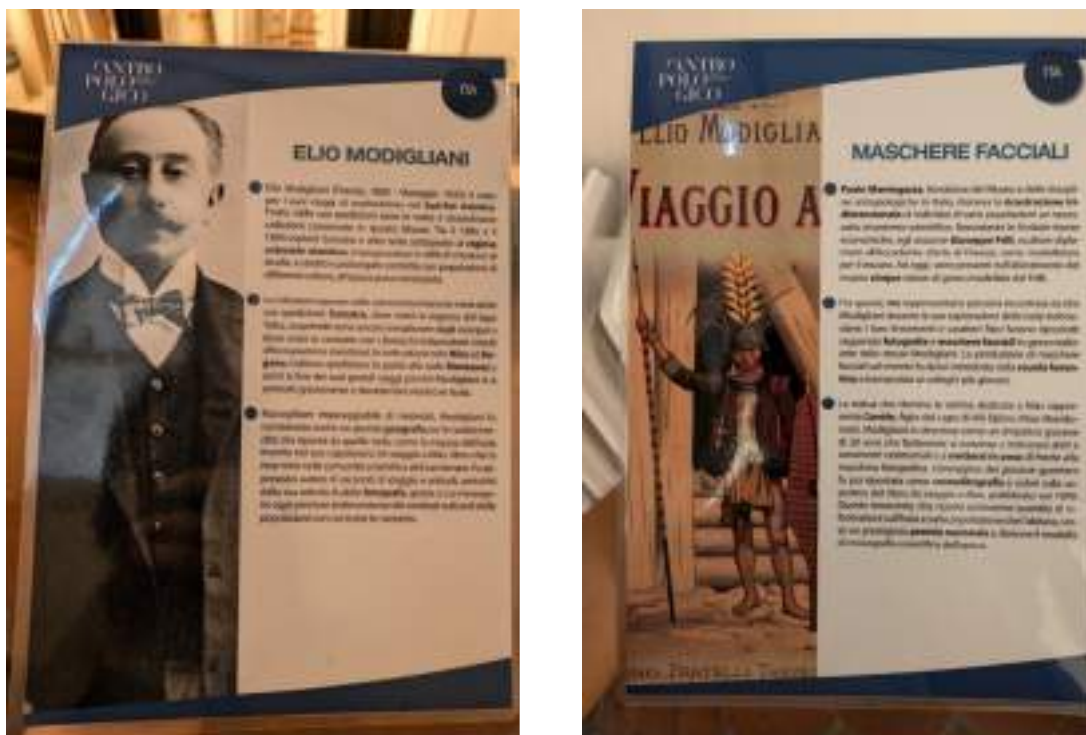
<sup>54</sup> The Collection of Elio Modigliani in Indonesia, written by Ciruzzi (2014)

Archipelago. Given changes in global politics, including shifts in borders and governance over the past centuries, it is fitting that, in this publication, Nias and Sumatra are identified as part of Indonesia.

The objects also underwent multiple transformations in terms of function and identity. Initially, the objects were used as functional, everyday tools by the people of Nias. Some items, such as jewellery and clothing, may also be used as symbolic tools by members of the nobility. Their function then changed as Modigliani acquired these objects. When Modigliani collected the everyday objects from Nias and sent them to Florence, they left their daily social life. They were given new life as “ethnographic collections” of the museum. In a museological context, ideally, museum professionals confer new meanings on objects through communication with visitors, encompassing both intellectual and emotional dimensions (Bruckner & Greci, 2016). This aligns with Van Mensch's (1992) three stages of contextual change in museum studies: the primary context, the archaeological (or, in this case, anthropological/ethnological) context, and the museological context. When objects are detached from daily circulation and placed in a temporary or permanent depository or collected as museum objects, they are transferred to a museological context. The term “social life of an object” is often used to refer to processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation as contexts are rewoven (Appadurai, 1986).

Based on Caple's (2006) work, Mao and Fu (2021) proposed three elements related to the object in a museological context: related people, related objects and related actions or events that occurred at a particular time and place(s). Related people refer to individuals or groups that own, use, or create the object, while related objects are those that surround the primary object or form a set with it. Lastly, related actions or events refer to how the object was created and utilised. These three elements are changeable throughout the object's social life (Mao & Fu, 2021, p. 3). However, within the contexts of anthropology and ethnographic museums, the newly assigned meaning can be complicated. Often, the objects are given new meaning to serve particular purposes. For example, during the fascist regime, the ethnographic objects were meant to show the ‘primitive’ stages of human evolution compared to those of Italians. Another example is the past

Museum Nusantara<sup>55</sup> in Delft, which amassed a huge ethnographic collection from Indonesia to educate future colonial officers about the people in their colonies. Both show the use of ethnographic objects in a museological context to serve the Western (colonial) agenda and domination over the cultures of others. Such an example can still be observed in the latest addition to the exhibition of Modigliani's collection. In 2024, the museum provided new supplementary materials (see Figure 3.15) in Room 9. The materials are intended to provide additional context and information about the collection related to Modigliani. The written text is as follows:



**Figure 3.15.** Supplementary label of Nias in the museum, heavily featured on Modigliani's story instead of the Nias culture.

First supplementary material (Figure 3.15, left).

*Elio Modigliani*<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Previously *Indische Instelling*, closed in 2013

<sup>56</sup> Supplementary material label, available in museum, documented in 18th October 2024.

*Elio Modigliani (Firenze, 1860-Viareggio, 1932) è noto per i suoi viaggi di esplorazione nel Sud-Est Asiatico. Frutto delle sue spedizioni sono le vaste straordinarie collezioni conservative in questo Museo. Tra il 1886 e il 1894 esplorò Sumatra e altre isole sottoposte al regime coloniale olandese, impegnandosi in difficili missioni di studio, a stretto e prolungato contatto con popolazioni di differenti culture, all'epoca poco conosciute.*

*Le collezioni esposte nelle sale testimoniano le mete delle sue spedizioni: Sumatra, dove visitò la regione del lago Toba, scoprendo zone ancora inesplorate dagli europei e dove entrò in contatto con i Batacchi indipendenti (ribelli all'occupazione olandese), le isole più piccole Nias ed Engano. L'ultima spedizione lo portò alle isole Mentawai e sancì la fine dei suoi grandi viaggi perché Modigliani vi si ammalò gravemente e dovette fare rientro in Italia.*

*Raccoglitore impareggiabile di materiali, Modigliani fu considerato anche un grande geografo per le notizie inedite che riportò da quelle isole, come la mappa dell'isola inserita nel suo capolavoro *Un viaggio a Nias*, libro che lo rese noto nella comunità scientifica del suo tempo. Fu apprezzato autore di racconti di viaggio e articoli, arricchiti dalla sua attività di abile fotografo, grazie a cui rimangono oggi preziose testimonianze dei contesti culturali delle popolazioni con cui entrò in contatto.*

Translation:

Elio Modigliani (Florence, 1860 – Viareggio, 1932) is known for his exploratory travels throughout Southeast Asia. The extensive and extraordinary collections housed in this Museum are the result of his expeditions. Between 1886 and 1894, he explored Sumatra and other islands under Dutch colonial rule, undertaking challenging research missions that required prolonged and close contact with various cultures that were, at the time, little known in Europe.

The collections displayed in the galleries reflect the destinations of his expeditions: Sumatra, where he visited the Lake Toba region and explored areas previously unknown to Europeans, establishing contact with the independent Batak peoples (who resisted Dutch occupation), as well as the smaller islands of Nias and Engano. His final expedition took him to the Mentawai Islands, marking the end of his great journeys after he fell seriously ill and was forced to return to Italy.

An unparalleled collector of materials, Modigliani was also regarded as a distinguished geographer for the original information he brought back from those islands, such as the detailed map of Nias included in his masterpiece *Un Viaggio a Nias*. This book made him known within the scientific community of his time. He was also a celebrated author of travel narratives and articles,

enriched by his skill as a photographer, which has left us with invaluable visual records of the cultural contexts of the peoples he encountered.

Meanwhile, the second supplementary material is written as follows:

Second supplementary material (Figure 3.15, right).

*Maschere Facciali*<sup>57</sup>

*Paolo Mantegazza, fondatore del Museo e delle discipline antropologiche in Italia, riteneva la ricostruzione tri-dimensionale di individui di varie popolazioni un necessario strumento scientifico. Nonostante le limitate risorse economiche, egli assunse Giuseppe Felli, scultore diplomato all'Accademia d'arte di Firenze, come modellatore per il museo. Ad oggi, sono presenti nell'allestimento del museo cinque statue di gesso modellate dal Felli.*

*Fra queste, tre rappresentano persone incontrate da Elio Modigliani durante le sue esplorazioni delle isole Indonesiane. I loro lineamenti e caratteri fisici furono riprodotti seguendo fotografie e maschere facciali in gesso realizzate dallo stesso Modigliani. La produzione di maschere facciali sul vivente fu da lui introdotta nella scuola fiorentina e tramandata ai colleghi più giovani.*

*La statua che domina la vetrina dedicata a Nias rappresenta Canolo, figlio del capo di Hili Djiono (Nias Meridionale). Modigliani lo descrisse come un simpatico giovane di 20 anni che facilmente si convinse a indossare abiti e ornamenti cerimoniali e a mettersi in posa di fronte alla macchina fotografica. L'immagine del giovane guerriero fu poi riportata come cromolitografia a colori sulla copertina del libro *Un viaggio a Nias*, pubblicato nel 1890. Questo resoconto, che riporta un'enorme quantità di informazioni sull'isola e sulla popolazione che l'abitava, vinse un prestigioso premio nazionale e divenne il modello di monografia scientifica dell'epoca.*

Translation:

Paolo Mantegazza, founder of the Museum and of the anthropological disciplines in Italy, considered the three-dimensional reconstruction of individuals from various populations a necessary scientific tool. Despite limited economic resources, he hired Giuseppe Felli, a sculptor who graduated from the Academy of Art in Florence, as a modeller for the museum. To date, five plaster statues modelled by Felli are on display in the museum's exhibition.

<sup>57</sup> Face Masks (Supplementary material label available in museum, documented in 18th October 2024).

Among these, three represent people encountered by Elio Modigliani during his explorations of the Indonesian islands. Their features and physical characteristics were reproduced based on photographs and plaster facial masks created by Modigliani himself. The production of facial masks on the living was introduced by him in the Florentine school and passed on to his younger colleagues.

The statue that dominates the showcase dedicated to Nias represents Canolo, son of the chief of Hili Djiono (Southern Nias). Modigliani described him as a lovely young man of 20 who was easily persuaded to wear ceremonial clothes and ornaments and to pose for the camera. The image of the young warrior was later reproduced as a colour chromolithograph on the cover of the book *Un Viaggio a Nias*, published in 1890. This account, which contains an enormous amount of information about the island and its people, won a prestigious national award and became the model for scientific monographs of the time.

Both supplementary material labels draw attention to the figure of Modigliani and the museification<sup>58</sup> of the objects in the museum. According to Mao and Fu's (2021) three elements of context (related people, related objects, and related actions or events that occurred at a particular time and place), these objects should have been able to convey a story of Nias culture to the visitors. However, the labels overemphasise Modigliani's achievement or the exhibition's creation. While both labels draw attention to the rich and vast information in Modigliani's book, *Un Viaggio a Nias*, neither accurately describes the book nor provides curated information about the objects. The content, a result of Modigliani's travel, is only mentioned as truncated information in some of the selected objects in the exposition. This raised the question of what the exhibition is about. Is the exhibition focused on the figure of Modigliani, or should the Nias people have been represented inside the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence?

The case of the Nias collection in Florence is far from unique. Similar dynamics are evident in other Italian collections, such as those assembled by Luigi Maria D'Albertis, an explorer who conducted three expeditions to Papua New Guinea in the late 19th century. From these journeys, D'Albertis amassed

<sup>58</sup> museification is bringing or turning selected object(s) into museums (Leshchinskii, 2023; Nguyen, 2024; Vaduva et al., 2024)

hundreds of ethnographic objects, many of which are now dispersed across museums in Florence, Rome, and Genova. The collection in Genova alone includes a range of artefacts: four bows and eighty arrows, axes, bamboo head-cutters, string bags, fishing implements, cassowary feather belts, nose ornaments, necklaces, and bracelets made from shells, seeds, and fibres, as well as a wig, shell money, a bamboo lute, a coconut shell rattle, a headrest, and a skull painted with ochre. These objects represent diverse regions, including the Fly River, Moresby Island, Orangerie Bay, and Yule Island. Accompanying the collection are photographs depicting skulls, artefacts, and staged portraits of men and women taken in Andai during his first expedition (Gnecchi-Ruscone, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, in the Nias case, the museum often relied on travellers' memoirs or records as the primary sources for presenting its collection. Gnecchi-Ruscone (2011, p. 179) refer to these documents as 'first contact' stories which still captivate a Western audience until today. Mosko (2009) also argued for the importance of these written records as sources of historical and anthropological information. However, these do not necessarily overshadow the story of the people that these ethnographic objects should have represented. Further, Gnecchi-Ruscone (2011) argued that the New Guinea collection, if presented without context, risks being understood merely as the D'Albertis cousins may have intended: trophies of personal adventure and exotic curiosities celebrating a European explorer's achievements in distant lands, as written by D'Albertis (1880) himself, "What I did and what I saw". Such an interpretation reproduces the colonial gaze, reducing the artefacts to evidence of one man's journey rather than acknowledging them as part of a broader network of unequal encounters. Yet, these objects carry deeper stories, traces of indigenous lives, knowledge systems, and the asymmetrical power relations that enabled their removal and display in Europe. Curatorial and scholarly efforts are needed to recover and reinsert the voices and perspectives of Papua New Guinean communities connected to these materials.

The issue of misinformation and labelling errors within museum collections is often attributed to a "lack of expertise," as stated by the curator.<sup>59</sup> However, as

<sup>59</sup> In personal communication with M. Zavattaro, 2023.

Bennett (2018, p. 1) argues, museums are deeply embedded in systems of knowledge and power. They are not neutral spaces of preservation but active institutions that construct, organise, and disseminate knowledge. Museums functioned as authoritarian sites where cultural meanings are produced and legitimised, shaping how the public understands the world and its histories. As Chen (2013) highlights, museums have long been used by political regimes, including fascist and authoritarian governments, to discipline populations and impose specific worldviews. Through the careful selection, classification, and display of objects, museums participate in what Foucault termed the "regime of truth", a system in which certain narratives are legitimised while others are silenced.

This thesis has repeatedly shown how such dynamics were evident under the fascist regime, where museums became ideological tools to support racial science and imperial ambitions. However, the capacity of museums to shape knowledge is not confined to the past. Even in contemporary contexts, museums continue to wield epistemic authority. They curate histories, define cultural significance, and influence collective memory. In modernity, museums are increasingly recognised not only as custodians of heritage but as sites of knowledge production and representation. What they choose to exhibit, how they contextualise it, and what they omit, all contribute to broader social understandings of identity, history, and belonging.

Recognising this power compels us to scrutinise museum practices critically, particularly with respect to collections of colonial and ethnographic origin. It also underscores the need for more inclusive, reflexive, and ethically grounded curatorial approaches, ones that acknowledge the contested histories of objects and involve source communities in the interpretive process. In doing so, museums can move beyond being instruments of authority and become spaces of dialogue, reconciliation, and shared knowledge-making.

### **3.3.2 Discussing Decoloniality**

Discussion of colonialism and decolonisation in Italy has often focused on issues concerning African countries. That is understandable, since after the

unification of Italy, the focus on acquiring new land shifted to Africa. East Asia and Southeast Asia were also within the Italian Empire's gaze. However, this ambition was hindered not by insufficient effort but by the presence of the British and Dutch, as the area had historically been a duopoly of the East India Company (EIC) and the Vereenigde Oostindische *Compagnie* (VOC) since the 16th century. The campaign was tried nevertheless, as Di Meo (2023) noted:

“In the second half of 19th century, Southeast Asia was the subject of numerous explorations set up by the Kingdom of Italy, promoted by the executives chaired by Luigi Federico Menabrea (1865-69) and aimed at the occupation of a territory to be used as a penal colony (Novero, 2011), or to commercial purposes outpost; the Piedmontese adventurer Celso Cesare Moreno proposed to the Italian government the conferral of the protectorate over the sultanate of Aceh, on the island of Sumatra, while Giovanni Emilio Cerruti, director of a trading house in Ningpo, China, scoured the Moluccas and Papua New Guinea. Finally, Admiral Carlo Alberto Racchia started a series of negotiations with the British government to obtain a territorial concession in Borneo, arousing the grievances of the Dutch Government, which controlled much of the Indo-Malay Archipelago, and did not tolerate the interference of Italian explorers.”

The Italian Empire's desire for a colony in East and Southeast Asia was realised only through a small concession granted in Tientsin (Tianjin, China) by the Chinese Government in 1901, which was subsequently lost to Japan in 1943 (Marinelli & Andornino, 2013). Italy's African Empire was of greater 'importance', encompassing East Africa (Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia) and North Africa (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Libya).<sup>60</sup> However, compared with other European countries, Italy's colonial history was relatively short-lived, as it renounced its colonial aspirations by 1947.

In contrast to African heritage, which has received increasing attention within the decolonisation discourse in Italian museums, Asian collections (particularly those from Southeast Asia) remain largely neglected. Indonesian artefacts are a striking example. The repatriation of looted cultural objects from Indonesia has been ongoing since the 1970s (Van Beurden, 2017), particularly in relation to the Netherlands. However, the Indonesian artefacts are not only kept in museums in the Netherlands but also in museums in France, Germany, and Italy. Recently,

<sup>60</sup> See Hess, 1963; Stafford, 1949; Visconti, 2021

France and Germany have discussed repatriation efforts through various channels.<sup>61</sup> Yet, within the Italian museum context, awareness of Indonesian ethnographic collections acquired during the colonial period is minimal, if not entirely absent. As discussed in Chapter 2, objects from Nias and other parts of Indonesia collected by figures such as Elio Modigliani should be understood as colonial artefacts, regardless of whether they were obtained through trade, barter, or other ostensibly legitimate means. This, of course, considering the Western travellers benefited from the existing colonial system, exploited the asymmetrical relationship with the indigenous communities and asserted power imbalance during their interaction.

The use of the term colonial objects is not intended to discredit or diminish the intrinsic cultural value of these artefacts. Instead, it highlights the importance of engaging critically with the historical and structural contexts of their acquisition. This includes acknowledging the racial prejudices, Eurocentric worldviews, and epistemic hierarchies that continue to shape how such objects are understood, displayed, and interpreted today. As Quijano (2000a; 2000b) asserts, coloniality did not end with the formal dismantling of colonial empires. It persists in the cultural, economic, and epistemological frameworks of the modern world, including within institutions such as museums. Acknowledging these objects as colonial objects will open new possibilities within decolonial discourse.

Before proceeding, it is essential to grasp several key definitions of decolonisation. Decolonisation can mean different things to different people, depending on the context and discussion. For example, Kreps (2011, p.72) compiled the decolonisation of museum practice as follows:

“acknowledging the historical, colonial contingencies under which collections were acquired; revealing Eurocentric ideology and biases in the Western museum concept, discourse and practice; also acknowledging and including diverse voices and multiple perspectives.”

Meanwhile, Rivet (2020) defines decolonisation as the restoration of Indigenous worldview, culture, and traditional ways of life, and the replacement

<sup>61</sup> France has opened the possibility of repatriation regulation through the Sarr-Savoy reports, although it is currently limited to African-origin artefacts. On the other hand, repatriation from Germany began in the early 2000s, facilitated by the church connection between Germany and Indonesia.

of Western interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives. Other authors, such as Modest (2023), highlight decolonisation as a concept to describe diverse demands for and practices of institutional change in museums. This demand primarily comes from grassroots activist initiatives.

As noted earlier, decolonisation can mean different things to different people. However, at least decolonisation begins with an acknowledgement of the systemic inequalities spread by colonialism, empire and wealth extraction related to characteristics such as race, gender, sexuality, class, disability and nationalism. Lonetree (2012) suggests that several essential elements are required for decolonising museums, including challenging stereotypical representations, honouring indigenous rights to self-representation in museum spaces, and discussing hard and complicated truths regarding colonisation within exhibition spaces. Within the same scope, Ariese and Wróblewska (2022) proclaimed six decolonisation aims: creating visibility, increasing inclusivity, decentering, championing empathy, improving transparency and embracing vulnerability. They insist that these six aims are not a typology but rather what should be achieved by decolonisation movements within museums.

Another term recently used in social and museum studies is decolonial. Decoloniality is primarily associated with the decolonial school, which originated in Latin American scholarship. Quijano (2000a; 2000b) highlights decolonial moves that expose the underlying coloniality within Western modernity, namely the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP). CMP, a term coined by Quijano and expanded upon by Mignolo and Walsh (2018), refers to the complex and enduring structures of power that originated during Western colonialism and continue to shape the global system today. This matrix concerns political or territorial domination and control over knowledge (and knowledge generation), culture, and the economy. Museums, as a child born of the golden age of colonialism, are not free of this either. Unlike postcolonialism, decolonialism not only seeks to overthrow colonialism but also to remove and redress its lasting traces and legacies by de-linking from Eurocentrism and acknowledging Indigenous knowledge systems and actual praxis (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Mignolo also mentioned key dimensions of the CMP, as listed below:

1. Control of knowledge and epistemology: Western colonial powers imposed their ways of knowing and thinking as superior. Indigenous knowledge systems were suppressed or devalued.
2. Control of economy: colonial economies were structured around resource extraction and labour exploitation. The legacy continues through global capitalism, multinational corporations, and unequal trade relations.
3. Control of authority and governance: the political system imposed by colonial powers often persists in postcolonial states, creating hierarchies aligned with Western governance models.
4. Control of gender and sexuality: patriarchal and heteronormative structures brought by Western colonisers disrupt pre-colonial gender relations and sexual norms.
5. Control of subjectivity and race: colonialism created racial hierarchies that dehumanised non-Westerners. These racial categorisations persist today in systemic racism and the marginalisation of non-Western people.

Decolonial studies critically examine the lasting effects of colonialism and aim to dismantle its enduring systems of power, knowledge, and representation. Rather than merely analysing colonial history, this field seeks to imagine and promote alternative ways of thinking, living, and organising societies beyond Eurocentric frameworks. In this sense, decolonisation involves not only rejecting colonial domination but also addressing and transforming its continuing legacies, creating space for genuine resistance and alternative worldviews (Hiraide, 2021, p. 14).

Although Modigliani's methods of collecting in Nias differed significantly from the violent looting carried out by Dutch military forces in Bali and Lombok, his collection still requires critical reassessment within a decolonial framework. As Bigoni and Barbagli (2023, p. 16) observe, there are important dimensions of Modigliani's collection (especially the facial plaster cast masks and human remains) that warrant deeper investigation due to their sensitive nature and the ethical questions they raise. They further argue that "much too often, the colonial problems of Italian collections are exclusively considered as linked to African

collections made during the fascist era.” Such reductionist approaches obscure the broader and more complex history of Italian colonialism.

Decolonisation efforts must avoid confining the issue to a single time period or geographic area. Instead, they must address the broader arc of Italian colonial engagements, pre-fascist, fascist, and beyond, within a wider cultural and international context. Modigliani’s pre-fascist collections at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence thus serve as a valuable case study for examining these broader issues. They illustrate the need for decolonial critique that extends beyond conventional narratives and engages with the full historical and epistemic dimensions of colonial-era collecting.

In contrast to developments in other national contexts, Italian museums tend to approach decolonisation through a more cautious and legalistic framework. Initial engagement by the author with the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence in June 2023 centred around discussions of the research project’s objectives and potential outcomes. The museum expressed initial interest in the proposal, particularly the prospect of an Indonesian researcher studying objects that had remained static for decades. However, once the term decolonisation was introduced in relation to these collections, the tone of the discussion shifted. Museum staff promptly raised concerns and cited the relevant legal framework: Legislative Decree of 22 January 2004, No. 42, *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio*, which follows Article 10 of Law 6 July 2002, Nos. 137–154. This legal code establishes the principle of inalienability for cultural property, classifying all such objects, including those acquired from former colonies, as inalienable components of the Italian national heritage. Under this legislation, the return or repatriation of such objects is deemed legally impermissible.

As previously discussed, this reaction is symptomatic of a broader tendency within museum institutions toward retentionism and the conflation of decolonisation solely with repatriation. Such a narrow interpretation often curtails meaningful dialogue before any critical engagement with colonial histories can begin. In this context, the present research seeks to identify an alternative path—a middle ground—through which the decolonisation of Nias ethnographic collections in Florence might be pursued. Rather than focusing solely on legal

restitution, this project explores digital and dialogical approaches to reconnecting source communities with their heritage and to challenging dominant epistemologies embedded in colonial-era collections.

## **Chapter 4. Restitution as Decolonisation for Ethnographic Objects?**

The return of cultural objects to their place of origin is described using several terms. Repatriation refers to the return of objects to their country of origin, whereas restitution often implies acknowledging past wrongdoing and typically involves returning objects to their community of origin. In international discussions, the terms "transfer" and "return" are also used to maintain a more neutral tone. In this chapter, these terms are used interchangeably, all referring to the process of returning colonial objects from former colonising countries to their original homes.

This chapter examines the complex and often contested processes of cultural heritage restitution, focusing on the interplay between international conventions, national regulations, and political agendas. It explores how restitution is not merely a legal or bureaucratic exercise but is deeply embedded in broader debates on decolonisation, identity, and cultural justice. By examining cases such as Indonesia's repatriation efforts from the Netherlands and Italy's return of the Aksum Obelisk and the Venus of Cyrene, the chapter highlights how legal frameworks, including the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the UNIDROIT Convention of 1995, intersect with political motivations, national pride, and international diplomacy.

At the same time, the chapter underscores the challenges that impede restitution processes, including bureaucratic hurdles, financial constraints, and governments' tendency to dominate negotiations while sidelining local communities. Restitution is often framed within national agendas, serving as a form of political symbolism or diplomatic relations, rather than as an acknowledgement of colonial injustices. By situating these issues within broader discussions of cultural heritage and decolonisation, this chapter critically questions whether restitution alone can embody decolonisation or whether alternative, more inclusive approaches must be considered.

### **4.1 Restitution = Decolonisation?**

Over the last few decades, as the discourse of decolonisation became more prevalent in the museum landscape, one word has become increasingly familiar: restitution. Restitution can be defined as returning something to its "rightful" owner.

The term restitution also includes admission of wrongdoing (Hamm, 2024).<sup>62</sup> In the museum context, restitution refers to the return of cultural objects from museum collections to their purported “original” owners. This “original owner” could refer to the source communities, the country of origin, or an individual. Another word used almost synonymously with restitution is repatriation. Repatriation denotes that an object or collection has a patria, a state or community that is connected to the object through kinship, language, history, and shared identity (Prott, 2009; van Beurden, 2017).

Repatriation is often invoked by the requesting country, underscoring its connection to the heritage and its claim to be the heritage's origin or homeland. For example, Nurjaman (2020, p. 76) notes, "the process of returning Indonesian historical objects is also known as decolonisation," referring to the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's artefacts from the *Museum voor Volkenkunde* (Netherlands) to the Museum Nasional Indonesia. Both academics and the mass media in Indonesia highlight the return of the objects as a form of repatriation, a return to their homeland, even though this attitude seems to narrow down decolonisation to only returning objects to their homeland. On the other hand, Western countries tend to use more neutral words, such as "return" or "transfer." A neutral tone is used when the removal of a cultural object does not violate any legal regulation (Prott, 2009). However, as discussed in previous chapters, objects from Africa or Asia rarely entered Western institutions without some power imbalance. However, the term restitution is also being used in Western institutions, especially while addressing the Nazi looted art. This highlights the nuance of admission of wrongdoing within the restitution term (van Beurden, 2017).

That being said, is restitution equal to decolonisation? Or are there ways to decolonise beyond restitution? In the previous chapter, we discussed several definitions of decolonisation from several authors. Instead of being seen as a single program, decolonisation should be seen as a whole institutional and practice changes within the museum, acknowledging historical and colonial wrongdoing, and affirming the rights of others to self-representation and access (Kreps, 2011; Lonetree, 2012; River, 2020; Ariese & Wróblewska, 2022; Modest, 2023). Despite its symbolic power,

<sup>62</sup> See also <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/restitution>

restitution alone cannot dismantle the imperial frameworks in which colonial museums and heritage institutions operate. Returning physical objects does not necessarily challenge colonial epistemologies, the narratives, classifications, and institutional cultures that govern how heritage is studied and displayed.

Ethically, decolonisation is more than the return of objects; it is about rebalancing the moral universe and acknowledging sovereignty. A watershed moment in this discourse is the French-commissioned Sarr–Savoy Report (2018), which recommends a phased return of African cultural heritage to former colonies and calls for a “new relational ethics” between France and sub-Saharan African countries. This instrument reframes restitution as a necessary act of decolonisation, anchored in the reactivation of cultural memory and mutual recognition. The Sarr–Savoy Report’s “relational ethics” encapsulates this shift: restitution is a step towards rebuilding trust, memory, and shared futures rather than a unidirectional act. Furthermore, the tension between universalist museum arguments, that holding global heritage serves all humanity, and demands for restitution, highlights the need to respect the rights of source communities over their heritage. As framed by Sarr and Savoy, restitution becomes a way of “putting history to work,” allowing erased cultural memories to reclaim their contexts.

Restitution or repatriation holds powerful symbolic and restorative potential, primarily when rooted in ethical reflection and political commitment. However, as this analysis shows, restitution alone does not achieve decolonisation; it must be integrated within a broader transformation: of narratives, governance, access, and epistemic structures. The path forward must be envisioned as holistic and multidimensional, not merely object-centred, but relational, participatory, and transformative. As discussed in the next section, restitution is often constrained by regulations in many museums and countries. There is a need to decolonise beyond restitution. The following subchapter will discuss these possibilities, particularly in relation to the ethnographic collection.

## 4.2 International Regulations and Problematic Practices of Cultural Objects Restitution

In 1832, Greece first requested the return of the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum (Rea, 2019a). The Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, are among the most famous cases of repatriation disputes concerning cultural heritage. The marbles were removed from Athens by Lord Elgin<sup>63</sup> with the permission of the Ottoman Empire between 1801 and 1803 (Browning, 1984). The marbles were then transported to Britain and entered the British Museum's collection in 1816 after being declared a legal acquisition by the Parliamentary Select Committee.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Greece repeatedly sent a request<sup>65</sup> for the permanent return of the marbles to Athens, as far as prepared the New Acropolis Museum in 2009 to welcome the marbles. In 2006, the Minister of Culture at the time, Georgios Voulgarakis, stated that the reunion of the marbles is 'our debt of honour towards history' and called on all foreign museums in possession of the Parthenon Marble to meet their moral obligations to ensure their return.<sup>66</sup> So far, only one piece from Heidelberg University,<sup>67</sup> one from Sicily,<sup>68</sup> and three pieces from the Vatican<sup>69</sup> have been restituted to the museum (Titi, 2023a; Titi, 2023b).

A few conditions complicated the return of the marbles from the British Museum to Athens. First, the British government is not the legal owner of the marbles. The marbles are 'legally' in the ownership<sup>70</sup> of the museum's Board of Trustees (Godwin, 2020). Hence, the decision will be in the Trustees' hands. The second is that

<sup>63</sup> During that time, serving as British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire

<sup>64</sup> British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/parthenon-sculptures>

<sup>65</sup> In the 1980s, a strong plea from Melina Mercouri (Minister of Culture) drew the world's attention to the case. In 1983, the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles was established. In the same year, during the ICOM resolution, thousands of delegates voted in favour of the return of the Marbles (Comino, <https://parthenonmarbles.org.au/the-case-for-the-return-of-the-parthenon-marbles/>)

<sup>66</sup> In a September 5, 2006 speech, during the return of the first piece of Parthenon Marbles from the University of Heidelberg, [https://www.greece.org/blogs/marbles/?page\\_id=397](https://www.greece.org/blogs/marbles/?page_id=397)

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> The collection is part of the Antonio Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo, Sicily. The fragment is being loaned for a four-year period following the agreement between the two museums. Harris, 2022. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/01/06/sicily-sends-back-parthenon-fragment-to-athens>

<sup>69</sup> Hucal, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/are-the-parthenon-sculptures-finally-returning-to-greece/a-64907213>

<sup>70</sup> 'Possession' might be a better term; however, the author used the word 'ownership' in relation to the British Museum Act

the British Museum is governed by the British Museum Act 1963, which outlines procedures for disposing of the marbles. For the disposal of an object, the Trustees of the British Museum must meet one of the three criteria.<sup>71</sup> The criteria are as follows:

- i) The objects must be a duplicate of another object in the collection.
- ii) the objects appear to the Trustees to have been made no earlier than the year 1850 and substantially consist of printed matter.
- iii) The objects are unfit to be retained in the collections of the Museum and can be disposed of without detriment to the interest of the students.

All three conditions seemed unsuitable for the possibility of disposing of the Parthenon Marbles. Arguably, the third point could be considered. However, given the importance of the Parthenon Marbles and the number of visitors every year, it is nearly impossible to call the marbles ‘unfit’ to be retained in the collection of the British Museum. In 2024, the museum was visited by 6.479.952 visitors, an 11% increase from the previous year.<sup>72</sup> There is growing public interest in the collection, with the Parthenon Marbles among the most sought-after works to be visited.

Further disputes over the ownership of the marbles stalemated the discussion of the return. The Trustees are willing to consider loans to Athens, which the Greek government previously refused. The acceptance of loans would mean that Greece acknowledges the legal ownership of the marbles belonging to the British Museum, which it currently refuses to recognise and continues to claim as its own.<sup>73</sup> In 2015, UNESCO offered to mediate the dispute between the two parties, but the British Museum rejected the offer (Clark, 2022). The Trustees cited that the British Museum is not a government institution, and want ‘to explore collaborative ventures directly between institutions, not on a government-to-government basis.’<sup>74</sup> Two parties maintained their positions, and to this day, the Parthenon Marbles case remains one of the most famous cases for the restitution of cultural heritage.

<sup>71</sup> British Museum Act, 1963; Clark, 2022

<sup>72</sup> Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, 2025, <https://www.alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=423>

<sup>73</sup> From the perspective of Greece, the British Museum has the possession of the Marbles, not the ownership (Titi, 2023b)

<sup>74</sup> The Parthenon Sculptures: the Trustees’ statement, available at <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/parthenon-sculptures/parthenon>

In a separate case in 2019, the Manchester Museum adopted a stance distinct from that of the British Museum on repatriation. In the early 20th century, the museum acquired 43 sacred objects from Australian Aboriginal (Yawuru) communities for its collection. In 2019, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)<sup>75</sup> submitted a request for the repatriation of those objects. The request was met with approval by the museum, three months after the request, in support of the communities and as “the right and ethical thing to do”, quoting a statement by the museum’s director (Clark, 2022). The objects were then repatriated in two waves, in 2019 and 2020. The return was made possible by the Manchester Museum’s Collection Development Policy, which states:

“The museum’s governing body, acting on the advice of the museum’s professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains, objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The museum will take such a decision on a case-by-case basis, within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance.”<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Clark (2022) analyses why the museum granted the request so readily. The Manchester Museum is not bound by regulations such as the British Museum Act, which allows the museum to make a moral choice. The other possibility is that the 43 objects repatriated were not part of the museum's centrepieces, unlike the Parthenon Marbles. It is easier to make a moral and ethical choice when it does not require a significant sacrifice. It would be interesting to see how the museum would respond to a repatriation request that would require it to make both moral and challenging decisions. However, the Manchester Museum's stance proved to be a way forward, as the museum took a more active and positive role in repatriation.

The two cases above highlight the museum's different approaches to the restitution of cultural objects. On the one hand, the ethnographic objects of the Manchester Museum demonstrate the museum's more ethical approach, as outlined in their regulations. On the other hand, the Parthenon Marbles highlight the difficulties faced within restitution discourse. The claim of ownership and the request for

<sup>75</sup> This is an Indigenous-led, national institute that celebrates, educates, and inspires people from all walks of life to connect with the knowledge, heritage, and cultures of Australia’s First Peoples. With the goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and cultures being recognised, respected, celebrated and valued. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/about-aiatsis>

<sup>76</sup> Collection Development Policy, The University of Manchester, Manchester Museum. (2018). <https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24714>

restitution by the country of origin are not always met by positive gestures. There are paradigm, political and regulatory barriers entangled within the system. The position of requesting countries and holding countries is well documented and evident in this dispute. In the UNESCO assembly in 1982, within the report mentioned as 'conflicting position' of such parties of cultural heritage restitution, the summary is as follows:

The argument of requesting countries often cites:

- i) It is necessary to recognise the moral right to recovery of vital tokens of cultural identity, removed in the moral context of colonialism.
- ii) Governments, museums, and collectors in the 'importing' countries must cease to be party to the illicit traffic that is so widespread today.

Meanwhile, the counterarguments of the holding countries covered several issues, including:

- i) The objects are better conserved in the prominent (or small) museums of industrialised countries (museological argument).
- ii) The objects are better and more widely appreciated in the large museums of the industrialised countries (universalist argument).
- iii) Museums and national ones in particular cannot alienate the objects in their collections (legal argument).
- iv) This type of problem is best resolved confidentially between museum authorities (technical argument).

Both parties justified their actions with the justifications mentioned earlier. Even after years, we will see similar arguments used in more recent contexts, as discussed in the latter part of this chapter. To find common ground between the parties' contradictory statements, regulation is necessary. The international community has taken serious measures on this issue through the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to demonstrate its commitment to protecting cultural heritage. However, several rules and regulations already exist to combat illegal looting and, in a way, promote the restitution.

The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 are a series of international treaties and declarations that were among the first formal statements of the law of war and the crimes against humanity that address the protection of cultural property. The Hague Convention (1899), in Articles 23, 28, and 47, prohibits pillage and seizure by invading forces. The latter convention also highlights similar concerns, particularly Article 56, which imposes the obligation to protect property belonging to institutions of a religious, charitable, educational, historic, or artistic character from intentional damage (Roehrenbeck, 2010, p. 194).

The 1954 Hague Convention (1954) for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, along with its two Protocols, constitutes the earliest international legal framework for safeguarding cultural property during armed conflict.<sup>77</sup> Prompted by the extensive destruction and looting of cultural heritage during the Second World War, the Convention requires signatory states to respect cultural property within their own territory and that of other states, even during times of war. This convention mainly laid the groundwork for the protection of cultural heritage during conflict by preventing any form of theft, pillage, misappropriation, and any act of vandalism directed against cultural property (Art. 4). The convention itself is not necessarily clearly relevant to the issues of museum restitution in most contexts (Clark, 2022).

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted in Paris, significantly broadened the scope of cultural property protection beyond wartime contexts. This Convention obliges state parties to adopt measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural objects and to facilitate their return when unlawfully removed from their country of origin. It promotes international cooperation by establishing a legal and procedural framework for restitution claims, particularly in cases involving stolen or illegally exported artefacts. However, it applies only to cultural property removed after the Convention entered into force and relies heavily on national implementation, resulting in uneven enforcement. For example, the United Kingdom did not ratify the Convention until 2022, so the requirements to return looted, stolen, or illegally exported cultural heritage objects apply only to

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention>; Roehrenbeck, 2010

objects brought into the United Kingdom after 2002 (Clark, 2022). Hence, this convention was unable to address the illicit export of cultural heritage during colonial times. This convention was also initially poorly supported by museums, as it disrupted the flow of antiquities to museums (Roehrenbeck, 2010). Despite these limitations, the 1970 Convention remains a cornerstone of global efforts in restitution.

The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects was introduced to strengthen the legal instruments of the 1970 UNESCO Convention by addressing its limitations in private law and ownership rights. This Convention establishes uniform rules that enable individuals and states to seek restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects through civil legal proceedings. Notably, it places the burden of proof on the possessor of the object to demonstrate due diligence at the time of acquisition, thereby discouraging the trade in undocumented artefacts. The UNIDROIT Convention significantly enhances the protection of cultural heritage by harmonising domestic laws across jurisdictions and offering a more robust legal mechanism for the return of cultural property. However, its impact is constrained by the limited number of ratifications and its applicability only to post-1998 transactions (Roehrenbeck, 2010).

The Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP), established by UNESCO in 1978, serves as a non-binding mechanism to facilitate bilateral dialogue and negotiation between states regarding disputed cultural objects. The Committee plays a mediating role, encouraging voluntary return and cooperation between source and holding countries, particularly in cases not covered by existing legal instruments. It provides a diplomatic alternative to litigation and is especially relevant for restitution claims involving colonial acquisitions, where legal ownership may be contested, but moral claims remain strong. Although its recommendations are not legally enforceable, the ICPRCP reflects a shift in the international community towards recognising ethical and historical justice as valid grounds for restitution, even in the absence of legal obligations.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), enacted in the United States in 1990, is among the most comprehensive legal frameworks addressing the restitution of cultural heritage. It mandates the return of

human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to federally recognised Native American tribes and Native Hawaiian organisations. NAGPRA is significant in that it legally acknowledges the rights of Indigenous communities to reclaim cultural heritage that was historically collected, often under coercive, exploitative, or unregulated circumstances, and held in museums or federal agencies. The act not only sets a precedent for ethical restitution grounded in human rights and Indigenous sovereignty but also foregrounds the importance of consultation, collaboration, and mutual respect in heritage stewardship (Clark, 2022). Its implementation has inspired broader discussions within the international museum community about the moral imperatives of restitution. While its scope is limited to the United States, NAGPRA provides a model for legislation that prioritises community agency and cultural continuity in restitution processes.

In 2003, as a response to the louder call of restitution, nineteen North American and European museums<sup>78</sup> gathered and released a joint statement. The statement titled ‘Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museum’ could be seen as a way for these museums to justify their ownership of foreign collections. This declaration emphasises the shared commitment of the international museum community to discourage the illicit trafficking of cultural objects, while urging a nuanced understanding of historical acquisitions, which occurred under different legal and moral frameworks. It argues that many objects now housed in Western museums, whether acquired through purchase, gift, or partage, have become integral to the heritage of the host nations and serve educational and cultural functions. Museums, the statement contends, provide valuable new contexts for displaced objects, contributing to global appreciation and understanding of ancient civilisations. It uses Greek sculpture as an example of how public collections have played a crucial role in shaping universal admiration for certain cultures. While acknowledging that calls for repatriation must be taken seriously, the declaration advocates a case-by-case approach and warns against narrowing the scope of museum collections, as this may diminish their role as spaces of cultural exchange and learning for a global audience.

<sup>78</sup> The Art Institute of Chicago, Bavarian State Museum (Munich), State Museums (Berlin), Cleveland Museum of Art, J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Louvre Museum (Paris), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Opificio delle Pietre Dure (Florence), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Prado Museum (Madrid), Rijkmuseum (Amsterdam), State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg), Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum (Madrid), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) and the support of The British Museum.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) also provide a Code of Ethics for Museums. It sets minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff.<sup>79</sup> The code was adopted unanimously by the 15th General Assembly of ICOM on November 4, 1986 and amended in 2001 and revised in 2004. One of the issues highlighted here is the restitution of cultural objects. As stated in Article 6.3 (2017) “When a country of origin seeks the restitution of an object or specimen that can be demonstrated to have been exported or otherwise transferred in violation of the principles of international and national conventions and shown to be part of that country’s or people’s cultural or natural heritage, the museum concerned should, if legally free to do so, take prompt and responsible steps to cooperate in its return.” This article, along with others in Section VI, was part of ICOM's agenda to promote collaboration between museums and communities of origin. The codes, however, do not have binding power and are of less significance than the national law.

In recent developments in the European context, French President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 speech in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, marked a turning point, as he pledged to return African heritage to the continent (Opoku, 2017, p. 2). The pledge was followed up in 2018, when the French government commissioned Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy to investigate African cultural heritage held in French public collections. The resulting report, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*,<sup>80</sup> marked a significant turning point in international debates on restitution. It strongly recommends the permanent return of African cultural objects acquired under colonial domination, unless their acquisition could be proven to have occurred through free, fair, and documented consent. The report proposed a three-phase roadmap:

- i) first phase, immediate return of selected priority objects (November 2018-2019)
- ii) second phase (Spring 2019 - November 2022, involving provenance research, inventory sharing, sharing digital content, workshop, and bilateral dialogue

<sup>79</sup> ICOM Code of Ethics, 2017

<sup>80</sup> Published in November 2018, [https://www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](https://www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr_savoy_en.pdf)

iii) third phase (November 2022 - open-ended), establishing a framework for ongoing restitution requests (Sarr and Savoy, 2018).

A central argument of the report was the need to reform French heritage law, particularly the principle of inalienability, to make such returns legally possible. After a delay, on December 17, 2020, French legislators passed Law No. 2020-1673 of December 24, 2020, concerning the restitution of cultural property to the Republic of Benin and the Republic of Senegal.<sup>81</sup> The law ensures the return of 27 specific cultural artefacts to Benin from the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac within a year. They include 26 pieces from the Treasure of Behazin and a 19th-century sabre (sword) formerly belonging to the Senegal anti-colonial leader El Hadj Omar Tall (Tackett, 2021).

However, several key points merit mention regarding the earlier-mentioned regulation. First, there is the timing. In his speech, French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to repatriate the items “without delay;” however, the lengthy legal proceedings surrounding the process led some parties to doubt the sincerity of the French in returning the artefacts (Rea, 2019b). The second point refers to a law passed in 2020 that specifically addresses the case of 27 artefacts from Benin and Senegal. It was described as “strictly exceptional, ad hoc (of) limited character,” meaning that the law will not be able to address different cases. Implementing the Sarr-Savoy recommendations will require a broader set of restitution regulations. Third, the law notably avoids the term “restitution” and instead uses more neutral terms, such as “transfer” (Tackett, 2021). As if still in denial of the underlying colonial system and how the collections arrived in France in the first place. Lastly, the returned artefacts will be temporary. Officials will now study how to implement restitution in French law, raising the possibility that the artefacts could be returned to Paris in the future, which would undermine the spirit of restitution and acknowledgement of past wrongs.

Although the French government's implementation of the Sarr-Savoy recommendation was not best practice, the spirit of decolonisation is already being echoed in European countries. The Netherlands is changing its stance towards the return of cultural objects to Indonesia, answering the call for the return of cultural

<sup>81</sup> LOI n° 2020-1673 du 24 décembre 2020 relative à la restitution de biens culturels à la République du Bénin et à la République du Sénégal (1), <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000042738023>

objects from Indonesia since the 1970s.<sup>82</sup> Aside from the return of hundreds of objects since 2019, museums in the Netherlands, such as the Rijksmuseum, and many universities have begun to conduct provenance research on their colonial collections. One of them is Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PROCE), initiated by *Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen* (NMVW), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, NIOD *Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust-en Genocidestudies*, and *Expertisecentrum Restitutie* (ECR), and several other institutions (Mooren, 2022).

Belgium, on the other hand, emerged as a forefront in the international restitution of colonial collections with the passing of the Bill, which recognised the alienability of goods linked to the Belgian State's colonial past and established a legal framework for their restitution and return. The bill was approved in 2022 and took effect in October 2022. Belgium's Restitution Bill for colonial heritage is the first of its kind to be adopted by a former colonial power. Nevertheless, the legislation remains limited in scope, as it applies solely to cultural objects originating from Belgium's former colonies and explicitly excludes archives and human remains. Furthermore, it does not provide a role for local communities within the countries of origin in restitution proceedings. The original draft of the Bill was significantly diluted to grant the Belgian Government broad discretion in negotiating bilateral restitution agreements. This lack of detailed procedural regulation has made the process less transparent and has rendered it heavily dependent on political considerations. Consequently, the restitution process is shaped almost entirely by the specific terms of bilateral agreements, leaving considerable room for political manoeuvring and contestation (De Clippele & Demarsin, 2022).

### **4.3 Restitution in the Italian Museums Context**

Italy, in adherence to the Latin museological tradition, firmly upholds the principle of the inalienability of museum collections. As a result, there are no explicit legal provisions regulating the deaccessioning or restitution of museum objects. The Legislative Decree of 22 January 2004, No. 42, Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, in accordance with Article 10 of Law No. 137–154 of 16 July 2002, reinforces this principle by allowing the transfer of objects only between public

<sup>82</sup> Read the next part 4.3 on Restitution in Indonesian Museums Context

institutions within Italy (Wijismuller, 2017). A recent development in this area is the Ministerial Decree UDCM/18/10/2021 No. 365 by the Minister of Culture, which established a Working Group on Colonial Collections. The group has been tasked with surveying, researching, identifying, and studying colonial-era collections (Decreto 365, DM/18/10/2021). However, no clear policy guidelines or recommendations have yet been issued by this working group.

Another significant initiative is the formation of the ICOM Italy Working Group – *Provenienza*. This group comprises a coordinator, seven members, and a dedicated cataloguing task force. The members include university researchers and curators from anthropology and ethnography museums, supported by at least 61 affiliates from both local and international institutions.<sup>83</sup> As its name suggests, *Provenienza*<sup>84</sup> focuses on bringing together professionals from various disciplines and institutions who share an interest in provenance research on objects housed in Italian museums and archives that reflect global histories. While the group acknowledges the significance of provenance and the importance of collaboration with source communities, its engagement with restitution remains limited. The group's manifesto draws a distinction between return, defined as the repatriation of objects exported illegally, regardless of their original mode of acquisition, and restitution, referring specifically to objects obtained through theft, looting, coercion, or other unethical means, aligning with Van Beurden's (Van Beurden 2017) definition of 'tainted objects'. Despite this conceptual clarity, the manifesto primarily advocates digital returns and stresses the need to assess restitution claims on a case-by-case basis rather than to establish a standardised approach.<sup>85</sup>

Italy's complex and, at times, contradictory position on cultural restitution is, to some extent, understandable. In the international context, Italy is often regarded as a "source country" that has experienced the loss of substantial cultural property during the Napoleonic occupation and World War II (Visconti, 2021). In recent years, Italy has also successfully secured the repatriation of cultural heritage items from the United States and Canada. Notably, on 19 March 2025, three reliquaries were

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.icom-italia.org/gruppo-di-lavoro-provenienza/>

<sup>84</sup> means origin in Italian, or 'coming from', <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/provenienza/>

<sup>85</sup> *Provenienza* publication in collaboration with the Swiss Museum Association/ICOM Switzerland 2022. See that the argument of *Provenienza* reflects the argument of holding countries in the 1982 UNESCO assembly, categorised as Technical Arguments

returned by Canadian authorities (Canadian Heritage, 2025), while a particularly significant restitution from the United States took place on 28 May 2024, involving 600 artefacts dating from 900 BCE to 200 CE (Schrader, 2024). These cases have led to an increase in the repatriation of cultural heritage to Italy in recent years (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1.** List of repatriated cultural heritage to Italy.

No	Items	Year	Returning Party	Details
1	Roman Mosaic panel	2025	Germany	A mosaic panel taken by a Nazi captain during World War II was returned to the Pompeii Archaeological Park, along with other artefacts, by the heirs of the last owner through the Italian Consulate in Stuttgart, Germany (Zampano and Rosa, 2025). <sup>86</sup>
2	Three religious reliquaries	2025	Canada	Returned items were imported to Canada before being seized by the Canada Border Service Agency in 2023 (Canadian Heritage, 2025).
3	600 artefacts	2024	USA	600 stolen artefacts were trafficked to private collectors, and museums returned to Rome (Anderson, 2024). <sup>87</sup>
4	60 artefacts	2023	USA	stolen artefacts trafficked to private collectors and museums (Nadeau, 2023). <sup>88</sup>
5	Four artefacts	2022	Germany	Four artefacts seized in 2021 by the German authorities, repatriated by the Minister of State for Culture and Media to the Italian Ambassador Armando Varricchio in Berlin (UNESCO, 2022). <sup>89</sup>

Italy is also an active member of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property (ICPRCP).<sup>90</sup> This permanent UNESCO body supports the implementation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of

<sup>86</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/italy-pompeii-artwork-find-stolen-wwii-germany-cefd48bbdef050d6f70b0b2065784c19>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/trove-600-looted-italian-artifacts-worth-65-million-comes-home-180984451/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/italy-looted-ancient-artifacts-return-scli-intl/index.html>

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/germany-returns-italy-four-illegally-trafficked-cultural-objects>

<sup>90</sup> Re-elected in November 16, 2023.

[https://delegazioneunesco.esteri.it/en/news/dalla\\_rappresentanza/2023/11/return-restitution-intergovernmental-committee/](https://delegazioneunesco.esteri.it/en/news/dalla_rappresentanza/2023/11/return-restitution-intergovernmental-committee/)

Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. Italy's engagement with the ICPRCP has facilitated the return of numerous cultural objects removed from its territory through illicit trade. Over the last 20 years, Italy has made a significant leap in repatriating illegally acquired cultural heritage to its country of origin. See Table 4.2 below for details.

**Table 4.2.** List of returned cultural heritage from Italy to the respective countries of origin.

No	Items	Year	Country of Origins	Details
1	Aksum Obelisk	2005	Ethiopia	see sub-chapter 4.3.1
2	Venus of Cyrene	2008	Libya	see sub-chapter 4.3.1
3	Sculpted busts	2017	Syria	Two sculptures, treated for conservation in Italy by the <i>Instituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro</i> , were returned to the National Museum of Damascus. <sup>91</sup> Technically, not a restitution.
4	796 artefacts	2019	China	The Italian culture ministry returned illegally exported 796 Chinese objects to the Chinese government (Rea, 2019c). <sup>92</sup>
5	Mary Magdalene Sculpture by Andrea della Robbia	2020	Germany	The statue was acquired legally by the Germans from an Italian count in 1941. After World War II, the statue ended up in the Allies' Central Collecting Point for art in Munich, then mistakenly sent to the Uffizi (Italy) in 1954 (Hickley, 2020). <sup>93</sup>
6	Fragment from the Parthenon Marble	2022	Greece	Antonino Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo, Sicily, loaned back a fragment (also known as Palermo Fragment or Fagan Slab) of the Parthenon Marble to the Acropolis Museum of Athens for a four-year-long loan (Harris, 2022; Titi, 2023b)

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.iccrom.org/press-release/palmyra-sculptures-restored-italy-now-returned-syria>

<sup>92</sup> <https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/china-italy-repatriation-1497034>

<sup>93</sup> [https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/02/21/italy-hands-nazi-looted-renaissance-sculpture-from-the-uffizi-to-germany?utm\\_source=The%20Art%20Newspaper%20Newsletters&utm\\_campaign=7b4fa80d2c-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_02\\_20\\_08\\_56&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_c459f924d0-7b4fa80d2c-61273417](https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/02/21/italy-hands-nazi-looted-renaissance-sculpture-from-the-uffizi-to-germany?utm_source=The%20Art%20Newspaper%20Newsletters&utm_campaign=7b4fa80d2c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_02_20_08_56&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c459f924d0-7b4fa80d2c-61273417)

7	Buddha statue	2022	India	The statue, stolen from Devasthan Kundalpur Temple in Bihar two decades ago, was returned by an Italian collector to the Consulate General of India in Milan. The cases overseen by two citizen activists (Small, 2022). <sup>94</sup>
8	Terracotta tablet	2023	Iraq	The cuneiform tablet returned to the Iraqi government in 2023. The circumstances of the arrival in Italy are unclear. <sup>95</sup>
9	5 ancient artefacts	2025	Iraq	Four terracotta cones and a cuneiform tablet returned to Iraq's ambassador to Italy. <sup>96</sup>

### 4.3.1 Restitution Cases from Italy

The table above shows progress in Italy's stance on restitution; however, compared with other European countries, such as France, the Netherlands, and Germany, Italy has seen relatively few cases of the restitution or repatriation of cultural heritage to its countries of origin. As previously discussed, this limited progress can be attributed to the absence of clear regulatory frameworks and to a persistent victimhood mentality within Italian heritage discourse. Nevertheless, two significant cases of restitution occurred in the early 21st century: the return of the Aksum Obelisk to Ethiopia and the return of the Venus of Cyrene to Libya. These cases exemplify the prolonged and complex nature of restitution processes in Italy, reflecting the bureaucratic mindset and institutional hesitations surrounding the repatriation of cultural objects. Each case not only marked an important milestone in international cultural diplomacy but also highlighted the challenges that continue to shape Italy's approach to the restitution of cultural heritage.

The Aksum Obelisk (stelae), a towering granite stele from the ancient Aksumite kingdom of Ethiopia, is among the most emblematic symbols of pre-Christian African civilisation. The obelisk dates to approximately 1700 years ago,

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/arts/design/stolen-buddha-statue-india.html>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2323686/middle-east>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/video/2025/01/31/italy-returns-ancient-iraqi-artefacts-seized-from-illegal-traffickers?insEmail=1&insNltCmpId=255&insNltSldt=10080&insPnName=euronewsfr&isIns=1&isInsNltCmp=1>

weighs 150 tons, and stands 24 meters high. It was one of the biggest monumental stelae erected in the city of Aksum as funerary markers for royalty.<sup>97</sup> In 1937, following Italy's invasion and occupation of Ethiopia during Mussolini's Fascist regime, the obelisk was looted and transported to Rome as a trophy of imperial conquest. The removal was part of a broader strategy to assert colonial dominance and showcase the supposed superiority of European civilisation. The monument was installed near the Circus Maximus in Rome, serving as both a physical and a symbolic reminder of Italy's colonial ambitions in Africa.

During the removal and transport of the Aksum Obelisk from Ethiopia to Italy, Italy was a party to the Second Convention (Hague, 1907) on the Laws and Customs of War on Land.<sup>98</sup> The Regulation attached to the convention prohibits pillage (Article 47) and the seizure of historical monuments and works of art (Article 56). Meanwhile, Ethiopia was party to the Fourth Convention on the Laws and Customs of War,<sup>99</sup> which restated the same prohibition mentioned in the act of looting and removal of historical monuments during armed conflicts during the war. Hence, as Scovazzi (2009, p. 53) noted, the removal of the Aksum Obelisk in 1937 can be considered as a consequence of the war between Italy and Ethiopia, which violated the regulation of the Convention.

The request for the obelisk's return began shortly after World War II, and was formalised in the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, in which Italy agreed to return all looted cultural property to Ethiopia, which had been taken since October 3, 1935, within an 18-month timeframe (Mariam, 2009). However, bureaucratic inertia, political reluctance, and logistical concerns delayed the actual repatriation for decades. Ethiopia consistently raised the issue through diplomatic and cultural channels, while Italy often cited technical difficulties in disassembling and safely transporting the fragile monument. It was not until the early 2000s, amid growing international advocacy and UNESCO's involvement, that serious steps were taken. The obelisk was dismantled in April 2005, with its three segments airlifted to Ethiopia aboard a specially designed aircraft and stored near the original location (Croci, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> Ministri degli Affari Esteri (1999) *La Stele di Axum: Progetto di smontaggio e trasporto della stele di Axum dall'Italia in Etiopia*.

<sup>98</sup> The Hague, 29 July 1899

<sup>99</sup> The Hague, 18 October 1907

The final phase of the return involved the reinstallation of the obelisk at its original site in Aksum, a process initiated in September 2007 and completed by the end of 2008, with technical support from UNESCO, Ethiopian engineers (Messele) and Italian engineers (Studio Croci).<sup>100</sup> Haile Mariam,<sup>101</sup> stated that the return of the obelisk undoubtedly made the site more complex and meaningful, returning the objects to their original context and enabling it to continue as a living witness to past human development while benefiting the present society. Furthermore, Mariam added, the changing attitude of the Italian government concerning the return of cultural heritage has placed Italy at the forefront of the debate concerning restitution (Mariam, 2009, p. 50). Covazzi, a professor of law who oversees the restitution of the Obelisk, stated different views.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the 57-year delay, the significance today lies in the fact that the obligation has finally been fulfilled. However, it is preferable not to detail here all the dubious justifications given in the past by public and private Italian circles to delay the restitution. It is difficult to understand how Italy, a country rightly proud of its extraordinary cultural heritage, could fail to recognise the importance of the Aksum Obelisk as a symbol of the Ethiopian people's culture, religion, and identity (Scovazzi, 2009, pp. 56-57).

The second important case was the return of the Venus of Cyrene. The Venus of Cyrene, a stunning marble statue from the 2nd century CE, was discovered in 1913 by Italian archaeologists in the ruins of ancient Cyrene, located near the present-day city of Shahhat, Libya. Representing the Roman adaptation of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, the statue exemplified the artistic grandeur of the Hellenistic period in the Roman Empire. At the time of its discovery, Libya was under Italian colonial rule, and the statue was swiftly transported to Rome, where it became a prized possession of Italy's national collection. It remained on display at the National Roman Museum for nearly a century, revered for its classical beauty and artistic value (Wilkie, 2009; Chechi et al., 2012).

<sup>100</sup> Croci (2009, p. 66)

<sup>101</sup> Haile Mariam is the General Manager of the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) of Ethiopia

<sup>102</sup> Tullio Scovazzi, Professor of International Law at the University of Milano-Bicocca.

Libya's demand for the return of the statue began in the 1980s<sup>103</sup> but gained renewed urgency in the 2000s, coinciding with the broader international discourse on post-colonial restitution. The discussions took place within the context of improving diplomatic relations between Italy and Libya. In 2000, both countries agreed on the restitution of the Venus of Cyrene. The treaty included provisions for historical reconciliation, infrastructure investment, and the return of cultural property. The repatriation of the Venus of Cyrene was one of the most visible outcomes of this agreement, symbolising Italy's willingness to acknowledge past colonial injustices. Despite the diplomatic goodwill, the statue's return was not without complications. Italian museum professionals and art historians initially expressed concern over the potential loss of a key piece in the national collection. Not to mention the demand for the annulment of the restitution decree by *Italia Nostra* in 2002 (Chechi et al., 2012).

Furthermore, there were legal questions about whether the object could be removed from Italian soil under existing heritage laws, such as the Legislative Decree 42/2004 (*Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio*), which protects state-held cultural heritage. However, the decision-maker upheld the decision set out in the 1998 and 2000 agreements and was obliged to return the Venus. The statue was officially returned to Libya in 2008, where it was eventually reinstalled in a museum in Cyrene (Chechi et al., 2012).

Despite these achievements, Italy's approach to restitution has drawn criticism. Some scholars and commentators have described its policies as a form of "trophy hunting" (Eakin 2013, cited in Rose-Greenland, 2016, p. 143) and as emblematic of a broader retentionist attitude (Cuno, cited in Rose-Greenland, 2016, p. 144). Critics argue that the Italian government exhibits an excessive preoccupation with reclaiming every artwork or artefact linked to Italian heritage, often without adequately substantiating the cultural or national significance of each object. Critics further question whether all repatriated artefacts genuinely contribute to the national identity or self-esteem of the Italian public (Rose-Greenland, 2016).

<sup>103</sup> Negotiation by the Joint Communiqué in 4 July 1998 decided the restitution of all cultural assets removed from the former Italian colony.

This pattern reveals a broader “double standard” in Italy’s cultural heritage policy. While the state maintains a vigorous stance in advocating for the return of its own cultural property from abroad, it remains significantly more conservative in addressing the restitution of colonial-era artefacts within its domestic museum collections. This contradiction reflects a deeper tension between Italy’s historical experiences as both a victim and a beneficiary of cultural displacement (Visconti, 2021).

Countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands are currently at the forefront of the discourse on cultural heritage restitution. France has also made significant progress through the publication of the Sarr-Savoy Report, which marked a pivotal shift in its approach to colonial collections. Even the United Kingdom has begun to engage with the issue, albeit within the constraints of its existing legal framework. Italy, however, continues to lag. Despite the establishment of working groups at both governmental and professional levels, the absence of clear policy guidance, a coherent legal framework, and standardised procedures for handling restitution claims remains a significant limitation within the Italian museum sector (Visconti, 2021).

## **4.4 Restitution in the Indonesian Museums Context**

### **4.4.1 Regulations Concerning Restitution in Indonesian Law**

The development of cultural regulations in Indonesia, particularly concerning the preservation of cultural heritage, has progressed very slowly. Historically, there have been only a few major regulatory frameworks for cultural heritage. The first regulation was issued in 1931 by the Dutch colonial government under Staatsblad 1931 No. 238, known as the *Monumentenordonnantie*. The colonial government issued this ordinance to protect objects deemed to have significant value in terms of prehistory, history, art, or paleoanthropology. This regulation did not yet address the repatriation of cultural heritage into the territory of Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies). On the contrary, it included a clause prohibiting the export of cultural heritage from the Dutch East Indies without the permission of the Head of the Archaeological Service. Several reports mention that the prohibition on exporting cultural objects began with the Dutch East India

Company's occupation of the archipelago. Cultural objects are only allowed to be exported to the Netherlands upon official order (Van Beurden, 2017). To provide context, during that period, a significant amount of Indonesian cultural heritage was taken abroad, particularly after the rise of Western interest in cultural and natural sciences in the Dutch East Indies following the implementation of the Ethical Policy in 1904.

The discussion began with Conrad Thomas van den Venters' proposal to implement a more humane policy, considering that the Netherlands had a moral obligation to Indonesia.<sup>104</sup> Van Deventer argued that the debt should have been repaid for the colony's welfare, particularly with respect to monetary and political reciprocity. The Dutch finally embodied this idea in the form of Ethical Politics (*Etische Politiek*) with the enactment of the Decentralisation Law on 20 December 1904 by Queen Wilhelmina. This ethical policy aimed to improve the welfare of the people in Indonesia and then periodically provide autonomy to the Dutch East Indies (Sumarno 2019, p. 370). The colonial administration realised this by providing access to education, infrastructure improvements, and improved health services for the Indonesian people. In response to the guidance of the colony's management, as outlined in the Ethical Policy, the colonial administration also prioritised the preservation of culture and historical monuments in the Dutch East Indies (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).

After Indonesia's independence in 1945, regulations concerning cultural heritage continued to follow the *Monumentenordonnantie*, as outlined in *Staatsblad* 1931 No. 238. The rules issued during this period were primarily procedural, in the form of Ministerial Decrees, Ministerial Circulars, or letters from Directors-General of relevant ministries (primarily Tourism and Culture).<sup>105</sup> It was not until 1992 that a new law was enacted: Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 5 of 1992 concerning Cultural Heritage Objects (*Benda Cagar Budaya*). The primary rationale for this law was the need to safeguard the nation's cultural heritage for the study and development of history, science, and culture.

<sup>104</sup> Conrad Thomas van Deventer's article "Een Eereschuld" was published in the *Journal de Gide* in 1899, and in 1901, van Deventer presented his thoughts in a lecture at a meeting organised by the Liberal Association of Democracy in Amsterdam

<sup>105</sup> Summarised from the *Compilation of Regulations for the Protection of National Cultural Heritage*, published by the Directorate of Protection and Development of Historical and Archaeological Heritage in 1981

Therefore, such heritage needed to be protected and preserved to safeguard national identity and interests.

Broadly speaking, this law did not differ significantly from Staatsblad 1931 No. 238. However, it introduced more specific provisions concerning ownership, possession, discovery, protection, maintenance, management, utilisation, and supervision of cultural heritage objects. Repatriation of cultural heritage began to be addressed in Chapter III (Ownership, Possession, Discovery, and Search), specifically in Article 4, paragraph (3), which states:

“The repatriation of cultural heritage objects that, at the time this law comes into effect, are located outside the jurisdiction of the Republic of Indonesia, shall be undertaken by the Government following international conventions.”

This is further explained in the regulation, stating that efforts to return cultural heritage objects on behalf of the state shall be carried out by the Minister responsible for cultural affairs. Regulations regarding export were also tightened, particularly in Article 6, paragraphs (2b) and (4), which stipulate that cultural heritage objects that foreign nationals may own are only those of which there is an abundant quantity for each type, and of which the state already holds a portion. Additionally, Article 8, paragraph (1), stipulates that all transfers of ownership, transfer of rights, and relocation of specific cultural heritage objects must be registered.

There are two significant observations regarding the restitution process as outlined in Law No. 5 of 1992 concerning Cultural Heritage Objects. First, the law specifies that the restitution or repatriation of Indonesian cultural heritage from abroad falls under the exclusive authority of the central government. This provision effectively excludes regional governments and source communities from participating in or influencing restitution efforts. Second, the implementation of heritage repatriation is to be carried out in accordance with applicable international conventions. Notably, the law does not address the possibility of returning cultural heritage through bilateral or multilateral cooperation mechanisms.

These issues have received attention in subsequent legislation. In 2010, the Indonesian government enacted Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage (Cagar

Budaya), which adopted a distinctly different approach from its predecessor. While the earlier law emphasised national identity, the 2010 legislation introduced a broader perspective, prioritising the development and use of cultural heritage to advance national culture for the most significant possible benefit of public welfare. The framers of this law recognised a paradigm shift in heritage preservation—from a rigid and protectionist stance to a more balanced approach that considers ideological, academic, and economic factors in promoting societal well-being.

The new law explicitly addresses the return of Indonesian heritage located abroad in Article 20, which states:

“The return of Indonesian cultural heritage located outside the territory of the Republic of Indonesia shall be carried out by the Government following ratified international agreements, bilateral agreements, or through direct handover by the owner, unless otherwise agreed, provided it does not conflict with existing laws and regulations.”

Unlike the previous legislation, this law acknowledges the potential for bilateral agreements and other forms of cooperation as legitimate pathways for restitution. However, the process remains the sole responsibility of the central government. In practice, this means that any cultural property returned to Indonesia is automatically considered state property and becomes part of the National Museum of Indonesia's collection. To date, there are no known cases or derivative regulations governing the redistribution of repatriated heritage to regional museums or the source communities (Ardiyansyah, 2023; 2025).

The first derivative regulation of Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage is Government Regulation No. 66 of 2015 concerning Museums. This regulation provides further provisions regarding museology and the preservation of museum collections. It was considered necessary as the 2010 Cultural Heritage Law primarily addresses the protection and conservation of heritage sites outside the museum context. However, Government Regulation No. 66 of 2015 does not explicitly address the issue of restitution. The regulation only discusses the matter of inter-institutional collection loans under Paragraph 4, "Collection Loans." Article 21(1), for example, allows for the possibility of international collection loans, provided there is a bilateral or multilateral agreement in the field of culture. Article 21(2) stipulates that such loans must receive prior approval from the

relevant minister, and Article 21(3) further requires that the process follow applicable legislation.

The second derivative regulation of Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage is Government Regulation No. 1 of 2022 concerning the National Register and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. The primary objective of this regulation is to establish a framework for registering Indonesian cultural heritage, both domestically and internationally. The systematic registration of heritage objects located outside Indonesia represents a significant advancement, as prior knowledge about such collections had mainly been incidental, relying heavily on information from researchers, particularly about collections in the Netherlands. This reliance is understandable given the colonial relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands. However, the spirit of this regulation is to comprehensively document Indonesian cultural heritage located abroad, not just in the Netherlands. According to the regulation, the documentation of overseas heritage objects is the responsibility of the minister overseeing foreign affairs and is to be carried out through Indonesian diplomatic missions abroad (Article 25).

The most recent relevant regulation is Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture. This law primarily focuses on intangible cultural heritage, with some provisions extending to tangible elements that embody associated values. It defines ten categories recognised as Objects of Cultural Advancement, namely: oral traditions, manuscripts, customs, rites, traditional knowledge, traditional technology, art, language, folk games, and traditional sports. Several of these categories also encompass tangible aspects that serve as material expressions of intangible heritage.

Article 26 (1) stipulates that both central and local governments are obliged to safeguard Objects of Cultural Advancement. Article 26 (2) provides that all individuals may participate in preserving these objects, while Article 26(3) clarifies that safeguarding includes revitalisation, repatriation, and restoration. The law's annexe further elaborates on the concept of repatriation, defining it as the return of Objects of Cultural Advancement located outside Indonesia through mechanisms such as purchase, cooperation with foreign counterparts, and advocacy at the international level. This regulation justifies the Indonesian

government's request for the repatriation of cultural heritage that embodies intangible cultural heritage abroad, such as manuscripts.

These regulations highlight the Indonesian central government's ambition to reclaim its cultural heritage abroad. The pilot documentation project and database of cultural heritage are now being developed by the Cultural Attaché in Paris, working in collaboration with La Rochelle University in France.<sup>106</sup> However, so far, only the Indonesian Cultural Attaché in France has actively participated in registering the Indonesian cultural objects abroad.

#### **4.4.2 Restitution Cases to Indonesia**

The restitution of cultural heritage from abroad to Indonesia has a long and complex history. The lengthy colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia has made Dutch museums the primary focus of Indonesia's repatriation requests. Discussions regarding the return of cultural heritage were already underway during the Round Table Conference in 1949. This conference, sponsored by the United Nations, led to the Netherlands' formal recognition of Indonesian sovereignty, following four years of violent conflict between 1945 and 1949, after the declaration of Indonesia's independence in 1945.

One of the subcommittees of the conference formulated a Cultural Agreement in Article 19, which emphasised that cultural heritage originating from Indonesia and currently in the Netherlands, obtained "*by means other than as specified in private law for the acquisition of property*" (interpreted as tainted objects), should be returned to the Indonesian government. However, this agreement did not go into much detail. It was not until 1963 that the call for the return of Indonesian cultural heritage was voiced again. This time, it came from Muljadi Djojomartono (Deputy Minister for People's Welfare) in an interview with the Antara news agency. Djojomartono called for the return of manuscripts and books of historical significance to Indonesia, asserting that their return would also help improve diplomatic relations between the two countries. This request was echoed by Indro Soegondo (Department of Cultural Affairs of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture) in interviews with Agence France-Presse and Antara. Soegondo

<sup>106</sup> According to the Head of Cultural Attaché in Paris, Dr. Luh Anik Mayani in an interview, 2024

demanded the return of cultural heritage items "*of which there was no second specimen and many of which [were] very valuable.*"

To pursue this matter, in October 1974, a group of Indonesian representatives visited the Netherlands under a technical cooperation agreement between the Jakarta and Amsterdam municipalities to examine, study, and collect historic Indonesian items. The Ministry of Internal Affairs allows them to access secret documents. After visiting twenty-one institutions and meeting thirty-eight dignitaries, the team compiled a lengthy list of ten thousand claimable items. The following items were included: Aceh objects, the Lombok Treasure, ornaments from the Luwu court, national heroes' belongings, such as those of Diponegoro Prince and Pattimura, and natural science items, including the Wadjak skull. This list became a source of annoyance for the Dutch government, particularly for several museums that were reluctant to return their prestigious items.

In early 1975, the Dutch Government declared its readiness to intensify the cooperation regarding the return of the objects. The Indonesian government proposed that both sides establish a team of experts to address cultural relations and the return of the objects. This event led to the first meeting of the team of experts in Indonesia, which lasted two weeks. The Director-General of the Ministry of Education and Culture led the Indonesian team for Culture, while the Director-General of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Works led the Dutch side. The demand for return from Indonesian representatives was stated in three categories:

1. Cultural objects that are regarded as significant creations of Indonesian thinkers and artists and as tangible manifestations of the Indonesian people's cultural heritage.
2. Historical objects that provide evidence of momentous or memorable historical events in the past of the Indonesian people.
3. Objects of aesthetic value or with a special appeal to the aesthetic feelings of Indonesians.

The request received resistance from the Dutch side. In their counteroffer, the Dutch argued that no UNESCO regulation or guideline required that all objects be returned to their country of origin. It is also challenging to fulfil the wish for the

return of thousands of objects, considering that the Dutch Government can only manage state-owned objects. Regarding non-state-owned objects, the Dutch government can only assist in negotiating with their owner on behalf of the Indonesian government, provided that the Indonesian side includes information on the objects' locations. Later, the Dutch representatives reminded Indonesia that the objects in Dutch museums are also part of their shared history and cannot be erased. However, they are open to cooperation, research, and the provision of access for Indonesians who come to study them. It is clear from the outset of the discussion that the Dutch are unwilling to return all Indonesian objects.

Pieter Pott, a representative and director of the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, is one of the most vocal opponents resisting the return. Given Indonesia's extensive collection of 10,000 objects, mainly housed in the Volkenkunde Museum, including the prized 13th-century Singasari Prajnaparamita statue, it is understandable that he sought to 'protect' the museum's most valuable piece. Pott expressed his annoyance that, on the one hand, Indonesia claimed the objects from museums in the Netherlands. On the other hand, an extensive collection was being exported almost unchecked to the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan.<sup>107</sup>

The stalemate was finally solved on the last day of the meeting. To everyone's surprise, Sjarif Thayeb, the Minister for Education and Culture of Indonesia, expressed his opinion. For him, there was no need for Indonesia to retrieve all the objects, as he did not know where to house the collection or how to manage it. This statement most certainly affected the position of Indonesian representatives, as they accepted a counteroffer from the Dutch representatives. The result of the meeting was the agreement on the 'Joint Recommendations by the Dutch and Indonesian Team of Experts, Concerning Cultural Cooperation in the Field of Museums and Archives Including Transfer of Objects,' dated November 22, 1975. This agreement was followed in subsequent years by the return of the Lombok Treasure in 1977 and, to the Pott's sadness, Prajnaparamita in 1978 (see Table 4.3 below).

<sup>107</sup> Could also cover around 20 Nias objects in the Osaka museum, the museum has not yet provided any confirmation during the writing of this thesis <https://htqfs.minpaku.ac.jp/mocat/simple/search?query=%E3%83%8B%E3%82%A2%E3%82%B9&initial=true>

**Table 4.3.** List of restitutions to Indonesia from the 1970s to the present.<sup>108</sup>

No.	Item(s)	Number of item(s)	Date	Notes
1	Paintings by Raden Saleh	2	1970	<p>Returned to President Suharto by Queen Juliana, exchanged for a golden evening bag for Queen Juliana and a smoking set of Yogyakarta silver for Prince Consort Bernard.</p> <p>From a legal point of view, it is considered a gift, not restitution</p>
2	Nagarakertagama manuscript	1	1973	<p>Part of the looted objects from the 1894 punitive expedition.</p> <p>Returned on behalf of the Dutch Government by Queen Juliana. The manuscript was housed in the University of Leiden Library and is now part of the National Library of Indonesia's collection.</p>
3	Ethnographic collection from Papua	380	1975	<p>On July 13, 1975, Museum Volkenkunde Leiden handed over 380 ethnographic objects from Papua. The objects were acquired in 1963, before Papua was released from Dutch control.</p>
4	Lombok Treasure	243	1977	<p>The objects were looted during the 1894 punitive expedition. The objects were observed by J.L.A. Brandes and sent to the Netherlands.</p> <p>One hundred twenty-two objects were returned from the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden; the other 121 were from the Rijksmuseum. The objects selected by Amin Sutarga and Pieter Pott.</p> <p>The objects were handed over to the cultural attaché, Hadjasomentir, in The Hague.</p>

<sup>108</sup> Van Beurden, 2012; Van Beurden, 2017; Stutje, 2022; observation in Museum Pusaka Nias, 2023-2024; Collectie Nusantara <https://collectie-nusantara.nl/> last accessed on 24/07/2025;

5	Prince Diponegoro's equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Red saddle with stirrups</li> <li>● Bridle</li> <li>● Umbrella</li> <li>● Spear</li> </ul>	4	1977	Returned by the Dutch State-inspector for Moveable Monuments to the Indonesia Ambassador in The Hague.  Taken in 1829 during the Java War and previously housed in the Museum Bronbeek.
6	Prajnaparamita	1	1978	One of the most disputed objects, finally returned after four plaster casts were made.  Founded by assistant-administrator D. Monnereau near Singasari in 1818, transferred to the Batavian Society in 1822, and shipped to the Netherlands in 1824. Previously kept in Leiden and now in the National Museum in Jakarta.
67	Wayang Puppets	185	2005	The World Museum in Rotterdam donated 185 wayang puppets to the Museum Wayang in Jakarta in the context of strengthening the municipal relations between Jakarta and Rotterdam
8	Baju perang Oroba Buaya	1	2007	Returned by the former deacon and Protestant Church's missionary in Nias, Horst Krank, to the Museum Pusaka Nias (Nias Heritage Museum), North Sumatra.
9	Ethnographic objects	12	2008	The Order of the Capuchins of Tilburg and Tropenmuseum donated 18 and 4 ethnographic objects to a new cultural centre in Sintang, West Kalimantan.
10	Ancestor figures	30	2009	Returned from the Volkenkunding Museum of Radboud University (Nijmegen, Netherlands) with the help of Missionprocurator Capuchin Congregation in Tilburg, Netherlands, to the Museum Pusaka Nias (Nias Heritage Museum), North Sumatra.
11	Prince Diponegoro's pilgrim staff	1	2015	Returned by the descendants of J.C. Baron Baud with the help of Curator Harm Stevens of the Rijksmuseum
12	Former Nusantara Museum collection	1501	2019	Ethnographic objects from the closure of the Delft Nusantara Museum
13	Prince Diponegoro's kris 'Kyai Nogo Siluman'	1	2020	Returned by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima of the Netherlands.  Taken during the Java War and was lost

				for more than 100 years before being found in a museum.
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Four Singhasari statues (Ganesha, Mahakala, Durga Mahisasuramardini and Nandiswara)</li> <li>● One Kris from Klungkung (Bali)</li> <li>● Lombok treasure (335 objects)</li> <li>● Pita Maha Collection (132 objects)</li> </ul>	472	2023	<p>Returned by Gunay Uslu, Minister of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands, to Hilmar Farid, General Director of Culture. Results of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2017.</p> <p>The statues and Kris were previously kept at the Volkenkunde Museum, while the Lombok treasure and Pita Maha Collection were housed at the Tropenmuseum.</p> <p>The statues originated from the Singhasari kingdom (13th century) in East Java.</p> <p>The Lombok treasure was part of the objects looted by the Dutch in 1894.</p> <p>The Pita Maha collection was created by a group of Balinese artists in 1936, led by Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati, I Gusti Nyoman Lempad, Walter Spies, and Rudolf Bonet, and was likely brought to the Netherlands in the 1940s.</p>
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ganesha statue</li> <li>● Brahma statue</li> <li>● Two Singosari temple statues</li> <li>● War loot from Puputan Bali (284 objects)</li> </ul>	288	2024	<p>Returned by Eppo Bruins, Minister of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands, to Hilmar Farid, General Director of Culture. Results of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2017, continuing the 2023 repatriation.</p> <p>The statues originated from the Singhasari kingdom (13th century) in East Java. In contrast, the looted objects were taken during the Dutch attack on Tabanan, Bali, in 1906.</p>
16	Majapahit era stone relief	3	2024	3 illegally exported antiquities returned to the Consulate General of Indonesia in New York by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

The second extensive transfer, aside from the results of the Joint Recommendations in 1975, was the redistribution of Delft Nusantara Museum objects. The Delft Museum, which closed in January 2013 due to the financial

crisis (Sudarto, 2016), was the only museum in the Netherlands dedicated entirely to Indonesian art and culture, a distinction rooted in its history as part of the *Indische Instelling*. This institution trained and educated prospective civil servants for work in the Dutch East Indies (nowadays Indonesia), operating from 1864 to 1901, when it closed due to an excess of students and a shortage of civil servant positions in Indonesia. The ethnographic collection at the *Indische Instelling* was intended to familiarise future Dutch civil servants with life in Indonesia. The collection was gradually assembled through donations from students, teachers, alumni, and their families. The government made additional contributions following exhibitions in Paris (1878), Berlin (1880), and Amsterdam (1883). When the *Indische Instelling* closed in 1901, around 5,000 objects from Indonesia were stored there.

The institution later rebranded as *Indische Collectie* in 1909 and opened an exhibition at Het Prinsenhof. After several relocations, the museum, renamed Nusantara Museum, settled in the Agathaplein wing of the Het Prinsenhof complex in 1911. It continued to expand its collection until the 1970s, maintaining its place in the history of civil service education in Indonesia. By the time the museum closed, it was estimated to house around 18,000 Indonesian objects (van Beurden, 2022).

When Museum Nusantara closed in 2013, a solution was needed for the 18,000 threatened objects. Of these, 459 objects linked to the city of Delft were retained as the Delft Collection; around 500 were returned to their original owners; and 3,194 were designated for the Netherlands Collection (van Beurden, 2022). Around 2,000 objects were deemed unsuitable by the Delft Heritage (Erfgoed Delft) director, while approximately 12,000 were set to be 'returned' to Indonesia. Discussions between Indonesia and the Netherlands began in May 2015, and a verbal agreement was reached in October 2015, with the 'return' to be completed by April 1, 2016 (Sudarto, 2016; van Beurden, 2018). A warehouse was built in Indonesia to store the returned objects, and the Netherlands sent a draft agreement in December 2015. A key point in the agreement was that Indonesia would receive the entire collection from Museum Nusantara and bear all costs associated with storage, insurance, and transportation.

However, there was a change on the Indonesian side. On December 31, 2015, Kacung Maridjan, Director of Culture, was replaced by Hilmar Farid, who, in March 2016, announced that the repatriation effort would not proceed. Bambang Hari Wibisono (former Education and Culture Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague) explained that Indonesia was reluctant to take back the entire collection due to the high costs of transport and maintenance. Additionally, many of the 12,000 objects slated for repatriation were already available in Indonesia (Sudarto, 2016).

Heritage specialist, Wim Manuhutu, echoed these concerns, noting that Indonesia was not allowed to select which objects to receive. The 'best' items had been reserved for the Delft and Netherlands collections, leaving Indonesia with the 'left-over' (van Beurden, 2022). Hilmar Farid further emphasised that the process of returning collections from the Netherlands lacked equality. Where the processes were promoted as the Netherlands' goodwill and as a 'gift,' rather than as an acknowledgement of past mistakes. I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja (Indonesia's Ambassador to the Netherlands from 2015 to 2020) similarly stated that repatriation should be based on equality, with Indonesia selecting items for return based on prior research and assessment (Wirayudha, 2023).

This refusal prompted Delft to resume the search for homes for the Indonesian objects. All items were placed in the Deaccessioning Database system of the Museum Association, and member museums could select objects they were interested in. Many Dutch museums expressed interest, but a significant number of objects remained unclaimed. To broaden the scope, the offer was extended to museums in Europe and Asia. During this process, Indonesia (re)expressed interest in receiving 1,500 objects, provided the National Museum of Indonesia could select which items would be returned. This put the collaboration between Delft Heritage and other museums on hold. Ultimately, Indonesia claimed 1,501 objects.

Symbolically, one of the Bugis Kris was returned by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, to the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, on November 23, 2016. The Indonesia National Museum received the remaining 1500 objects on December 23, 2019. The objects were then exhibited in a

temporary exhibition titled “*Kembali ke Tanah Merdeka,*” or “Return to the Land of the Free”, by the end of December 2020.<sup>109</sup> The remaining unclaimed objects, held by the Indonesian government, were then distributed internationally to approximately 16 institutions. The most significant number went to the Asia Culture Center in Gwangju, South Korea, which received more than 7000 objects.<sup>110</sup>

Reflecting on the chaos and confusion surrounding the transfer of former Nusantara Museum objects, which led to a 2017 meeting between the Netherlands and Indonesia. The meeting was intended to avoid uncertainty and miscommunication, and to establish the transfer of cultural objects on an equal footing. The meeting resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding for repatriation. The Indonesian government then appointed a group of experts as the Repatriation Committee in 2021, led by I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, and Ismunandar now succeeds it. In the Netherlands, the counterpart committee was established by the Dutch Minister of Culture, led by Lilian Goncalves-Ho Kang You (Stutje, 2022).

Both teams then addressed the finer details. Technical arrangements for cooperation on the Repatriation of Indonesian historical and cultural objects in 2023 were based on the decision. The documents arranged the transfer of the cultural objects in a batch; the first batch of 2023 covered 472 objects (including Singhasari statues, Kris from Klungkung, Lombok Treasure, and Pita Maha collection); the second batch will be covering 288 objects in 2024 (including Singhasari statues, artefacts from Puputan War in Klungkung and Tabanan), see the details in Table 4.3.<sup>111</sup> After the return of the objects, Indonesia is still not done. More batches will come, including the horse bridle belonging to Prince Diponegoro, a collection of Homo erectus ancient human fossils discovered by Eugène Dubois,<sup>112</sup> the Luwu Regalia, and the Al Quran belonging to Teuku Umar.

<sup>109</sup> The exhibition page <https://www.museumnasional.or.id/3400/>

<sup>110</sup> Van Beurden (2021a) mentioned 7744 objects. Interview with the curator in the Asia Culture Center in July 2025 confirmed the number around 7000, but they were in the middle of recounting, and data from Delft Heritage, <https://collectie-nusantara.nl/#/query/aaa9ac52-ecda-4281-8f8b-cbe0f3f6ed8e> shows 7685 objects

<sup>111</sup> <https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/serah-terima-repatriasi-objek-warisan-budaya-indonesia-dari-belanda/> last accessed 25/07/2025

<sup>112</sup> During the writing of this thesis, the Netherlands government agreed to the return of 30.000 Eugene Dunois' objects to Indonesia.

All of these objects are part of the Indonesian government's 2022 request.<sup>113</sup> This pattern indicates that the returned objects largely align with the Joint Recommendations of 1975 and largely address the three demands made by Indonesia's previous delegation.<sup>114</sup>

Nearly all the cultural objects mentioned above were returned to Indonesia and subsequently became part of the collection of the National Museum of Indonesia. This outcome resulted from the stipulations in Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, which designates repatriation as the sole responsibility of the central government. To date, there are no derivative regulations that govern the redistribution of repatriated cultural heritage from the National Museum to regional museums. Yet, there have been numerous objections from local stakeholders, notably when the central government "rejected" 12,000 cultural objects offered by the Nusantara Museum in Delft, choosing instead to accept only 1,501 items for the National Museum. This decision disappointed many of the original heirs and regional museums, including the descendants of the Puri Tabanan royal family in Bali, the Buleleng Museum in Northern Bali, and the Nias Heritage Museum.

Ardiyansyah (2025) also highlights the absence of regulations governing the repatriation of heritage objects to institutions other than the National Museum. In fact, requests to return cultural heritage by individuals or non-governmental entities have existed for decades. In March 1980, descendants of Si Singamangaraja XI, a Batak priest-king of the Bakkara dynasty in North Sumatra, submitted a request for the return of a machete (Piso Gaja Dompok) and a manuscript (Pustaka Harajaon) authored by Si Singamangaraja XI himself. Another request, documented in 1980 by an 81-year-old former district head from North Sumatra, sought the restitution of a Dutch medal of recognition awarded to his grandfather, which was confiscated in 1866 (Stutje, 2022).

Attempts by local governments and former aristocracies to reclaim the ancient power of symbols and heirlooms from the National Museum of Indonesia were echoed in 1937-1938, when they sought to return heirlooms to the Bone and Gowa

<sup>113</sup> In the Directorate General letter, more information available here <https://www.historia.id/article/serba-serbi-di-balik-layar-repatriasi-472-artefak-indonesia-vjyg0>

<sup>114</sup> See page 29

kingdoms and Bali (Budiarti in Stutje, 2022, p. 39). A similar concern is echoed among the descendants of the Tananan Kingdom in Bali regarding the recent transfer of cultural objects (heirlooms) from the Netherlands to the National Museum in Jakarta, rather than to the rightful heir in Bali.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, the restitution agenda in Indonesia remains heavily reliant on central government action and, for the time being, is focused predominantly on objects located in the Netherlands, limiting wider community-led involvement in the recovery of cultural heritage.

In Table 4.3, several exceptions are noted within the list of repatriations. For instance, in 2005, 185 *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) were sent to the Wayang Museum by the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam as part of a cultural exchange under the sister-city relationship between Rotterdam and Jakarta. Another notable exception concerns cases in which religious institutions were involved in the repatriation process. The Nias Heritage Museum (Museum Pusaka Nias), a private museum established and managed by a church-affiliated foundation, utilised its connections with the Capuchin congregation to facilitate the return of several Nias cultural objects from abroad, without the involvement or assistance of the central government.

The Museum Pusaka Nias also provide interesting cases of restitution. Pastor Johannes M. Hämmerle founded the museum in 1991, 20 years after arriving on Nias to begin his work with the church. Since beginning his work in Nias, community members have brought him cultural objects almost every day. Economic reasons and poverty drive the sale of these cultural objects. To prevent the Nias ancestral heritage from leaving Nias, Hammerle proposed the quickest solution: purchasing and storing it in a local museum. As a result, the collection at the Nias Heritage Museum currently comprises approximately 6,001 items. It continues to grow through acquisitions and restitution from individuals or museums abroad.

Data from the museum indicate that at least 947 cultural objects were acquired through grants or donations; 5045 were the result of compensation for services or

<sup>115</sup> The concern shared during the focus group of digital decolonisation of Balinese heritage in May 1, 2025 by the descendants of the Tabanan Kingdom of Bali.

purchases; and the remaining 9 were loans from the original owners (Diansyah dan Harefa 2019, p. 79). The latest additions from the restitution process were the return of oroba buaya (crocodile-skin cloth) by a private collector and former Christian church deacon, Horst Krank (2007), and the return of 30 cultural objects by the Volkenkunding Museum, owned by Radboud University (Nijmegen), in 2009.<sup>116</sup> The Museum Pusaka Nias cases highlight the current landscape of restitution in Indonesia. As acknowledged by the Head of the Museum Pusaka Nias, considerable financial and administrative barriers often hinder local communities from actively seeking the return of their heritage from abroad.<sup>117</sup> The lack of clear regulations regarding the redistribution of returned cultural objects within Indonesia further complicates this. In an area where cultural object restitution in Indonesia remains highly centralised, the Nias Museum provides a different approach.

#### **4.4.3 The Agenda within Restitution in Indonesia**

The previous parts highlight two interesting findings regarding the Indonesian side's approach to restitution. First, there is a heavy reliance on the central government. The government initiated all significant restitution under the 1975 Joint Recommendation between the Indonesian and Dutch governments. The second finding is the centralisation of restituted cultural objects in the National Museum of Indonesia. Regardless of their actual provenance, all restituted objects are returned to the National Museum, including known cases such as the Lombok Treasure and the Bali Looting. Despite protests from local museums and the 'rightful' heir to the objects, the central government has not addressed the redistribution of these objects.

Another notable point is that all significant restitution efforts have always involved Dutch museums or private collections. According to Table 4.3, only one case consists of the restitution of cultural objects from outside the Netherlands. The return of the three stone reliefs from the United States of America to the Indonesia Consulate General in New York in 2024. These objects, however, were considered an illegal trade in the modern era, and the arrested person has been

<sup>116</sup> Data obtained from information at Pavilion I of the Nias Heritage Museum during a field visit in May 2024

<sup>117</sup> Nata'alui Duha, during the interview in May 2024.

active since the 1990s in Southeast Asia for the New York antiquities market (Rachmandita, 2024).<sup>118</sup>

Considering the wealth of Indonesia's cultural heritage in other countries such as Great Britain, France, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, and Italy, it is questionable whether Indonesia is genuinely committed to its decolonisation agenda. While it is true that the Netherlands colonised Indonesia for an extended period of history,<sup>119</sup> there were also periods when the Portuguese, British and Japanese occupied the territory now known as Indonesia. In 2025, the Indonesian government established a new repatriation team to conduct provenance research and compile a list of important artefacts to be repatriated from the Netherlands to Indonesia. This move highlighted the Indonesian central government's agenda to focus on the Netherlands, while ignoring the others.

Some of the important cases include the Sangguran Inscriptions, also known as Minto's Stone. The stone was initially discovered in East Java in 1812 by a Scottish military engineer, Colin Mackenzie, who subsequently shipped it to the Governor-General of India, the first Earl of Minto, as a gift. Thomas Stamford Raffles facilitated the shipment. In recent years, the stone has gained attention in the restitution debate in Indonesia. However, it has not yet attracted the same level of interest as Indonesian objects held in the Netherlands (Griffiths et al, 2024). Not only the Sangguran Inscription, but Raffles also sent another inscription, known as the Pucangan Inscription. This stone was also sent as a gift to Minto; however, when Minto returned to Scotland, the stone was left behind in Kolkata, India. Today, the inscription is still stored at the Kolkata Museum in India (Nastiti et al., 2022). Both inscriptions are essential to Indonesia's history, particularly from the 10th to the 11th centuries (Carey, 2015).<sup>120</sup> However, neither inscription prioritises being repatriated by the Indonesian government.

Furthermore, Griffiths et al. (2024) highlight the near-zero attention given by the Indonesian government to repatriate text-bearing artefacts. This is particularly

<sup>118</sup> See also, <https://manhattanda.org/d-a-bragg-announces-return-of-30-antiquities-seized-from-subhash-kapoor-and-nancy-wiener/>

<sup>119</sup> The Netherlands colonised Indonesia since the collapse of Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie in 1899 until the Declaration of Independence in 1945.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Peter Carey in <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2826481/tolong-2-prasasti-sejarah-milik-ri-ini-telantar-di-inggris-dan-india>

evident in the July-August 2023 repatriation of a substantial collection of artefacts looted in 1894 by Dutch forces from the royal palace of Lombok (Sastrawan, 2020-2021; 2023; see also Table 4.3, Lombok Treasure). The considerable number of text-bearing artefacts that had been looted was donated in 1906 by the Netherlands Indies government to the Leiden University Library, where they remain to this day. Some of them are fundamental texts of early Indonesian literary and religious culture; none of them were included in the 2023 repatriation (Griffiths et al., 2024). The most apparent exception was the return of the late-14th-century Hindu Javanese manuscript *Nagarakrtagama*, which the Dutch seized from Lombok (see Table 4.3). The manuscript was among the most sought-after returns requested by the Indonesian government, as its contents were interpreted as proof that Indonesian territory, including Papua and East Timor, was a pre-colonial entity (van Beurden, 2017, p. 131).

This political aspiration of Indonesia is also affecting the demands for the return of other cultural objects. Not only text-bearing artefacts, but also ethnographic objects received subpar attention from the Indonesian government, except for the Papuan ethnographic objects in the 1970s. In 1975, the Netherlands repatriated around 380 Papuan ethnographic objects to Indonesia (see Table 3). The request was justified by the need for ethnographic objects for the new museum in Papua, planned by the Indonesian government. However, this is closely tied to the conflict between Dutch control and Indonesian control over Papua. After the Dutch transferred sovereignty over Papua to Indonesia in 1962, Papuans were given the right to decide their fate within five years under the Act of Free Choice (also known as a Referendum). They were “persuaded” to join Indonesia by the Indonesian government.<sup>121</sup> Hence, the need for the *Negarakertagama*,<sup>122</sup> the manuscript mentioned above and the Papuan ethnographic objects were paramount for Indonesia’s political agenda to maintain Papua's inclusion within Indonesia.

For other ethnographic objects outside Papua, attention was minimal. For example, the return of ethnographic objects to the Museum Pusaka Nias and the cultural centre in West Kalimantan (see Table 4.3) has never been a government

<sup>121</sup> Van Beurden, 2021

<sup>122</sup> As a proof of historical legitimation and claim over the land of Papua

priority, as no support has been provided to either museum.<sup>123</sup> Nias ethnographic objects, in particular, are among the most widely represented from Indonesia in museums worldwide. Given the drastic changes in Nias society over the last 100 years, particularly after the introduction of Christianity and the Dutch iconoclasm of indigenous religion, Nias artefacts hold significant value for Nias identity and art (Purnawibawa et al., 2025). However, the central government's attention is always minimal.

The government's negligence is never clearer than in the latest case involving the Nias ethnographic objects in Paris. Dr Luh Anik Mayani, the Indonesian Cultural Attaché in France, reached out to the author in June 2024 to provide information regarding a disputed Nias stone ancestral statue known as Gowe. The statue was intended for auction at the Giquello Auction House in Paris. According to the documents, the stone statue entered Paris through intermediaries in Denpasar (Bali, Indonesia) and Brussels (Belgium). In the document, the statue was labelled as a garden decoration when it departed from Indonesia. However, when it entered Paris from Brussels, the object's label was changed to a cultural object label. The inconsistency in the documents raised suspicions among the local authorities. Local authorities contacted the Indonesian Cultural Attaché in Paris to claim the cultural object, which the officers then forwarded to the Indonesian Ministry of Culture.

However, based on a superficial observation of the photos,<sup>124</sup> the Ministry stated that the object was fake and was unwilling to pursue the matter further, leaving the object's situation unclear.<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, the object's authenticity was confirmed. The confirmation was provided after three independent experts on Nias culture, appointed by the local authorities, physically examined the object. Later, it was also recognised as a genuine object during a closed focus group discussion between the Indonesian Cultural Attaché and the Nias Heritage Museum.<sup>126</sup> The situation shows the inconsistency of the Indonesian central

<sup>123</sup> The Head of Museum Pusaka Nias and the staff mentioned that the central government did not provide any aid for the repatriation of Nias ethnographic objects to their museum, in interviews May 2024

<sup>124</sup> Without bothering to send experts to check the authenticity directly in Paris

<sup>125</sup> Based on the information provided by Dr Luh Anik Mayani in the interview, June - August 2024

<sup>126</sup> The closed focus group discussions were held on 30th August 2024, by the Indonesian Cultural Attaché in France and the Nias Heritage Museum to confirm the authenticity of the objects and find a

government. On the one hand, the regulation requires the country to monitor its heritage abroad, and the government eagerly repatriates the objects deemed suitable for the nation's narrative; on the other hand, it also neglects its duty and other objects that are not in its interest.

In conclusion, restitution remains a profoundly complex and contested process, caught between international conventions, national regulations, and the political priorities of states. While recent restitutions, from Indonesia's negotiations with the Netherlands to Italy's returns to Ethiopia and Libya, represent important milestones, they also expose the limitations of current frameworks. Too often, restitution is pursued as a symbolic gesture of diplomacy or national prestige, rather than as a genuine effort to address colonial injustice. The centralisation of decision-making within governments, combined with bureaucratic and financial obstacles, further limits the agency of local communities and original custodians of heritage.

These dynamics raise a critical question: can restitution alone be equated with decolonisation, or must it instead be understood as only one component of a broader process of cultural justice? The cases examined in this chapter demonstrate that while restitution has the potential to rectify historical wrongs, its effectiveness is contingent upon more inclusive, transparent, and community-driven approaches. Moving beyond state-centric agendas and diplomatic bargaining will be essential if restitution is to become a meaningful practice of decolonisation rather than a narrowly defined transfer of objects.

solution for the return of the object; no results have been achieved so far.

*This page is intentionally left blank*

## Chapter 5. Digital Restitution as Decolonisation Tools

From the discussion in the previous chapter, it is evident that restitution is entangled in complex regulations, diplomatic and bureaucratic hurdles, and is further complicated by the political and cultural agendas of the parties involved. On the Italian side, observable outcomes of restitution appear to be primarily framed within the enforcement of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

However, there remains limited awareness of restitution as a process for acknowledging and addressing colonial injustices. The cases of the Axum Obelisk and the Venus of Cyrene illustrate how Italian institutions and decision-makers did not comprehensively approach restitution as a meaningful act of reckoning with the colonial past. In contrast, Indonesia has pursued restitution as part of its own political agenda. Repatriated objects are often linked to national political interests, with specific characteristics prioritised in determining return targets. Within this framework, Dutch museums, which represent the former colonial power, have become the principal focus of Indonesian restitution efforts.

In the Indonesian case, this put some of the “undesired objects”<sup>127</sup> in a dilemma. Already, thousands of objects had been ‘refused’ by the Indonesian government and were transferred to other foreign institutions. But what if there are different voices within Indonesia that seek the objects' return? Such as local communities for their cultural heritage abroad? This is the case of the Nias ethnographic objects in Western museums. Nias Island has been depleted of its cultural heritage due to iconoclasm in the 19th and 20th centuries, resulting from Christianisation brought by Western colonisers. The changing of socio-cultural in Nias society also made them ‘distant’ from their own heritage. Many cultural objects, such as ancestral statues (*adu*), are losing value in society due to the younger generation's association with a new religion. Combined with the introduction of mass

<sup>127</sup> The author refers to these as objects that do not align with the nationalist agenda, usually the heritage of minorities and those that provide an alternative narrative to the nation's history.

tourism to Nias Island by the Netherlands in the 1930s, which peaked in the 1970s, many of these ethnographic objects found their way into Western countries, where they were sold as souvenirs to curious travellers.

However, the movement of these objects was not a new phenomenon. Many have already sat in natural history, anthropology, or ethnography museums in Europe and North America. These ethnographic objects have been taken by adventurers, researchers, and even missionaries since the 18th century. These collections were already in many museums before the enforcement of the 1970 UNESCO Convention or the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, complicating the discussion of the return of these objects. Some objects, such as Elio Modigliani's Nias collection<sup>128</sup> in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, also became difficult. Considering that Italy never colonised Indonesia, the request for the return of these objects would probably be a diplomatic issue. Given the museum's characteristics, the applicable laws, and prior restitution cases, there is only a slim possibility that the Italian government approved the repatriation request.<sup>129</sup>

All this, assuming the Indonesian government will facilitate the formal request, which is unlikely. Consider the case of the Nias ancestral statue in Paris: as of today, the Indonesian government has no plan to repatriate ethnographic objects that do not align with "national interests." The Nias, as a minority group in Indonesia, is not a priority for cultural heritage repatriation. This is also evident in several restitutions to the Nias Heritage Museum, which were facilitated through church connections rather than government aid. On the other hand, Nias' ethnographic objects are among the most widely represented in world museums (see Figure 5.1).

<sup>128</sup> See Chapter 3

<sup>129</sup>As shown by the response of the museum curators during the workshop (September-October, 2023) at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence, confronted with the possibility of the return of the Nias objects, they adamantly stated that the objects are inalienable parts of the museum, protected by regulation.



**Figure 5.1.** Diasporic Institutions housing Nias ethnographic objects worldwide. A darker colour indicates that more institutions hold the Nias objects.

During this research, the author found that at least 57 institutions worldwide house Nias ethnographic objects. The highest concentration of institutions is located in North America and European countries.<sup>130</sup> In Indonesia, the Nias ethnographic objects are represented in only five museums.<sup>131</sup> In Italy, two museums house Nias ethnographic objects: the Museum of Civilisation in Rome and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. Both museums' collections originated from Elio Modigliani's 1886 trip to Nias. This list, however, does not mention the animal specimens collected by Modigliani as part of natural science collections in museums, such as the Museum of Natural History "Giacomo Doria" in Genoa.<sup>132</sup> If explored, the number of museums might increase.

The difference between the number of diasporic Nias cultural objects represented inside Indonesia and outside of Indonesia demands more serious attention.

<sup>130</sup> See the detail in the Appendix 1

<sup>131</sup> Indonesia has at least 428 museums, according to the Indonesia Museum Association (2016), <https://asosiasimuseumindonesia.org/anggota.html>

<sup>132</sup> See <https://catalogo.museidigenova.it/cerca?filtro=common%7C78a3668e26d6d172e22fd81b8876a7ed%7CMuseo%20di%20Storia%20Naturale%20Giacomo%20Doria%7C%2FsuperrootObjects%2FMuseo%20di%20Storia%20Naturale%20Giacomo%20Doria&filtro=common%7C66%7C1801%20-%201900%7C%2FPeriodo%20storico%2F1801%20-%201900&sort=fn&page=0>

Decolonisation effort, if you will. This effort, however, need not focus solely on physical restitution. While the legal aspects and the path to repatriation remain unclear, several steps can still be taken in discussions of decolonising Nias collections abroad, in this case, Italian museums. Museum decolonisation, in broad terms, can be understood as the process of recognising the historical, colonial contexts under which collections were acquired; uncovering Eurocentric ideologies and biases within Western Museum concepts, discourse, and practices; acknowledging and incorporating diverse voices and multiple perspectives; and transforming museums through sustained critical analysis and concrete actions (Kreps, 2011). In the practice of decoloniality within museums (Ariese & Wroblewska, 2022), several core values can be implemented, such as increasing visibility, promoting inclusivity, decentering, fostering empathy, enhancing transparency, and embracing vulnerability. These values can be realised through programs that more actively support the indigenous communities from which the collections originated, provide open access to collections and databases, and create spaces for indigenous perspectives within museum settings. Within this framework, Italian museums have many opportunities to pursue decolonisation initiatives.

An illustrative example of this broader decolonial approach is the process of decolonising museum databases, a practice already adopted by institutions such as the Swedish National Museum of World Culture and a collective of museums in the Netherlands.<sup>133</sup> This process involves incorporating Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and languages into museum database systems, while also ensuring access for source communities (Sprague 2021, p. 52). Decolonising databases yields multiple benefits; it empowers both museum technical teams and Indigenous communities by enabling shared cultural and conceptual decision-making in the documentation and interpretation of collections. Such initiatives promote freedom of expression and foster collaborative knowledge production, thereby enriching our understanding of the cultural significance of objects (Muñoz et al., 2022). This approach offers mutual advantages: it not only benefits source communities but also strengthens the museums' ethical and curatorial practices. For that reason, this thesis explored this possibility as a way to decolonise the Nias ethnographic collection in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence.

<sup>133</sup> <https://app.colonialcollections.nl/en>

## 5.1 Digital Restitution: An Introduction

As discussed above, the restitution of museum collections is a complex, multi-layered problem. The problem of the restitution of cultural objects is not a single problem with a single solution. It is not a problem that can be solved with a single treaty or international agreement. A lasting solution will require both a willingness to address past wrongs and a commitment to change by individual museum professionals, museums, nations and the wider international community (Clark, 2022). However, such solutions will take years or decades to be implemented effectively, if they will ever be implemented at all.

Fortunately, recent technological advancements offer a wide range of options and opportunities for innovative solutions. Documentation, traditionally in the form of photography and, more recently, three-dimensional modelling, has long been an essential part of museum collection management (Haydenreich, 2011). Such documentation supports the work of conservators and curators in managing cultural assets, particularly in identification, conservation, security, and publication (ICOM, 1995; Perera, 2018; Lawan & Yusuf, 2021). Importantly, the outcomes of this documentation should not only serve the museum's needs but also benefit the wider public. With the rise of digital technologies, public expectations for access to collections have grown significantly (Wharton, 2015).

Digital technologies now play a crucial role in advancing the decolonisation of museums in recent decades (Poske, 2024). High-quality digital documentation enables museums to create accurate digital surrogates of cultural objects, which can then be returned to the source communities or used to physically reconstitute the original object while the museum retains a digital copy (Kenderdine, 2024).<sup>134</sup> This makes the concept of digital restitution increasingly feasible, as cultural artefacts held in museums can be digitised and made widely accessible (Lazzeretti & Sartori, 2016). Although digital restitution cannot wholly replace the significance of physical repatriation, it holds unique value in preserving, revitalising, and sustaining cultural knowledge (Christen, 2011, p. 187). It thus represents a complementary form of decolonisation that bridges the gap between institutional constraints and community aspirations.

<sup>134</sup> In interview with Zachariah, 2024

As explained above, digital returns or digital restitution refers to the practice of creating digital surrogates of cultural objects and documentary heritage (photographs, films, records, etc) to the community of origin (Edmundson, 2023). This practice is increasingly regarded as a middle ground for decolonising cultural objects held in museums, bridging the demands for restitution and museums' retentionism. However, some denied these practices, arguing that digitisation or digital restitution is not a form of true decolonisation. Digitising museum objects may bring benefits by allowing more people to access them; however, it does not decolonise the colonised knowledge structures embodied within them (Gibson, 2024; Poske, 2024). As Quijano (2000a, 2000b) and Mignolo (2011) have highlighted, the goal of decolonisation is to deconstruct the colonial system embedded within it and to replace it with indigenous values, or to incorporate the indigenous worldview into the museum system (Rivet, 2020).

Moreover, without a proper strategy, digital restitution will instead become an event to reenact and reinforce the act of colonial violence (Lixinski, 2020). The digital restitution should consider local communities as primary stakeholders and adapt the project outcomes to meet their needs. Questions such as “Who is your target for the digital restitution? What do they want from this digital restitution? Which objects are acceptable to be made available digitally, and which ones are not?” are important to be answered before starting the digital restitution projects (Singh, Blake & O’Donnell, 2013). The arguments above set the distinction between museum archives and digital restitution. Many museums considered digitisation, a process of creating digital copies of cultural objects, as a form of decolonisation. The author argues that such a project should be considered as a digital or visual archival effort. To avoid such a trap, museums should work closely with the communities of origin for the digital restitution project (Edmundson, 2023). Digital restitution should aim to expand access to cultural collections for communities of origin and to establish new, more equitable relationships with museums (Barrkman, 2021).

Accessibility is another crucial factor; without an effective strategy, an abundance of high-resolution photographs and 3D models in the digital realm is of little value if the communities of origin cannot access them. Instead, these asymmetrical digital and technological relationships between museums, or other

institutions holding the artefacts, and the communities of origin will perpetuate the colonial violence further (Lixinski, 2020), a “digital colonialism” where the Western institutions retain authority over how to digitise, categorise, access, and interpret a cultural heritage (Mohammed, 2025). According to that argument, providing access without challenging the existing system or offering an alternative is tantamount to supporting the colonial system itself. Hence, for this project, the author paid close attention to this issue, carefully incorporating the indigenous perspective of the Nias community into the project's outcome.

Beyond the philosophical debate, Wharton (2015, p. 177) identified three technical challenges that must be addressed to enable broader public access. The challenges include:

1. Developing common metadata standards,
2. Developing a system for discoverability and access, and
3. Accommodating the range of file formats used to archive the documentation.

To overcome such challenges, several considerations need to be taken into account. To that end, the following subchapter presents several successful cases of digital restitution as examples of effective practices.

## **5.2 Example Cases of Digital Restitution**

### **5.2.1 Mapping Philippine Material Culture**

Mapping Philippine Material Culture (see Figure 5.2) is a project developed by the Philippine Studies team at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, led by Maria Cristina Juan. The project is taking the form of a visual inventory of Philippine material culture. In this project, material culture is defined in its broadest sense to include objects made in the Philippines, as well as objects related to the Philippines through consumption, trade, exchange, and other means. However, the project imposed several limitations on the selected material culture: it

excludes unaltered natural objects (botanical and animal specimens), texts and photographs produced mechanically, and objects created after the 1950s.<sup>135</sup>



**Figure 5.2.** Mapping Philippine Material Culture web page.

The primary aim of this project is to promote open access to cultural heritage data. The consolidated inventory leverages digital technologies, taking advantage of vast storage capacities and the growing availability of data and images released into the public domain or under Creative Commons licenses. Similar to platforms such as Europeana and other digital aggregators, this database is designed to be freely accessible to all users. It aspires to serve as a comprehensive research tool for the study of Philippine political, economic, and cultural history through its material heritage.

<sup>135</sup> <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/>



**Name:**  
Guilgan

**Origin:**  
Philippine Islands, Mindanao, Cotabato

**Materials:**  
Rattan, wood, cane

**Physical Description:**  
1. 100cm x 20cm x 10cm

**Workshop:**  
The item was originally collected by the group in 2011, which was a collection of objects and was shown at the American Museum of Natural History. The item is now in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History. The item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood. The item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood. The item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood.

**Notes:**  
This item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood. The item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood. The item is a traditional woven rice huller (guilgan) from Mindanao, Philippines. It is made of rattan and wood.

**Source:**  
American Museum of Natural History, accessed October 17, 2025, <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/items/show/48467>.

**Contributor:**  
Maria Cristina Juan

**Official Website:**  
<https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/items/browse>

Figure 5.3. Information on one of the objects in the project.<sup>136</sup>

According to Juan (2024)<sup>137</sup>, the team utilised the Omeka<sup>138</sup> platform for its practicality in building and managing a large-scale digital database. As of 2025, the project hosts 8,893 items from museums and collections across North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.<sup>139</sup> Omeka is an open-source repository that provides comprehensive functionality for individuals and institutions seeking to publish collections online in accordance with international standards. Omeka provides two schemas for a database: a Dublin

<sup>136</sup> “Guilgan (Rice huller- funnel),” *Mapping Philippine Material Culture*, accessed October 17, 2025, <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/items/show/48467>.

<sup>137</sup> Maria Cristina Juan, personal communication, June 2024.

<sup>138</sup> Web publishing platform, <https://omeka.org/classic/>

<sup>139</sup> <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/items/browse>

Core-based metadata schema and a custom schema from Omeka (Garvilis, Ioannides, & Theofanous, 2015). The ability to accommodate this schema enabled a seamless transition from the museum’s database to a web-based visual representation of the objects, noting that the museum already used the corresponding schema for its database (see Figure 5.3).

However, functioning effectively as a visual repository does not necessarily mean that Mapping Philippine Material Culture has achieved a decolonising impact. Therefore, the project also incorporates several complementary activities, such as opportunities for public contribution and dialogues with local communities, organised under the section “In Conversation.” One notable initiative involved reconnecting material objects held in foreign museums with the members of the Muna Kalyak Blaan community (see Figure 5.4). This activity aimed to identify and trace several objects taken from Muna Kalyak Blaan in 1911 (Salway, 2022).



**Figure 5.4.** The “In Conversation” activity in the project involved. (left) The team is preparing materials for discussion, and (right) one of the community members is displaying his object alongside the museum collection.<sup>140</sup>

Representatives of the Muna Kalyak Blaan community warmly received the initiative. Revisiting their cultural heritage evoked deep collective memories, particularly among the elders who participated in the event. For the community, the activity provided valuable insight into the presence of their cultural objects in foreign museums, fostering a renewed sense of pride in their ancestors’ craftsmanship and artistic skill. For the museum and project

<sup>140</sup> <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/tours/show/30>

team, the encounter offered an opportunity to develop new, more inclusive narratives that better reflect the living realities and perspectives of the originating community (Salway, 2022).

General audiences are also encouraged to contribute to the Mapping Philippine Material Culture website through the “Contribution” feature. This menu provides two distinct options: (1) contacting the project team for collaborative research or community-based initiatives, and (2) contributing digital data to expand the visual inventory. In the second option, contributors are directed to a Google Form to provide essential metadata. The required information includes the object’s location; a link, if it already has an online presence; the object’s name, description, provenance, physical dimensions, materials, date of acquisition, and additional details regarding its storage or display status. For the visual component, contributors may upload up to ten images, each with a maximum file size of 10 MB. At present, the system only accommodates image files and does not yet support 3D models or other multimedia formats.<sup>141</sup>

Currently, the project is expanding into a network of researchers. The involved personnel include the Mapping Philippine Material Culture Germany (MPMC.G), a research group from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte in Spain, a research group in Mexico from Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) and National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), a research group from an independent association called Studiyo Filipino in Switzerland and financial support by the Senate of the Philippines.

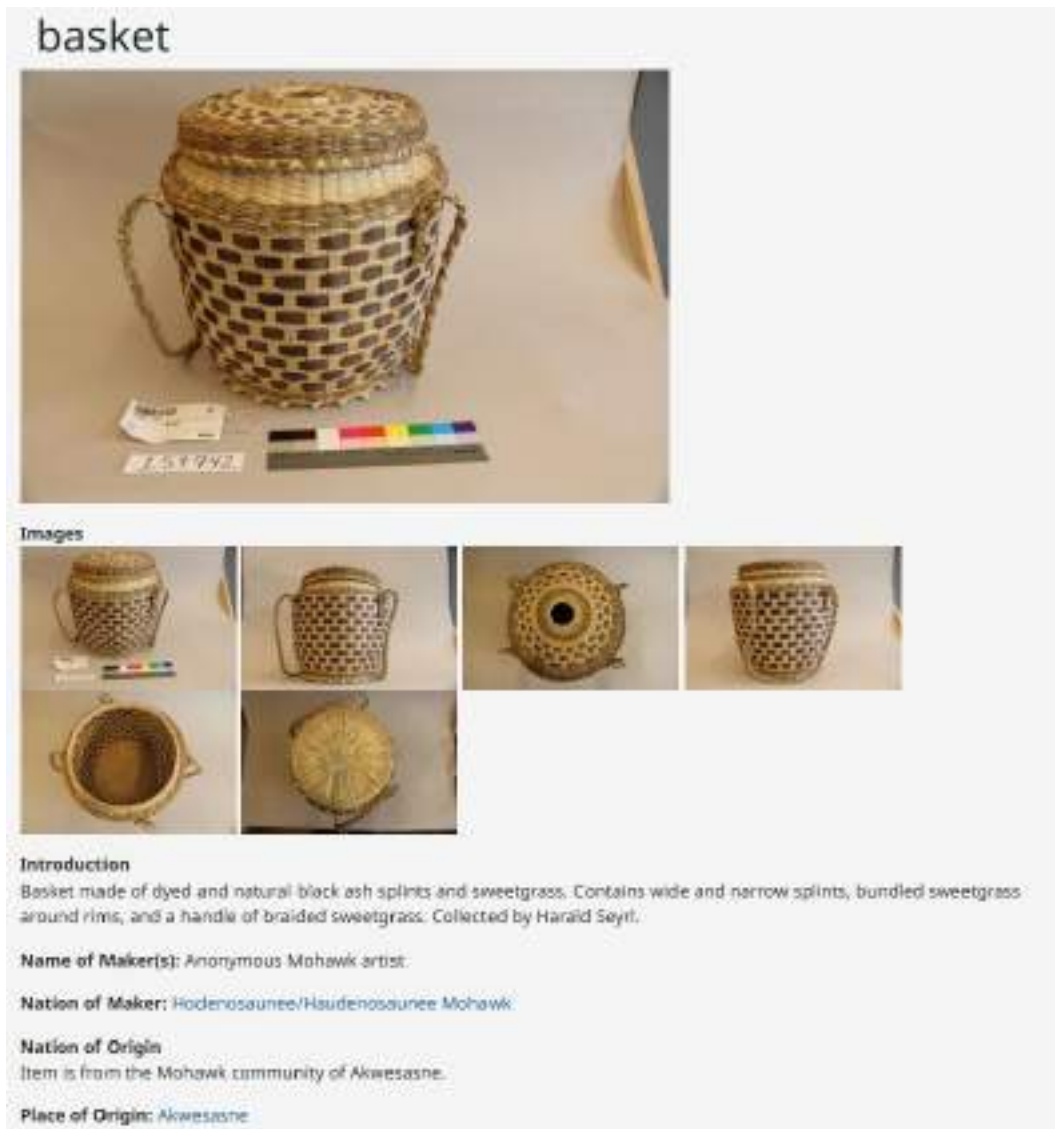
Overall, Mapping Philippine Material Culture represents an exemplary decolonial initiative in the field of digital heritage. The scale of effort required to compile and transform dispersed data into a coherent visual repository is considerable, involving extensive coordination among institutions, researchers, and community representatives. Beyond its archival value, the project also stands out for its participatory and democratic approach, an embodiment of

<sup>141</sup> Research contribution, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdYtuIL-tnvxA4ewisjnPJz1ln5tmnJEH1QVIkdExzCZo1Low/viewform>

what might be termed “citizen heritage science.” Unlike many visual repositories such as Google Arts & Culture, which often function through one-directional communication, this platform invites the public to co-create and share knowledge. By allowing communities and individuals to contribute visual data and interpretive narratives, the project challenges the traditional authority of museums and researchers, thereby promoting a more inclusive and polyvocal understanding of cultural heritage.

### **5.2.2 Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts & Cultures (GRASAC)**

An earlier example of digital repatriation is the establishment of the Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts & Cultures (GRASAC). This collaborative network comprises Indigenous researchers, academics, and museum professionals, united in their goal of using information technology to digitally reunite Great Lakes heritage, currently dispersed across museums and archives in North America and Europe, with its source communities. GRASAC provides secure online access to digital materials for its research collaborators and affiliated source communities, supporting their use in education, exhibitions, teaching, and scholarly research. To date, the platform has registered more than 450 members, including individuals and institutions, and hosts more than 4,000 digital assets (Rossi, 2017). In short, GRASAC functions similarly to Mapping Philippine Material Culture, serving as a platform for a researcher network and visual inventory (see Figure 5.5).



**Figure 5.5.** Capture of the GRASAC Knowledge Sharing System (GKS).<sup>142</sup>

The significant difference is that GRASAC is more selective about contributors and who can access the database. Initially, the GRASAC database is accessible only to group coordinators and approved members assigned a password; in short, only to museum institutions and tribal members. These limitations are due to the sensitive nature of some materials and copyright restrictions on others (particularly photographic materials). GRASAC is designed as a reciprocal tool, in which community members are not merely passive users but also contribute by sharing their knowledge (Rossi, 2017, pp. 662-663).

<sup>142</sup> <https://gks.artsci.utoronto.ca/search-page/basket-70>

The GRASAC website and system have been through several changes over the years. The website was first launched by Migwans in 2014 as part of his doctoral project at Columbia University. In 2017, the website was redesigned by Higginson<sup>143</sup> to accommodate more informational features, news, and personnel as the project had grown significantly. In 2020, the site was transitioned to the University of Toronto for hosting.<sup>144</sup> The GRASAC project has drawn on numerous sources and secured various grants and funding since its inception in 2004, mainly from the Government of Canada and the British Academy. Several university consortia, indigenous communities and many others also support the project.

At present, the Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC) has become a robust platform for knowledge exchange between researchers and Indigenous communities. The platform facilitates meaningful collaboration by enabling community members to access, reinterpret, and contribute their own narratives to cultural heritage objects across museums. Through its selective contributor system, GRASAC ensures that the authenticity and cultural integrity of these narratives are preserved, maintaining a careful balance between scholarly research and community authority. The visual repository is now openly accessible to a broader audience, providing opportunities for both public education and cross-cultural dialogue. Remarkably, GRASAC has sustained its mission for over two decades, a rare achievement among digital restitution initiatives, which are often challenged by issues of continuity and long-term sustainability. As such, it stands as an exemplary model for ethical and durable digital restitution practice.

### **5.2.3 Digital return of ethnographic collection and value creation by an originating community in Baguia, Timor-Leste**

Another example is a digital return project by Barrkman (2017) to the community in Timor-Leste. The study focuses on the Baguia Collection, comprising 691 material culture objects and over 300 historical photographs, collected in 1935 by Swiss ethnologist Alfred Bühler for the Museum der

<sup>143</sup> Then GRASAC's Communications Director

<sup>144</sup> The current affiliation of the founder

Kulturen Basel (MKB) in Switzerland. Barrkman explores how digital technologies and participatory approaches can facilitate the “return” of such collections to source communities, primarily when the artefacts lie on the edge of living memory.

The Baguia Collection was acquired during the height of salvage ethnography, a practice rooted in early 20th-century European anthropology that sought to record and preserve the material cultures of non-Western societies perceived as “disappearing.” Bühler’s 1935 expedition, shaped by Germanic ethnographic and racial theories, occurred within a colonial framework of scientific authority and Western epistemology. Although Switzerland was not a colonial power, its ethnographic collecting practices reflected colonial hierarchies and knowledge production embedded in European anthropology.

Barrkman situates this historical context within debates on decolonisation, shared heritage, and museum ethics, arguing that collections such as the Baguia objects cannot be seen solely as relics of colonial science but also as potential resources for cultural regeneration in their source communities. By treating the collection as diasporic heritage, the project challenges binary understandings of “ownership” and promotes models of shared custodianship and reciprocal benefit between museums and source communities.



**Figure 5.6.** One community member, Domingos da Costa, reviews photographs of swords documented in the project and compares them with his private collection (Barrkman, 2021).

In 2014, Barrkman implemented a digital return project in Baguia with support from the MKB, Australian National University, and local partners. Using the Online Cultural Collections Analysis and Management System (OCCAMS), she digitised and catalogued the collection, producing accessible images and metadata that were shared through tablets and printed folders during community workshops (see Figure 5.6).

The participatory methodology emphasised dialogical encounters, sensory engagement, and community interpretation. Local elders, artisans,

teachers, and students viewed images of the collection, discussed them in their own languages, and related them to existing practices. These sessions revealed diverse forms of engagement, including recognition, memory activation, reinterpretation, and even non-engagement, each highlighting different modes of cultural connection to the objects. Barrkman argues that the digital return of collections can serve as a form of restitution, not in a legal or material sense, but as a restoration of cultural agency. By viewing and interpreting their heritage, the Makasae people of Baguia reclaimed interpretive authority and recontextualised the collection within their social world. Digital images became what she calls “prosthetic memories”, enabling intergenerational transmission and cultural continuity even when physical repatriation remains impossible.

#### **5.2.4 Several non-physical returns of the Nias collections from the Netherlands**

In recent years, Nias has seen several initiatives that mark a significant shift in how cultural heritage can be reconnected to its communities of origin without requiring physical restitution. These projects, conducted between 2023 and 2025, demonstrate how digital, visual, and audiovisual media can facilitate cultural re-engagement, knowledge exchange, and historical reflection. While each project has its own focus and approach, they collectively embody the principle of “returning knowledge” rather than merely returning artefacts, emphasising collaboration, accessibility, and the reinterpretation of colonial archives through local perspectives.

##### ***Pameran Jejak Denmark di Nias (2023)***

The first major initiative, Pameran Jejak Denmark di Nias (The Danish Footprints in Nias Exhibition), was held in 2023 as a collaboration between the Nias Heritage Museum in Gunungsitoli and Danish representatives, focusing on the collection of the anthropologist A. G. Møller, who conducted research in Nias in the early 20th century. Møller’s photographs, taken during his visit to Nias around the 1920s, had long been preserved in Danish archives and were virtually unknown to the local population. The exhibition marked the

first time these materials returned, albeit digitally, to the island where they were originally captured (see figure 5.7).



**Figure 5.7.** One of the sections from the *Jejak Denmark di Nias* exhibition (taken during the first survey, March 2023)

The exhibition presented more than 100 restored and digitised photographs depicting daily life, architecture, rituals, and portraits of Nias communities before major cultural transformations brought about by colonial influence and missionary activities. These images provided a rare visual documentation of Nias society during a transitional historical period and evoked strong emotional responses among local audiences. However, the curatorial concept of *Jejak Denmark di Nias* emphasised display over dialogue. With minimal discussion, decolonisation is happening in the project. However, this project underscored the value of transnational collaboration in reuniting fragmented cultural histories without removing objects from institutional collections abroad.

### ***Melihat di Balik Wajah Ono Niha (2024)***

In 2024, another exhibition, *Melihat di Balik Wajah Ono Niha* (Seeing Behind the Faces of Ono Niha), took place as part of a broader research collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch institutions, including Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN). This project revisited the controversial collection of face plaster casts created by Dutch

anthropologist J. Kleiweg de Zwaan during his 1910 expedition to Nias. The casts, housed in several Dutch museums, were long regarded as anthropometric specimens representing colonial pseudo-scientific approaches to race.



**Figure 5.8.** S. Boonstra, one of the members of the research in the *Melihat di Balik Wajah* exhibition in Nias Heritage Museum (TVRINews, 2024)<sup>145</sup>

Rather than focusing on their scientific history, the 2024 exhibition (see Figure 5.8) sought to re-humanise these objects by connecting them with the stories and descendants of the individuals represented. Through photographic reproductions, digital 3D scans, and interpretive panels, *Melihat di Balik Wajah Ono Niha* invited visitors to see these faces not as anonymous specimens but as ancestors and members of real families. The curators incorporated testimonies from community elders, reflections from Nias scholars, and archival excerpts from De Zwaan’s field notes to build a multi-layered narrative that acknowledged both the colonial violence of objectification and the resilience of cultural identity.

The exhibition’s public reception was notably positive, with many visitors expressing a mixture of curiosity and pride in seeing their ancestors “returned” in visual form. It sparked conversations about the ethics of representation, historical trauma, and the role of museums in mediating

<sup>145</sup> <https://daerah.tvrinews.com/berita/tlgjcd5-museum-pusaka-nias-pamerkan-cetakan-wajah-orang-nias-masa-kolonial>

memory. The exhibition also prompted further academic dialogue on recontextualising anthropological collections and integrating community voices into their interpretation, a core principle of decolonial museology.

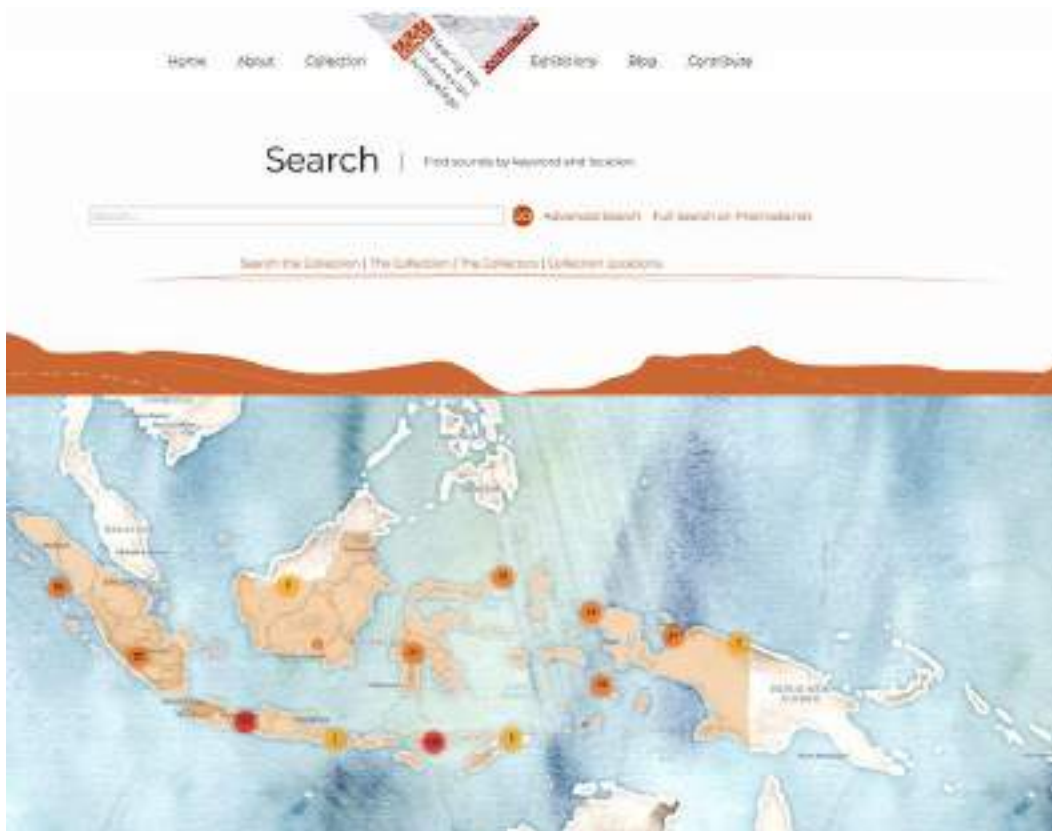
### *Suara yang Pulang*<sup>146</sup> (2025)

The most recent initiative, *Suara yang Pulang* (The Returning Voices), launched in 2025, continues this wave of non-physical returns through sound and audiovisual heritage. The temporary exhibition was held at several locations in Jakarta and Nias, culminating in Hilisimaetanö village from 15-22 June 2025. The project, led by researchers Yamomo and Titus (2024), focuses on the repatriation of early 20th-century audio recordings made by Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst, who documented traditional Nias music and oral traditions between 1929 and 1931. His legacy comprises a collection of sound recordings, photographs, silent film, correspondence, manuscripts, and a library containing a wealth of material from across the Indonesian archipelago, as well as the development of “ethnomusicology” as an academic discipline. Kunst is widely regarded as a founding figure of this discipline, credited with coining the term in the mid-20th century (Kunst, 1950).

*Suara yang Pulang* reintroduced forgotten soundscapes to the island, songs, chants, and instrumental performances that had not been heard locally for nearly a century. The act of playing these recordings in their places of origin was profoundly symbolic: it allowed communities to reconnect not only with their intangible heritage but also with the emotions and collective memories associated with these intangible traditions. Yamomo and Titus (2024) referred to this project as a decolonising sound archives through access, agency, and discourse. *Suara yang Pulang* demonstrated how audio archives can serve as a medium of affective restitution. The project’s collaborative framework involved not only researchers and museums but also local communities and universities, artists, and the Nias Heritage Museum, ensuring

<sup>146</sup> The Returning Voice

that the initiative was rooted in community participation. The project is now accessible online via the Southeast Asia Hearing platform (see Figure 5.9).<sup>147</sup>



**Figure 5.9.** The Jaap Kunst collection in the Southeast Asia Hearing platform

Collectively, these three initiatives mark a transformative period in Nias's cultural landscape. They reveal that restitution does not always require physical repatriation; rather, the return of knowledge, images, sounds, and stories can be equally powerful in re-establishing cultural continuity and pride. These projects exemplify a new paradigm of decolonial practice: one that privileges access, dialogue, and co-creation over ownership.

Through visual, digital, and auditory means, these initiatives reconnected Nias communities with their dispersed heritage while challenging the hierarchical structures that once dictated whose knowledge counted. They also demonstrate the importance of sustained collaboration between local and international institutions, highlighting how decolonisation can be enacted through care, creativity, and shared stewardship. Together, these non-physical

<sup>147</sup> <https://omekas.seasia-hearing.org/s/jaapkunst/page/search-page> a platform designed using Omeka.

returns offer a hopeful model for other communities facing similar challenges in reclaiming their cultural voices from global archives.

### 5.3 Digital Restitution Channels

Several of the digital restitution projects mentioned above develop their own databases and systems to meet their needs. However, several systems have been developed that can be adopted for general and mass use. For example, ICOM has developed Object ID as a standard and guidelines for creating a museum database. This model is also widely used and gaining recognition to facilitate global collaboration (Fanizzo, 2005). Regarding discoverability and access, several viable options exist for sharing digital collections and creating engaging online exhibitions to enhance open-access catalogues and digital accessibility. Platforms such as Sketchfab,<sup>148</sup> Omeka,<sup>149</sup> Figshare<sup>150</sup> and Wikimedia<sup>151</sup> provide valuable opportunities for institutions to make their collections more accessible to the public (Hardesty et al., 2020; Villaespesa & Navarrete, 2019; Cornut et al., 2023).

These platforms have their advantages and disadvantages. Sketchfab, Figshare, and Omeka are more commonly used in museums because they offer a degree of control and access. However, Sketchfab offers a limited range of file formats. As a platform focused on 3D models, Sketchfab can only visualise a collection of 3D models. Omeka serves as a more flexible landing page, as any type of file can be embedded within its visual interface. However, Omeka requires a certain level of proficiency in computer science to understand the basics and build a usable, interactive platform.<sup>152</sup> Figshare is simpler, providing only an upload mechanism for each file and creating general repositories; every file can also be attached with the necessary metadata as desired by the operator. However, a free account is

<sup>148</sup> <https://sketchfab.com/>, a digital platform for 3D models

<sup>149</sup> is an open-source online exhibition tool for galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM)

<sup>150</sup> <https://figshare.com/> General repositories that are shown in are gaining popularity for GLAM institutions, also used by the British Museum

<sup>151</sup> a user-generated, free online encyclopaedia, including content for museums, libraries, and archives

<sup>152</sup> This platform is also used by the projects from Mapping Philippine Material Culture and the Southeast Asia Hearing

limited to 20 GB,<sup>153</sup> which undoubtedly restricts the amount of data that can be shared with the public.

Wikimedia, on the other hand, is a distinct entity from other platforms. The Wikimedia ecosystem, comprising services such as Wikimedia Commons, Wikidata, and Wikipedia, is a vital component of the global information infrastructure. Wikimedia offers a neutral space, accuracy, and an example of crowdsourced information building and collaboration (Dickison, 2020). Currently, Wikimedia and many GLAM institutions collaborate to develop open knowledge initiatives. In Indonesia, at least eleven institutions<sup>154</sup> have provided open access to their collections on Wikimedia, as shown in Figure 5.10. While concerns exist regarding the open access to GLAM institutions' collections, especially those of museums, the benefits generally outweigh the disadvantages (Kapsalis, 2016).

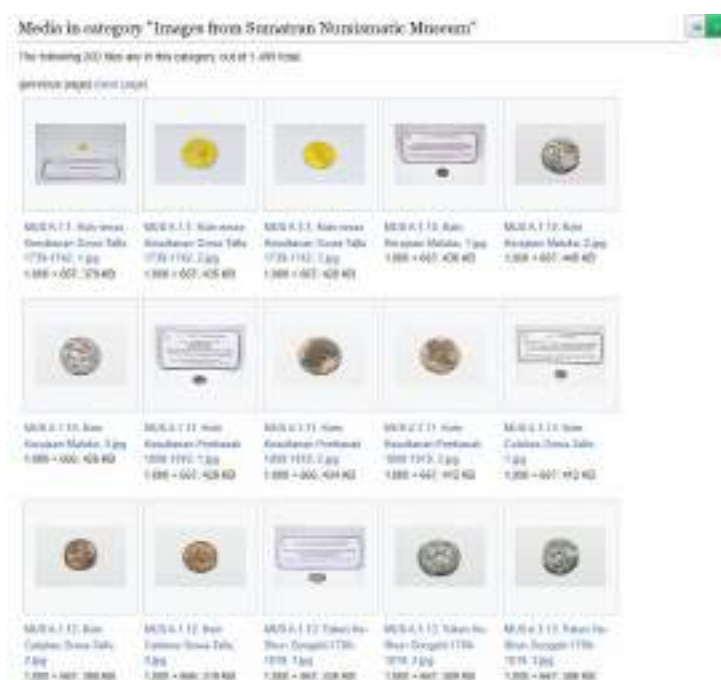


Figure 5.10. Example of digital collection in Wikimedia (Sumatra Numismatic Museum)<sup>155</sup>

Using Wikimedia as a platform also indirectly addressed the sustainability challenges faced by many small institutions. Many independent platforms, such as websites or premium accounts, often struggle with financial instability. Moreover,

<sup>153</sup> <https://info.figshare.com/figshare-plus/> per 30/09/2025

<sup>154</sup> <https://glam.wikimedia.or.id/mitra/>

<sup>155</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images\\_from\\_Sumatran\\_Numismatic\\_Museum](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images_from_Sumatran_Numismatic_Museum)

as one of the most-visited websites in the world, Wikimedia provides a larger audience (Dickison, 2020). These include increased visibility, enriched metadata, multilingual capabilities through automatic translation, and broader audience engagement (Villaespesa & Navarrete, 2019). Moreover, they provide accessible entry points for institutions to expand their online exhibition presence and to enable public participation in the co-curation of displayed objects (Hardesty et al., 2020).

Another essential aspect to consider in the digital restitution project is best practices for the museum, researchers, and the community. In this regard, digital restitution data should align with the FAIR principles. The FAIR principles<sup>156</sup> are an acronym for:

1. **Findable.** The data are assigned a globally unique and persistent identifier, described with rich metadata, and searchable.
2. **Accessible.** Data and Metadata are stored in a trusted repository using an open, free protocol.
3. **Interoperable.** Using vocabularies and public-domain ontologies, metadata can be referenced and linked.
4. **Reusable.** Additional documentation and protocol describing the acquisition of data, licensed with a detailed provenance.

The FAIR guiding principles for scientific data management and stewardship were first proposed in 2016 as a response to the urgent need to improve the infrastructure supporting the reuse of scholarly data. With more rigorous management and stewardship, research yielded digital results. The results are expected to be that the scholarly data is not only accessible and understood by the academic community, but also by funding agencies, communities, and industries (Wilkinson et al. 2016).

Wikimedia operates as an ecosystem aligned with the FAIR principles, ensuring that data are Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (Poulter, 2024; Lindemann, 2025). As more research outputs and digital data are released under open licenses, publishing them on Wikimedia platforms significantly

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

enhances their visibility and impact. Platforms such as Wikipedia and Wikidata serve as foundational data sources for widely used information systems, including search engines and AI models, extending the reach of shared knowledge. Beyond simple dissemination, Wikimedia also facilitates contextualisation and creative reuse: digital materials, such as figures, datasets, and code, can be translated, remixed, or integrated into Wikipedia articles and educational content by a global community of contributors. In this way, open sharing fosters transparency and accountability, thereby making the research process and outputs publicly verifiable. Furthermore, Wikimedia's infrastructure ensures long-term preservation and version control, maintaining both the accessibility and integrity of the shared materials over time (Poulter, 2024).

As shown by the cases above, the most important consideration in selecting the adopted platform is the project's aims and the primary stakeholders' opinions on the matter. Digital access in any form will be rendered useless if the community of origin is unable to access it due to technological or knowledge limitations. On the other hand, creating an accessible platform and/or providing partial restitution in the form of photographs and exhibitions could also constitute a form of colonial extension if the community of origin is not allowed to tell its own story regarding its diasporic collection. Hence, the author realised that this is a fine thread that needed to be considered carefully during this research. In the next chapter, this thesis discusses the implementation of digital restitution in this research.

*This page is intentionally left blank*

# **Chapter 6. Digital Restitution on Ethnographic Objects - Case Study: Nias Collection in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This research focuses on the digital restitution project for the Nias collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. As discussed in the previous chapters, the Nias collection in Florence presents a unique case that faces many challenges in the process of decolonisation. The absence of a direct colonial relationship between Indonesia and Italy has meant that this collection has received little attention within the Italian decolonisation discourse. Similarly, from the Indonesian side, government policies on decolonisation (particularly repatriation) have so far focused primarily on Indonesian collections held in Dutch museums. Additionally, Italian regulations regarding cultural property do not support the repatriation of cultural artefacts from museums to their countries of origin. For these reasons, a decolonisation project in the form of digital restitution emerges as the primary proposal of this thesis.

The initial aim of this project is to raise awareness of the Nias collection's existence in Italy, particularly among the Nias community and the broader Indonesian public, as it has received relatively little attention to date. Modigliani, the collector, published his magnum opus, *Un Viaggio a Nias*, which depicted his journey, described the objects he collected in their original contexts during the expedition, and offered many reflections on the Nias communities he encountered in 1886. Unfortunately, this publication, written in his native Italian, has never been translated into another language, creating a barrier for Nias speakers and Indonesian readers. The first 'international' recognition of his work appeared in 1887 through Giglioli,<sup>157</sup> who recounted Modigliani's observations and collecting activities in Nias based on their letter correspondence.

<sup>157</sup> Modigliani's mentor and his correspondences in Italy during his trip to Nias in 1886.

In native Indonesian, the first dedicated publication was a translation of a book written by Vanni Puccioni (2013), titled “*Tanah Para Pendekar: Petualangan Elio Modigliani di Nias Selatan Tahun 1886*”<sup>158</sup> translated by Evi et al., (2016). The book described several aspects of Modigliani's trip, combined with Puccioni's views from a retrace of Modigliani's journey in South Nias. Although much original information was omitted, Puccioni also provided numerous confirmations, such as the existence of the Nias skulls in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology (Puccioni, 2016, p. 22), which the museum “refuses”<sup>159</sup> to provide access for this project. In addition to its limited publications, the Nias Heritage Museum also provides information on the whereabouts of Nias objects in Florence museums. The Nias Museum is the only institution in Indonesia dedicated to preserving Nias heritage through research and preservation. Their website mentions 30 objects from Nias in Florence.<sup>160</sup> While the number is incorrect, they at least acknowledged the existence of these objects.

The second aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of the local Nias community regarding the presence of the Nias collection in Florence. It is crucial to understand how the community of origin relates to these objects today: whether they wish for their return to Nias or Indonesia, how they feel if physical restitution is not possible, and how they respond to the possibility of digital restitution as an alternative form of decolonisation. This investigation not only provides insight into the community's cultural expectations and priorities but also highlights the complex realities of the circulation of heritage in a global context. By situating the voices of the Nias community at the centre of the discussion, the research contributes to reframing restitution debates, which too often privilege institutional or governmental agendas over the perspectives of the people to whom the heritage originally belonged.

The third aim is to design and build a platform as a decolonising initiative. Such a platform would serve as a medium to make the Nias collection digitally accessible, enabling knowledge exchange and reconnection between the Nias community and their dispersed heritage. The platform should also align with the

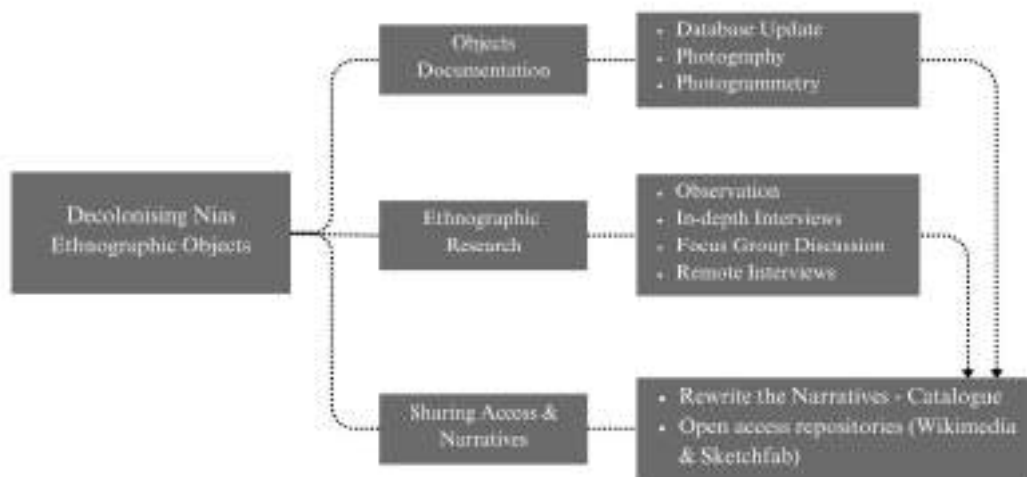
<sup>158</sup> The original title is “Fra i tagliatore di teste. Elio Modigliani: un fiorentino all' esplorazione di Nias Salatan - 1886” published in 2013

<sup>159</sup> The author had previously discussed the topic with the curator several times, both before and during the workshop in the museum, but always encountered avoidance. To ensure the documentation project for other ethnographic material was not interrupted, the author decided not to pursue the matter further. Still, the documentation project was cut short one month earlier than the proposed deadline.

<sup>160</sup> See <https://museum-nias.org/en/other-museums/>

FAIR principles. More than a technical solution, the platform aspires to be a dialogical space in which stakeholders (local communities, museums, and researchers) can collaboratively engage with objects, generate new interpretations, and revitalise cultural practices. In this sense, the platform serves as both an educational resource and a cultural bridge, ensuring that the Nias collection does not remain silent in museum storage but becomes actively integrated into contemporary community life.

To achieve these objectives, the research employs three interrelated methodological steps. First, documentation, both photographic and three-dimensional, ensures that the objects are recorded with the highest possible accuracy and made available for broader access. Second, fieldwork in Nias provides first-hand engagement with local stakeholders, capturing their perspectives and expectations concerning the collection. Third, the development of a digital platform integrates the outcomes of documentation and fieldwork into an accessible format, ensuring that the decolonisation process materialises not only in discourse but also in practice. The proposed outcomes were a revised catalogue and the establishment of open-access repositories. Together, these steps form a holistic approach that situates digital restitution as both a method and a goal of decolonising heritage (Figure 6.1).<sup>161</sup>



**Figure 6.1.** The design of this research includes the approaches and expected results of each stage.

<sup>161</sup>More details and pictures of each stage can be seen in the project documentation in Appendix III.

## 6.2 Museum Workshop - Objects Documentation and Digitisation

One of the problems encountered during the identification of Nias ethnographic objects in the museum was inconsistent data recording. The original calculation of Modigliani's Nias collection, based on data recorded by Mantegazza in 1887 and Mochi in 1904, counted 185 objects. The latest update by Bigoni et al. (2019a) reveals, however, that their collection contains 189 objects from Nias. For a museum with hundreds of thousands of objects, the number may seem insignificant; however, given the importance of the collection, more careful calculations are warranted. Moreover, as evidenced by the documentation of Mantegazza and Mochi (see Figure 6.2 and Appendix IV), there is no objective evidence of remaking the catalogue or the database. Given recent developments in museum cataloguing, the update of the database for the Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence is long overdue.

The figure displays two pages of a handwritten record, which has been digitized. The left page is a table with columns for 'Numero', 'Descrizione', 'Materie', 'Pesi', and 'Valori'. The right page is a similar table with columns for 'Numero', 'Descrizione', 'Materie', 'Pesi', and 'Valori'. Both tables contain detailed entries for various ethnographic objects, including their descriptions, materials, and weights.

Figure 6.2. The digitised version of the written record by Mantegazza in 1887 and Mochi in 1904.

The previous record contains several key pieces of information about the objects, for example, in the description of object No. 05652, written as follows:

“Lancia del capo villaggio, “TOHO SALAWA”, con asta in legno di palma e punta di ferro lanceolata, cm. 259 punta cm. 43,5, Nias, Indonesia”<sup>162</sup>

The database is also completed with the type of objects (e.g., spear, sword), the location within the museum, and the exact exhibition cabinet. This system is concise and works well for curators familiar with the museum's collection. However, for visiting scholars or the general public, the database is incomplete, particularly with respect to visual content. Photographic and 3D model documentation has been conducted by museum personnel as part of prior research (Bigoni et al., 2019b). However, the results are not being used as a supporting material for the database. With these considerations, one of the project's goals is to provide access to and a digital copy for the communities of origin in Nias.

For that purpose, this project proposed the recataloguing of the Nias collection in the museum. The system used will follow the Object ID, a system used by multinational organisations such as UNESCO and ICOM for the identification of art and cultural objects. The system was developed in 1996 in Prague, Czech Republic, by UNESCO to assist law enforcement agencies in combating the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. The final model was launched in 1997. The system is designed to address the need for a simple, easily implemented standard for information that can be used to identify objects (Yasaitis, 2025). Object ID requires a minimal level of description and would provide a core standard for implementation within museums and galleries; however, it is also used in complement to the existing system (Thomes, Dorrell, & Lie, 1999). This system is also used by the Metropolitan Police (London, Great Britain), the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection (Italy), the European Commission, Interpol, the National Museum of World Cultures (the Netherlands), and UNESCO, among others.<sup>163</sup>

The Object ID standard defines nine categories of information and four steps to fulfil. The categories are as follows:

<sup>162</sup> Village chief's spear, “TOHO SALAWA,” with palm wood shaft and lanceolate iron tip, 259 cm, tip 43.5 cm, Nias, Indonesia

<sup>163</sup> <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/objectid/>

**Table 6.1.** Checklist of the Object ID database system<sup>164</sup>

Type of Object	What kind of object is it (painting, sculpture, etc)
Material & Techniques	What material is the object made of? How was it made?
Measurements	The size and weight of the objects
Inscriptions & Markings	Are there any identifying markings, numbers, or inscriptions on the objects (signature, dedication, title, maker's mark, etc)
Distinguishing Features	Does the object have any physical characteristics that could be identified (damage, repairs, etc)
Subject	What is pictured or represented
Date or Periods	When was the object made?
Maker	Name of a known individual, company or cultural group
Short description	Colour, shape, and any relevant information

Meanwhile, the four steps are divided as follows:

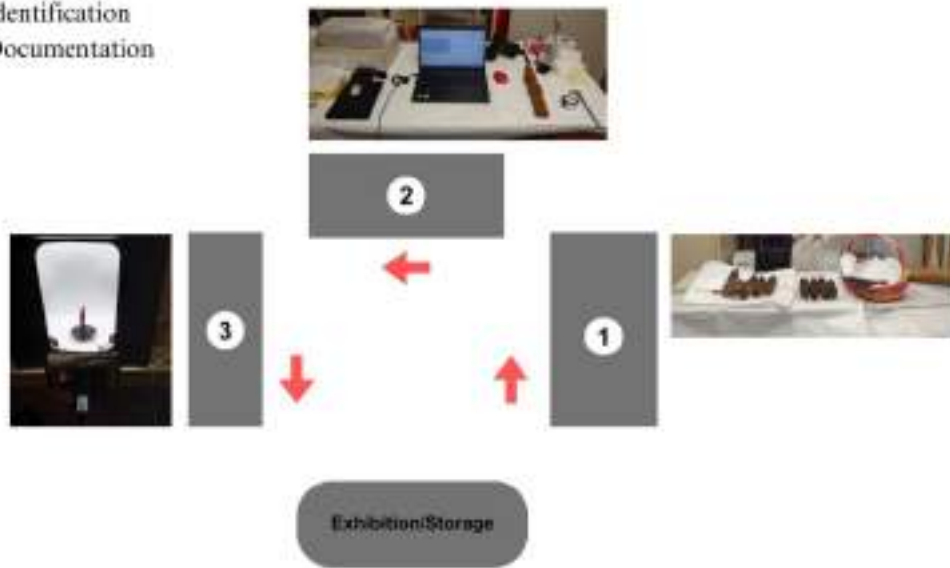
1. Taking photographs of the objects
2. Identifying the categories mentioned above
3. Writing a short description, including additional information
4. Keeping the constituted documentation in a secure place

For this research, the museum initially granted the author access to a portion of Modigliani's Nias collection for two months. The work commenced at the beginning of October 2023, but was cut short and finished by the end of the same month. For this research, the project followed the Object ID (with minimal modification) database system guidelines to create a replicable, straightforward database. To streamline the workflow in a consistent and regulated manner, the documentation of museum objects follows the diagram shown in Figure 6.3 below.

<sup>164</sup> *ibidem*

## Museum Objects Documentation Workflow

1. Preparation
2. Identification
3. Documentation



**Figure 6.3.** Museum object documentation workflow during the project

During the workshop, the flow was separated into three stages. First, the objects stored in the exhibition hall or the museum's storage were prepared for documentation. The objects were transported to the studio with assistance from a curator or museum staff, with careful attention to their safety, including the use of gloves to prevent direct contact (see Figure 6.4). In each documentation session, only five to seven objects were selected to facilitate optimal monitoring and workflow. During the preparation stage, the objects were cleaned using a dry brush and a clean cloth, as needed. The objects were also observed for early identification and consideration for the documentation strategy in a later stage.



**Figure 6.4.** Moving the objects carefully during the workshop, with assistance from museum staff.

The second stage was identification. At this stage, the objects were identified by their collection numbers, compared with the museum's database, and described to conform to the Object ID database system. The objects were measured and described, with notes taken on specific markings and distinguishing features. In the description, the textures, colour, pattern and other details were explained. Meanwhile, regarding the maker, all objects were listed as made by the Nias community, except when the exact provenance was recorded. For dating, all objects are dated to 1886 (the time of gathering by Modigliani), except where Modigliani's records indicate otherwise. The third stage was the visual or pictorial documentation. The visual documentation is meant to accompany the verbal description. For this research, two approaches were chosen: photography and photogrammetry.

### **6.2.1 Photography**

Photography (still images) has long been a form of visual documentation. As a static image, a photograph conveys a wealth of information, such as scenes, poses, expressions, shapes, colours, and textures. When executed with proper techniques and accompanied by a scale, photographic documentation can provide sufficiently

accurate information about an object's size. At the same time, more ‘artistic’ photographs can make objects appear more appealing for promotion, thereby encouraging tourism and increasing visitor numbers. Today, thanks to digital technology, photography has become one of the most accessible methods of documentation for everyone (Purnawibawa et al., 2021). However, not all photographs are ‘good’ photographs. A good picture, especially for museum use, is one in which lighting and positioning have been standardised, allowing the object to be compared with others in images of similar quality. Consistent control of key factors such as brightness and contrast, with no areas of “zero data”<sup>165</sup>, the sharp focus and the representation of scale are essential for such photographs (Callomon, 2021).

In this research, two cameras were used to document the Nias ethnographic objects in the museum: the Canon EOS M50 and the Sony ILCE-6400 (commonly known as the Sony Alpha 6400). Both cameras share comparable settings, with a key advantage being their ability to capture images in RAW format (see Table 6.2 for details). The RAW file format is particularly suitable for documentation, as it preserves the maximum amount of image data and offers greater flexibility in post-production, including adjustments to colour accuracy and lens distortion. By contrast, the JPEG format compresses image data, thereby reducing the scope for editing and limiting overall quality. Although both cameras are classified as consumer-level devices, they nonetheless provide sufficient technical control to achieve professional-standard documentation results.

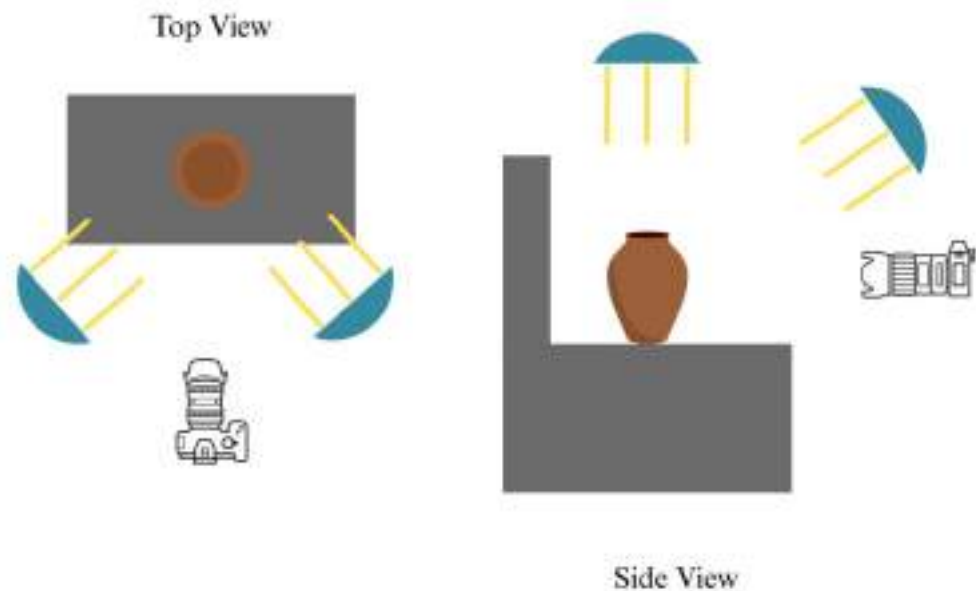
**Table 6.2.** Camera specification comparison<sup>166</sup>

<b>Specification</b>	<b>Canon EOS M50</b>	<b>Sony ILCE 6400</b>
Sensor type	APS-C (22.3 x 14.9 mm) CMOS	APS-C (23.5 x 15.6 mm) CMOS
Effective pixels	24.1 megapixels	24.2 megapixels
Maximum Image Size	6000 x 4000 pixels (3:2)	6000 x 4000 (3:2)
RAW file support	Yes	Yes

<sup>165</sup> Areas that appeared too bright or too dark

<sup>166</sup> Sources: <https://www.canon.co.uk/cameras/eos-m50/specifications/> and <https://www.sony.com/electronics/support/e-mount-body-ilce-6000-series/ilce-6400/specifications>

Given the wide variety of object types documented in the museum and the limited space available in the research studio, a zoom lens was selected as the primary documentation tool. The Sigma Contemporary 17–70 mm F2.8–4 DC Macro OS HSM<sup>167</sup> was chosen for its versatility, offering both wide-angle coverage and semi-macro capabilities that are suitable for capturing small details on objects. A wide maximum aperture was deemed unnecessary, as a light box provided adequate lighting and, when required, was supplemented by two flash units. Throughout the documentation process, the aperture was typically set between F4 and F8 to achieve optimal sharpness and ensure sufficient depth of field across the objects. The reduction in light caused by the narrower aperture was compensated for by using intense lighting and slower shutter speeds, thereby ensuring the highest possible image quality.



**Figure 6.5.** Diagram of object and camera positions relative to each other during the still photography documentation.

To minimise size distortion during photography, the objects were placed at the same height as the camera (see Figure 6.5 above). The objects were placed between the camera and the background to maximise contrast and focus; a scale as a size reference was also included in the frame. The light sources were positioned at 45 degrees to the left and right of the objects, and one above to illuminate all parts of the objects. After the documentation, the RAW data were processed in

<sup>167</sup> More details available in [https://www.sigma-global.com/en/lenses/c013\\_17\\_70\\_28\\_4/](https://www.sigma-global.com/en/lenses/c013_17_70_28_4/)

Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. The adjustments were kept minimal, limited to colour correction and, if necessary, lens distortion correction, to maintain the images' authenticity as closely as possible to the actual objects.



**Figure 6.6.** Photographs of several Nias ethnographic objects.

The documentation phase of this project produced high-quality photographic data. The results (Figure 6.6) provide a detailed visual representation of the objects, including their shape, colour, and other attributes that may be necessary for the community of origin to access for various purposes. For the complete database and documentation of the Nias ethnographic collection, see Appendix IV: List of Museum Objects. No significant obstacles were encountered during the process, aside from the limited time available for documentation. Of the 180 targeted objects, the author documented only 80.

Additionally, the relatively small studio space posed challenges for photographing larger objects, necessitating creative solutions to capture them effectively. The resulting documentation was later utilised as supporting material for the subsequent stages of this research. Its primary function was to serve as a visual medium during discussions with local communities in Nias, aimed at

identifying the objects' names, functions, and cultural meanings (see Figure 6.7). The second function was to support the development of the digital database created in the third stage of this research.



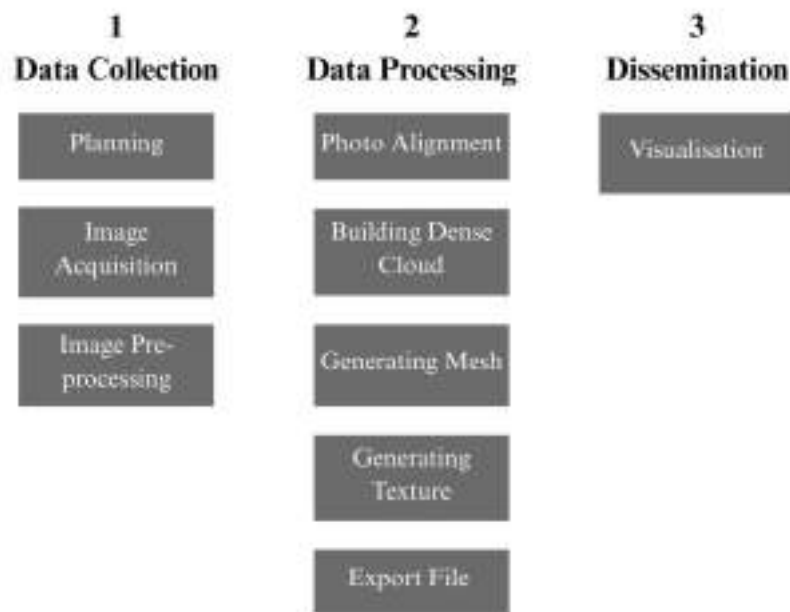
**Figure 6.7.** The printed postcard-style photographs of the objects were helpful in identification during fieldwork on Nias.

### 6.2.2 Photogrammetry

The visual documentation not only involved photography but also photogrammetry. The photographs produced by the cameras offer greater opportunities for digital documentation. One of the most recent forms of documentation currently being developed is three-dimensional (3D) modelling using photogrammetry. Photogrammetry is a technique for creating models with accurate measurements by utilising recorded images. The image contains photometric, positional, and dimensional information of the subjects. Knowledge of the location and orientation of the lens/axis and the photoplane relative to the subject could then be extrapolated to create information about the object's dimensions (Ray, 2015). This method was initially applied for aerial surveys and map-making. First employed in 1851 for cartographic purposes, photogrammetry later played a significant role in surveying and mapping during World Wars I and

II (Britannica, 2025; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This included its use by the Dutch colonial government in mapping territories in the past (Purnawibawa et al., 2021).

Photogrammetry is increasingly being adopted in archaeological research and in efforts to preserve cultural artefacts. Compared with laser scanning, photogrammetry offers a more cost-effective method for creating digital copies of objects. This technique enables researchers to reconstruct the shape and dimensions of artefacts through photographic outputs (Santamaria & Sanz, 2011). Moreover, digital photogrammetry can provide data suitable for image-based measurement, reconstruction, and restoration of cultural objects with high accuracy (Yilmaz et al., 2007). Consequently, heritage professionals can utilise digital photogrammetry for documentation, reconstruction, and the dissemination of research outcomes (Forlin, Valente, & Kazmer, 2018).

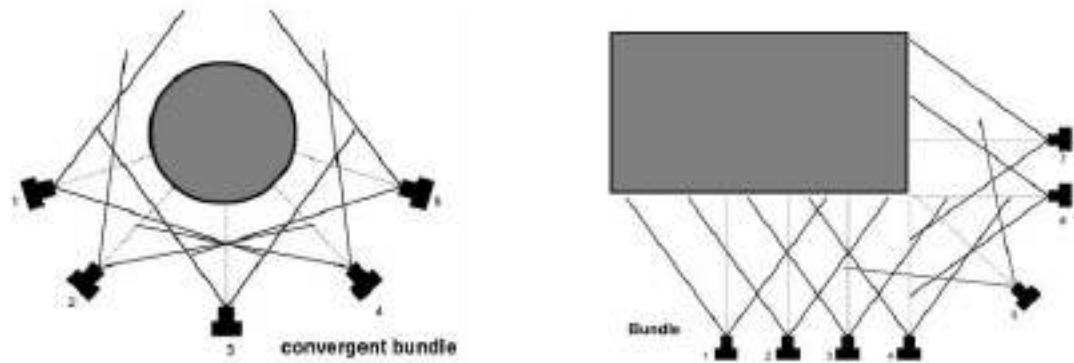


**Figure 6.8.** Photogrammetry workflow in this research.

The photogrammetry workflow, as shown in Figure 6.8, can be divided into three phases: data collection, data processing, and dissemination. Data recording in photogrammetry focuses on capturing sequential images of the objects, with an overlap of approximately 60% between images (see Figure 6.9).<sup>168</sup>

<sup>168</sup> These numbers depend on the accuracy required for the projects (Hanke & Grussenmeyer, 2002); the higher the number, the more accurate the project. However, the higher overlaps required more data

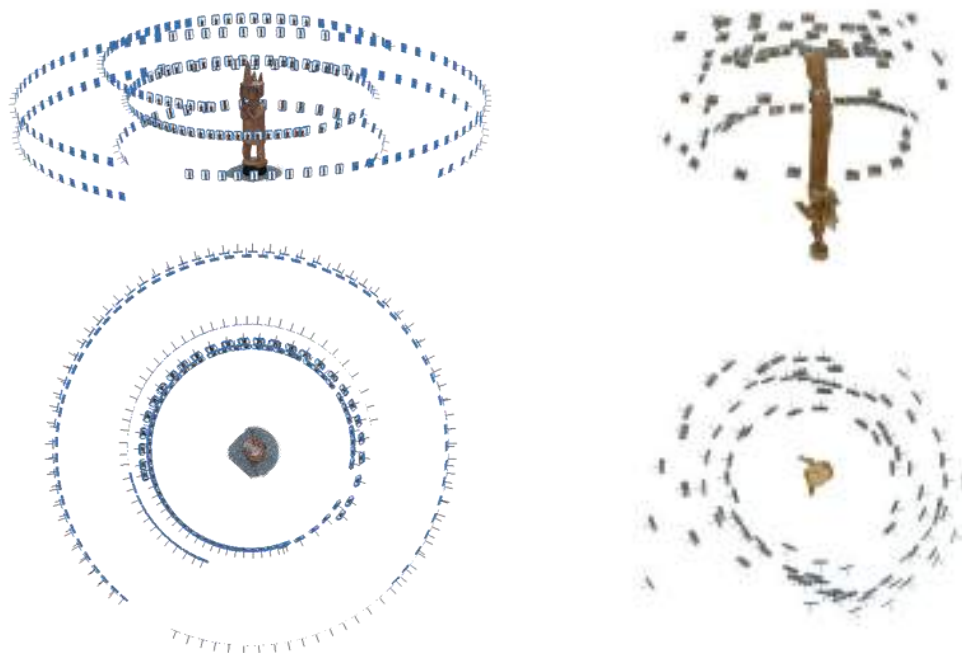
Photogrammetric methods rely on multiple points and image data to reconstruct the geometric shape of an object. To assist the software, tools such as targets and scales were provided, enabling the program to reconstruct the objects. The images were taken using the same camera as described in the photography above. To fully capture the objects' shapes, two techniques were employed, depending on the objects' shape and size.



**Figure 6.9.** Different configurations for ‘bundle selection’ or overlap images (Hanke & Grussenmeyer, 2002).

The first technique employed was the use of a turntable within a light room/tent. The objects were placed on the turntable or revolving tray against an empty white background, and the camera and light sources were mounted on a tripod in a fixed position. The camera could then be positioned at a specific height and angle to capture previously undocumented sides of the object. Figure 6.10 (left) shows the camera position relative to the objects during the rotation using the turntables. This technique provided proper coverage and more consistent results.

and images, as well as a longer processing time. Sixty per cent considered it sufficient to provide adequate data and avoid excessive digital waste from overlapping images.



**Figure 6.10.** Diagram of object and camera positions using the turntable technique (left) and using the handheld technique (right).

However, due to size and weight limitations, some larger objects were impossible to process on the turntables. For these objects, the camera was handheld and rotated around them to achieve adequate image overlap. Space limitations and lighting conditions were the primary challenges for the second technique. This technique, although less methodical than the turntable techniques, still yielded adequate results, particularly for larger objects (see Figure 6.10, right). All images captured in RAW format, and then adjusted in the image pre-processing stage, to highlight the details and texture of the objects, if necessary.

After the images were captured and processed, a three-dimensional model was built using Agisoft Metashape. For this study, Agisoft Metashape Professional 1.8.5 (Agisoft, 2022) was used. The steps were as mentioned in Figure 9 as follows:

- 1) Photo alignment was the first step in reconstructing the 3D model. In this process, the computer will estimate the camera position and tie the point cloud.<sup>169</sup>
- 2) Building a dense point cloud was the next step. Dense point cloud generation begins with the creation of depth maps from overlapping photographs, where the distance of each point is computed from the camera positions. These depth maps are merged into a single, more accurate map, thereby filtering out erroneous measurements. From this, a final dense point cloud is produced, with colours added from the original images and extra filtering to reduce noise.<sup>170</sup> To create a high-quality model, manual selection was performed at this stage to remove unnecessary points and undesired parts.
- 3) Generating a mesh was done to reconstruct a polygonal mesh model based on the point cloud information (dense cloud or tie cloud) or based on the depth maps data. This stage decided the general shape of the final model.
- 4) Generating texture was the last step in generating the 3D models in this research. This stage determined the textured appearance of the finished model.

Refer to Figure 6.11 below for a visual representation of each stage.



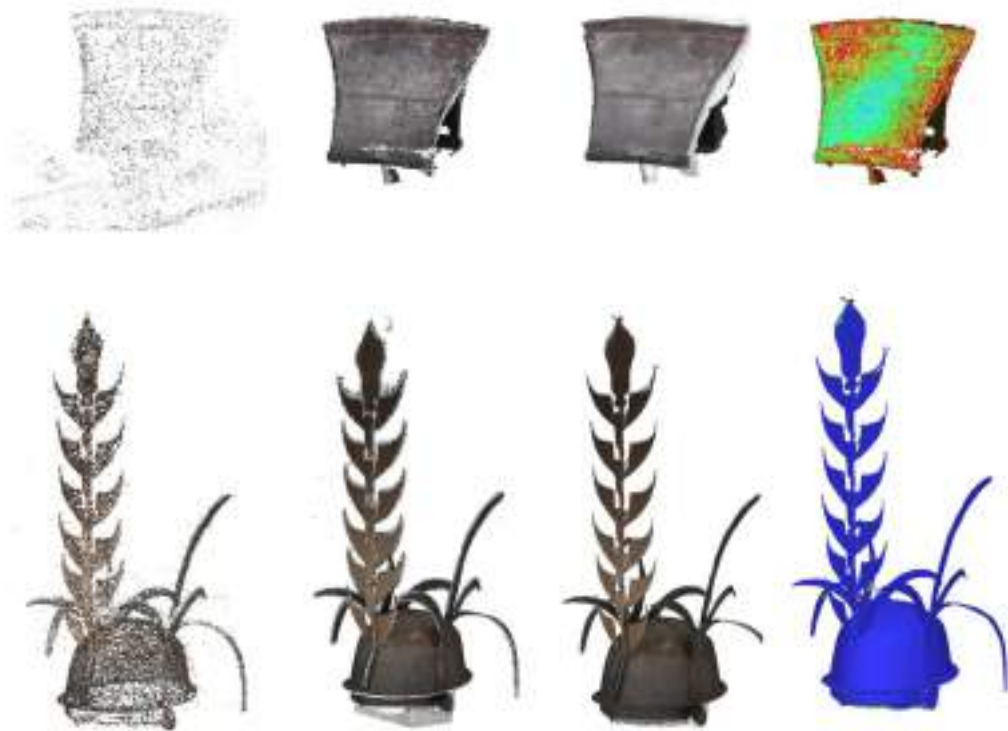
<sup>169</sup> Matching points for every image

<sup>170</sup> Agisoft LLC, 2022

**Figure 6.11.** Stages of model reconstruction using Agisoft Metashape software on the Nias ancestral statue.

Visualisation is part of the dissemination process in this research to ensure open access to the 3D model for the broader public. The ideal dissemination channel can present the 3D models in a format and on a platform accessible without requiring bespoke software (Corns et al., 2024). For this research, Sketchfab was chosen as the primary dissemination platform. Sketchfab is a 3D modelling platform designed to publish, share, discover and sell 3D content. It enables users to display 3D models on the web, accessible in any mobile or desktop browser. Sketchfab is also popular for cultural heritage content, with over 100.000 3D models in Sketchfab's Cultural Heritage & History Category (Murphy, 2017). Many cultural institutions also utilise Sketchfab to showcase their collections, including the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*.

In this project, the author collected 40 data sets for photogrammetric analysis. Many objects, particularly those made of metal and featuring a reflective surface, pose challenges for photogrammetric documentation. The reliance on geometric and textural features in the surfaces of objects prevented photogrammetry from accurately reconstructing fine-surfaced objects such as polished jewellery and metal utensils. Figure 6.12 below shows different reconstruction stages of two metal objects from Modigliani's Nias collection. Object no. 5765, a metal case, was used as a flint stone box. Made of a tin sheet, which was joined with metal nails. The object was reflective and served as a model for reconstruction using Agisoft Metashape, despite the application of several techniques, including cross-polarised photogrammetry, which is often used for reflective materials such as ceramics and metals (Frost et al., 2023).



**Figure 6.12.** Reconstruction stages of two objects. Object no. 5765 (top) and Object no. 5699. The final stage displays the object's confidence level, with more red indicating lower confidence and blue indicating higher confidence.

The author identified several factors contributing to this issue. The first concerns the non-optimal configuration of the workstation, particularly the lighting setup. While the lighting arrangement was sufficient for standard photography, it was less suitable for photogrammetry, where consistent and controlled illumination is essential. The presence of multiple light sources produced reflections that cross-polarisation techniques could not mitigate. These reflections were further influenced by the uneven surfaces of the metallic objects being documented. For example, object no. 5765 exhibits relatively simple craftsmanship, as evidenced by its irregular, undulating surface, which caused significant distortion in the resulting 3D model.

In contrast, object no. 5699 (Figure 6.12, bottom), a metal helmet belonging to a Nias nobleman, exhibits a much higher level of craftsmanship, with a smoother surface that produced superior results under the same technical conditions. Minor defects in the helmet's 3D reconstruction were observed primarily along the

outermost edges, demonstrating that material quality and surface finish significantly affect photogrammetric outcomes. This, however, required further investigation to fully understand the problem's roots, which is not the focus of this study. Potentially, also applying a different approach to 3D reconstruction, a novel technique such as 3D Gaussian Splatting (3DGS), which performs better for rebuilding of a reflective surface and transparent object (Billi, Caroti, & Piemonte, 2025; Lee et al., 2025), could be explored as an alternative for future research and application.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, for the purposes of this research, photogrammetry has proven practical and cost-effective. The majority of Nias objects, which are made of wood, have proven to be advantageous for photogrammetry, which relies on texture. The results were sufficient to provide digital copies of objects that closely resemble the originals for digital purposes. The results were then uploaded to Sketchfab to facilitate access. The 3D model can also be printed as an additional medium during fieldwork on Nias, thereby facilitating communication and interaction with local communities.



**Figure 6.13.** 3D-printed miniatures of the model and photographs of them were used to help local communities more effectively identify some of the objects during fieldwork in Nias.

### 6.3 Fieldwork - Ethnographic Research

The other part of this research's discussion involves the perspectives of different stakeholders within the communities of origin on Nias Island, Indonesia. As we learned in the previous chapter, the attention paid by the Indonesian government to the restitution of ethnographic objects, including those from Nias, is considerably low. Hence, this study seeks to amplify voices from the grassroots level to gain an understanding of local perspectives on the issues of Nias ethnographic decolonisation. To achieve this goal, this research employed semistructured interviews and focus group discussions with selected informants. The fieldwork on Nias Island was conducted in two periods: March 2023 and May-June 2024. The first visit was for an initial survey to understand the location and to build relationships with potential key informants. Meanwhile, the second visit aimed to confirm the informants' perspectives on Nias ethnographic decolonisation, following updated documentation results and further probing.

The informants were selected from several different backgrounds and locations. The cultural background and location are essential, as Nias culture comprises several distinctive groups that are connected to Modigliani's Nias ethnographic collection. During his visit to Nias, Modigliani visited several sites (see Figure 6.14), some of which were more important than others. He spent most of his time in the area now known as Gunungsitoli.<sup>171</sup> During his stay in this area, he gathered most of his collection related to the religion and ceremonies through his supplier,<sup>172</sup> as well as daily objects obtained through barter with locals in the market (Modigliani, 1890).

<sup>171</sup> including areas mentioned by Modigliani as Hili Nangea and Hili Zabobo, now known as Sihareo and Hilimbawadesolo, respectively

<sup>172</sup> A shaman who often-exchanged objects with Modigliani (Modigliani, 1890)



**Figure 6.14.** Location visited by Modigliani in Nias Island, traced from Modigliani's records.

Meanwhile, the majority of his collection, which concerned the social system, technology, and equipment, was gathered primarily from the southern parts of the island. This includes areas such as Hili Gheo (Hiligeho), Hili Dgiono (Hilizihönö), Bawo Lowalani (Bawolowalani), Hili Simaetano (Hilisimaetanö), which are now part of Nias Selatan (South Nias) regency. Bawömataluo is another important place mentioned by Modigliani in his book, as the origin of skilful craftsmen (Modigliani, 1890). He himself, however, never visited the place, possibly because of the war between the Bawömataluo village and the Dutch, which would have put his safety as a Westerner in danger.

Bawömataluo is vital to the history of Nias. Bawömataluo was built by the survivors of wars between the older Orahili village and the Dutch army. The wars began in 1855, when the arrival of the Dutch was met with aggressive resistance by the Orahili forces. After a series of wars, the village of Orahili was burned down by Dutch forces in 1863; the survivors moved inland and built a new village,

Bawömataluo.<sup>173</sup> Although the Dutch claimed complete conquest of Nias Island in their 1864 document, hostility persisted until the capture of Saönigeho, the leader of Bawömataluo, in 1908. The capture of Saönigeho put an end to the fight of the Southern Nias (Nieuwenhuisen & von Rosenberg, 1863; von Brenner-Felsach, 1890; Schröder, 1917; Hämmerle, 2017; Sabar et al., 2018).

After Modigliani's visit in 1886, Nias Island faced considerable cultural and social changes. The Dutch began implementing Ethical Policies (*Politik Etis*) in Nias by 1906, providing "access" to education, infrastructure, and health services for Nias (Purnawibawa et al., 2025). To "civilised" Nias indigenous people, to be precise. In 1906, the Dutch government entrusted education on Nias Island to the Rhenish Missionary Society to realise this mission. This started a massive wave of mass conversion to Christianity in almost every village in Nias, also known as *Fangesa Sebua*,<sup>174</sup> with its peak between 1916 and 1930 (Tjoa-Bonatz, 2009) and lasting until the 1960s (Beatty, 2012). The destruction of idols rapidly followed the mass conversion and the prohibition of many cultural practices, resulting in the loss of the Nias people's cultural heritage, traditions, and knowledge within a few generations (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).

Currently, only a few locations still preserve the knowledge and traditions of Nias culture. This research selected these locations as the primary sites for ethnographic research during the project. The chosen locations and informants are as follows:

- 1) Museum Pusaka Nias in Gunungsitoli is home to thousands of Nias ethnographic objects, mainly from the southern parts of Nias. This museum is also one of the best examples of indigenous-run institutions worldwide (Kreps, 2020). The informants from the museum were the Head of the Museum and a museum staff member, both of whom are knowledgeable about Nias culture and actively engaged in the research and documentation of Nias' cultural and intangible heritage.

<sup>173</sup> Bawömataluo literally translates to "Hill of the Sun," as the village is located on a higher plateau and offers a clear view of the sunrise to the east. The location, however, was also strategically advantageous for anticipating enemy forces approaching from any direction, as the village is the highest point in the area.

<sup>174</sup> In Nias local language

- 2) Local scholars from Universitas Nias Raya (Nias Raya University), one of the leading educational institutions on the island of Nias, are recognised for their expertise. The majority of their researchers and lecturers are of Nias heritage. The informants from the university were Bambowo Laiya, Sitasi Zagötö, Rebecca Laiya and Agustinus Sukses Dakhi.
- 3) Two villages in South Nias, namely Hilisimaetanö and Bawömataluo, also became important locations for this research. Of all the villages in the southern region, only these two retained their traditional cultural practices. Bawömataluo was acknowledged as a National-level Cultural Heritage by the Indonesian government in 2017<sup>175</sup> and is already listed in the Temporary List of World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2009.<sup>176</sup> The neighbouring village of Hilisimaetanö was recently designated as a provincial-level cultural heritage site (Purnawibawa et al., 2025). Among the two villages, the primary informants who were willing to be named were Virdolin Manaö (collector and craftsman), Hiburan Zagötö (craftsman), Nitrasari Fau (tour guide), Oktavianus Fau (collector and historian), and Franciscus Dakhi (collector).
- 4) WikiNias, an online Nias community actively engaged in and contributing to the preservation of the Nias language and culture through digital platforms, such as Wikimedia, was also interviewed to provide its insight for this research. Sirius Laia, a Nias diaspora residing in London, was the primary informant from the WikiNias community.

**Table 6.3.** List of informants in this research

Name	Institution(s)	Code
Nata'alui Duha	Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN)	ND
Filemon Hulu	Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN)	FH
Faozisökhi La'ia	Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN)	FL
Temazisokhi Hulu	Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN)	TH
Bamböwö Laiya	Yayasan Pendidikan Nias Selatan	BL
Sitasi Zagötö	Yayasan Pendidikan Nias Selatan/Universitas Nias Raya	SZ

<sup>175</sup> As a National Cultural Heritage Area through the Minister of Education and Cultural Decree No. 186/M/2017

<sup>176</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5463/>

Rebecca Laiya	Universitas Nias Raya	RL
Agustinus Sukses Dakhi	Universitas Nias Raya/Hilisimaetanö	ASD
Virdolin Manaö	Bawömataluo	VM
Hiburan Zagötö	Bawömataluo	HZ
Nitrasari Fau	Bawömataluo	NF
Oktavianus Fau	Bawömataluo	OF
Franciscus Dakhi	Hilisimaetanö	FD
Sirus Laia	WikiNias	SL

The focus of the interview mainly covers four crucial questions regarding the topic discussed:

1. The informants' opinion on the possibilities of restitution of Nias ethnographic objects to Indonesia or Nias.
2. Their opinion on whether the objects should remain in Italy or be housed in other Western institutions.
3. The possible use of digital restitution for the stakeholders.
4. The possibility of returning sensitive material, such as the Nias skulls, from Florence.

Additionally, all local informants in Nias helped identify the objects documented at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence during the first half of the research. The identification was done using media, such as printed photographs and 3D models, being presented to the informants.

For the interview, a semi-structured interview format was used. Compared with a structured interview, the semistructured interview can better utilise the knowledge-producing potential of dialogue by allowing more leeway to follow up on additional angles the interviewee considers necessary (Brinkman, 2014). All questions were open-ended to elicit informants' tacit assumptions and explicit opinions regarding the research topic. The only exception was the interviews of scholars and local practitioners at the Universitas Nias Raya. To enhance effectiveness, the interview was structured as a focus group discussion or group interview, as this format was deemed more effective for eliciting information and consensus from

multiple participants. In a focus group, the interviewer is conceived as a moderator who focuses the group discussion on specific themes (Morgan, 2002).

Group interviews are often more dynamic and flexible, suitable for exploratory studies and newly emerging topics (Brinkman, 2014). Numerous other people also provide their opinions and contribute to this research. However, many of them are students attending the general lecture related to the group discussion at Universitas Nias Raya, or through daily interaction with villagers in Hilisimaetanö and Bawömataluo. While the additional information is welcome, the absence of a clear explanation of the projects and consensual clearance makes it unethical to mention their names in this thesis. In such a condition, they will be referred to as anonymous informants. The findings presented below are based on the topics discussed with all informants.

### **6.3.1 Possibility of Physical Restitution of the Nias Ethnographic Collection**

The Nias Heritage Museum (Figure 6.15), also known as Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN), is actively engaged in the decolonisation of Nias cultural heritage and maintains ongoing collaborations with international institutions in relation to restitution efforts. A notable example occurred in 2007, when Horst Krank<sup>177</sup> voluntarily returned a rare artefact, a crocodile-skin battle vest (*oroba buaya*), to the museum. Further restitution followed in 2009, when 30 artefacts, including jewellery and ancestral statues (*adu*), were repatriated to MPN by the Volkenkundig Museum of Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Currently, MPN is engaged in discussions with a museum in Utrecht and the Ethnology Museum in Dresden regarding the potential return of additional objects<sup>178</sup>.

<sup>177</sup> Private collector and a former deacon

<sup>178</sup> Head of MPN, ND, interview, May 2024.



**Figure 6.15.** Nias Heritage Museum in Gunungsitoli, Nias, Indonesia, May 2024

These restitution efforts have been facilitated in part by the historical connection between MPN's founder, R.P. Johannes Hämmerle, and the Order of Capuchins. As early as the 1980s, the Order began to consider the return of cultural objects acquired during the colonial era. Logistics played a central role in this decision-making process, particularly in relation to the limitations of storage and display capacity (Van Beurden 2017). More importantly, there was a growing awareness within the Order of the significance of returning cultural objects once local communities had begun to recognise their historical and cultural value (Met Kap en Koord: Het Missiemuseum van de Kapucijnen 1979, in Van Beurden 2021, p. 188).

In an interview, the head of the museum, ND, offered a pragmatic perspective on the issue of Nias cultural heritage held in Italy. While expressing hope for the eventual return of Nias artefacts, he highlighted the considerable bureaucratic and logistical challenges that the museum has already faced in previous efforts to return artefacts. Issues related to transportation, permits, and taxation have proven complex, and the museum currently struggles with limited storage capacity due to ongoing renovations. Considering these constraints, ND proposed alternative approaches to decolonisation, such as joint exhibitions, digital displays, training programmes, and digital restitution. He emphasised that such efforts must involve meaningful collaboration with the Nias communities at every stage, cautioning against top-down initiatives that impose objects or programmes on local

institutions without consultation. He advocated for "decolonisation as an actual practice, rather than meaningless meetings and empty dialogue."<sup>179</sup> A complementary perspective was offered by a museum staff member, FH<sup>180</sup>, who raised concerns about the accessibility of Nias objects held in foreign collections. While acknowledging the challenges associated with physical repatriation, FH expressed cautious optimism about future restitutions.

To gather diverse perspectives, a discussion was held at Universitas Nias Raya in May 2024. Focus group discussion with local educators and cultural practitioners (Figure 6.16) revealed significant concerns regarding the decolonisation of Nias objects, particularly regarding the younger generation's sense of identity. Participants highlighted that the removal of a substantial number of material culture items to museums in Europe and North America has contributed to a growing disconnect between the younger Nias generation and their cultural heritage. Many traditional songs, folktales, and oral histories have become increasingly complex for younger generations to comprehend in the absence of visual and tangible cultural references (informant SZ, 2024).<sup>181</sup>



**Figure 6.16.** Focus group discussion with educators, researchers, and practitioners in the University of Nias Raya, South Nias, Indonesia, May 2024 (courtesy of Zagötö, 2024).

During general lectures related to this research, attended by more than 300 students, it became evident that many participants were unfamiliar with traditional

<sup>179</sup> ND, in interview, May 2024

<sup>180</sup> In interview, May 2024

<sup>181</sup> SZ in focus group discussion, May 2024.

Nias cultural objects, including *adu* (ancestral statues), traditional jewellery, and musical instruments. This observation corresponds with earlier research that has noted the disappearance of *adu* and other 'archaic' objects from the living memory of the Nias people (Yamamoto 1986; Bakker 2004). In the past, elaborately ornamented coffins were held in high esteem (Yamamoto 1986), and they continue to symbolise the deceased's social status. However, contemporary representations of Nias culture, particularly in tourism and public events, have prioritised more martial objects, such as shields, spears, and battle vests, resulting in a shift in cultural symbolism.

The group discussion concluded that younger generations in Nias have experienced a disconnection from older cultural values, primarily due to the socio-cultural transformations of the early 20th century. The group emphasised the importance of restituting Nias cultural objects, either physically or digitally, for educational purposes to help bridge the widening gap in cultural understanding. Only one informant, ASD, expressed opposition to the physical restitution of the Nias cultural objects, stating the worries for lack of care and fast deterioration if being restituted to Nias.

Should restitution occur, the group proposed that the objects be housed in South Nias, ideally in their villages of origin or in a new facility at the University of Nias Raya. This location is of particular significance, as most of the artefacts in question originate from the southern part of the island. Locating the objects there would enhance their accessibility to the communities that produced them and ensure that the repatriated collections contribute meaningfully to education, cultural revitalisation, and local tourism. This was considered a more appropriate and effective solution than housing them at the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN), which is in the northern part of the island. On the issue of restitution, local communities share the University of Nias Raya's view on the preferred location for restituted Nias cultural objects. Interviews with village representatives, craftspersons, and cultural practitioners from the respective villages revealed a strong consensus: all informants advocated returning these objects to their places of origin rather than to museums or other institutions. Two key reasons were consistently cited.



**Figure 6.17.** In-depth interview with OF, local informant, in Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024 (courtesy of Fau, 2024).

The first reason relates to the depletion of cultural artefacts in villages due to the long-standing influence of the antique trade, which has been active since the 1970s. Many villagers have sold, and in some cases continue to sell, cultural objects to tourists in exchange for income. Middlemen often capitalise on this trade by purchasing artefacts at low prices from other villages and reselling them to foreign collectors at significantly higher prices. During the interview, local historian, OF<sup>182</sup> (Figure 6.17), described this process as having “drained the villages of their cultural soul,” resulting in a loss of identity and connection to ancestral traditions among the local population.

<sup>182</sup> In Interview, June 2024



**Figure 6.18.** In-depth interview with HZ (craftsman; left) and NF (tour guide; right) in Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024.

Craftspersons similarly expressed concern, noting that the absence of original objects hinders their ability to produce culturally accurate works. During the interview, informant HZ (Figure 17), a master sculptor of *adu* (ancestral statues) in South Nias, explained that he now relies on the few remaining artefacts in his village and on images from academic publications to inform his practice. This phenomenon has been discussed in previous studies (Yamamoto 1986; Feldman 1994; Bakker, 2004), which highlight how the disappearance of *adu* and growing interest from the art market have led to the creation of contemporary styles that no longer align with regional traditions. These “new *adu*” are no longer imbued with ancestral or ritual significance; instead, they serve as commercial art objects.

Regarding aesthetics, HZ raised an interesting point. HZ has not only worked on sculpting an ancestral statue replica but also on making the Nias ceremonial sword (*tolögu*). After viewing several photographs of Modigliani’s *tolögu* collection collected during his trip, HZ questions the authenticity of the sword. The sword, according to HZ, exhibits very low craftsmanship and is not as ‘glorious or beautiful’ as it should be (see Figure 6.19). This is an interesting point, as Modigliani (1890) himself stated that many of the swords originated from trade with warriors in South Nias (possibly around Hilizihönö and Hilisimaetanö, where he had the most productive collection activity).



**Figure 6.19.** The image of the Bawömataluo village chief in 1936 (de la Varre, 1936) depicts a sword adorned with animal teeth (possibly tiger). This is considered a standard for a ‘glorious or beautiful’ sword by the current Nias craftsman, according to HZ.

The presence of stratification within past Nias society may help explain this situation. Research by Italian anthropologist Scarduelli (1990) identified several social classes within the Nias community. There was “*Si Ulu*,” which denoted the noble lineage, usually that of the village chief.<sup>183</sup> Under *Si Ulu*, there was “*Balö Ila*.” If *Si Ulu* is a king, then *Balö Ila* is a prime minister. Then there was “*Si Ila*,” which generally consisted of people outside of noble lineage who served as shamans or counsellors. *Si Ila* meant as ‘the one who knows’. Under *Si Ila*, there was “*Balö Niha*,” which was considered a warrior class. Then there were “*Sato*” or regular people, and “*Sawuyu (Sauyu)*,” who were slaves. During his time on Nias, Modigliani primarily exchanged with a *Balö Niha* or a *Sato*. Not because of a lack of access; rather, nothing interests the noblemen that Modigliani can offer. *Gongs*<sup>184</sup> and firearms were the only items that attracted the attention of the nobles;

<sup>183</sup> In Nias culture, what we considered a village chief was regarded as a king.

<sup>184</sup> a large, disc-shaped musical instrument made of brass, originating in Asia and producing a vibrant sound when struck with a soft mallet

in fact, Modigliani exchanged a set of gongs for the helm of the Hilizihönö village chief's son, Kanolo. He used the firearms to trade for 26 skulls from the chiefs of Bawölowalani and Fadoro.



**Figure 6.20.** The anatomy of the Nias sword, tolögu. Photographed by the author and annotated with the help of Virdolin Manaö (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).

For the sword, as mentioned in Chapter 3, it is practically impossible for Modigliani to acquire a beautiful sword from noblemen. As noted by Modigliani, most warriors do not want to be separated from their sword, especially the ragö part, which has great personal value (see Figure 6.20). Not to mention the sword of kings and noblemen, it was impossible for Modigliani to acquire them without malicious methods. For this reason, Informant HZ considered the swords in Modigliani's collection to be of low quality, as most of them belong only to the low-level warrior class, not a sword of nobility. On the other hand, it highlights HZ's knowledge, as he can identify which sword is better designed and which is not. This example illustrates the contemporary Nias people's perspective on cultural objects from the past.

Returning to the topic of Nias objects in Italian museums, jewellers reported similar frustrations. Many traditional designs documented in historical

photographs and archives have disappeared from villages. In the past, the crafting and wearing of gold jewellery were privileges reserved for nobility, and the knowledge of goldsmithing was closely guarded. However, the decline of the noble class, brought about by the end of the slave trade, the spread of new religious influences, and increased economic pressures, led to widespread dispersal of such jewellery into foreign collections. Today, the lack of surviving examples and the secrecy surrounding traditional techniques make it exceedingly difficult to recreate these cultural expressions. With many skilled artisans now elderly and few younger individuals willing or able to learn the craft, the continuation of material culture production in South Nias is under threat (informant VM, 2024).<sup>185</sup> In this context, digital restitutions, or access to high-quality digital archives, such as photographs or 3D models, could support local artisans in reviving lost techniques and designs.

The second reason consistently emphasised by local stakeholders was the potential role of returned objects in developing sustainable cultural tourism. Many villages in South Nias are actively seeking strategies to attract more visitors. Since the central government designated Bawömataluo as a national-level cultural heritage site in 2017, interest in cultural tourism has grown. However, current offerings are primarily limited to performances, such as war dances and *ombo batu* (stone jumping), as well as traditional architecture. Due to the large-scale outflow of material heritage to private collectors and foreign museums, many traditional houses have been left devoid of their original objects.

According to local tour guide NF<sup>186</sup>, the absence of authentic cultural artefacts negatively affects the quality of the visitor experience and has contributed to a decline in both domestic and international tourist numbers. This, in turn, creates economic pressures that perpetuate the cycle of heritage commodification. Many villagers view the establishment of small, community-based museums as a viable solution to this challenge. However, such an initiative would require not only appropriate infrastructure and conservation facilities but also a fundamental shift in local attitudes toward valuing cultural heritage as a legacy to be protected and shared, rather than as a commodity to be sold. While such a view may appear

<sup>185</sup> VM in an interview, June 2024.

<sup>186</sup> In an interview, June 2024

commonplace among academics and scholars, community members strongly believe that the restitution of Nias objects, whether physical or digital, has the potential to restore cultural identity and catalyse sustainable, locally driven economic development through heritage-based tourism.

WikiNias, represented by SL<sup>187</sup>, offers a perspective that differs from that of the other local stakeholders. Unlike the other informants, SL, a member of the Nias diaspora living in London, was the only participant in this study to have personally visited the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence in 2023 to view the Nias ethnographic collection. This unique experience shaped SL's view, which expressed appreciation for the museum's role in safeguarding the objects. SL noted that the collection is kept in excellent condition, supported by modern conservation technology, and benefits from international visibility. However, SL also reported a significant lack of dedicated research on the collection, highlighting the museum's limited resources and the absence of specialists specialising in Nias material.

Regarding physical restitution, SL argued that the collection is better preserved in Europe for the time being. He suggested that the objects should only be considered for return if the museum were no longer able to maintain them<sup>188</sup>, and even then, repatriation should depend on the availability of adequate facilities and professional staff in Nias. This position highlights concerns about the Nias Heritage Museum's (MPN) limited capacity to manage such a collection. SL further cautioned against the risk of neglect or misuse if the objects were returned to local villages, citing the weakening of cultural connections, religious sensitivities, and the lack of perceived monetary value as potential threats to their care and preservation.<sup>189</sup>

SL's concerns were indirectly confirmed during the author's fieldwork in Bawömataluo in June 2024. In discussions with villagers to identify objects photographed in the museum, most locals were unable to recognise many of the items. At the same time, scholars, craftsmen, and collectors were more

<sup>187</sup> In an interview through the online platform Zoom, May 2025 and in person, September 2025

<sup>188</sup> SL referred to the case of Delft Nusantara Museum that closed due to the monetary constraints in this statement, in an interview, May 2025

<sup>189</sup> Affraidness of locals to certain 'old' religious symbols such as adu

knowledgeable about their significance. In an unexpected development, two villagers approached the author privately after the discussion, offering for sale a small stone ancestral statue and an oval wooden jewellery box at modest prices. This incident underscored the ongoing risks of commodification and the fragile local appreciation for these cultural objects, even as debates about restitution continue.<sup>190</sup>

### **6.3.2 Nias Ethnographic Objects staying in Italy**

The fieldwork revealed nuanced perspectives among local stakeholders regarding the Nias collection housed in Florence. While many informants expressed general agreement on the principle of return, none articulated a strong or urgent demand for restitution. Opinions also varied on the potential destination of the objects should they be repatriated; some preferred their return to the villages of origin, while others suggested placement in local museums or national institutions in Jakarta. Interestingly, most informants did not object to the objects remaining in Italy. Two participants (SL and ASD) argued that the collection would be better preserved there, citing the superior conservation facilities and greater readiness of Italian museums compared with those in Nias. The Nias Heritage Museum (MPN), despite being the local institution most directly concerned, did not demonstrate significant initiative in pursuing the restitution process.

At the same time, several informants offered pragmatic perspectives on the cultural and economic implications of the collection's current location. NF, for instance, viewed the presence of Nias artefacts in a European museum as a potential opportunity to promote Nias culture internationally and attract visitors to the island. Meanwhile, OF and two local craftsmen, VM and HZ, raised concerns about the community's preparedness to manage the objects if they were physically returned. They argued that restitution should be accompanied by broader capacity-building programmes to ensure that the objects are appropriately cared for and contextualised. Collectively, these views reflect a more complex and pragmatic

<sup>190</sup>After the opening of Nias for mass tourism by the Dutch in the 1920s, the sales of artefacts as souvenirs were seen as a standard practice even until today. This souvenir demand also grows, motivating Nias craftsmen to create replicas of historical adu and swords, or in a 'more attractive' style, rather than maintaining their traditional practices.

understanding of restitution—one that prioritises access, visibility, and readiness over the mere physical return of heritage.

Despite advocating for the collection to remain in Florence, informant SL emphasised the importance of presenting the Nias objects through an indigenous lens. This includes accurately naming the artefacts and showing greater respect for their spiritual and ritual significance, an opinion shared by other participants. Informant NF further proposed establishing artist or scholar residencies in Florence to facilitate direct dialogue between Nias communities and the museum. Such initiatives, she argued, would allow Nias representatives to reinterpret the collection from contemporary perspectives and help the museum develop a deeper understanding of the objects' cultural meanings. Similarly, representatives of the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN) suggested collaborative projects, such as database sharing or virtual exhibitions, to foster ongoing partnerships between institutions in Florence and Nias.

### **6.3.3 The Possible Use of Digital Restitution**

Regarding digital restitution, participants strongly supported expanding virtual access to the collection. They encouraged the museum to host online exhibitions, either through its own platform or via broader initiatives such as Google Arts & Culture, to strengthen connections with Nias communities and enhance the collection's educational value for younger generations. In parallel, SL and the WikiNias community are collaborating with Wikimedia Indonesia to create open-access resources on Nias culture and language. This initiative not only preserves cultural and linguistic heritage but also promotes educational and artistic engagement, ensuring that Nias culture remains visible, dynamic, and accessible in both local and global contexts.

Beyond the discourse on physical restitution, the MPN is actively engaged in broader decolonisation efforts through joint exhibitions and collaborative research initiatives. In 2023, the museum partnered with the Embassy of Denmark in Jakarta to host a temporary exhibition titled *Jejak Denmark di Pulau Nias*, and in 2024-2025, participated in an ongoing international research project with a

consortium of Dutch institutions.<sup>191</sup> In the interview, Informant ND expressed openness to alternatives beyond restitution. Collaboration, such as exchanging databases, training, and exhibitions, is considered more important for the museum. The statement, supported by informant FH in the interim, is that he welcomed the prospect of digital access and digital restitutions from partner museums, viewing them as valuable tools for enabling local communities to reconnect with their cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the focus group discussion with local academics presented a more reflective and forward-looking perspective. Participants agreed that even when physical restitution is not feasible, continuous dialogue between museums and local communities remains crucial. Such engagement should prioritise collaborative decision-making, particularly regarding the use of Nias objects, the selection of items for exhibition, and how interpretive narratives can best reflect the values, beliefs, and perspectives of the originating communities. This approach resonates with the principle of indigenisation in museology, which calls for museum spaces that acknowledge, respect, and integrate the knowledge systems and worldviews of source communities. Currently, the University of Nias Raya, alongside the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN), is participating in the “Pressing Matter” provenance research project, funded by the Dutch National Science Agenda (NWA) and conducted in collaboration with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. This participation highlights a growing academic engagement among Nias institutions in international discussions on colonial collections, provenance research, and restitution practices.

The lecturers from Universitas Nias Raya also emphasised the educational potential of digital restitution. Informant SZ noted that photographs and 3D models of the Nias collection could serve as valuable teaching materials, particularly for courses on Nias culture and history. SZ, together with ASD, expressed concern about the increasing disconnect between the younger generation and their cultural heritage. They suggested that digital access to Nias artefacts could play a vital role in reintroducing these cultural materials into the educational sphere, helping younger generations rediscover their roots and identity.

<sup>191</sup> See the previous chapter in 5.2.4 Several non-physical returns of the Nias collections from the Netherlands

Through this integration of heritage and pedagogy, digital restitution is seen not merely as a technical solution but as a bridge connecting the past with the future of Nias' cultural consciousness.



**Figure 6.21.** In-depth interview with VM, highlighted potential use of digital restitution (Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024).

Artists such as HZ and VM viewed digital restitution as a valuable opportunity for cultural and creative revitalisation. Both agreed that the return of Nias cultural objects in digital formats, or even through high-quality photographs, could serve as an important source of inspiration and a learning tool for local artists. HZ, a sculptor, has already engaged in similar practices by studying photographic materials and catalogues from academic publications, such as *Nias Sculpture* (Sibeth & Carpenter, 2013) and Feldman's works (1990; 1994), to reproduce adu or ancestral statues. For him, access to detailed visual documentation allows artists to observe craftsmanship techniques that might otherwise be lost.

VM shared a similar perspective, noting that many traditional objects, particularly jewellery and war helmets, have disappeared from circulation in villages. He emphasised that access to 3D models and high-resolution images would allow local craftsmen to analyse, understand, and even reverse-engineer the

methods used in their creation. Through such access, VM hoped that local artists could rediscover and revive the techniques for producing these culturally significant artefacts that had become extinct. In this sense, digital restitution not only restores visibility to Nias material culture but also empowers contemporary creators to reclaim and sustain traditional knowledge through art.

#### 6.3.4 The Sensitive Collection

Regarding the case of sensitive objects in the collection, the museum personnel in MPN paid particular attention to the skulls that Modigliani brought to Florence. Informant FH expressed strong curiosity about the existence of the skulls in Florence and about how they are being exhibited. From the author's perspective, FH's interest was purely academic and curatorial. There was no indication of strong demand for the return of, or any emotional attachment to, such a sensitive collection of human remains. This fact was quite surprising and unusual, considering the rise of demands for the return of the human remains from Western institutions and museums to indigenous communities in Australia (Gallagher, 2010; Besterman, 2020; Clark, 2022), Africa (Lamprey & Apoh, 2020), North America, and Oceania (Jaha, 2024).

Regarding the skulls of the Nias people in Florence, the local academicians provide a similar response to that of the museum personnel. There was no sign of emotional attachment. Notably, the informants agreed that the stigma or prejudice toward head-hunting practices in Nias needed to be addressed. Both Modigliani (1890) and Scarduelli (1986; 1990) mentioned head-hunting as part of rituals associated with religious and social status. The group, however, stated that headhunting is unrelated to social status within the society. The head-hunting was related to keeping the village secure from the enemies and sacrificial for particular needs, such as the building of the bridge or the main house in the village, also known as *Omo Sebu*a (the big house)<sup>192</sup> or the big ancestral statue made from stone called *Behu Lawölö*<sup>193</sup> (Duha, 2011). Given the necessity of human

<sup>192</sup> The author finds this interesting. Since the *Omo Sebu*a were typically constructed for the village chief and his family (Bramantyo, 2012; Zeraluo et al., 2022), they were closely tied to the ongoing need for human sacrifice in the house, likely driven by a desire for power and status, which contradicts the forum's message.

<sup>193</sup> A big stone carved in the shape of the respected ancestor will be erected on the top of the human head, which serves as a sacrificial medium.

sacrifice (*binu*), it logically follows that the victim would be kidnapped or hunted from another village, rather than within the village (Modigliani, 1890; Scarduelli, 1986; 1990). The group expressed approval of Modigliani and Scarduelli's second observation regarding the victims' origin.

Local communities in several locations, including Hilisimaetanö, Bawömataluo, and Gunungsitoli, provide largely similar responses. When confronted with the topic of the Nias skulls in Florence and the associated head-hunting traditions, locals usually expressed hesitation. One of the anonymous informants<sup>194</sup> referred to that period as a “time before religion or before the Nias people civilised.” This provides an interesting discussion, as Laiya (in Purnawibawa et al., 2025) noted that the Nias people experienced a prolonged identity crisis following Dutch colonisation. The colonial and religious authorities have told generations of Nias<sup>195</sup> about their ancestors' savagery and backwardness. The doctrine is so strong that it evokes shame and fear, making it difficult to fully understand the cultural complexity of their own tradition. This created a new generation that adopted an identity imposed by their colonisers.

The cultural impact of these historical events in Nias has been profound. Many traditional practices and forms of knowledge were either abandoned or reinterpreted, often acquiring new meanings that were disconnected from their original contexts. A notable example is the *ombo batu* (or *hombo batu*) tradition. *Ombo batu* is a distinctive combination of ritual and sport in which young men leap over a stone structure reaching up to two metres high. Historically, this practice was closely linked to inter-village warfare in South Nias. To qualify as a warrior capable of attacking enemy settlements, many of which were fortified by high stone walls, a young man had to demonstrate his ability to jump such barriers. The *ombo batu* thus served as a form of martial training, preparing young men, both physically and mentally, for battle (Siregar & Syamsudin, 2015; Sibarani, 2017; Lase et al., 2021).

<sup>194</sup> Local resident of Gunungsitoli

<sup>195</sup> Christian missionaries



**Figure 6.22.** Local tourists watching and documenting the *Ombo Batu* procession (Bawömataluo, South Nias, Indonesia, June 2024).

In contemporary times, however, the meaning of *ombo batu* has shifted. It is now commonly interpreted as a rite of passage, symbolising a young man's readiness for adulthood, marriage, or work. Furthermore, there is an additional interpretation regarding how the *ombo batu* represents the Nias belief in the almighty god (Gea and Sazali, 2023).<sup>196</sup> This reinterpretation reflects a broader cultural adaptation, an effort to dissociate the tradition from its violent past and align it with modern, peaceful values, while preserving its symbolic and performative significance within Nias society. Currently, the *ombo batu* has become one of the most sought-after attractions for visitors to South Nias, with young people practising the traditional sport primarily for economic gain (see Figure 6.22; Lase et al., 2021; Waruwu et al., 2025). Even with shifts in meaning, many men, including younger ones, felt a sense of achievement, manhood (Suharmiati et al., 2016), and empowerment when they were able to participate in *ombo batu*.<sup>197</sup>

Informant SL, in two separate interviews, argued that the indifference of many Nias people toward their cultural heritage is deeply rooted in the religious and

<sup>196</sup> A modern interpretation, through applied research, holds that Indonesian culture must align with the five fundamental principles of the state, one of which is the belief in the One and Only God. This is clearly flawed, given that, prior to the arrival of monotheistic religions, the majority of Indonesians, including the Nias, practised ancestor worship.

<sup>197</sup> According to the participant OF and another anonymous resident of Bawömataluo, June 2024

educational doctrines they received. Having attended Christian schools and universities throughout his youth, SL admitted that he once felt detached from Nias traditions. During his formative years, he experienced embarrassment and even discrimination because of his Nias ethnicity, which led him to distance himself from his own cultural roots. It was only after moving to Europe, where he met numerous Western researchers with a profound understanding of Nias culture, that SL developed a renewed interest in preserving and promoting his heritage. According to him, the influence of religious doctrine has contributed to a widespread sense of cultural alienation among the Nias people, especially toward practices and objects associated with pre-Christian beliefs. Skulls, for instance, are often regarded merely as relics of a violent past, devoid of any sacred or ancestral value.

SL further clarified that the skulls in the Florence collection were not ancestral remains but trophies from human sacrifices or inter-village warfare. If the skulls originated from a particular Nias village, they would have belonged to outsiders, captives, or enemies slain in battle, rather than to members of the community. This interpretation aligns with Modigliani's own accounts (1890) and later analyses by Scarduelli (1986; 1990), both of whom documented the cultural practice of headhunting and the symbolic importance of such trophies in affirming warrior status. Consequently, the villagers in the supposed "place of origin" of the skulls do not experience emotional or spiritual attachment to these objects, as they hold no genealogical or ritual connection to their ancestors.

This perspective contrasts sharply with community reactions to another type of colonial collection: the face plaster casts created by the Dutch anthropologist Kleiweg de Zwaan in 1910, which are now held in several Dutch museums. De Zwaan's meticulous documentation, which records the names and villages of the individuals involved (De Zwaan, 1914; Lai, 2023), has enabled descendants to identify their ancestors. When these casts were reintroduced to the communities, villagers expressed deep emotional responses, seeing the objects as tangible links to their familial and collective memory. The comparison between the two cases underscores how provenance, context, and relational meaning determine whether an object evokes indifference or intimacy within the community of origin.

Nevertheless, SL recognised the scholarly and historical importance of the skulls in Florence. He suggested that rather than being physically repatriated, these objects should be carefully studied to provide a fuller understanding of Nias’ cultural and historical complexity. Similarly, informant NF from Bawömataluo shared the view that the skulls should be exhibited as they are, presented truthfully to tell the story of Nias’ past, violent, complex, yet deeply human.

Further archival research conducted after the fieldwork strengthened these insights. The author found several of Modigliani’s unpublished letters written prior to *Un Viaggio a Nias* (1890), in which he detailed the provenance of the 26 skulls. Modigliani noted that 11 skulls were given to him by the chief of Bawolowalani, three belonging to warriors from Hili Gheò (Hiliegeho), five from villagers of Hili Falago (Hilifalago), and three from Iraono (1886a). The remaining 15 skulls were obtained through exchange with the chief of Fadoro, though their specific origins were not recorded (1886b). These letters corroborate the statements from local informants: the skulls were indeed taken from outside communities, explaining the absence of emotional connection or spiritual significance attached to them today. This finding reinforces the need for nuanced interpretation and contextualisation of sensitive collections in decolonial research and museology.

The general response of the informants' opinions on each topic discussed can be observed in Table 6.4 below:

**Table 6.4.** Views of local stakeholders on the issues regarding the decolonisation of Nias objects in Florence

	<b>Physical Restitution</b>	<b>Objects remain in the Italian museum</b>	<b>Digital Restitution</b>	<b>Sensitive Collection</b>
<b>Local museum</b>	The objects should be returned to the local museum for safeguarding.	Acceptable, provided that data is shared and other collaboration programs are utilised.	Access and digital returns are acceptable.	Interested in knowing the existence and curatorial practice of such a collection.

<b>Local scholars and academicians</b>	The objects should be returned to their place of origin in South Nias (either to the university or to the villages).	Acceptable. However, the narrative and story should be communicated between museums and local communities of origin.	Digital returns in the form of photographs and digital 3D objects as learning media and cultural identity for younger generations.	No strong emotion regarding the objects, aside from the need to “correctly” represent the collection.
<b>Local communities in South Nias</b>	The objects should be returned to the villages as sources of identity and sustainable tourism development.	Acceptable. The objects will serve as ambassadors with promotional value for foreign audiences. However, narrative and representation should involve local communities.	Digital returns in the form of photographs and digital 3D models serve as artistic inspiration and as models to revive lost techniques.	Considered as a part of the shameful past and an act of barbarism by the ancestors, no strong emotions are attached.
<b>WikiNias</b>	Hesitant on the topic of restitution, and only agrees if necessary.	The objects are better preserved and kept in the current museums.	Agree to any digitalisation effort that shares access to and utilises the material for cultural preservation through digital means.	No strong emotion is involved, and it is better to view and treat it as a source of research material.

Table 6.4 summarises the perspectives of key local stakeholders on three central themes of this study: the restitution of Nias ethnographic objects, the retention of these objects in European museums, and the potential of digital restitution. Overall, stakeholder views reveal substantial alignment, though notable differences emerge. Regarding restitution, all parties, except WikiNias and one scholar, agree that the objects should eventually be returned to Indonesia. Their opinions diverge, however, regarding the preferred final location. The Nias Heritage Museum (MPN) advocates the return of the objects to the museum for safeguarding and conservation. University representatives suggest that the objects

be repatriated either to the original villages in South Nias, recognising traditional custodianship, or to the university, where they could function as educational resources. Members of the originating communities strongly favour the return of objects directly to their villages. In contrast, WikiNias stands out for its preference that the objects remain in Florence, citing the advantages of professional conservation.

When considering the option of retaining Nias objects in European museums, stakeholders generally express little opposition. MPN highlights the financial and spatial challenges that restitution would entail, especially given ongoing renovations and limited resources. Some community members also note the potential benefits of maintaining collections in Europe, including promoting Nias culture to an international audience and stimulating tourism to the island. Despite these considerations, all stakeholders agree that, if the objects remain in Europe, museums must engage in meaningful collaboration with Nias institutions and ensure that originating communities actively participate in shaping the interpretation and presentation of the collections.

Regarding digital restitution, most stakeholders view it as a promising complement to or alternative to physical return. University representatives emphasise the value of their institution for education and cultural revitalisation in South Nias. While members of originating communities express some reservations—primarily due to the absence of adequate cultural infrastructure, such as village museums or cultural centres, local craftspersons are notably enthusiastic, seeing digital access as a source of inspiration and a means to revive traditional artisanal practices. WikiNias shares a similar perspective with the university, highlighting digital access as a crucial step for enhancing the educational and cultural significance of the Nias collection in Florence.

The perspectives of the Nias informants reveal a strikingly pragmatic and detached attitude toward the return of the skulls collected by Modigliani. Across groups (museum professionals, academics, and local community members), there was a shared understanding that these human remains hold limited spiritual or ancestral significance for present-day Nias people, given their origins as war trophies rather than as ancestral relics. Instead of calling for their physical

repatriation, the informants emphasised the importance of accurate interpretation, contextual research, and educational use to correct long-standing misconceptions about Nias culture and its headhunting practices. Their responses suggest that restitution, in this case, should not focus on the physical return of the skulls but instead on reclaiming narrative agency and promoting a deeper, more respectful understanding of Nias history within both local and international contexts.

The fieldwork conducted to understand local perspectives in Nias offers valuable insights into attitudes towards restitution. While there is interest in the potential return of the Nias ethnographic collection, most stakeholders expressed little objection to the objects remaining in an Italian institution. This position contrasts with other examples of ethnographic restitution, such as the Yawuru Aboriginal artefacts at the Manchester Museum<sup>198</sup> or the Saskatchewan First Nations cultural objects in the Vatican Museums (Dudha, 2025), where the originating communities led initiatives due to the objects' profound cultural and spiritual significance. For many Nias stakeholders, the return of objects is primarily framed as the return of knowledge, learning resources, or potential cultural attractions, rather than as the recovery of sacred or identity-defining heritage.

This perspective is noteworthy within the Indonesian and broader Southeast Asian context. Although Indonesia maintains selective policies regarding the cultural heritage prioritised for national repatriation, public and governmental interest in restitution remains generally strong. Similar patterns can be observed in neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, where restitution remains a central goal of decolonising cultural heritage (Tythacott & Ardiyansyah, 2021). A comparable emphasis on restitution is also evident in academic discourse, which makes the Nias community's relative indifference particularly distinctive. Preliminary findings from this fieldwork, which highlight the possibility of digital restitution as an alternative framework, were submitted to a leading Southeast Asian journal but were not accepted for publication, suggesting ongoing debate and sensitivity around this subject.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Johnston et al, 2020; Clark, 2022, see previous chapter

<sup>199</sup> The anonymous reviewer criticised the article for what they perceived as a lack of understanding of decolonisation, particularly regarding the argument for digital restitution. They also dismissed the idea

On the other hand, the absence of strong pressure from the Nias community regarding physical restitution presents both an opportunity and a unique advantage. So far, academic stakeholders and the local museum community have shown openness to collaborative decolonisation projects that extend beyond the narrow framework of returning objects. In recent years, several initiatives led by European partners have already been undertaken, including photo exhibitions, provenance research on facial plaster casts (Lai, 2023), and the repatriation of sound archives from Nias (Yamomo & Titus, 2024; Dani, 2025). These projects demonstrate that meaningful decolonisation can be achieved through knowledge exchange, collaborative research, and the sharing of intangible heritage, rather than solely relying on the physical return of objects.

For the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, this situation presents a significant opportunity to lead in implementing decolonisation practices that extend beyond the traditional focus on restitution. By engaging with local stakeholders through joint research, co-curated exhibitions, and digital access initiatives, the museum could foster a more equitable relationship with the Nias community while also demonstrating responsible stewardship. Such efforts would not only enhance the visibility and understanding of the Nias collection but also demonstrate that decolonisation is an ongoing process of dialogue, transparency, and knowledge-sharing—one that does not necessarily depend on the transfer of physical objects to be meaningful.

Beyond the interviews, the fieldwork in Nias proved highly beneficial to this research, offering both practical and collaborative insights. During the 2024 visit, the author conducted a comparative study between the collections of the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN) and those housed in Florence. The MPN staff provided significant assistance in identifying several objects in the Florentine collection that are absent from their own holdings, thereby helping to fill important gaps in documentation. The museum is also actively involved in training younger

of using restituted objects as a cultural attraction as “naïve,” even though this perspective was drawn directly from interviews with a local village guide. The striking reality remains that the community of origin appeared largely indifferent to the question of restitution, whether physical or digital, a stance that many might find unexpected. As a final remark, the reviewer suggested that the article would be more suitable for publication in a Western European journal rather than an Asian one (as conveyed in a personal communication with the journal’s Managing Editor, January 2025). This feedback, while critical, sparked the author’s curiosity and raised questions about potential biases underlying the decision, beyond the stated need for revisions.

generations of Nias people interested in traditional musical instruments, many of which are also part of Modigliani's collection in Florence. One staff member, TH,<sup>200</sup> kindly agreed to be recorded while playing several instruments, including the *surune* (flute), *tutuhao*, and *doli-doli* (wooden percussion instruments). These recordings later became an integral component of this study's digital restitution initiative, enriching the open-access platform by reuniting tangible and intangible heritage elements. The collaboration with local scholars, community members, and the WikiNias team was equally invaluable, as their contributions provided essential cultural context and content for developing the digital catalogue, ensuring that the project remained grounded in local perspectives and knowledge.

## 6.4 Sharing Access and Narratives

The third step in this research involves sharing access and narratives. Access is a crucial element in the process of museum decolonisation. In several cases, such as in Australia, access to digital collections has strengthened community interaction with heritage (Pickering & Gordon, 2011). As previously discussed, one of the significant challenges in providing access is sustainability. Many digitisation initiatives, particularly those launched without long-term planning, disappear within just a few years. A notable example is the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive (ACHDA),<sup>201</sup> which was developed in 2018 and officially launched in 2020. The project, led by NTT Asia Pacific in collaboration with ASEAN and funded by the Government of Japan, aimed to document and safeguard cultural heritage for future generations.<sup>202</sup> However, since 2025, the project has become inaccessible.

By contrast, programmes such as Mapping Philippine Material Culture<sup>203</sup> have demonstrated stronger sustainability, primarily due to support from universities, cross-national institutions, and, more recently, the Senate of the Philippines.<sup>204</sup> In Italy, several museums also maintain systems of open access alongside well-developed databases—for example, the museums in Genoa. Their databases are collectively integrated through a digital catalogue system that currently contains information on

<sup>200</sup> TH resigned not too long after the fieldwork

<sup>201</sup> <https://heritage.asean.org/>

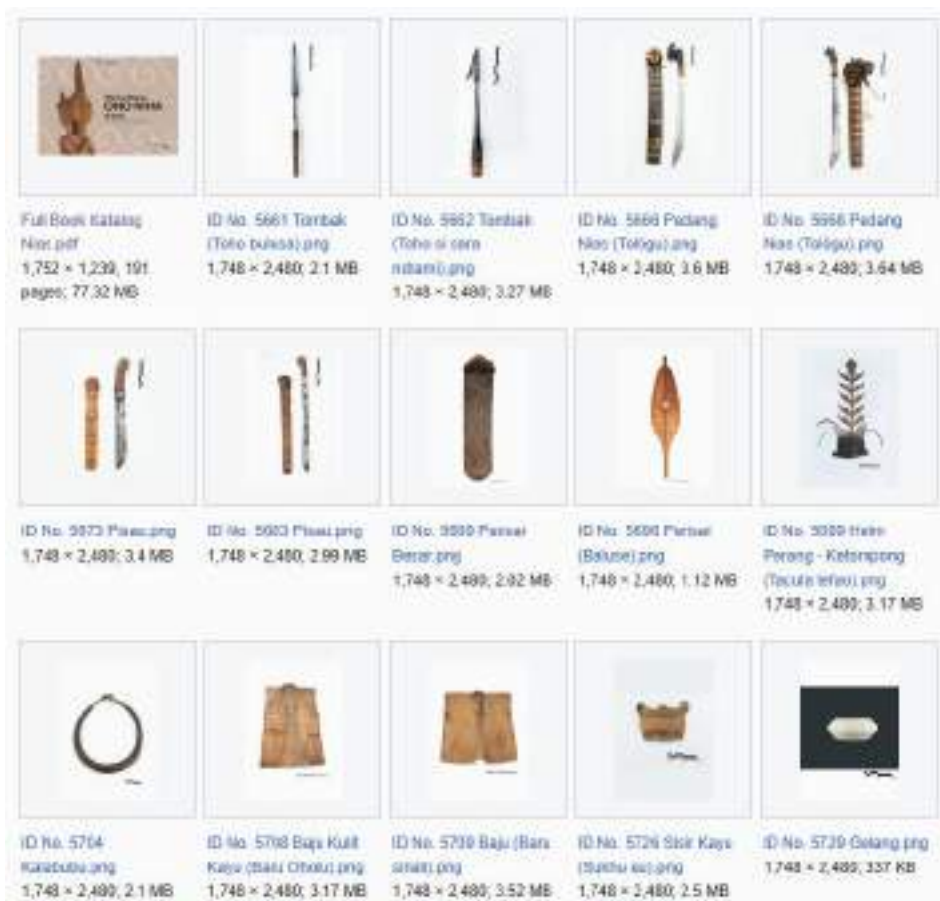
<sup>202</sup> <https://asean.org/in-focus/>

<sup>203</sup> <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/>, see previous chapter

<sup>204</sup> <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/about>, 2025

thousands of cultural objects.<sup>205</sup> All visual data are openly accessible; however, the information provided remains limited and is intended primarily for museum management and academic research, rather than for public access.<sup>206</sup>

This project adopts an alternative strategy. Instead of creating an independent platform, it partners with Wikimedia to provide open access for the wider public. Established in 2003, Wikimedia has become one of the most widely accessed encyclopaedic ecosystems in the world. By utilising Wikimedia’s platform, the project aims to achieve two key goals: sustainability and broad audience reach. The collaboration involves GLAM Indonesia, a subdivision of Wikimedia Indonesia,<sup>207</sup> whose primary activities focus on digitising museum collections and ensuring open public access, as well as organising workshops and training programmes, including funding support for promising projects.



<sup>205</sup> <https://catalogo.museidigenova.it/>

<sup>206</sup> See Appendix IV

<sup>207</sup> <https://glam.wikimedia.or.id/>

**Figure 6.23.** Nias collections page on Wikimedia, within the category "Digitalisasi Koleksi Etnografi Nias di Italia".<sup>208</sup>

Through the GLAM Mini Grant 2024,<sup>209</sup> this project plans to develop a dedicated Wikimedia page supported by multimedia files (see Figure 6.23), including photographs, 3D models, videos, and a digital catalogue. The images and 3D models are derived from documentation of the Nias collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, produced in 2023. The videos included in the programme originate from recordings made at the Nias Heritage Museum during the 2024 fieldwork, particularly demonstrations of how to play several musical instruments represented in Modigliani's collection in Florence.

Providing open access to the Nias collection via Wikimedia offers significant advantages for this research. As one of the most widely used digital knowledge platforms, Wikimedia ensures that the collection in Florence can reach diverse audiences, including the Nias community and the wider Indonesian public, without the need to create or maintain a costly independent platform. Its robust infrastructure also guarantees stability and longevity, addressing a key challenge faced by many digital projects. Another advantage of using Wikimedia lies in its collaborative ethos, which directly supports the principle of shared authority. This project aims to incorporate the perspectives of the Nias community, local scholars, and cultural practitioners in shaping narratives about the objects collected by Modigliani. By hosting the collection on Wikimedia, these voices can be presented alongside institutional knowledge, offering a more inclusive interpretation of the collection (Figure 6.24). This shared authority challenges the traditional top-down approach of museums, positioning the Nias community not as passive subjects but as active participants in defining the meaning of their cultural heritage.

<sup>208</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Digitalisasi\\_Koleksi\\_Etnografi\\_Nias\\_di\\_Italia](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Digitalisasi_Koleksi_Etnografi_Nias_di_Italia)

<sup>209</sup> [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia\\_Indonesia/Hibah\\_Mini\\_GLAM\\_Indonesia\\_2024](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Indonesia/Hibah_Mini_GLAM_Indonesia_2024)



**Figure 6.24.** The editing process on the Wikimedia information of the Nias collection. This process can be performed and verified by everyone to facilitate democratic knowledge generation.

The use of the Wikimedia platform also aligns with the idea of democratising the museum. The museum, as an institution, should not only work alone to produce knowledge and guard heritage. With recent technological advancements, museums should seize the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the public (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2014). While support came from both the Nias Heritage Museum and the staff of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, active participation primarily came from WikiNias and local communities in South Nias. This actually highlighted Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Aljas's (2009) observation that cultural institution workers tended to be more passive towards creating online content. Furthermore, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel (2014) conclude that the very nature of museum tradition has monopolised knowledge production for centuries, fostering a 'closed' mentality among museum workers. Exposing themselves to a new, democratic, and open system of knowledge generation in technological ages erodes confidence among many workers and hinders their contributions.

Another notable point to discuss is the adoption of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 (CC BY-SA 4.0) license. This licence for the digital

documentation of the Nias collection offers several clear advantages. First, the licence ensures that attribution is guaranteed: anyone who uses or adapts the images, videos, or 3D models must acknowledge the original source, whether that be the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, the research project, or local collaborators. This condition provides continued visibility to both the institution and the community of origin, maintaining their presence in the broader circulation of knowledge. Another benefit lies in the ShareAlike clause, which requires any derivative works to be released under the same licence. This prevents others from enclosing or restricting access to adapted versions, thereby creating a multiplying effect. New research outputs, educational resources, or creative adaptations of the Nias collection remain accessible to the public, thereby preserving the principle of openness across different layers of engagement.

The licence also offers global accessibility, as CC BY-SA 4.0 is widely recognised and compatible across digital platforms such as Wikimedia, Sketchfab, and YouTube. This compatibility ensures that digital surrogates of the Nias collection can circulate internationally, reaching both scholarly audiences and broader publics. For marginalised or geographically distant communities, such as those in Nias, this represents an opportunity for wider cultural recognition and educational use of heritage materials that were once confined to a museum archive in Florence.

Nonetheless, the use of CC BY-SA 4.0 also presents some disadvantages. Once materials are released under this licence, the creator or uploader effectively relinquishes control over how the digital assets are used. While attribution is required, there is little protection against uses that may be perceived as culturally insensitive, commercialised, or decontextualised from their original meaning. Furthermore, the perpetual and irrevocable nature of the licence means that once published, the materials cannot later be withdrawn or re-licensed to impose stricter controls. This creates challenges when local communities seek to renegotiate access conditions or impose cultural restrictions on the use of sensitive materials.

The choice of CC BY-SA 4.0 is also a middle ground. The museums in Italy, according to Art. 108 of the Legislative Decree 42/2004 and Art. 3, Clause 2 of Ministerial Decree 11 April 2023, n. 161 has the right to determine the necessary fees for reproductions and for the use of cultural heritage in museums. The Museum of

Anthropology and Ethnology, for example, charges no cost for non-profit activities such as study and research, which aligns with Article 108, paragraph 3-bis of the Code. Many museums, such as the Rijksmuseum and the British Museum, now release their collections to the public domain, or CC 0, as many of their collections fall within the scope of creative works made more than 70 years after the author's death (Pekel, 2014). In Italy, while the regulations for copyrights are similar to those in the Netherlands,<sup>210</sup> the museums tend to be more cautious and traditional regarding their collections.

Museums often claim custodianship of objects, while communities of origin may assert moral rights over their cultural heritage. By releasing Nias materials under CC BY-SA 4.0, copyright ownership is effectively shared with the global public, which can be both empowering and problematic. In the Nias case, this raises important questions about whether open licences adequately protect the community's cultural rights or unintentionally perpetuate asymmetries by exposing heritage to unrestricted global circulation without robust safeguards.

The copyright framework that Wikimedia employs further supports the project's goals. By uploading photographs, 3D models, and videos of the Nias objects under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license, credit remains attributed to the museum and collaborating researchers, while ensuring that the materials are available for reuse in education, cultural revitalisation, and creative projects. For the Nias community in particular, such open licensing enables the reintegration of their dispersed heritage into teaching, local exhibitions, and cultural initiatives without the restrictions often associated with museum-held collections.

However, these benefits also come with challenges. Since Wikimedia is a general platform, the presentation of Nias objects may lack the detailed context that a dedicated museum database could provide. While open editing allows many people to contribute, it also poses risks: contributions from outside the Nias community may introduce errors or misinterpretations, reducing the accuracy and sensitivity of the narratives. This highlights the need for careful moderation and ongoing collaboration with Nias stakeholders to ensure the information remains reliable and culturally appropriate.

<sup>210</sup> <http://outofcopyright.eu/> in Pekel, 2014

The promise of permanent access through Wikimedia is both a strength and a limitation for the Nias collection. On the one hand, it ensures that digitised objects can be accessed worldwide, helping communities and researchers overcome the geographical and logistical barriers posed by European museums. On the other hand, this permanence can become a problem if the community later decides that certain materials, especially those of a sacred or sensitive nature, should not be publicly shared. Once something is open, it is nearly impossible to remove. Therefore, while Wikimedia is a powerful tool for widening access and supporting decolonisation, it also requires thoughtful negotiation of cultural protocols and ethics with the community of origin.

For these reasons, the decision on which objects to make available on the Wikimedia page needed to be negotiated with the primary stakeholders. Following a lengthy discussion with WikiNias, local communities, and researchers from Universitas Nias Raya, 35 selected objects from the 80 documented in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence have been agreed upon for presentation on Wikimedia's page for the Nias collection in Florence. The objects selected were considered integral parts of Nias' cultural identity and past, while not overly stepping on the sensitive issues of the past, such as the head-hunting practice or the slave trade. The selected objects to be made available to the public are as follows:

**Table 6.5.** Selected cultural objects in the open catalogue of the Nias collection in Florence  
(Purnawibawa et al., 2025)

No.	Object ID	Type of objects	Categories	Name (Modigliani, 1890)	Name (after correction)
1	5748	Ancestral statue	Rituals, belief	Adu Siraha Salaŵa	Adu Siraha Salaŵa
2	9597	Ancestral statue	Rituals, belief	Adu Zatura	Adu Zatura
3	5749	Protective charm	Rituals, belief	Adu siharava maho	Adu siraha famahö
4	5708	Clothes	Daily activities	-	Baru oholu
5	5709	Clothes	Daily activities	-	Baru sinali
6	5699	War helmet	Weaponry	Tacula tefao	Takula tefao

7	5704	Warrior's torc	Weaponry, social status	Calabubo	Kalabubu
8	5752	War mask	Weaponry, rituals	Bechu lenio	Bawa mbekhu/Bekhu lewuö
9	5661	Spear	Weaponry	Toho bulusa	Toho bulusa
10	5662	Spear	Weaponry	Toho fatibusa	Toho si sara ndrami
11	5666	Sword	Weaponry, social status	Balatu sebua	Tolögu
12	5668	Sword	Weaponry, social status	Balatu sebua	Tolögu
13	5673	Knife	Daily activities, weaponry	Si oli warasi	Si'öli warasi
14	5683	Machete	Daily activities, weaponry	Balatu buda	Balatu
15	5696	Light shield	Weaponry	Baluse	Baluse
16	5689	Heavy shield	Weaponry	Dagne	Baluse danga
17	5729	Bracelet	Jewellery	Tola gasa	Töla Gaza
18	9627	Bracelet	Jewellery	Aia cola	Aya kola
19	5734	Bracelet	Jewellery	-	Gala danga
20	5739	Earring	Jewellery	Gaule	Gaule
21	5744	Earrings	Jewellery	Sialu	Sialu
22	5726	Hair comb/ornament	Jewellery	Sukhu E e	Sukhu Eu
23	5769	Pouch	Daily activities, guest welcoming rituals, and social status	Cabe-cabe	Bola-bola
24	5771	Betel Nut Mortar	Daily activities, guest welcoming rituals	-	Fole
25	9617	Betel Nut Crusher	Daily activities, guest welcoming rituals	-	Tutu wole
26	5774	Smoking	Daily activities,	Pipa	Pipa

		pipe	guest welcoming rituals		
27	5765	Flint box	Daily activities	-	Kotak Batu Api
28	5790	Flute	Musical instruments	Surune	Surune
29	5787	Percussion	Musical instruments	Doli-doli	Doli-doli
30	5788	Zither	Musical instruments	Tutuhao	Tutuhao
31	9634	Fish trap	Daily activities	Bowwu	Buwu
32	5783	Tankard	Daily activities	Cata	Kata
33	5786	Tankard	Daily activities	Lauru	Tumba
34	5761	Cooking pot	Daily activities	-	Bowoa lamaecha
35	5762	Plates and Plate holder	Daily activities, social status	-	Sa'era dan Figa zino

The list above illustrates the breadth of Modigliani's research in Nias. His documentation provides highly detailed and precise information regarding the names, functions, and contexts of many of the objects collected from the island. When cross-checked with members of the local communities in South Nias, WikiNias contributors, and researchers from Universitas Nias Raya, the majority of Modigliani's descriptions were found to be accurate. Minor discrepancies were primarily related to spelling variations. For instance, object no. 5749 (Figure 6.25), a protective charm, was recorded by Modigliani as "Adu siharava maho," whereas the local term is "Adu siraha famahö."<sup>211</sup> Another scholar, Feldman (1990), referred to the same object as "Adu siraha maho." Such variations are considered normal, given the linguistic differences between Italian, the language in which Modigliani originally wrote, and modern Nias orthography, which developed later under Dutch colonial influence.

<sup>211</sup> Informant SL, WikiNias, 2025



**Figure 6.25.** Object no. 5749, Adu siraha famahö, a protective charm.

Some objects, however, bear multiple names depending on the region of origin. Object no. 5786 (Figure 6.26), described by Modigliani as a “lauru,” is a container used for measuring rice or other grains. In the central and northern parts of Nias, this name remains in use today, even though the lauru has largely disappeared from daily life. In contrast, in the island's southern region, the same object is known as “tumba.” One of the key advantages of developing a digital catalogue through platforms such as Wikimedia is the ability to accommodate such regional variations. This allows for multiple local terminologies to coexist, ensuring that the knowledge of different communities is equally represented and accessible.



**Figure 6.26.** Object no. 5786, tumba or lauru, a tankard.

There are also intriguing cases of knowledge recovery and the completion of Modigliani's original records. For example, object no. 5689 (Figure 6.27, left), a large shield described by Modigliani as a "dagne," was noted to have been used by village chiefs in battle. The shield's massive size makes it resemble a portable fortress. However, shields of this type no longer exist in Nias today, neither in local villages nor in the museum's collection. During the fieldwork, most informants were unable to identify it; only SL from WikiNias successfully recognised it as a "baluse danga."

Another example is the war mask, object no. 5752 (Figure 6.27, right), which Modigliani identified as "bechu lenio" and associated with shamanic practices. Local informants, however, recognised it as "bawa mbekhu" or "bekhu lewuö," a mask used to conceal the identities of prominent individuals during warfare, thereby protecting them from being targeted. The son of a chief or another member of the noble lineage typically wore it. According to another informant (Sarumaha in Purnawibawa et al., 2025), such masks were sometimes used by warriors conducting raids on other villages to capture individuals for enslavement or ritual sacrifice. These cases illustrate how collaborative engagement with local communities not only enriches historical interpretation but also restores the cultural context and living memory of the objects.



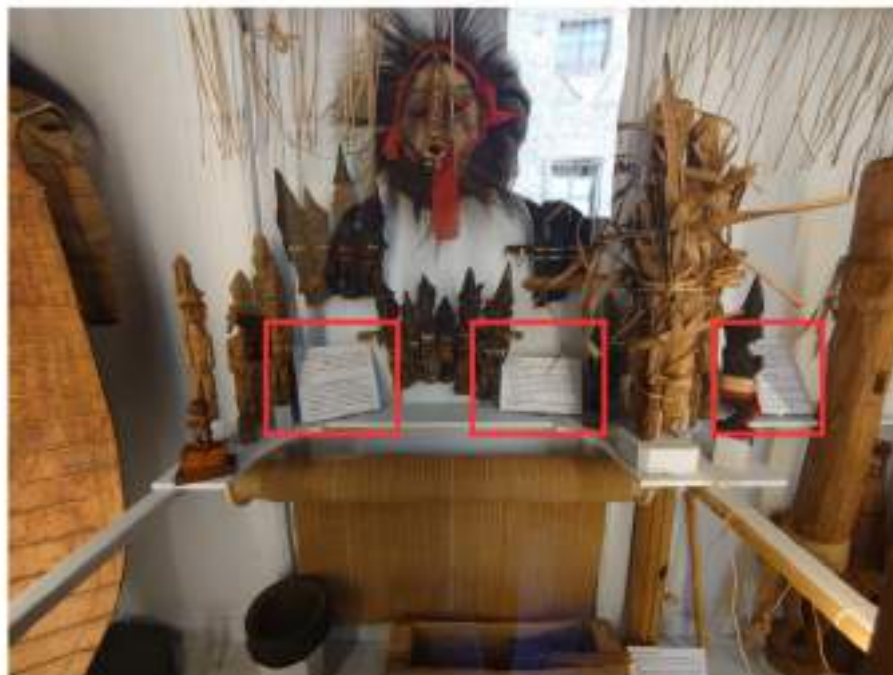
**Figure 6.27.** Object no. 5689 (left) Baluse Danga, a great shield and object no. 5752, Bawa Mbekhu or Bekhu Lewuö, a war mask.

The few objects discussed above represent only a small portion of the dialogue that took place between the author and the local communities during fieldwork. The provenance research conducted on these artefacts underscores the remarkable accuracy and meticulousness of Modigliani's documentation. His records were not merely academic descriptions but vivid ethnographic portrayals of Nias culture before the transformations that unfolded in subsequent decades. The objects themselves serve as tangible representations of Nias' cultural past, embodying its social structures, beliefs, and artistic traditions. While specific corrections and clarifications were necessary, and some information was missing, these do not diminish the cultural and historical value of the collection.

However, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence has not effectively conveyed or enhanced the value of the Nias collection within its current museographic framework. As discussed in Chapter 3, a crucial question arises: whose story is being told in the museum, the story of Modigliani or that of the Nias people? At present, the exhibition narrative appears to centre overwhelmingly on Modigliani

himself. Much of the introductory text and accompanying materials focus on his journey and personal achievements, while the voices and cultural context of the Nias people remain marginalised.

Furthermore, the museum's labelling system reinforces this imbalance. Individual object labels are largely absent, replaced by collective descriptions for groups of objects. These labels typically include only the object's name or a brief note about its material composition (Figure 6.28). In some cases, limited information about function is provided, yet it remains heavily reliant on Modigliani's nineteenth-century interpretations. The museum's approach neglects the dynamic nature of Nias culture and fails to acknowledge the historical, social, and religious transformations that have taken place over more than a century. Consequently, the Nias collection remains frozen in time, presented as an ethnographic curiosity rather than as part of a living cultural continuum.



**Figure 6.28.** Labels for a group of objects, shown in red squares, in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (photograph taken 23 June 2023).

Fortunately, a gradual change began to take shape within the museum during this project. During the documentation workshop, as numerous objects were temporarily moved from the exhibition hall for photographic and 3D documentation, the museum took the opportunity to reconfigure part of the display. Although the

overall layout retained its cabinet-of-couriers style, characterised by a dense, generalised arrangement of artefacts, the introduction of improved object labels represented a notable step forward (Figure 6.29). The new labels now include essential information such as inventory numbers, object names, and functions. While this modification may seem modest, it marks an important improvement in accessibility and transparency, allowing visitors to identify individual objects more effectively.



**Figure 6.29.** Change in an object label, shown in red squares, in the Nias collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (photograph taken 18 October 2024).

To further address the need for alternative and more inclusive narratives, a digital catalogue is currently being developed in collaboration with local communities, Universitas Nias Raya, and the WikiNias Online Community (Figure 6.30). This initiative aims to reinterpret the Nias collection housed in Florence by integrating both historical and contemporary voices. Rather than relying solely on Modigliani's nineteenth-century documentation, the catalogue provides space for the perspectives

of present-day Nias communities, encouraging dialogue between archival knowledge and living heritage. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence has offered full institutional approval for this project. Permission to publish selected objects was granted by the Università degli Studi di Firenze Sistema Museale through Protocol No. 0250996 del 16/10/2024 – (UOR: XPAAM – Classif. X/9), authorised by Lucilla Conigliello, the Technical Director of the Sistema Museale.<sup>212</sup> Dr Zavatarro, curator of the ethnographic collections, also contributed valuable insights and corrections to the publication.



**Figure 6.30.** The digital catalogue of the selected Nias objects in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).<sup>213</sup>

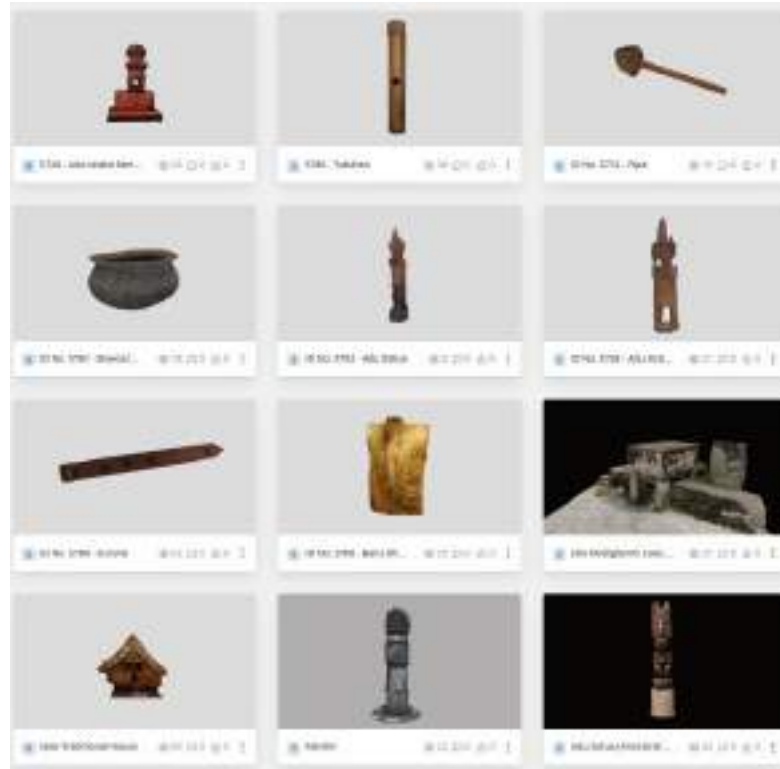
The information presented in the digital catalogue is closely interlinked with the Wikimedia page dedicated to the Nias collection in Florence. While the catalogue serves as a ‘permanent’ and curated record, developed collaboratively with local

<sup>212</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>213</sup> Can be accessed through <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29133119>

communities to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity, the Wikimedia database functions as a more dynamic and participatory platform. Through its open-editing structure, the Wikimedia page allows continuous contributions, corrections, and reinterpretations by a global audience. Together, these two platforms foster a dual system of knowledge sharing: the catalogue offers academic rigour and stability, whereas Wikimedia ensures inclusivity and the democratic co-creation of knowledge. To enhance interactivity, readers can access digital repositories containing 3D models, images, and videos by scanning Quick Response (QR) codes embedded within the catalogue entries.

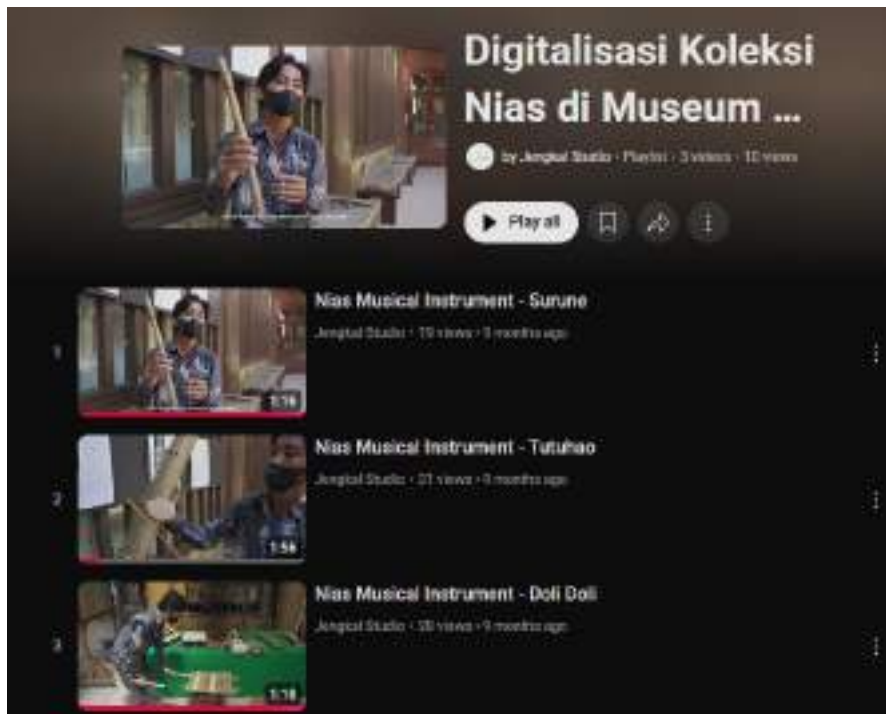
To further facilitate visual engagement, the 3D models of the Nias objects have been uploaded to the Sketchfab platform (Figure 6.31). As previously discussed, Sketchfab is specifically designed for hosting and visualising 3D content, enabling users to explore digital replicas in great detail, complete with photorealistic textures and interactive controls that allow zooming, rotation, and close examination of intricate features. Other repositories, such as Wikimedia Commons and Figshare, are valuable for archiving but currently lack the capacity to preserve and render textured 3D assets with similar fidelity. By integrating Sketchfab into the digital restitution framework, the project enhances both accessibility and immersion, allowing audiences to experience the objects in a way that closely approximates direct, physical observation. This approach exemplifies how digital technology can bridge geographical and institutional divides, contributing to a more equitable and decolonised circulation of cultural heritage.



**Figure 6.31.** The 3D models of the Nias collection on the Sketchfab platform.<sup>214</sup>

To further enhance accessibility and engagement, the project integrates video materials hosted on YouTube (Figure 6.32). YouTube was chosen as a more familiar media for the local communities in Nias, compared to other video platforms. While repositories such as Wikimedia Commons or Figshare also support video hosting, they lack the same degree of interactivity and community engagement that YouTube provides. Its robust infrastructure for video streaming enables these cultural materials to reach a wider audience, thereby maximising both their educational potential and cultural visibility.

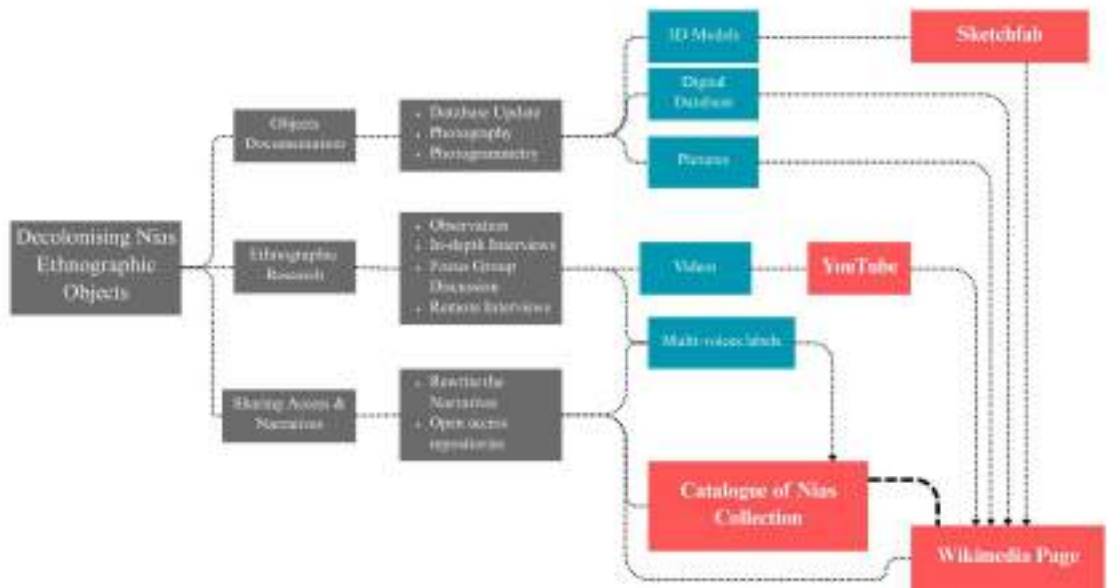
<sup>214</sup> <https://sketchfab.com/ragpw/collections/nias-digital-returns-feat-glam-wikimedia-indonesia-fdcab0363a63406cab220efed5f47027>



**Figure 6.32.** The videos related to the Nias collection on the YouTube platform.<sup>215</sup>

This multi-platform system has functioned effectively to date, although not without challenges. Following the project’s launch, the catalogue, 3D models, and accompanying video materials received significant attention and positive feedback from the public. The catalogue, as the primary output, was designed to present alternative narratives and multiple voices that complement and sometimes challenge the interpretations presented by the museum. It also serves as a gateway to other digital components, directing users to the Wikimedia database for collaborative contributions and to the Sketchfab and YouTube repositories for interactive engagement. However, while the use of multiple platforms (PDF, Wikimedia, Sketchfab, and YouTube) enhances flexibility and accessibility, it also introduces a degree of fragmentation. For some stakeholders, the modular structure facilitates adaptation to specific needs, whereas others perceive it as lacking integration and continuity. Figure 6.33 below illustrates the overall workflow of this interconnected but decentralised digital restitution system.

<sup>215</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyYGeA5uAiE5vLHKHibRbgF24fMNkQIYc>

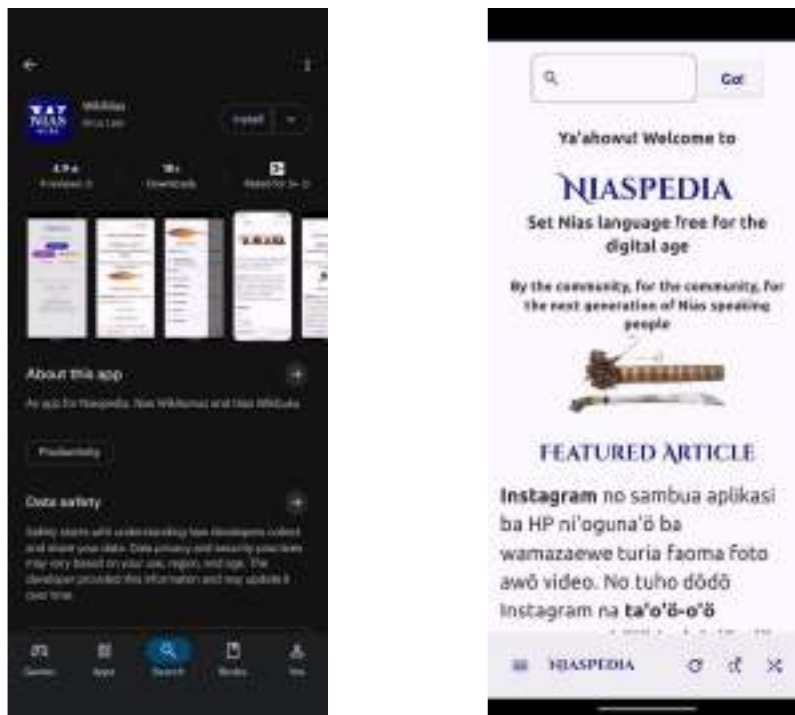


**Figure 6.33.** The design of this research includes the approaches, results of each stage and the hosting platforms.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the project was implemented through three main stages, each producing distinct yet interconnected outcomes, as illustrated in the blue square above. The object documentation stage resulted in a comprehensive collection of photographs, 3D models, and a digital database of the Nias collection. The ethnographic research stage produced video recordings and qualitative data that informed the development of inclusive, multi-voiced object labels and inclusive narratives. Finally, the sharing access and narratives stage involved active collaboration with local stakeholders, ensuring that community perspectives were embedded within the interpretive framework.

The red square (Figure 6.33) denotes the digital platforms that host these outputs. The 3D models are published on Sketchfab, videos are hosted on YouTube, and the broader digital database and catalogue are made accessible via Wikimedia and the open-access PDF catalogue. The catalogue and the Wikimedia page function complementarily, one offering a curated, downloadable reference, and the other serving as a dynamic “landing page” that allows continuous updates and contributions. This multi-platform distribution, while appearing fragmented, reflects the project’s commitment to democratising access and adhering to open-knowledge principles. Particularly in the case of Wikimedia, the open-access structure enables the collective generation and evolution of knowledge, allowing researchers, community members,

and the public to participate in curating the Nias collection. Nonetheless, future development could benefit from creating a unified, curated platform that consolidates these materials, preserving the project's participatory spirit while enhancing coherence, navigation, and long-term sustainability.



**Figure 6.34.** The image of object number 5668 from the Nias collection is used in a new developed application by WikiNias (courtesy of Laia, 2025).

In addition, the results are now beginning to yield benefits for the preservation of Nias culture. Some of the open-access material began to be used as teaching materials in Universitas Nias Raya and other institutions, featured in an exposition by local communities, and utilised by the WikiNias community as supplementary material for their new project (Figure 6.34). Building on these outcomes, the digital restitution project has begun to demonstrate its sustainability and alignment with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable). The open-access materials, comprising photographs, 3D models, videos, and catalogues, have not only served academic purposes but have also found practical applications in educational and cultural initiatives across Nias. Their integration into teaching materials at Universitas Nias Raya and other institutions illustrates how digital restitution can foster heritage literacy and strengthen local identity through accessible learning tools. The inclusion of these materials in community exhibitions and WikiNias projects

further expands their reach, ensuring that the cultural narratives surrounding the Nias collection are continuously reinterpreted and revitalised by the communities themselves.

By using Wikimedia and other open-access repositories, the project adheres to the FAIR principles in several key ways. First, the materials are findable, each digital object is assigned a unique identifier and accompanied by detailed metadata that ensures global visibility and scholarly traceability. Second, they are accessible, hosted on trusted open platforms such as Wikimedia Commons and Sketchfab, which guarantee free and long-term availability to users worldwide. Third, the data are interoperable, using standardised formats and open vocabularies that allow integration across various digital systems and research infrastructures. Lastly, the materials are reusable, accompanied by clear Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0) licensing and detailed documentation regarding provenance, authorship, and acquisition methods.

By adhering to these principles, the Nias digital restitution project has transcended its initial role as a decolonial intervention and evolved into a sustainable digital heritage ecosystem. The FAIR-aligned approach ensures that the materials not only serve present educational and research needs but also remain adaptable for future generations. This enables long-term stewardship of Nias' cultural heritage while maintaining transparency, accessibility, and accountability, values that are central to decolonising heritage practice in the digital age.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion - Digital Restitution as a Middle Way

### 7.1 Summary of Findings

This research has examined the complex and interwoven relationships between restitution, decolonisation, and digital heritage through an in-depth study of the Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence. At its core, this work has sought to interrogate how decolonisation is performed, negotiated, and reimagined within both the material and digital dimensions of museum practice.

The findings reveal that the development of ethnographic museums in Italy has been a long and intricate process. Originating from early scholarly collections of naturalia and artificialia (Olmi, 1985; Abt, 2011; De Gruy, 2023, p. 30), these institutions gradually evolved into sites where national identity and pride were constructed after the *Risorgimento*. In the decades that followed, museums became instruments of the Italian Empire's ambitions (Falcucci, 2021). This imperial aspiration directly influenced the transfer of thousands of ethnographic objects from around the world to Italy and their display, in ways that reinforced narratives of racial hierarchy and imperial superiority for Italian audiences. As Said (1993, p. 11) observed, the imperial enterprise was sustained by “the idea of having an empire.”

In Italy, such ideas deeply permeated cultural institutions. Museums such as the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence and the Museum of Civilisations in Rome were closely entangled with the political agendas of their time. The Florentine museum, in particular, played a role in advancing racial science and colonial ideology through its African and Asian ethnographic collections. Figures such as Lidio Cipriani, one of its leading anthropologists, not only espoused racial superiority theories but also redirected the museum's mission to align with the Fascist regime's objectives (Landi & Cecchi, 2014).

In the 21st century, however, the role of museums has begun to shift with the growing discourse on decolonisation and the democratisation of heritage institutions.

International bodies such as ICOM<sup>216</sup> and numerous scholars<sup>217</sup> have advocated for the recognition of indigenous worldviews and the rights of source communities to engage with their cultural heritage held in Western museums. Despite this global momentum, Italian museums have largely remained stagnant, with many ethnographic collections still framed within colonial and Eurocentric narratives. One example is the Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, assembled by Elio Modigliani in the late 19th century. Without deliberate efforts to disrupt these inherited frameworks, such collections risk remaining merely colonial trophies or exotic fetishes (Gnecchi-Ruscione, 2011).

The call for decolonisation has also coincided with increasing demands for the restitution of colonial objects. Following the waves of political decolonisation in the 1940s and 1950s, many newly independent nations began to demand the return of cultural heritage held by their former colonisers. Similarly, indigenous communities across various continents have sought the return of ancestral remains and sacred artefacts (Gallagher, 2010; Besterman, 2020; Clark, 2022; Lamptey & Apoh, 2020; Jaha, 2024). Yet, these efforts have often faced significant resistance. Even with the establishment of international frameworks such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, many Western museums continue to defend retentionist positions under the pretext of “universal value.”<sup>218</sup>

This research also reveals that restitution, although often regarded as a cornerstone of decolonising practice, remains constrained by deep-seated legal, political, and institutional frameworks. In the Italian context, heritage law classifies museum collections as inalienable State property, meaning they cannot be transferred or returned to other nations under normal circumstances (Wijismuller, 2017). This legal immobility not only restricts the potential for physical restitution but also reveals the underlying reluctance of Italian institutions to confront the colonial legacies embedded within their collections. As a result, Italy continues to lag behind other European countries such as France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, which in

<sup>216</sup> ICOM Code of Ethic, 2004 (ICOM, 2017) to be revised in June 2026.

<sup>217</sup> Following the first wave of decolonisation as a part of New Museology movements (Karp & Lavine, 1991; Aries, Pozzi & Wawrzyniak).

<sup>218</sup> Declared as Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museum in 2003

recent years have taken concrete steps toward the ethical restitution of colonial-era artefacts. When Italy has engaged in restitution, as in the 2008 returns of the Axum Obelisk to Ethiopia and the Venus of Cyrene to Libya, these acts were framed as diplomatic gestures rather than moral reckonings. The Italian government's discourse has often focused on reconciliation and international cooperation rather than on acknowledging historical exploitation, colonial violence, or epistemic injustices (Scovazzi, 2009).

In contrast, the Indonesian approach to restitution presents a different yet equally hierarchical framework. The Indonesian state has, since the 1970s, positioned itself as the primary actor in matters of repatriation, with the Ministry of Culture and related government agencies monopolising authority. While several high-profile restitutions have occurred, such as the return of the Lombok Treasure and the Prajnaparamita statue from the Netherlands, these acts have largely reinforced nationalist narratives that celebrate the state as the rightful custodian of national heritage. In practice, local museums, universities, and communities are seldom invited to participate in policy-making or negotiation processes. For instance, institutions like the Nias Heritage Museum (MPN), despite their direct cultural relevance, remain excluded from official restitution dialogues. This state-centred approach reproduces colonial power hierarchies, replacing European curatorial authority with a centralised national bureaucracy. Restitution in Indonesia thus becomes less an act of decolonisation and more a symbolic extension of state diplomacy, instrumentalised to assert cultural sovereignty on the global stage rather than to empower the communities of origin.

The Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, which forms the central focus of this study, is among the collections entangled in the complex and often contentious discourse of decolonisation. Collected in 1886, this assemblage represents an important chapter in Nias society prior to the profound and irreversible transformations brought about by colonisation and Christian missionary activity. Comprising 180 objects and 26 human remains, the collection is among the most diverse and comprehensive representations of Nias material culture. It encompasses artefacts related to ancestral worship, warfare, music, measurement, attire and adornment, domestic life, ceremonial hospitality, and vernacular architecture (Purnawibawa et al., 2025).

Many of these cultural forms and objects have since disappeared from circulation on the island, largely due to iconoclastic campaigns by missionaries and the suppression of certain cultural practices under Dutch colonial rule. As a result, the collection, together with Elio Modigliani's detailed ethnographic account in *Un Viaggio a Nias* (1890), serves as a crucial record of a cultural landscape that has been irretrievably altered. It is this significance that motivates the present study: to explore pathways for decolonising the collection and to consider how restitution, in its various possible forms, might restore meaning, agency, and connection to the people of Nias.

Within this context, digital restitution emerged as a viable and ethical alternative, a decolonial practice that operates within existing legal and institutional boundaries while still enabling meaningful cultural reconnection. Through this project, the Nias ethnographic collection in Florence was digitally documented and disseminated via open-access platforms, including Wikimedia and Sketchfab. These platforms facilitated the repatriation of visibility and knowledge to Nias and Indonesia more broadly, providing unprecedented access to objects that had long been confined within European museum archives. High-resolution photographs, 3D models, and contextual narratives were made available not only to scholars but also to teachers, students, and members of the Nias community who might otherwise never have encountered these collections.

A key strength of this project lies in the active participation of local communities. It engaged diverse stakeholders, including community representatives from Hilisimaetanö and Bawömataluo, scholars from Universitas Nias Raya, staff of the Nias Heritage Museum, and members of the WikiNias community. Rather than establishing a top-down, one-directional model of communication through a static website, the project developed a dynamic, participatory platform on Wikimedia Commons and a digital catalogue. Here, anyone can contribute to, reinterpret, and reuse digital objects, reshaping the narratives surrounding them in accordance with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable). This model of digital return fostered new forms of storytelling and cultural revitalisation, creating a shared and dialogic space for interpretation that transcends national and institutional boundaries.

While digital restitution cannot replicate the material presence of artefacts, it serves as a crucial ethical bridge, restoring agency and participation to the community of origin. It empowers local actors to reinterpret their heritage through their own epistemic, linguistic, and cultural frameworks, thereby breaking away from the authoritative narratives historically imposed by colonial institutions. Moreover, this process promotes transnational collaboration, encouraging museums, researchers, and communities to co-create narratives, reinterpret collections, and develop shared digital repositories that embody multiple perspectives. This approach aligns with emerging concepts in heritage studies, such as shared authority and co-curation (Frisch, 1990; Duclos-Orsello, 2013; Mutibwa, Hess, & Jackson, 2020), which advocate decentralised control and community-led interpretation.

Ultimately, the digital restitution of the Nias collection demonstrates that technology can serve as both a decolonising tool and a mediating bridge between institutions and communities. It challenges the assumption that decolonisation must always involve the physical repatriation of artefacts, showing instead that access, visibility, and dialogue can themselves become meaningful acts of return. For communities facing legal, bureaucratic, or logistical constraints, digital restitution is not a lesser substitute but a practical reimagining of justice, one that reflects the ethical, social, and technological realities of the twenty-first century. By creating new spaces for participation and knowledge exchange, digital restitution enables the ethically recontextualisation of colonial collections, reconnecting fragmented heritage networks and allowing communities such as the Nias to reclaim their narratives within global cultural discourse.

In conclusion, this chapter asserts that restitution is only one dimension of the broader, ongoing project of decolonisation. While formal repatriation remains a significant legal and diplomatic process, true decolonisation requires the transformation of power structures, epistemologies, and access systems that govern heritage. The case of the Nias collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence exemplifies this shift, from restitution as a legal or political act to restitution as an ethical, dialogic, and participatory practice. Through digital restitution, this study reveals that decolonisation is not a final endpoint but a continuous process of negotiation, evolving through sustained collaboration among communities, institutions, and technologies in the shared pursuit of cultural justice.

## 7.2 Decolonisation Beyond Repatriation

The fieldwork conducted in Nias in March 2023 and May–June 2024 revealed an unexpected dimension in the debate on restitution. Unlike many communities across Africa, Asia, and Oceania that actively campaign for the return of their cultural property, local stakeholders in Nias expressed a more pragmatic and ambivalent view. Representatives from museums, universities, community organisations, craftspeople, and village elders consistently noted that while the physical return of objects would be welcomed, it was not their main concern. What mattered more to them was access to knowledge, visibility, and cultural exchange. For these stakeholders, restitution was not simply about returning objects but about restoring connections among people, knowledge, and heritage. They valued opportunities to observe, study, and reinterpret their material culture, regardless of where the objects were physically stored.

This finding challenges the common assumption that all source communities primarily seek the physical return of artefacts. It highlights a more diverse and context-sensitive understanding of heritage, shaped by local conditions, including limited resources, infrastructure, and shifting cultural values. In doing so, it complicates the dominant restitution narrative, which often portrays source communities as passive claimants within international heritage systems. The voices from Nias demonstrate a more negotiated form of cultural agency, where preservation, education, and visibility take precedence over symbolic notions of ownership. This perspective aligns with recent scholarship that critiques the binary framing of “possession versus dispossession” and instead promotes a relational understanding of heritage (Tythacott & Ardiyansyah, 2021). The Nias case thus shows that decolonisation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of re-engagement, in which communities redefine their relationships with objects, knowledge, and institutions.

The findings further suggest that restitution and decolonisation are not synonymous. Returning objects may symbolically address historical injustices, but it remains insufficient without structural change. Decolonisation, as shown in this study, requires a continuous reconfiguration of power, knowledge, and representation within

museums and heritage institutions. It extends beyond the physical movement of objects to question who has the authority to narrate, interpret, and define their meaning. The case of the Nias collection in Florence demonstrates that decolonisation is a process of dialogue and participation that challenges long-standing hierarchies of interpretation and control.

In both Italy and Indonesia, heritage governance remains highly centralised, reproducing the same hierarchies that decolonisation seeks to dismantle. In Italy, rigid heritage laws define museum collections as inalienable state property, leaving little room for ethical claims from source communities. In Indonesia, repatriation is similarly centralised within government agencies and is often framed within nationalist narratives that treat cultural heritage as state property rather than as community heritage. In both contexts, decision-making is dominated by institutional elites, while the voices of communities of origin remain marginal. This imbalance mirrors the colonial epistemologies that once governed museum practice, where the “Other” was studied and displayed from a distance.

Decolonisation must also address the epistemic dimension of heritage, the systems of knowledge and authority that determine what counts as legitimate understanding. Many postcolonial museums, even when objects are repatriated or reinterpreted, still rely on Western museological frameworks. Genuine decolonisation requires integrating indigenous epistemologies, values, and modes of storytelling into curatorial practice. In this context, the digital restitution of the Nias collection offers a practical model. Although the artefacts remain in Florence, the inclusion of local perspectives through digital access restores Nias' ways of knowing within global heritage discourse. This process rebalances interpretive authority and redefines the museum's role, from a colonial archive to a platform for shared knowledge and collaboration.

The Nias case also challenges the conventional “coloniser–colony” framework. Indonesia has focused its restitution efforts primarily on collections in Dutch museums, its former coloniser, while overlooking important holdings in countries such as Italy. Conversely, Italy has yet to acknowledge the colonial dimension of collections such as the Nias artefacts in Florence. Although no formal colonial relationship existed between the two countries, the acquisition of these objects was

shaped by the power imbalances of the late 19th century. Elio Modigliani, though he claimed neutrality as a scientific observer, benefited from colonial structures that enabled his access and authority in Nias.

From a decolonial perspective, following Quijano (2000a, 2000b) and Mignolo (2011), this research goes beyond historical critique to expose the continuing structures of coloniality embedded in museums and systems of knowledge. The Nias collection embodies this persistence; its meanings have long been framed through Eurocentric perspectives that marginalise indigenous voices. This study seeks not only to analyse these dynamics but also to contribute to dismantling them by demonstrating how collaborative and digital approaches can challenge entrenched hierarchies of interpretation. The author hopes this research serves as a starting point for more systematic transformation in how museums interpret and present colonial collections.

### **7.3 Contributions of the Study**

This research is not the first to explore digital restitution or to engage with the perspectives of source communities regarding heritage held within colonial collections. However, it makes distinct and meaningful contributions to the fields of cultural heritage, museology, and decolonial studies by combining theoretical innovation with applied practice. Its originality lies in bridging academic discourse with hands-on implementation, demonstrating how digital restitution can move from concept to tangible decolonial action.

First, the study advances theoretical discussions on digital restitution by framing it as both a technological process and an ethical practice. While much of the existing scholarship views digitisation as a neutral or technical act, primarily concerned with preservation and access, this research attempted to channel it as a decolonising gesture. When undertaken collaboratively and reflexively, digital restitution becomes an act of epistemic justice, allowing communities that were once objectified through colonial collecting to regain narrative authority and interpretive power. In this sense, the digital realm becomes a site of empowerment, where communities of origin can rearticulate the meanings of their heritage in their own cultural and epistemological terms. This reconceptualisation contributes to the ongoing shift in decolonial thought,

moving beyond the physical return of artefacts to the restitution of stories, knowledge, and representation itself.

Second, the case of the Nias ethnographic collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence offers a unique example of how restitution can function in postcolonial contexts lacking direct colonial ties. The unique relationship between Indonesia and Italy, unburdened by a formal colonial past, provides fertile ground to test restitution as a dialogic rather than diplomatic process. In such a setting, digital restitution emerges as both a practical and symbolic mechanism for reconnection, enabling transnational collaboration without the legal and political barriers that often hinder physical repatriation. The project is designed within a broader ecosystem of open-access knowledge production, aligning with contemporary efforts to democratise heritage under equitable terms. By incorporating the voices of museum professionals, local academics, artisans, and community members from Nias, the project establishes a participatory model of co-curation that challenges the traditional one-way flow of knowledge from Western institutions to source communities.

Third, this research provides a concrete methodological framework for community-based digital restitution to guide future initiatives. Its three interrelated stages, documentation, fieldwork, and platform-building, were not only designed for data collection but also for fostering mutual engagement and reciprocity. The documentation phase created detailed digital surrogates of the collection; the fieldwork stage gathered insights and cultural interpretations from local communities; and the platform-building phase translated these findings into openly accessible digital repositories. This approach is adaptable to other contexts of displaced heritage, particularly where physical restitution is infeasible. Furthermore, it bridges academic research and community practice, providing a replicable model that integrates scholarly rigour with social relevance.

Finally, this study contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge production within museums and heritage institutions. By placing community perspectives at the centre, promoting shared authorship, and prioritising access over exclusivity, it challenges the structural hierarchies that have long defined Western museological practice. More than merely documenting Nias' heritage, the project facilitates its

cultural reactivation, transforming static colonial collections into living archives of identity, dialogue, and creativity. It demonstrates how digital technologies, when guided by ethical and participatory principles, can help rebuild fragmented relationships between institutions and source communities. Ultimately, this research underscores that decolonisation in heritage practice is not achieved through return alone but through the restoration of agency, voice, and ongoing collaboration.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

Just as every journey reaches its end upon arriving at its destination, so too must this research conclude with the completion of this thesis. Yet, many reflections remain, notes that serve not as an ending, but as a bridge toward future work that can expand and deepen the discussions initiated here. Over three years of exploring the Nias collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, the author has discovered that numerous Indonesian ethnographic collections in Italy remain unstudied, whether in public institutions or private holdings. Much like the Nias collection in Florence, these Indonesian artefacts appear almost invisible within current debates on museum decolonisation. This invisibility must be acknowledged. As Gnechchi-Ruscone (2011) and Bigoni et al. (2023) remind us, collections located outside formal colonial relationships risk being trapped in a perpetual cycle of misinterpretation and Eurocentrism unless they are critically re-examined.

To address the question of the presence and dispersal of Indonesian collections in Italy, further research is necessary. Building on this study and earlier works by Monaco (2020), Di Meo (2023), and Soriente (2024) on Italian explorers and scholars in the Indonesian archipelago, future research could undertake a more comprehensive mapping of Indonesian ethnographic collections across Italian museums. Such work is vital, not merely as an archival exercise but as an effort to recover cultural memories of societies that once flourished. In the case of Nias, these collections serve as portraits of a culture transformed by colonialism and missionisation. In other cases, such as the Sakai collection from Riau, donated by Dario Novellino to the Museum of Ethnobotany and Palaeobotany in Naples, they represent communities displaced from their ancestral lands by mining and large-scale deforestation.

Another important direction for future research is to improve digital documentation by leveraging emerging 3D technologies. As discussed in Chapter 6, this study faced some technical challenges when applying photogrammetry to metallic artefacts with reflective surfaces. These objects often caused problems such as glare, distortion, or incomplete 3D models, which reduced the accuracy of the results. To overcome these issues, future projects could adopt new methods, such as 3D Gaussian Splatting, structured-light scanning, or combining photogrammetry with laser or depth sensors.

These technologies can produce clearer, more detailed 3D models, particularly for shiny or uneven objects that are difficult to capture with traditional methods. Better models would not only improve visual quality but also support deeper study, conservation work, and public engagement. Researchers, students, and local communities could explore the artefacts in greater detail, gaining new insights into their design and meaning. By developing more accurate and accessible digital documentation, future research can help strengthen ethical access, preservation, and shared understanding, ensuring that digital restitution continues to grow as an inclusive and responsible practice.

For museums, this research opens an important opportunity to engage more deeply with the process of decolonisation. The study of the Nias collection and the insights gained from local perspectives demonstrate that communities of origin do not always seek the physical return of their heritage. What they often desire instead is the return of knowledge and technique, the revival of traditions that can once again find meaning in contemporary life, and, equally, the recognition of indigenous rights and voices within museum spaces. These reflections should guide future collaborations between museums, as stewards of cultural heritage, and source communities, as custodians of living knowledge. By fostering this dialogue, museums can evolve from institutions of preservation into spaces of ethical exchange, where shared heritage becomes a bridge rather than a boundary between worlds.

*This page is intentionally left blank*

## References

- Abadia, O.M. (2002). Towards a Definition of Time in Archaeology: French Prehistoric Archaeology (1850-1900). *Institute of Archaeology*, 13, pp. 51-63. <https://student-journals.ucl.ac.uk/pia/article/414/galley/533/view/>
- Abadia, O.M. (2005). Pour une nouvelle histoire des sciences humaines: Lartet, Mortillet, Piette et le temps de la Préhistoire. *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française* T. 102, No. 4 (Octobre-déc. 2005), pp. 715-720.
- Abt, J. (2011). The Origins of the Public Museum. In Macdonald, S. (ed). 2011. *A Companion to Museum Studies*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Agisoft LLC. (2022). *Agisoft Metashape User Manual: Professional Edition, Version 1.8*.
- Anderson, S. (2024). Trove of 600 Looted Italian Artifacts Worth \$65 Million Comes Home. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/trove-600-looted-italian-artifacts-worth-65-million-comes-home-180984451/> accessed on 13/08/2025.
- Allen H. 1895. Correspondence. *The Classification of the Skulls*. *Science*, 1: 381.
- Aplers, S. (1991). The Museum as a Way of Seeing. Article in Karp, I., and Lavine, S.D. (eds). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1986). *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Appadurai, A. (2017). Museum Objects as Accidental Refugees. *Historische Anthropologie* Vol. 25 (3): 401-408. <https://doi.org/10.7788/ha-2017-0306>
- Ardiyansyah, P. (2021). Restitution and National Heritage: (Art) Historical Trajectories of Raden Saleh's Paintings. In Tythacott, L., and Ardiyansyah, P. *Returning Southeast Asia's Past. Objects, Museums, and Restitutions*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Ardiyansyah, P. (2023). Caring for a national hero's weapon: Object restitution in the Indonesian (legal) context. Article in BIICL Blog, last accessed 25/07/2025, <https://www.biicl.org/blog/64/caring-for-a-national-heros-weapon-object-restitution-in-the-indonesian-legal-context>
- Ardiyansyah, P. (2025). Beyond the spotlight: A need for regulating community-led object repatriation. Article in BIICL Blog, last accessed 25/07/2025,

<https://www.biicl.org/blog/103/beyond-the-spotlight-a-need-for-regulating-community-led-object-repatriation?cookieset=1&ts=1752134242>

- Ariese, C.E., & Wróblewska, M. (2022). *Practising Decoloniality in Museums, a Guide with Global Examples*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Ariese, C.E., Pozzi, L., & Wawrzyniak, J. (2021). Curating colonial heritage in Amsterdam, Warsaw and Shanghai's museums: No single road to decolonization. In *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354929648\\_Curating\\_colonial\\_heritage\\_in\\_Amsterdam\\_Warsaw\\_and\\_Shanghai's\\_museums](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354929648_Curating_colonial_heritage_in_Amsterdam_Warsaw_and_Shanghai's_museums) accessed on 20/10/2025.
- Bacci, F. (2024). Reconceptualizing museum decolonisation: A proposal for the repatriation of agency. *Routledge Open Research*, pp.3–20. <https://doi.org/10.12688/routledgeopenres.18053.1>
- Bakker, L. (2004). At Nias or From Nias? Museum Displays, National Images and Local Reality in a West Indonesian Island. In Kerlougé, F. (ed.). *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*. Horniman Museum.
- Barocchi, P., and Ragionieri, G. (eds). (1983). *Gli Uffizi: Quattro secoli di una galleria*, 2 vol. Florence: Olschki.
- Barrkman, J. (2017). *Return to Baguia: an ethnographic museum collection on the edge of living memory*. Doctoral Thesis, The Australian National University.
- Barrkman, J. (2021). Digital Return of an Ethnographic Museum Collection and Value Creation by an Originating Community in Baguia, Timor-Leste. In Morphy, H. (ed.). *Museum, Societies and the Creation of Value*. London: Routledge.
- Barsanti, G., & Landi, M. (2014). Anthropology, ethnology and comparative psychology: the museum of the “natural history of man”. Paolo Mantegazza and Aldobrando Mochi. In Cecchi, J.M., and Stanyon, R. (eds). *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze - Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Basu, P. (2011). Objects Diasporas, Resourcing Communities: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape. *Museum Anthropology* Vol. 34 (1): 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01105.x>
- Beatty, A. (2012). The Tell-Tale Heart: Conversion and Emotion in Nias. *Ethnos Journal of Anthropology*, 77 (3), pp. 295-320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2011.609943>

- Bennett, T. (2018). Introduction, Museums, Power, Knowledge. *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research*, 6, pp. 1-16. Berghan Books. doi:10.3167/armw.2018.060102
- Berger, S. (2015). National museums in between nationalism, imperialism and regionalism, 1750-1914. In Aronsson, P., and Elgenius, G. (eds). *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe 1750-2010. Mobilization and legitimacy, continuity and change*. New York: Routledge.
- Bergvelt, E., et al. (eds). (2009). *Napoleon's Legacy. The Rise of National Museums in Europe 1794-1830*. Berlin: Berliner Schriftenreihe zur Museumsforschung.
- Bertolino, M.A. (2011). *Museology and ethnography in Italy: a historical perspective*. Article in Conference proceedings from EuNaMUs, European National Museum: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June-1 July & 25-26 November 2011. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodestein & Jose Maria Lanzarote Giral (eds). Linköping University Electronic Press, <https://ep.liu.se/ecp/078/018/ecp12078018.pdf>
- Besterman, T. (2020). Contested human remains in museums. In Fforde, C., McKeown, C.T., Keeler, H. (eds). *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203730966>
- Bigoni, F., Dionisio, G., & Barbagli, F. (2019a). Con seria intenzione di studiare gli uomini e le cose: Elio Modigliani e le sue raccolte etnografiche. *Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia*, Vol. CXLIX, pp. 2-22.
- Bigoni, F., Dionisio, G., & Barbagli, F. (2019b). L'etnografia di Elio Modigliani: rilettura di una collezione dell'800. *Museologia Scientifica* (13), pp. 68-75.
- Bigoni, F., & Barbagli, F. (2023). Elio Modigliani in Indonesia: Nineteenth century views of natives and Dutch colonizers. *Museologia Scientifica*, 17, pp. 7-17.
- Billi, D., Caroti, G., & Piemonte, A. (2025). Metric Error Assessment Regarding Geometric 3D Reconstruction of Transparent Surfaces via SfM Enhanced by 2D and 3D Gaussian Splatting. *Sensors*, 25 (14), <https://doi.org/10.3390/s25144410>
- Boas, F. (1912). Changes in the Bodily form of descendants of immigrants. *American Anthropologist*, 14 (3), pp. 530-562. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1912.14.3.02a00080>
- Boast, R. (2011). Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited. *Museum Anthropology*, 34 (1), pp. 56-70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01107.x>

- Boehme, F. (2025). Restitution of colonial heritage collections: Partial norm implementation in Belgium and the United Kingdom. *Review of International Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210525101113>
- Bonilla, MLA. (2017). Some Theoretical and Empirical Aspects on the Decolonization of Western Collections. *OnCurating*, 35, pp.129-139. <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35-reader/some-theoretical-and-empirical-aspects-on-the-decolonization-of-western-collections.html>
- Bramantyo, B. (2012). Identifikasi Arsitektur Rumah Tradisional Nias Selatan dan Perubahannya. *Jurnal Permukiman* 7 (3), pp. 151-161. <https://doi.org/10.31815/jp.2012.7.151-161>
- Brinkman, S. (2014). Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing. In Leavy, P. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, December 27). decolonization. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/decolonization>
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, December 16). imperialism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/imperialism>
- Broccolini, A. (2013). Intangible Cultural Heritage Scenarios within the Bureaucratic Italian State. In Bendix, R.F., et al. (eds). *Heritage Regimes and the State*. Gottingen: Gottingen University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.gup.395>.
- Browning, R. (1984). The case for the return of the Parthenon Marbles. *Museum*, XXXVI, P. 38-41. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000059731>
- Brückner, Uwe R., & Linda Greci, eds. 2016. *Eurovision – Museums Exhibiting Europe (EMEE): Translation of Perspectives. Scenography – a Sketchbook*. Edition mono: Wien
- Budasz, D., & Wurzer, M. (2023). *Postcolonial Italy, A Public History Project Mapping Colonial Heritage. Interventions*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2023.2222710>
- Callomon, P. (2021). A basic guide to specimen photography in museum collections. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350530306\\_A\\_basic\\_guide\\_to\\_specimen\\_photography\\_in\\_museum\\_collections](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350530306_A_basic_guide_to_specimen_photography_in_museum_collections) accessed on 14/10/2025.
- Canadian Heritage. (2025). Government of Canada returns three reliquaries to the Italian Republic. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2025/03/government-of-canada-returns-three-reliquaries-to-the-italian-republic.html> accessed on 23.04.2025

- Caple, C. (2006). *Reluctant Witness to the Past*. London: Routledge.
- Carey, P. (2015). Curator's Talk in 'Aku Diponegoro Exhibition. In article "Tolong! 2 Prasasti Sejarah Milik RI ini Terlantar di Inggris dan India." <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2826481/tolong-2-prasasti-sejarah-milik-ri-ini-telantar-di-inggris-dan-india> accessed on 23/08/2025.
- Cecchi, J.M., and Stanyon, R. (2014). *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Universita degli Studi di Firenze - Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Cerro, G. (2017). Giuseppe Sergi. The Portrait of a positivist scientist. *Journal of Anthropological Sciences*, Vol. 95, pp. 109-136.
- Cechi, A. (2008). The Return of Cultural Objects Removed in Times of Colonial Domination and International Law: Case of the Venus of Cyrene. Article in Pavoni, R. (ed). *The Italian Yearbook of International Law Online*. Brill Nijhoff, pp. 159-181.
- Cechi, A., Bandle, A.L., & Renold, A. (2012). Case Venus of Cyrene - Italy and Libya. *Arthemis*, <https://plone.unige.ch/art-adr/cases-affaires/venus-of-cyrene-2013-italy-and-libya/case-note-2013-venus-of-cyrene>, accessed on 28/08/2025.
- Chen, K.T.N. (2013). The Disciplinary Power of Museums. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, Vol. 3, No. 4. DOI: 10.7763/IJSSH.2013.V3.271
- Christen, K. (2011). Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation. *American Archivist*, vol. 74, No. 1, pp. 185-210. doi: 10.17723/aarc.74.1.4233nv6nv6428521.
- Cipriani, L. (1932). *In Africa dal Capo al Cairo*. Florence: Bemporad.
- Cirese, A. M. (1973). *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne*. 2nd edition. Palermo: Palumbo.
- Clark, L. (2022). Yours, Mine, and Ours: International Law and the Problem of Museum Repatriation. *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 31 (1), 175-194.
- Clemente, P. & Rossi, E. (1999). *Il terzo principio della museografia*. *Antropologia, contadini, musei*. Roma: Carocci.
- Clifford, J. (1997). Museums as Contact Zones. In Clifford, J. (ed.). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Pp. 188–219. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Corns, A., et al. (2024). Developing enhanced and enriched 3D Models of Cultural Heritage Assets as part of the EU Co-funded 5DCulture Project. *The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, Vol. XLVIII-2/W4-2024.
- Cornut, M., Raemy, J.A., & Spiess, F. (2023). Annotations as Knowledge Practices in Image Archives: Application of Linked Open Usable Data and Machine Learning. *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 16 (4), pp. 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3625301>
- Croci, G. (2009). From Italy to Ethiopia: the dismantling, transportation and re-erection of the Axum Obelisk. *Museum International*, Vol. 61, No. 1-2, 61-67.
- Cusicanqui, S.R. 2012. Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A reflection on Practices and discourses of decolonization. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111(1), pp. 95-109.
- D'Albertis, L.M. (1880). *New Guinea. What I dia and What I Saw*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivingston.
- Dani, R. (2025). Suara Leluhur Nias Kembali Menggema, Dialog “Suara yang Pulang” Hidupkan Warisan Budaya. *Times Indonesia*, <https://timesindonesia.co.id/indonesia-positif/548107/suara-leluhur-nias-kembali-menggema-dialog-suara-yang-pulang-hidupkan-warisan-budaya> accessed on 29/09/2025.
- De Caro, S. (2003). *Il Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*. Naples: Electa Napoli.
- De Clippele, M-S., & Demasin, B. (2022). Pioneering Belgium: Parliamentary Legislation on the Restitution of Colonial Collections. *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, 2/2022 (8), pp. 323-340. <https://doi.org/10.4467/2450050XSNR.22.022.17035>
- De Gruy, L. (2023). *Reframing Culture: The Decolonization and Repatriation Process in the Italian Museum System*. Honors Theses. 3018. [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon\\_thesis/3018?utm\\_source=egrove.olemiss.edu%2Fhon\\_thesis%2F3018&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/3018?utm_source=egrove.olemiss.edu%2Fhon_thesis%2F3018&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages).
- De la Varre, A. (1936). *Nias and Sumatra*. <https://www.travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=13967&keywords=Andre+d+e+la+Varre+Andre+de+la+Varre&startrow=160> accessed on 05/10/2025.
- Di Meo, A. (2023). Italian explorations in Southeast Asia. In Tortarolo, E. (ed.). *Cosmopolitan Italy in the Age of Nations. Transnational visions from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge pp. 161-174.

- Dickison, M. (2020). An Auckland Museum Wikimedia Strategy. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e5/An\\_Auckland\\_Museum\\_Wikimedia\\_Strategy\\_Dickison\\_May\\_2020.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e5/An_Auckland_Museum_Wikimedia_Strategy_Dickison_May_2020.pdf) accessed on 30/09/2025.
- Deloria, V. Jr. (1969). *Custer Died for Your Sins. An Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan.
- Duclos-Orsello, E. (2013). Shared Authority: The Key to Museum Education as Social Change. *Journal of Museum Education*, 38 (2), pp. 121-128.
- Dudha, A. (2025). Indigenous leaders call on the new Pope to return thousands of artifacts. CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/indigenous-leaders-call-pope-return-artifacts-1.7536529> accessed on 29/09/2025.
- Edmundson, A. (2023). Decolonisation, Indigenisation and Digital Returns: Two case studies from Australia. *Museum International*, Vol 74, Issue 3-4, pp. 94–105.
- Falcucci, B. (2021). Bringing the Empire to the Provinces: Colonial Museums and Colonial. Knowledge in Fascist Italy. *Cahiers François Viète* [Online], III-10 | 2021, Online since 01 April 2021, connection on 18 February 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cahierscfv.402>
- Fanizzo, K. (2005). Object ID: A Model of Global Collaboration. *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 20 (21).
- Feldman, J. (1990). Nias and its traditional sculptures. In Gronett, W. et al (eds). *Nias Tribal Treasures: cosmic reflections in stone, wood and gold*. Delft: Volkenkundig Museum Nusantara.
- Feldman, J. (1994). The adaptation of indigenous form to western taste: the case of Nias. In Taylor, P.M. (ed). *Fragile traditions: Indonesian art in jeopardy*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ferrero, G.L. (1911). *Criminal Man, according to the classification of Cesare Lombroso*. London: The Knickerbocker Press.
- Findlen, P. (1996). *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Forlin, P., Valente, R., & Kazmer, M. (2018). Assessing Earthquakes' Effects on Archaeological Sites using Photogrammetry and 3D Model Analysis. *Digital Application in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.daach.2018.e00073>
- Forni, G. (1999). Ethnographic museums in Italy: a decade of phenomenal growth. *Museum International*, No. 204, Vol. 51 (4), pp.47-52

- Frisch, M. (1990). *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Fromm, A.B. (2016). Ethnographic museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage return to our roots. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* (2016) 5, pp.89–94.
- Frost, A., et al. (2023). Digital Documentation of Reflective Objects: A Cross-Polarised Photogrammetry Workflow for Complex Materials. In Ioannides, M., & Patias, P. (Eds.): *3D Research Challenges in Cultural Heritage III*, LNCS 13125, pp. 131–155, 2023. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35593-6\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35593-6_7)
- Gallagher, S. (2010). Museums and the Return of Human Remains: An Equitable Solution? *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 17 (1), pp. 68-86. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739110000019>
- Garvilis, D., Ioannides, M., & Theofanous, E. (2015). Cultural Heritage Content Re-Use: An Aggregator’s Point of View. *ISPRS Annals of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, Volume II-5/W3, 2015 25th International CIPA Symposium 2015, 31 August– 04 September 2015, Taipei, Taiwan.
- Gea, S.R., & Zazali, H. (2023). Hombo batu sebagai Media Penguatan Moderasi Beragama di Kepulauan Nias. *Journal of Education Research*, 42 (2), pp. 583-591.
- Gibson, L. (2024). Digitization is not decolonization. *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 12 (2024), p. 31-46. <https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2024.120104>
- Giglioli, H.H. (1890). Modigliani’s exploration of Nias Island. *Nature*, Vol. 41, No. 1069, pp. 587-591. [https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/link\\_gateway/1890Natur..41..587G/doi:10.1038/041587b0](https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/link_gateway/1890Natur..41..587G/doi:10.1038/041587b0)
- Girardi, G. (2022). Museum: Italy. In Leerssen, J. (ed). *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*. Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462981188/ngFM7R16rFWBrQsUYFYB1Mep>
- Gnecchi-Ruscone, E. (2011). From New Guinea 1872-78 to Genova 2004: recovering Luigi Maria D’Albertis’ private collection. *Journal de la Société des Oceanistes*, 132, pp. 165-181.
- Grechi, G. (2021). *Decolonizzare il museo. Mostrazioni, pratiche artistiche, sguardi incarnati*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Griffiths, A., Sastrawan, W.J., & Bastiawan, E. (2024). Restoring a Javanese Inscription to its Proper Place. *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde /*

- Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia, 2024, 180 (2-3), pp.133-211. 10.1163/22134379-bja10060.hal-04629294
- Griffiths, P., & Scarantino, A. (2008). Emotions in the Wild: The Situated Perspective on Emotion. Article in Robbins, A. (ed). Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition, pp.437–444. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guermendi, M.P. (2021). Decolonizzare Il Patrimonio. Roma: Lit Edizioni.
- Hagen, H.A. (1876). The History of the Origin and Development of Museums. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/271587> accessed on 13/10/2025.
- Hamm, A. (2024). From European Museums to African Homeland: Restitution as Geopolitics. <https://euides.eui.eu/2024/02/01/from-european-museums-to-african-homelands-restitution-as-geopolitics/> accessed on 14/08/2025.
- Hämmerle, P.J. (2017). Pasukan Belanda di kampung para penjagal. Gunungsitoli: Yayasan Pusaka Nias.
- Hanke, K., & Grussenmeyer, P. (2002). Architectural Photogrammetry: Basic Theory, Procedures, Tools. Kasser, M., & Egels, Y. (eds). Digital Photogrammetry. Taylor & Francis, pp. 300-339.
- Hardesty, J.L., et al. (2020). 3D Data Repository Features, Best Practices, and Implications for Preservation Models: Findings from a National Forum. College & Research Libraries, 81 (5), <https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/24512/32346>
- Harris, G. (2022). Your move, British Museum: Sicily sends back Parthenon fragment to Athens. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/01/06/sicily-sends-back-parthenon-fragment-to-athens> accessed on 13/08/2025.
- Hess, R.L. (1963). Italy and Africa: Colonial Ambitions in the First World War. Journal of African History, IV (1), pp. 105-126.
- Heydenreich, G. (2011). Documentation of Change - Change of Documentation. Scholte, T., & Wharton, G. (eds). Inside Installations. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Hickley, C. (2020). Italy hands Nazi-looted Renaissance sculpture from the Uffizi to Germany. [https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/02/21/italy-hands-nazi-looted-renaissance-sculpture-from-the-uffizi-to-germany?utm\\_source=The%20Art%20Newspaper%20Newsletters&utm\\_campaign=7b4fa80d2c-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_02\\_20\\_08\\_56&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_c459f924d0-7b4fa80d2c-61273417](https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/02/21/italy-hands-nazi-looted-renaissance-sculpture-from-the-uffizi-to-germany?utm_source=The%20Art%20Newspaper%20Newsletters&utm_campaign=7b4fa80d2c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_02_20_08_56&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c459f924d0-7b4fa80d2c-61273417) accessed 13/08/2025

- Hiraide, L.A. (2021). Postcolonial Decolonial Anti-colonial: Does it Matter? *New Voices in Postcolonial Studies Magazine*. Summer 2021, pp.10-15.
- Hopkins, O. (2021). *The Museums, from its Origins to the 21st Century*. London: Frances Lincoln.
- Huff, L. (2022). *Museum Decolonization: Moving Away From Narratives told by the Oppressors*. <https://smea.uw.edu/currents/museum-decolonization-moving-away-from-narratives-told-by-the-oppressors/> accessed on 21/10/2025.
- ICOM. (1995). *International Guidelines for Museum Object Information: the CIDOC Information Categories*. Paris: The International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums.
- ICOM (2017). *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museum*. Paris: International Council of Museums.
- Ingold, T. (2008). Anthropology is Not Ethnography. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 154, pp.69–92.
- Impey, O., & Macgregor, A. (eds.). (1985). /2001. *The Origins of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (1st published 1985). North Yorkshire: House of Stratus.
- Iverson, D. (2024, December 19). postcolonialism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postcolonialism>
- Jaha, E. (2024). *Repatriation Laws of Indigenous Human Skeletal Remains, Native Americans and Maori case studies*. Thesis, Uppsala University.
- Jalla D. (2003). *Il museo contemporaneo. Introduzione al nuovo sistema museale italiano*. Torino: UTET.
- Jourdan, A. (2009). A national tragedy during the French Restoration: the return of the works of art to their countries (1815). Article in Bergvelt, E., et al. (eds). *Napoleon's Legacy. The Rise of National Museums in Europe 1794-1830*. Berlin: Berliner Schriftenreihe zur Museumsforschung.
- Kapsalis, E. (2016). *The Impact of Open Access on Galleries, Libraries, Museums and Archives*. Smithsonian Emerging Leaders Development Program, [https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/2016\\_03\\_10\\_OpenCollections\\_Public.pdf](https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/2016_03_10_OpenCollections_Public.pdf) accessed on 30/09/2025.
- Karp, I., & Lavine, S. (eds.). (1991). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute.

- Kassim, S. (2017). The museum will not be decolonised. <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/> accessed on 05/02/2025, 09.32 CET
- Keurs, P. (1999). Things of the Past? Museums and Ethnographic Objects. *Journal des Africanistes*, 69, 1, pp. 67-80.
- Kleiweg de Zwaan, J.P. (1914). *Anthropologische Untersuchungen über die Niasser*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Kreps, C. (2011). Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology. In Marstine, J (ed.). *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*. London: Routledge.
- Kreps, C. (2020). *Museums and Anthropology in the Age of Engagement*. New York: Routledge.
- Kuever, J. (2024). Framing participatory methods in provenance research: From the restitution of objects to a collaborative production of knowledge. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 52-1, pp. 74–88. <https://doi.org/10.4000/11zlt>
- Kunst, J. (1950). *Musicologica: A Study of the Nature of Ethnomusicology, Its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut (Mededeling; 90 / Afdeling Culturele en Fysische Antropologie; 35) [2nd exp. Ed., retitled *Ethnomusicology*, 1955; 3rd ed. 1959].
- Lai, L. (2023). The archive of faces and the archive of plaster. Reading anthropological facial plaster-casts taken from living individuals from the former Netherlands East Indies. *Wacana*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp.570-593.
- Lamphey, P., & Apoh, W. (2020). *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, 7 (1), pp. 97-115. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/contjas.v7i1>.
- Landi, M., and Cecchi, J.M. (2014). Colonial anthropology: from the people of the world to the Fascist man, Nello Puccioni, Lidio Cipriani. In Cecchi, J.M., and Stanyon, R. (eds). *The Museum of Natural History of the University of Florence. The Anthropological and Ethnological Collections*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Lang, S. (2018). *Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts*. Berlin, German Museums Association.
- Lase, I.W., Indrawadi, J., & Montessori, M. (2021). Pergeseran Fungsi Tradisi Hombo Batu pada Masyarakat Nias Selatan. *Anthropos: Jurnal Antropologi Sosial dan Budaya*, 7 (1), pp. 113-122.

- Laurenmich-Minelli, L. (1985). *Museography and Ethnological Collections in Bologna during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. In Impey, O., and Macgregor, A. (eds). 1985/2001. *The Origins of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (1st published 1985). North Yorkshire: House of Stratus.
- Lawan, S., & Yusuf, U. (2021). Digital Documentation of Museum Collections for Sustainable Development. *Journal of Social Sciences Advancement*, 2 (3), pp. 85-91.
- Lazzeretti, L., & Sartori, A. (2016). Digitisation of Cultural Heritage and Business Model Innovation: The Case of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. *Il Capitale Culturale*, 14, pp. 945-970. <https://doi.org/10.13138/2039-2362/1436>
- Lee, J., et al. (2025). 3D Gaussian Splatting for Enhanced Documentation of Cultural Artifacts. *ISPRS Ann. Photogramm. Remote Sens. Spatial Inf. Sci.*, X-M-2-2025, 215–222, <https://doi.org/10.5194/isprs-annals-X-M-2-2025-215-2025>.
- Lejeune, B. (2007). *The effects of Online Catalogues in London and other Museums: A study of an Alternative Way of Access*. Institute of Archaeology S1, pp. 79–97.
- Leventhal, R.M., & Daniels, B.I. (2013). Orphaned Objects, Ethical Standards, and the Acquisition of Antiquities. *DePaul Journal of Art, Technology & Intellectual Property Law*, Vol. 23 (2): 339-361.
- Lerario, M.G. (2011). The National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography “Luigi Pigorini” in Rome: the Nation on Display. Article in Conference proceedings from EuNaMUs, European National Museum: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June-1 July & 25-26 November 2011. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodestein & Jose Maria Lanzarote Guiral (eds). Linköping University Electronic Press, <https://ep.liu.se/ecp/078/005/ecp12078005.pdf>.
- Leshchinskii, K. (2023). Nostalgia, Situated Affectivity and Museification. *Thaumazein*, Vol. 11, No. 1, <https://doi.org/10.13136/thau.v11i1.236>
- Lindemann, D. (2025). FAIR data in Wiki-platforms. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14746111>
- Lixinski, L. (2020). Digital Heritage Surrogates, Decolonization, and International Law: Restitution, Control, and the Creation of Value as Reparations and Emancipation. *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, 6 (2), pp. 65-86.
- Lombroso, C. (1876). *L'uomo delinquente studiato in rapporto alla antropologia, alla medicina legale, ed alle discipline carcerarie*. Milan: Hoepli.

- Lonetree, A. (2012). *Decolonizing Museums. Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Loumpet - Galitzine, A. (2009). *Displaced Objects, Objects in Exile. Changing Virtues of Cameroon Objects in the West*. Article on Anderson, J (ed.) *Crossing cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence: Conference Papers of the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of the History of Art*. Melbourne, Miegunyah Press.
- Macdonald, S. (ed). (2011). *A Companion to Museum Studies*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Mantegazza, P. (1882). *Commemorazione di Carlo Darwin. Celebrata nel R. Istituto di studi superiori in Firenze [Commemoration of Charles Darwin]. Celebrated in the Royal Institute of Advanced Studies in Florence*. Firenze: Coi Tipi Dell'Arte della Stampa.
- Mantegazza, Paolo. (1893). *Di alcune recenti proposte diriforme della craniologia*. *Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia* 23: 45–55.
- Mantegazza, Paolo. (1906). *Un falso indirizzo dell'antropologia in Italia*. *Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia* 36: 189–93.
- Mao, R., & Fu, Y. (2021). *Interweaving multiple contexts for objects in museum exhibitions: a contextual approach*. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 37, (5), pp. 491-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2021.1914141>
- Maranda, L. (2021). *Decolonization within the Museum*. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 49-2, pp.180-195. <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.3863>
- Mariam, H. (2009). *The cultural benefits of the return of the Axum Obelisk*. *Museum International*, Vol. 61, No. 1-2, 48-51.
- Marinelli, M., & Andornino, G. (2013). *Italy's Encounters with Modern China: Imperial Dreams, Strategic Ambitions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mazzarello, P. (2011). *Cesare Lombroso: an anthropologist between evolution and degeneration*. *Functional Neurology*, Vol. 26 (2), pp. 97-101.
- McClellan, A. (1994). *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McClellan, A. (2003). *Brief History of the Art Museum Public*. In McClellan, A. (ed). *Art in Its Publics. Museum Studies at the Millennium. New Interventions in Art History*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- McClellan, A. (2009). Article in Bergvelt, E., et al. (eds). *Napoleon's Legacy. The Rise of National Museums in Europe 1794-1830*. Berlin: Berliner Schriftenreihe zur Museumsforschung.
- Meigs, J.A. (1866). *Observations Upon the Cranial Forms of the American Aborigines Based Upon Specimens Contained in the Collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*. *Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia*, 18: 197-235.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Photogrammetry*. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved October 14, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/photogrammetry>
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C.E. (2018). *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. London: Duke University Press.
- Modest, W. (2023). *Decolonisation as Infra-structure: Can the Museum be Decolonised?* In *Museums, Decolonisation and Restitution: a global conversation*, Shanghai University, 20-21 March 2023.
- Modigliani, E. (1886a). *Escursione Nell Isola Nias*. *Bollettino Societa Geografica*, 2 (11), December 1886. pp. 781- 787. <https://www.bsgi.it/index.php/bsgi/article/view/3565/2883>
- Modigliani, E. (1886b). *Escursione Nell Isola Nias*. *Bollettino Societa Geografica*, 2 (11), December 1886. pp. 854- 862. <https://www.bsgi.it/index.php/bsgi/article/view/3572/2890>
- Modigliani, E. (1890). *Un viaggio a Nias*. Milan: Fratelli Treves.
- Mohammed, A. (2025). *Beyond Access: Rethinking Ownership, Justice, and Decolonization in Digital Repatriation Initiatives*. <https://heritagemanagement.org/beyond-access-rethinking-ownership-justice-and-decolonization-in-digital-repatriation-initiatives/> accessed on 17/10/2025.
- Monaco, G. (2020). *The Modigliani's collection of Batak manuscripts at the Museum of Anthropology in Florence: description and philological analysis of the manuscript 11118*. Doctoral thesis Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale.
- Montella, E.M. (2024). *Exhibiting Colonialism: Reflections on Ethnographic Museums*. Article on ICOM Voices, <https://icom.museum/en/news/exhibiting-colonialism-reflections-on-ethnographic-museums/>, accessed on 18/02/2025, 09.11 CET.

- Mooren, J., et al. (2022). *Jejak: Penelitian sejarah asal usul dan pemaksaan benda-benda dan koleksi budaya yang diperoleh dalam situasi kolonial*. Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- Morgan, D. L. (2002). Focus group interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context & method*. (pp. 141–160). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mosko, M. (2009). Black Powder, White Magic: European Armaments and Sorcery in Early Mekeo and Roro Encounters. In Jolly, M., Tcherkezoff, S., & Tyron, D. (eds.). *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence*. Canberra: ANU E-Press, pp. 259-293.
- Muller-Scheessel, N. (2001). Fair Prehistory: Archaeological Exhibits at French Expositions Universelles. *Antiquity* (75), pp.391-401.
- Muñoz, A., et al. (2022). Decolonising ethnographic databases: a pilot project of data migration from the Swedish National Museum of World Culture's Carlotta to the open-source software Tainacan, version 1.0. Published on Europeana Pro, 25 August 2022.
- Munzi, M. (2001). *L'Epica del ritorno. Archaeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana*. Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Murphy, A. (2017). Exploring 3D on Europeana with Sketchfab. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/stories/exploring-3d-on-europeana-with-sketchfab>, accessed on 19/09/2025.
- Mutibwa, D.H., Hess, A., & Jackson, T. (2020). Strokes of serendipity: Community co-curation and engagement with digital heritage. *Convergence*, 26 (1). pp. 157-177.
- Nadeau, B.L. (2023). Seized artifacts worth \$20 million are shown off on return to Italy. <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/italy-looted-ancient-artifacts-return-scli-intl/index.html> accessed 12/08/2025
- Nastiti, T.S., Bastiawan, E., & Griffiths, A. (2022). Towards a Corpus of Inscriptions Issued during Airlangga's Reign in Eastern Java, A Provisional Inventory and Four New Inscriptions. *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 108 (2022), pp. 63-216.
- Nguyen, Q.H. (2024). *Abandoned landscape museification - the cases in Milan*. Milan: Doctoral Thesis Politecnico Milano.
- Nieuwnhuisen, J.T. & von Rosenberg, H.C.B. (1863). *Verslag omtrent het eiland Nias en deszelfs bewoners. Met platen en eene Kaart*.

- Nunn, N., and Whetung, M. (2020). Anticolonialism. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. London: Elsevier
- Nurjaman, J. (2020). Dekolonisasi Arsip sebagai Warisan Budaya: Kajian Awal Pengembalian Arsip Statis Era Hindia -Belanda. *Khazanah: Jurnal Pengembangan Kearsipan*, Vol. 13 (1), pp.75-90.
- Olmi, G. (1985). Science - Honour - Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. In Impey, O., and Macgregor, A. (eds). 1985/2001. *The Origins of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (1st published 1985). North Yorkshire: House of Stratus.
- Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984). London: Secker & Warburg.
- Panayot, N. (2023). Gender diversity and inclusive representation as a means to decolonise museums. *Gender & Development*, Vol. 31, Issue 2-3, pp. 495-514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2023.2259204>
- Pekel, J. (2014). Democratising the Rijksmuseum: Why did the Rijksmuseum make available their highest quality material without restrictions, and what are the results?  
[https://pro.europeana.eu/files/Europeana\\_Professional/Publications/Democratising%20the%20Rijksmuseum.pdf](https://pro.europeana.eu/files/Europeana_Professional/Publications/Democratising%20the%20Rijksmuseum.pdf) accessed on 15/10/2025.
- Penny, H.G., & Bunzl, M. (2003). *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Perera, K. (2018). Implementing Best Practices in Museum Documentation in Developing Countries. *Proceedings of CIDOC ICOM International Conferences*. [https://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/Kamani\\_Perera\\_-\\_Implementing\\_Best\\_Practices\\_in\\_Museum\\_Documentation\\_in\\_Developing\\_countries.pdf](https://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/Kamani_Perera_-_Implementing_Best_Practices_in_Museum_Documentation_in_Developing_countries.pdf) accessed on 30/09/2025.
- Pickering, M., & Gordon, P. (2011). Understanding Museums - Indigenous people and museums. Repatriation: the end of the beginning. In Griffin, D., & Parossien, L. (eds). *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*. National Museum of Australia. [http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Indigenous\\_people\\_and\\_museums.html](http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Indigenous_people_and_museums.html) accessed on 05/10/2025.
- Pinna, G. (2009). I musei nelle dittature: Germania, Italia, Spagna. *Nuova Museologia*, Vol. 21, pp.2-33.

- Poske, C. (2024). Digital Repatriation of Cultural Heritage. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Cultural Heritage and Conflict*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67932-6\\_130-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67932-6_130-1)
- Poulter, M. (2024). Wikimedia and open research: a Primer from UKRN. <https://www.ukrn.org/2024/05/17/wikimedia-and-open-research-a-primer-from-ukrn/> accessed on 14/10/2025.
- Prott, L.V. (2009). *Witness to History*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000185386> accessed on 14/08/2025.
- Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P., & Aljas, A. (2009). Digital Cultural Heritage - Challenging Museums, Archives and Users. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 3 (1), pp. 109-127.
- Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P., & Runnel, P. (2014). Increasing the Usability of the Museum: Four Studies. In Runnel, P., & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P. (eds). *Democratising the Museum - Reflection on the Participatory Technologies*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Academic Research.
- Puccini, S. (2014). I viaggiatori nel Museo. In Cecchi, J.M., and Stanyon, R. (eds). *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze - Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Puccioni, V. (2016). *Tanah Para Pendekar, Petualangan Elio Modigliani di Nias Selatan Tahun 1886*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Purnawibawa, A.G., et al. (2021). Peluang dan Tantangan Digitalisasi Warisan Budaya Benda dan Tak Benda sebagai Upaya Pelestarian Budaya Indonesia. In Yasa, I.P., et al (eds). *Sejarah dan Kearifan Lokal di Era Globalisasi*. Klaten: Penerbit Lakeisha.
- Purnawibawa, A.G., et al. (2025). Warisan Budaya Ono Niha di Museum-Museum Italia. Buleleng: Satu Jengkal Indonesia.
- Purnawibawa, A.G. (2025). Bridging Legacies: Multiperspective Insights of Local Stakeholders on the Decolonisation of Nias Ethnographic Collections in Italian Museums. *Il Capitale Culturale*, 32, <https://doi.org/10.13138/2039-2362/3693>
- Quijano, A. (2000a). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 1 (3), pp.533-580.
- Quijano, A. (2000b). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, Vol. 15 (2). pp. 215-232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>

- Rachmandita, A. (2024). AS Kembali Benda Bersejarah Peninggalan Majapahit ke Indonesia. *Historia*, 27 April 2024, <https://www.historia.id/article/as-kembalikan-benda-bersejarah-peninggalan-majapahit-ke-indonesia-plxke> accessed on 22/08/2025
- Ramasso, C. (2018). *Orienti, 7000 anni di arte asiatica dal Museo delle Civiltà di Roma*. Rome: Silvana Editoriale.
- Rassool, C. (2018). *Museum Labels and Coloniality*. In *Words Matter. An unfinished Guide to Word choices in the cultural sector*. The Netherlands: Tropenmuseum.
- Ray, S.F. (2015). *Scientific Photography and Applied Imaging*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Rea, N. (2019a). The British Museum says it will never return the Elgin Marbles, defending their removal as a ‘creative act’. *Artnet*, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/british-museum-wont-return-elgin-marbles-1449919> accessed on 07/08/2025, 14.44 CET.
- Rea, N. (2019b). After a Year of Inaction, France Commits to Returning 26 Looted Artifacts to Benin by 2021. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/france-restitution-26-benin-1735425> accessed on 11/08/2025, 11.42 CET
- Rea, N. (2019c). Amid strengthening political ties with China, Italy gives the go-ahead to repatriate 800 Chinese Cultural Artifacts. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/china-italy-repatriation-1497034> accessed on 13/08/2025.
- Rheindt, F., et al. (2020). A taxonomic and conservation re-appraisal of all the birds on the island of Nias. *The Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*, Vol 68, pp. 496-528. <https://doi.org/10.26107/RBZ-2020-0068>
- Richard, N. (1989). La revue *L’Homme* de Gabriel de Mortillet. *Anthropologie et politique au début de la Troisième République*. *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d’anthropologie de Paris*, 1(3–4), 231–155.
- Richard, N. (1992). L’institutionnalisation de la préhistoire. *Communications*, 54, 189–207.
- Richard, N. (2008). *Inventer la préhistoire. Les débuts de l’Archéologie préhistorique en France*. Paris: Vuibert/Adapt-SNES.
- Righettoni, V. (2022). Photomontage in the Fascist Magazine *La Difesa della razza*. *Visual Sources, Manipulations, Controversies*. *Cromohs* (25), pp. 43-67.

- Rivet, M. (2020). Decolonization and Restitution: Moving Towards a More Holistic and Relational Approach. Report on the Panel on Ethnographic Museums and Indigenous People, ICOM Kyoto, September 2019. *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research*, 8 (2020), pp.204-209.
- Roehrenbeck, C.A. (2010). Repatriation of Cultural Property- Who Owns the Past? An Introduction to Approaches and to Selected Statutory Instruments. *International Journal of Legal Information*, Vol. 38 (2), pp. 185-200.
- Rose-Greenland, F. (2016). Cultural Internationalism and the Italian Model of Repatriation. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. XXIII (1), pp. 143-154.
- Roselli, M.G. (2014). Asia. In Cecchi, J.M., and Stanyon, R. (eds). *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze - Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Roselli, M.G. (2016). Paolo Mantegazza: La Prima Cattedra di Anthropologia in Italia e la Fondazione del Museo. [https://www.archivistorico.unifi.it/upload/sub/ricerche/studi\\_umanistici01/11b\\_roselli.pdf](https://www.archivistorico.unifi.it/upload/sub/ricerche/studi_umanistici01/11b_roselli.pdf) accessed on 13/10/2025.
- Rossi, E. (2017). The Digital Biography of Things: A Canadian Case Study in Digital Repatriation. In Pinton, S., & Zagato, L. (eds). *Sapere l'Europa, Sapere d'Europa*, 4. Cultural Heritage Scenarios 2015-2017. Venice: Venice University Press.
- Russoli, F. (1981). *Il museo nella società. Analisi, proposte, interventi (1952-1977)*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Sabar, et al. (2018). Dinamika Sistem Pemerintahan dan Perlawanan Rakyat Nias Pada Masa Kolonial Belanda. In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional 90 Tahun Sumpah Pemuda*. Padang: Universitas Andalas.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Salm, C., & Weller, M. (2017). *Cross-border restitution claims of looted works of art and cultural goods*. Brussels: European Union.
- Salvadori, T. (1887). Catalogo delle collezioni ornitologiche fatte presso Siboga in Sumatra e nell'isola Nias dal signor Elio Modigliani e descritte da Tommaso Salvadori. *Annali del Museo civico di storia naturale di Genova*, 24: 514–563.
- Salway, D. (2022). Muna Kalyak Blaen: Reconnecting Cultural Identity through Cultural Materials. <https://philippinestudies.uk/mapping/tours/show/30> accessed on 17/10/2025.

- Sanesi, R.G., & Bonfiglioli, G. (2019). Giuseppe Domenico Felli Scultore. Grosseto: Innocenti Editore.
- Santamaria Pena, J., & Sanz Mendez, T. (2011). Fundamentos de Fotogrametría. La Rioja: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Rioja.
- Sarr, F., & Savoy, B. (2018). Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage Toward a New Relational Ethics.
- Scarduelli, P. (1990). Accumulation of heads, distribution of food; The image of power in Nias. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia and Oceania*, 146 (4), pp. 448-462. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003210>
- Schrader, A. (2024). Italy Receives 600 Ancient Artifacts Repatriated from the U.S. *Artnet News*, 30 May 2024, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/us-repatriated-600-artifacts-to-italy-2494724>, accessed on 23/04/2025.
- Schröder, E.E.W.G. (1917). Nias, ethnographische, geographische en historische aantekeningen en studien. Leiden: Brill.
- Scott, C. (2016). Renewing the ‘Special Relationship’ and Rethinking the Return of Cultural Property: The Netherlands and Indonesia, 1949-79. *Journal of Contemporary History*, pp.1-23.
- Scovazzi, T. (2009). Legal aspects of the Axum Obelisk case. *Museum International*, Vol. 61, No. 1-2, 52-60.
- Sergi G. (1892-1893). Sur une nouvelle méthode de classification des crânes humains. *Congrès international d’archéologie préhistorique et d’anthropologie. 11ème session, à Moscou du 1/13-8/20 août, 1892. Vol. II*, pp. 297-394.
- Sheehan, J.J. (2000). *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime of Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shelton, A. (2009). The Public Sphere as Wilderness: Le Musée du Quai Branly. *Museum Anthropology* 32 (1): 1–16.
- Sibarani, R. (ed). (2017). Analisis Konteks Pengetahuan Tradisional dan Ekspresi Budaya Tradisional di Sumatera Utara. Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Sibeth, A., & Carpenter, B.W. (2013). *Nias Sculpture*. Jakarta: Red & White Publishing.
- Simpson, M. (1996). *Making Representations: Museums in the Postcolonial Era*. London: Routledge.

- Singh, S., Blake, M., & O'Donnell, J. (2013). Digitizing Pacific Cultural Collections: The Australian Experience. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 20 (1), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739112000483>
- Small, Z. (2022). Stolen Buddha Statue That Resurfaced in Italy Will Return to India. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/arts/design/stolen-buddha-statue-india.html> accessed on 13/08/2025.
- Soares, B.B., & Witcomb, A. (2022). Editorial: Towards Decolonisation. *Museum International*, Vol. 74, pp. iv-xi. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2022.2234187>
- Soriente, A. (2024). Cross-cultural encounters of Italian travellers in the Malay world; A perspective on the languages spoken by the local populations. *Wacana*, 25 (2), <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v25i2.1679>
- Spadavecchia, F. (2003). *Museo d'Arte Orientale di Venezia*. Venice: Electa.
- Sprague, C.E.P. (2021). *Decolonization and Databases: Examining Collections Management Systems and Decolonizing Practices*. Master's Thesis, University of Washington. <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstreams/b5713c0a-ff6a-4b46-aef6-d8e0b9de48b3/download>
- Stafford, F.E. (1949). The Ex-Italian Colonies. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 47-55.
- Stahn, C. (2023). *Confronting Colonial Objects. Histories, Legalities and Access to Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stocking, G. W. (1968). *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. New York: Macmillan
- Stutje, K. (2022). The history of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate. Working paper, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).
- Suharmiati, Fahriani, A.F., & Ramdhani, S. (2016). *Tradisi Böwö dan Malnutrisi pada Etnik Nias*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.
- Tackett, K. (2021). "Transfer of Good Faith": Two Years Post-Sarr Savoy Report and European Repatriation of Colonial Artifacts. Centre for Art Law, <https://itsartlaw.org/art-law/transfers-of-good-faith-two-years-post-sarr-savoy-report-and-european-repatriation-of-colonial-artifacts/> accessed on 11/08/2025.
- Taher, H., et al. (2022). Reuse and Appropriation: Remediating Digital Museum Collections and Digital Tools for Participatory Culture in Transition. *Baltic Screen Media Review*, 10, pp. 123-138.

- Taylor, P.M. (1988). Anthropology and the Racial Doctrine in Italy before 1940. *Antropologia Contemporânea*, Vol. 11 (1-2), pp. 45-58.
- Taylor, P.M., & Marino, C. (2019). PAOLO MANTEGAZZA'S VISION: The Science of Man behind the World's First Museum of Anthropology (Florence, Italy, 1869). *Museum Anthropology*, 42 (2), pp. 109-124.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, March 10). photogrammetry. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/science/photogrammetry> accessed on 15/10/2025.
- Thornes, R., Dorrel, P., & Lie, H. (1999). Introduction to Object ID, guidelines for making records that describe art, antiques, and antiquities. Los Angeles: Getty Information Institute.
- Titi, C. (2023a). Debate: Sorry, British Museum, a loan of the Parthenon Marbles is not a repatriation. *The Conversation*, February 15, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/debate-sorry-british-museum-a-loan-of-the-parthenon-marbles-is-not-a-repatriation-199468> accessed on 12/08/2025
- Titi, C. (2023b). *The Parthenon Marbles and International Law*. Springer.
- Tjoa-Bonatz, M.L. (2009). Idols and Art: Missionary Attitudes toward Indigenous Worship and the Material Culture on Nias, Indonesia, 1904–1920. In: DuBois, T.D. (ed) *Casting Faiths*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230235458\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230235458_5)
- Troilo, S. (2011). National Museums in Italy: A Matter of Multifaceted Identity. Article in Conference proceedings from EuNaMUs, European National Museum: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 29 June-1 July & 25-26 November 2011. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodestein & Jose Maria Lanzarote Guiral (eds). Linköping University Electronic Press, <https://ep.liu.se/ecp/064/020/ecp64020.pdf>
- Tucker, E. (2014). Museum Studies, in Leavy, P. (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Tythacott, L., & Ardiyansyah, A. (2021). *Returning Southeast Asia's Past, Objects, Museums and Restitution*. Singapore: NUS Press
- Unruh, L. (2015). Dialogical Curating: Towards Aboriginal Self-Representation in Museums. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 58, pp. 77-89.

- Vaduva, L., et al. (2024). Musealisation, Museification, Museumification, and/or Museumisation. *Quasteus*, 24, pp. 116-124.
- Van Beurden, J. (2017). *Treasures in Trusted Hands. Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Van Beurden, J. (2021a). *Inconvenient Heritage, Colonial Collections and Restitution in the Netherlands and Belgium*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Van Beurden, J. (2021b). Returns by the Netherlands to Indonesia in the 2010s and the 1970s. In Tythacott, L., and Ardiyansyah, P. *Returning Southeast Asia's Past. Objects, Museums, and Restitutions*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Van Broekhoven, L. (2019). On Decolonizing the Museum in Practice. *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, No. 32, pp. 1-10. : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26802050>
- Van Mensch, P. (1992). *Towards a Methodology of Museology*. Zagreb, PhD Thesis, University of Zagreb.
- Vergo, P. (ed). (1989). *New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books
- Visconti, A. (2021). Between “colonial amnesia” and “victimization biases”: Double standards in Italian cultural heritage law. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 28, pp.551-573. doi:10.1017/S0940739121000345
- Villaespesa, E., & Navarrete, T. (2019). *Museum Collections on Wikipedia: Opening up to Open Data Initiatives*. Conference MW19, Museums and the Web 2019. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333852928\\_Museum\\_Collections\\_on\\_Wikipedia\\_Opening\\_Up\\_to\\_Open\\_Data\\_Initiatives](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333852928_Museum_Collections_on_Wikipedia_Opening_Up_to_Open_Data_Initiatives) accessed on 30/09/2025.
- Von Brenner-Felsach, J. F. (1890). *Reise durch die unabhängigen Battak-lande und auf der Insel Nias*.
- Waruwu, K.J.I.M., Lattu, I.Y.M., & Suwartiningsih, S. (2025). Transformasi Fungsi Tradisi Lompat Batu: Adaptasi Nilai Budaya Masa Lalu Untuk Masa Kini. *Pustaka*, 25 (2), pp. 224-237.
- Webster, R. A., Nowell. Charles E., & Magdoff, Harry (2024, December 14). *Western colonialism*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism>
- Weil, S.E. (1985). *A Cabinet of Curiosities, Inquiries into Museums and Their Prospects*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

- Wharton, G.E. (2015). Public Access in the Age of Documented Art. *Revista de Historia da Arte - Série W*. Lisboa: Instituto de História da Arte.
- Whittingham, V. (2021). Decolonising the Museum? Dilemmas, possibilities, alternatives. *Culture Unbound*, Vol. 13 (2), pp. 245–269.
- Wiener, M.J. (1994). Object Lessons: Dutch Colonialism and the Looting of Bali. *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 347-370.
- Wijsmuller, D. (2017). Deaccessioning & disposal in Europe 2008-2017. <https://www.museumsanddeaccessioning.com/wp-content/uploads/Deaccessioning-disposal-Europe-2008-2017-D.-Wijsmuller.pdf>, accessed on 23/09/2024
- Wilkie, N.C. (2009). Colonization and Its Effect on the Cultural Property of Libya. In Nafziger, J.A.R., & Nichorski, M. (ed.). *Cultural Heritage Issues: The Legacy of Conquest, Colonization, and Commerce*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Wilkinson, M.D., et al. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Scientific Data* 3, 160018 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18>
- Wintle, C. (2017). Decolonising UK World Art Institutions, 1945-1980. *OnCurating*, 35, pp.106-112. <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35-reader/decolonising-uk-world-art-institutions-1945-1980-371.html>
- Wolf, L.F., & Smith, J.K. (1993). What Makes Museum Labels Legible? *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 36 (2), pp. 95-110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.1993.tb00783.x>
- Yamamoto, Y. (1986). A sense of tradition, an ethnographic approach to Nias material culture. Doctoral thesis, Cornell University.
- Yamomo, M., & Titus, B. (2024). Rehearsing Decolonial Curatorship of Southeast Asian Sound Archives in Europe. In Van Bijnen, E., et al (eds). *The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048556731-009>
- Yasaitis, K.E. (2005). Object ID: a model of global collaboration. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 20, pp. 21-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09647770500402001>
- Yilmaz, H.M., et al. (2007). The Importance of Digital Close-Range Photogrammetry in Documenting Cultural Heritage. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 428-433. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2007.07.004>

- Zachariah, P. (2024). The digital has a big role to play in the decolonisation of museums. *The Hindu*, February 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/the-digital-has-a-big-role-to-play-in-the-decolonisation-of-museums/article67795475.ece> accessed on 30/09/2025.
- Zampano, G., & Rosa, A. (2025). Roman-era mosaic panel with erotic theme that was stolen during World War II returns to Pompeii. <https://apnews.com/article/italy-pompeii-artwork-find-stolen-wwii-germany-cefd48bbdef050d6f70b0b2065784c19> accessed 13/08/2025
- Zimmerman, A. (2003). *Adventures in the Skin Trade: German Anthropology and Colonial Corporeality*. In Penny, G., and Bunzl, M. (eds). *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ziraluo, M., et al. (2022). Filosofi dan Makna Omo Sebua (Rumah Adat Besar) di Desa Bawomataluo Kecamatan Fanayaman Kabupaten Nias Selatan. *Curve Elasticity: Jurnal Pendidikan Ekonomi*, 3 (2). <https://doi.org/10.57094/jpe.v3i2.465>

**Appendix I. List of Museums with the Nias Collection.**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Museum</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	Museum Nasional Indonesia	Jakarta	Indonesia
2	Museum Provinsi Sumatera Utara	Medan	Indonesia
3	Museum Pusaka Nias	Gunungsitoli	Indonesia
4	Museum Etnografi dan Pusat Kajian Kematian	Surabaya	Indonesia
5	Museo Vaticani	Vatican City	Vatican
6	Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia	Florence	Italy
7	Museo della Civiltà	Rome	Italy
8	Museo delle Culture	Milan	Italy
9	University Museum of Groningen	Groningen	Netherlands
10	Volkenkundig Museum of Radboud University	Nijmegen	Netherlands
11	Tropenmuseum	Amsterdam	Netherlands
12	Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde	Leiden	Netherlands
13	Wereldmuseum	Rotterdam	Netherlands
14	Museum Prinsehof	Delft	Netherlands
15	Museon-Omniversum	Den Haag	Netherlands
16	CODA Museum	Apeldoorn	Netherlands
17	Universiteits Museum Utrecht	Utrecht	Netherlands
18	Náprstek Museum	Prague	Czech
19	Nationalmuseet i Kobenhavn	Copenhagen	Denmark
20	Etnografiska Museet	Stockholm	Sweden
21	Varldskultur Museet	Gothenburg	Sweden
22	Louvre Museum	Paris	France
23	Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac	Paris	France
24	La Rochelle Museum of Natural History	La Rochelle	France
25	Museum für Völkerkunde	Dresden	Germany
26	Museum Auf der Hardt	Wuphertal	Germany
27	Ethnologisches Museum	Berlin	Germany
28	Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum	Cologne	Germany
29	Museum der Kulturen	Basel	Swiss
30	Bernisches Historisches Museum	Bern	Swiss
31	Musee Barbier - Mueller	Geneva	Swiss

<b>No.</b>	<b>Museum</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Country</b>
32	Musee d'ethnographie de Geneve	Geneva	Swiss
33	Volkerkunde Museum der Universitat Zurich	Zurich	Swiss
34	Weltmuseum Wien	Vienna	Austria
35	Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van Belgie	Brussels	Belgium
36	MAS Museum	Antwerp	Belgium
37	British Museum	London	England
38	Museum of Fine Arts	Houston	USA
39	Field Museum of Natural History	Chicago	USA
40	The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York	New York	USA
41	Asian Art Museum	San Francisco	USA
42	de Young Fine Arts Museum	San Francisco	USA
43	Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History	Washington DC	USA
44	The Dallas Museum of Art	Dallas	USA
45	The Fowler Museum	California	USA
46	Yale University Art Gallery	Connecticut	USA
47	Museum of Fine Arts	Boston	USA
48	Penn Museum	Pennsylvania	USA
49	Saint Louis Art Museum	Missouri	USA
50	Asian Culture Centre	Gwangju	South Korea
51	Asian Civilisations Museum	Singapore	Singapore
52	National Gallery of Australia	Canberra	Australia
53	The Asia and Pacific Museum	Warsawa	Poland
54	Museum Keris Nusantara	Surakarta	Indonesia
55	National Museum of Ethnology	Osaka	Japan
56	Museum Bronbeek	Bronbeek	Netherlands
57	IFICAH Museum of Asian Culture	Hollenstedt	Germany

**Appendix II. Documentation Permit by the Director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence**

Prot. n. 0250996 del 16/10/2024 - [UOR: XPAAM - Classif. X/9]

To the Museum System of the University of Florence  
Via G. La Pira, 4  
50121 FLORENCE  
Italy

segrmuseo(AT)unifi.it

Fill the form, sign it in original and scan it in a single pdf

**REQUEST FOR PHOTO/VIDEO/IMAGES SHOOTINGS AND USE OF IMAGES  
OF THE MUSEUM SYSTEM**

TO BE FORWARDED AT LEAST 30 DAYS AHEAD OF THE INTENDED SHOOTING DATE

Requesting agent (Name and surname of person signing the request) AHMAD GINANJAR PURNAWIBAWA

Affiliated institution UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES L'ORIENTALE

Street address VIA CHIATAMONE 61\62

City NAPOLI Area code 80121

Telephone +6282210201705 e-mail a.purnawibawa1@unior.it

Business registration number and/or Tax number PRNHKG91T05Z2235

Specify the collection and/or location to shoot, and the type of shoot (photo/video/other images)

PHOTOS OF NIAS COLLECTION OF ELIO MODIGLIANI

Subject requested \_\_\_\_\_

Available images 35

Date of the shoot 4 OCTOBER 2024 - 4 NOVEMBER 2023 from (time) \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people involved 1

Intended use of the images (attach additional pages if necessary)

FOR OPEN ACCESS CATALOGUE IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITIES OF ORIGIN AND WIKIMEDIA  
INDONESIA

Legal entity to invoice (if different from applicant)

Business name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Business reg. number and/or Tax number \_\_\_\_\_

Date 30/09/2024

Signature



### Rules for shooting photos / videos / images and using images of the Museum System

Authorization to shoot videos, photographs or images of the collections and exhibition spaces and to use the images of the Museum System is granted by the Technical Director following a written request; it entails the full acceptance of the following conditions and may be revoked in the event of non-compliance.

The term 'images' in this licence agreement refers to images or data derived from any mode of production: photographs, scanning (included all techniques, laser or structured light), X rays (computed tomography, microtomography, pq CT) to obtain a representation in 2D or 3D of the sample and represented in any electronic or physical format.

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

- a. The permission is granted exclusively for the use stated in the application.
- b. In case the applicant or any other person authorized by the applicant intends to use all or part of the images for different purposes, a formal permission request must be submitted and the management reserves the right to grant it.
- c. The photos, images or video shoot will be free of charge only for study purposes or in case of out-of-print works and for a strictly scientific purpose, with the obligation to cite the source and submit – once published- a copy (hard or electronic) of the work to the Museum System.
- d. In all other cases, a fee established by the Museum System Scientific Committee is applicable:
  - a. e.g.: € 80,00 for each item photographed.The total due will be communicated in writing and shall be paid in full at least 15 days prior to the commencement of the shoot or the shipping of material, in compliance to the terms indicated in the quote.
- e. The use of images downloaded from the Museum System's website is not permitted without prior written authorization.
- f. The authorization to use the material never implies the transfer of the material and/or its rights. All material and related rights are the exclusive property of the Museum System.
- g. The images of the Museum System cannot be used for advertising or promotional purposes without the prior authorization of the Management and, in such cases, specific rates may apply.
- h. The name of the Museum System of the University of Florence must be cited in full in the acknowledgements/credits.
- i. Copy of the images needs to be deposited with the Museum System of the University of Florence.

#### VIDEO AND PHOTO RECORDINGS

- j. The applicant is required to obtain an adequate third-party liability insurance policy to cover the risk of damage to the space and equipment requested; a copy of the policy must be received by the Director of the Museum System at least 15 days before the shooting.
- k. The filming permission has no territorial or temporal limitations, but it refers exclusively to the use specified in the request. In the event that the applicant, or other persons authorized by the applicant, intend to re-use all or part of the footage for other purposes, the permission must be formally requested and the Management reserves the right to grant it.
- l. The name of the Museum System of the University of Florence must be cited in full in the credits/acknowledgements.
- m. Dates and times of the filming must be agreed with the person in charge of the collection at least 3 weeks in advance.
- n. The cost will be established in relation to each specific request. The amount to be paid will be confirmed by the office in charge in the form of a written quote and must be paid in full at least 15 days before filming, as indicated in the quote.

The signee fully accepts the terms and conditions stated above  
and authorizes the use of personal data according to the bylaws  
Art.13 EU Reg. 2016/679 and D.Lgs 196/2003.

Date 30/09/2024

Signature

For office use only

AUTHORIZATION OF THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR of the Museum System

A TITOLO GRATUITO

Università degli Studi di Firenze  
Sistema Museale  
IL DIRETTORE TECNICO  
Dott.ssa Lucilla Cungiello

### Appendix III. Research Documentation



**Figure A.1.** First Survey in the Museum Pusaka Nias, March 2023. (top-left) Facade of the Museum Pusaka Nias (MPN), (top-right) with one of the museum personnel, Mr. Laia and (bottom) several displays of the Nias ethnographic objects in the museum



**Figure A.2.** Survey in the Bawömataluo (March 2023), showing the situation of the Bawömataluo village (left) and group photo with one of the informants and local TV crews (right).



**Figure A.3.** Survey in Hilisimaetanö (March 2023)  
(left) Situation of the Hilisimaetanö village  
(right) One of the Daro-Daro (stone chair/table), believed to be a replica of Modigliani's chest of drawers, was left when he kicked out of the village (Puccioni, 2016)



**Figure A.4.** Early survey in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of Florence (27 June 2023)



**Figure A.5.** The start of the Object Documentation Workshop in the museum (3 October 2023), (top) the museum personnel assisted the author with object handling and transport to the studio (bottom).



**Figure A.6.** The preparation table (top) and identification/description table (bottom-left), the identification always considers the conservation of the object (bottom-right).



**Figure A.7.** The photography and photogrammetry implementation using a light box and rotary table (top), the creative and emergency measures needed for bigger objects (bottom).



**Figure A.8.** Situation in the display room during the project (5 October 2023).



**Figure A.9.** Interview with Dr Zavattaro, curator of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology (6 November 2023).



**Figure A.9.** The geographic label of the Nias collection was corrected to indicate Indonesia (8 November 2023).



**Figure A.9.** Fieldwork Museum Pusaka, (left) matching the Florence collection with the MPN's collection and (right) giving the book and photographs of Nias objects in Florence to one of the museum personnel (May 2024)



**Figure A.10.** General lecture and discussion with the lecturers and students at the Universitas Nias Raya as part of the research (May 2024)



**Figure A.11.** Focus group discussion with the lecturers and cultural practitioners at the Universitas Nias Raya (May 2024, courtesy of Noventinus Zagötö)



**Figure A.12.** Showing the Nias collection to the local craftsperson in Bawömataluo.



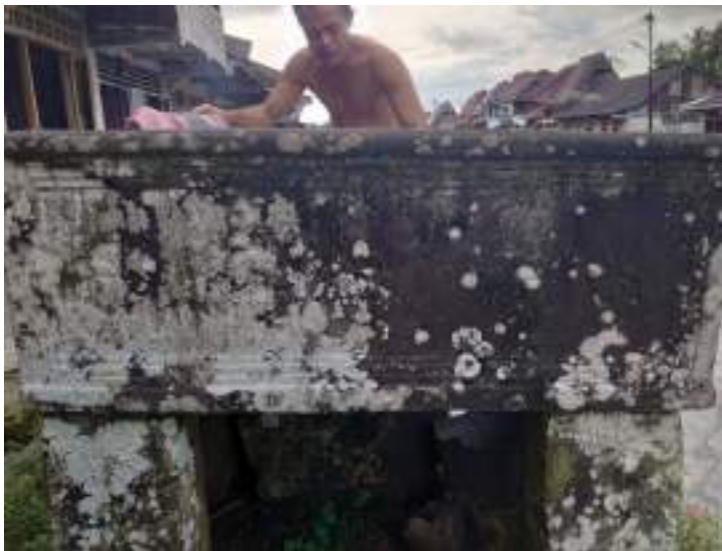
**Figure A.13.** One of the craftsmen shows his image collection from the academic publication (top), which he used as an inspiration for his craft (bottom left) using simple tools (bottom right).



**Figure A.14.** A collection of cultural objects belonging to a collector in Bawōmataluo. He claims to have acquired the objects from other villages to sell to tourists and send them to Jakarta and Japan.



**Figure A.15.** Interviews with several sources in Bawömataluo village. They were pleased to showcase the objects they still possess and the traditional clothing that has adapted to suit modern times.



**Figure A.16.** Interviews with several sources in Hilisimaetanö village. One of the collectors displays his rare collection of war attire. Meanwhile, the locals cannot confirm whether Modigliani's wooden box inspired the stone table.



**Figure A.17.** New display of the Nias ethnographic collection in the museum, October 2024.



**Figure A.18.** Remote (top, Universitas Nias Raya, 17 December 2024) and in person (bottom, SL, WikiNias, 13 September 2025) discussion for the digital platform of the project.



Figure A.19. The launching of the catalogue and Wikimedia page during the GLAM Wikimedia Online Event, May 2025.

## Appendix IV. List of Nias Collection from Museum

COLLEZIONE MODIGLIANI – Manufatti di Nias, tot. 185.

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
E05652	Lancia del capo villaggio, "TOHO SALAWA", con asta in legno di palma e punta di ferro lanceolata, cm.259 punta cm.43,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05653	Lancia del capo villaggio, "TOHO SALAWA", con asta di legno ornata da una spirale d'ottone e da un ciuffo di capelli, punta di ferro, cm.214,5 punta cm.31, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05654	Lancia del capo villaggio, "TOHO SALAWA", con asta in legno di palma ornata da treccioline di fibre e punta di ferro, cm.207 punta cm.42, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05655	Lancia di un capo, "TOHO BALAGU", con asta di legno di palma, ornata con lamina d'ottone avvolta a spirale, punta di ferro, cm.220 punta cm.33,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05656	Due lance del capo villaggio, "TOHO SALAWA", con asta di legno di palma ornata da treccioline di fibre, punta di ferro, cm.197,5 punta cm.21,5 e cm.212,5 punta cm.33, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05657	Lancia di un capo, "TOHO BALUGU", con asta di legno ornata con fascette di lamina d'ottone, punta di ferro, cm.203 punta cm.27,2, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05658	Lancia con asta in legno di palma, ornata con intrecci di fibre vegetali, punta di ferro, "TOHO SALAWA", cm.193,5 punta cm.20, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	3B	
E05659	Lancia da guerra, "TOHO IRARUATA", con asta in legno di palma ornata di treccioline di fibre e punta di ferro, cm.208 punta cm.28,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05660	Lancia da guerra, "TOHO IRARUATA", con asta di legno di palma e punta di ferro con piccoli arpioni, cm.214,5 punta cm.21,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05661	Lancia da guerra, "TOHO IRARUATA", con asta di legno ornata da treccioline di fibre di palma e punta di ferro, cm.186 punta cm.30, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05662	Lancia da caccia, "TOHO FATIBUSA", con asta di legno di palma ornata da treccioline di fibre e punta di ferro, cm.195,5 punta cm.22, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05663	Lancia da caccia, "TOHO FATIBUSA", con asta di legno di palma ornata da treccioline di fibre, punta arpionata di ferro, cm.195,5 punta cm.24,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05664	Lancia da caccia, "TOHO FATIBUSA", con asta in legno di palma e punta di ferro, cm.201 punta cm.23,5, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05665	Lancia da guerra, "TOHO IRARUATA", con asta di legno di palma ornata da alcune treccioline ed un ciuffo di fibre, punta di ferro, cm.162 punta cm.20, Nias, Indonesia.	lancia	01	25	4	
E05666	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra, lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito a motivi zoomorfi, "BALLATU SEBUA", cm.63,5	coltello	01	25	3B	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet	rip
	lama cm.46; fodero di legno ornato d'ottone con porta-amuleti, Nias, Indonesia.					
E05667	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra, "BALLATU-SEBUA", cm.61 lama cm.47; fodero di legno con porta-talismani di fibre vegetali, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05668	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra, "BALLATU SEBUA", manico di legno scolpito, cm.53 lama cm.40,5; fodero di legno con porta-talismani in fibre e idoletti lignei antropomorfi, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05670	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno e ottone, "BALLATU IDE IDE", cm.35 lama cm.24,5; fodero in legno e ottone, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05671	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno, "BALLATU IDE IDE", cm.31 lama cm.23; fodero di legno ornato con fibre vegetali, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05672	Due oggetti: piccolo coltello con manico di legno e ottone, "BALLATU IDE IDE", cm.17,5 lama cm.11; fodero di legno, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05673	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.21,5 lama cm.13,3; fodero di legno ornato da treccioline di fibre vegetali, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E05674	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito e decorato da intarsi e voluta centrale di ferro, cm.65 lama cm.47,5; fodero di legno rivestito d'ottone, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05675	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.57 lama cm.39; fodero di legno ornato con un lembo di stoffa colorata, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05676	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra, con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.56,5 lama cm.43; fodero di legno con lembo di stoffa colorata legata all'imboccatura, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05677	Due oggetti: coltello da lutto con lama in ferro e manico di legno e ottone, cm.38 lama cm.26,8; fodero di legno rivestito di ottone, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05678	Due oggetti: coltello da lutto, con lama di ferro e manico di ottone, cm.41 lama cm.30,5; fodero di legno ornato da fascette di fibre vegetali, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05679	Due oggetti: coltello da lutto con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.47 lama cm.33,4; fodero di legno rivestito di ottone, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05680	Due oggetti: piccolo coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno, "BALLATU IDE IDE", cm.28 lama cm.20; fodero di legno ornato da una conchiglia, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05682	Due oggetti: coltello da lutto con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.23,5 lama cm.15,3; fodero di legno, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E05683	Due oggetti: coltello usato dagli schiavi, "BALLATU BUDA",	coltello	01	25	2	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
	con manico di legno e ottone, cm.43 lama cm.32,6; fodero di legno; Nias, Indonesia.					
E05684	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno ornato da una fascetta d'ottone, cm.44,5 lama cm.34; fodero di legno ornato da treccioline di fibre, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E05685	Due oggetti: coltello da schiavo, "BALLATU BUDA" in lingua locale, con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.48,5 lama cm.36,5, proveniente dall' isola Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E05686	Due oggetti: coltello da schiavo, "BALLATU BUDA", con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.50,5 lama cm.40; fodero di legno ornato da treccioline di fibre vegetali, Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E05687	Bastone di legno, ornato con applicazioni di lamina d'ottone e di piombo, "SI-O", usato dalle donne mogli dei capi, h.cm.157,5 diam.cm.4,1, Nias, Indonesia.	bastone	01	25	3A	
E05688	Bastone di legno, ornato da applicazioni di lamina d'ottone e di piombo, "SI-O", usato dalle donne mogli dei capi, h.cm.139,2 diam.cm.2,9, Nias, Indonesia.	bastone	01	25	3A	
E05689	Grande scudo di legno rivestito di cuoio, "DAYNE", di forma esagonale allungata, ornato di ciuffi di peli ad un'estremità, cm.158x37, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	2	
E05691	Scudo di legno, "BALUSE", di forma ovoidale oblunga sagomata, con nervatura e umbone centrale, decorato con fibre di "Calamus rotang" intrecciate, cm.109x21, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	2	
E05692	Scudo di legno, "BALUSE", di forma ovale oblunga, con nervatura centrale e umbone rivestito di pelle di rettile, ornato da treccioline di fibre di "Calamus rotang" cm.118x29,5, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	4	
E05693	Scudo di legno di forma ovale oblunga, "BALUSE", con umbone e nervatura centrali, ornato da treccioline di fibre di "Calamus rotang", Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	4	
E05695	Scudo di legno, "BALUSE", dalla forma ovoidale oblunga, con nervatura e umbone centrale, decorato con fibre di "Calamus rotang" cm.120x27,5, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	2	
E05696	Scudo di legno di forma ovale oblunga con umbone e nervatura centrali, "BALUSE", ornato da treccioline di fibre vegetali, con tallone in ottone, cm.144,3x43, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	01	25	3B	
E05697	Copricapo di fibre di "Arenga saccharifera" intrecciate, portata dagli uomini nei combattimenti a scopo difensivo, "TETENAULO", h.cm.12 diam.cm.20, Nias, Indonesia.	copricapo	01	25	3A	
E05698	Copricapo di fibre di "Arenga saccharifera" intrecciate, portata dagli uomini nei combattimenti a scopo difensivo, h.cm.10 diam.cm.23, Nias, Indonesia.	copricapo	01	25	3A	
E05699	Elmo di ferro, ornato da due pennacchi laterali ed uno frontale, "TACULA TESAO", h.cm.60,5 diam.cm.23, Nias, Indonesia.	elmo	01	25	3B	
E05700	Giacchetta senza maniche usata come corazza nei combattimenti, "BARU-SINALI", in tessuto di fibre di	giacca	01	25	3A	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet	rip
	"Gnetum", cm.54x43, Nias, Indonesia.					
E05701	Baffi in lamina d'ottone, anneriti con fuliggine e olio di cocco, "BUMBEWE TEFAO", usati in guerra per spaventare il nemico, cm.11x15, Nias, Indonesia.	baffi	01	25	2	
E05702	Baffi in lamina d'ottone, anneriti con fuliggine e olio di cocco, "BUMBEWE TEFAO", usati in guerra per spaventare il nemico, cm.17,3x10, Nias, Indonesia.	baffi	01	25	2	
E05703	Due collane, composte da dischetti del legno di "Lodoicea sechellarum" e rifinite in ottone, "CALABUBO", ornamento maschile con significato onorifico, diam.cm.22,8, Nias, Indonesia. La n°5703/1 è in Mag 1, vet.20, rip.2.	collana	01	25	3B	
E05704	Collana composta da dischetti di "Lodoicea sechellarum" e rifinita in ottone, "CALABUBO", oggetto con funzione onorifica per i guerrieri, diam.cm.31, Nias, Indonesia.	collana	01	25	3A	
E05705	Cintura composta da una fascia di scorza d'albero battuta, cm.290x27, Nias, Indonesia.	cintura	01	25	3B	
E05706	Fascia di scorza d'albero battuta, cm.164x42, Nias, Indonesia.	fascia	01	25	3C	
E05707	Lunga fascia di scorza d'albero battuta, cm.479x20, Nias, Indonesia.	fascia	01	25	3C	
E05708	Giacchette di tapa (scorza d'albero battuta) senza maniche, "BARU-OHOLU", con due tasche esterne applicate, cm.55x45, Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3A	
E05709	Giacchetta senza maniche, con due tasche interne, di tessuto di fibre vegetali, cm.51x54, Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3A	
E05710	Giacchetta senza maniche, in tessuto di fibra vegetale, annerita con fuliggine e olio di cocco, con tasca interna, cm.54x52, Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3A	
E05711	Giacchetta senza maniche, di tapa (scorza d'albero battuta) bordata di tessuto bianco, con tasca interna di fibra vegetale, cm.57x52, Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3B	
E05712	Giacca di tapa (scorza d'albero battuta) con impunture orizzontali, "BARU OHOLU", cm.100x59, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3B	
E05713	Stuoia di fibre di "Gnetum" intessute, usata come giaciglio dal capo del villaggio, cm.154x79, proveniente da Nias, Indonesia.	stuoia	01	25	3B	
E05714	Cappello di paglia intrecciata di forma conica a base circolare, diam.cm.46, Nias, Indonesia.	cappello	01	25	3A	
E05715	Cappello di paglia intrecciata, di forma conica a base circolare, diam.cm.49, Nias, Indonesia.	cappello	01	25	3A	
E05716	Collana da uomo, costituita da una fascetta di legno flessibile, intagliata e chiusa a collare, cm.15x11,5, Nias, Indonesia.	collana	01	25	3A	
E05717	Collana da uomo, costituita da una fascetta di legno flessibile, intagliata e chiusa a collare, cm.15,5x12,2, Nias, Indonesia.	collana	01	25	3A	
E05718	Collana di conterie rosse, bianche e nere, montate in 9 file	collana	01	25	3B	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rig.
	Intrecciate tra loro, cm.23,5, Nias, Indonesia.					
E05719	Diadema di conterie e perle d'ottone, montate in quattro file su cordicella di fibra vegetale, "BOBOTORA", h.cm.4,5 diam.cm.16, ornamento femminile di fabbricazione cinese, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E05720	Diadema di conterie e perle d'ottone, montate in quattro file su cordicella di fibra vegetale, "BOBOTORA", h.cm.3 diam.cm.18, ornamento femminile di fabbricazione cinese, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E05721	Ornamento femminile costituito da una fascetta circolare di lamina d'ottone, diam.cm.17, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E05722	Ornamento femminile per la testa, costituito da una striscia di stoffa rossa a cui sono applicati dischetti metallici, montata su una fascetta di fibre vegetali intrecciate, h.cm.2 diam.cm.14, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E05723	Diadema composto da catenelle d'ottone e trecce di fibre vegetali con fermagli di lamina d'ottone, il tutto montato su una fascia di corteccia, h.cm.5 diam.cm.16, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E05724	Ornamento di fibre vegetali bicolore, intrecciate a formare una larga fascia da portare sul capo, h.cm.4,5 diam.cm.17, Nias, Indonesia.	fascia	01	25	3A	
E05725	Ornamento maschile per la testa, costituito da una fascia di fibre vegetali scure intrecciate, h.cm.8 diam.cm.14, Nias, Indonesia.	fascia	01	25	3A	
E05726	Tre pettini di legno per uso ornamentale, "SUCU-E-E", uno ha intarsi di madreperla, gli altri due sono intagliati, misurano rispettivamente cm.9x7; cm.6,6x7,5; cm.7,2x7,5; Nias, Indonesia.	pettine	01	25	3A	
E05727	Braccialetto da donna, "AIA COLA", costituito da filo d'ottone avvolto in una spirale lunga cm.21, diam.cm.8, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05729	Braccialetto da uomo, costituito da una fascia circolare bombata verso l'esterno ricavata da una conchiglia di "Tridacna", h.cm.3,8 diam.cm.9,5, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05730	Braccialetto da uomo, costituito da una fascia circolare bombata verso l'esterno, ricavata dalla conchiglia "Tridacna", h.cm.4,2 diam.cm.8, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05731	Braccialetto da uomo, costituito da una fascia circolare ricavata dal corno di bufalo, h.cm.1,1 diam.cm.7,9, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05732	Braccialetto d'ottone ornato da piccoli intagli sul bordo, diam.cm.7,1, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05733	Braccialetto di ottone, portato sia dagli uomini che dalle donne, h.cm.0,6 diam.cm.8, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05734	Braccialetto in maglia d'ottone, h.cm.0,5 diam.cm.6,3, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
E05735	Braccialetto d'ottone sbalzato, portato sia dagli uomini che dalle donne, diam.cm.10,4, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05736	Braccialetto di ottone, portato sia dagli uomini che dalle donne, h.cm.0,6 diam.cm.6, Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E05737	Orecchino, costituito da una fascetta circolare d'osso, h.cm.0,9 diam.cm.3,1, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchino	01	25	3A	
E05738	Orecchino composto da foglie di palma arrotolate, diam.cm.4,3, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchino	01	25	3A	
E05739	Orecchino di lamina d'ottone sbalzata e modellata a forma di "8", cm.11x5,5x1,7, ornamento portato dal figlio del re del villaggio Hii Dgiono, isola Nias, Indonesia.	orecchino	01	25	3B	
E05740	Due orecchini da donna, in lamina d'ottone sbalzata, "SARU-DALINGA", cm.5,4x2,4 e 5x2,5, provenienti dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	orecchini	01	25	3A	
E05741	Orecchino da donna in lamina d'ottone sbalzata, "SARU-DALINGA", cm.3,5x1,2, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchino	01	25	3A	
E05742	Grande orecchino da donna, costituito da un cerchio d'ottone in cui sono infilate due conchiglie di "Conus" e una di "Tridacna", diam.cm.9,5, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchino	01	25	3A	
E05743	Due grandi orecchini da donna, composti ciascuno da un cerchio d'ottone in cui sono infilate conchiglie di "Conus" e di "Tridacna", diam.cm.10 e cm.11, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchini	01	25	3A	
E05744	Due orecchini da donna, in ottone a forma di pendolo, cm.11x3,4, Nias, Indonesia.	orecchini	01	25	3A	
E05745	Idolo composto da un centinaio di elementi di legno e di bambù fissati ad un'asta centrale tramite legatura di fibre di palma, "ADU' BIHARA", cm.253,4x35, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E05746	Idolo composto da 100 elementi di legno annerito, scolpiti a tratti antropomorfi, montati su un'asta di legno centrale tramite legature di fibre di palma, "ADU' BIHARA", cm.188x50, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E05747	Idolo di legno e foglie di palma, "ADU' FOLAGI HORO", rappresenta lo spirito protettore dalle malattie, h.cm.62, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E05748	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, "ADU' SIRAHU SALAWA", rappresenta lo spirito protettore del capo del villaggio, cm.45x9x9, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E05749	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante lo spirito protettore da gravi accidenti, "ADU' SIRAHAVA MAHO", cm.8,1x3,4, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E05750	Figura antropomorfa maschile scolpita nel legno, fallica, con fascia di scorza battuta avvolta ai fianchi, "ADU' SIRAHU GOSAU", protettore delle decisioni del capo, cm.120x25, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E05751	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, fallica, con fascia di scorza avvolta ai fianchi, "ADU' HIRO", raffigurante lo spirito protettore delle decisioni del capo, cm.60x18, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet	rip
E05752	Maschera di scorza d'albero, legno, filamenti di "Arenia scaccharifera" e lembi di tessuto rosso, "BECHU LENIO", cm.50x45, Nias, Indonesia.	maschera	01		25	3B
E05753	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante un antenato della famiglia del capo, "ADU ZATUA", cm.19,2x3,3, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01		25	3B
E05754	Immagine antropomorfa scolpita nel legno annerito e ornato con lembi di tessuto rosso e bianco, raffigurante un antenato della famiglia del capo, "ADU ZATUA", cm.27,5x6, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01		25	3B
E05755	Set personaggi antropomorfi scolpiti nel legno e fissati ad una stecca tramite legature di fibre vegetali, raffigurano gli antenati della famiglia del capo, cm.34,5x39, Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01		25	3B
E05756	Accetta con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.41 lama cm.15,5, Nias, Indonesia.	accetta	01		25	3B
E05757	Due oggetti: strumento a percussione ricavato da un tronco di legno scavato, cm.57x20, con relativo percussore, usato per allontanare i cinghiali dai campi, Nias, Indonesia.	tamburo	01		25	3B
E05758	Nassa di listarelle di canna di bambù e fibre vegetali intrecciate, h.cm.63 diam.cm.11,5, Nias, Indonesia.	nassa	01		25	3C
E05759	Piccola gabbia di legno, cm.26x15,5, Nias, Indonesia.	gabbia	01		25	3C
E05761	Pentola di terracotta bruno-nera, di forma globulare schiacciata con orlo svasato, superficie esterna resa ruvida da incisioni di linee irregolari, h.cm.10,5 diam.cm.17,5, Nias, Indonesia.	pentola	01		25	3B
E05762	Tre oggetti: cestino porta-piatti di fibre vegetali intrecciate, diam.cm.32; due piatti di terracotta smaltata, entrambi diam.cm.23, Nias, Indonesia.	piatti	01		25	3C
E05763	Borsa di tela rossa a inserti neri, a forma di tasca rettangolare con nappe ornamentali agli angoli, chiusura "a coulisse" formata da una cordicella ornata di pendagli metallici, cm.51x30, Nias, Indonesia.	borsa	01		25	3A
E05764	Sacco di fibre vegetali intrecciate, con frange ai lati, cm.108x32, Nias, Indonesia.	sacco	01		25	3B
E05765	Astuccio di latta, utilizzato per riporre le pietre focali, cm.4,2x2,9x1,7, Nias, Indonesia.	astuccio	01		25	3A
E05766	Pettine di legno e canna di bambù, "SUCU-TI-TI", cm.6,4x5,7, Nias, Indonesia.	pettine	01		25	3A
E05767	Pettine di legno e canna di bambù, "SUCU-TI-TI", cm.9,2x4,4, Nias, Indonesia.	pettine	01		25	3A
E05768	Borsetta di fili di "Gnetum" fittamente intrecciati, usata per contenere la bilancia ed i pesi usati per la polvere d'oro, cm.10, Nias, Indonesia.	borsa	01		25	3A
E05769	Borsetta in tessuto e fibre vegetali intrecciate, cm.14,5x18,5, Nias, Indonesia.	borsa	01		25	3A

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
E05770	Borsellino di fibra vegetale, intrecciata in modo da creare un motivo ornamentale di trafori, foderata con stoffa colorata, cm. 15,5x15, Nias, Indonesia.	borsa	01	25	3A	
E05771	Due oggetti: piccolo mortaio di legno, h.cm.8,5 diam.cm.2,8; pestello assorbito con corpo di legno e asta in ferro, cm. 14, usato nella preparazione del "bate" droga con funzione rituale, Nias, Indonesia.	mortaio	01	25	3A	
E05772	Astuccio con coperchio, ricavato dal seme delle "Madgsonia macrocarpa", cm. 6,5x5,4, Nias, Indonesia.	astuccio	01	25	3A	
E05773	Scatolina d'ottone, di forma esagonale con coperchio e catenella ornata di sonagli, cm. 2,8x5,7x5,2, Nias, Indonesia.	scatola	01	25	3A	
E05774	Piccola pipa con cannello di legno e fornello ricavato dal pericarpo di "Areca catechu", cm. 8,2, Nias, Indonesia.	pipa	01	25	3A	
E05775	Piccola pipa, con cannello di legno e fornello ricavato dal pericarpo di "Areca catechu", cm. 7,5, proveniente da Nias, Indonesia.	pipa	01	25	3A	
E05777	Pinzetta depilatoria d'ottone, con catenella di sospensione, cm. 12,7x1,6, Nias, Indonesia.	pinzetta	01	25	3A	
E05778	Pinzetta depilatoria d'ottone, con catenella di sospensione, cm. 15x1,5, Nias, Indonesia.	pinzetta	01	25	3A	
E05779	Borsetta in fili di "Gnetum" fittamente intrecciati, usata per contenere la bilancia ed i pesi per la polvere d'oro, cm. 6,7x11, Nias, Indonesia.	borsa	01	25	3A	
E05780	Due oggetti: bilancia per pesare l'oro, "FALIERA", con piattini d'ottone trattenuti da fili di fibra vegetale non originali; custodia di legno cm. 9x4,7, Nias, Indonesia.	bilancia	01	25	3A	
E05781	Nove piccoli pesi o pietre di paragone per la misura dell'oro, montati su una tavoletta di cartone, sulla quale è indicato il nome di ciascuna misura ed il suo equivalente in grammi, Nias, Indonesia.	peso	01	25	3A	
E05782	Misura lineare di legno, con varie tacche, "ASORE", cm. 123,5x1,5, Nias, Indonesia.	calibro	01	25	3A	
E05783	Recipiente cilindrico di legno di bambù, "CATA", usato come misura di capacità, h.cm.23,7 diam.cm.6,5 capacità litri 0,6, Nias, Indonesia.	recipiente	01	25	3A	
E05784	Recipiente cilindrico in legno di bambù, "NOIO", usato come misura di capacità, h.cm.30, diam.cm.7,5, capacità litri 0,9, Nias, Indonesia.	recipiente	01	25	3A	
E05785	Recipiente di legno con un manico, usato come misura, "DGIUMBA", cm. 13x16, Nias, Indonesia.	recipiente	01	25	3A	
E05786	Recipiente di legno con manico, usato come misura, "BECHU-LAURU", cm. 20x30, capacità litri 7,5, Nias, Indonesia.	recipiente	01	25	3A	
E05787	Quattro oggetti: tre pezzi di legno cm. 39x5,4, che compongono uno strumento musicale a percussione, "DOLI-DOLI"; percussore formato da due bacchette di legno unite da un cordino, Nias, Indonesia.	xilofono	01	25	3C	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
E05788	Strumento musicale di bambù, costituito da un cilindro cavo con 4 "corde" ricavate dall' intaglio della superficie del cilindro, h.cm.60 diam.cm.8, Nias, Indonesia.	cebra	01	25	3C	
E05789	Flauto di canna di bambù, "SIGU", cm.43,5 diam.cm.2,1, suonato dalle donne abitanti dell'isola Nias, Indonesia.	flauto	01	25	3C	
E05790	Zufolo di canna di bambù, con 5 fori, "SURUNE", cm.26 diam.cm.2,4, è suonato dagli uomini abitanti dell'isola Nias,Indonesia.	flauto	01	25	3C	
E05791	Scacciapensieri di bambù, cm.10,3x1,3, Nias, Indonesia.	scacciapensieri	01	25	3C	
E05792	Gioco-rompicapo, "SI-FA-DAU-DAHO", in canna di bambù con incisioni ornamentali e palline di legno scorrevoli su cordicelle di fibre vegetali, cm.49,5x2, Nias, Indonesia.	gioco	01	25	3B	
E05793	Modello di casa del consiglio e delle adunanze, "OSALE", in legno e foglie di palma, cm.93x78x73, Nias, Indonesia.	casa	01	24		
E09591	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito e ornato da una voluta di ferro, cm.67 lama cm.49; fodero di legno ornato un lembo di stoffa colorata, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09592	Due oggetti:coltello da guerra con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.57x43,8; fodero di legno e lamiera con porta-talismani riempito di oggetti scaramentici, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09593	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama in ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.58 lama cm.42,7; fodero di legno con porta-talismani in fibra vegetale, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09594	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama di ferro, manico di legno scolpito a motivi antropomorfi e rifinite in ottone, cm.58,5 lama cm.46; fodero di legno con fascette di fibre vegetali, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09595	Tre personaggi dai tratti antropomorfi scolpiti nel legno e fissati ad una stecca tramite legatura di fibre, raffiguranti gli antenati della famiglia del capo, "ADU ZATUA" in lingua locale, cm.28,5x22,5, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09596	Idoletto antropomorfo di terra impastata, raffigurante lo spirito protettore del parto, "ADU FANGOLA" in lingua locale, cm.25x8,5; oggetto molto raro proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09597	Quattro idoletti antropomorfi scolpiti nel legno e fissati ad una stecca tramite legature di fibre vegetali, raffigurano gli antenati del capo, "ADU ZATUA" in lingua locale, cm.32x22,5, provenienti dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09598	Baffi in lamina d'ottone anneriti con fuliggine e olio di cocco, "BUMBEWE TEFAO" in lingua locale, usati in guerra per spaventare il nemico, cm.11,5x20, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	baffi	01	25	2	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
E09599	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno annerito, con copricapo appuntito e lobo destro allungato dal peso di un orecchino, faceva parte di una "filza" simile al n° 9597, cm.29,4x5,5, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia	idolo	01	25	3C	
E09600	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno annerito, raffigurante un antenato della famiglia del capo, "ADU ZATUA" in lingua locale, cm.19,5x3,7, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09601	Collana composta da dischetti di "Lodoicea sechellarum" rifinite in ottone, oggetto con significato onorifico per i guerrieri, diam.cm.20,5, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	collana	01	25	3A	
E09602	Baffi in lamina d'ottone anneriti con fuliggine e olio di cocco, "BUMBEWE-TEFAD" in lingua locale, usati in guerra per spaventare il nemico, cm.21,5x8x13, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	baffi	01	25	2	
E09603	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, con copricapo appuntito e lobo destro allungato, "ADU SIRAHA SALAWA" in lingua locale, rappresenta lo spirito protettore del capo del villaggio, cm.43,5x7, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E09604	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, con fascia di tessuto rosso intorno alla testa, "ADU SIRAHA GORAL" in lingua locale, rappresenta lo spirito protettore del villaggio, cm.37x6,7, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E09605	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante lo spirito protettore della moglie del capo, "ADU BIHARA" in lingua locale, cm.29x4,3, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09606	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante lo spirito protettore della moglie del capo, "ADU BIHARA" in lingua locale, cm.29,2x4,2, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09607	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, con copricapo appuntito e lobo destro allungato, "ADU SIRAWA SALAWA" in lingua locale, rappresenta lo spirito protettore del capo villaggio, cm.34,8x5,7, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E09608	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante lo spirito protettore della moglie del capo, "ADU BIHARA" in lingua locale, cm.37,3x6,2, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3B	
E09609	Figura antropomorfa scolpita nel legno, con copricapo appuntito e lobo destro allungato, "ADU SIRAHA SARAWA" in lingua locale, rappresenta lo spirito protettore del capo villaggio, cm.31x4,5, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idolo	01	25	3C	
E09610	Idoletto antropomorfo scolpito nel legno, raffigurante lo spirito protettore della moglie del capo, "ADU BIHARA" in	idolo	01	25	3B	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	vet.	rip.
	lingua locale, cm.32,5x7,1, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.					
E09611	Due oggetti: coltello di uso domestico, "BALLATU IDE IDE" in lingua locale, con manico in legno e ottone, cm.20,4 lama cm.14; fodero di legno, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09612	Due oggetti: coltello da guerra con lama di ferro e manico di legno scolpito, cm.60 lama cm.46; fodero di legno ornato con fascette di fibre vegetali, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	2	
E09613	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno intagliato, cm.40 lama cm.29; fodero di legno ornato da treccioline di fibre vegetali, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E09614	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.36,5 lama cm.26,5; fodero di legno ornato da treccioline di fibre vegetali, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E09615	Due oggetti: coltello con lama di ferro e manico di legno, cm.39,5 lama cm.29,3; fodero di legno ornato con treccioline di fibra vegetale, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	coltello	01	25	4	
E09616	Piccolo mortaio di legno, usato nella preparazione del "betel", droga euforizzante con funzione sociale e rituale, h.cm.9,1 diam.cm.4,9, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	mortaio	01	25	3A	
E09617	Piccolo pestello con asta di ferro e corpo di legno, corredo del mortaio n° 9616, cm.17 diam.cm.2,9, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	pestello	01	25	3A	
E09618	Gioco-rompicapo di canna di bambù, con due palline di legno scorrevoli su una cordicella, "SI-FA-DAU-DAHO" in lingua locale, cm.26,5x1,2, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	gioco	01	25	3C	
E09619	Pietra per arrotare i coltelli, cm.11,3x2,1, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	utensile	01	25	3B	
E09620	Ornamento di fibre vegetali bicolore, intrecciate a formare una larga fascia da portare sul capo, h.cm.5 diam.cm.16,5, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	fascia	01	25	3A	
E09621	Bracciale di filo d'ottone avvolto in una spirale lunga cm.23, diam.cm.10,7, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E09622	Pettine di legno e canna di bambù, dai denti molto fitti, usato per eliminare i parassiti, cm.8,9x4,3, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	pettine	01	25	3A	
E09623	Grande orecchino da donna, costituito da un cerchio di ottone in cui sono inflate due conchiglie di "Conus" ed una di "Tridacna", diam.cm.8,2, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	orecchini	01	25	3A	
E09624	Due orecchini composti da due cerchietti d'ottone in uno dei quali è infilato un frammento circolare di conchiglia.	orecchini	01	25	3A	

catalogo	descrizione	nome	piano	stanza	wt	rip
	diam.cm.3,6 e 7,3, provenienti dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.					
E09625	Diadema di conterie e perle d'ottone montate in quattro file su cordicella di fibra vegetale, h.cm.4,5 diam.cm.15, Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E09626	Diadema di conterie e perle d'ottone, montate in quattro file su cordicella di fibra vegetale, "BOBOTORA" in lingua locale, h.cm.4 diam.cm.15, ornamento femminile di fabbricazione cinese, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	diadema	01	25	3A	
E09627	Bracciale costituito da filo d'ottone avvolto in una spirale lunga cm.22,6, diam.cm.10, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E09628	Bracciale d'ottone, diam.cm.7,5, retto in due pezzi, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	bracciale	01	25	3A	
E09629	Scacciapensieri di bambù di tipo javanese, cm.10x1,3, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	scacciapensieri	01	25	3C	
E09630	Giacchetta senza maniche per bambini, in tessuto di fibra vegetale, annerita con fuliggine e olio di cocco, cm.49x45, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	giacca	01	25	3A	
E09631	Pinzetta depilatoria in ottone, con catenella di sospensione ornata da un pendaglio di legno, cm.15, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	pinza	01	25	3A	
E09632	Bastone di legno, ornato da applicazioni di lamina d'ottone e di piombo, "SI-O" in lingua locale, usato dalle donne mogli dei capi, h.cm.134 diam.cm.3,7, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	bastone	01	25	3A	
E09633	Bastone di legno, ornato da applicazioni di lamina d'ottone e di piombo, "SI-O" in lingua locale, usato dalle donne mogli dei capi, h.cm.135,5 diam.cm.3, proveniente dall'isola di Nias, Indonesia.	bastone	01	25	3A	
E09634	Nassa di listarelle di canna di bambù e fibre vegetali intrecciate, h.cm.62,5 diam.cm.13, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	nassa	01	25	3C	
E09635	Tre pezzi di legno rettangolari leggermente concavi, cm.35x5 ciascuno, che compongono uno strumento musicale a percussione, "DOLI-DOLI" in lingua locale, proveniente dall'isola Nias, Indonesia.	idiotono	01	25	3C	
E10009	Grande cappello da pioggia di forma ovale, in foglie di palma, bordato di bambù e rifinito con fibre di "Calamus rotang", cm.85,5x48, Sipora, arcipelago Mentawai, Indonesia.	cappello	01	13	2	
ESNC/69	Collana di perle sintetiche color blu, montate su una cordicella di fibre vegetali, cm.58, Nias, Indonesia.	collana	01	25	3B	
ESNC/79	Gonnellino da donna di fibre vegetali con frange, cm.157,5x28, Nias, Indonesia.	gonnellino	01	25	3A	
E32861	Elmo di ferro, TRACULATESAQ, con due ornamenti laterali e uno frontale, Nias, Indonesia.	elmo	0,5	1	20	2
E05690	Grande scudo in legno a patina scura, a forma di losanga, con estremità superiore decorata da intagi geometrici, legature in fibra di rotang e bambù, Nias, Indonesia.	scudo	0,5	1	21	inf

## Appendix V. List of Objects re-identified in the research


No.	ID	Type of Object	Name (Modigliani)	Name (Nias)	Subject	No. Item(s)
1	5654	Spear	(Toho) Barusa	Toho Bulusa	War equipment	1
2	5655	Spear	(Toho) Barusa	Toho Bulusa	War equipment	1
3	5661	Spear	(Toho) Barusa	Toho bulusa	War equipment	1
4	5662	Spear	(Toho) Fatibusa	Toho si sara ndrami	War equipment	1
5	5664	Spear	(Toho) Fatibusa	Toho si sara ndrami	War equipment	1
6	5666	Sword	Balatu Sebua	Tolögu	War equipment	2
7	5668	Sword	Balatu Sebua	Tolögu	War equipment	2
8	5672	knife	Balatu Ide Ide	Ono mbalatu/ ono nekhe	Household equipment	2
9	5673	knife	Si oli warasi	Ziöli warasi	Household equipment	2
10	5683	Machette	Balatu Buda	Balatu	Household equipment	2
11	5689	Big shield	Dagne	Baluse dagna	War equipment	1
12	5691	Light shield	Baluse	Baluse	War equipment	1
13	5692	Light shield	Baluse	Baluse	War equipment	1
14	5693	Light shield	Baluse	Baluse	War equipment	1
15	5695	Light shield	Baluse	Baluse	War equipment	1
16	5696	Light shield	Baluse	Baluse	War equipment	1
17	5698	headgear	Tetenaulo	?	War equipment	1
18	5699	helmet	Tacula Tefao	Takula tefao, Vaze-vaze	War equipment	1
19	5700	sleeveless shirt	Baru Sinali	Baru houra	Clothing and jewellery	1
20	5704	warrior's torc	Calabubu	Kalabubu	War equipment	1
21	5707	wood bark cloth	-	Öndröra	Clothing and jewellery	1
22	5708	wood bark sleeveless shirt	Baru Holu	Baru Oholu	Clothing and jewellery	1
23	5709	sleeveless shirt	-	Baru sinali	Clothing and jewellery	1
24	5713	blanket	-	Ambala göna	Household equipment	1
25	5715	Hat	-	topi (?)	Clothing and jewellery	1

26	5720	head ornament	Bobotora	Bala högö	Clothing and jewellery	1
27	5722	head ornament	-	Bala högö	Clothing and jewellery	1
28	5725	head ornament	Bala hogo niasa	Bala högö	Clothing and jewellery	1
29	5726	hair comb	Sucu e e	Sukhu Eu	Clothing and jewellery	1
30	5729	bracelet	Tola gasa	Töla Gaza	Clothing and jewellery	1
31	5733	bracelet	-	Gala-gala	Clothing and jewellery	1
32	5734	bracelet	-	Gala danga	Clothing and jewellery	1
33	5737	earring	-	Ati-ati (?)	Clothing and jewellery	1
34	5738	earring	-	Ati-ati (?)	Clothing and jewellery	1
35	5739	earring	-	Gaule	Clothing and jewellery	1
36	5740	earrings	Saru dalinga	Ati-ati	Clothing and jewellery	2
37	5741	earrings	Wale-wale	Ati-ati	Clothing and jewellery	2
38	5742	earring	-	Ati-ati (?)	Clothing and jewellery	1
39	5743	earrings	-	Ati-ati (?)	Clothing and jewellery	2
40	5744	earrings	-	Sialu	Clothing and jewellery	2
41	5746	ancestral statuettes	Adu Bihara	Adu Bihara	ancestral worship	1
42	5748	ancestral statue	Adu Siraha Salawa	Adu Siraha Salaŵa	ancestral worship	1
43	5749	protective charm	Adu Sirahava Maho	Adu siraha famahö	ancestral worship	1
44	5750	ancestral statue	Adu Horo	Adu Horo	ancestral worship	1
45	5752	war mask	Bechu lenio	Mbawa mbekhu Bechu lewuö	War equipment	1
46	5753	ancestral statue	Adu Zatusa	Adu Zatusa	ancestral worship	1
47	5754	ancestral statue	Adu Zatusa	Adu Zatusa	ancestral worship	1
48	5755	ancestral statues	Adu Zatusa	Adu Zatusa	ancestral worship	6
49	5756	hatchet	fato	fato niha	Household equipment	1
50	5757	wooden gong	-	koko	Household equipment	2
51	5758	fish trap	Bouwu	Buwu	Household equipment	1

52	5761	clay pot	-	Bowoa lamaeha	Household equipment	1
53	5762	plates and plate holder	-	Sa'era & Figa Zino	Household equipment	3
54	5764	Sack	-	Töwa	Household equipment	1
55	5765	Flint box	-	Kotak Batu Api	Household equipment	1
56	5769	Betel pouch	Cabe-cabe	Bola-bola	Guest welcoming equipment	1
57	5771	Mortar	-	Fole	Guest welcoming equipment	2
58	5774	Pipe	-	pipa	Guest welcoming equipment	1
59	5780	Gold scale	Faliera	Fali'era/tulo Gana'a and Naha Wali'era	Measuring tools and scales	2
60	5781	Weights	-	Tambua gana'a	Measuring tools and scales	9
61	5782	Measurement rod	afore	afore	Measuring tools and scales	1
62	5783	Tankard	Cata	Kata	Household equipment	1
63	5784	Tankard	Noio	hinaoya	Household equipment	1
64	5786	Tankard	Bechu-lauru	Lauru, Tumba	Household equipment	1
65	5787	Xylophone	Doli-doli	Doli-doli	Musical instruments	4
66	5788	Zither	-	Tutuhao	Musical instruments	1
67	5789	Flute	Sigu	Surune	Musical instruments	1
68	5790	Flute	Surune	Surune	Musical instruments	1
69	5791	Wind chimes	-	Ndruri weto	Musical instruments	1
70	5792	Game	Si Fau Dau Daho	-	Household equipment	1
71	9595	ancestral statues	Adu Zatua	Adu Zatua	ancestral worship	3
72	9596	protective charm	Adu Fangola	Adu Zatua (?)	ancestral worship	1
73	9597	ancestral statues	Adu Zatua	Adu Zatua	ancestral worship	4
74	9608	ancestral statue	Adu Bihara	Adu Zatua (?)	ancestral worship	1
75	9617	pestle	-	Tutu wole	Guest welcoming equipment	1
76	9619	sharpening stone	-	batu asah	Household equipment	1
77	9622	hair comb	-	Sukhu eu	Clothing and jewellery	1

78	9627	bracelet	Aia cola	Aya Kola	Clothing and jewellery	1
79	9630	sleeveless shirt	-	Baru goni	Clothing and jewellery	1
80	9632	wooden stick	si-o	-	Clothing and jewellery	1
81	9634	fish trap	Bouwu	Buwu	Household equipment	1
<b>Total</b>						116

No. 5654

Name	Toho Bulusa (Toho) Barusa (Modigliani, 1950, p. 238) Toho Salawa (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology)
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	207 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Leaf shape spearhead
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This spear consists of two parts: the spearhead and the shaft. The spearhead is made of iron and has a leaf-like shape, measuring 42.1 cm long and 0.7 to 0.2 cm thick. The shaft, meanwhile, is made of wood (kayu nibung) and is 161 cm long, with a tapered bottom. The shaft is adorned with 112 woven rattan rings. The spearhead and shaft are joined by a brass ring decorated with horizontal lines and small circles.</p>

No. 5655

Name	Toho Bulusa (Toho) Barusa (Modigliani, 1950, p. 238) Toho Salawa (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, Florence)
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass; forging, carving, gilding
Dimensions	220 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Leaf shape spearhead
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This spear consists of two parts: the spearhead and the shaft. The spearhead is made of iron and has a leaf-like shape, measuring 33.5 cm long and 1 to 0.5 cm thick. The shaft, meanwhile, is made of wood and is 180 cm long, with a tapered bottom. The shaft is adorned with a long, thin brass band along its surface. The spearhead and shaft are joined by a brass ring decorated with horizontal lines and small circles.</p>

No. 5661

Name	Toho bulusa
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	185 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Leaf shape spearhead
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This spear consists of two parts: the spearhead and the shaft. The spearhead is made of iron and has a leaf-like shape, measuring 30 cm long and 1.4 to 0.8 cm thick. The shaft, meanwhile, is made of wood and is 148 cm long, with a tapered bottom. The shaft is adorned with 17 woven rattan rings. The spearhead and shaft are joined by a brass ring decorated with horizontal lines and small circles.

No. 5662

Name	Toho si sara ndrami (Toho) fatibusu (Modigliani, 1890, p. 239)
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	195.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Hook-shaped spearhead
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This spear consists of two parts: the spearhead and the shaft. The spearhead is made of iron and has a hook-like shape, and is 22 cm long and 1.6 to 0.6 cm thick. The shaft, meanwhile, is made of wood and is 173.5 cm long, with a tapered bottom. The shaft is adorned with five woven rattan rings. An iron ring holds the spearhead and shaft together.</p>


No. 5664

Name	Toho si sara ndrami (Toho) fatibusa (Modigliani, 1890, p. 239)
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	201 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Hook-shaped spearhead
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This spear consists of two parts: the spearhead and the shaft. The spearhead is made of iron and has a leaf-like shape, measuring 23.7 cm long and 0.7 to 0.4 cm thick. The shaft, meanwhile, is made of wood and is 174.5 cm long, with a tapered bottom. The shaft is adorned with seven woven rattan rings. An iron ring joins the spearhead and shaft.</p>


No. 5666

Name	Tolögu (South Nias), Balatu (North Nias) Balatu sebua (Modigliani, 1890, p.241) Telogu, Balatu sebua (Viaro, 2001, p.164)
	
Type of Object	sword
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan, boar tusks; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	63.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Lasara-shaped carved handle, rattan amulet ball ( <i>rago</i> ) decorated with tusks
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This sword consists of two elements: the blade and its scabbard. The sword is 63.5 cm long, made of iron with a wooden handle. The blade is 0.5 to 0.2 cm thick. The base of the handle is carved in the shape of a lasara (a mythological animal). The sword ring/collar is made of brass.</p> <p>The scabbard is 56 cm long, made of wood reinforced with 11 brass plates. The base of the scabbard is decorated with an amulet ball (<i>rago</i>) made of rattan and decorated with boar tusks.</p>


No. 5668

Name	Tolögu (South Nias), Balatu (North Nias) Balatu sebua (Modigliani, 1890, p.243) Telogu, Balatu sebua (Viaro, 2001, p.164)
	
Type of Object	sword
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	53 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Lasara-shaped carved handle, amulet ball decorated with small wooden figurines (rago)
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Hilizihono, South Nias
Short description	<p>This sword consists of two elements: the blade and its scabbard. The sword is 53 cm long, made of iron with a wooden handle. The blade is 0.6 to 0.2 cm thick. The base of the handle is carved in the shape of a lasara (a mythological animal). The sword ring/collar is made of brass.</p> <p>The scabbard is 43 cm long, made of wood reinforced with 10 brass plates. The base of the scabbard is decorated with an amulet ball (rago) made of rattan and adorned with three miniature ancestral statues made of wood, red cloth, and a metal hook.</p> <p>This particular sword, belonging to a South Nias warrior, was stolen by Modigliani.</p>


No. 5672

Name	Ono mbalatu/ ono nekhe
	
Type of Object	knife
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, brass, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	17.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Unique-shaped handle
Subject	War equipment/household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This knife consisted of the blade and the sheath. The blade is made of iron, with a wooden handle. The base of the handle is carved in a unique way, with two parts: the round end and the curved decoration. The sheath is made of wood and adorned with three woven rattan rings.</p>


No. 5673

Name	Ziöli warasi Si oli warasi (Modigliani, 1890, p.239) Si euli (Feldman, 1990, p.301)
	
Type of Object	knife
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood, rattan; forging, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	21.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	
Distinguishing Features	Weaved rattan in the sheath
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This knife consists of two elements: the blade and the sheath. The blade is 21.5 cm long and made of iron with a wooden handle. The blade ring is made of iron.</p> <p>The sheath is 17.4 cm long and made of wood reinforced with four woven rattan rings.</p>

No. 5683


Name	Balatu Balatu buda (Modigliani, 1890)
	
Type of Object	machette
Material & Techniques	Iron, bronze, wood, rattan; forging, casting, carving, gilding, and weaving
Dimensions	43.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Flower engraving on the base of the handle
Distinguishing Features	Weaved rattan in the sheath
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This machete consists of two elements: the blade and the sheath. The blade is 43.2 cm long and made of iron with a wooden handle. The base of the handle features floral carvings. The blade ring is made of brass.</p> <p>The sheath is 36.2 cm long and made of wood reinforced with seven woven rattan rings. The base of the sheath features a spiral decoration.</p>

No. 5689


Name	Baluse dagna Dagne (Modigliani, 1890, p. 232; Feldman, 1990, p. 295)
	
Type of Object	Heavy shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, leather, arenga, bamboo; carving, weaving
Dimensions	158 x 39 x 3.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Slashed/sword markings on the front part
Distinguishing Features	Arenga decoration on the chief point
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	North Nias
Short description	The baluse dagna is a large wooden shield. It is hexagonal, with long sides. The front is covered with thick leather tied to a wooden frame with rattan. The top of the shield (the chief point) is decorated with palm fibre tied with rattan. The back of the shield features a wooden handle.

No. 5691


Name	Baluse
------	--------

	Baluse (Modigliani, 1890, p. 230)
	
Type of Object	Light shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, rattan; carving, weaving
Dimensions	108 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Oval-shaped with elongated top and bottom
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	The baluse is a lightweight wooden shield. It is ovoid with an elongated top (chief point) and bottom (base point). The chief point is decorated with two horizontal lines. The charge/centre point of the shield features a protrusion to accommodate a handle at the back; in this particular shield, the centre point is damaged, likely from battlefield use. The body/rib of the shield is 1.9 cm and reinforced with rattan. The edge of the body is also decorated with a carved frame.


No. 5692

Name	Baluse Baluse (Modigliani, 1890, p. 230)
	
Type of Object	Light shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, rattan; carving, weaving
Dimensions	120 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Oval-shaped with elongated top and bottom, blackish surface colour
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>The baluse is a lightweight wooden shield. It is ovoid with an elongated top (chief point) and bottom (base point). The charge/centre point of the shield features a protrusion to accommodate a handle at the back; in this particular shield, the handle is decorated with a rattan weaving. The body/rib of the shield is 2 cm and reinforced with rattan. The edge of the body is also adorned with a thin carved frame.</p>


No. 5693

Name	Baluse Baluse (Modigliani, 1890, p. 230)
	
Type of Object	Light shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, rattan; carving, weaving
Dimensions	113 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Oval-shaped with elongated top and bottom
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	The baluse is a lightweight wooden shield. It is ovoid with an elongated top (chief point) and bottom (base point). The charge/centre point of the shield features a protrusion to accommodate a handle at the back.. The body/rib of the shield is 1.4 cm and reinforced with rattan.


No. 5695

Name	Baluse Baluse (Modigliani, 1890, p. 230)
	
Type of Object	Light shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, rattan; carving, weaving
Dimensions	120 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Oval-shaped with elongated top and bottom
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	<p>The baluse is a lightweight wooden shield. It is ovoid with an elongated top (chief point) and bottom (base point). The charge/centre point of the shield features a protrusion to accommodate a handle at the back; in this particular shield, the handle is decorated with a rattan weaving. The body/rib of the shield is 1.5 cm and reinforced with rattan. The edge of the body is also adorned with a thin carved frame. In the top right part of the body, damage is observed, likely from the battlefield.</p>


No. 5696

Name	Baluse Baluse (Modigliani, 1890, p. 230)
	
Type of Object	Light shield
Material & Techniques	Wood, bronze, rattan; carving, weaving, gilding
Dimensions	144 x 34 x 2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Gilded bronze on the top part, a domed-shaped part in the charge point, and a light brown colour
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	The baluse is a lightweight wooden shield. It is ovoid with an elongated top (chief point) and bottom (base point). The chief point is decorated with brass sheeting. The charge/centre point of the shield features a protrusion to accommodate a handle at the back. The body/rib of the shield is 1.3 cm reinforced with rattan.


No. 5698

Name	Tetenaulo (Modigliani, 1890, p. 229)
	
Type of Object	head gear
Material & Techniques	Arenga; braiding
Dimensions	d. 21 cm; l. 62 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Made entirely of arenga
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>A protective gear for the head on the battlefield. This object is made of arenga (ijuk), which is braided into a thick layer and used as a helmet. In the back, there are five braided arenga, each measuring 62 cm, probably as a decoration or to protect the neck.</p>

No. 5699

Name	Takula tefao/ Vaze-vaze Tacula tefao (Modigliani, 1890, p. 226)
	
Type of Object	helm
Material & Techniques	Iron, brass; welding
Dimensions	58 x 23 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Plant-like decoration in the front and side parts of the helm
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Hilizihönö, South Nias
Short description	This helmet is made of iron. On the front and sides, small metal pipes support floral ornaments. The front is decorated with 13 brass leaves, while on each side are four iron leaves. These ornaments can be removed if needed. The main body of the helmet is made of iron held together by welded iron pins.

No. 5700

Name	Baru sinali (Modigliani, 1890, p. 233) Baru leama (Langi et al. 2021, p. 51)
	
Type of Object	Sleeveless shirt
Material & Techniques	Plant fibre (Gnetum sp.); braiding
Dimensions	43 x 49 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Thick braided surface
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This sleeveless garment is made of braided plant fibres. It has a rough surface, suitable for protective gear on the battlefield. A collar is present at the neck. There is no mechanism, like buttons, to close the garment.


No. 5704

Name	Kalabubu Calabubo (Modigliani, 1890, p. 215)
	
Type of Object	Warrior's torc
Material & Techniques	Coconut shells, bronze; beading
Dimensions	d. 25 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Hilizihönö, South Nias
Short description	A Kalabubu is a torc made from coconut shells strung on a metal cord. The coconut shells are carefully crafted to achieve a symmetrical, tight diameter. The Kalabubu is secured at the back with a brass clasp.


No. 5707

Name	Öndröra
	
Type of Object	Beaten bark loincloth
Material & Techniques	Wood bark; Beaten bark making
Dimensions	479 x 20.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	The long band of a beaten bark cloth. The material surface is rough, typical of beaten bark cloth and porous. It has a brown colouration.

No. 5708

Name	Baru oholu
	
Type of Object	jacket
Material & Techniques	Wood bark; stitching
Dimensions	50 x 31 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Rough texture
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This sleeveless garment is made of tree bark sewn together with thread. It has a rough surface, typical of bark garments. Pockets are sewn into the front and inside, along each side. A collar is present at the neck. There is no mechanism, like buttons, to close the garment.


No. 5709

Name	Baru sinali
	
Type of Object	jacket
Material & Techniques	fibres; weaving, stitching
Dimensions	48 x 46 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Woven fabric
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This sleeveless garment is made of melinjo fibres woven and sewn with thread. Its surface is smoother than bark garments. It features a collar. There is no button-like mechanism to close the garment.


No. 5713

Name	Ambala göna
	
Type of Object	blanket
Material & Techniques	Plant fibres; weaving
Dimensions	154 x 77 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This blanket is made of woven plant fibres with brownish and yellowish colouration. This blanket is made of three 25 cm x 154 cm long sheets that have been joined to become one.

No. 5715

Name	Topi
	
Type of Object	Hat
Material & Techniques	Pandanus leaf, wood; stitching
Dimensions	d. 49 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Big hat made of leaves
Subject	household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This hat is made from pandanus leaves, which are supported by a thin wooden stick. The leaves are stitched together to create a thick layer that protects against the sun and rain. The hat is 49 cm in diameter, with a volcano-shaped design, and is approximately 16 cm tall. In the inner part, there is a 16 cm diameter band to fit the wearer's head.</p>

No. 5720

Name	Bala högö Bobotora/Bala hogo sicondra (Modigliani, 1890, p. 511)
	
Type of Object	Head dress
Material & Techniques	Beads, coin, thread, brass; beading
Dimensions	d. 17 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	V.E.I.C 1878
Distinguishing Features	Beads and metal coins
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>This headdress is made of four lines of threads. The threads are filled with different types of beads, made of glass and metal, and at the ends are tied to a metal coin. The coin is marked with the acronym V.E.I.C. 1878. The coin most likely belonged to the United East India Company, and the numbers indicated the coin's date of production.</p>

No. 5722

Name	Bala högö
	
Type of Object	Head dress
Material & Techniques	Cloth, fibre, metal (silver ?); weaving, beading, stitching
Dimensions	46 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Coin-shaped decorations
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This headdress is made of a strip of woven plant fibres. The outer part is adorned with a red cloth and 18 coin-shaped metal pieces, probably silver. At the end, the strip is joined with a brass coil to create a circle.

No. 5725

Name	Bala hogo niasa (Modigliani, 1890, p. 510)
	
Type of Object	Head dress
Material & Techniques	Fibres; weaving
Dimensions	d. 14 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This headdress is made of woven plant fibres in different colours. There are reddish-brown and yellowish-white fibres that are neatly woven to create a thick, circular-shaped headdress.

No. 5726

Name	Sukhu Eu Succu e e (Modigliani, 1890, p. 513) Suahu (Feldman, 1990, p. 280)
	
Type of Object	Hair decoration
Material & Techniques	Wood, shells, carving
Dimensions	9.4 x 7 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Geometrical engraving
Distinguishing Features	Small fragment of the shells
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	The sukhu eu is a wooden comb used as a headdress for women. It is made from a carved block of wood, complete with serrated edges and decorations on the other side. The circular decoration at each end features a shell ornament bonded with resin. The comb's surface is also adorned with geometric carvings.

No. 5729

Name	Töla Gaza Tola gasa (Modigliani 1890, 515) Töla gasa (Feldman 1990, 276-278)
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	
Type of Object	bracelet
Material & Techniques	Giant shell ( <i>Tridacna</i> sp); burnish
Dimensions	d. 9.7 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Shiny and lucid surface
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	North Nias
Short description	This bracelet is made from a giant shell that has been cut and then polished. It is torus-shaped with a prominent centre. It is shiny white and smooth. It is worn on the wrist as a wrist protector.

No. 5733

Name	Gala-gala
	
Type of Object	bracelet
Material & Techniques	Brass; smithing
Dimensions	d. 6.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Multiple strip lines are engraved in the surface
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This bracelet is made from a thick brass wire with an open end. The outer surface is adorned with a strip marking, while the inside part is smooth and plain.


No. 5734

Name	Gala danga
	
Type of Object	bracelet
Material & Techniques	brass
Dimensions	d. 5.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	North Nias
Short description	This bracelet is made from brass wire strung together. At the end, it is locked with a wire in the form of a hook. This bracelet is worn on the wrist.


No. 5737

Name	Ati-ati (?)
	
Type of Object	earring
Material & Techniques	wood
Dimensions	d. 3.1 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Circle shape
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A wooden earring in a circular shape.

No. 5738

Name	Ati-ati (?)
	
Type of Object	earring
Material & Techniques	Leaf, sagoo
Dimensions	
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Circle shape,
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A circular-shaped earring made of wood and encased with a layer of leaves. The leaves are secured with two thread knots.


No. 5739

Name	Gaule
	
Type of Object	earring
Material & Techniques	brass; hammering
Dimensions	10.9 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Thin surface and shaped like '3'
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Hilizihönö, South Nias
Short description	Earrings made of a brass sheet. These earrings are shaped like the number 3, with spiral ornaments at the ends.


No. 5740

Name	Ati-ati Saru dalinga (Modigliani, 1890, p. 514)
	
Type of Object	earrings
Material & Techniques	brass; hammering
Dimensions	5.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Thin surface and shaped like '3'
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	Earrings made of a brass sheet. These earrings are shaped like the number 3, with ridges on the surface.


No. 5741

Name	Ati-ati Wale-wale (Modigliani, 1890, p. 464)
	
Type of Object	earrings
Material & Techniques	brass; hammering
Dimensions	3.8 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Thin surface and shaped like '3'
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	North Nias
Short description	Earrings made of a brass sheet. These earrings are shaped like the number 3.

No. 5742

Name	Ati-ati (?)
	
Type of Object	earring
Material & Techniques	Brass wire, cone shell, stone, bone; metal bending
Dimensions	6.4 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	Earring made of four brass wires joined into one thick circle. The earring is adorned with a holed cone shell, bone and stone.

No. 5743

Name	Ati-ati (?)
	
Type of Object	earrings
Material & Techniques	Brass wire, cone shell, stone; metal bending
Dimensions	8.3 cm and 7.4 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A pair of earrings made from brass wires, formed into a single thick circle. The earring is adorned with a holed cone shell and a stone.

No. 5744

Name	Sialu
	
Type of Object	earrings
Material & Techniques	brass; casting
Dimensions	11 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Diamond shaped
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	A pair of brass earrings. These earrings are pendulum-shaped, with a diamond-shaped pendant and a hook at the top.

No. 5746

Name	Adu Bihara (Modigliani, 1890, p. 645)
	
Type of Object	spear
Material & Techniques	Wood, plant fibre; carving
Dimensions	188 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A series of small statuettes
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>A series of human-like statues composed of 100 statues and having a total length of 168 cm. 98 statues are shaped like arrowheads with a length of 20 cm and a width of 1.5-2 cm. 2 other statues have a shape resembling the letter 'Y' and are located at the left end of the series, with dimensions (23x1; 28x1). In the middle of the series, there is a second row consisting of 6 small statues in the shape of arrowheads with dimensions of 8 cm x 1 cm. Next to the second row are tied six small statues in the shape of animals (dragons?) and weapons, and woven wood measuring 8 cm x 1 cm. At the front of the series, it is joined to a 162 cm long piece of wood with a diameter of 4 cm, and decorated with palm leaves (?). The series is tied to an 188 cm long piece of wood with plant fibres. All parts of the series are made of wood and are blackish due to oxidation.</p>


No. 5748

Name	Adu Siraha Salaŵa
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	wood
Dimensions	46 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	“W” shaped hand folded on chest
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	North Nias
Short description	<p>A human-like statue measuring 46 cm high x 8.8 cm wide x 6.5 cm thick. The statue is depicted standing with slightly bent knees and both hands placed in front of the chest. On the head is an ornament resembling a pointed hat, and a round ornament surrounding the head. On the statue's right ear is an earring ornament that hangs down to the statue's shoulder. On the neck, there are six diagonal scratches on the front. The statue is made of wood and exhibits rough workmanship throughout its entire surface. The whole surface of the statue is brown.</p>


No. 5749

Name	Adu siraha famahö Adu siharava maho (Modigliani 1890, 636) Adu siraha maho (Feldman 1990, 245)
	
Type of Object	Protective charm
Material & Techniques	wood
Dimensions	8.1 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	In the shape of a baby
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	A human-like statue measuring 8.1 cm high x 3.2 cm wide x 3 cm thick. The statue is depicted standing with knees slightly bent and both hands placed in front of the chest. A round ornament adorns the crown of the head. The statue features a phallus. Made of wood, the statue shows signs of workmanship throughout its surface. The entire surface of the statue is brown.

No. 5750

Name	Adu Horo (Modigliani, 1890, p. 636)
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	Wood, bark cloth; carving
Dimensions	119 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A pronounced phallus
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	<p>A human-like statue measuring 119 cm high and 12.5 cm in diameter. The statue is depicted standing with slightly bent knees and both hands placed in front of the chest. The neck and shoulders are adorned with plant-like ropes, and the stomach is adorned with bark clothing. A 3.5 x 4 cm hole penetrates the stomach. A protruding phallus measuring 16 cm in length is visible on the statue. The statue is made of wood and shows signs of rough workmanship throughout. The entire surface of the statue is brown. The base of the statue at the front features a simple, serrated decoration.</p>

No. 5752

Name	Mbawa mbekhu Bechu lewuö Bechu lenio (Modigliani 1890, 628) Ma holo (Feldman 1990, 302)
	
Type of Object	Mask
Material & Techniques	Palm fronds, arenga, cloth; weaving, stitching
Dimensions	31 x 20 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Tiger skin pattern painted in front of the mask
Subject	War equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	A mask made from palm fronds. The perimeter of the mask is decorated with palm fibre hair, while the face is decorated with red cloth. This cloth is also used to decorate the eyes, ears, and tongue. The nose and mouth of the mask are decorated with a black-and-orange tiger-skin motif.


No. 5753

Name	Adu Zatus
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	19 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A pronounced hair
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	<p>A human-like statue measuring 19.5 cm high x 3.5 cm wide x 3.5 cm thick. It stands on a pedestal measuring 15 x 4 x 3 cm. The statue shows a standing posture with slightly bent knees and both hands placed in front of the chest. On the head, there is an ornament resembling a pointed hat. On this statue, there is a phallus and a belt ornament. The statue is made of wood and exhibits fine workmanship throughout its entire surface. The whole surface of the statue is brown. On the feet of the statue, there are vertical cracks in the wood.</p>

No. 5754


Name	Adu Zatia
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	Wood, cloth; carving
Dimensions	27.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A pronounced hair
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	<p>The statue resembles a human, measuring 27.5 x 5.2 x 4.7 cm in dimensions. The statue shows a standing posture with slightly folded knees and both hands placed in front of the chest. On the head, there is an ornament resembling a pointed hat. On this statue, there is a phallus and a belt ornament. On the waist, there is a tied cloth decoration, with the first layer being white and the second layer being red. The statue is made of wood and exhibits rough workmanship throughout its entire surface. The whole surface of the statue is a dark brown. On the feet of the statue, there are vertical cracks; large cracks can also be observed from the buttocks to the head at the back of the statue.</p>

No. 5755

Name	Adu Zatus
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	33.7 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Six small statues
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	<p>a group of human statues, consisting of six statues with their respective sizes (left-right: 30x5; 22x3; 25.2x3.5; 22x4; 30.5x6; 33.7 x 5.4). All statues are depicted in a standing position, with their knees slightly bent and both hands placed in front of their chest. All statues appear to be wearing hats. Head coverings that are pointed at the top. The two rightmost statues (no. 5 and 6) show ornaments in the form of circles on the head coverings they wear. Other visible decorations are earrings on the statue's ears and bracelets (on statues no. 5-6). Necklaces on statue no. 6, and beards on statue no. 5. The statues are made of wood, have experienced oxidation on the surface so that they are blackish, and on statues (1, 2, 5 and 6) there are visible vertical cracks on the body of the statue. Other visible damage is a fracture on the left earring of statue no. 6 and a fracture on the head decoration at the back of statue no. 5. Traces of workmanship can be clearly observed on the statues, especially statue no. 4. The six statues are joined together on a 39 cm long piece of wood using rope made of plant fibres.</p>



No. 5756

Name	Fato niha
	
Type of Object	hatchet
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood; carving, forging
Dimensions	41 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	A hatchet made of an iron axe and a wooden handle. The handle is a rounded wood with a length of 41 cm and a diameter between 4.5 and 3 cm, which tapers in the bottom part. The iron axe is 11.1 cm long and 0.7 cm thick.


No. 5757

Name	Koko
	
Type of Object	Wooden gong
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	56 cm and 34 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Hollowed tree trunk
Subject	Household equipment/music instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A sound instrument made of a hollowed tree trunk and a percussion tool. At the top, there is a notch for hanging the item. The entire surface reveals the signs of being crafted with simple chisel tools.


No. 5758

Name	Buwu Bouwu (Modigliani 1890, 272)
	
Type of Object	Fish trap
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, rattan; weaving
Dimensions	63 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	A fish trap made of bamboo and rattan. This fish trap is made of 40 bamboo columns, woven with rattan to create a bottle-like structure. To hold the structure, the fish trap is reinforced with seven woven rattan rings along its surface.

No. 5761

Name	Bowoa lamacha
	
Type of Object	pot
Material & Techniques	Clay; pottery making
Dimensions	d. 17.8 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	zigzag scratches on the surface
Distinguishing Features	Black colored and used mark
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A vessel-shaped earthenware pot. The rim of the vessel is open, with less pronounced carination/shoulders on the body. The base is semicircular. The pottery has zigzag scratches over its body and is black, possibly from cooking over a fire.


No. 5762

Name	Sa'era and Figa zino
	
Type of Object	Plate holder (sa'era) and plates (figa zino)
Material & Techniques	Rattan, arenga, caolin; weaving, ceramic making
Dimensions	Sa'era d. 31 cm Figa zino d. 23 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Greenish glazing in the plates
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	<p>Ceramic dish and plate storage containers. These containers are made of woven rattan and tied with palm fibre. The fibre ties serve as reinforcement, a lock, and a hanger.</p> <p>Ceramic dishes are circular with glazed edges. The ceramic is thick and simple.</p>

No. 5764

Name	Töwa
	
Type of Object	bag
Material & Techniques	Plant fibres; weaving
Dimensions	71 x 32 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A bag with fringes
Subject	household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This bag is made of woven plant fibres. In the upper and lower parts, there are fringes due to the excess of the plant fibres. The bottom end is stitched closed, while the upper part is open, allowing something to be put inside the bag.


No. 5765

Name	Kotak Batu Api
	
Type of Object	Flint box
Material & Techniques	Tin; gilding
Dimensions	4.2 x 4.2 x 2.9 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Silverish color
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Halambawa, Nias
Short description	A tin firebox. This firebox is trapezoidal, with the top serving as a lid. It is small and has a hole in the back, possibly for attaching a rope.

No. 5769

Name	Bola bola Cabe cabe (Modigliani 1890, 187)
	
Type of Object	Betle pouch
Material & Techniques	Fibre, cloth; weaving, stitching
Dimensions	19 x 14 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Red color cloth with geometrical decoration
Subject	Guest welcoming equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	A small bag made of woven plant fibres and decorated with red, yellow, and black fabric. The fabric on each side forms a geometric decorative pattern with straight lines, triangles, Xs, and Vs.


No. 5771

Name	Fole
	
Type of Object	mortar
Material & Techniques	Wood, tin; carving, casting
Dimensions	10.4 x 2.6 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Guest welcoming equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	mortar made of wood and reinforced with metal rings. This mortar is cylindrical, with one side open and the other blocked by a wooden plug. The cylinder body is reinforced with two metal rings. This mortar is used to crush betel and betel nuts. Paired with another tool called Tutu Wole as a crusher.


No. 5774

Name	Pipa
	
Type of Object	Tobacco pipe
Material & Techniques	Areca sp seed, bamboo; carving
Dimensions	9 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Geometric patterns
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Guest welcoming equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	This pipe consists of two elements: a bowl (chamber) and a ferrule (pipe). The bowl is made from a hollowed-out areca nut and decorated with geometric patterns. The ferrule, which serves as the suction pipe, is made from small bamboo with carved edges.


No. 5780

Name	Fali'era/tulo Gana'a and Naha Wali'era
	
Type of Object	Gold scale
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood; casting, smithing, carving
Dimensions	Scale 6.9 cm Box 9.3 x 4.4 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A thin and precise metalwork
Subject	Measurement tools
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	<p>This gold scale consists of two elements: a scale and a storage box. The gold scale is made of thin, precise metal, with one balance and two counters connected by a thread. The storage box, meanwhile, is made of wood explicitly carved to hold the scale.</p>


No. 5781

Name	Tambua gana'a
	
Type of Object	weighing scale
Material & Techniques	Stone, metal
Dimensions	17.7 x 15.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Information on weight conversion by Modigliani
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Measurement tools
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	A scale for weighing gold. Made of stone and metal, it comes in various weights and sizes. It came in 12 sizes, but three are missing, leaving nine scales.


No. 5782

Name	Afore (Modigliani, 1890, p. 150)
	
Type of Object	Measurement rod
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	124 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Marking in 17 different places
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Measurement tools
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	A wooden stick used to measure pigs. It has 17 marks on its surface to mark the size.


No. 5783

Name	Kata Cata (Modigliani 1890, 154)
	
Type of Object	Tankard/measuring container
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, rattan; weaving
Dimensions	23.5 x 6 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Weaved rattan near the lip
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	This measuring container is made of bamboo. Made by using the part between the segments of two bamboo. The base of this bamboo tube remains closed with the bamboo segments. On the body, close to the lip of the container, there is a woven rattan decoration.

No. 5784

Name	Hinaoya Noio (Modigliani, 1890, 154)
	
Type of Object	Tankard/measuring container
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, rattan; weaving
Dimensions	30 x 7.8 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Weaved rattan near the bottom
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	This measuring container is made of bamboo. Made by using the part between the segments of two bamboo. The base of this bamboo tube remains closed with the bamboo segments. On the body, close to the bottom of the container, there is a woven rattan decoration.

No. 5786

Name	Lauru Tumba (Bawomataluo)
	
Type of Object	Tankard/measuring container
Material & Techniques	Wood, rattan; carving
Dimensions	30.5 x 20 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	Wave and geometric carving
Distinguishing Features	Large handle and carving
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Gunungsitoli, Nias
Short description	This measuring container is made of wood, likely a tree trunk carved to create a hollow centre and create a handle on one side. The base is covered with another piece of wood cut into a circle. Around the rim and base of the container are decorative curved lines resembling clouds or waves. The body features geometric carvings. The handle features a rattan rope, likely used to hang the container.

No. 5787

Name	Doli-doli
	
Type of Object	Xylophone
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	Wood bars 38 x 5 x 2.5 cm Percussor 26 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Set of percussors and wooden bars
Subject	Musical instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	a musical instrument consisting of two percussion instruments and three wooden bars. The two percussion instruments are cylindrical with rounded ends, the percussion surface having a larger diameter than the handle. At the end of the handle, the two percussion instruments are tied with a string made of plant fibre. The wooden bars are hexagonal with long sides. They are carved and make a loud sound when struck.


No. 5788

Name	Tutuhao
------	---------




Type of Object	Zither
Material & Techniques	bamboo
Dimensions	60 x 8.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Bamboo with a hole in the middle
Subject	Musical instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A musical instrument made from bamboo. This instrument utilises bamboo segments to create an insulating chamber. The top and centre of the body are hollowed out to control the sound. The sides feature four strings, stripped from the bamboo skin and suspended by wooden rods. The top and bottom are reinforced with rattan rings to hold the bamboo strings.

No. 5789

Name	Surune Sigu (Modigliani, 1890, p. 565)
	
Type of Object	Flute
Material & Techniques	Bamboo; carving
Dimensions	26 x 2.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Musical instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	wind musical instruments made of bamboo. The inflatable part is carved, tapered and plugged with wood to create a small hole. On the body, there are four holes. The bamboo skin is only peeled at the end of the flute.

No. 5790

Name	Surune
	
Type of Object	Flute
Material & Techniques	Bamboo; carving
Dimensions	26 x 2.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Musical instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	wind musical instruments made of bamboo. The inflatable part is carved, tapered and plugged with wood to create a small hole. On the body, there are five holes. The bamboo skin is peeled away to reveal a flatter surface.

No. 5791

Name	Ndruri weto
	
Type of Object	Wind chimes
Material & Techniques	Bamboo; carving
Dimensions	10 x 1.3 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Musical instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A musical instrument made from bamboo. This instrument is 0.1 cm thick and carefully carved from a small bamboo piece. The middle part is carved to separate a single bar of bamboo from its main body, allowing it to move and vibrate to create the sound.

No. 5792

Name	Si fa dau daho (Modigliani, 1890, p. 561)
	
Type of Object	game
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, plant fibres; carving
Dimensions	49 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Bamboo with a hole in the middle
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	<p>A game made of bamboo, plant fibres and two balls. The bamboo stick is adorned with a geometric pattern on its surface. The threads, made of plant fibres, are tied at both ends and in the middle part of the bamboo, and the balls are beaded onto the threads.</p>

No. 9595

Name	Adu zatua
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statues
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	28 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Three characters in black colour
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A group of human-like statues, consisting of three statues of different sizes (left to right: 28x2.5; 26.5x4.2; 26x4.1). Statue 1 has a shape resembling the letter 'Y', while statues 2 and 3 resemble arrowheads. There are no decorative ornaments on the three statues, only carvings resembling faces. The statues are made of wood, which has undergone oxidation on the surface, resulting in a blackish appearance. Traces of workmanship can be clearly observed on the statues. Vertical cracks are visible on statues 1 and 3. The three statues are held together on a 23.5 cm long piece of wood using rope made of plant fibres.

No. 9596

Name	Adu fangola / Adu ono alave (Modigliani, 1890, p. 641)
------	--



Type of Object	Protective charm
Material & Techniques	clay; sculpting
Dimensions	25 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A human-like statue measuring 25 cm high x 5.2 cm wide x 7.4 cm thick. The statue is depicted standing with slightly bent knees and both hands placed in front of the stomach. On the head is a decorative ornament in the form of a pointed hat and two round decorations on the front of the hat. There are breasts and a vagina. The statue is made of clay and shows traces of workmanship (carved from a clay block) on its entire surface. The whole surface of the statue is light brown. There are fine cracks on the head and left shoulder. On the left waist of the statue is a paper sticker with the number 6.


No. 9597

Name	Adu Zatua
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statues
Material & Techniques	Wood, cloth, rattan; carving
Dimensions	32 x 17 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Sets of ancestral statues
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	<p>A set of ancestral statues. Each is made of wood, with a cone-shaped head decoration. All statues are standing with their arms folded in front of their chests and their legs folded forward. The faces are not clearly carved, with only a nose and mouth outline, and a beard-like outline on the male statue. The statues are decorated with red cloth as a headband and a loincloth. Rattan ties are tied around the abdomen to hold the four statues together. The male and female statues are arranged alternately, with the male statues marked by one earring in the left ear and the female statues with two.</p>

No. 9608

Name	Adu Bihara
	
Type of Object	Ancestral statue
Material & Techniques	Wood; carving
Dimensions	37 x 6 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	A character with a high hat
Subject	Ancestral worship
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A human-like statue measuring 37 cm high x 6 cm wide x 5.2 cm thick. The statue is depicted standing with slightly bent knees and both hands placed in front of the stomach. On the head is an ornament resembling a pointed hat. On the left and right ears of the statue are ornaments in the form of earrings, and a necklace around the neck. On this statue, there are protrusions (referred to as breasts) and a vagina. The statue is made of wood and exhibits fine workmanship throughout its entire surface. The entire surface of the statue is brown. On the side of the statue, there is a relatively large vertical crack from the thigh to the head.

No. 9617

Name	Tutu Wole
	
Type of Object	Pestle
Material & Techniques	Iron, wood; carving
Dimensions	17 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Guest welcoming equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Bawolowalani, South Nias
Short description	A tool used in conjunction with a mortar. It consists of two elements: a metal betel crusher and a wooden handle. The metal tip of the betel crusher is flat with four-pointed edges. The wooden handle is plain and comfortable to hold.

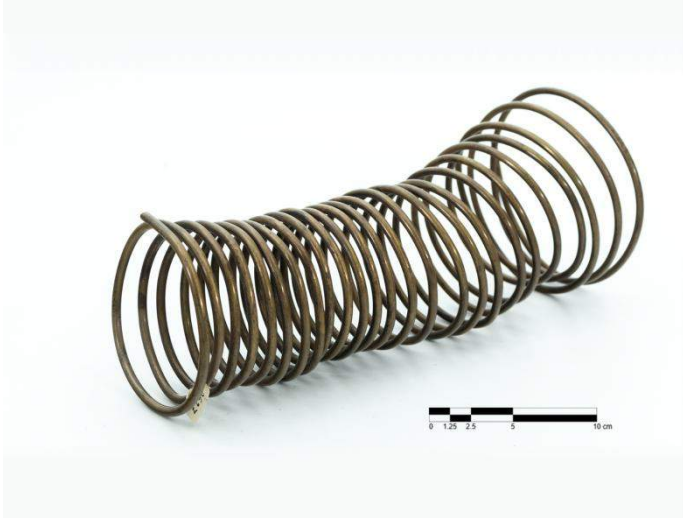
No. 9619

Name	Batu asah
	
Type of Object	whetstone
Material & Techniques	stone
Dimensions	11.2 x 2.2 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Household instrument
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Nias
Short description	A whetstone for sharpening a knife or sword. It is rectangular and shows signs of use on its surface.

No. 9622

Name	Sukhu Eu
	
Type of Object	Hair comb
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, wood, fibres; carving
Dimensions	8.9 x 4.3 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This hair comb is made of bamboo and wood. The handle is made of four layers of small bamboo tubes arranged to be tapered in the lower part. At the same time, the shered teeth were made of a series of wooden picks separated with plant fibres to create a consistent distance between each pick. Two black wooden parts are placed at the end of each sherd to hold them in place.


No.9627

Name	Aya kola Aia cola (Modigliano 1890, 516) Aja kola (De Moor 1990, 118)
	
Type of Object	bracelet
Material & Techniques	Brass; metal bending
Dimensions	22 x 9.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Spiral-shaped brass wire bracelet
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	A heavy bracelet made of wire brass. The wire is 0.3 cm thick and rolled to create a spiral shape. The diameter of the front part is 7 cm, and the diameter of the end part is 9.5 cm. The total length of the spiral shape is 22 cm.

No. 9630

Name	Baru goni Baru sinali (Langi et al., 2021, p. 51)
	
Type of Object	Sleeveless shirt
Material & Techniques	fibres; weaving, stitching
Dimensions	42 x 30 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Woven fabric, dark brown colour
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	South Nias
Short description	This sleeveless garment is made of fibres woven and sewn with thread. Its surface is smoother than bark garments and very thin. It features a collar. There is no button-like mechanism to close the garment.

No. 9632

Name	Sio (Modigliani, 1890, p. 488)
	
Type of Object	Walking rod
Material & Techniques	Wood, brass; carving, gilding
Dimensions	134 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	Wooden stick with a decorative metal band
Subject	Clothing and jewellery
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Tabaloho, Nias
Short description	A walking rod used by a noblewoman in Nias. It is made of wood (kayu nibung) with a diameter of 3.8 cm and tapers to the bottom. The rod is adorned with metal at the top part and a brass band along its surface.

No. 9634

Name	Buwu Bouwu (Modigliani 1890, 272)
	
Type of Object	Fish trap
Material & Techniques	Bamboo, rattan; weaving
Dimensions	62.5 cm
Inscriptions & Markings	-
Distinguishing Features	-
Subject	Household equipment
Date or Periods	1886
Provenance/Maker	Lagundri, South Nias
Short description	A fish trap made of bamboo and rattan. This fish trap is made of 42 bamboo columns, woven with rattan to create a bottle-like structure. To hold the structure in place, the fish trap is reinforced with seven woven rattan rings along its surface.