

**"The Formation of 'Our Heritage' – Defining, Exploiting, and Protecting Cultural Assets
in 18th- 19th Century Europe"**

– Robert Skwirblies –

The case study examines how the modern notion of tangible cultural assets emerged in Europe – both in the collective consciousness of certain population groups, and in political and juristic spheres. This question of definition is directly related to two fundamental aspects that are essential both for museum and collection practices in the modern era, and for cultural politics: (1) ideas of systematisation and attribution of value, and (2) notions of the objects' worthiness of protection and need for protection. The research cluster *translocations* explores the ideas and practices of violent appropriation or removal of objects perceived as cultural assets; and this case study seeks to explore the foundational premises of the overall project: Why, in which respect, and under which circumstances have objects of all kinds received the status of a “cultural asset” in particular in modern Europe?

While research on the protection of cultural assets generally does not start before the end of the 19th century, the pre-modern history of this complex of topics is the focus of the study. The departure point for this study will be Italian state legal documents from the late 16th century and beyond – some of which have already been found and edited, and some of which still need to be accessed. Insofar as they can be verified and found, legal documents from France, England, and central and southern European countries will also be used. In addition, literary and art historical sources which explicitly or implicitly revolve around the topic of "heritage" and collective identity are being researched. The overall methodological framework of the *translocations*-cluster, which allows access to and filtering of such documents, is a central reference point for this purpose.

The following questions will guide this research: To what extent has the European understanding of cultural heritage presupposed the differentiation between the "own" and the "foreign"? Which philosophical and political ideas have been formative in assembling the concept of “heritage”? And how have these processes been selectively focused on specific object categories, historical images, or narratives? Overall, the case study aims to show links between this historical construction and contemporary Euro-American discourses on shared heritage with non-European discursive spaces, thus broadening the perspective of this field of research.