

Screening the Collection

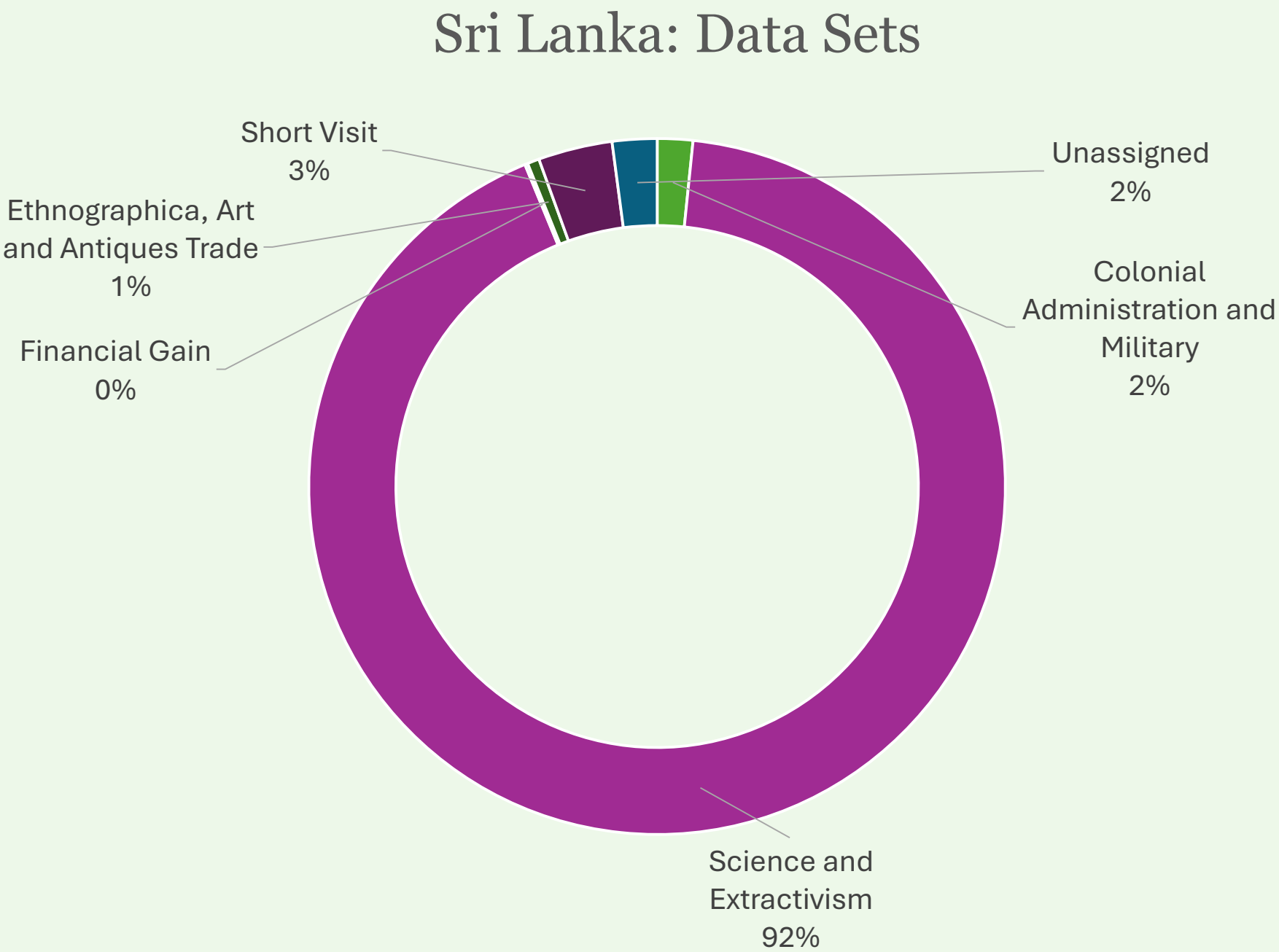
Provenance Research at the Museum der Kulturen Basel (MKB)

Researching the Archives



By systematically evaluating the museum’s archives (entry books, index cards, protocols, annual reports, collection files), we reassemble as many pieces of information as possible on each entry to MKB. This leads to a thorough documentation and better understanding of emergence and development of the museum's collection and its (colonial) entanglements.

Quantifying the Results



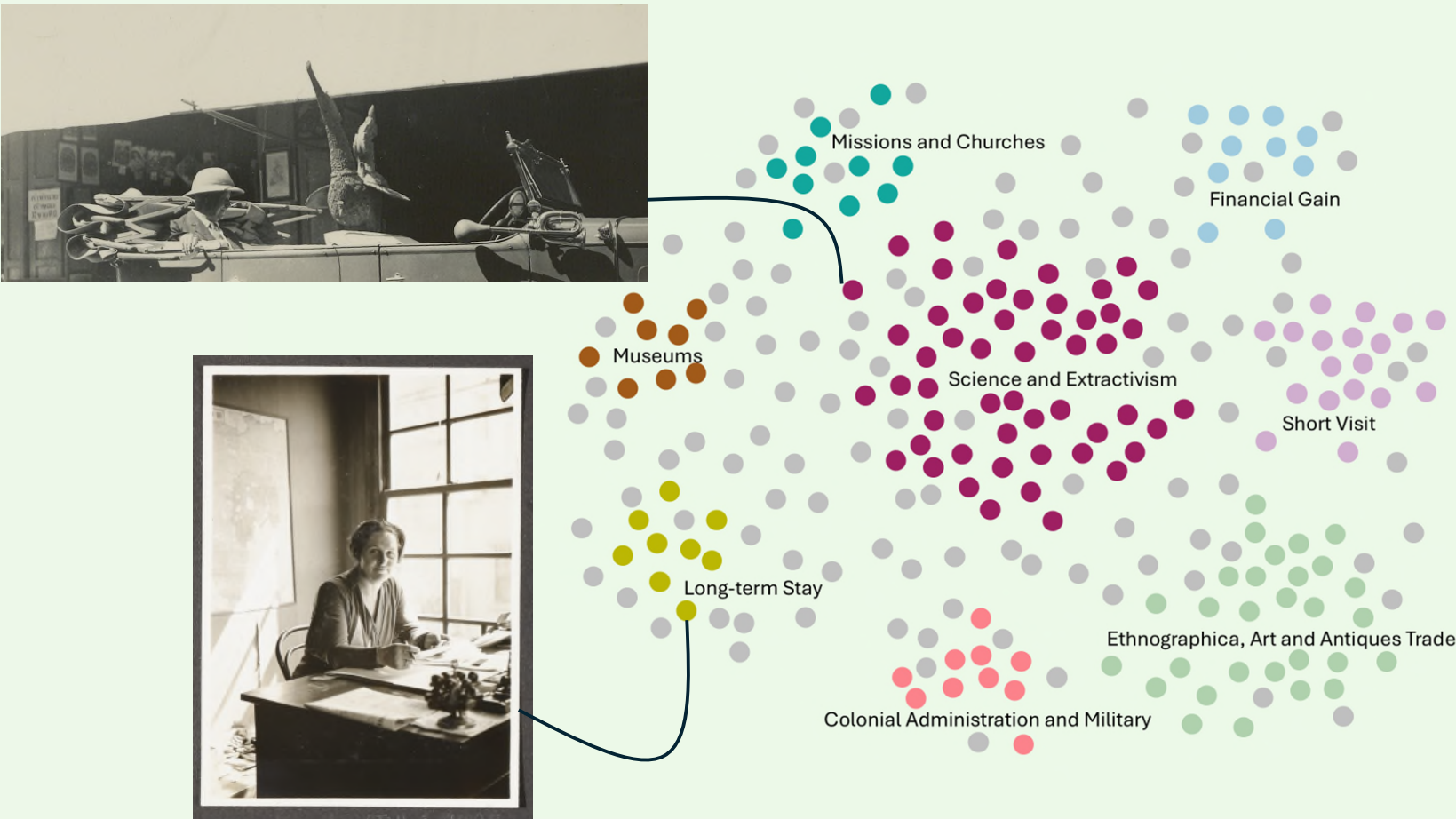
This method not only yields a wide range of case studies but also allows for quantitative insights into the museum’s wider pattern of collecting. It reveals the mechanisms and interrelations that led to the formation of the ethnographic collection in Basel. One of the findings from the evaluation so far, for instance, is that actors in the “Science and Extractivism” cluster are the most strongly represented group. Regional differences are noticeable and point to different regional collection or appropriation strategies, accessibility, or personal networks.

Schmid, Anna; Museum der Kulturen (eds.) 2025. Each Case Is Different. Anthropological Provenance Research at the Museum der Kulturen Basel. Berlin: Hatje Cantz.

ISBN: 978-3-7757- 6174 -1 [PRINT in German]
ISBN: 978-3-7757- 6175 -8 [e-book in German]
ISBN: 978-3-7757- 6176 -5 [e-book in English]

Looking for Patterns

In the analysis of the historical sources, we follow an actor-based approach. We examine the specific roles of the museum’s suppliers, with the intent of determining in what capacity the respective actors operated at the moment of an object’s first change of hands. This also sheds light on the coloniality of MKB’s holdings. By grouping individuals according to their specific roles in the (colonial) context, we are creating clusters of actors that share a number of similarities in the ways they accessed objects.



For MKB, determining the contemporary significance of collections for communities of implications in Switzerland and abroad is just as important as anthropological and historical research. This can only be established in collaborative processes. Together we are looking for forms of access and collaboration these stakeholders seek and prioritize. By doing our research and becoming transparent about it, we want to lay the foundation for future collaborative case studies in provenance research.

