

### **Round Table: New ways for digitizing estate inventories**

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Estate inventories are lists of movable goods that belong (or belonged) to a household. Typically they were drawn up after the death of one or more members of the household (probate inventories), but inventories were also made in the case of bankruptcy, mortgage and other circumstances. A large number (probably in the millions) of such documents, dating from the late middle ages to the early twentieth century have been preserved by archives worldwide. And there is a large body of literature that sees estate inventories as an important source for the historical study of topics like material culture, consumption, the distribution of wealth, the demand for art, the circulation of coin, and so on.

As semi-structured texts estate inventories have been a favorite of digital history for a long time. In fact, the earliest attempts to digitize probate inventories date back to the punch card era of computing. Since then there have been many research projects that created estate inventory databases using a standardized data model. Such data sets have the advantage that they are relatively easy to query, but they suffer from the drawback that much information from the original document inevitably gets lost in the process of digitization and that modeling and standardization decisions are hard to reverse. On the other hand, transcription oriented digitization projects, of which there are also a few, tend to generate a lot of data that is hard to aggregate and to combine.

Already a decade ago some proposals have been made to use XML to overcome the gap between database oriented and transcription oriented digitization projects concerning estate inventories. Strangely enough these proposals have yielded little follow up. Meanwhile, the rise of the Linked Data paradigm and the advances being made with regard to handwritten text recognition and automated classification, are posing new challenges with regard to the digitization of estate inventories.

In this round table we want to provide a critical overview of past, current and future developments in digital estate inventory research. We would also like to use this opportunity to establish a new consortium, that revitalizes the digital research into estate inventories.