

## Words from the President

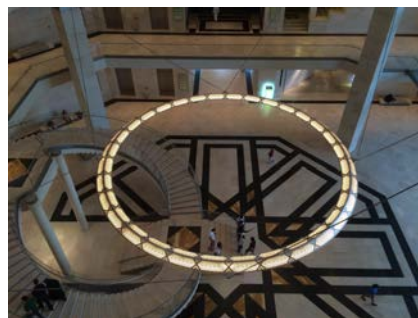
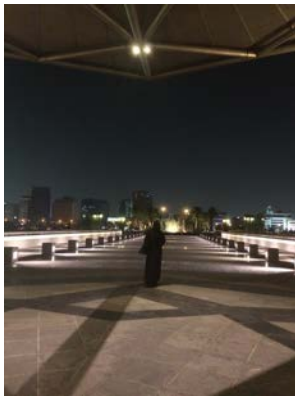
Dear ICME colleagues, dear friends,

It is three months since we had our annual meeting in summertime Milan. Now I am looking out on the autumn leaves here in Leicester. This is such a beautiful season and we are fortunate that Martin Earring is organizing our 2017 meeting in Washington with a trip to New York. THANK you Martin!

On my return from Milan I was invited to Doha and made two trips in July and August during my annual holiday. My role was to advise our Qatari colleagues in the National Museum (NMoQ) on museum education in general and programming in particular. The new museum designed by Jean Nouvel, which is still under construction, takes its form from desert rose petals with a series of interlocking discs, placed around the historical Amiri Palace. NMoQ is already spectacular, extending across a stretch of land facing the ocean on one side with extensive green spaces for socializing outside the museum, in the manner of the I. M. Pei's Museum of Islamic Art (MIA).

My brilliant colleagues in the Learning Department of the National Museum were extremely generous hosts (hospitality may be the middle name of Qataris) and they kindly took me to MIA before I began my work. I.M. Pei's building takes inspiration from traditional Islamic architecture, with geometric forms and patterns featuring on the external and internal spaces.

The prime materials and textures are fitting, externally the limestone captures the changing light of the sun and internally materials, including wood and stone, create a unique environment. The MIA collections – spiritual and secular – span three continents and over 1,400 years.



30.10.16

### Issue 79 The Halloween Issue!

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I would like to give ICME a brief overview of one temporary show at MIA. Muhammad Ali: Tribute to a Legend, reflects on Muhammad Ali's visit to Doha in 1971, when he was warmly welcomed by His Royal Highness and gave a demonstration-boxing match. The exhibition opens with a quotation from Ali.

The fight is won or lost  
Far away from witnesses –  
Behind the lines, in the gym,  
And out there on the road  
Long before I dance  
Under the lights



Ali was a skillful wordsmith as well as a talented boxer. It is worth sharing a little more of his thought here that we can see in the exhibition.

He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.

It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wears you out it's the pebble in your shoe.

If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it – then I can achieve it.

Throughout the exhibition all the text panels that include Ali's words are highly engaging and the timeline is highly informative. There are some incredible photographs, posters and a video showing the 1971 trip to Qatar. On the video Ali says 'Seeing how many Muslims I have in my corner, this will give me more strength and power inshAllah (God-willing) to defeat Joe Frasier, no trouble.'



The show also has a range of objects. We see the gloves he wore as a 22 year old in the controversial fight with Sonny Liston on 25 May 1965, where the 'Phantom Punch' was struck, the document outlining Ali's objection to serving in US army and the reasons for his refusal to fight the war in Vietnam and the beautiful ring awarded after defeating Leon Spinks in 1978. The cases that house the objects are exquisite and lit in a low resolution that imparts a special if not sacred atmosphere. Well worth a visit!



Meanwhile in this ICME News you can read about Staffan Lundén's PhD research into the Benin objects at the British Museum, which has just been published, an announcement from your committee member Ulf Dahre on a new book on the ethnographic museums of Scandinavia, some reflections on the trip to Castello D'Albertis which Tone Karlgård enjoyed as part of the ICME meet up in Milan, and then following this we have a special seasonally themed section, where Gudrun Whitehead gives us a glimpse into the strange world of Icelandic folklore, and where Peter Hewitt opens the doors of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England.

Viv Golding

# 'Mentally the Negro is inferior to the white': On the Benin Loot and the British Museum

'To whom do these objects belong?' and 'Should these objects be returned to their places of origin or should they remain with their current possessors?' are questions which, for good reasons, are often asked in relation to a range of objects in Western museum collections – the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum being the most well-known case.

But what happens if we, when looking at such cases, turn the attention from ownership to representation? That is, if one looks what current possessors actually communicates with the contested objects and adds the question if the conflict over ownership affects the representation being made?



This was one of the points of departure for my Ph. D. *Displaying Loot: The Benin Objects and the British Museum*, about the objects looted from Benin City, present-day Nigeria, in 1897. It studied how the British museum represents (or as, I argue, makes) the Benin objects, the Edo/African, the British/Western, and the British Museum. Neil MacGregor, the museum's director until 2015, has claimed that the Benin objects provide the 'key argument' against the return of objects in its collections, and the study looked closely at how the museum's representations relate to its retentionist argument.

According to MacGregor, the British Museum was founded to foster tolerance, dissent, and respect for difference, and today the museum shows many different cultures without privileging any of them. The museum's benevolent societal impact is exemplified with the Benin objects, whose arrival in the West led to the disintegration of European derogatory stereotypes of Africans, thanks to British Museum scholars.

Yet, the source material – the museum's own guidebooks and scholarly publications – reveal a far less glorious picture of the museum's past than that imagined by MacGregor. The documentary record makes clear that the museum has generally shown cultures not as equal, but as occupying various positions on a scale of progress. To the British Museum scholars, who were convinced that the people of Benin had learned the technical and artistic skill evident in the Benin castings from the Portuguese, these objects did not challenge the assumption of Western superiority. Rather they confirmed it. For example, when British Museum employee Thomas Athol Joyce wrote the article 'Negro' for Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1911, the perceived decline in artistic quality after the session of Portuguese influence, corroborated his dictum that 'Mentally the Negro is inferior to the white'. His text also gave scientific legitimization to a range of derogatory stereotypes, such as the likening of Blacks to apes and the sexual appetite of black men. Such views are hard to reconcile with notion of the museum as a beacon of tolerance.

The study does not only look at how the museum distorts history and

downplays its racist past. It also analyses its contemporary displays and publications and shows that the museum, in a subtly manner, still represents self and other as different: the Edo/African is portrayed as traditional while the Westerner is portrayed as progressive.



In sum, despite the museum's 'universalistic' ambition, its representations are deeply entangled in, and formed, by British (Museum) traditions and cultural assumptions. Paradoxically, whereas the claim to neutrality and impartiality is a central tenet in the museum's defence against claims, it appears that the ownership issue strongly contributes to the biases in its representations.

Hopefully, the book will contribute to the discussion on topics such as representation, ownership and the decolonization of the mind.

Staffan Lundén, Gothenburg University

The book is available at: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/45847>

It has been published at Gothenburg University and a number of printed copies are still available for research libraries. If you are interested, please contact [Staffan.lunden@globalstudies.gu.se](mailto:Staffan.lunden@globalstudies.gu.se)

## Announcement: A new book on the ethnographic museums of Scandinavia

In 2015, Ulf Johansson Dahre, Lund University, Sweden, and Thomas Fibiger, Aarhus University and Moesgaard Museum, Denmark, published the anthology *Ethnography at Museums: Visions and Challenges for the Ethnographic Museums in Scandinavia*, Aarhus University Press (title translated from Danish). The purpose of the book is to situate the developments in Scandinavian museums within the larger context of changing ethnographic museums on the global scene.

The anthology consists of thirteen chapters in Danish and Swedish. One chapter is translated into Danish from Icelandic and one from Finnish to Swedish. The book is divided into two major areas. One deals with museum political issues, like the changing names and ideas of ethnographic museums into museums of world cultures. These chapters deal with questions like the future of collections, the new ideas concerning the museum as a social arena, if there is a future for the ethnographic museums of

Finland. The other part consists of chapters dealing with new ideas and innovative ways of exhibition practice and interpretation. For example, one chapter deals with the life of the dead; another one deals with the automobile as an ethnographic object; and one links botanical gardens and ethnographic museums in both a historical and contemporary perspective.

The reason for this is, of course, that currently there is a wide spread discussion on the political and social role and meaning of ethnographic museums. Sometimes it appears as if the whole idea of maintaining ethnographic museum is challenged. Ethnographic museums seem to be inherently controversial, as several observers have noticed.

Not long ago, in the 1980s and the early 1990s, observers using post-modern and post-colonial theories as weapons made frontal attacks on the ethnographic museums. James Clifford deconstructed the museums and challenged the existence of ethnographic

museums as such, even if the question of the legitimacy of the museums remains an unresolved issue, it is argued, the critique today usually takes a different direction. Questions raised are often, but not exclusively: what is cultural heritage in a multicultural world? Who owns the museum and its collections? And, if we wish to maintain the museums, what social role should they play? In relation to this debate I wish to raise three questions, in an effort to put the whole discussion in a wider political and social context. Firstly, in what does the transformation of the museums consist? What are the changes that so many observers, policy-makers, and people in the museum sector are talking about? Secondly, why are these transformations occurring? What are the ideas and forces that underlie the claimed transformations? The third and last question to be addressed is what are the consequences for museums of these transformations?

Ulf Johansson Dahre

## Castello D`Albertis in Genoa - engaging museum of world culture

*'Museums are places where new interpretations of the world may appear'*

Director Maria Camilla De Palma

During the ICOM General Conference in Milan 3-9. July 2016 ICME organized a one-day seminar in Castello D'Albertis, a fantasy castle built in 1892 situated in a spectacular location with a magnificent view of the ocean and the city. Upon his death in 1932 Captain Albertis gave the castle to his beloved hometown. Enrico Alberto D'Albertis (1846-1932) lived an adventurous life as a sea captain, ethnographer, zoologist and photographer, and his

collections include both objects and an impressive photo collection.

By now the building serves as a particularly active, engaging and charming museum in the city. Inclusion, communication and participation are the fundamental principles for the activities in Museo D `Albertis.

People with migrant experience are often engaged as guides and cultural interpreters. ICME was warmly welcomed by director Maria Camilla De Palma, who gave a brief introduction to the museum and introduced us to Sakho Ngagne from Senegal, who would be showing us around in the special

exhibition of historical photos from west Africa. Sakho Ngagne was born and raised in Senegal and migrated to Genoa.

The exhibition is beautifully curated and shows photos from Albertis' travels in North and West Africa in the late 1800s. The pictures are in quite small formats, framed and mounted on the golden brown, painted walls on the museum's second floor. Sakho Ngagne gives the tour in English, interpreting the photos quickly and clearly, referring us to the details in the pictures that indicate what is taking place in the actual situations documented by the captain.

Ngagne gives detailed explanations about the costumes and housing conditions and the work performed in some of the photographs. He is proud to share knowledge from the region. He expresses how much he enjoys interpreting photography and collections and communicate to the museums audience out of local knowledge and personal history. Ngagne is really engaged and sometimes he takes hold of the frames with his hands as well as putting his index finger on the actual photo to clarify what he wants to highlight. This is a somehow mind blowing experience to some of us, a group of museum people used to touching objects with gloves if touching them at all. Using his hand like this was really effective and not harmful to either frames or photocopies, rather it is part of Sakho Ngagne's style.

### **Migranttour**

Our guide tells us that he is related to a cultural project for migrants - <http://www.mygrantour.org/en/the-project/#the-project> - and that it is through this he has established contact with the museum. Migranttour is a project which develops cultural city tours led by residents with migrant background. Migranttour started in Turin in 2010, and since then both Milan, Florence and Rome and Genoa have become partners in the project.

The group of migrant interpreters in the Castello comprises guides from Africa, Latin America and Albania. Maria Luisa Gutierrez from Peru gives us an interesting guiding of the Peru section in the museum. She is a member of COLIDOLAT, an association of women from Latin America. Maria Luisa Gutierrez holds an MA in Intercultural Communication and she is working on projects involving refugees both in the museum and other venues.

Participants from Migranttours are going through a 6 month training programme of which part of the training is specifically geared toward museum guiding. Director

Maria Camilla De Palma says that the museum supports participants that educate intercultural guides through working together on collections and exhibitions in the museum. In this work, the museum staff put especially the emphasis on listening to and learning from migrants' perspectives. They encourage participants to share their feelings and opinions about the museum and collections. Migrants' experiences both from homeland and from Genoa is relevant and interesting information for the museum. De Palma explains that it is very interesting and inspiring to find connections between the city's streets, the museum's stories and the participants' own stories of homeland and travelling.

### **The museum as a venue for diverse artistic expressions**

After our ICME group enjoyed seminars and a tour of this little fairy-tale castle, contemporary dancer Federica Loredan (<http://www.federicaloredan.com/>) gave an intense and inspiring dance performance on the castle roof. Loredan had recently returned to Genoa from a period of work and studies among the refugees on Lampedusa. There she used dance as a tool both to connect and work with people who are experiencing life as refugees in the uncertain situation they find themselves in on Lampedusa.

Federica's performance is just one example of the varied cultural program and extensive cooperation taking place at this World Culture Museum.

The Museum's director governs on the basis of an ideology of openness, cooperation and sharing of power and authority with the general public, both refugees, people with backgrounds in other countries and continents, and local people get involved.

De Palma's main interest is to use the museum as a forum for exchanging experiences and

opinions, a place for communications between many voices. She writes in the visitor guide to Castello D'Albertis: 'If the museum is actively involving the audience as well as raising awareness of the constructed and relative in the museum's nature, museums will still be useful places to continue the historical, political and moral connections between past and present and be agents of social change and cultural dialogue rather than elitist temples detached from the rest of society' (own translation).

Tone Cecilie Karlgård

# Halloween Special: *Object Spotlight - Sinister Pants*



The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft is one of the country's most intriguing narrative museums. Within its walls, Iceland's folklore heritage comes to life, through visual representations of orally transmitted tales of old. The item which has received the most notoriety is doubtless the necropants (in Icelandic they are called: 'nábuxur' or 'finnabrækur'). Made by the stage designer Árni Páll Jóhannsson, the necropants gained worldwide attention when they were featured on the popular BBC quiz show, *QI*.

According to folklore, the pants are made by skinning a dead man from the waist down and placing a stolen coin inside the scrotum. Putting on the pants, they would become grafted to the wearer, guaranteeing them an endless flow of money inside the scrotum. The only catch was, that to ensure your salvation, you had to get someone else to put them on before you died. Good friends are indeed a treasure.

The backstory of the trousers is not the only fascinating information about this exhibit. Due to the realistic construction of the

trousers, stories pop up online regularly, claiming they are the only known intact pair of necropants. *International Business Times* describes them as 'so grotesque they could make even Hannibal Lecter reach for the barf bag', while *Disinfo* calls them 'the only known intact pair of necropants, a beyond-disturbing item [...]'. In an interview with *Icelandic Magazine* in 2014, Sigurður Atlason, the museum's manager, said that despite the gruesome descriptions and look of the pants, people flock to see them, demanding a verification of their authenticity. Unfortunately, he had to admit that they do not exist outside legends and the museum walls.

The popularity of and debates about the necropants demonstrate the essence of the Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft's uniqueness within the Icelandic museum sector. It has been a favourite of mine for years; an interest fuelled by the many academic debates it opens up: authenticity, the value of replicas, the visual representation of oral heritage and history, dark tourism and the grotesque in museums.

The museum's online notoriety has been essential to its success, opening the doors to a new visitor market. In this context, does the authenticity (or the lack thereof) influence its value? What substance, beyond the grotesque, does the museum offer? Does the museum offer a truly unique location for dark tourism due to its lack of historical authenticity? Or does it offer its own authenticity within the realms of folklore and oral narration?

Whatever the answers, the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft provides visitors with a unique view into Iceland's past. A place where magic and mystery, death and grotesqueness are celebrated and enjoyed.

And should someone be interested in how to make their own pair of necropants, thus creating a new layer of authenticity, Sigurður Atlason can provide detailed instructions.

Dr Gudrun D. Whitehead  
Adjunct lecturer and post-doctoral fellow  
University of Iceland

# Halloween Special: *Museum Spotlight - The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, Boscastle*



Nestled in the picturesque fishing harbour of Boscastle on the north Cornish coast, the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic is located midway between the elemental grandeur of Bodmin Moor, with its pre-historic settlements and fabled sites of witchcraft initiation, and the cliff castle of Tintagel, the physical heart of the Arthurian myths. The museum opened here, it is said, because this is where the sea-witches once 'sold the wind' to sailors in the form of a piece of thrice-knotted rope charmed with seagull feathers. Recent research has revealed that a wise woman did indeed work here in the village and was consulted by the famous Shakespearean actor Sir Henry Irving in the 1890s.

The museum moved into the sixteenth century building in the harbour (known traditionally as the 'Witches House') in 1960 and is the largest independent, publicly accessible collection of magical objects in existence. It was recently acquired by the Director of the Museum of British Folklore, Simon Costin, after the previous director Graham King steered the museum through some difficult times, including the devastation of a flood in 2004. At the centre of the collection are folk magic and occult artefacts amassed by our founder, Cecil Hugh Williamson (1909 – 1999) who primarily collected

magical lore and objects from his native Devon and Cornwall, but also as far afield as Africa. His interest in magic began when he and his parson uncle saved a supposed witch from a mob in a small Devonshire village. This was Cecil's first contact with the 'wayside witches' of England; practitioners who were to be found the length and breadth of the country each plying their own intuitive, localised form of cunning craft. From the spiritualists and occultists of elite London society, the 'middle-class magic' concocted behind net curtains in the urban Midlands, to the indigent witch whose 'fearful' magical tools were buried in the ruins of a cottage in Port Broderick on the Isle of Man – this varied history of Britain's magical past is analysed and celebrated in both permanent displays and temporary exhibitions at the Museum.

Each visitor appears to have their own special relationship with the Museum. For some, it is a temple housing the ritual tools of their priests and priestesses: Aleister Crowley, Gerald Gardner (founder of Wicca), Doreen Valiente, Patricia Crowther and Alex Sanders, to name a few. Wicca is a relatively recent development in the history of witchcraft and therefore its proponents still have living relatives whose response to our objects add

to the unique atmosphere of the museum: for instance, one woman burst into floods of tears when she recognised the handwriting of her estranged mother in a Book of Shadows from a New Forest Coven dating to the 1950s. For others, the museum experience may be described as something akin to a 'Gothic' thrill, a place where one's 'dark leanings' may be satisfied and allowed free reign before returning to the 'real world'. For others, the Museum is fully living entity whose displays are portals to the spirit world. I will always remember one visitor who reported being hit by a spirit force emanating from the museum (she was walking past the building at the time) which gave her an instant migraine. She rang us up later, neither annoyed nor surprised, to let us know that the 'spirits were very much alive here'.

The Museum is fully engaged with academics, magical practitioners, historians, artists and folklorists, and we are always open to collaboration with institutions and individuals. For more information about our fabulous collections search our online catalogue at <http://museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk/> or better still visit us (ICME members get in free) between Easter and Halloween!

Dr. Peter Hewitt,  
Hallowtide, 2016

## Words from the Editor

The clocks have just gone back here, and I, for one, am grateful that that means lighter mornings for my partner and I to walk to work.

On the other hand, I welcome the incoming darkness. The following week is usually one which is full of festivity in the UK: from All Hallow's Eve to Bonfire Night, the midnight sky is lit of by fireworks.

In Leicester, the festival nature of this time of year is only enhanced by the mix of cultures from around the world. Diwali starts things off, with the switching on of the lights at Belgrave, and the fireworks continue from then until the New Year. The famous Golden Mile is made even more spectacular, as celebratory lights glitter across the jewels and bright fabrics, and the city centre begins to glimmer with Christmas lights.

But this weekend is Halloween. And what a strange holiday it is; both highly secular and peculiarly spiritual. The candy apples, and the closer connection to the souls of those whom we have lost. The

strange ambivalence which comes with the joy of being afraid, the abject awareness of your mortality in the face of the upcoming winter.

It's starting to get *cold*. Our local blue-faced witch, Black Annis, is probably on the prowl. I work near the archway where she is said to lurk around midnight, so I plan to be especially careful walking home at night.

I want to thank, again, all of the contributors to this issue; Staffan, for sharing his research, committee members Tone and Ulf for being prepared to share their thoughts and feelings on books and experiences, and particularly to Gudrun and Peter, who were willing to do a quick turn around for some peices for my whimsical desire to have a 'Halloween' section.

Let me know what you think about the various sections I'm trialling at the moment - the book and exhibition reviews and announcements, museum and object spotlights, and research peices. What do you like? What

would you like to see more of? What would you be willing to contribute? (I'm very open to ideas).

I have a correction to make to the last issue: I should have named Natasha Barrat as the author of the review of *Dressed as a Newzealander*, and the same article should have referred to Ella, not Alice. My apologies.

Stay safe, in the dark.

Jen Walklate

*There is nothing funny about Halloween. This sarcastic festival reflects, rather, an infernal demand for revenge by children on the adult world.*

Jean Baudrillard.



### Picture Credits

Pages 1-2, courtesy of Viv Golding  
Page 3, Fig 1. The Sainsbury African Galleries, British Museum. Benin objects on display. Photo. Staffan Lundén

Page 3, Fig. 2. Benin City 1897. British soldiers posing with Benin objects. Note the classic manspread.  
© Trustees of the British Museum

Page 6, Gudrun Whitehead, courtesy of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

Page 7, All images courtesy of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, Boscastle

This Newsletter is published every three months. You can contact the News with anything you think the wider ICME/Museum Ethnography Community would like to hear! Please email [jenny.walklate@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.walklate@gmail.com) with anything you'd like to include.

The website is:  
<http://network.icom.museum/icme/>

See you next time!