

## **Fake and Real in Ancient and Modern Societies – Objects, Places, Practices**

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On 15–16 March 2018 the workshop took place in Leiden, the Netherlands. It was embedded into the curriculum of Museum Studies at the University of Leiden and brought together international experts from the fields of Archaeology, Cultural Anthropology and Museology to discuss the notions of fake and real across disciplines. The framing keynote speech was delivered by Martin Berger from the Museum Volkenkunde at Leiden. Four discussion panels tackled different aspects of authenticity and authentication, two on each day; each panel featured impulse presentations by early career researchers. Geographically, the case studies spanned the globe and were chronologically spread from 1,600 B.C. to the present. This report presents insights from the workshop.

MARTIN BERGER (Leiden) pointed out that any labelling as „fake“ or „real“ is not imminent to a specific object. „Authenticity“ and „inauthenticity“ are being negotiated by discourse and narrative (Price 2012). Authentication processes raise the question: Who has the power to determine which representation is authentic? (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner 1992). Experts need training to attach the right labels; educational institutions offer such training and re-produce concepts of authenticity. Berger discussed the case of the so-called Mixtec Mosaic skulls from the Leiden Museum, which seemed to be Mesoamerican, made in a Pre-Columbian mosaic technique – however, after decades they were detected as a modern invention, handcrafted with archaeological materials. Berger discussed the market for inauthentic objects and forgeries, e.g. on eBay, pointing out that faking for the market might have the potential to decrease looting and therefore is of interest for

the museum. Berger argued that the public needs authenticity in stories, not in things – „fakes“ can also be exhibited if the right labels are being attached. An on-going debate is on restoration: How „faithful to the original“ does a restoration need to be? In ethnological collections, intangible aspects and continued use play a vital role.

Panel 1 discussed the concepts of **Fake, Copy and Imitation**. Questions of Western concepts of original and value were raised. The impact of hierarchy, power and economy was discussed. Fake and Real seem to be shifting notions, and their attribution to objects can be altered in a transformation process: The moment of shifting is most interesting.

NADJA BREGER (Basel) presented the Dafen oil-painting village in Southern China where most of the current commercial paintings are produced, mainly as art on demand. Breger introduced two concepts regarding this art production: first „Shanzai“, a Chinese term for fake, valuing the creative potential inherent to that method of copying. Second, the concept of the original in Chinese art history. Contrary to the Western concept of an original artist, commercial oil-painting art in China is traditionally seen more as a work in progress, replicable and based on existing material. Some of the oil-painters who produce artworks in en bloc-fabrication perceive themselves as „original artists“, which challenges our Western concepts of what „original“ actually means. We can raise questions about the originality of the paintings produced in Dafen. Demand has created a market for replicas, which claim authenticity of their own.

FELIX KOTZUR (Frankfurt am Main) discussed the phenomenon of „imitations“ of Roman prototype objects and their transformation across the borders of the Roman Empire in North-Western and Central Europe. In Kotzur’s area of research beyond the Roman Limes (therefore trans limes area), imported Roman objects might have served as active triggers for a „creative plagiarism“ which results in a mix of Roman and indigenous. Objects were sometimes deliberately made from other materials than the „original“, a phenomenon, which can be described as „skeuo-

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morphism". Cultural dynamics and exchange are at the base of such processes. Kotzur warned to adopt modern categories such as fake and real, which may not fully apply to the Roman archaeological context; he encouraged the audience to adopt a more descriptive terminology.

MATHIJS SMITH (Leiden) questioned the relationship between fake and forgery in Egyptology. Regarding the dynamics of authentication processes, he argued against the „expert's-eye-argument“ and pointed out that the attachment of labels is historically rooted in the era of Nation-building. That makes it difficult for scholars to discuss fakes across national borders. Forgery would be a sub-category of fake in terms of fraud, which has legal implications since it aims at deception. Forgers have come up with ingenious ways of fooling modern detection methods, and it has become difficult to distinguish fake from real, even for experts. The risk is that experts might train their eyes on fakes, which erroneously had been labelled as authentic.

Panel 2 examined the shift from context to objects. Three impulses introduced the audience to **facsimile, replica and reconstructions in research, re-enactment and the museum**. The panel discussion tackled the question how we can present context without presenting stereotypes.

NICOLAS SARZEAUD (Paris) introduced us to the use of cast copies and substitutes to preserve the originals in museum and exhibition contexts, as done with the prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux and the statues in the Versailles gardens. Facsimiles are used to protect originals, which goes back to the 20th century when „Patrimoine“ emerged as a paradigm in France to protect cultural heritage for future generations. Facsimiles on display acquire an „exhibition value“ of their own and attract many visitors; they question established views of the relationship between the original and its copies and challenge our definition of art. Sarzeaud argued against what he called „the cult of authenticity“.

ANDRÉ LUIZ R. F. BURMANN (Frankfurt am Main) summarized the research of the so-called Nok Culture in Central Nigeria and showed examples of faked and over-restored terracotta figurines. Insights from a sys-

tematic German-Nigerian excavation project since 2005 have raised doubts about the authenticity of many figurines on display in Western museums. Burmann gave an outline of the specific scientific analyses of the material, which often help to distinguish the fake from the authentic parts in over-restored compositions. He showed that field research as well as new methods in the material analysis lead to more clarity for museums and collections and prove useful to distinguish authentic figurine specimen.

By the example of color, BORIS A. N. BURANDT (Frankfurt am Main) demonstrated how huge the impact of modern reconstructions and in particular re-enactment is on our perception of antiquity. Burandt has wondered why the tunics of soldiers nowadays are depicted in scarlet red most of the time – this is dubious and rooted in the history of re-enactment: the choice of red refers to modern military clothing in the British army. According to the few surviving colored images from Egypt, military men most likely wore white tunics. Burandt's paper raised awareness for the impact of reconstructions, which have a long-lasting effect on the image of antiquity. Visitor expectations can easily entrap museums into re-producing false images. Burandt suggested ways how to deal with that problem when creating an exhibition.

Panel 3 discussed **material/s and authenticity**. In the course of the discussion, the importance of tackling an object-perspective was highlighted. One conclusion was that our modern labels of fake and real, regarding the material, are too narrowly based on contemporary sets of values. MIGUEL-JOHN VERSLUYS (Leiden) pointed out the importance of applying the material turn to Roman archaeology. Historical depth was claimed as a necessity for cultural-anthropological studies.

ISABEL BREDENBRÖKER (Frankfurt am Main) introduced the participants to the funeral practices in an Ewe town in South-East Ghana, where synthetic materials play a vital role in burial rituals. Plastic wrappings of grave goods and plastic wreaths are preferred to organic materials which can decay. The permanence of the materials seems to be more appreciated than the ephemeral qualities of natural flowers. Bredenbröker exam-

ined the dormant properties of „Vibrant Matter“ (Jane Bennett) and the degree of agency inherent to hybrid objects – like, e.g., a fur cup or a soap bowl made from liquid wood which looks like plastic. Questions of authenticity seem to boil down to the object’s capacity to convey the idea of permanence rather than giving priority to questions of temporality, change of design and invention.

SILKE HAHN (Frankfurt am Main) raised the question if the material grants money its authenticity. The Romans are said to have perceived the intrinsic material value as the main category for the authenticity of their coinage. Hahn showed examples of money and imitation money made from various materials. Regarding the Romans, „forged“ counterfeit coins became a ubiquitous phenomenon by the end of the third century A.D., more or less home-made coins must have circulated as „real currency“. The archaeological evidence of coin hoards with so-called „barbarized“ coins or hoarded raw material demonstrates: Fake was not always made for profit in terms of fraud, but could be the local production of emergency money in times of lacking official coin supply. In this sense, „Fake“ was a new „Real“.

Panel 4 was about **Customs, Practices and Rituals**. As to fossilized practices, the question was raised whether their historical freezing had been community-based or government-driven: the recurrent issue of power and authority in the process of determining labels of authenticity emerged. Regarding the Bronze Age case study, the question was raised whether miniaturization could be evidence for – or part of – a practice, which had started to vanish. A special focus was on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

FRANCESCA MENEGHETTI (Frankfurt am Main) examined Oxhide ingots and their miniaturized form in Late Bronze Age Cyprus. The meaning of the miniatures is still subject to debate, and it is unclear whether the miniature ingots in the typical shape of oxhides served a votive purpose, if they were weights, used as toys or „low-quality copies of their full-size counterparts“. Meneghetti discussed the most obvious property of this class of objects, their small size, and challenged the traditional no-

tion of „miniature“ by discussing semiotics and the material properties of things.

LOUISA RUTTEN (Rotterdam) examined the roots of carnival on the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. The substitution of precious materials and various imitation performances are essential for the period of Carnival when „Faking it“ becomes an art form of its own. Rutten referred to the intangible aspects of living cultural traditions and tackled the question of authenticity before this canvas: How is it possible to define authenticity and keep cultural diversity alive in an age of globalism? Her contribution opened the floor for a discussion about the cultural value of practices and raised the question of how far authenticity is about creating change and adaptation or about freezing a living tradition into a fossilized ritual.

A crucial insight was that fake and real are less homogeneous categories than initially thought. An observation of particular objects through time shows their potential transgression of labels, their denomination may shift from fake to real and vice versa. This may be due to physical alteration, or due to contexts. Fakes do not always have negative connotations and are not necessarily related to fraud: some cases showed their potential to preserve originals and serve as vehicles for symbolic value – fakes can have a value of their own. The problem of Gate-Keeping and Authority came into focus. Archaeologists and museum experts are „gatekeepers“, but they also act within economic frameworks. Institutions and authorities stabilize narratives of fake and real; they provide arguments for such categorization. Museums are institutions for disambiguation, and knowledge requires re-emerging negotiation. The consensus was that the public needs authenticity as much as the experts – not only for reasons which Walter Benjamin described in 1936 when claiming that the „aura“ of the work of art gets lost during mechanical reproduction. The „labelling“ as authentic takes place by embedding objects into narratives for a particular audience, and the expert’s authority to determine the label depends not only on his/ her training but also on his/ her hierarchical position in a network of institutions. We closed our workshop with thoughts on an

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initial question: Who is in power to define authenticity?

**Conference Overview:**

*Keynote*

Martin Berger (Leiden): Fake, Real and Everything in Between – On the different guises of authenticity in Ethnographic Museums

*Panel 1: Fake – Copy – Imitation*

Chair: Hans Peter Hahn (Frankfurt am Main)

Co-Discussionist: Christoph Rippe (Leiden)

Nadja Breger (Basel): The Art of Fake – Dafen Oil Painting Village in Southern China

Felix Kotzur (Frankfurt am Main): Imitation, Copy or Fake? How Rome's neighbours dealt with foreign objects

Mathijs Smith (Leiden): The Concept of Fake in Egyptology

*Panel 2: Replica and Facsimile in Research and the Museum*

Chair: Martin Berger (Leiden)

Co-Discussionist: Anda Podaru (Leiden)

Nicolas Sarzeaud (Paris): The Facsimile – Thinking ubiquity in the Museum Paradigm

André Luiz R. F. Burmann (Frankfurt am Main): Fake and over-restored figurines: How did they change the perception of a world-wide known archaeological culture?

Boris A. N. Burandt (Frankfurt am Main): Long Live the Cliché! How replicas and reconstructions have a lasting influence on the public image of Ancient Rome

*Panel 3: Material/s and Authenticity*

Chair: Mariana de Campos França (Leiden)

Co-Discussionist: Jacoline Buirma (Leiden)

Isabel Bredenbröker (Frankfurt am Main): Materials and Death – Transformations / Imitations

Silke Hahn (Frankfurt am Main): In Fake We Trust – Counterfeit coinage in the Roman North-West

*Panel 4: Customs – Practices – Rituals*

Chair: Boris A. N. Burandt (Frankfurt am Main)

Co-Discussionist: Lanah Haddad (Frankfurt am Main)

Francesca Meneghetti (Frankfurt am Main): Just something small? Miniaturisation process and the case of miniature Oxhide ingots in Late Bronze Age Cyprus

Louisa Rutten (Rotterdam): Faking it for Real in the Caribbean Carnival

*Conclusions*

Hans Peter Hahn (Frankfurt am Main): Fake and Authentic – Concluding Remarks

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