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

Organiser – Workshop of the RTG Value and Equivalence in Cooperation with Leiden University

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**Introduction**

The workshop *Fake & Real: in Ancient and Modern Societies* **–** *Objects, Places and Practices,* took place on March 15-16 of 2018. It was held at the Gravensteen Building in Leiden, the Netherlands. The workshop was organised by Lanah Haddad, Silke Hahn and Réka Mascher-Frigyesi. The aim of the workshop was to examine notions of fake and real, ‘and everything in-between’ through case-studies from across the globe. The researchers covered material culture and immaterial culture, spanning the different disciplines of Archaeology, Cultural Anthropology and Museology. The organisers noted that object of the workshop was not to generate a normative definition of the terms ‘fake’ and ‘real’ but instead to bring to light limitations of the established terminology in various contexts. This is a summary of the event with key observations.

**Keynote**

In his keynote lecture, **Martin Berger** (Leiden) implored on the subjectiveness of “authenticity” through the narrative of a mosaic skull displayed at Volkenkunde Museum at Leiden. Acquired in 1964, the skull was speculated to be of pre-Columbian origin. But analysis of the skull, the mosaic and the adhesive presented an alternate dimension to the artefact. While the mosaic appeared to be pre-Columbian, the skull appeared to be meso-American and the adhesive was Shellac (of south-east Asian origin). The study concluded that the skull was likely from the 1950s made by a dentist and his wife in southern Mexico. Through his presentation and the discussion that followed, Berger explored the revelation of the object’s (in)authenticity from the perception of the museum, the public, the media, and the source culture. While the public appreciated the authentic narrative of an inauthentic object, the media offered more scrutiny into the museum’s role in spending on a fake skull. But the coherence and convincing nature of the narrative has added to the integrity of the object, despite being essentially “fake”. It also brings to the front, the role of the museum in dealing with such scenarios. At the Museum Volkenkunde, the skull continues to be on display but in an alternate location with a new label. He also noted that inauthentic objects could have relevance to museums as seen with copies sold on eBay, while treading legal boundaries it has reduced demand for looting of excavation sites.

**Panel 1 | Fake - Copy - Imitation**

**Nadja Breger** (Basel) opened the panel with a presentation on *The Art of Fake: Dafen Oil Painting Village in Southern China.* Most people are familiar with seeing replicas of famous oil painters in museum and souvenir shops or displayed in restaurants and hotels. Breger delves into the culture and livelihoods behind these paintings. Based on figures published by the Chinese government, Breger explained that Dafen houses approximately 8000 artists in under half a square kilometre and more artists in surrounding communities. Of these 200 are promoted as “original” artists*.* Bregerintroduced the audience to the term *Shanzai* from a novel titled *Outlaws of the Marsh*; a metaphor for places and products out of the reach of the authorities and sometimes on the verge of being illegal, encompassing everything from cell phones to fashion to even immaterial products according to demand. The West easily dismisses Shanzai works as replicas and fakes; as it collectively glorifies originality, exclusivity, and artistic individualism. But Breger used the term in relation to the works of Dafen and emphasized that the value of Shanzai is in its ability to make art inclusive and democratic. The ingenuity of the artists is that they not only replicate works, but also innovate through appropriation; while replicas often do not carry signatures of the artist, they are unique reiterations of the original work. They are not only *new* originals but they have the power to add value to the original by sheer numbers of copies in existence.

**Felix Kotzur** (Frankfurt) continued the panel presenting *Imitation, Copy or Fake? How Rome’s Neighbours Dealt with Foreign Objects.* Kotzur’s paper attempted to throw light on the various forms of Roman objects and iconography that occur in Translimitan territory, landscapes that existed outside of Roman dominions. The genuine Roman-ness of these objects (ranging from coins to jewellery to vessels) is under speculation by academic circles. Instead of terms such as *imitation* or *Nachahmung*, Kotzur affirmed *adaptions, associations* and *creations.* One of the possible interpretations was that these Translimitan objects are a result of societal competition - Roman influence combined with differing local values and materials as the trigger for imitation. He explained that these objects best fall under the category of *Skeuomorphism*, that describes the intentional use of other material. For example, design strategies that evoke analogue imagery in digital design. He concluded that such objects cannot be described as fake or imitations as the intentions behind them were not fraudulent. Instead, they are but the product of cultural motivation.

**Mathijs Smith** (Leiden) followed with a presentation titled *The Concept of Fake in Egyptology: How do we identify forgeries and fakes?* Smith introduced his research through a short introduction of Egyptology and its conflicting relationship with forgeries. Research and knowledge developed in the 19th century has had a significant influence on fakes. Smith elaborated through the example of Oxan Aslanian, a 19th century forger also known as the *Master of Berlin.* The quality of Aslanian’s fakes was pronounced by the audience’s mixed response on identifying his work set against the original. Working with such skilled forgeries, it seemed apparent that an important role of an Egyptologist would be in identifying such objects. But this would require that academia define the term forgery in this context and develop the tools to detect them. Smith postulated that a ‘fake’ could be a replica, a pastiche imitation invoking historic form but with different materials. He argued that even the restoration of an original could deem it inauthentic. But he reflected that a negative connotation was unnecessary, for instance there is positive value in the museum souvenir on our shelves. Like Kotzur before him, he reiterated that replicas or copies must be viewed in the negative context only when they are presented fraudulently as the original.

*Discussion*

The panel was concluded by a discussion between the presenters chaired by **Hans Peter Hahn** (Frankfurt) with **Christoph Rippe** (Leiden) as a co-panellist. Hahn opened the discussion remarking that original works like Dutch paintings from the 16th century, the Roman empire and Ancient Egypt set strong paradigms for imitation. He also noted that there were significant windfalls associated with these paradigms. In the discussion, an interesting observation was that while the West is critical of imitations in architecture and objects in the East, similar appropriation can be observed the other way around. Delft Blue pottery is one such example. While the replicas bear a negative connotation, market trends reflect the windfalls associated with the strong paradigm of the original. But as the terms ‘fake’ and ‘imitations’ were explored, their ambiguity was always pronounced when studied in context. For instance, in classifying the Translimitan objects as forgeries; are they art or merely objects of daily life in a different era? This also evoked a discourse on legalities, single authorship and the value of the copyright.

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

**Nicolas Sarzeaud** (Paris) opened the second panel following a lunch break and presented during an unfortunate instance of a power blackout in Leiden. Even so, the workshop continued with Sarzeaud’s pictorial essay, *The Facsimile – Thinking Ubiquity in the Museum Paradigm.* Sarzeaud began with the example of Lascaux caves and their numerous replicas (three!) in various museums. He remarked that these museum reproductions, expensive but commercially successful, are remarkable pieces of facsimile. However, they are dismissed by academics and purists; Walter Benjamin theorised that aura of the original remains with its materiality and is stronger than the exhibition facsimile. Sarzeaud pointed out that through resemblance (or a guarantee of) the facsimile could transfer a part of the original aura for the visitor. Additionally, an imitation allows a more immersive experience for the visitor. Sarzeaud concluded that while the imitation is a stooge, its value is significant as it increases accessibility to visitors. The facsimile is also of value to historians; it could capture lost information due to decay of the original artwork. He remarked that the facsimile was an extension of the original and had the potential to achieve the same status as the original, should it be destroyed.

**André Luiz R. F.  Burmann** (Frankfurt) continued the panel with the electricity restored and presented his research on *Fake or Over-restored Figurines in Museums and Collections.* Burmann introduced the audience to terracotta figurines of the so-called Nok Culture in Central Nigeria. The figurines were named after Nok, the site of their first discovery. The Nok figurines are often falsely represented either by pastiche reconstruction to deceive both the eye and scientific test or by the incorrect (over-)restoration with elements out of context. Burmann noted that stylistic analysis (elements not characteristic of the “Nok style”), cultural analogies (Nok figurines depicted e.g. with horses or corn cobs irrelevant to the time period) and material analysis (heterogeneous mixtures) could be used to identify fake or over-restored objects. As with some of the previous presenters, he critically reflected on the terminology used – fakes (with the intention to deceive), adaptations (new figurines adapted to look old or authentic) and reproductions (intentional copies) . He concluded that the terminology for “fake” and the techniques to identify them are crucial - as many sophisticated fakes or over-restored specimen are accidentally incorporated into well-known collections and subsequently become benchmarks for future stylistic and cultural references.

**Boris A. N. Burandt** (Frankfurt) concluded the panel with a presentation titled *Long Live the Cliché* where he discussed *How replicas and reconstructions in museums have a long-lasting influence on the public image of Roman antiquity.* Burandt began his rhetoric evoking the public cliché of the Roman soldier in popular culture. The Roman legionary is typically depicted in a red tunic. Burandt argued that this archetype is problematic as various archaeological museums have appropriated this depiction. He contested this imagery based on research that indicated that the colour possibly played a minor part and was more indicative of fashion trends than of military regulations; at best archaeological evidence from textile and mosaic artworks depict white tunics. He traced back the imagery of red tunics to a 20th century British re-enactment society for the 1st century. British infantry troops of the period were prominently known as “red-coats” and transferred qualities to the re-enactment. While this archetype is convincing to the public and the media, Burandt countered the museums as institutions of knowledge were bound by scrutiny for an authentic narrative.

*Discussion*

**Martin Berger** (Leiden) chaired the discussion to conclude the panel with **Anda Podaru** (Leiden) as a co-panellist. The panel discussed the varying value of re-enactments in the context of museum for the public to consume and as a tool for scientific experiments. The role of the museum here is critical, based on the intention of the re-enactment or reconstruction. Another key insight was the question of legitimacy behind the display of reconstructed objects as with the case of the Nok figurines. The object could be displayed as a function of its excavation or reduced to an art object without its intended function. While reconstruction of the object’s function was possible, the panel observed the risk of displaying stereotypes and showing the object as fixed point in time. They concluded that museums have a responsibility to ensure that reconstructions do not enforce false clichés.

**Panel 3 | Materials and Authenticity**

**Isabel Bredenbröker** (Frankfurt) opened the panel with her talk on *Materials and Death: Transformations/Imitations.* Her research elaborated on an ethnographic study of grave wreaths in Peki (Volta region of Ghana). In her presentation she explored the changing materiality of wreaths in the region. During her fieldwork she observed locals favouring wreaths made from synthetic materials over natural wreaths due to their durability. However, the ‘plastic’ wreaths do fade and are not completely static in nature. Furthermore, she also identified difference in quality in graves; poorer families indicated graves with a plaque and a live plant while an affluent family would cement their grave. Bredenbröker noted that the permanence of some materials dominated the impermanence of traditional materials as well as visible signs of fading in synthetic materials. She looked at this phenomenon through a New Materialist lens with a decided focus on materials as constantly transforming matter which defies concepts of authenticity, fake-ness and realness. “Hybrid objects” like the plastic-covered wreaths transcend categories like the ‘inauthentic’ through local values, in this case the property of perceived permanence. Bredenbröker furthered her argument with other examples of artefacts that transgress the original through unorthodox combinations of form and material: for instance, the work ‘Object’ by Meret Oppenheim, a china cup covered in fur, a soap dish made from biodegradable liquid wood that resembles plastic or square-shaped watermelons.

**Silke Hahn** (Frankfurt) continued the panel with her research on *Counterfeit Coinage in the Roman Northwest* presenting *In Fake we trust.* Hahn began her rhetoric with cases of imitation and special purpose money – Chinese ghost money burnt at ancestors’ graves, German emergency money that lost value after an expiry date and former bank notes used as wallpaper in the 1920s. She pointed out that the significant difference between contemporary legal tender and historic Roman coins is their value through materiality. But she also argued that this notion is incorrectly used to classify Roman coins as “fake” or “official”, based narrowly on the weightage, metal content and style. Lesser weights and atypical imagery are typical of unofficial Roman coins. But she argued that these counterfeit coins were significant in that they presumably attained the status of real coins when Rome could not guarantee steady supply of official coinage. She concluded that regardless of materiality, coins and money attain the status of (semi-)legal tender by collective will of the people. A transgression of the categories took place, whereby coinage made from less valuable material was considered as trustworthy.

*Discussion*

The panel was concluded with a discussion chaired by **Mariana de Campos Françozo** (Leiden)with **Jacoline Buirma** (Leiden). It was observed from the presentations that while substitutes are a provocation for scholars they transgressed the original by material change and local use. Connotations of “fake” was inappropriate in many of these situations.  The discussion followed that a “fake” object was perhaps better attributed as a “new real”; one that had attained new values through local production. The synthetic material of the wreaths in Bredenbröker’s research cannot be described as inauthentic, instead more appropriate terms are (non)prestigious and (non)lasting. As with the Chinese imitation money, the original intention is of symbolic and religious value. This was also comparable to the “counterfeit” Roman coinage that was a reflection of dwindling Roman authority in the extreme extents of the Empire.

**Panel 4 | Customs – Practices - Rituals**

**Francesca Meneghetti** (Frankfurt) narrated her research in a presentation titled, *Just something small? Miniaturisation process and the case of miniature oxhide ingots from late Bronze Age Cyprus.* Miniature ingots, based on 14 examples weighed on average between 4 and 240 g and dimensions ranged between 2 and 11 cm. In contrast, standard ingots weighed 29-30 kg and ranged between 50-80 cm. They are both characterised as flat rectangular slabs of copper with handles at each corner. While the standard ingots were intended to be transported for smelting, the purpose of the miniatures was unclear. Meneghetti explained that current interpretation presumed they were for religious contexts, used as weights or perhaps commercial samples. She argued that while academia followed a tendency to interpret these miniatures as copies instead they should be studied as independent from the standard with separate functions. She finally concluded that these miniatures helped the viewer assign a new meaning to object by its relatable size and ability to handle the artefact.

**Louisa Rutten** (Rotterdam) concluded the panel with her master thesis fieldwork in Aruba on *Faking it for Real in Caribbean Carnival.* She opened her talk with her rhetoric on enormous impact of carnival in Aruba. Carnival enthusiasts prepare months in advance; however, the carnival changes every year. Rutten notes that such change is not without friction. She argued that while the UNESCO attempted to safeguard the carnival under *The Intangible Cultural Heritage* program in 2003, the tradition is rooted in its ability to reinvent itself. Understandably, the Aruba ICH 2012 failed after public debate due to an inability to define original elements of the carnival. Aruba, a former Dutch colony, is in the centre of many colonial migration flows and is home to many diverse cultures. She explained that as the carnival embodied various elements from different groups, not every Aruban could conclude on the carnival’s identity. In contrast, she noted that carnival in Trinidad had attained a static image to establish a copyright over their culture. She concluded that museums and academia have a complex task while attempting to document intangible living heritage.

*Discussion*

A discussion followed, chaired by **Boris Burandt** (Frankfurt) with **Lanah Haddad** (Frankfurt) as co-panellist.The panel discussed the role of communities, museums, and institutions (like UNESCO) in preserving and documenting living heritage. They also reflected on different perspectives of different realms, an archaeologist may consider the clothes or the material as artefacts of the carnival; the museum would perhaps capture its spirit through re-enactment. Communities may document the carnival differently as well, as seen with Rutten’s contrasting stories of Trinidad and Aruba. Similarly, the miniature oxhide ingots can perhaps be the remnants of previous cultural practices; tokens of the past.

**Conclusion**

**Hans Peter Hahn** (Frankfurt) led the conclusion of the workshop with three points. Firstly, he reflected on the workshop’s title, where both categories were more homogeneous than they appeared. Secondly, he evoked the *cost signal theory,* to stimulate the transference of qualities from an original to a copy. He emphasized that only an original with a worthy signal would be copied. A high number of copies also stabilises the value of the original. Finally, he emphasized on the role of academia and museums as gatekeepers and authorities of knowledge.

To conclude, the workshop reiterated the need for terms like ‘fake’ and ‘real’ to always be read with respect to the context of the object. Additionally, one could also note the distinction in different professions, the detail-oriented perspective of the archaeologist, the narrative-driven perspective of the anthropologist and the museologist balancing both perspectives against the backdrop of public perception. Conflicts with ‘fake’ and ‘real’ can perhaps only be resolved where the three realms collaborate beyond the scope of such a workshop.