

Eunamus conference

## **National museums and the negotiation of difficult pasts / Les musées nationaux et la négociation des passés difficiles**

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**Maison des Arts, Campus of the Université Libre de Bruxelles.**

### **Astracts**

#### **Tassos ANASTASSIADIS**

(McGill University, Montreal)

*From Ottoman refugees to EU citizens and global diasporas: Shifting boundaries of imagined communities and the glocal usages of the past*

Why is Rhodes an UNESCO World Heritage site and not Hios? Why has it been so difficult to create a Holocaust museum or to preserve a minaret in Salonica? Is the transformation of a church into museum problematic? Using the case study of Greece, this lecture will try to identify the (sometimes troubling) relationship between the transnational consequences of the refugee phenomenon in the Eastern Mediterranean and the politics of the past during an era usually understood as a traumatic but linear passage from an imperial to a national and now global mode of functioning.

#### **Simina BADICA**

(Eunamus, CEU)

*Museums of Oblivion. Exhibiting Communism in Post-Communist Romania*

The only Romanian museum dealing specifically with the country's communist past is the Sighet Memorial Museum, a civil society private initiative, established in a former political prison in 1993 and officially inaugurated, with state support, in 1997. From its establishment as a memorial to the victims of communism, the museum has grown, I argue, into a wider narrative about the communist regime in Romania and the former Socialist bloc, a narrative thus subjected to the prison and martyrdom metaphor. My article will analyze this transformation, from a museum of the prison towards a museum of communism, focusing on the changing historical narratives proposed by the museum, the usage of historical objects, building and museum scenography and the subtle interplay between private initiative and state support.

A similar, although a smaller scale project, is the permanent exhibition room dedicated to communism in the basement of the Romanian Peasant Museum, a museum itself heavily challenged by the history of the building it inherited from the History Museum of the Romanian Communist Party. Both museum projects, in Sighet and Bucharest, were constructed, I argue, in the specific memorial context of the 1990s whose influence is visible in the curatorial concept of the exhibitions, in their usage of space and architecture, in the basic argument they strive to convey about the communist past. The article will conclude with recent claims and incentives towards building a Romanian Museum of Communism, from the president's official condemnation of the communist regime in December 2006 to research institutes promising to build such museums in specific places like the former political prison in Ramnicu Sarat or Fortul 13 Jilava, or even the House of People.

### **Lill EILERTSEN**

(Eunamus, Oslo)

*Breaking the ice: Contested objects in the Arctic areas*

The Sámi people represent one of few European indigenous cultures, and have their historical residence in the multi-state area of *Sápmi* stretching across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Their history of cultural and political discrimination is shared with the indigenous population in Greenland, until 1979 governed by Denmark. From the 1970's, a growing awareness of their cultural and indigenous identity made both Sámi and Greenlandic Inuit groups develop strong cultural and political ambitions. Museums were established respectively in Sápmi and Greenland during the following decades in order to manage and display their own cultural heritage. This paper will present some Norwegian cases on return of Sámi cultural material and human remains, as well as existing plans for future repatriation. An additional comparison of the Norway/Sápmi processes to those of Denmark/Greenland will hopefully shed light to political, administrative and museological conditions for repatriation of Sámi material in Norway.

Already in 1981, a huge collection of watercolours painted by the Greenlandic huntsman Aron of Kangeq (1822 - 1869) was handed over to the Greenlandic Home Rule Government by the Danish Queen Margrethe II as a first step in the process of repatriating 35 000 items from the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen to Greenland's National Museum (*Nunatta Katersugaasivia*) in Nuuk. The process was completed in 2001 and is acknowledged by UNESCO as an exemplary one, providing general guidelines for scientific development and cooperation on the subject of repatriation.

Returning of cultural heritage from Norwegian institutions to Sámi museums have not been an equally smooth process, and are so far mainly connected to the return of human remains collected for questionable scientific purposes. The return of the skulls of two beheaded leaders of a social-religious revolt taking place in Kautokeino in 1852 was no easy match, and has become an important and symbolic victory for Sámis in Norway, paving the way for future repatriation processes also involving museums. The fact that *Sápmi* unlike Greenland is a transnational area intergrated in Scandinavian nation states may explain some of the difficulties the Sámi people has met. Another fundamental difference between Sápmi and Greenland is the administrative structure of their museum networks. The Norwegian Sámi Parliament

has declared *all* Sámi museums national institutions, thus lacking the concentrated scientific and museological competence a national museum like that in Nuuk provide. In 2006 and 2007, three Nordic Sámi museums recorded 70 000 Sámi objects in Scandinavian institutions outside of Sápmi in a project called Recalling Ancestral Voices – Repatriation of Sámi Cultural Heritage. Besides providing an overview of existing Sámi material, the project aimed to secure and develop mutual respect between Sámi museums and non-Sámi museums administering old and significant Sámi collections. The Norwegian Folk Museum (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) being in charge of the oldest Norwegian Sámi collection is now willing to transfer half of it to Sámi museum institutions.

**Rossitza GUENTCHEVA**

(Eunamus, CEU)

*Communism Contested: The Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia*

My proposal is to discuss the controversies surrounding the newly opened museum of socialist art in Sofia, on 19 September 2011. The first national museum dedicated to the socialist past in Bulgaria was founded after years of profound hesitation whether there was a real need of it, whether the communist past should be remembered at all, and whether museification of the communist period would not propel nostalgia among various strata of the population. When the project to build it took pace in the last couple of months, clashes arose around its name and content. First conceived as a museum of totalitarianism, it soon turned out that its focus would be on totalitarian art, while as late as September 2011 its name was changed once again, this time to museum of socialist art. I intend to first describe and then analyse these protracted controversies around the memory of communism in Bulgaria. I plan to make in-depth interviews with the persons involved in the museum's establishment – clerks from the Ministry of Culture, experts from the National Gallery of Fine Arts, as well as prominent intellectuals. I will follow the controversies in the printed press too.

**Lotten GUSTAFSSON REINIUS**

(Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm)

*Beyond the ritualized closure: re-locating perspectives on a celebrated Swedish-Australian restitution case*

During the last decades many national museums in European capitals have turned into arenas for the negotiation of postcolonial relations and cultural heritage politics. Although many claims for restitution of museum objects are heavily contested or media-wise silenced others come to ends of agreement that allow them to turn into well covered, emotion-dense and highly symbolical public celebrations. Few cases seem to receive as much positive attention from media and the public in general as so called repatriations of once sacred/secret objects, from European museums of ethnography to representatives of groups from aboriginal (nota bene, over-seas) societies.

Using, as analytical point of vantage, the return of human remains from Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm (taking place in 2004 and 2009) to an aboriginal delegation from the desert area Kimberley in northern Australia I will bring up two

themes I aim to develop further in a recently begun research project on the ritual and socio-material aspects of restitution cases, relating to three major national museums in the Swedish capital.

Firstly, I would like to bring attention to what seems to be an internationally developing expressive ritual genre and to some of the conventional themes that are enacted through it. Particular emphasis will be laid on the concrete ways in which turning-points, in the social, emotional and sensory biographies of the things in motion, are ritualized.

Secondly, I will take the opportunity to present some ideas on who the coming study could evolve to embrace the rites of homecoming and re-narration on the receiving end, which often tend to fall out of sight for European publics and media. Which transformations of significance are marked and take place beyond the highly ritualized celebrations of reconciliation, confession and closure on stage in national museums of Europe?

### **Andrzej JAKUBOWSKI**

(Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

*The Effects of State Succession on National Museums: the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts in the Post-Cold War Context*

‘Cultural heritage’ and ‘state succession’ are viscerally linked one to the other. They both derive from a universal idea of ‘inheritance’ and express the continuity between the past and the present. Cultural heritage is a vehicle and main provider of collective memory and identity – the factors fostering processes of creation and dismemberment of states, to which legal and doctrinal frameworks are provided by the theory of state succession. However, the semantic and historic associations between these two concepts do not facilitate their reciprocal relations. In fact, the role of cultural heritage as an assertion of one’s rights and legitimacy to control a determined area may foster hostile attitudes and cause violent solutions to territorial disputes. On the other hand, the symbolic significance of cultural heritage often feeds the claims aimed at restoring and/or (re)constructing national identities and collective memories through physical ‘repatriation’ of cultural treasures, despoiled or disparaged in the past.

The paper explores how the recent post-Cold War wave of state succession in Europe has affected the integrity of state art collections. In particular, it focuses on the role and significance of national museums in the processes of dissolution of multinational states. Firstly, it explains that the allocation and distribution of national cultural treasures in cases of state succession have been essentially based (since the end of WW I) on two customary principles: i) territorial origin of artworks; ii) cultural significance of such items for new nation-states and their newly formed museum institutions. Secondly, the paper discusses the actual implementation of these principles in relation to two recent cases: apportionment of cultural material between Czech Republic and Slovakia (1994) and the ongoing dispute between Italy and Slovenia on the title to the so-called ‘Istria’s Jewels’ and their future allocation. The first one refers to the exchange of certain number of medieval paintings between national museums of Czech Republic and Slovakia fundamentally driven by the principle of territorial origin and historical provenance. The issue of ‘nationality’ of

the objects has not been raised. By contrast, the dispute between Italy and Slovenia is profoundly marked by what one may call ‘the negotiation of difficult pasts’. Accordingly, this case concerns the status of the artworks evacuated by the Italian administration in 1940 from three coastline municipalities of Italian Istria, nowadays known as Slovenian Littoral or Primorska. In result of WW II, the region became a part of the Free City of Trieste, and eventually was transferred to the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. Italian inhabitants of the region emigrated or were forced to emigrate. The status of the Istrian art treasures, currently preserved in the National Gallery of Art in Trieste, remained pending. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia have brought the issue to the light: Slovenia has demanded the return of the objects, invoking the principle of territorial provenance, while Italy has argued that the treasures are entirely of Italian origin, on the one hand, and preserve the traumatic memory of the war refugees, on the other.

Within this context, the paper attempts to (re)locate the role of national museums in the broader discourse on cultural reconciliation. It advocates the view that nowadays such institutions need to be perceived both as major actors and efficient instruments in cross-border cultural co- operation.

**Mathilde LE LUYER**

(Université de Lille 2)

*Repenser une mémoire européenne du totalitarisme, l'expérience des musées de l'occupation baltes*

Depuis leur indépendance obtenue en 1989, les pays baltes ont placé la question du passé au cœur de leur processus transitionnel : la nécessité de reconnaissance et de vérité attachée à l'histoire de la seconde guerre mondiale et des occupations a orienté la construction politique de la nation. Ce travail des mémoires a été protéiforme : institutionnel par le biais des commissions internationales baltes ; muséal avec la construction des musées des occupations et civil autour des monuments. Cette reconfiguration des identités collectives et nationales s'est cependant avérée particulièrement conflictuelle, actualisant des controverses douloureuses sur l'interprétation de l'histoire que ce soit dans son versant national ou européen : l'opposition entre Goulag et Shoah ainsi que les questions de résistance et collaboration nationales ont conduit à la constitution d'une asymétrie mémorielle entre ces pays, l'Europe et la Russie. Ce bras de fer mémoriel, exultant par exemple lors du cinquantième anniversaire de la libération célébré à Moscou ou lors des nuits de bronze à Tallinn, a consolidé la volonté de ces pays de réviser les interprétations historiques conventionnelles : la lecture différenciée de la seconde guerre mondiale, le traumatisme des occupations, la méconnaissance de la souffrance de leurs populations ont cristallisé la lutte autour de la question politique de l'équivalence des totalitarismes nazis et communistes. Cette culture historique portée aussi bien par les dirigeants politiques et les communautés scientifiques locales que par les populations civiles (ligues de vétérans très puissantes) s'est matérialisée dans la constitution d'espaces muséaux spécifiques dédiés à la mise en scène de ce schème d'interprétation. En tant que véritables marqueurs moraux, idéologiques, politiques et existentiels ces musées nous renseignent sur d'une part un usage politique de l'histoire et d'autre part sur la constitution même de la mémoire collective de la nation. Consacrant la notion de victimité, la muséographie de ces lieux créés en

Lituanie en 1992, en Lettonie en 1998 et en Estonie en 2003 retranscrit une vision de l'histoire centrée sur la nation, dont l'identité s'est forgée dans la référence à la souffrance, incarnée et exemplifiée par la double occupation soviétique. Largement prépondérante dans les collections de ces musées, la mise en scène de cette période doit permettre une prise de conscience européenne voire internationale des crimes communistes et aboutir in fine à leur qualification juridique en tant que génocide. Les musées baltes constituent donc une illustration du processus de justice historique à l'œuvre dans ce cône et signent l'institutionnalisation d'une nouvelle mémoire européenne du totalitarisme dont la portée politique résonne par exemple avec la déclaration de Prague. Permettront-ils à terme de construire une mémoire paneuropéenne pacifiée ? La proposition faite est donc comparatiste entre les trois musées baltes et ouvre la réflexion sur la dimension politique des choix scénographiques et narratifs faits au sein de ces entités.

### **Nabila OULEBSIR**

(Université de Poitiers)

*Non European Museums in the Time of Globalisation: Negotiating French History, Investing National Identity in the Twenty-First Century Algeria*

The entry in the Twenty-First century of North Africa is characterized by an important investment for museums. The recent observation of the situation reveals a similar state that in Europe where there are increasing renovations and creation of new museums. While in Algiers, the former big French department stores in neo-Moorish style are transformed in 2007 to a Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, in Casablanca, the old slaughterhouses are replaced in 2009 by a cultural space displaying artistic creation defined on the model of the various conversions of the Belle de mai wasteland area of Marseille (1992) or the former slaughterhouses of Toulouse (2000). Having educational and social aims, these places are experimenting new cultural practices of museums in the South in the alignment of those in the North. It is a kind of globalization of the museum experience and the homogenization of the reuse of buildings constructed during the colonial era, now seen through their architectural aspects and/or technical construction. It is an interesting museums developments in both contexts, European and non European, which evolution since the decolonizations is however different.

I will focus in my talk particularly on the case of Algeria, whose status as former French Department and the post-independent industrial economic policy, with few roots in the tourism, have placed her significantly far away from its neighbors countries, Morocco and Tunisia, although the latter has the same character of a young state-nation that Algeria. Indeed, both have built their new national identity on the same path: Arabism, Pan-Africanism highly expressed at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival held at Algiers in 1969 – an event renewed at Algiers in 2009 with the Second Panaf, where was decided the creation of a big African museum –, and the Non-Aligned Movement (Cairo Congress of 1964, Algiers Congress of 1973).

Resulting from the Manifesto of Algiers (1969), the cultural component was seen in Algeria in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s as a major asset in the construction of the national identity, with various cultural events organized at that period – concerts, theatre, cinema, literary meetings –, but the museums inherited

from the French colonial era have received little attention from the local authorities, as if the objects and the works of art they housed have represented the symbols of the French colonial power, the value of art or archaeology being completely denied. I propose to analyze the contrast between this denial of Algeria's French history and the recent acceleration of the renovations of the museums inherited from the colonial period, between negotiating this French past and investing in the national identity in the time of celebrating the anniversary of its fiftieth independence, taking for examples the current museums projects at Algiers and Oran, and those have been renovated and modernized in 2011 at Tlemcen, a city which was in this year the capital of Islamic Culture, after Tarmi (2010), Kairouan (2009), Alexandria (2008), etc.

### **Robin OSTOW**

(Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, and University of Toronto)

*Warsaw's new Jewish Museum: Building a new history in a twenty-first century democracy*

Warsaw's Museum of the History of Polish Jews, scheduled for completion in late 2012, was conceived in the mid 1990s by two Polish Jewish historians as a response to the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1993. The collapse of Communism in 1990 had sparked a 'Jewish rebirth' in Poland, and the original proposal aimed to display Jewish life, rather than death, in Warsaw. The early years – 1996 to 2006- were difficult. Despite endorsements from respected statesmen, including Shimon Peres (then Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs) and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, then Poland's president, and the donation of 13,000 square meters of land by the city of Warsaw, support for the project was disappointing. Many non-Jewish Poles argued that "there are so many other urgent needs, also in the area of preservation and commemoration of the past" (Kozłowski, 2003). There was a strong feeling among Jews living in Warsaw that resources should be used to support local Jewish cultural activities rather than to display Poland's Jews as relics of the past (Green 2003 in Ostow 2007:171). And some American Jews feared that the display would feature a sanitized storyline that would gloss over the enduring anti-Semitism that has shaped Polish-Jewish history.

But, in 2006, with a commitment by the Polish government and the city of Warsaw to provide \$38.5 million, an architectural plan, and an established Jewish curator from New York, work began on the concrete structure, the permanent exhibit, and on internet portals and other outreach programs. This paper will examine the ways in which the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is musealizing the difficult Polish-Jewish past, and, at the same time, facilitating a process in which Jews and non Jewish Poles are constructing a new Polish Jewish history together. Three strategies will be foregrounded. The first is the museum's refusal to make the Holocaust the organizational center of the historical narrative. The second is the project of having students, artisans and volunteers in eight communities in Poland rebuild the painted ceiling of a destroyed eighteenth-century wooden synagogue which will be one of the major installations. The third strategy is the creation of two internet portals, the Virtual Shtetl and the Polish Righteous, which allow users to upload, download and share information about Polish Jewish history and to make contact with each other.

The paper will conclude that, through these activities, the MHPJ is creating a redemptive space in which Jews and non Jewish Poles, who have a painful and burdened shared past, work together to create inclusive communities around producing and maintaining Polish Jewish history.

### **Ilaria PORCIANI**

(Eunamus, Bologna)

*A Tale of Three Museums. The Parenzo and Pola Museums in Istria and the Fiume museum in Rome: hot spots for national identities*

This paper deals firstly with the Parenzo Museum, created in the 1880s along with a historical journal by an Italian learned society as the core institution for enhancing national identity in Istria, then belonging to Habsburg Empire. Secondly, It also deals with the archaeological museum of Istria founded in Pola in 1902 and transformed in 1930 into the Royal Museum of Istria. Strongly enlarged by the Fascist, it became a powerful showcase of Italian identity in this area. Last by not least, it deals with the Fiume Museum, created in Rome by exodus Istrians, after the Second World War.

These three museums focused on the crucial issues of WP3: the construction of an imagined community and the role of museums to build cohesion and identity; the process of constructing material heritage in order to materialize the nation and crystalize a center for the community. Following this history, helps focusing on the politics of Italianization under Fascism, going beyond the already well studied investigated linguistic issue, while after Second World War, under the allies' administration, the museum holdings were abruptly removed in order not to leave them to Tito's Yugoslavia. After 1946, property claims were raised by the Croatian Republic, while the museum took a Croatian turn.

This story is entangled with the dramas and traumas of the Exodus of the Foibe (massing killings of ethnic Italians in Croatian territory after the war), with conflicts of identity and property, as well as with the sad story of the Italian exiles in Istria, for a long time unwelcomed from Italy and forgotten in camps. We will then move to Rome. There, in the middle of the Dalmatian neighborhood, gifts, symbolic objects, replicas and memories generated the Fiume Museum: a site of memory and pain.

Following these steps shows different ways in which a museums have been able to attract and polarize identities, to represent conflicts, tighten networks and to make the heritage and the history visible, with strong national implications. Thus, museums are used as an unconventional litmus test in order to analyze borderlands, deep conflicts and overlapping histories.

### **Luís RAPOSO**

(National Museum of Archaeology, Lisbon).

*Portuguese ancestry and contemporary disillusion: the role of the National Ethnographic Museum / National Museum of Archaeology, from late XIX century to present days*

After short period of intense development, based mainly on foreign capitals, the Portuguese national treasure was virtually bankrupt and tremendous tensions did arise at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century both with banks and

capitalists as well as with countries promotion them, specially those with particular interest in the Portuguese Colonial Empire. In 1890 Britain formally presented an *ultimatum* to Portugal, causing huge inflammatory reactions throughout the Portuguese society – a situation which has been cleverly used by the republican movements in order to promote the ideal of a "new society".

The King was forced to call to the Government a few independent personalities, some with republican sympathies. In 1894, a minister of the kingdom that later will become twice President of the Republic, approves the creation of a Portuguese Ethnographic Museum, a museum designed to show the material part of life of the "Portuguese man" throughout his long diachrony, ie from pre-history to the formation of the nationality, in early medieval times.

Some years later, in the turn of the century, when a new area of one of the Jeronimus Monastery, the most symbolic Portuguese monument, was achieved, the place was handed over to this museum, the museum of the roots of "being Portuguese", after a controversy where an alternative use was considered and defended by more conservative minds, advocating the celebration of the “epic maritime expansion”: the Museum of Discoveries.

The Portuguese Ethnographic Museum, presently named National Museum of Archaeology, has followed throughout the twentieth century all the episodes of the Portuguese political history. Its relationship with the space, where it is still located today, is especially symptomatic of this situation. During the First Republic (1910-1926) it became the most popular museum in Portugal, a place where many free courses in archaeology and history were granted, within a republican ideal of social liberation through culture. During the Dictatorship and the so-called "New State" (1926-1974) it was decided to withdrawal it from the Jeronimus Monastery, again to install a Museum of Discoveries - which was never done due to discrete civic resistance (the only possible at the time) and mainly due to insurmountable technical and financial difficulties. In recent years, the same perspective returned to, with the same degree of authoritarianism, but by the hand of political leaders called socialists. It is so irresistible to think that the only bond of union between 1890 and today is the country's deep financial crisis, a crisis that is primarily social and that national museums are in special in conditions to detect and, when ever the case, to denounce.

### **Eva SILVÉN**

(Nordiska Museet, Stockholm)

*Contested Sami heritage: drums and sieidis on the move*

The Sami are an indigenous people, with their traditional lands stretching over northern Sweden, Norway, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia – today the transnational area *Sápmi*. For centuries there has been an intense circulation of Sami material heritage outside the Sami society, involving both museums and private hands. The collecting was particularly active from the last decades of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th, with the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, the national museum of cultural history, as an influential actor. The museum's Sami collections contain more than 7,500 objects – everyday items as well as sacred and spiritual artefacts like *sieidis* and ceremonial drums.

From its opening in 1873, the Nordiska Museet became a center for Sami collecting, field studies, research, and exhibitions, a position that was further strengthened in the late 1930s, when a collection of Sami drums was transferred from Sweden's National Historical Museum. The drums had a long history of being kept in governmental custody since they were confiscated during the Christian mission in the 18th century. The background of the *sieidis* was, on the other hand, rather an effect of colonising the north by tourism and travelling. Many *sieidis*, natural objects used for worship, were taken by individuals from the mountains, kept for a while and then donated to a national museum in the capital, like the Nordiska Museet, the Museum of Ethnography, or the National Historical Museum.

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s this movement from the periphery to the center was reversed, according to a growing Sami political activism and a strengthening of regional institutions in the north. The authority of the Nordiska Museet was questioned and in 1980 an exhibition was postponed half a year, due to a serious conflict between the museum and the Sami representatives. In 1989, a new museum opened in northern Sweden: *Ájtte*, the Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum in Jokkmokk. As an act of repatriation, the Museum of Ethnography deposited its Sami collections there. The old periphery started turning into a new center, the "nation" *Sápmi*, as a node in a global indigenous community.

I will present two case studies about Sami drums and *sieidis* related to the Nordiska Museet. My main interests are not in the current reclamations and repatriation processes, instead I'm focused on analysing the dynamic movements of objects in a historical perspective: actors and networks constituted by museums, scholars, political bodies, and material heritage, as well as biographies and trajectories of objects and collections. Why were the artefacts acquired by the museum and why returned? What power relations have they been involved in? What has been the political, social, and cultural consequences of taking them from *Sápmi*, moving them around, and then back again? How has the interest and influence of the Sami actors changed over time?

**Theopisti STYLIANOU-LAMBERT** (Cyprus University of Technology)

**Alexandra BOUNIA** (Eunamus, Aegean)

*"Reluctant Museums": between a church and a museum Displaying religion in Cypriot museums*

In the 1990's a new kind of museum appeared in the North, mainly Muslim, part of Cyprus: Orthodox Christian churches that have been dis-used after the events of 1974, were turned into icon museums. In these museums, religious objects (mainly icons) have been displaced, ironically not from their natural place, which is the church, but from their original function, which is that of worship. Furthermore, the administration and ownership changed from their legal owners (the church of Cyprus and the Greek Orthodox people) to that of an occupying force of a different religion of the self-declared "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC).

After briefly presenting the on-going claims made by both Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities regarding the destruction of religious sites and the illegal trafficking of religious objects such as icons and frescoes, this paper will examine issues of cultural ownership and "heritage wars" as these are exemplified in the the five icon museums,

currently under the supervision of TRNC's "Department of Antiquities and Museums". These museums seem to take different forms depending on the national claims of the two communities. For the Republic of Cyprus, they are either seen as proof of the purposeful and continuous cultural destruction of Christian religious sites or as spaces which are temporarily «out of order» due to the Turkish occupation and which will resume their normal function as soon as a solution is found. On the other hand, for the TRNC, icon museums are the answer to Greek Cypriot accusations for cultural destruction and a public display of respect and religious tolerance. As a result, these museums are in limbo between permanent, neutral institutions (as museums are supposed to be) and temporary, emotional ones.

Furthermore, the fact that religious objects of one community are displaced and displayed by an occupying force creates personal psychological barriers to both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Being between a church and a museum, these institutions bring to the forefront issues of ownership and purpose, of religious and national representation, of restitution of cultural property and peaceful cultural co-existence.

### **Fredrik SVANBERG**

(Historiska Museet, Stockholm)

*Bodies collected and contested: the heritage of anatomical museums*

A major part of current repatriation claims, debates and conflicts over contested European collections concerns the heritage of human remains from old anatomical collections created in relation to anatomical museums now closed or significantly transformed. The history of anatomical collecting as well as the museum and research use of these collections in the 19th and 20th centuries is quite little known beyond a general historical frame. New research projects are on the way, however, revealing interesting new historical knowledge in this field which gives new perspectives on the "dark" history of the latest two centuries as well as new backgrounds to current debates on contested heritage and repatriation issues.

### **Simona TROILO**

(Eunamus, Bologna)

*The fabrication of Rhodes heritage. The Italian colonial politics and the question of antiquities in the Dodecanese (1914-1928)*

My paper aims at analysing mediations and conflicts on the management of Rhodes antiquities between the Italian colonizers and the local population in the period 1914-1928. It was then that a preservation system was organized in the island of Rhodes in order to create a central Archaeological Museum and some institutions devoted to heritage (for instance, the Soprintendenza agli scavi e ai monumenti di Rodi). The work focusses on some issues arisen out of this process: the creation of a colonial heritage consciousness; the fabrication of the myth of the "Italian" medieval Rhodes; the impact (and resistance) of the local population to the Italian heritage politics. This last issue will highlight tensions, conflicts and mediations between the colonizers and the colonized on the use of the past and the meaning which the colonial power invested it with. The paper also shows how the discourse of "barbarianism" vs

“civilization” shaped the Italian politics of heritage and, more in general, how an ideological use of heritage moulded a specific hierarchy of the civilization.

**Silke WALTHER**

(Ruhr-Universität, Bochum)

*Imagined Communities in Contemporary Holocaust Exhibitions*

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fantastic seems to have conquered all genres, even blurring the boundaries between historical facts and fiction. As an interdisciplinary phenomenon the fantastic is interesting for all those who question the validity of given cultural consensus because it disrupts conventional notions by introducing something that appears unreal, unfamiliar, unimaginable. Given that it probes reality as it appears, one of the concerns since postmodern theory is “knowledge about knowing”: “Alternative histories” or the possibility to reflect upon historical events from several perspectives are fantastic modes to engage with historical events. The Holocaust used to be the blind spot in a traumatized postwar culture, isolated and unique. After eyewitnesses have reached old age, the tectonics of memorial culture underwent another crucial process of transformation: Museum exhibitions dealing with the one unrepresentable event have changed dramatically over the past two decades, shifting from didactic information about the event that really meant “the end” to various postmodern and “post-Holocaust” perspectives. How can a museum exhibition position “history” and “memory” in relation to the Holocaust? Is contemporary museum practice influenced by modes or tropes of the fantastic? My paper explores how two specific exhibitions deal with the task of the lost communities not only to a past but also to present “trans-national” European identity. The Imperial War Museum London and the Jewish Museum Berlin have chosen different strategies to make us reimagine Europe’s lost communities in their permanent exhibitions. In London, historical objects are part of the museum’s rather “gothic” narrative on “persecution and slaughter, collaboration and resistance”, whereas in Berlin museum is the “axis of continuity” as crossed by the “axis of the Holocaust”. The visitor experiences this moment of disruption passing through the building. How can the relationship between image, representation and the museal construction of memory be described? What kind of setting is meant to intensify the museum experience in Berlin and London? My paper will compare and contextualise the two widely discussed Holocaust exhibitions and the strategies to mediate the past within the dynamic field of “post-traumatic” museum culture in Europe.

**Sheila WATSON, Andy SAWYER**

(Eunamus, Leicester)

*Museums and World War II*

How do we understand the ways in which the museum represents conflict? This paper will explore the narratives of selected case study museums that concern themselves in some way or another with World War II, reflecting on the ways in which political and social concerns affect interpretation strategies and how the decade in which the displays were created affect the war’s interpretation.

**Paul WILLIAMS**

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*Treading Difficult Ground: The Effort to Establish Russia's First National Gulag Museum*

Two hours from the industrial city of Perm at the edge of the Urals lies the surprisingly well-preserved remains of harsh wooden barracks, administrative buildings, and security features of a Gulag (forced labor) camp called Perm-36. This site has recently been marked as the memorial site and museum for the Russian Federation's first National Gulag Museum. These buildings, constructed by prisoners in 1946 and closed down only in 1988, typically held several thousand prisoners at once, and are the best-preserved remnants of the Gulag phenomenon.

As a professional museum planner, I have been asked to transform this difficult site into a functioning national memorial and museum. Working with the non-profit Perm-36 Foundation and various representatives of local and national government, I have been asked to consider challenging questions about how, and why, the murder of around 15 million people through the Gulag system (and the suffering of many more) might be remembered in Russia.

My Russian colleagues are interested in what I can share about other sites of this kind; specifically, the Central and Eastern European Holocaust memorials that lie on authentic sites of mass murder and genocide. Although the Gulag predated – and far-outlasted – the Holocaust, these European sites are the primary reference point for this kind of national commemoration. In discussion, we often settle on three important issues that make this project troubling in terms of a contemporary Russian “politics of recognition” *vis a vis* Holocaust memorials:

First, the early (and sometimes defining) features of Holocaust memorials were carried out by Socialist government-sanctioned designers and sculptors, eager to expose these sites as evidence of Fascist atrocity. In conversations with Russian architectural and exhibition designers, the issue of how – or whether – to avoid this formal design vocabulary is pressing.

Second, beyond Germany (and many admirable attempts among occupied nations to show complicity), other European nations have managed to frame the Holocaust as a perpetration of atrocity from a foreign nation. The Perm-36 Museum will be one of the first public attempts at historical self-incrimination in Russia's modern era. In discussion, I am asked how to gauge when the Russian public is “ready for this topic.” For this purposes of this conference, we might ask: are nationally “disturbing histories” just fact histories too soon, or histories that defy some deeper sense of national selfhood?

Third, national memorials that document disturbing pasts can be geared towards both political reconciliation and social reawakening. While the government-sanctioned political excavation of Perm-36 at this point is geared towards the former, might there be unexpected social passion around the result, where evidence and stories retrieved from the forced labor camps might flow into other public dissatisfactions?

Addressing these three questions, my paper will describe my professional fieldwork at Perm-36 in comparison to my work at European Holocaust memorials, and, using my

findings from my Memorial Museums research, I suggest ways forward for this Russian case.