

interrogation of the unique forms of poetry, sagas, myths, language and manuscripts that makes the Viking world so enduringly fascinating to many. It is for such reasons that the exhibition is not as evocative as it could be. In an age where museums frequently aim to appeal to diverse communities, the British Museum has maintained a traditional outlook along with few interactive elements, thus with little appeal here for younger audiences. In its apparent attempt to draw families the exhibition severely disappoints.

Indeed there has been a mixed reception of the exhibition amongst the British press tending towards the negative, with famed English art critic Brian Sewall proclaiming the exhibition “a crushing disaster”. An exhibition that aims to demythologize what makes the Vikings to many people so glamorous is bound to invite detractors. Although the nuanced and cool tone of the exhibition is recognizably noble in its attempts to portray the Norsemen as neither more or less violent than their contemporary Anglo-Saxons, Franks and Slavs, the curator’s absolute unwillingness to resort to any form of sensationalism overly neutralizes the Vikings. The ambience here is not quite the modernist aesthetics of the Viking Ship Museum in Norway (*Vikingskipshuset på Bygdøy*), but instead something more detached and bleached.

However, despite the overly clinical display method, this well thought out exhibition along with a fantastic and wide ranging programme of associated events, accessories, publications (including an excellent catalogue) and public outreach (not to mention a recreated Viking burial in the courtyard of the British Museum on April 24th) will no doubt insure that the Vikings continue to shine on in the British psyche for many years to come. Hopefully this

exhibition will mark the turning point of how the public perceives the Vikings, perhaps generating a greater appreciation of how the artistic merits of this truly global culture can be balanced with its more brutal and violent aspects, though whether it will be successful in this endeavor remains to be seen.

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PHD-ANMELDELSER

Lise Camilla Ruud. *Doing Museum Objects in Late Eighteenth-Century Madrid*. (Thesis submitted for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, November 2012.)

Carlos III of Spain was especially fond of pachyderms. In 1773 an elephant arrived in the port city of Cadiz, a gift from the ruler of the Carnatic region of India via the Governor-General of the Phillipines. After trekking 600 km it fascinated nobility and the masses alike in Madrid, then lived out its days in the royal menagerie at Aranjuez. But elephants often have afterlives as interesting and varied as their lives, and this one was no exception. Upon its demise in 1777, Juan Bru, the dissector at the Royal Cabinet of Natural History, hurried the 50 km to Aranjuez to preserve and prepare the specimen, and to secure it for his master, Pedro Franco Dávila. The King wanted an elephant to display, and

106 Dávila wanted a specimen for the cabinet. Accordingly, Bru spent over a week defleshing his mammoth charge, cooking the bones, drawing everything as he went along. Dávila ordered Bru back to Madrid with the bones and the skin (itself weighing 300 kg), where 20 craftsmen spent three months working to create not only the first articulated elephant in the cabinet but also one of the first taxidermized elephants in Europe. For the latter, a sculptor spent seven weeks (after a false start with incorrect measurements) carving a wooden frame over which to stretch the skin, which would have crushed the taxidermists' more usual wire-and-straw infrastructure. An extra set of tusks was necessary so that both skin and bone elephant(s) were complete. A proposed third version of the elephant, from some of its remaining organs, never materialized. Despite concerns about the load-bearing capacity of the floor of the cabinet's building, both were displayed from 1778.

One individual elephant, then, generated multiple post-mortem versions as well as considerable political and pragmatic debate. Such narratives, and many others intersecting at the Royal Cabinet of Natural History are presented with imagination and verve by Lise Camilla Ruud in *Doing Museum Objects in late Eighteenth-Century Madrid*. She spans cultural history, material culture studies, museology and history of science; many scholars these days are interdisciplinary, but Ruud is impressively *multi-disciplinary*, not only blending methods and approaches but also and moving them forward.

Effectively Spain's first public museum, the cabinet opened in 1776 based around Dávila's own collection and would form the core of what is now the Museo Nacional de Ciencias

Naturales. Its early decades span an especially interesting era for the study of collecting and collections.

Colonial expeditions quantitatively and qualitatively expanded European collections, challenging and expanding taxonomic systems and the functions of cabinets. The shorthand historiography of the *Encyclopédie* reordering Renaissance cabinets into Enlightenment museums masks a far richer tapestry of meanings and uses. It is this messy, contingent development that Ruud unpacks so adeptly.

Throughout she is interested in the transformation of natural things to museum objects. *Doing Museum Objects* joins a rich museological vein which pays due attention to museum processes as well as their exhibitionary products. The poetics and functions of museum objects are much better understood if, as they are here, their trajectories are traced as they are found, travelled, treated and displayed. Ruud presents the brute details of museum work, presenting in painstaking detail the painstaking hours, days and even months of labour that go into preparing specimens like the elephant. There can't be very many historical accounts that revel as she does in the opening of boxes as they arrive in the museum.

This is not only a study of practice but of place. Most immediately, the architectural environment is an essential element in museum meanings, and Ruud brings alive the ten halls in the original building (in modern parlance: three for geology, four for zoology, one for botany and the final two ethnology). Beyond its walls, the cabinet was one of a web of institutions in Madrid and elsewhere, and these networks run throughout the work, as she frames the museum objects with actor-network theory (ANT). This method is both

a blessing and a curse. It helpfully emphasizes the material culture involved, and provides a welcome dynamism to the analysis; museum collections are perpetually in a state of becoming, growing a shrinking, their meanings changing with each new acquisition and new visitor. The networks too shifted and mutated as gravitational authority and political power changed, and ANT is one way to keep track of the complex dynamic systems and to frame collecting and display as essentially relational phenomena. But then again, conceptualizing collections as “enacted realities” does not always help the reader. One could have written this story without ANT (and perhaps Ruud should not have). But if it is to be used, it should be used as she does: consistently, eloquently and imaginatively, with a very close eye to the primary sources.

Crucially, Ruud’s actors include visitors alongside collectors and curators. Travellers came from all over Europe, and took back with them what they learnt in Madrid. They included, for example, the Danish physician Peter Christian Abildgaard, founder of the Danish Veterinary School, who was involved in the Danish Natural Society and who worked for the establishment a Danish National Natural History Museum. And we learn not only who visitors were but also how they behaved, or were expected to. Twice a week the museum was opened to the general populace in their vernacular dress; a soldier was stationed at the entrance, however, better to ensure a tranquil environment – there was an etiquette to museum visiting. Ruud thereby contributes to the cultural history of the relationship between science and sensibility.

But at the heart of this work are the objects, and Ruud scatters among the background of

the wider collection stories of singular objects. The stories are all the richer that these are natural history specimens, from the “arrogant” two-tailed lizard to an exploding fruit. For these vignettes alone, this original and engaging work should be read by any historian, anthropologist or museologist interested in the meanings of objects that were once alive.

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BØGER

Anita Maurstad & Marit Anne Hauan (red.). *Museologi på norsk. Universitetsmuseenes gjøren.* Trondheim: Akademika forlag 2012. 237 s. ISBN 978-82-519-2888-5.

Bogen udspringer af et norsk projekt, *Museers viten, museumsviden – Museologisk forsknings-satsning ved universitetsmuseerne* (forkortet til MusVit) og af Norges Forskningsråds strategiske satsning på at styrke forskningssamarbejde og kompetenceudvikling på de norske universitetsmuseer. Det er Tromsø Museum – Universitetsmuseet og NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, der sammen med Arkeologisk Museum, Universitetet i Stavanger, Bergen Museum, Universitetet i Bergen og Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo, har været den drivende kraft i projektet. Målet med antologien er at udforske museologien som et fælles forskningsfelt og derigennem at skabe et nyt