

Call for Papers for the international conference
of the Leibniz Research Alliance “Historical Authenticity”



Museums – Places of Authenticity?

Date, place

3 and 4 March 2016

Mainz, Erbacher Hof and Museum für Antike Schifffahrt des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums

Museums, collections and archives collect, maintain, keep and research “authentic” evidence of our cultural and natural heritage. At the same time, they present this evidence in new categories and contexts, so giving objects a new significance as museum or collection artefacts. They also translate and communicate the knowledge associated with their exhibits in the terms of today’s society. In addition, many museums inform the public about the approaches, questions and methods of the scientific disciplines associated with research into these objects and so offer academics a platform for dialogue with the public.

The aim of the interdisciplinary international conference is to perform a joint assessment of the importance and functions of “authenticity” in museums and other similar institutions, such as archives and collections. It is to consider on a broad interdisciplinary basis how “authenticity” can be established by means of collection and research, conservation and restoration, as well as the exhibition concept and communication work.

With this conference, the Leibniz Research Alliance “Historical Authenticity” wishes to help reflect and develop the collection strategies, conservation and restoration practices, as well as the dialogue and communication work of museums and other collection-led research institutions. This should provide important impetuses for museum and collection practices.

Target group

The conference is aimed equally at scientists from all subject areas and other specialists from museums, collections and educational establishments.

Conference topics

A) Historical change of authenticity ideals from curatorial theory and practice

The growing importance of scientific analysis in the evaluation of objects, as well as the new sensitivity for provenance (“provenance research”), are increasingly bringing “cumulative status”, uncertain provenances or old restorations to light involving everyday history exhibits, scientific collection items and “art” or archaeological objects. It is rare to find objects that have not been modified in some way, which would be ideal in terms of authenticity.

Conference papers can examine the following issues:

- In view of the "historical processuality" that is increasingly observed in museums, collections and archives, is it even possible to work with the concept of the authentic?
- Which contradictions or synergies can be derived from the opposition between the two concepts – the aura of the unchanged and the "ruin value" of an often eventful object biography – for historical object analysis and public presentation?
- Are new classification systems required "behind the scenes" at research museums that make the later history of objects the focus of research interest, rather than traditional authentication strategies (like place, time)?
- What interactions are there in museum practice between specialist, i.e. typical disciplinary classification systems with authentication sovereignty, and subsequent museum instrumentalisation?
- What effects do logical systems of ordering in archives and collections have on the creation, preservation or destruction of historical authenticity?
- Is the tremendous, often admiring interest in counterfeiters and forgeries a result of the general scepticism of society to established authentication strategies in the museum environment?
- What opportunities would a cross-cultural/intercultural approach to the understanding of original, forgery and copy offer, for example, in a European/East Asian comparison?
- How has the significance of copies, restorations and reconstructions in museums changed?

B) Ethics and basic principles of restoration, conservation and preparation

Approaches to artistic, cultural and natural heritage and thus also the aims and methods of restoration and conservation have changed dramatically over the years. Part of this process is an ongoing examination of the methods and ethical principles of working with originals.

Conference papers can examine the following issues:

- Can objects that have been adapted, revised, reworked or put to a new use actually have an "original", "authentic" state that can be preserved and made visible?
- How do we deal with the change in meaning of objects?
- What is included in the "object totality", how do we work with interrelated object associations and where and why were which priorities set?
- To what extent do measures to determine species influence the authenticity of natural history exhibits?
- Which social contexts and values have to be taken into account when dealing with cultural and natural heritage?
- What effects do conservation, restoration or preparatory steps have on the significance of the object and on its credibility or the authentication strategies in the museum?
- What effect do new technologies and scientific findings have on the authentication of objects?

C) Authenticity, learning and experience: the museum as a place for knowledge transfer and for the public understanding of science and the humanities

The topic examines the learning and engagement strategies and methods in museums today and the significance assigned to authenticity and credibility. It is also about the challenge of communicating scientific knowledge methodologies and making them transparent, i.e. clarifying research questions, processes and methods, demonstrating and discussing its limits (cf. PUSH and PUR, as well as science & humanities & society).

Conference papers can examine the following issues:

- What role does the original (cultural-history or natural-history) object play in communicating knowledge in a museum? Does the original have an empirically verifiable "aura" – or is it just the result of museum presentations and museological reflections?
- How do we deal with the changeability of the authentic with respect to the visitor?
- How are different scientific theories or attempts at explanation represented? How are the different ways of interpreting objects and topics presented so that, on the one hand, the historicity of findings is visible and, on the other hand, the fact that current theories and attempts at explanation can be contradictory or unexplained? To what extent can visitors' ideas about authenticity be deconstructed?
- What effects do participative approaches have on museums as "places of authenticity"?
- What is the significance of "copies" and restorations of objects and finds – ranging from plaster copies and reconstructions to digital images – in the exhibition concept and museum communication? What role does contextualisation play – and how does it influence our perceptions and cultural legacies?
- How is evidence created in the museum and how can "conflicting evidence" be communicated? Which methods can be used to communicate scientific research questions and approaches, as well as the relativity of research results?
- What role do the spoken language, sounds and music play as (authentic) sources?
- What are the opportunities and possibilities for personal communication methods and events, or the use of scientists as communicators?
- How can an optimum dialogue be created – also in the form of feedback to research?
- How do different media influence the perception and creation of historical authenticity and what opportunities do they offer in communication practice?
- What is the relation between effect, i.e. a "communication success" and economic cost?

Publication and language

The papers will be published. The presentations will be given in German and English.

Submission of abstracts

Abstracts for the 20-25-minute papers (not more than 500 words) can be submitted with a brief vita **by 30 September 2015**. Please email this to tagungsbuero-authentizitaet@rgzm.de. The Programme Committee will select papers by 2 November 2015.

Poster presentation

As part of the evening event on 3 March in the Museum für Antike Schifffahrt, posters can be presented independently of a conference paper in the "Marktplatz der Projekte". Please submit a short abstract (max. 500 words) and a brief vita to tagungsbuero-authentizitaet@rgzm.de **by 30 September 2015**. We explicitly welcome not only scientific projects but also practical projects relating to the conference topic. Posters should be in DIN A0 portrait format. The Programme Committee will select posters by 2 November 2015.

Further Information:

www.rgzm.de/leibniz-authentizitaet

Organisers

Leibniz Research Alliance "Historical Authenticity"

Together with:

Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum – Archaeological Research Institute, Mainz

Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum

Deutsches Museum, München

National Maritime Museum – Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum, Bremerhaven

Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg

Museum für Naturkunde – Leibniz Institute for Evolution and Biodiversity Science, Berlin

Senckenberg Nature Research Society – World of Biodiversity, Frankfurt am Main

Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig – Leibniz Institute for Animal Biodiversity, Bonn

Knowledge Media Research Center – Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen

The Leibniz Research Alliance "Historical Authenticity" (www.leibniz-historische-authentizitaet.de) seeks to explore how historical and contemporary conceptions of authenticity affect the way we deal with our cultural heritage. 18 Leibniz institutes and four external partners are currently involved in the project. The Leibniz Research Alliance "Historical Authenticity" aims to analyse the public, museum and scientific definition of the authentic when dealing with the past, as well as its epistemological, cultural, social and political significance across different countries and periods.

Programme Committee

Dr. Stefan Brüggerhoff (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum)

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