

# The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Magazine



Japan – Kyushu  
Iran – Islamic Tiles  
Chinese Mythology  
Indian Drums  
Bissau



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Cover image: Mrs Kumagai and a Japanese lunch  
Photo © Joy Hendry. From article on page 5.

## Between Friends

What a change there has been in the world since I last wrote - the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are affecting us all, in unexpected ways. The Pitt Rivers Museum is closed, and many Friends' events have been postponed. The very popular Last Rites-themed Kenneth Kirkwood Day, booked for March 14th, has been moved to October; many of those of you who booked and paid for it are willing to wait until then – thank you. We have also deferred the 20th March event by Shayam Patel, one of the Indian dancers at the twelfth night party last year.

Also postponed is a talk scheduled for May 20th by Marenka Thompson-Odlum on the PRM's labelling project. Marenka received Kenneth Kirkwood funding last year to attend a conference in Kyoto on museum labelling, where she spoke about her work on the PRM's collection of objects from the Ainu people of Japan. These objects were purchased by Henry Balfour at an exhibition at Shepherd's Bush in 1910. The Ainu were for a long time a persecuted group within Japan, but in 2019 they at last received indigenous people status.

We have cancelled the AGM and the accompanying talk by the Director, which was much looked forward to. The AGM reports will be sent to you by chimpmail, as will decisions about the events scheduled for September and October. Will life will be back to something resembling normal by the autumn? Or will we have adapted to a new normal? We are getting used to uncertainty: we can self-isolate and fill our time constructively; we can also reconsider our priorities and appreciate, and contribute, small acts of generosity in our local communities. Meanwhile I wish you all good (or recovered) health, and look forward to seeing you again – whenever that may be.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Chair of the Friends



Photo © Studio Edmark

## Burns Night at the Pitt Rivers Museum

For its annual party this year, the Friends of the Pitt Rivers tried something new: this was a celebration of Burns night. This event was first held 25th January 1801 in Burns' cottage to celebrate what they thought was the 50th anniversary of the great poet's birth - he was actually born in 1759. Our celebration was held on the 29th, the nearest Saturday.

Health, safety and PRM regulations stopped us from going through the full Burns night rigamarole which involves eating too much hot haggis, neaps and tatties and drinking too much whisky to help listen to too many speeches. Instead, a group from the Abingdon Scottish Dancing Society made sure that the immortal memory was respected in its essence at least.

The evening started in the subdued light of the Museum to the lovely sounds of the Meadow Lane string quartet playing Scottish music. There was then a brief pause before the sounds of the pipes resonated throughout the Museum and two kilted Scots-for-the-night carried in a haggis, followed by Philip Powell, its brilliant piper, who in a broad west Scottish accent addressed it with Burns' poem which starts:

Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,  
Great chieftain o the puddin'-race!

We all then followed the haggis to the Blackwood room where vast amounts of food had been laid out and prepared by the organising committee ably run by Terry Bremble (as it was for "us" and not the public, we didn't need commercial caterers). The evening ended with an enthusiastic display of Scottish country dancing by the Abingdon group. I don't know how they felt when they finished, but I was exhausted just watching them. It really was a lovely evening.

Jonathan Bard Friend



Members of the Abingdon Scottish Dancing Society dancing a reel

Photo: © Jonathan Bard

# From the Director

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had significant impact on the Museum's plans and operations. We are aiming to stay open in a virtual way so that we can inspire and reach out to stakeholder communities that need us now more than ever. The Museum is doing well with many projects coming to fruition, new applications being granted and several new exhibitions opening, as you can see from the report



Maasai Visit

below. Of particular importance this year, we had visits by representatives from the Maori and Maasai. The first was a delegation in January of seven Maasai from Kenya and Tanzania that included their spiritual leader and several elders from Kenya and Tanzania who visited the Museum as part of the Living Cultures project. We are working with other UK museums, including the Horniman and Cambridge, to ensure that the delegation sees as many relevant collections as possible.

Two new exhibitions opened in December. 'Blow-Up in Bissau' about photography and museum revival in West Africa in the Long Gallery and 'Memoirs in My Suitcase' concerning Turkish migrants in the Archive Case. These are discussed in more detail later in the magazine. A third exhibition 'Beyond the Binary' will open in the Temporary Exhibition space later in the year.

In March we were due to host a large international (EU-funded) conference that inaugurated the Taking Care project. This 'Matters of Care' conference focused on how ethnographic and world cultures' museums can, and should, not only be homes for objects, but be places where we represent other peoples' cultures. The conference had to be postponed, but will explore how our museums, as collections that tell stories of cultural, linguistic and species

characteristics, can, and should, play a more active role in public discussions around planetary and environmental precarity.

December saw the retirement of two of our esteemed PRM colleagues, Joint Head of Collections, Jeremy Coote, and Front of House Manager Derek Stacey. We are immensely grateful for the work both have done at the Museum. They leave a great legacy of achievement that will be

carried forward by the Museum's staff.

Finally, we received the great news that the Arts Council Designated Development Fund has awarded us £90,000 to undertake conservation, research, photography and digitisation of the Museum's internationally significant textile and clothing collections. This project will start next year.

**Laura van Broekhoven, Director**



Maasai Visit

## Museum News

One of the internal preoccupations of the Museum at the moment is moving the PRM musical instruments and stone tools collections to what was the basement area of the Radcliffe Science library. This is due to the repurposing of the Organic Chemistry building to house the new Parks Graduate College.

To handle our collections of some 90,000 objects, a team of ten collections assistants and a team leader has been formed to handle the move and rearchiving. The whole programme will take six months and is now under way.

We completed the second staff well-being survey last year and, to help with the pressures that come with run-

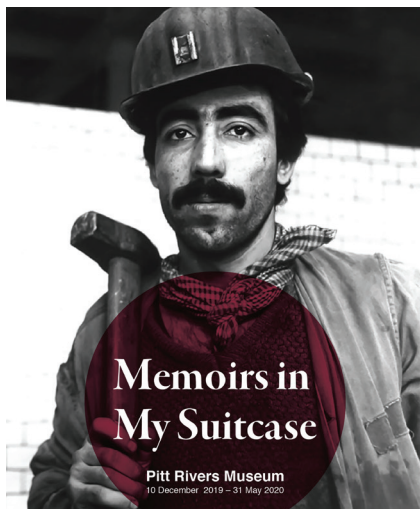
ning a museum these days and to support improvement in staff morale, the Museum has set up a well-being group. Although it is still early days, the group has organised staff lunchtime walks and is planning a series of social events. We are glad to say that our staff is appreciating this initiative.

The new welcome desk is now at the bottom of the stairs and staff report it is being much used by visitors. Finally, work on the new Parks College begins soon. Hoardings have been put up with a pathway to the museum through the middle of the lawn. While we expect some disruption, we are doing everything we can to remain accessible to visitors.

**Laura van Broekhoven, Director**



# Memoirs in my Suitcase



*Memoirs in my Suitcase book cover*

In Turkish, we have an emotional word: 'gurbet.' There is no direct translation to English. It is defined as being in a foreign land. Being lonely and away from your loved ones. This is a type of migration you are not forced to, but you are required to do. It is supposed to be temporary, there is a specific goal, earning some money, and when you return to

your home, making some investment to live in better conditions and secure your future. Therefore, when you listen to a song about 'gurbet' or another word with the similar meaning, 'sıla', you recall all these requirements, motivations, hopes and desires.

Our exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum sheds light on one of the most significant types of 'gurbet' in Turkish migration history: Joining the ranks of guest workers in Western Europe in the 1960s. The majority of them stayed in their new countries; their third and fourth generations are living in these countries. They have found ways to synthesise their lives in their host countries with their home country, Turkey, creating a unique identity and new cultural norms they have called 'gurbetçi'; this adds a new aspect to the word 'gurbet', now applied to people who have become permanent in a foreign land, converted from guests to foreigners, staying in limbo.

A guest-worker program was initiated by the German Federal Republic to overcome the scarcity of labour-force in heavy industry in the post-War period. According to the program, guest-workers would be invited from selected countries; they would work temporarily based on the rotation system and would return to their countries when their contract was terminated. The first agreement was signed with Italy in 1955 and then between 1960 and 1968 Germany signed similar agreements with Yugoslavia, Tunisia, Portugal, Jordan, Turkey, Spain and Greece. Guest workers were mainly employed in metal, automotive, mining and waste cleaning sectors.

790,000 workers from Turkey went to Europe between 1961 and 1973 and 80% of them arrived in Federal Germany. As the guest workers scheme was temporary and based on rotation, apart from accommodation, immigrants were not provided with a particular social space or other opportunities. Turkey-origin immigrants met their cultural, religious and social needs via grassroots initiatives. Coffeehouses, mosques, hometown associations or political organisations served as spaces where Turkey-origin immigrants reinforced their internal solidarity in a country that was foreign to them in all respects.

Turkey-origin guest-workers faced harsh living conditions.

Many companies had offered 6 square metre hostel rooms or crowded dormitories. 20 people shared a shower and 10 people shared a toilet on average. As a result of hard-working conditions, they could not learn the German language comprehensively.

This was the first time that German society met with an Islamic community in their daily lives. So factories didn't provide a mosque or prayer rooms; workers faced difficulties on Ramadan fasting and Eid al-Adha. There were also problems concerning food and shopping. Many workers had psychological problems due to the working conditions and being away from their families for long years. Family unification could be possible for them following the 1965 Foreigners Act. In 1964, the German employer association asked the German government to halt the rotation system by mentioning their satisfaction with the guest-workers labour force, and this paved the way for permanent residence for immigrant workers. The guest-worker program was terminated by the 1973 oil crisis. Also, because of the demand for low-cost labour the authorities encouraged family unification if other family members were also able to work. Additionally, the struggles of immigrants' associations, trade unions, pro-immigrant political parties and decisions of legal courts provided more rights and longer-term contracts for immigrants.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when guest-workers became permanent workers, they began to be defined as foreigners (auslanders). This continued for decades until 2000, when Germany decided to recognise itself as a country of immigration and began to take further positive steps on the citizenship rights of immigrants. The exhibition shows photographs of the tokens of home that these guest-workers carried with them and I hope that you enjoy seeing it.



*Memoirs in my Suitcase at the PRM*

**Dr Emre Eren Korkmaz, St Edmund Hall**



*Memoirs in my Suitcase at the PRM*

# What remains?

**W**hat! Remains? Watt remains. This is how Sir Philip Pullman began his talk on January 15th, indicating how different emphases on the same two words are context-related, such as the discovery of a corpse or a reference to James Watt. Watt remains because his improvement of the steam engine's efficiency is part of the sequence of events that led to today's climate crisis. Much of what we experience remains only in the memory, and in visual reminders. Philip took us back to his childhood, beginning with a photograph of himself, aged 5, at the 1951 Festival of Britain in Battersea Park. In the comics he read, such as 'The Eagle', the artwork indicates movement of the characters while speech and thought bubbles carry the story. In contrast to the sequential images of comics, great artists can portray a narrative in a single image, e.g. Goya's painting of the firing squad: in addition to the main event, the past is represented by a corpse and the future by the waiting line of horrified prisoners. Even more remarkably, in Caspar David Friedrich's 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog', the subject's imagination is evoked by his back view as he looks into the distance from a mountain peak.

Illustrations enrich a story and are not just for children: Dickens used them in his novels, and William Blake totally integrated them with the text of his poetry. They are an aid to the imagination and integral to the narrative. Philip believes that imagination is the true power underlying what remains,

and must be nurtured in children. He brought the evening to an end by performing excitingly dramatic readings from one of Kipling's 'Just So Stories' and from his own recent book 'The Secret Commonwealth'. We are warmly grateful to him for a most enjoyable evening.

**Gillian Moriss-Kay, Chair of the Friends**



*Philip signs a book for Alice Shrimpton after his talk.*

Photo © GMK

## An Affair with a Village: Wrapping Up 45 years of Research in Japan

**A**s a doctoral student back in the seventies, it was customary for a burgeoning anthropologist to set out for a reasonably distant location, and to spend a year gathering information about the place for a thesis. I accomplished that task in 1975 and have since kept in touch with the wonderful friends I made, returning when possible to update my understanding of their lives as horticulturalists and tea producers in rural Kyushu. Last autumn, I was funded by the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation to return to the village with the materials I had collected, which included family trees for each of the 50 odd houses, and a large chart showing how they were, or were not, related to each other.

The visit was bittersweet, for I stayed as usual with the family which had adopted me over the years, but knew that once I had returned the materials that this might be the last time I would see them. My vegan son and his partner came to film the process, and our hosts produced delicious meals daily, direct from their organic vegetable patch, so that we could go out refreshed to tour the houses and hand over the materials I had made so long ago. One family gathered all seven of their grandchildren and laid out the books I had written about the village, one of which happened to have a photograph of their grandparents' wedding on the cover, and another of two of their parents when they were small. Two of the now adult children of my hosts flew in from their homes in distant parts of Japan and we reminisced about being neighbours.

The culmination of the visit was a formal handing over of the village-wide chart to a gathering of village officials who had been active members of the youth group 45 years ago, and we shared a cup of local tea in the splendid village hall they had built since then. The village seems still to thrive, but there has been much change, which we have documented in my son's film, which also explains some of the advantages of such a long-term anthropological experience. It is available to view on U-tube at <https://youtu.be/x7qptoXqnhE>

**Joy Hendry Professor Emerita,**



*Shibata Hideshi and offspring*

Photo: © Joy Hendry



# From Persia to Bath

Twenty years ago, in a box of unframed sketches and pictures for sale outside an architect's office in Bath, I picked up a watercolour of what looked like a twelve-pointed blue and gold star. It had obviously been an illustration for a book, as a note 'Diez, Tafel [figure] 34' scribbled in a corner indicated. A visit to the library of the Royal Geographical Society revealed that it had been used in a book by an Austrian archaeologist, Ernst Diez. *Islamische Baukunst in Churasan (Islamic Architecture in Khorasan)* was published in 1923. And some additional research identified a link between this book, the watercolour and the Great Game, the political and diplomatic confrontation that existed for most of the 19th century between the British Empire and the Russian Empire over Afghanistan.

The watercolour was of a star pattern tile, from the dome of one of the vaulted halls of the Madrasa al-Ghiyasiyya, a religious college at Khargird, in eastern Iran, built in the last years of the reign of Shah Rukh. Shah Rukh's father, Timur (also known as Tamerlane), in addition to his military genius and legendary cruelty, was a great artistic patron, transporting artisans from all parts of his newly conquered empire to the principal Timurid cities. The madrasa, completed in 1444, is regarded as the last great surviving monument of the Timurid rulers and, in its design, influenced later architecture in Safavid Iran and Mughal India.

The building was covered in glazed tile mosaic and star pattern tiles, of cobalt blue, gold, white and turquoise, rising out of the landscape; the effect must have been dazzling. By 1905, when the site was visited by the British Consul General of the region, Major (later Brigadier General Sir) Percy Sykes, almost all of the star pattern tiles had been removed,



Watercolour of tile from Madrasa al-Ghiyasiyya



Tile from Madrasa al-Ghiyasiyya, on display in the Islamic Middle East Gallery at the V&A



Photograph of the Madrasa taken by H R Sykes in 1902-4

though the mosaics remained. In a market in the nearby town of Meshed, Sykes was able to buy a number of the tiles, a collection of which he gave to the British Museum. Other examples found their way to collections in the V&A, where one is on display in the Islamic Middle East gallery, the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague.

Dr Ernst Diez's research on the monuments of Khorasan was undertaken just before the outbreak of the First World War and his publication records 'a thousand thanks' to 'General Sir Sykes' (sic) for allowing his research to continue despite the fact that England and Germany were at war. Dietz's comments might perhaps be seen as ironic, given that his team included an architect, Lieutenant Oskar Niedermayer, ostensibly acting as a surveyor but, in reality, a spy, undertaking work for German intelligence. Later, during WWI, Niedermayer was to travel to Kabul to try and persuade the Amir of Afghanistan to join cause with the Kaiser and launch an uprising amongst the Muslims in India to throw the British out of the Raj, a story that John Buchan later embellished

and used in his novel 'Greenmantle'. Using the archaeological survey as a cover, Niedermayer had travelled widely in Persia. (In Southern Palestine, T E Lawrence had made use of the same subterfuge). After meeting Sykes, Niedermayer was ambushed and robbed of all his belongings. Sykes arranged for his money to be repaid, but the lieutenant's surveying equipment was never returned. In a wry official telegram, Sykes laid the

blame on a local sub-governor, but, clearly, the Great Game was still on in the early 20th century.

**Jane Weeks, Friend**

Photo: © Stephen Riley

Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Photo: © Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)



# Friends' PRM Away Day: Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

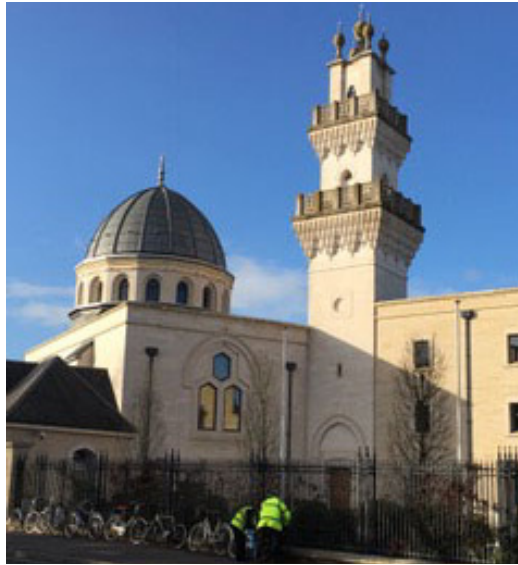
On 4 February, 24 Friends gathered at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in Marston Road and were greeted by the Home Bursar, Tim Yates. He explained that the Centre, founded in 1985, had first been based in a portacabin in St Cross Road and in 1990 had moved to offices in George Street. Work began on the Marston Road site in 2002 and the Centre was officially opened by its Patron, The Prince of Wales, in 2017. It is a recognised Independent Centre of the University. Support from many sources, including various Islamic countries, is reflected in the names of different parts of the Centre. Overall it is a blend of the architectural features of traditional Oxford colleges with styles of the classical period of Islam.

As we stood in the Istanbul Courtyard we admired the warm colour of the Clipsham limestone typical of many of Oxford's university buildings. We were stunned by the *kiswah* displayed within the main entrance hall, a large textile piece, richly decorated in gold and silver thread, part of the covering of the Kaaba in Mecca in 2004. Each year a new *kiswah* is made and pieces of the old one are gifted to individuals.

Passing through the King Fahd Quadrangle, with a lovely formal garden, and cloisters reminiscent of medieval cathedrals and also Moorish buildings such as the Alhambra in Granada, we entered the 183-seater auditorium, panelled in beautifully carved hardwood donated by Malaysia. From here, lectures can be broadcast to many parts of the Muslim world.

The Prince of Wales has been involved in the design of the main garden, which takes his name. Although it was designed in the intrinsically formal Islamic style, many of the plants there are typical of an English garden. The central sunken area has been planted as an English wildflower meadow.

Indoors again, we



Arriving at OCIS



The richly embroidered Kiswah



Mosque interior, with minbar



Viewing the King Fahd quadrangle

admired the collegiate-style dining hall, the Oman Hall, with seating for 120, including a 'high table'. I particularly liked the traditional lanterns from Egypt. Students and staff, both academic and administrative, eat lunch together: the food served is halal, much of it Middle Eastern in style.

The Mosque has a very peaceful atmosphere. The only furniture in the carpeted space is the wooden minbar (from which the Imam preaches on Fridays). The walls are clad in brightly coloured Italian marble, and the windows are filled with geometrically patterned stained glass. Upstairs is the women's gallery, and beneath the Mosque is a multi-purpose hall that can be used by the local community for Eid festival activities. Members of the public may attend the five-times daily prayers. I was pleased to learn that as part of the outreach programme, school groups visit regularly — an opportunity to learn something of the beliefs and traditions of Islam. And there is a programme of lectures and seminars open to the public in term time; for details, visit [www.oxcis.ac.uk/events](http://www.oxcis.ac.uk/events).

After seeing the Jerusalem Room (ideal for seminars) and Exhibition Hall, we were shown into the Common Room, where coffee and biscuits were served. It was a chance to ask Tim a few more questions before thanking him and saying goodbye.

Note: During winter months the water in the gardens is switched off for protection against frost, but during the summer, on the first Monday of the month, there will be public tours, when visitors can see and hear the fountains and the 'rills' in action. Bookable visits are also possible during the Oxford Open Doors weekend in September.

**Felicity Wood,**  
Friend.

All Photos: © Friend of PRM



# Mouse-Wolf



Image: © Weimin He

*Xiao Mei's hutong*

**M**ouse-Wolf is a story of the loss of home and habitat, of superstitions, dreams and memories, and of a three-generational family swept along in a tsunami of change they are powerless to resist. The city is Beijing and the time is a year before the 2008 Olympics. I was living there and witnessed the daily destruction of old buildings including hutongs to be replaced by shiny new apartment blocks or shopping centres. Great earth-moving machines rumbled down the road, demolition vehicles rammed their claws against old walls, huge cranes towered over cavernous holes that were the foundations of new buildings.

Amidst the noise and destruction birds and animals managed to survive. When walking our little Pekinese dog I would regularly see woodpeckers, magpies, and azure-winged jays. And once or twice I caught a glimpse of one of Beijing's best known wild animals: the weasel, known in Beijing dialect as *huangshulang*, the 'mouse-wolf' of my title. As I cast around for material I came across a fascinating article by Li Wei-tsu published in 1948: 'The Cult of the Four Sacred Animals in the Neighbourhood of Peking'\*. One of these animals was the *huangshulang*, the others being snakes, foxes and hedgehogs. These animals appeared either in their everyday 'profane' form or in a higher, supernatural 'sacred' form. Thus, in their profane form *huangshulang* were reviled and even killed. But killing a sacred *huangshulang* was strictly taboo.

It is in the hutongs of Beijing that *huangshulang* are still most often found and it is in one of these alleyways, in an old courtyard house, that the story is set. The *huangshulang* that lives there is a 'profane' creature, keeping itself to itself, and just about tolerated by the human occupants. The family consists of 10-year-old Xiao Mei, her feckless father Ba, anxious mother Ma, and half-demented grandmother Nainai. Across the courtyard lives their pigeon-keeping neighbour Old Wang. A homeless boy named Stone hides out nearby. When a big black (*chai*) character signifying 'demolition' is painted on the outside wall, the family is thrown into confusion, with Xiao Mei half-believing it is her

fault because she lost Nainai's jade talisman. Two parallel narratives then unfold. The first is the family's growing anxiety about the move, with each person reacting in a different way. Alongside this is a perilous journey across the city to return the jade, in which three *huangshulang* play key roles.

Mouse-Wolf creates a palimpsest of multi-layered experiences, where everything is happening so quickly that the past is barely past before it becomes the future. Stone, floating above a sea of tower blocks, looks down and sees a 'memory of what had been there before, an older street, a tree, a rack of bicycles...'. A tearful Xiao Mei gazes up at the 'people in the sky' who will occupy that

space when her house is torn down and replaced with a skyscraper. Nainai tries to make sense of her changing world by recalling the legends and superstitions of her childhood. Ba seeks out a fortune-teller. Ma seeks solace in painting. Xiao Mei is angry at being a powerless child and just wants to grow up.

One of my aims was to provide readers with an intense sensory experience of what it felt like to live in Beijing that long hot summer, with the suffocating heat, the incessant stridulation of cicadas and the mournful call of the bugu bird. Personal experience, observation and conversations with Chinese friends and family have informed the many stories in Mouse-Wolf.

[www.mousewolf.co.uk](http://www.mousewolf.co.uk)

\* 'On the Cult of the Four Sacred Animals in the Neighbourhood of Peking' by Li Wei-tsu (published by Nanzan University. *Folklore Studies* Vol. 7 (1948), pp. 1-94) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1177454?seq=1>

Mouse-Wolf by Elisabeth Hallett  
Illustrations by Weimin He  
Anglepoise Books  
published by Oxfordfolio, 2019

**Elisabeth Hallett**, author of *Mouse-Wolf*



*Huangshulang*

Image: © Weimin He



# Blow-Up in Bissau: Photography and Museum Revival in West Africa



Photo: © PRM

View of the exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum (2019)

In December 2012, one of us (Ramon Sarró) visited a small exhibition on “traditional arts” at the Franco-Guinean Cultural Center in the West African capital of Bissau. The few pieces on display, he was told, belonged to the National Ethnographic Museum, an institution he was convinced had ceased to exist in 1999, when a civil war created a watershed in the history of the public space of Guinea-Bissau. The war had been particularly damaging for this museum because it was used as headquarters of Senegalese troops. Sarró learned that despite the war, the museum still existed as part of the General Directorate of Culture, even if it had no physical space. The few objects still remaining were kept in the museum directors’ office, at the headquarters of the General Directorate of Culture. When Sarró visited it, he found that together with the objects they also had a photographic collection, an archive of 35 contact proof sheets.

Thanks to technical and financial support from the University of Oxford, the PRM, and the director of the museum, Dr. Albano Mendes, Sarró and Temudo started a three-year intense collaboration which included research in Bissau, Lisbon and Oxford. Each of the 400 images kept in Bissau was digitized, described in detail and thematically classified. We conducted archival research and interviewed many of the main actors in Bissau as well as the Portuguese specialists who, back in the late 1980s, had gone to Bissau to offer training for Bissauan museum technicians. The digitized images reveal the early stages of the National Ethnographic Museum in the period from 1986 to 1990 (images of the 1990 to 1998 period were lost in the war), illustrating the collecting of ethnographic items in the field as well as their installation in the museum in Bissau, which opened to the public in May 1988. The ethnographic expeditions of the 1980s were supported by the international WAMP (West African Museums Programme, created by British anthropologist Philip Ravenhill) as well as by the British Museum. Its Ethnographic Keeper Malcolm Mcleod spent more than half a year in 1986 in Guinea Bissau. He has shared his 2000 colour images with us, which

complemented the black-and-white collection of contact prints kept in Bissau. Altogether, the photographic archive shows the variety of material culture in Guinea-Bissau, as well as the enthusiasm of a group of researchers to build a national heritage in the early days of the postcolonial state (Guinea-Bissau was only 13 years old when the museum was inaugurated in 1988).

The digital reconstruction of these images allowed an exhibition ‘The Ethnographic Museum of Guinea-Bissau: Thirty years of History’ that, held at the museum in Bissau in 2017 and curated by one of us (Temudo),

aimed at reflecting on the consequences of a civil war that caused not only a lot of human losses and pain, but also the dematerialization of a cultural heritage.

The current exhibition ‘Blow-Up in Bissau: Photography and Museum Revival in West Africa’ (PRM, December 2019–May 2020), tells the story of our engagement with the museum in Bissau since 2012, especially with Albano Mendes, who deserves all our admiration. He has very carefully been looking after these prints for two decades and is now directing the new museum which, thanks to the exhibition he inaugurated in 2017 in Bissau, is entering into a new life, with new international partnerships (such as the PRM), and ready to face new theoretical and practical challenges.

**Ramon Sarró and Ana Temudo, Curators**



View of the exhibition in Bissau (2017)

Photo: © Ramon Sarró and Ana Temudo



# Connecting Threads: Multaka Oxford



Multaka at the Pitt Rivers Museum

“When memory stands on the threshold of the homeland and you are at the top of longing and longing for it, you remember all the things that were there and you enjoy them despite their simplicity. The war leaves you behind all your memories, dreams, past, future and all the beautiful things you used to have. In the midst of all this darkness, a dear friend surprises me by sending

a gift from my homeland to become a precious treasure.”

Niran, Multaka Volunteer

The gift was a modern brocade scarf displayed (and now donated) by Multaka volunteer Niran as part of ‘Connecting Threads’, a Multaka Oxford display at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Multaka Oxford is a collaborative programme running at the Pitt Rivers and History of Science Museum since 2017. Meaning meeting point in Arabic, Multaka creates opportunities to bring people and communities together to develop an intercultural dialogue as we share our cultures, histories and stories. Through a structured volunteering programme, Multaka has embraced and supported a multi-layered approach to object interpretation and public engagement activities with the Pitt Rivers’ collections. It brings together multiple voices and perspectives from diaspora communities living in Oxford, many of whom are refugees and asylum seekers. As part of a two-way value exchange, museums and their collections are used to build practical skills, connect with others, learn and share stories, and the museums benefit greatly by listening and gaining new insights into their collections.

The collaborative Multaka exhibition ‘Connecting Threads’ was co-curated by Multaka Collections Officer Abigael Flack and five Multaka volunteers – Niran, Nav, Suheer, Hussein and Emma. Over 5 months (Dec – April 2019), leading to the exhibition, staff and volunteers collaborated to select objects, design the layout and write the labels, facilitating this unique display of individual stories and perspectives connected with objects donated by Jenny Balfour Paul, ‘Textiles from the Arab World’. Together, the team selected a Syrian wedding dress from Jenny’s collection and then chose unique objects that personally resonated and embraced their different stories, cultures and histories. The final display highlighted how individual narratives can reveal the common threads we all share.

Niran chose her brocade scarf, helping visitors understand the power of objects from a homeland and culture that she was forced to leave.

Nav chose an Omani Mask, presenting his interest in the processes of collection, and the expertise of the collector Jenny Balfour Paul.

Hussein told his personal story of working in textile factories in Syria and Turkey helping visitors understand the human stories behind our textile production.

Suheer chose henna and the practice of henna tattoos which links cultures and religion from all over the world.

Sarah chose Tunisian brooches, as she focused on shared imagery used in different countries and religions.

Multaka Oxford is currently funded by a donor until November 2020. The activities and impact of the project continues to grow as we embrace the different approaches and perspectives our local diverse community brings to understanding objects and representing the complex and rich narratives held within museums’ collections.

**Nicola Bird** Project Manager for Multaka Oxford, Community Engagement Officer - Gardens and Museums (GLAM), University of Oxford



Multaka Volunteer Niran with her brocade scarf



Multaka Volunteers and Collections Officer with Syrian Wedding Dress



Connecting Threads Volunteer exhibition producers: Hussein, Sarah, Niran, Suheer, Nav



# Indian Tabla at the Pitt Rivers Museum



Photo: © Caroline Howard-Jones

'Pandit Ram Sahai (1785-1826)'

The tabla is a pair of medium sized hand drums with heads of multiple goat skins. They are said to be among the most complicated drums in the world. This instrument has branched out to become internationally revered, and tabla players often join together with musicians world-wide, as well as within the

context of many different forms of music including classical, folk, jazz and experimental.

Tabla is an essential musical instrument in India because it accompanies all kinds of music, singing and dance, and instruments such as sitar, sarod, santoor, sarangi, bansuri and others. The tabla provides essential rhythmic support and the tabla player creates opposition, tension, and resolutions by challenging or agreeing, mirroring the mood, decorating and by exploring melodic and rhythmic ideas in collaboration with other musicians on stage.

What is not so well known about tabla is that it is also an amazing solo instrument and in this role it is accompanied traditionally by the sarangi or the harmonium to provide a recurring melodic time cycle for the tabla player to base some pretty complex rhythmical compositions and variations on. Solo tabla is an improvised art form, but having said this it is based upon an enormous repertoire of compositions.

There are six major tabla gharanas (schools of music within households) in India:

- 1 Delhi
- 2 Punjabi
- 3 Lucknow
- 4 Benares
- 5 Farukhabad
- 6 Ajrara

I belong to the Benares gharana, which was founded by Pandit Ram Sahai. My guru is the late Pandit Sharda Sahai, who taught tabla many times in the Pitt Rivers Museum at classes that I set-up and attended as his assistant teacher.

Each gharana has a different style of playing with different compositions and different approaches to compositions and extemporising, but there is a lot of overlap as well. Some hundreds of Punjabi gats, a particular type of composition, were given to the Benares gharana as a dowry.

Just as every tabla player has a different hand and so will create a different sound, one from another, so each tabla is different and also each centre of tabla makers has a different recipe for making their tablas - especially in keeping their own secret recipe for making the syahi, the black spot at the centre of the tabla, and off centre on the bayan (dugga).

I was invited into the Pitt Rivers Museum last year and the year before to do performances and demonstrations on tabla, finishing with "hands-on-tabla" sessions where people were able to try out the basic sounds of tabla. My assistant was Neil Kensit, who sang and accompanied me on keyboard and harmonium.

Our session on 15 September 2018 coincided with the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi and because Lord Ganesh, the elephant God, is of special importance in my Hindu tabla tradition, we brought along a small copper statue of Lord Ganesh to watch over our event.

Afterwards we spent time with those wanting to ask questions.

In 2019 we were back at the museum doing mini hands-on-tabla events, but very many more of them, focusing on demonstrations within a tighter group circle.

We are enormously grateful for the beautiful gallery space at the Pitt Rivers Museum and for our enthusiastic audiences and participants.

**Caroline Howard-Jones, Friend**



Neil Kensit and Caroline Howard-Jones at PRM

Photo: © PRM

## Obituary

**Deborah Manley** recently died aged 87. She was the FPRM Newsletter's Editor for 10 issues (No 31, January 2000 to No. 40, April 2002). She continued to contribute pieces for 10 years after that, in particular News from the Museum - reports following conversations with the administrator, first Julia Cousins and later Cathy Wright.

She was instrumental in setting up the link between Oxford and Perm (Russia) and also ASTENE (The Association for the Study of travellers in Egypt and the Near East). She wrote brilliantly and was a wonderful observer of people.

**Felicity Wood, Friend**

**New Friends:** France Godfrey of Woodstock, Janie and Charles Hampton of Oxford, Helen Henman of Leominster Gavin Medhurst of Hemel Hempstead, John Perrott of Milton Keynes, Margherita Pierini and Mike Nightingale of Eynsham, Lee and Wendy Thompson of Eynsham To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Friend, or if your details change, please contact the membership secretary **Rosemary King** at: [rhking17@gmail.com](mailto:rhking17@gmail.com) or **01367 242433**



# INFORMATION SHEET

The Friends' Magazine is published three times a year

## INFORMATION

### Friends

[prm.ox.ac.uk/friends](http://prm.ox.ac.uk/friends)

**General Information:** Gillian Morriss-Kay  
gillian.morriss-kay@dpag.ox.ac.uk

**Programme:** Juliet Eccles  
julieteccles@virginmedia.com

**Membership:** 01367 242433  
rhking17@gmail.com

**Annual Subscription:** £30 (Joint: £40);  
Family (two adults and all their children  
under 18 living at the same address): £40;  
Over 65: £20 (Joint: £30); Student: £15 (18-25,  
in full time education).

**Life Membership:** (for 65+): £200.  
Subscription year from 1 May.  
First subscription paid after 1 January valid  
to 30 April of following year.

**President of Friends of Pitt Rivers:**

Professor Chris Gosden

**Patrons of Friends of Pitt Rivers:**

Alexander Armstrong, Sir David  
Attenborough, Danby Bloch, Professor Sir  
Barry Cunliffe, Dame Penelope Lively, Layla  
Moran, Sir Michael Palin, Sir Philip Pullman.

### Museum

**Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road,  
Oxford OX1 3PP  
01865 270927**

[www.prm.ox.ac.uk](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk)

Email: [ea@prm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ea@prm.ox.ac.uk)

Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00-16.30

Monday 12.00-16.30

Admission FREE.

#### Highlight tours

**Wednesdays 14.30 and 15.15**

Volunteer-led introduction to the Museum.

Approximately 20 minutes.

No booking required.

#### After Hours

Occasional themed evening events.

**All museum events:** see [www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events](http://www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events)

### Magazine

**Editor:** Dawn Osborne  
[dawnosborne@btopenworld.com](mailto:dawnosborne@btopenworld.com)

**Design:** Juliet Eccles

**Printer:** Oxuniprint

Unit 10, Oxonian Park,  
Kidlington OX5 1FP

[www.oxuniprint.co.uk](http://www.oxuniprint.co.uk)

The views expressed are not necessarily  
those of the Museum. All contributors to the  
Magazine are Friends unless otherwise stated.  
For further information see:

[www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events](http://www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events)

## MUSEUM DIARY DATES

**The PRM is currently closed  
to the public. See website:  
[www.prm.ox.ac.uk](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk) for  
information.**

### Exhibitions and case displays Located throughout the galleries

**Losing Venus:  
4 March to 29  
November**

Installations by  
artist Matt Smith  
highlights the  
colonial impact on  
LGBTQ+ lives across  
the British Empire.

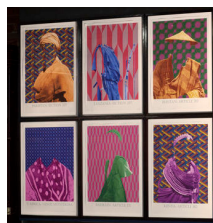


Photo: © PRM

**Archive Case  
Memoirs in my  
suitcase:  
10 December  
to 1 May**

Display relating to the  
lives and experience  
of Turkish migrant  
workers in Western  
Europe in the 1960s  
and 1970s.



Memoirs in my suitcase

Photo: © PRM

**The Long Gallery  
Blow up in Bissau: Photography and  
Museum Revival in West Africa  
16 December - 4 May**

Prints documenting the collections once  
held in the museums in Bissau before civil  
war 1998-9.

### Case Installations (Second Floor)

**Traces of the Past  
29 June - 17 May**

Reflections on the  
1994 Genocide  
against the Tutsi in  
Rwanda. Rwandan  
community  
members tell their  
stories of survival &  
meaning-making.



Drum (Ingoma)

Photo: © PRM

### Family Friendly Events

Come and enjoy a wide variety of free family  
friendly events, activities and workshops.  
All children must be accompanied by a  
responsible adult. [www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events](http://www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events)

## FRIENDS' DIARY DATES

Unfortunately all FPRM events are now  
cancelled until at least June. This is due  
to the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks  
entailed. The events for March, May  
and June are postponed, but will be  
rescheduled as soon as the crisis is over. We  
are also negotiating for the postponed KK  
Day to take place in October.

**Talk: Labelling Matters Project  
Wednesday 20 May, 18.30 (Postponed)**

**Marenka Thompson-  
Odum, Research**

Assistant will talk about  
the historical and  
present use of language  
throughout the Pitt  
Rivers Museum.



Labels at PRM

Photo: © PRM

**Talk and AGM  
Wednesday 24 June, 18.30 (Postponed)**  
**Dr Laura Van Broekhoven, director of  
the PRM with talk, followed by AGM.**

**Talk: The Diamond Jubilee of Kariba  
Dam: The Lake Thereafter  
Wednesday 9 September, 18.30**

**Jonathan Waters** will talk about his book  
Kariba: Legacy of a vision. A history of the  
world's biggest manmade lake by volume.

**Talk: The world in a box: Cabinets of  
Curiosity Wednesday 21 March, 18.30  
Nandini Das**

Professor of Modern English Literature  
& Culture. Exeter College, University of  
Oxford, will talk on how Britain first learnt  
to collect.

**Talk: The Coconut: How the shy fruit  
shaped our world.**

**Wednesday 18  
November, 18.30**

**Robin Lawrence** is an  
Oxford based writer  
and photographer of 35  
years and will talk about  
his book and the social  
history of the coconut during the past 500  
years.



Coconuts

Photo: © Reuters

Wednesday evening talks in Pitt Rivers  
Lecture Room, access via Robinson  
close, South Parks Road, OX1 3PP Visitors  
welcome: £2. No Parking. Tea from 18.00.  
For further information contact:  
julieteccles@virginmedia.com.