

Merging Past and Present:

Local Level Conservation of Material Heritage in the Museums of Harar, Ethiopia

平成 14 年編入

Academic society: The 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies
Belle ASANTE

1. Background of ICES

The International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) is usually a triennial meeting of scholars of Ethiopian studies, traditionally focusing on the humanities and social sciences. The first conference was held in Rome in 1959 and subsequent venues have included Addis Ababa, Tel Aviv, Moscow, Kyoto, and Hamburg. ICES conference papers are often published as multi-volume proceedings, however, the 2007 Trondheim conference proceedings (ICES XVI) will be published on the internet and made available for free downloading in 2008. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University is the Permanent Secretariat of ICES.



Fig. 1. NTNU Dragvoll Campus was the venue for ICES 2007.

2. Content of researcher's presentation

Title: Merging Past and Present - Local Level Conservation of Material Heritage in the Museums of Harar, Ethiopia

Presenter: Belle Asante

Studies of African museums have focused predominantly on activities in the national capitals of the continent; however, in-depth studies of museums in smaller municipalities are few and far between. The researcher's presentation at ICES therefore sought to illustrate the cooperation between community and individual actors in heritage management at the local level in Africa by presenting her findings related to local participation in heritage conservation in museums of Harar.

3. New knowledge obtained from participation in the activities of the academic society

The researcher attended both the 2003 conference in Hamburg and the 2007 conference in Norway and generally found a high level of earnest and intellectual discourse in the arts, history and anthropology panel sessions of this academic society. Some of the most respected scholars of Ethiopian Studies consistently attend ICES and offer invaluable formal leadership during the discussion sessions (especially to the younger generation of researchers) as well as guidance during the informal gatherings throughout the duration of the conference.



Fig. 2. A plenary session of ICES XVI.



Fig. 3. ICES participants enjoy a buffet dinner at Trondheim's Archbishop's Palace.

4. Recent trends of thought in this academic society and their relationship to the researcher's presentation

In the spectrum of scholarship in Ethiopian art, religious art and contemporary artwork by formally trained artists dominate the discourse not only at the infrequent International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art, but also at ICES. However, vernacular arts – that are central to the collections of the museums of Harar and therefore are an important component of the author's research – are often less considered. While academicians of Ethiopian Studies do not deny the historical and contemporary importance of vernacular arts in the country, it is still challenging to have these cultural items presented alongside other “arts” in the conference itself. For example, although the researcher requested a place in the “Music and Fine Arts” panel (as musical instruments, music recordings and manuscripts are important elements in the case study museums), organizers grouped her rather peculiarly in the “History and Archaeology” panel.

5. What are the prospects for participants of the conference to influence future research in the given field?

Younger scholars whom are active in ICES today are about to witness a “changing of the guard” as the founding generation of this academic society will soon entrust the future of the conference to this group. In nearly fifty years, the conference has grown from a small roundtable in Rome in 1959 to a legion of 400 participants in Hamburg in 2003. Certainly, there is great potential for younger scholars to influence the output of research in Ethiopian Studies to a broad audience in the 21st century. Furthermore, if the number of contributing authors by country of the 2007 conference is indicative of future trends, then Ethiopian, American, German and Japanese scholars will be at the forefront of Ethiopian Studies in the coming years.



Fig. 4. An evening concert and dance performance by Ethiopian and Norwegian musicians was kept the crowd on their feet at Dokkhuset.