

## Missionary Material Assemblages and the Mission of Museums:

### *The Spirit on Display*

Workshop organised by Ana Rita Amaral & Birgit Meyer

27 February to 1 March 2024

The Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, Via Omero 12, Rome

In 2019, at the double inauguration of the new permanent exhibition of the Australian and Oceanian sections and the temporary exhibition *Mater Amazonia: The Deep Breath of the World*, Pope Francis referred to the old Vatican Ethnological-Missionary Museum, created back in 1926, as “Anima Mundi”, the “soul of the world”. And so, with a new name and a new museography, a new museum came to light. And because it ought to be more than “simply a museum, in its traditional conception”, Francis found the new name particularly fitting and evocative. Indeed, as we can read on the Vatican Museums’ website, the *mission* of the new museum has become “to welcome the spirit of each culture”.

While the *mission* as purpose of the Vatican Museums is repeated throughout the website, we must look a little harder to find the *mission* as religious endeavour and the *missionary* as one of the agents involved in it in how Anima Mundi is being rethought and presented. “Ethnology,” on the other hand, seems to have managed to retain its appeal within the Catholic milieu, at least for the time being, even if Anima Mundi’s counterparts all over Europe are moving away from it and becoming “world” museums.

What does it mean to (re)name and (re)conceive a museum, and this one in particular, as “the soul of the world”? Which conceptual operations does this transformation reflect? An extension of classic Catholic claims of universalism? A new emphasis on the spiritual? An increased awareness of global interconnectedness? How does it impact the way the collections are re-interpreted, valued, and displayed? And how might different audiences, including members of communities from where these collections originated, view such exhibitions?

This renaming signals a turning point – within the Catholic Church but also more broadly – in the relationship between religion and heritage, in which the encapsulation of the former into the latter seems to have gone so far that spirits had become subsumed by culture or art. Debates about the colonial provenance and restitution of artefacts in ethnological and other museums raise questions about modalities of display. In what ways do museums in the Catholic spectrum and beyond address tensions arising between a view on collections as embodiments of spirit/s, on the one hand, and as musealized objects that are to be researched, conserved, stored, and put on display? How do the secular logic of museums and their routines and regulations in handling collections relate to – i.e. clash or intersect - with the religious provenance of the items in these collections? And how does the reappraisal of the spiritual dimension of artefacts in missionary and other collections affect modes of storage, preservation and display, as well as relate to claims of ownership and restitution?

We propose to approach such collections as missionary material assemblages. Building upon insights from Actor-Network-Theory and assemblage theory, we situate musealized objects in a wider configuration of multiple human and non-human actors. We ask how the specific value, meaning, affordances and display of the items around which such assemblages evolve, depend on, as well as inform, the mission of museums holding such collections. Of particular interest is research in moments of salient breaks and shifts, when missions are reformulated, and material assemblages are reformed. Taken together, we would like to track the transformations of the value, meaning and display of musealized objects across time and space in Catholic institutions and beyond.

This workshop is a joint effort of the Heritage and the Question of Conversion work package of the research Program *Pressing Matter. Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums* (<https://pressingmatter.nl>) and the research program Religious Matters in an Entangled World (Utrecht University) ([www.religiousmatters.nl](http://www.religiousmatters.nl)). It will take place at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, which will host all the participants. The workshop involves both the presentation and discussion of papers and site visits to Anima Mundi and other venues. Participants are expected to prepare 20-minute presentations and to take part in the excursions and discussions. Travel costs (economy) will be refunded.

## Overall Programme for the Week

### 26 February (Monday)

- **Arrival of WP3b team**

### 27 February (Tuesday)

- **Arrival of workshop participants**
- **Visit to the [Museo della Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori di Gesù e di Maria \(Picpus\)](#)**  
Address: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/UmA528ZFfGqosJ8TA>  
Tickets: donation  
Visit: 12:00  
Mode of transport: Metro  
Departure from the KNIR: 11:00
- **Group dinner at the restaurant All'Orsetto**  
Address: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/cx3g9GYNsrKM5taH9>  
Departure from the KNIR: tba

### 28 February (Wednesday)

- **Workshop** (see detailed programme below)

### 29 February (Thursday)

- **Visit to [Anima Mundi and the Vatican Museums](#)**  
Address: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/JHW2NdeSFNkYBtSv5>  
Tickets: Anima Mundi covered by the VM; remaining museums 8€  
Visit: 9.30  
Mode of transport: Metro/Bus/Walk  
Departure from the KNIR: 8.30

## 1 March (Friday)

- **Wrap up discussion (9.30-11.30)**
- **Lunch and check-out from the KNIR**
- **Visit to the [Museo della Civiltà](#)**

Address: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/5tfBsJ3dC96b4BTg9>

Tickets: tbc

Visit: 15.00

Mode of transport: Metro/Bus

Departure from the KNIR: 14.00

- **Departures**

## Workshop Programme - 28 February (Wednesday)

9.15	Welcome
09.30-11.15	Panel 1 <b>Maria Bonaria Urban</b> , <i>The Sodality of Sint Peter Claver at the Vatican Missionary Exhibition (1925): Displaying Faith and Alterity in Ethnographic Collections</i> <b>Deborah Dainese</b> , <i>Unpacking indigenous identities: Mashitolo Mwata Zola's sculptures displayed at the 1950 World Exhibition of Sacred Art from the 'Missionland' held at the Vatican</i> <b>Belinda Peters</b> , <i>'This tangle reveals a great sense' - The collecting activities of Catholic missionary orders and congregations in the mid-nineteenth century-mid-twentieth century</i> Discussion
11.15-11.30	Coffee
11.30-13.15	Panel 2 <b>Amélie Roussillon</b> , <i>Exhibiting the mission: display lives of the Utrecht Missionary Society collections</i> <b>Paul Voogt</b> , <i>Contemporary relevance of mission museums: the Papuan skulls of the Mission Museum Steyl as a case study</i> <b>Alison Khan</b> , <i>Returning cultural nomads: AI and the repatriation of religious objects</i> Discussion
13.15-14.15	Lunch
14.15-16.20	Panel 3 <b>Niklas Wolf</b> , <i>The museum as shrine? The shrine as museum?</i> <b>Marleen de Witte</b> , tba <b>Ana Rita Amaral</b> , <i>Catholic and colonial legacies: interrogating the trajectories and future of the collections assembled by the Dutch Spiritans in Angola</i> <b>Ramon Sarró</b> , <i>On historical correcting: Prophecy, Catholicism, and heritage in today's Kongo Kingdom</i> Discussion
16.20-16.35	Coffee
16.35-17.35	Final discussion (brief summaries and comments by Birgit, Erna, Peter and Wonu, followed by open discussion)

## Abstracts

### Belinda Peters

*"This tangle reveals a great sense" - The collecting activities of Catholic missionary orders and congregations in the mid-19th - mid-20th century*

Missionary collections are a phenomenon that emerged with the intensification of missionary work by Catholic orders and congregations in modern history. This presentation deals with the motives, backgrounds and aims of the collecting activities of Catholic missionaries, which differ from those of their contemporaries - contrary to what is often postulated. This is because missionary collecting activities and the missionary collections that emerged in Germany from these activities are closely linked to the missionary context.

### Maria Bonaria Urban

*The Sodality of Sint Peter Claver at the Vatican Missionary Exhibition (1925): Displaying Faith and Alterity in Ethnographic Collections*

Following the tradition of international exhibitions and fairs in the 19th and early 20th centuries, one such event, the 1925 Vatican Missionary Exhibition, is key to exploring the interplay between the sacred, Catholicism and ethnography, and reflecting on the dynamics between colonialism, religious universalism and missionary practices (Kahn 2023). As is well known, one hundred thousand objects arrived from different parts of the world to be displayed in the Vatican, but much work remains to be done to uncover how this process took place, step by step, as well as to reconstruct the role played by visual and written media in refracting the exhibition's narrative.

Drawing on unreleased sources – a letter, a photo album and a list of objects from the African collection of the Sodality of Sint Peter Claver - the paper aims to provide a first analysis of how this auxiliary order - dedicated to the promotion of missionary work - intended to contribute to the exhibition, with a special focus on the nature and format of these sources. Given their complexity, the paper highlights and tries to address some of the questions that these sources pose.

Moving from the idea that missionary mediation determines “a complex and dynamic process of object eradication and material re-sedimentation”(Brevaglieri 2022), the paper examines, in particular, the photo album and the collection's list as missionary “devices” (pieces of assemblage?) in conveying the tension between Catholic universalism and ethnic diversity. Both sources include, in fact, objects and staged missionary daily life events from different religious orders and African communities but they are all encapsulated in an overarching religious narrative from a Catholic/Western perspective.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the articulation of the concepts of spirituality, faith and the sacred. The paper exposes, in particular, how these concepts are framed in these sources and brings them into dialogue with other publications of the time.

Moreover, according to Susan Sontag, to photograph people “is to transform them into things that you can own in a symbolic way”. However, the paper argues that if, on the one hand, the photo album was a staged, visual narrative from a stadium of primitive faith up to Catholic salvation, on the other hand, the presumed authenticity of the missionary vision is clearly contested by the African subject in the same pictures.

Finally, as we do not know in detail which part of the Sodality’s missionary collection was indeed displayed, the paper tries to retrace how this collection resonates with the Catholic press spread during the exhibition. In so doing, the paper aims to shed new light on the transmedial construction of faith and alterity in the Vatican Missionary Exhibition.

### **Deborah Dainese**

#### *Unpacking Indigenous Identities: Mashitolo Mwata Zola’s Sculptures Displayed at the 1950 World Exhibition of Sacred Art from the ‘Missionland’ held at the Vatican*

During the middle decades of the 20th century, in a context of transition from European colonialism to political independence across Africa, new forms of patronage began emerging that sought to support African artistic productions. The Papacy, among the patrons, promoted in the “countries of mission” missionary-sponsored art workshops based on existing cultural traditions which were adapted to the provision of church furnishings, vestments, paintings, and sculptures. In the 1940s, in view of the Jubilee to be held in 1950, Archbishop Celso Costantini, on behalf of Pope Pius XII, began requesting to the heads of artisanal workshops examples of artistic productions, that often were commissioned. The artworks were intended to be exhibited during the 1950 World Exhibition of Christian Art from the Missionland, one of the most momentous events organised on the occasion of the Holy Year. Mostly framed in a post-World War II context, this work, through the analysis of the sculptures produced by the modern Congolese sculptor Mashitolo Mwata Zola (1915-after 1979) that were displayed during the exhibition, engages with the role the Papacy played in framing African material culture within a well-defined Catholic agenda; furthermore, it aims to shed light on African artists’ biographies which have remained for long neglected.

### **Amélie Roussillon**

#### *Exhibiting the mission: display lives of the Utrecht Missionary Society collections*

As early as the 1860s, the Protestant missionaries of the Utrecht Missionary Society (Utrechtse Zendingsvereniging – UZV) acquired hundreds of items from their mission fields, in particular on the northern coast of Dutch New Guinea. These missionary material assemblages of ‘ethnographic’ items, but also of natural specimens and human remains, have been gathered for different purposes, including display, and it is their fate and the different museum and exhibition settings through which they were (re)framed that I propose to investigate in this paper. From the UZV museum in Utrecht

until its closure in 1905 and the transfer of the collection to the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde (today Wereldmuseum) in Rotterdam, but also in the context of missionary exhibitions (such as the 1909 UZV 50th anniversary exhibition in Utrecht) and of international colonial exhibitions (in 1883 in Amsterdam and 1900 in Paris), the values and meanings conferred to these collections have changed and accumulated through time and display modes. The exhibition histories of the UZV collections have had lasting consequences on how these items, which have become museum objects along the way, were and still are epistemologically comprehended, as tokens of conversion, ethnographic artefacts, testimonies of colonial endeavours and Papuan heritage. By unpacking their museum and display lives, this paper will question missionary collections and displays and their deep entanglements with other colonial institutions and agendas.

### **Paul Voogt**

#### *Contemporary relevance of mission museums: the Papuan skulls of the Mission Museum Steyl as a case study*

Colonial collections are the subject of wide public debate. Visitors to the Mission Museum in Steyl also ask critical questions about the collection and how it was collected. The Mission Museum wants to be able to answer those questions, but very little has been recorded or researched about the background of the objects. This research focuses specifically on the case of a series of modeled Papuan skulls. The research asks questions about the meaning of the objects. How has that meaning shifted over the course of their history? What was the spiritual function of the objects in the community of origin at the time? How were they collected? What was their ideological function for the mission? How and why were they displayed in the Mission Museum? Could they have a function as mediators in a new relationship between "us" and "them"? The origin of the skulls will be investigated and a dialogue will be initiated with all stakeholders, also in Papua New Guinea. On this basis, the future of the objects will be decided. The research into the shifting meaning of the objects and the dialogue with stakeholders will be used to provide context to the museum's presentations and engage visitors in today's public discussion. In addition, the results might serve as an example for all mission museums in their search for relevance in the present time.

### **Alison Khan**

#### *Returning Cultural Nomads: AI and the Repatriation of Religious Objects*

This paper highlights the ways AI can help in the restoration of object cultural legacy. Recent museum politics has focused on the ethical position of European curators in trying to re-establish connections with places and peoples of origin in order to repatriate objects. However, reconciling historical imbalances and completing the historical narrative, by taking objects back to their homeland, is a complex process as provenance and legitimacy of ownership is often difficult to ascertain. The aim of this project is to map pathways to provenance from micro-level artefactual observations of Sepik River objects and to insert them into a 3D database and visualisation map to identify materiality and provenance. We begin with the collections connected with Father Franz Kirschbaum, SVD (1882-1939). This is a proof-of-concept study, using AI, geometric and 3D design to help in determining

more taxonomic characteristics of early twentieth-century Sepik collections. These include examination of granular compositions, styles, and temporal insights into cultural and religious origins, places, and people connected to the production and consumption of Sepik material culture. This will add more detailed metadata into the decision-making process for the return of displaced cultural objects to their original cultural environment, i.e., to help resettle these cultural nomads.

### **Niklas Wolf**

#### *The museum as shrine? The shrine as museum?*

This presentation will focus on Vodun's terminology and their active or deactivated display - both can be read as being performative in different settings and convey different intentions, different missions so to speak - in Ghanaian shrines and German museums.

The material culture of West African Vodun can be understood as a supra-temporal, inter-national, and inter-medial system of material and iconographic references, connecting past, present, and future with different localities and media. The term \*Vodun\* signifies the spirits themselves, as well as the spiritual and practical knowledge system and its material manifestations, with which spirits temporarily coincide categorically and ontologically by making use of those connections and ergo becoming present in a temporal, local, and material sense at the same time.

An essential part of Vodun's practice are their architectural settings, their housings where they often reside in a tangible form, where they are treated, fed and interacted with. Not all Vodun live in shrines and a shrine is much more than a building for Vodun. They are places of interaction, performative practice (especially when Vodun take possession of a human vessel to manifest) and spiritual education. Not all tangible manifestations of Vodun are accessible to a public audience, some are. Some shrines have elaborate pictorial programs on their walls, informing about the Vodun they practice there, their appearance and objects they use. Similar to the very European idea of a museum they archive and display imageries of very specific local histories and practices.

While giving some operable understandings of Vodun, their terminology and practice, this talk will look at two Ghanaian shrines and a museum as well as two German exhibitions dealing with the topic of Vodun. In Dzita, Ghana the shrine of Mami Wata priestess Mamishie Rasta is located. Taking on an educational character, the pictorial program on the walls of her shrine is very elaborate, displaying and performing an archive of local spirituality; there are several stages of Vodun on display, temporary or permanent, making deliberate use of the surrounding architectural framing. Images, signifying objects and material manifestations, what I call in my own research Vodun's Visuals, are also very actively on display at Hunua Adoglos shrine in Anloga, Ghana.

Last but not least the Nkyinkyim Museum (nota bene) combines the terms and ideas of a shrine and a museum. By deliberately connecting Vodun's practice to the experiences of the middle passage and the idea of home coming they address an international audience.

The Soul of Africa Museum (again, nota bene) is a \*Voodoo\* museum in Essen, Germany. It houses the huge collection of Henning Christoph, researcher, collector and photographer, and is widely published in several extensive volumes. Parts of his collection was on display in the two floor show simply called \*Voodoo\* at the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim, Germany in 2020.

The display of Africa's material culture, their powerful or everyday objects, in European museums has a long tradition, that must be evaluated very critically. The arrangement of efficacious things on the altars of museums no longer functions as a spatial marker of a spiritual practice. Thus the form of the mensa is understood as installational, encompassing all objects involved in it, demanding a material and formal iconography of the museum display.

A center piece of the Soul of Africa Museum is their Mami Wata altar, still active, according to Christoph. While it can be interacted with in Essen, in the Hildesheim show it was installed (re-enacted in a way) behind walls of glass in Hildesheim and could only be viewed as an art piece by artist Henning Christoph.

### **Marleen de Witte**

Tba

### **Ana Rita Amaral**

*Catholic and colonial legacies: interrogating the trajectories and future of the collections assembled by the Dutch Spiritans in Angola*

Among the hundreds of items assembled by the Dutch Spiritans in late colonial, early independent Angola, three caught my eye during a recent visit to the reserves of the Afrika Museum. A 'power object' in the shape of a 10 cm cone made of woven reed, with a small loop at the top, filled with hair and nails, said to be intended to cause death and to have been found by Father Jan Vissers in his bed. Another, consisting of a small leather pouch filled with undetermined matters and a thin cord, said to protect the wearer from the evil eye, also linked to Vissers, who worked in Angola between 1946 and 1971. What could have motivated the spiritual threat against the missionary? Did he feel threatened by the cone-shaped charm, and if so, could he have used the small pouch for his protection? Or did he reach for an eventual medal with a saint hanging from his neck, or perhaps gazed at a crucifix on his bedroom wall? When and who deemed the two items spiritually impotent and ethnographically valuable? A third item, a ring, said to have belonged to a ritual specialist or Nganga in Lukembo, who gave it to Vissers' brother Frans, also a missionary in Angola, 'out of fear of the indigenous revolt against the Portuguese', between 1964 and 1965. What powers did this ring have to make the nganga fear the uprising? And why did he seek out the missionary to dispose of the ring?

Far from all being considered as having spiritual powers, these collections, more generally seen as cultural heritage, are today under the umbrella of the recently renamed Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands. In this presentation, I will interrogate what items like these do in the museum and what their future is, as this museum recently closed to the public and there is an ongoing dispute over their ownership and the mission of the museum where such collections should be. These questions will be anchored in an examination of the collections' trajectories in relation to 1) the complex dynamics of power, fear and resistance, considering the historical situation of Catholic missionaries and their interlocutors during a period of increasing political tension leading up to independence,



and 2) their value as colonial and missionary legacies in the interplay between Catholicism and heritage in contemporary Angola.

### **Ramon Sarró**

#### *On Historical Correcting: Prophecy, Catholicism, and Heritage in Today's Kongo Kingdom*

The most common view of history in scholar or popular understandings is that it is a narrative of things past (the “simple past” view, in grammatical usage: things happened). Other than in science fiction, travelling to the past to undo things is not a possibility for many of us humans. But simply accepting that things happened and that “there is nothing to do about it now” sounds to many of us unethical. Recent debates and practices around restoration or repatriation are intended to, at least to a certain extent, correct mistakes done by humanity to humanity in not-so-distant past, moving our historical consciousness from a passive simple past to a more entangled and fluid “continuous past”: things were happening... and may still be happening today, the Kongo Kingdom, for instance). In this paper, I will discuss how explicit discourses and practices around “correcting” the mistakes done by European agents (especially Catholic missions) emerge in the Kongo regions of Central Africa, channelled especially in prophetic pro-Kongo churches. This will offer a view on how the history of Catholicism is critically revisited in the Global South and how such a revisiting gives rise to very creative practices of “counter heritage” around places and objects linked to the turbulent Catholic history in the continent.

## **Participants**

**Alison Kahn** is currently Visiting Research Fellow in AI and Design Anthropology at Loughborough University (UK), and Senior Research and Tutorial Fellow in Stanford University Overseas Program in Oxford (UK). She has just published her monograph *Imperial Museum Dynasties in Europe: Papal Ethnographic Collections and Material Culture* (Springer, 2023). Email: [akahn145@stanford.edu](mailto:akahn145@stanford.edu)

**Amélie Roussillon** is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University, under the larger NWA-funded project ‘Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value, and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums’. Her research focuses on the itineraries of museum collections (now mostly held in the Wereldmuseum) acquired by Dutch Protestant missionaries in former Dutch New Guinea. Paralleling the conversion of Papuans into Christians, she investigates the multi-layered processes through which collected objects were translated/converted into museum objects. Email: [a.roussillon@uu.nl](mailto:a.roussillon@uu.nl)

**Ana Rita Amaral** is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University, under the larger NWA-funded project ‘Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value, and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums’. Her research focuses on museum collections assembled by Dutch Catholic missionaries in Angola during the period of Portuguese colonialism, particularly those that can be found today in the Wereldmuseum, in the Netherlands. Email: [ana.r.amaral@gmail.com](mailto:ana.r.amaral@gmail.com)

**Belinda Peters** is currently a research associate and PhD candidate at the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES) of the Ruhr University Bochum, in Germany. She is working on CERES' Research Focus 'Missionary Collections', having previously done a master's thesis on the Spiritan missionary museum in Knechsteden, Germany. Email: [Belinda-Maria.Peters@ruhr-uni-bochum.de](mailto:Belinda-Maria.Peters@ruhr-uni-bochum.de)

**Birgit Meyer** is Professor of Religious Studies at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University. She heads the research programme 'Religious Matters in an Entangled World. Things, Food, Bodies and Texts as Entry Points to the Material Study of Religion in Plural Settings', funded by the Spinoza-award (NWO) and the Academyprofessor prize (KNAW). She is also co-PI of the Work Package 'Heritage and the Question of Conversion' within the 'Pressing Matter' project. Foci of her research over time include material religion; religion in Africa; the rise and popularity of global Pentecostal churches; religion, popular culture and heritage; religion in (post)colonial settings; religion and media; religion and the public sphere; religious visual culture; and senses and aesthetics. Email: [B.Meyer@uu.nl](mailto:B.Meyer@uu.nl)

**Deborah Dainese** is currently an AHRC CHASE-funded PhD candidate at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (Norwich, UK). In her doctoral thesis, through the analysis of multiple sources, she is reconstructing the biography of the modern Congolese sculptor Gabriel Mashitolo mwata Zola (1915-after 1979), who lived and worked in the Kwango-Kwilu region (DRC) during the mid-20th century. She is also particularly interested in Italian missionary collections and exhibitions, indigenous agency, and representation. Email: [d.dainese@uea.ac.uk](mailto:d.dainese@uea.ac.uk)

**Erna Lilje** is Curator Indigenous knowledge & material culture at the Wereldmuseum, in the Netherlands. Her work focuses on south coast New Guinea material culture. She pursues the idea that museum collections can tell us much more about the people who made and used the objects within them if we bring to bear a cross-disciplinary approach that encompasses present-day makers and cultural experts with a close study of the artefacts themselves. More recently, Erna has begun to think about the role and 'use' of contemporary artists in ethnological museums. Email: [erna.lilje@wereldmuseum.nl](mailto:erna.lilje@wereldmuseum.nl)

**Fanny Wonu Veys** is Curator Oceania at the Wereldmuseum, in the Netherlands. She is president of the Pacific Arts Association Europe and has been a research fellow at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, France and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, USA. She curated the *Mana Māori exhibition* (2010-2011) in Leiden and published a book with the same title. She co-curated a barkcloth exhibition *Tapa, Étoffes cosmiques d'Océanie* in Cahors (France). Her fieldwork sites include New Zealand (since 2000), Tonga (since 2003) and more recently Arnhem Land, Australia (since 2014). Her topics of interest and expertise include Pacific art and material culture, museums and cultures of collecting, Pacific musical instruments, Pacific textiles, and the significance of historical objects in a contemporary setting. Email: [wonu.veys@wereldmuseum.nl](mailto:wonu.veys@wereldmuseum.nl)

**Maria Bonaria Urban** is currently Director of Studies in History at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome. She is also a Senior Lecturer at the Italian department of the University of Amsterdam. Her research and teaching interests are in the cultural history of the XXth and XXIth century, with a strong focus on the construction and mediation of history and national discourse from a transnational, transmedial and interdisciplinary perspective. Email: [m.b.urban@knir.it](mailto:m.b.urban@knir.it)

**Marleen de Witte** is currently postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Utrecht University, under the larger project 'Religious Matters in an Entangled

World'. In collaboration with the 'Pressing Matter' project, she is studying the lives and travels of museum objects acquired through missionary collecting in the Gold Coast/Ghana, and of the people connected to and through them. More broadly, she is interested in how current frictions and negotiations around issues of religion, culture, heritage, race, and identity (whether in Africa or Europe) are situated in colonial encounters and entanglements. Email: [m.dewitte@uu.nl](mailto:m.dewitte@uu.nl)

**Niklas Wolf** is currently a PhD candidate at the Art History Institute of the University of Zurich, and a research assistant in the project 'Conflict and Cooperation. Episteme and methods between art history and ethnology in the performative pictorial practices of Vodun'. He works on topics of African art history, art (science) and ethnography, interculturality and aesthetics, as well as on questions of material and immaterial cultural heritage. His doctorate is on the contemporary updating and globalization of image production, archives and media in West African Vodun. Email: [niklas.wolf@khist.uzh.ch](mailto:niklas.wolf@khist.uzh.ch)

**Paul Voogt** is Curator in the Missiemuseum in Steyl, in the Netherlands, and a guest researcher at Leiden University. He is working on the NWO-funded project 'Contemporary relevance of mission museums: the Papuan skulls of Steyl as a case study'. He has extensive experience in management of museums and other cultural institutions, having previously directed the Utrecht University Museum and Oude Hortus. Email: [paul@missiemuseumsteyl.nl](mailto:paul@missiemuseumsteyl.nl)

**Peter Pels** is Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Africa, at Leiden University. He has worked on the interactions between missionaries and Africans in late colonial Tanganyika, on the construction of differences of culture and power in human relationships. He is co-PI of the Work Package 'Heritage and the Question of Conversion' within the 'Pressing Matter' project, and PI of 'At Home Otherwise: Rethinking Heritage through Diversity', recently funded by the NWO. He has just published *The Spirit of Matter, a book on material culture, religion and the power of objects* (Berghahn, 2023). Email: [pels@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:pels@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

**Ramon Sarró** is Professor of Social Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Oxford. Having conducted field research in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Portugal (among African diasporas), Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, he has worked on the religious and political dimensions of social change in Africa and the diaspora, as well as on the manifestations of prophetic imagination and on material culture (including its iconoclastic destruction). His most recent project is entitled 'Kongo Prophets and UNESCO technocrats: Ruins, Forests, and Heritage in Northern Angola', and is funded by the Leverhulme Trust (2022-24). Email: [ramon.sarro@anthro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ramon.sarro@anthro.ox.ac.uk)