

# Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

We have our commentator, Dr.

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Federica Gigante, and she will be looking at the papers and discussing the themes that our speakers have looked at today.

00:00:10 Speaker 2

Thank you.

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So it was an honor for me to be invited and be in the presence of all of you and listen to these fantastic papers.

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I must say, I've never quite learned so much as today.

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That's mainly because I know nothing about it.

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And so anything is added.

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I come from a completely different field.

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I work on, yes, maritime history, but in the Mediterranean.

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And I work on the early modern period and the Islamic world, late medieval, early modern.

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So for me, it was really interesting to find the connections and the differences.

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And I worked a lot in museums, history of science museums, especially here in Oxford.

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So I find the project fascinating.

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And one of the first points I really wanted to bring up was coming from the point of view of someone who knows so little.

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It struck me how Scott, in the last paper, started by saying, I know this is very touchy and a very controversial topic to bring up, that of piracy.

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And it struck me because that hadn't emerged before, in particular with regard to the idea that museums are, in a sort of sense,

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there to construct a self-identity and an image for the nation and the others.

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And so it really made me reflect on the role of the curator and the fact that in English, the very word curating can also be interpreted sometimes in a negative way.

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You know, that truth is curated.

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I had never thought about it.

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This is really just something that I thought, as someone who's been a curator for many years, that

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as curators, we have a role, and that role will, by definition, be one of leaving out parts and including others.

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And it's a great responsibility.

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What's also interesting is that I come also from the history of museums.

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I studied a lot how early modern museums came about, and it struck me that

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These have always been looked at as cabinets of curiosities, places where things from all over the world are assembled for people to look at.

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Oxford is a particularly interesting place because the first public museum in the world opened here in 1683, just across the road on the other side.

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But now there's the History of Science Museum, at the time it was the Ashmolean Museum.

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But what I think people immediately failed to grasp is that these museums are actually presenting, they were curating what other nations were like.

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And so the knowledge and the material culture that was being presented shaped for years to come, in this particular case, British understanding of those nations.

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And so yes, museums are important.

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And I can only be excited about your project.

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And I have so many questions and other aspects and other things that I'd like to bring out.

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Hopefully, if I throw some questions at you, could keep them in mind without answering immediately and we can open the discussion.

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Starting from the first paper, one of the other points that I wanted to really bring out was

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The fact that sometimes, especially for smaller nations, vis-a-vis Europeans, and I'm talking as a European here in a European country, there's a lot of things that one cannot control.

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You talked about soap operas, you talked about things that, you know, you cannot really have that reach, but such an initiative is one of those that, you know, you can really put an effort into shaping how tourists, how visitors perceive it.

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In terms of material culture and what is included in this specific museum, it was fascinating to see all the actual objects, the shipwrecks that showed us.

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It was, of course, for me particularly interesting to see the navigational instruments.

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I actually was really struck that the astrolabe you showed is probably a European

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looks like a central European type astrolabe.

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So I have a specific question with regard to that one.

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And I wondered how much and how you can regulate the tension between the museum really being a repository for local knowledge.

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You all talked about education, taking in and trying to actually preserve traditional crafts and techniques.

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So that is really the facing aspect that looks inside your country, as opposed to the other aspect that was trying to attract tourism and present the image.

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And I can see that is a tension in a way.

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There's a lot that in one case you have to basically take for granted, and in the other case you have to explain.

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And in one case, you don't have to compare yourself.

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So the connection of Pahang with the other state powers around is extremely fascinating.

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And it's something that really speaks of a regional network.

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And I found it doubly fascinating to think about is the sea network and a river network, as well as some, of course, inland routes.

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But I can see that the moment you open it to tourists coming from other countries, there's also a lot of having to situate it vis-a-vis a much broader world, such as traditional navigational techniques and instruments like dolphins or flying fish, which is extraordinary, as opposed to the very technological European instrument-based scientific tradition, which is something that it's not a given that you want to do, but

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it's a decision to make in the curating process of this new museum that you are, exactly, that you are curating.

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In terms of sources, so there were a mixture of very interesting papers talking about the use of Malai letters as they were framed.

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One of the things that from a complete outsider was an interesting point is to see how many were actually not

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in situ, but in European collections.

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And that is actually a broader story of what colonialism did to so many of these countries, taking things out and out of context.

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So doubly interesting to see that one is here in Oxford.

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And this is a little side interest of mine to actually trying to understand.

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So I come from Islamic material culture.

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And my interest at the moment is also trying to understand how did so many things ended up in Oxford really.

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So seeing that one of the British Museum in London.

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Yeah, But being here, it's a bit easier for me now at the moment.

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Yes, these are some of the main themes and like this tension between what you want to do by creating your own identity and the various

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sort of forces that pull you out in many different directions, from a curatorial side, from a more scientific side, from a practical viewpoint in terms of even having to engage with European museums.

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You've talked a lot about partnerships and partnering.

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And yeah, these are the main points.

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I shouldn't talk more as we're a bit over time.

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So I have a series of questions.

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These are very individual questions.

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Would you like me to kind of

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start asking those and opening it to then maybe other speakers and other, people from the public.

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So one of the questions was, how are you going, like what's the plan within the museum of using all the manuscripts and sources that have been talked about and mentioned?

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I have been a curator, so I know that there is this complete dichotomy between big ideas and

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things I want to say, and then the practicality of having to put it in a case behind glass that reflects light, and with many people just put in their notes, I know this is a very practical side of it, but I wonder whether there was a plan also to include like the letters, the written culture, the written sources in it.

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Another question that I had was about modern practitioners.

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So it struck me about the boats that might or might not have had a sail.

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Because there's so much about our own ignorance of how things worked that we cannot even see when there's a problem with some material cultures, some objects.

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I worked a lot myself with scientific instruments.

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You know, I read, I specifically focused on astrolabes and

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In my own experience, you can read so much about an astrolabe works until you just put it in, hold it, try to go and sight the sun or a star, depending on the time of the day, and realizing how many problems that creates.

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There's the wind, it wobbles.

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It says you have to reflect the light on a surface and suddenly you're like, which?

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There's no self.

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So I ended up realizing that probably your own body was the surface.

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It was the only physical thing to do.

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So I wonder whether the idea of bringing in practitioners, people who probably today still navigate and go about and use those boats and actually have to face the problems that people faced at the time,

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and might, bring in a completely different type of viewpoint.

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And one last, this is really a curiosity of mine because of where I come from.

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I was fascinated to see how many of these, especially Chinese ceramics, were found in Pekan or Tioman.

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And this is one of the main telling tales of exchange and trade.

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And there were no Islamic ones.

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And so suddenly I was like, because I work on a more Western Islamic connected world, it really made me wonder why the main connections went towards China rather than Central Asia.

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So these are, I'll stop here for the moment and if we can just start a discussion.

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Wonderful.

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Thank you very much.

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resonates with Tuanko's speech this morning about how we need to reclaim our cultural heritage.

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Tuanko, I must say, probably started a revolution here.

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I want to reclaim our cultural history.

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So thank you very much.