



## The Archive:

# Sex in the Secret Museum: Photographs from the British Museum's Witt Scrapbooks

Dr Helen Wickstead

Kingston University, London

Cupboard 55 of the British Museum contains what remains of its Secretum – the secret museum of artefacts once deemed too sexually explicit for public display. A large part of the Secretum derived from a 'Collection Illustrative of Phallic Worship' donated by George Witt in 1865-6<sup>1</sup>. Witt's bequest included images and texts as well as objects, many of which are now dispersed across different departments<sup>2</sup>. Within the Anthropology Library is a set of scrapbooks that unlock the relationships between objects, texts and images among Witt's collections. The scrapbooks comprise illustrated arguments concerning the origins, global spread and survival of sex worship. The scrapbooks are among the world's most valuable resources for investigating the history of archaeologies of sexuality. While they contribute valuable materials for British Museum exhibitions (Frost 2016) they remain understudied as a visual-textual creation in their own right.

From the late nineteenth century, the dominant media used in pornography changed from textual to photographic<sup>3</sup>. Photography became an important tool in anthropology, and photographs began to be collected for sexological research<sup>4</sup>. The scrapbooks were created between 1856 and 1866 at the very beginning of these shifts. Most images are ink and watercolour drawings and paintings, or engravings cut from publications. Photographs are only a small element, as can be seen from the list of photographs below. As well as photographs there are Japanese woodblock prints, "Indian native" paintings on vellum, and Fuseli drawings. Alongside the images are texts; handwritten captions, notes, essays, diary entries, letters and printed matter bound into the volumes. There are even small artefacts (Japanese "Change of Luck stones" resembling male and female genitalia). Among the most interesting aspects of the scrapbooks is how the photographs relate to drawings, engravings, artworks and archaeological artefacts.

The scrapbooks comprise nine books in the British Museum (numbered Witt 114 to Witt 122 in the catalogue). And a tenth volume ("Sacta and Linga Puja") which I have recently rediscovered in the

Private Case of the British Library. They are all bound in identical red and gold leather with either star-burst or foliate pattern on the spine and Witt's monogram ("W" with extended middle bar - like an upside-down phallus - piercing the letter G). Despite the monogrammed bindings, I am uncertain to what extent Witt can be seen as the sole author rather than the editor of these albums, which collect the products of collaborative researches. Much of the original imagery can be attributed to a group of Witt's friends; including the Egyptologist James Burton (aka Haliburton, died 1862), the "painter sculptor, archaeologist and traveller" Jean Frederic de Waldeck, and Britain's foremost war artist, William 'Crimean' Simpson<sup>5</sup>. In addition to the original images, there are a large number of copies, many of which copy sketches made by informants acting as eye-witnesses on the ground. Some of the copies are "from native drawings"; one entire scrapbook of "Indian Drawings" (Witt 117) was apparently copied from drawings by "Krishna-swamy Pundit, a native of Bangalore, India, 1864", by the pornographer-anthropologist Edward Sellon<sup>6</sup>. Sellon is also the author of the scrapbook rediscovered in the Private Case.

An additional scrapbook (Witt 123) once belonged to William 'Crimean' Simpson and bears Simpson's bookplate (a stylized lingam and yoni in combination). It is bound in green leather, closed with a lock and key. This volume contains preparatory sketches for several of the drawings and paintings in the Witt scrapbooks. It also contains letters and notes concerning the archaeology and anthropology of sexuality. Simpson's scrapbook, and his publications, reveal that his research interests were along slightly different lines than those pursued in the Witt scrapbooks. Nonetheless, Simpson's scrapbook contains information, including photographs, that usefully supplement the nine Witt scrapbooks. This scrapbook was completed more than three decades after the Witt scrapbooks, in 1899. The photographs date between 1863 and 1886.

### **A Collection Illustrative of Phallic Worship**

For decades, the Witt scrapbooks have been treated more as an assortment of pornography than as works of serious scholarship<sup>7</sup>. However, it is a mistake to presume that pornography must exclude scholarship, or vice versa. Furthermore, the scrapbooks reveal abundant evidence of a sustained programme of research that was scholarly by the standards of its time. Far from being a jumble of erotica, the scrapbooks supply carefully organised visual arguments. If they appear confusing today, it is because they seek to provide answers to questions that few researchers would ask today. They result from the application of comparative approaches appropriate in the 1860s, but now largely

discredited. The catalogue of Witt's collection of objects was entitled "A Collection Illustrative of Phallic Worship". To the post-Freudian reader this title might suggest a focus on material culture bearing images of penises and/or phallic symbols, which are found in Witt's collection (see Figures 1 and 2 below). The scrapbooks, however, contain many images of people having sex, and include images of female as well as male genitalia. Images of sex featured in Witt's scrapbooks not just because they were sexually arousing, but because, to Witt and his circle, sex scenes potentially constituted evidence of activities involved in worship of the generative organs; acts of phallic worship as it were. The Witt scrapbooks were part of an attempt to reconstruct ancient acts of sex worship and sacred prostitution. Modern sexual practices that might preserve anthropological 'survivals' of ancient sex rites were among the evidence Witt collected <sup>8</sup>.

The notion of a primitive religion based on veneration of the generative organs was not a new idea. Renaissance mythologies compiled evidence from classical texts and the early church fathers, to write about the worship of Priapus, the procession of the ithyphallus, and the lascivious abandon of male and female worshippers of Bacchus, Dionysus and Priapus<sup>9</sup>. Scholars produced equivalences between religions in different parts of the ancient world, often conflating Priapus, the Egyptian god Osiris, and the biblical idol Baal Peor<sup>10</sup>. They drew on passages of Herodotus, Strabo and Lucian to conjure images of sacred prostitution in oriental temples and exported these around the world as part of the imaginary practices of an ancient cult of phallic worship. From the seventeenth century, museum catalogues connected the cults of Priapus and Osiris with phallic artefacts. Protestant countries were particularly susceptible to sexualized fantasies of pagan idolatry, which, by the nineteenth century drew in the displays of antiquities in the British Museum (Janes 2008). One of the most famous systematic theorization of this material as the surviving traces of a once universal ancient religion emerged in the late eighteenth century: Richard Payne Knight's *Discourse of the Worship of Priapus* (1786) extended "worship of the generative organs" from the classical world to ancient Britain, India, China, and South America (Carabelli 1996, Funke et al 2017). Payne Knight's *Discourse* emerged from the collaboration of an exclusive group of men who became noted benefactors to the British Museum, much as Witt did nearly a century later.

Witt and his circle were united in their efforts to revive an elite homosociality they associated with eighteenth-century scholars of phallic worship. Witt and Sellon in particular were key players in the Anthropological Society of London (ASL), a scholarly society set up to resist the admission of women to anthropological institutions (Sera-Shrair, 2013: Chapter 4). The Witt scrapbooks often refer to Payne Knight's *Discourse* and related eighteenth century literature (such as the works of Baron

d'Hancarville) which he collected in his library. In 1865, around the time he bequeathed his collection, Witt backed a republication of Payne Knight's *Discourse*, along with a new essay concerning "The Worship of the Generative Powers during the Middle Ages". Witt apparently held Sunday morning meetings in the private museum in his home at Princes Terrace for members of the ASL, and also donated objects to the ASL museum.

The scrapbooks allowed Witt to collect images (including images of objects he could not buy), and to position them against one another in thematic groupings. If the scrapbooks ever had an index, I have not yet located it, however, their thematic structure is apparent from the title of the albums and manner in which carefully selected images were set alongside each other within each volume. Traces of excision covered by other images suggest items have been moved or removed, either because they could be better placed in other sequences, or because of second thoughts on the part of the compilers. It is also possible images were removed before the scrapbooks were acquired by the British Museum, or stolen afterwards. There are many blank pages separating thematic groups of text and imagery. There are also blank pages set aside at the beginning of volumes, often with page numbers painted at the corners, as if these pages were reserved for materials yet to be added. This also suggests a careful system was in place to organise the composition.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how images were grouped thematically. Witt's "Grecian, Etruscan, Roman" album (Witt 119) contained sequences exploring affinities among ancient artefacts bearing images of genitalia. Figure 1 followed a page of illustrations of the bas-reliefs from the Roman amphitheatre at Nimes<sup>11</sup>. The photograph in Figure 1 showed what had become of these ancient sculptures by 1863; architectural fragments piled in a courtyard. The pages which followed analysed these carvings. Immediately after Figure 1 was a page of engravings with French captions, explaining the iconography of the carvings and their removal from the amphitheatre during restoration in 1829. The next page (Figure 2) compared one of the phallic carvings from Nimes with others from elsewhere. After this, the sequence shifted to analyse another of the architectural fragments shown in Figure 1 - a statue base with ranks of vulva in high relief - interpreted as evidence for "worship of the Female Pudenda". There was a written report of worship of "the female organ" in Lebanon from the biographer of Lady Hester Stanhope. The sequence then compared the vulva carvings in Figure 1 to another statue excavated near Nimes in 1825; a bird-headed winged phallus incubating a clutch of vulva-eggs. Photographs, engravings, drawings and text amassed a corpus of information contributing to a reasoned analysis of the imagery of ancient sex worship.

**Figure 1: Artefact photography in the Witt “Greek” scrapbook; Architectural fragments in a courtyard, showing a Roman altar topped with a bas-relief with phallus ridden in harness and another fragment with a relief comprising ranks of vulvas (page 50).**

**Figure 2: Page following Figure 1; a comparison of phallic reliefs including one from Nimes shown in Figure 1 (page 54).**

### **Global Correspondences**

Witt did not collect from all parts of the globe equally. The catalogue of his collection focused on objects from Egypt, Greece, India, Tibet, and Japan (other objects are not listed) (Anon. 1866). The scrapbooks expanded the geographical focus of Witt’s catalogue to encompass material from the Americas, prehistoric and medieval Northern Europe, as well as “Modern” (medieval and post medieval) materials. Sub-Saharan Africa and Australia are almost completely neglected, however. The omission of Australia is especially intriguing given the fact that Witt lived in Sydney from 1849 to 1854, making millions (in today’s money) from investments in Australian banks and gold mines, and acting as Honorary Secretary of the Australian Museum (Morgan, 2017). Witt knew of the existence of phallic materials from “Southern Africa”, which were noted in his catalogue. Sir Richard Burton, read an account of “phallic worship” among the Dahomey of Nigeria while the scrapbooks were being created (Burton 1863-4). Why, then is there so little on Australia and sub-Saharan Africa? Part of the reason might lie in the prominence of the classical world, Egypt and Asia in nineteenth century cultures of collecting. But another possibility is that Witt and his circle were especially attracted to white and Asian nakedness, and married this preference to classical nudes and traditional art styles. There is some support for this suggestion in the classicizing styles preferred in images selected for the scrapbooks. The “Aboriginal American” scrapbook (Witt 121) contained numerous Neoclassical paintings of South American artefacts and naked people by Jean Frederic de Waldeck, who claimed to have trained under Jacques-Louis David (Pasztory, 2010). The “Modern” scrapbook emphasised neoclassical art, including photographs of statues and paintings with classical

themes, as well as a series of sexual positions inspired by the infamous 'I Modi'<sup>12</sup>. The scrapbooks reflect a racist model of beauty that extended to India, Asia and America, but stopped at sub-Saharan Africa and Australia.

Another reason for the scrapbooks' unevenness was the geographical concentration of the network of informants and eye-witnesses who contributed information to the albums. The network of correspondents whose work found its way into the scrapbooks can be partially reconstructed because, as Figures 1 and 2 show, the scrapbooks often attribute sources. Figure 2, for example, includes a drawing "sketched from the original in 1856 by F.W. Fairholt", an artist and antiquary likely to have been known by Witt and his circle. Not infrequently, however, eye-witnesses remained anonymous. In Figure 1 the photographer was not identified, but the time and place of the photograph was noted along with the fact that it was photographed "from the originals". Sometimes the names of contributors were simply left blank (see appendix), or people were identified only by initials, or given aliases like "A. Smith". Some contributors may not have wanted their names written down - the anonymous letter-writer who reported on Chinese sex aids in the form of vibrating brass balls inserted into the vagina, for example. Yet the name of the diarist who detailed his visit to a Japanese brothel is recorded (see below) suggesting some contributors were happy to be identified as belonging to the exclusive company who produced and consumed the scrapbooks. All the informants I have revealed to date identified as male in their public lives.

One group of informants was based in the Japanese treaty port of Yokohama. These men contributed a sequence in the "Indian, Thibetan, Chinese, Japanese" volume (Witt 115). This section was introduced by a full-page photograph of the Great Buddha (Daibutsu) of Kamakura (see appendix). The name of the photographer of the Great Buddha was not recorded, but an almost identical photograph held by the Getty Museum shows the photographer Felice Beato sitting in front of the Buddha (Lacoste 2010: Figure 1). Beato covered the aftermath of the Crimean War, and, like Simpson, travelled to India to document the impact of the 1857 rebellion. By 1865, he was in business with Charles Wirgman, who, like Simpson, was correspondent for the Illustrated London News. Simpson's scrapbook contains a sketch from Wirgman, and two Japanese "change of luck" stones Wirgman gave to Simpson in 1873. It is possible the photograph of The Great Buddha could have been produced by Beato, although Beato did not incriminate himself by appearing personally in the photograph collected by Witt<sup>13</sup>.

Yokohama could be a dangerous place. In 1862, British merchants visiting a Buddhist temple outside the port were attacked, leading to reprisals in which British gunboats bombarded Japanese towns. The scrapbook relates an expedition by British merchant Adam Scott, in the company of Captain Moresby and Admiral Kuper of the Royal Navy, to a phallic temple at Azima, an island 20 miles west of Yokohama. Scott made drawings “on the spot”, some of which were drawn up as watercolour sketches (Clark 2013). Scott’s expedition is accompanied by eye-witness testimonials concerning the prevalence of phallic worship in Japan. Some of contributors – such as the mysterious “J.L.” – remain unidentified. “Dr Dickson”, however, might be Walter G. Dickson, whose book, “Japan”, published in 1869, mentions a temple devoted to phallic worship near the Great Buddha of Kawakura. Witt collected two votive phalli from the Azuma Gongen shrine that remain in the British Museum (Clark et al 2013: 493).

The scrapbook section on Japanese phallic worship concludes with an extract from Adam Scott’s diary recording his visit to a brothel in Ghankiro. Two woodblock print maps of Yokohama, showing “the detached settlement of Ghan-kiro, set apart for the accommodation of courtesans” open the first of Witt’s two scrapbooks containing “Japanese Prints” (Witt 116) as if to say that the sumptuous sexually themed artworks that followed should be seen as taking place there. Scott visited Ghankiro, he claimed, to observe the distinctive dance and music customary in the “houses of entertainment”. He reported a musical “game of forfeits” during which the women discarded their clothes. Afterwards Scott visited the “narrow stalls or cells” of the prostitutes, noting the system of prices. His account was corroborated by another eyewitness, “D” (possibly Dickson?). The scrapbook connected Scott’s report to two photographs of drawings, one of which represents “Japanese women playing at a game of forfeits”. One of the photographed drawings shows a bath-house scene which might even have been designed to pander to Witt’s personal enthusiasms. Witt’s house at Prince’s Terrace, Hyde Park, not only contained his library and private museum of phallic worship, but also, London’s first Turkish Bath. From 1858, visitors were inaugurated as “Companions” of Witt’s “Order of the Bath”, with benefits including a firm rub-down by Witt himself wearing a camel-hair glove (Wilson 1861:74).

### **Pornography and Portraits**

During the late nineteenth century photography became an important anthropological tool. Yet the portraits of human subjects in Witt’s scrapbooks are largely drawings rather than photographs. The

photographs were taken before 1866, preceding the publication of early anthropometric photographs by Henry Evans and Thomas Huxley (Sera-Shriar, 2015), and a decade before another member of the ASL, Augustus Pitt-Rivers, began collecting photographic portraits for his museum<sup>14</sup>. The scrapbooks also pre-date most of the known photographic collections of modern sexologists. The small number of studio portraits illustrating cross-dressing, fetishism and pony-play that were found in the private papers of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example, are thought to date to the 1890s (Forde and Beddard 2014). The photographs are generally of artefacts, engravings or drawings, not people.

Witt's "Modern" scrapbook contains photographs of post-Renaissance paintings and sculpture alongside items of popular culture and pornography. Figures 3 and 4 show a series featuring semi-naked women in gladiatorial combat. This formed part of sequence exploring the survival of ritualistic lesbianism: it followed a Fuseli sketch of two women artists with one is digitally penetrating the other, and preceded an 1863 Paris Almanac ornamented with women dancing around a horned statue. These photographs resemble the pornographic postcards that would become popular after the 1870s. They call to mind the scrapbook's wider interest in sexual games, rules and ritualized activities, extending to ritualized female chastisement and humiliation<sup>15</sup>.

Witt's collecting, especially as evidenced in the "Modern" scrapbook, was related to a wider interest in collecting pornography among British elite men after the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. Collectors who likely knew of Witt's collections were associated with the ASL through its dining club The "Cannibal Club"<sup>16</sup>. James Campbell Reddie (who published Edward Sellon), Richard Monckton Milnes and Henry Spencer Ashbee, were noted collectors of pornographic books with connections to the ASL. Ashbee's collection incorporated Campbell Reddie's in 1877, and went on to form the largest part of the Private Case. Illustrated publications are only a small part of what now survives of the Ashbee bequest, but illustrated material and ephemera were most likely among the six books of "offensive matter" destroyed by the British Museum when they acquired Ashbee's collection for the library in 1900 (Mendes 1993: Appendix G). Items like Figures 3 and 4, collected in Witt's "Modern" scrapbook, call to mind Campbell Reddie's embrace of ephemeral publications, illustrated pornography and "low culture" in his collecting practices. The archives of pornography are uniquely vulnerable to destruction. Despite this fact, enough material survives to suggest collecting photographs was widespread, and worldwide, after the 1870s (Minsky 2000).

**Figure 3: “Jeux de Cirque” from the “Modern” scrapbook (first page).**

**Figure 4: “Jeux de Cirque” from the “Modern” scrapbook (second page).**

Portraits of named individuals – either drawn or photographed - are noticeably absent from the scrapbooks. Human subjects are overwhelmingly anonymous non-westerners<sup>17</sup>. William Simpson’s scrapbook, completed in 1899, contains the only portrait photograph of a named individual. Jadunathi Maharaj (“Jeehun Laljee” in Figure 5) was a figure of traditional religious authority among the Vallabhacharyas, a sect of Bombay Hindus. In 1860, he was named in a newspaper article accusing the Vallabhacharyas of sexually enjoying the “tender maids and daughters” of their male devotees. Jadunathi Maharaj brought a libel charge for damages in a British court overseen by British lawyers and judges, which quickly became a trial of his sect and the “morality” of Hinduism in general. British Orientalists and Hindu modernizers were pitched against the sect’s followers, who soon faced a counter-charge for “conspiracy” as well as hostile cross-examination before the imperial authorities. Simpson was friends with the physician and antiquary Dr Bhau Daji who testified against the sect (Simpson, 1903:168). Daji confided to Simpson that he treated “these priests” for “one particular disease” (presumably sexually transmitted) (Simpson 1895:8-9). Not only did Jadunathi Maharaj fail to win the significant points of his libel action, but the judge’s summary, widely reported across the empire, publically shamed the men depicted in Figure 5 as “a rapacious and libidinous priesthood” dedicated to a God (Krishna), “whose most popular attributes are his feats of sexual prowess and practicing a “system of carnal sensualism, of strange, transcendental lewdness” (Haberman 1993).

Simpson’s scrapbook begins with a series of images and texts exploring lingham worship. It starts with Simpson’s watercolour sketches, and continues with photographs of artefacts from a private collection and further sketches of lingham worship featuring floral offerings and libations. Figure 5 is the final image in this sequence. It fulfils the functions of late nineteenth century ethnographic photographs, displaying the features of a “type” of people (Simpson’s “Maharajahs”) to illustrate a wider body of data collected in the pursuit of Simpson’s anthropological theorising. The presence of these photographs in the Simpson scrapbook underlines the absence of similar anthropological photography in the Witt scrapbooks, which were compiled just as anthropological photography was developing an established methodology. Simpson’s re-presentation of portraits of the Vallabhacharya situates them firmly within the imperialist “phallic worship” narrative that Jadunathi Maharaj had struggled to resist.

**Figure 5: Priests of the sect prosecuted in the “Maharajah Case” of 1862, appended to a series of images exploring lingham worship within the Simpson scrapbook.**

### **Conclusion: Homosocial Collections**

Far from being a jumble of materials, the Witt scrapbooks present a series of thematically structured arguments incorporating both visual and textual sources. Images were crucial to the exposition of these arguments. Firstly, they supplied information on the iconography of phallic worship and they were the means by which this iconography could be compared within and between cultures (see Figures 1 and 2). Secondly, they documented practices which interpreted as ‘survivals’ of phallic worship practices (Figures 3, 4 and 5). Thirdly they enhanced and verified the eye-witness testimony of informants, as with Adam Scott’s expedition to the Azuma shrine and report on the Ghankiro brothel. Images - many of which were sketches by the war correspondent and journalist William Simpson - emphasised the role of the witness in the field, in ways that would later be associated both with anthropological field-workers and photo-journalists. The majority of images in the Witt scrapbooks were drawings, yet they were drawings of a very particular kind, performing functions that, in the decades that followed, photography would dominate.

The scrapbooks re-presented images so that they could be collected together in new groupings and compared across time and space. In the Witt scrapbooks this often involved copying of images within chains of representation that incorporated drawings of photographs, photographs of drawings and drawings of drawings. Drawing and photography were both treated as a means of reproduction and evidencing. Photographs were used to reproduce drawings (as in the documentary drawings of Japanese brothels); likewise, drawings were used to reproduce photographs, (as with the drawing of a “Hindu Temple Near Sultangunge” [Sultanganj] copied from a photograph published by British Railway Engineer, E.B. Harris, who excavated the famous Sultanganj Buddha in 1861-2). Copying obscured the exact contribution of named individuals or authors. In places the Witt scrapbooks recorded the person or publication responsible for an original drawing, underlining Witt’s aspiration towards established modes of scientific witnessing. Yet elsewhere the scrapbooks preserved the anonymity of informants, using initials or simply leaving out attributions. Witt promoted a homosocial mode of collaborative authoring in the scrapbooks, shifting the attribution of information between sources in ways that revealed and disguised.

## **Appendix: List of photographs in the Witt and Simpson scrapbooks**

### **Witt 115 “Indian, Thibetan, Chinese, Japanese” “(Before 1866)**

The Daibutsu Buddha, similar to photographs taken by Felice Beato around the same year (see discussion above). Annotation under print: ““DIE BOOTS”, THE JAPANESE BUDDHA, PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE IMAGE AT CANNATA YOKOHAMA 1864”

Photograph of drawing showing three fully clothed Western men watching 11 naked Japanese women washing themselves. Note underneath reads: “Photographed from a drawing by [left blank], of the interior of a Japanese washing place for women:-“

Photograph of drawing showing naked, semi naked and clothed Japanese women. To the left, two seated women playing musical instruments. To the right, three clothed Western men (the same three men as in the bath house drawing above). Annotation reads: “Photographed from a drawing by [left blank], representing Japanese women playing at a game of Forfeits. For description vide p.p. 163-4.”

### **Witt 119 “Grecian, Etruscan, Roman” (Before 1866)**

Pile of pieces of ancient sculpture and architectural fragments (Figure 1 above). Another copy of this photograph is pasted into the Simpson scrapbook (Witt 123, see below).

Two Herms, left hand sculpture with missing phallus, right hand herm with phallus intact. Handwritten text beneath reads: “- PRIAPIC TERMINALS – From the Originals found in the excavations made at Rome near the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, in February 1864. – Height about 6 feet.”

### **Witt 122 “Modern” (Before 1866)**

Large (fold out) albumen print. Handwriting above reads: "Photographed from the large original of Salviati's Procession of Phallus". Annotation underneath reads: "J. Rossi di Salviati. Printer, Florence 1510 – 1563. His "grand procession of Phallus" was first modelled in clay, from which an etching was made; a few copies only of these reached some of the chief capitals of Europe, and one of them sold at Sir Mark Syke's sale for 400 guineas. This work was discussed by the priests and he was obliged to flee from Florence, where he afterwards returned. The larger and more finished engraving is not to [illegible] - ." According to the British Museum online catalogue the engraving itself (accession number 2002,1027.55) was discovered in 2002 "in poor condition ... rolled into the cupboard ... containing the Witt collection, and transferred to Prints and Drawings." Adding, "there is no reason to think it came from George Witt". The existence of this photograph may contradict that statement.

Photograph of sculpture of putti riding on a lion: "Photographed from the original sculpture of Rosetti, Rome 1864." The sculptor was Antonio Rosetti whose sculpture was popular among commissioners of public sculpture in Britain between 1860 and 1883.

Photograph of sculpture of semi-naked woman with four putti. Text beneath: "Il mercatante di Amore. Photographed from the original sculpture of Rosetti, Rome 1864."

Photograph of painting of Leda and the swan: "From a painting by a French Artist".

"Jeux de Cirque" Series of six studio photographs of semi-naked women in gladiatorial attire (Figures 3 and 4).

### **Witt 123, Simpson scrapbook, (before 1899)**

Two photographs of South Asian bronzes, linga with naga (cobra), with annotation "In the possession of T.G. Rylands, Esq. Highfields, near Warrington, 1886". Collections of Thomas Glazebrook Rylands are now held by Warrington Museum and Liverpool University.

Portrait of Jadunathi Maharaj and group portrait of "Maharajahs", (Figure 5, above)

Four different views of an Asian “Bronze Figure, in the possession of T.G. Rylands Esq. Warrington, 1883.”

Photograph of architectural fragments from Nimes annotated “Fragments at the Maison-Carre, Nimes”. This is the same photograph as in Witt 119. See Figure 1.

Three photographs of different views of a British Prehistoric wooden figure, with erect penis and scrotum. Annotated “Figure found about 11 years ago at Kingsteignton, Devon. Carved in Oak, found 25ft below the surface in an inclined position, against the trunk of a buried oak tree. “The local antiquarians seem to think it a processional Priapus.” July 1877.”

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the staff of the Anthropology Library and Central Archive of the British Museum, especially Jemima Jarman and Mary Hinton, as well as Elizabeth Bray from British Museum Images. Also, thanks to Jennifer Grove, of University of Exeter, who first made me aware of the Witt scrapbooks and very kindly allowed me to read her PhD thesis. Kathy Kubecki encouraged me to publish this research and Chris Horrocks assisted with researching Witt’s volume of Japanese woodblock prints. Lastly, thanks to David Notaro of Ram Books, London, for advice on pornographic collections. Funds from Kingston University Research Fund paid for pages of the scrapbooks to be specially photographed for this article.

### **References**

Anon. 1866 Catalogue of a Collection Illustrative of Phallic Worship Presented to the British Museum. Privately Printed.

Banks, Marcus and Vokes, Richard 2010 Introduction: Anthropology, Photography and the Archive. In History and Anthropology 21(4):337-349

Carabelli, Giancarlo 1996 In the Image of Priapus London: Duckworth

Clark, Timothy C., Andrew Gerstle, Aki Ishigami and Akiko Yano (eds) 2013 Shunga: Sex and pleasure in Japanese art, London: British Museum Press

Forde, Kate and Honor Beddard 2014 The Institute of Sexology. London: Wellcome Collection

Frost, Stuart 2016 Secret Museums and Shunga: Sex and Sensitivities at the British Museum. In Lehnés, Patrick and Frost, Stuart (eds.) Proceedings of the Interpret Europe Conference ... (2014 and 2015) pp86-97

Funke, Jana, Kate Fisher, Jen Grove and Rebecca Langlands (2017) Illustrating Phallic Worship: Uses of material objects and the production of sexual knowledge in eighteenth-century antiquarianism and early twentieth century sexual science. In Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry 33(3) pp324-337

Gaimster, David (2000) Sex and Sensibility at the British Museum. In History Today, 50(9) September 2000: pp10-15

Grove, Jennifer Ellen (2013) The Collection and Reception of Sexual Antiquities in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Exeter: University of Exeter

Haberman, David L. 1993 On Trial: The love of the Sixteen Thousand Gopees In History of Religions 33(1): 44-70

Hodgen, Margaret T. 1931 The Doctrine of Survivals: The History of an Idea. In American Anthropologist 33(3): pp307-324

Janes, Dominic 2008 The Rites of Man: The British Museum and the Sexual Imagination in Victorian Britain. In Journal of the History of Collections 20(1): pp101-112

Lacoste (2010) Felice Beato: A photographer on the Eastern Road, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum

Lutz, Deborah 2011 Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism, New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company

Mendes, Peter 1993 Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English, 1800-1930: A Biographical Study. London and New York: Routledge

Minsky, Laura (2000) Forbidden Erotica: Introduction. In Schmidt, Nina (ed.) (2000) The Rotenberg Collection: Forbidden Erotica. Koln: Taschen

Morgan, Richard 2017 New Light on George Witt Part 2. In History in Bedfordshire, Vol. 7(10) Spring 2017 pp6-16. Bedfordshire Local History Society

Morton, Christopher 2014 The Place of Photographs in the Collections, Displays and Other Work of General Pitt-Rivers. In Museum History Journal Vol. 7(2) pp168-187

Pasztor, Esther (2010) Jean-Frederic Waldeck: Artist of Exotic Mexico, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press

Sera-Shriar, Efram 2015 Anthropometric portraiture and Victorian anthropology: situating Francis Galton's photographic work in the late 1870s. In History of Science 53(2) pp155-179

Sera-Shriar, Efram 2016 The Making of British Anthropology, 1813-1871 London and New York: Routledge

Sigel, Lisa Z. (2002) Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press

Simpson, William (1895) Sikh Initiation (Read at a Masonic Meeting). In North Indian Notes and Queries, April 1895: 5-14

Simpson, William 1903 The Autobiography of William Simpson, R.I. (Crimean Simpson) edited by George Eyre Todd. London: T. Fisher Unwin

Wallace, Marina 2007 *Under Lock and Key*. In Wallace, Marina, Martin Kemp, Joanne Bernstein (eds.) 2007 *Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now*. London and New York: Barbican

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on the history of the Secretum and the place of Witt's collection within it, see Gaimster (2000), Wallace (2007), Grove (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The Secretum began to be broken up after 1912 (Grove 2013). Its contents were made available within the general catalogue from the early 2000s (Frost 2016).

<sup>3</sup> The date of this transition is placed after the 1870s when it became feasible to mass-produce pornographic photographs (Mirsky 2000). The heyday of pornographic postcards is generally set after the 1890s, when pornographic postcards were made easily accessible to all ranks in society (Sigel, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Since the 1990s there "has been an explosion of anthropological interest in historical ethnographic photography and other photographic practices associated with the discipline" (Banks and Vokes 2010:337). For more on photographs from sexological collections see Funke et al (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Simpson first met "the Comte de Waldeck ... at my friend Witt's, Princes Gate." Waldeck then visited Simpson's rooms to view his Indian sketches. The description of Waldeck as "painter, sculptor, archaeologist and traveller" comes from Simpson who later wrote an obituary of Waldeck (Simpson, 1903:256).

<sup>6</sup> Drawings of "Indian and Persian" people having sex resemble the illustrations Sellon produced for several pornographic works including his autobiography "The Ups and Downs of Life". They illustrate scenes of ritualized prostitution described in Sellon's anthropologies of Hinduism. The attribution of these drawings to Sellon is my own and is explored further in a publication in preparation. Sellon's work "organising the Secretum at the British Museum" has been explored by Jennifer Grove (2013). Letters from Sellon to Simpson in the Simpson scrapbook give Witt's home in Princes Terrace as Sellon's postal address.

---

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Grove (2013) has pointed out the dismissive attitude to Witt's scholarship in much previous writing, and has made a powerful case for recuperating his work as credible and significant research. Her approach to Witt's scholarship has made this article possible.

<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of survivals was a cornerstone of the comparative method. Its application was most famously refined and systematized by Edward Tylor in 1871 but the notion of contemporary customs and practices as "remains", "vestiges" and "relics" pre-dated Tylor's theory by more than a century (Hodgen 1931:316).

<sup>9</sup> The Vatican mythographers, between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, taught the mythology of Priapus. After the Renaissance, popular texts like Natali Conti's *Mythologies* (1551), and illustrated books in vernacular languages (such as Vincenzo Cartari's 'Images of the Gods of the Ancients' (1556) further developed and theorized Priapic iconography.

<sup>10</sup> Henry VIII's bible of 1540, the first English translation of the Old Testament, included a note in the margin stating that Baal Peor was Priapus, disseminating this idea to the congregations of every parish church in England.

<sup>11</sup> Another copy of the photograph in Figure 1 appears in Simpson's scrapbook, illustrating the close connections between his volume and Witt's. A shorter sequence featuring the Nimes sculptures is found in the Simpson scrapbook.

<sup>12</sup> Waldeck produced a version of *I Modi* based on tracings of an original copy he claimed to have found in a convent in Mexico.

<sup>13</sup> The British Museum sent Witt 115 on a touring exhibition after the funding had been secured and the images of the Daibutsu Buddha and the photographs of drawings of Japanese brothel scenes had been requested. Consequently, it was not possible to reproduce these photographs here.

<sup>14</sup> Among the photographs collected by Pitt Rivers are a series from the Stillfried and Andersen Company of Yokohama collected between 1875 and 1879. They are all portraits of young Japanese women, some of whom are depicted in revealing poses (Morton, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Some drawings reconstruct imaginary scenes derived from accounts of “native customs” including rape scenes and sadistic punishments for female adultery involving flagellation and humiliation. Edward Sellon also catered to the taste for flagellation in his illustrations for pornographic books including ‘The Adventures of a Schoolboy’ (1874) and ‘The Ladies Tickler’ (1866).

<sup>16</sup> The Cannibal Club are now one of the more conspicuous societies within the history of Victorian sexuality and culture. The interests of the group included anthropology, pornography and flagellation (Lutz 2002).

<sup>17</sup> The Mexican siblings Zucum Chel and Nicti Chel - who feature in semi-nude and nude full portrait illustrating an autobiographical account of seduction and adventure by Jean Frederic de Waldeck in the “Aboriginal American” scrapbook - are exceptions.