

Finding

Lost in this free-floating world of dust;
Anchored by nothing, anchored by all.

The voice inside cannot explain
the path to free oneself.

From the cases, the shells, cloaks

That we envelop ourselves in,

We can uncover the true soul,

that hidden treasure.

NYSA

The Treasure within a single story: 'African Seaman's Testimonial'



History is such a beautiful tribute to those that came before; those of the past; those who paved the way for us. Unfortunately, it is often manipulated and so hides the true treasure within. The depth and meaning of stories can therefore be lost.

Museums are a valuable resource that people often use to obtain reliable and unbiased information and whilst it may seem as if they do so on the surface, a closer look at some of the colonialist-era artefacts will show that there is a barrier between ideals and reality.

The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich is bursting with captivating exhibits and historic items that hold great significance, such as Nelson's coat, for example. Yet, we noticed a striking lack of sensitivity within one particular exhibition in the Atlantic Gallery: Slavery, Trade and Empire.

One particular artefact, entitled the 'African Seaman's Testimonial', is a powder horn with engravings, that had a rather threadbare description, which hardly revealed anything about the true story of the man to whom it had belonged. The description simply alluded to his identity as a Sierra-Leonian. The imposed pan-African nationality that was associated with him at the time of making the piece was not further explored and is an example of the way the Europeans de-humanised slaves, by referring to them, in this case, as 'supernumeraries'. This 'African' was actually given an English name, (Ben Freeman) another example of an attempt to bleach the culture of the people forcibly taken as slaves aboard the 'HMS THAIS'.

With a minimal amount of research, we were able to find out a lot more information about this seaman. For example, he belonged to a West African ethnic group known as the Kru people. This group was indigenous to Eastern Liberia but migrated to Freetown, Sierra Leone as well as the Ivorian Coast. So, the reference to him being 'Sierra-Leonian' was only a fraction of his identity. The Kru were renowned for their navigation and sea-faring skills. We feel this information should have been made available and the seaman placed accurately in his historical context.

The lack of sufficient information and detail, aided, in some cases, by curators' indifference, can conceal the truth, so the struggles experienced by our ancestors can often be erased. It is fundamental that we all feel able to connect with the true lives of our ancestors, to relate and learn from them and to give us our identity.

"When we realise that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise"

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

NYSA & LAURYN

Tomb Raiders – the search for Genghis Khan



Genghis Khan is known in Mongolia as its greatest hero, to this day.

The West recalls only what he conquered but Mongolians remember what he created. His rule enshrined the concepts of religious freedom and his empire allowed the Silk Road to flourish. He even established the use of paper money. Genghis Khan didn't just conquer the world, he civilised it.

Genghis Khan's death is shrouded in mystery. He died in the summer of 1227, during a campaign along the upper reaches of the Yellow River in Yinchuan, the real cause of his death remains unknown.

Historians claim that Genghis Khan wished to be buried in an unmarked grave in the Burkhan Khaldun Mountains in Mongolia. Based on the legends, every soldier, involved in the burial, was brutally killed in order to keep the location secret. Other popular myths claim that his people released over a thousand horses in the area to further hide any signs of human activity and that they also altered the flow of the nearby river to run over his grave. This obsession with secrecy is largely due to concerns about what could happen should knowledge of the burial site fall into the wrong hands. Not only would the discovery of the tomb of the founder of the Mongol empire be of huge historical significance, it's also believed to be full of jewellery, precious metals and relics. It's one reason why interest remains strong - people remain hopeful to become as affluent as the brave warrior. The reasons for his tomb remaining undiscovered to this day vary hugely. Foreign media has romanticised his wish not to be discovered into a curse, deterring curious travellers or historians from seeking out the place. This echoes the legend of Tamerlane, a 14th-Century Turkic-Mongolian king whose tomb was opened in 1941 by Soviet archaeologists. Immediately following the tomb's disturbance, Nazi soldiers invaded the Soviet Union, launching World War II's bloody Eastern Front. Superstitious people are therefore wary of the tomb's whereabouts.

Another reason is the technical issues associated with the search. Mongolia is huge and underdeveloped – more than seven times the size of Great Britain with only 2% of its roads. Added to that is the fact that Genghis Khan was most likely buried Xiongnu style, which means his tomb is buried 20m underground.

To this day, Genghis Khan's burial remains one of life's great mysteries.

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