

**Rede zur Eröffnung der Tagung
„Bridging Cultures through Exhibitions“
Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin
22. März 2006**

**Excellencies,
Honoured Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,**

To open a conference in these days, that focuses on bridging cultures between Europe and the Arabian countries means to touch topics, that are of central importance for the future of both regions. Only since a few years, the quest to define and debate, what European identity is, has begun and I believe, that it could be helpful to link our present times with the mythologies, that tell us about the origins of Europe.

Europa was most probably the daughter of King Phoenix, from whom Phoenicia, which is pretty much Lebanon today, has received its name. Her mother was called Telephassa, “the woman with the white face”, a woman of distinguished beauty, resembling the moon. Phoenix means the red color of the sun. And so, from a love affair between the sun and the moon, the two poles of life, as mythology tells us, Europa was born. Her beauty was even more exceeding, than that of her mother and it didn't take long for Zeus, the ruler of the Olymp, to hear about her. With Zeus a new episode of peaceful reigning had begun. We all remember, that he defeated

his enemies by blowing into a gigantic shell, whose sound caused the titans to panic and run away.

One fine morning the young princess Europa was playing on the beach of Phoenicia, where she was gathering flowers with her girlfriends. And you all know, what comes next: Zeus appears disguised as a bull, decorated with bouquets of flowers and smelling like crocus. Not by force, but by mere enchantment, he convinces Europa to mount his back and travel to Crete with him, to his place of birth, where they married in one of the caves. And, sorry, the story is not over yet, because the two sons, that derive from this divine conjunction, are Minos and Rhadamanthys. Minos is the founder of the legendary minoic culture, whose wallpaintings are so much determined by gentleness, music and poetics. Together with his brother Rhadamanthys as advisor Minos created a society based on justice and – very important - a wise system of laws. We have a good deal of archeological evidence, that the minoic culture on the Isle of Crete was committed to peace. Among us, I assume, are many archeologists, that will confirm, that so far no weapons have been found at excavations near the palace of Minos.

It seems, that at the beginning of Europe's mythological origin, we find the birth of a civilisation out of the spirit of peace, and the link of the Phoenician daughter with her heritage in the Arabic and oriental world may well be a symbolic bridge between our cultures today. European identity will only gain strength, if it is tied back to the grand mythologies of ancient times and if we enrich them with new interpretations. This is where we come in, as

intellectuals, as scientists and experts in communication by means of exhibitions in museums. It is up to us, what stories about our regions we will tell.

If we look into the mirror today, we will each of us see the specific crisis in which both Europe and the Arabian countries are. Only together in partnership we will be able to solve these problems. Culture, I believe is the main key for this. If we want to make this world safer and more peaceful, we should invest in the arts and in culture. Only culture maintains the capacity to approach one another as equal. And we should engage to make this work in reality by exchanging our views, by creating longterm forms of cooperation and last not least continue to bridge cultures by exhibitions, that are made for the visitors of our museums .

It is my great pleasure to welcome our guests from the Arabian countries. I very much acknowledge the strong commitment to this endeavour by my colleague, the Secretary General of ICOM-Arab and chair of AFRICOM, Chedlia Annabi. Chedlia, without you this would not have been possible. And, please be careful, whenever you walk on the beach, near the Phoenician ruins of Carthage in Tunisia, where you work as conservator, because you never know in which disguise Zeus might approach you.

Thanks to ICOM- Germany, thanks to Dr. York Langenstein and especially to Johanna Westphal, who has provided the management for this workshop, thanks to the State Museums of Berlin, represented by its Director General, Prof. Schuster, and the State Museum of Man and Nature in Oldenburg, represented by Prof.

Fansa, and last not least thanks to the speakers we are looking forward to a workshop, in which all of you can participate in this very important dialogue.

I am very thankful, that we can be guests in the German Historical Museum today, a museum, that has committed its activities to understanding German history and culture in its European context. Thank you Prof. Ottomeyer for being our host and thank you to Dr. Hans-Martin Hinz, my predecessor as chair of ICOM-Europe and today a member of the Executive Council of ICOM. It was his idea to arrange this workshop as the second in a row after having met in Aswan in the spring of 2005 and it was a welcome challenge for me to continue these efforts. Unfortunately he is ill today. In substitution for Allissindra Cummins, the chair of ICOM, who has sent us her very best regards for this conference and regrets, that she cannot be with us, due to obligations on the Bahamas, where she works, Prof. Rosemary Beier, member of the board of ICOM-Germany and treasurer of ICMAH, will speak some words of welcome on her behalf.

Thank you very much.

c. Udo Gößwald