Have you ever walked into a museum and realized that what you believed to be real was ‘just’ a copy? I have experienced this more than once. Every time, it leaves me with a feeling of disappointment, not to mention the embarrassment of being unable to distinguish between the ‘original’ and a ‘copy’. I can say that I regained my confidence by reading the volume *Museums as Cultures of Copies*. In this volume, it becomes clear that copies within museums are extensive and undertake a variety of different forms. The volume debunks the widespread assumption that museums are “storehouses for authentic and real objects” (p. 1) by questioning the idea that originals are superior in value to copies.

This volume, which appears in the Routledge Research in Museum Studies book series, is edited by Brita Brenna (University of Oslo), Hans Dam Christensen (University of Copenhagen), and Olav Hamran (Arts Council of Norway). Consequently, contributions by Norwegian scholars comprise the bulk of the volume. Geographically, however, the case studies stretch further. The book has a clear interdisciplinary approach and contains a rich diversity of research objectives as well as museum contexts. There are seventeen chapters, organized into four parts, where the practice of copying as a key point of reference is discussed under the headings of *Modelling; Mobility and instability; Body, life and death* and *Text as/of thing*.

In Part I, *Copying and modelling*, the common dichotomy between original and copy is demolished through examples of models that are neither the original nor the copy, but can be both simultaneously or fluctuate at different times. Models are not static objects, and neither are copies. They exist only in relation to something else, but they can also detach themselves from the original and become the original themselves.

Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, Alice Blackwell, Peter Davidson, Martin Goldberg and Geoffrey N. Swinney draw in objects as diverse as a miniature engineering model, a papier mâché larynx, wood crystallography models and reproductions of medieval silver objects that are...
all maintained in National Museums Scotland. Since “copies are commonplace in museums” (p. 24), they appear in different corners of the museum, crafted in different materials and serving different purposes – what they have in common, though, is that they all make something absent present in the museum.

In the past, scientific work often depended on models. Brita Brenna contemplates how wooden models were used in knowledge production in the eighteenth century through examples from Trondheim. Here Bishop Johan Ernst Gunnerus collected “a drawing, a model, written statements, a head of a basking shark, and not least a shark’s skin stuffed with heath” (p. 36) in order to produce a scientific description of the basking shark without having seen it himself. In that sense, the model is not just a ‘model of’ but a ‘model for’ since the model is what the description is based upon.

Through the example of the bird collection at Manchester Museum, Henry McGhie shows how the collection of bird skins “created a standardized ‘format’, indeed, a ‘model for’ bird specimens” (p. 58), as well as a representation of a species. McGhie argues that we should continue the scientific collecting because “specimens are held in a limbo as representing the potential ‘answers’ to unarticulated questions” (p. 65).

But what is the model worth after having served its function? Olav Hamran explores this question by drawing on a three-dimensional copy of the Bekkemellomkverna Mill (located in Snertingdal in Oppland County) displayed in the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. It is categorized as an exact, even though it is a 1:25 scale and missing one wall. It proves how “in certain contexts, for example, in exhibitions and museum education, a copy could be better and more useful than an original object” (p. 43). It serves both as a model of the existing mill in Snertingdal and, when the mill was demolished, also as a model for the rebuilding of the mill in an open-air museum.

In part II, Copying: Mobility and Instability, the distinction between original and copy is not so clear. The question here “is not about the original or the copy, but about the relation between them – the ambiguous movement from one to the other” (p. 69). The chapters problematize case studies of originals and discuss their intersections with copies.

Mari Lending discusses the example of the ‘Great Altar of Pergamon’ that was reconstructed in Berlin from the ruined monument found in ancient Greece. “Monuments and their representations are always in flux: In time, in space, in media, in materiality, and in function” (p. 74). Gönül Bozoglu and Christopher Whitehead show how copies enter into the sphere of governmental memory practices in how ‘a past’ is made into ‘the past’: “This past becomes the sole ‘original’ to be copied, restored or reverted to” (p. 85) when the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey reconstruct buildings and historical sites in Istanbul from a selective understanding of the Ottoman age. Felix Sattler and Anna Simandiraki-Grimshaw analyze the ‘Throne of Minos’, a gypsum seat from an archaeological site of Knossos in 1900. This chapter challenges the term replica as a “faithful imitation of an original” (p. 100). The carving in the gypsum seat ‘imitates’ woodwork, but whether a wood model ever existed remains unclear. The copies of this ‘original’ also differentiate from each other and testify to the fact that copies are in a dialogical interaction with the original in the re-interpretation of it. In this case study, we see how one object can inspire copies of it to serve different purposes that allow it “to transport, filter or highlight only certain qualities” (p. 104).

Hans Dam Christensen examines the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen. In this chapter we see how the copying practice of casting also ‘kills’ the clay original – a marble sculpture is an ‘original’ or ‘copy’ depending on one’s perception of the original-copy relation. The nineteenth-century understanding of original-copy was different, so the article therefore raises the question: Is Thorvaldsen’s museum
an original museum of copies? Joanna Iranowska’s chapter focuses on a hybrid copy with two originals merged together into a metonymic object “constantly multiplied though not being an exact quotation” (p. 135). She examines how the bedspread pattern from Edvard Munch’s self-portrait ‘Between the Clock and the Bed’ (that exists both in a painting and as a ‘real object’) has been used as a branding strategy to create merchandise at the Munch Museum in Oslo.

On the other hand, what happens when there is a clearly defined original on which a copy is based, but the copy produced fails to capture the singularity of the original? In Part III, Copying: Body, life and death, the practice of copying the lifeliness of humans and non-humans through different materials such as photographs, death masks and mannequins is examined by asking: “how do copies of bodies convey life?” (p.145)

It begins with Anne Folke Henningsen’s chapter on the lifecasts of indigenous people’s bodies in different ethnographic collections. Living human beings provide the model for the mannequins whose purpose is to ‘preserve’ vanishing races in museums in as lifelike a way as possible. But they also represent “assumed bodily and racialised difference”, (p. 152) since they are presented as typical for a race rather than the singular individuals they are copies of. From this morbid copy practice, Liv Emma Thorsen moves on to consider how photography helped to construct nature in museums in the 1900s. She looks beyond and behind the Mammal Hall in the Gothenburg Natural History Museum, showing how photographs of biological bird groups exhibited in the museum became as valid as photographs of bird groups in natural habitats, which “swept away the division between original and copy, between nature and museum nature” (p. 168). Photographs stood in for missing specimens in exhibitions of exotic animals. Photographs of killed animals were distributed to find buyers, as well as used to make the animal ‘live’ again, since the photograph could capture the animals in motion.

Conversely, when death occurs, how do we preserve it through copy practices? Ole Marius Hylland investigates death masks found in museum collections in Norway. Death masks attempt to “represent the character, soul and spirit of the deceased person” (p. 180), whether this be the genius of a person or what, on the other hand, could be described as the features of a criminal. The death mask is “a (positive) copy of a (negative) copy of a dead person’s face” (p. 190) to keep the person ‘alive’ in the very moment death arrives. All of the chapters touch upon the challenges faced by museums in displaying these ‘copy objects’ embedded in death.

In contrast to Part I, which distinguishes between a ‘model of’ and a ‘model for’, Part IV, Copying: Text as/of things, contains the textual copy as or of things in producing memory. Anne Eriksen discusses commonplace books used in the seventeenth century. She illustrates how two Norwegian brothers systemized museum objects into tables, inventories and drawings during a voyage through Europe. Commonplace books “shaped not only the information that was copied into them, but also the minds and mentality of their owners” (p. 207). Whereas the commonplace book produces textual copies, Siv Froydis Berg examines heavenly letters where the original is “transformed from its nonphysical appearance to a physical object of letters, formed and spelled in ink and put on paper” (p. 212). Berg explains how originals of the heavenly letter were in fact copies, whereas now it exists in an ‘intangible’ online version that can be multiplied unlimited times as intended.

Janne W. Olsrud looks more specifically at how a textual copy of an object made for cataloguing in the museum is also “an object in its own right and provides knowledge regarding the collections” (p. 225), through the example of a spoon that has been catalogued in three different ways in the museum: In a handwritten museum ledger, on a catalogue card, and in
the online database, providing different (con)textual copies of the same object using Latour’s definition of inscription. The section ends with Bodil Axelson’s chapter on three Swedish museums that have opened up their digital collection for public engagement. Here, the digital copying practices seem endless but “still rely on museum professionals’ interpretations and values” (p. 250).

Marcus Boon, the author of the book *In Praise of Copying* (2010), concludes the volume by reflecting on the possibilities for a future of a ‘museum of copies’. Such a museum would have to engage with the themes, practices and arguments presented across the pages of this volume, where the contributors break with the common understanding of the original-copy relation. The reader is challenged to consider cases in which: 1) the copy comes before the original; 2) the copy exists without an original; and, 3) an original and a copy interfere with each other so much that it is hard to tell how they differ.

The volume departs from an outdated notion of museums as storehouses of ‘authentic’ objects by revealing how copies have historically always been present and, moreover, will have an even greater presence into the future. The volume therefore contributes to both scholarly discussion of museum practices and to the professional development of practitioners working in the field. The significance of the volume is the way in which it engages more positively with copy practices, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of copy practices and how they have traditionally been regarded as threats to museums as ‘truthful institutions’. Placing copy practices in this more positive light is perhaps the volume’s greatest achievement.

The variety of chapters from different times, places and disciplines adds something new, relevant and important to the ongoing discussion of the credibility of the museum as a modern institution within museum studies and the heritage field more broadly. Even if the volume’s breadth of coverage can at times come at the expense of depth of analysis, it achieves its objectives by extending understanding and appreciation of the culture of copies in museums while providing a rich resource that scholars and practitioners can use as a springboard for further research.