Chapter 6
The Archaeological Museums:
An Educational Profile – Dealing With Identity

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ABSTRACT

In archaeological museums, people and communities find the signs and expressions of their own history, with a strong connection with the ethno-anthropological sphere. The areas and archaeological parks, then, are just pieces of landscape-made outdoor museums. The chapter analyzes the situation of museums, areas, and archaeological parks, especially in Italy, and outlines an educational profile with the reading key of identity. Archaeology can make the concept dangerous, because incorrect interpretations of the teaching coming from the finds can cause a misunderstood sense of ethnic identity leading to exclusive behaviors. Instead, the chapter proposes to work on self-identity, with the museum helping the person to become a member of an inclusive community.

INTRODUCTION

The life that took us in a storm has given us a taste for purity and renunciation. We assume all our values of person, family, country, freedom on our shoulders. But we must first tear them from the forgers. (Mounier, 1949, p. 410)

We also concede that a young person puts a touch of romanticism in the formation of his discoveries; but why stopping at the surface? ... Truth and lie offer the same mask, it is true: it is up to you to know how to read and distinguish. But do not consider it normal that profound ardor does not worry about good manners. (Mounier, 1949, pp. 10-11)

These two quotes by Emmanuel Mounier, the proponent of community personalism, at first reading offer no connection to museums. They certainly have a pedagogical value, perhaps naive but strongly spiritual,

as it is logical to expect from him. Mounier introduces his personalist and community revolution (see further on) with a harangue in defense of youth.

And yet, that confused world, in the storm, where true and false are presented as similar in the eyes of young romantics, recalls that nebula in which, in the eyes of young people of every generation, but even more of this digital generation, cultural heritage fidgets, and museums with it. A dimension where something that can be assumed as truth undoubtedly exists: but when brought to the youngsters, it gets confused with the falsity. It happened at Mounier's times – caught between great ideologies, capitalism and communism, both rejected by him – as well as in these years where technology is a powerful tool that seduces and can stifle youth. Both dominated by economy (today probably by finance), their falsity is always "political", because it always directs to alleged practices of the common good which, according to Mounier, do neither the good of the person nor that of the community.

If falsehood is political, political must be the reaction. This implies the adoption of a heritage pedagogy. It is providing cognitive tools to those who benefit from the cultural assets that "citizens" are created, that is, people able to enjoy their rights. And it is worth starting with the youngsters, even if it is not to limit to them. There must be an awareness of the existence and value of the heritage. Moreover, it constitutes the first and most effective form of protection, according to a path that sequentially goes from knowledge to protection through communication, teaching tools, understanding, acquisition and consolidation of skills, sharing.

Museums, especially archaeological museums exhibiting materials from the earth, that is where the roots are, where there is concreteness, must be instruments of "absolute" truth and become learning environments with safe and recognizable values. Young people must be able to become familiar with archaeology. For sure, this absolutism is relative! This paradox means that the truth of museums comes from the honesty and openness – absolute – with which they are given to people as a public good. Further on, the concept will be expanded.

Museums must therefore put education as a priority moment. It is interesting to explain how this term, in Italian language, assumes two shades of meaning. It defines both the set of interventions aimed at forming the intellectual and moral personality of an individual (education) and, with the same lexical incidence, a correct and polite behavior (politeness): and the descent of the second meaning from an interpretation of the first can easily be seen. Cultural heritage education is not a goal, but a means. The obviousness of this statement is not, unfortunately, always remembered, leading, at the time of many educational - or didactic - interventions, at least to two errors.

- The tendency to propose mere lessons (in visits, in panels, etc.) not requested and carried out in the wrong place and in conditions unfavorable to learning: for example, standing in a museum room.
- Such interventions are often divorced from any planning aimed at a true, actual and effective improvement of the cognitive baggage and the degree of understanding of the heritage.

One or even several single lessons not included in a planned teaching strategy are not effective. An impromptu guided tour is of no use to anyone; a long and pedantic explanatory panel bores, tires and makes one fall out of passion; but short too, if an end in itself, it results in a mere display of skills on the part of the person who wrote it. Cultural heritage education must be a service to citizens and to the heritage itself, not to those who carry it out.

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