

Chapter 7

Museum, Not Temple: A Moral Place Where People Meet the History of Ancient Contexts From Personal Experience to Transnational Openness

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ABSTRACT

A Museum is not a temple but a place giving an ethical, moral framework to the meeting of people and cultural assets. Museum's outfitting must be able to make visitors understand, without any further mediation. Two aspects are shown: the need to be suitable for early childhood and the capacity of being a reference of citizenship. For centuries, some Museums and Collectors have used illegal digs as a source to acquire antique objects, with the result that most Museums and Collections possess a large amount of objects with no trace of their provenance. The countries of origin, on the other hand, feel deprived of their past. There is a change necessary: a change in how to deal with ancient objects, which should be presented because of their historical evidence. A new way of dealing with objects is possible: examples of new collaborations between the officials of the Countries of origin and the Museums are given. In the new ways of working in the culture sector the public will be the profiteer, beginning with everyone's own personal experience.

INTRODUCTION

Museum is a place where the communication of archaeology knows one of its most intense moments. Every aspect has been widely studied.

Already at the beginning of the 1970s, Duncan Cameron recognized that the museum was presented as a temple and that instead it was not the right interpretation, on the threshold of the electronic (then

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Museum, Not Temple

become digital) revolution (Cameron, 2004: 1971). When this setting is not exceeded, the public of museum has hardly any benefits. These latter can instead arrive through mediation methods, expressing museum ethics. They help - must help - the personal experience of learning during the visit of the museum but also extend subsequently. Benefits can also derive from cultural policies of museum management, such as the opening of the museum to social dynamics, to the problems of the contemporary (also the archaeological museum!), to the great international themes. It becomes a museum that takes care of “others” (visitors, citizens, communities) rather than of “itself” (the collections, the staff and the director, its patrimonial capacity). It welcomes all what is represented by the definition of Public Archaeology. It becomes a forum where people meet: cultural objects and meanings, but first of all, other people.

More recently, against a proprietary conception of the museum, which makes it precisely that Cameron temple, a sacred place far from the community, also the report for the Council of Europe by Copeland (2006) has authoritatively expressed its contents.

An article on the New York Times noted that in the 1980s *museums still retained an aura of moral superiority left over from a more romantic era. They were still temples of art, repositories for the creative best that humanity had to offer*. It added – in truth referring to contemporary art museums – that, however, by the time 21st century started, *few people see them that way anymore* (Cotter, 2016). Contemporary art collections – it is necessary to say – are dynamic and feel the influence of social and economic contingencies, while archaeological ones tend to be – or to be seen – decidedly less sensitive to the demands of the time.

It is clear that collections have main importance and meaning – without them there was no museum. Nevertheless, they must not only have a value in themselves but for what they mean to current and future society, for benefits they give.

The museum experience can, and must, be a central point already in the first phases of developmental age. It is therefore necessary that actions performed are not random and improvised, but fall within a planning awareness. The child has the right to a museum where he feels comfortable – a duty for the museum.

Likewise, citizens must find in the museum the characteristics of social coexistence, necessarily dictated by shared norms. Regularly presenting experiences of trans-national collaboration developed in a context of respect for legality is an excellent way of giving this testimony. Museum must be felt as a moral place.

Archaeology, because of its nature, of the stories of ancient civilizations, is trans-national. The archaeological heritage - a strong element of identity, as an agent of qualification of landscapes, also local and therefore of the communities - has however distributions and relationships that go beyond human boundaries.

So, just as the child finds in the museum the tools to develop his own knowledge skills, so the adult finds the evidence to confirm the origin of his own cultural world.

(A.P.P., K.H.)

BACKGROUND

A museum flaw is often to still act as a sanctuary of knowledge, where to behave as humble devotees. Visitors are too often asked to keep silent, have a rigid behavior, admire cold windows, strictly follow the path, possibly leave a comment that nobody ever answers (see again Copeland, 2006). Instead the

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