

EDITORIAL

Archaeological knowledge in the era of scientific mediation: issues in the mass media and museums

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The present Special Issue is a part of a scientific research and mediation program. It is especially related with the question of cultural dissemination of scientific elements in the archaeological museum. This program is the fruit of a Greek–Canadian collaboration team set up in recent years by experienced and young researchers from the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) and the University of Patras. The program was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) with a grant from its Connection program (2019–2021–Archeology in the era of scientific mediation). This financial aid enabled our team to support events and outreach activities, such as seminars and knowledge mobilization initiatives and lead to the publication of this Special Issue *Archaeological knowledge in the era of scientific mediation: issues in the mass media and museums*.

These events and activities represent opportunities to exchange knowledge and to engage with participants on research issues of value to them. Moreover, these outreach activities will serve as steps toward more comprehensive and longer–

term projects. By proposing this Special Issue, we were able to support exchanges and outreach activities that facilitated disciplinary and interdisciplinary exchanges in the social sciences and humanities (science education, archaeology, history, museology) and favor international research collaboration and scholarly exchanges with researchers, graduate students and museum professionals from countries such as Greece, Canada and France. Moreover, a Higher Education Mobility Agreement for Staff Mobility ERASMUS+ has permitted for both principal investigators and editors of this Special Issue from Québec (A. Meunier – 2022) and Greece (D. Koliopoulos – 2018) to pursue research collaborations.

Therefore, individual researchers or groups of researchers among which the Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation et les musées (GREM–UQAM) from the fields of Archaeometry, Museology, Science Education and Scientific Communication have been invited to take part of this special issue, as well as specialized staff of archaeological and/or science museums to contribute to the discussion concerning the approach of issues as:

- Is the interpretation of archaeological exhibits in the light of modern scientific knowledge an acceptable socio–cultural goal for archaeological museums?
- Are there any scientific or social practices as reference that constitute an appropriate interpretive framework for archaeological exhibitions or exhibits?
- Is it feasible the scientific knowledge to be disseminated in the archaeological museum as an exhibition/communication element and/or an educational tool?
- What do the museum professionals think? How do they work and what are their practices?
- What can be the impact on the interest and cognitive progress of the different public groups and especially the school public?

However, in addition to researchers or groups of researchers involved in research and/or practical activities related to the specific topic of dissemination of scientific knowledge in the environment (such as mass media) of the archaeological museum (or other museums), this Special Issue also invited researchers who can contribute with their work in the development of a more general reflection on the subject of the transformation that scientific knowledge undergoes when it becomes knowledge of dissemination through exhibits and communicational elements and/or teaching through formal, informal or non–formal forms of education.

Furthermore, we were opened to receive contributions directly concerned with science, archaeological or even history museums because we think that the reflection going on in theses informal education settings can also inform on how science and technology are communicated through those contexts and sites.

- How do these museums present diverse interpretations into their exhibits in the light of modern scientific knowledge and the recent results of the research done in

the field of social sciences? Is there a place for controversy or questioning the way science is presented?

– How is the communication thought and carried throughout their internet sites, exhibits and other means of communication and how are their publics (or external users) represented?

– What are the collaborations possible and wished? Are they stable or constantly changing?

Our intention is thus for this Special Issue *Archaeological knowledge in the era of scientific mediation: issues in the mass media and museums* to be not only a forum for discussing new research trends or questioning old patterns but also to constitute educational material addressed to postgraduate and doctoral students. In that, this Special Issue intends to procure a variety of point of views presenting texts by Greek, Canadian and French authors. The six texts consider the questions and thematics mentioned and developed above in different and singular perspectives which are rich in diverse knowledge each in itself and together contributing to the conversation concerning the approach and intentions of this Special Issue.

Dr Daniel Jacobi is emeritus professor at Avignon University. His article entitled *How to taste ancient vestiges? The case of amphorae / Comment goûter des vestiges antiques? Le cas des amphores* is concerned by French archaeological museums that exhibit numerous Gallo–Roman vestiges. As these collections are old and well known, one could assume that they are no longer the subject of debate or of scientific issues. According to the example of the Roman amphora, he compares three forms of mediation that leads to consider the amphora in three different ways: 1) the amphora as a picturesque find of the collector, 2) the amphora as a pedagogical object and finally 3) the amphora as a research theme still subject to scientific debate. His contribution is rich of reflections about the way the communication about the amphora is proposed, in museums and outside. As a matter of fact, he studies the way the information circulates keeping in place some multiple scientific interpretations that might be the source of controversy.

Dr Alexandre Schiele et Dr Bernard Schiele respectively postdoctoral researcher from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and professor at University of Quebec in Montreal sign the contribution *Archaeological representations in the media: The Dominance of Pseudo–Archeology*. By a fine analysis of two documentaries: *Lost World of the Maya* (National Geographic) (NG) and *Ancient Aliens©: Secret of the Maya* (AA) revealing a great number of similarities: format is identical, number of segments is the same, separated by synchronous commercial breaks of equal lengths (give or take a few seconds). If they somewhat differ in terms of treatment (AA proposes to uncover a conspiracy, and NG to solve an enigma) and the structure of the argumentation (AA: narration, assertion, speculation; NG: description, question, interpretation), they both

show the same archetypal images of the Maya culture and mobilize the same enunciative modalities: a voice-over commentary ensures coherence throughout, interspaced with snippets from specifically invited “experts” whose task is to illustrate, specify, justify the overarching narrative. Thus, their similarity is such that it is accurate to speak of variations within a media format. More precisely, the contribution reaffirms Marshall McLuhan’s observation that “the medium is the message”, as, beyond the scientific or pseudoscientific narrative, the very dynamic of the media predominates, blurring the distinction between the two.

Dr Popi Georgopoulou, museologist, Dr Kalliopi Meli, post-doctoral researcher and Dr Dimitrios Koliopoulos professor at University of Patras present the paper *An interpretive and pedagogical approach of archaeological collections in the light of natural sciences: the notion of Science Educative Islet* in which they investigate the possibility to interpret the exhibits of an archaeological museum in the light of natural sciences. The article on the one hand describes the design principles and the main characteristics of a museographic structure, addressed to groups of children aged 11–13 years old, which embodies the relationship between natural sciences and archaeology due to both museographic and didactic transposition simultaneously and on the other hand presents the results derived from investigating the conceptions of Greek archaeological museums’ mediators. This investigation shows that most mediators are challenged when approaching topics that contain elements from the natural sciences. However, they emphasize not only the usefulness but also the need to introduce such elements in archaeological museum exhibitions and educational programs.

Katy Tari, Director, Collections – Programs and Services to the Public at Pointe-à-Callière, Montreal Museum of Archaeology and History presents an article entitled *Between outreach and archaeology at Pointe-à-Callière, a shared link: the quest for authenticity*. The text describes diverse actions and projects where archaeologists are implied in the contents of many mediation projects lead by this major archaeological museum. How is the new information produced and updated by the archaeological team research can be put to the service of those projects? Her text articulates a professional point of view where to achieve the mission of the museum to help visitors discover and appreciate the history of Montréal in all its dimensions, the museum has focused on outreach, education, conservation, and research activities related to Montréal’s archaeological and historical heritage. As the museum is a site-based institution, it exhibits authentic vestige, artifacts and ecofacts providing visitors with a unique archeology-based experience where emotions are favored and highlighted.

Natalie Sadowski, Ph.D. candidate and Dr Christine D. Tippett, associate professor are both affiliated to the University of Ottawa; Dr Anik Meunier is a full professor at University of Quebec in Montreal. In the article they sign (*The roles of Canadian science*

museums: Making sense of mission statements), they looked at 80 Canadian science museums mission statements which are part of a museum's organisational culture that describes the 'raison d'être' of the institution. As they show in their research science museum mission statements (SMMSs) guide museum staff and influence their activities, and also send a message to visitors and the general public about the museum's purpose. In order to explore the role of Canadian science museums their research aimed to put a light on the following question: *What are the roles of Canadian science museums according to their mission statements?* They analyzed the SMMs by the following sub-questions: *How readily available are SMMSs? What are the lexical features of SMMSs? What does a thematic analysis of SMMSs reveal?* Using lexical and thematic analysis, they determined the common characteristics of the public portrayal of science museums' institutional identities as suggested by their mission statements, also providing insight into their roles. Although, as museums change as do the public's expectations, so too will their mission statements as they attempt to capture changing roles and purposes to maintain their public relevance. The following questions *Who do we serve? Why do we exist?* remain relevant for science museums. As their text mentioned, the time has come for science museum professionals to reflect upon their current practices, reassess how they wish to rebuild as well as re-envision their relationships with the communities they strive to serve, and redraft their missions to ensure that they remain relevant today and in the future.

Dr Anastasia Filippopoliti, assistant professor at Democritus University of Thrace writes the paper *Neutral, balanced or controversial: an overview and some remarks on how technoscientific issues are treated in museum exhibitions* in which she notes that in the last two decades museum exhibitions that deal with the representation of technoscientific issues and their impact to society have gradually gained the attention of researchers in Museology, Science Education, Science and Technology Studies (STS) as well as the field of Science Communication. Older exhibition tactics on such topics presented a *neutral or balanced narrative* to visitors more or less descriptive in its content. Yet, from the end of the 1990s, bibliography particularly on Scientific Museology refers to examples of exhibition experiments which propose alternative ways of representation and visualization. Creating an exhibition narrative that could hopefully inform citizens on science and technology issues, provoke their minds and support critical thinking is a stimulating task for museum professionals considering the fluidity and unpredictability of the nature of scientific practice. Among the broad repertoire of technoscientific themes treated occasionally in exhibitions, science controversies and science issues that may create a controversy to the public are of particular interest. The article attempts to investigate the repertoire of technoscience as a theme in museum exhibitions, uncover the communication frames that underpin their presentation and gives particular emphasis on the concept of *controversy* as a

promising framework that enable visitors' understanding of the impact of Science in everyday life.

We wish you a good reading, hoping that with this particular Special Issue we contribute to an interesting and constructive discussion on the complex interdisciplinary nature of the dissemination of archaeological and scientific knowledge in the media and museums.