

Considerations in Relation to the Museography  
for Objects of a Religious Nature

*Original*

Considerations in Relation to the Museography for Objects of a Religious Nature / Minucciani, V. - In: RELIGION AND MUSEUMS Immaterial and Material Heritage / valeria minucciani. - STAMPA. - torino : ALLEMANDI & C., 2013. - ISBN 9788842222491. - pp. 11-23

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2513876 since:

*Publisher:*

ALLEMANDI & C.

*Published*

DOI:

*Terms of use:*

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

*Publisher copyright*

(Article begins on next page)

# RELIGION AND MUSEUMS

Immaterial and Material Heritage

EDITED BY  
VALERIA MINUCCIANI



Allemandi & C.

# RELIGION AND MUSEUMS

## Immaterial and Material Heritage

EDITED BY VALERIA MINUCCIANI

UMBERTO ALLEMANDI & C.  
TORINO ~ LONDON ~ NEW YORK

Published by Umberto Allemandi & C.  
Via Mancini 8  
10131 Torino, Italy  
www.allemandi.com

© 2013 Umberto Allemandi & C., Torino  
all rights reserved  
ISBN 978-88-422-2249-1

RELIGION AND MUSEUMS  
Immaterial and Material Heritage  
*edited by Valeria Minucciani*

*On cover:*

Kolumba. View of one of the rooms of the exhibition  
“Art is Liturgy. Paul Thek and the Others” (2012-2013).  
On the walls: “Without Title”, 28 etchings by Paul Thek,  
1975-1992. Hanging from the ceiling: “Madonna on the Crescent”,  
a Southern-German wooden sculpture of the early sixteenth century  
(© Kolumba, Köln / photo Lothar Schnepf).

The publication of this volume has been realized with financial contributions  
of the Ministry of Education, University and Research PRIN 2008.

# Considerations in Relation to the Museography for Objects of a Religious Nature

VALERIA MINUCCIANI, Politecnico di Torino

The modern museum is a creation of the Enlightenment, closely related to the illusion of dominating and creating order in the world as well as closely linked to secularisation: therefore it is not by chance even its architectural typology recalls, from its very origins, a *non-religious temple*.<sup>1</sup>

From time immemorial, the eradication of objects from their original context (in our case: churches, tombs, altars...) will alter its characteristics: thus becoming aesthetic, historical, artistic and ethnographic proof, which are utilised by researchers as transformed objects. Afterwards, these objects have been continuously utilised, within the museum context, to celebrate nations or social classes, for education or indoctrination, to promote behaviour or opinions and to exercise a social control.

The modern museum is aimed towards that part of the public that should have already overcome the “irrational” aspects: however, notwithstanding the enlightened predictions which prophesized a future without religion, thanks to the definitive supremacy of reason and science, we have to recognise that nowadays these still have a very strong influence on our history. They create social sharing; giving an identity to individuals and groups, but also creating formidable barriers: with an implicit recognition of the “normative” character for the dominant culture which was amply disseminated, during these last years, in relation to *multiculturalism* and *restraint* which have also now been included in the museum’s educational objectives. A new role for the museums is also taking shape in relation to this, and it can vary if included in a culture more or less secularised.

In addition, the research and discussion on the cultural heritage has been enriched by new nuances: the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage is an acquired concept, and we know that the cultural assets always convey values and meanings that in part go beyond them, in reference to wider concepts.

The intangible content is extremely *volatile* and can be easily lost. However, whilst we have developed highly sophisticated theories and techniques, in respect of the object’s physical conservation, we can say that we have still not managed to conserve its significance (and its meaning) and we still do not *restore the intangible*.

The heritage of a religious nature<sup>2</sup> seems to represent these issues to the highest degree: for example the lack of liturgical or ritual usage reference could lead to total mutism

some objects. If the rite now belongs to the past, then the problem is more pronounced. The conservation in the museum guarantees only the visible part of an invisible heritage moreover the exhibition context always modifies the objects. In addition, as we know very well, notwithstanding the best intentions, the museum is never completely *neutral*: not only in relation (obviously) to its didactics and all the elements of the explicit communication, but also (and this is mostly interesting under the museographic aspect) for the *manner* of presentation, in relation to the space and its attributes. The exhibition set-up is not neutral, as well as the museum is not, when it is using distances, proportions, walk-through, lights, colours (which is frequently not taken into adequate consideration by the curators).

Coming back to the objects having a religious nature and their relation to the museums, it is very clear that the museum typology, in which it is conserved and exhibited, has a strong influence on the manner with which it is explained: what is highlighted, what is left out or obscured. These are objects that can be conserved in historical museums as well as in artistic, ethno-anthropologic, diocesan and archaeological; in eco-museum, and in museums dedicated to local culture, like those for culture which are geographically very far away. The only exception is for the natural scientific museums. It is important to highlight that for some time there have been in-depth contributions and reflections on the theme of *conservation* of the religious heritage, but the same cannot be said about the set-up context and exhibition. The Forum ICCROM 2003 “Living Religious Heritage: conserving the sacred”<sup>3</sup> started with an implicit assertion about the “diversity” of the religious heritage in respect of other cultural assets, in defining it as being “alive” and devoted to its auto-conservation.

However its protection is frequently threatened, when society opts for other social and political priorities: strongly secularised societies, who look at religion as an obstacle, are not interested in this conservation activity and they have gone as far as physically destroying - on the contrary - the places and the testimonies (or, more subtly, conserving only the form without passing on the substance). Even the dialogue between religious communities and secular authorities can boost this conservation.

However internal contradictions are also present: generally, a living heritage should still be in use; and it must also be taken into consideration that the religious “live” practices evolve and adapt themselves. All this does not seem to be very compatible with the conservation, which however cannot “freeze” the objects in relation to forms and traditions.

Even other aspects can end up in contrast with the conservation activity, due to the religious characteristics of the collections: some cleaning or restoration practices cannot be carried out on specific objects, for example, due to the use of materials or substances extracted from animals which are considered “impure” by some religions. Therefore ethical and professional views related to the conservation of objects, can sometimes be

superimposed and can sometimes end up in contrast.

But it is much more difficult to conserve the intangible reality of the artefacts' (and all the religions') origin:<sup>4</sup> this is about a vision of the world having divine roots, in which the objects and artefacts are an extension of the unseen. It penetrates the entire life of the individual, giving a sense and place within the universe and the time. It is therefore obvious that the religious heritage of a race cannot be fully understood unless the entire culture is understood, things are seen from their point of view, and the symbols, language, convictions, rituals, myths and ideologies are known.

As we were saying, since the year 2000 the European Community has dedicated substantial attention to the intercultural dialogue, by inviting European citizens to rediscover their own common heritage. The Holy See had immediately indicated the ecclesiastical and religious cultural assets as being strategic towards this objective, but we have to clarify that new changes were implemented in recent times:

- the need to promote an inter-religious dialogue has generated a new demand for museums;

- religious and academic studies have pushed the museums into facing this aspect more professionally;

- the museum has also started to be perceived by some confessions as a means to present their mission. The cathedrals have started to look more like museums and the distinction between a museum and a sanctuary has diminished;

- the religion is recognised as a typical phenomena of human society, with an extremely important role, even within a contemporary world.

This was also evident in the professional and academic debate. Paine (2000) was surely one of the first books to have explored how different religions have been presented in world museums. Other (few) general studies have followed, amongst them Sullivan, Edwards (2004), Claussen (2009), Beier-de-Haan, Jungblut (2010), Roque (2011) together with a wider study on single museums or homogenous groups of museums, like for example Michel (1999), Kamel (2004), Minucciani (2005), Wilke, Guggenmos (2008), Hughes, Wood (2010) and Lüpken (2011). There is also a volume of writings in the periodicals field, including *Material Religion: the Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, founded in 2005 and purposely aimed, with specific interest, to the religion in museums.

Finally, during these last years, a new awareness has been experimented (especially in humanistic disciplines and social sciences) in many fields within the academic world. For example, the participants in the sixth international conference on cultural policies (Jyväskylä 2010) were surprised by how much the religions were active within the cultural field and above all by the lack of research that surrounds this issue.

By now, from a study which was not exhaustive but quite systematic, it results that mu-

seums having a specific reference to religion are amply disseminated across Europe. Nevertheless, their communicative strategies demonstrate that the focus is still not centred on the specific characteristic of the objects which they exhibit.

There is also a much higher need to insist on the museums' task, in line with the recognition of an increased "illiteracy", towards the religious practices and concepts: therefore there is an exceptional potential in the museum/religion tandem.

In a society which over time has globalised many different cultures and beliefs, the comparison within the European context is interesting for various reasons. In fact, within the different countries we find different approaches, as amply demonstrated by this collection of essays, but above all there is the need to reorder the scenario in line with the first general criteria: essentially museum and religion can come into contact in three possible contexts

- ✓ within "laical" museums with varied typologies, which also conserve and exhibit objects and artefacts having a religious nature;
- ✓ within "laical" museums specifically dedicated to religion (or, more frequently, to religions);
- ✓ within museums having an "ecclesiastical" nature or in some way linked to the faithful community, which display a determined religious context through its artefacts and artistic works. Many times both the curators and the reference public have the same religious orientation.

In these cases the differences are defined at museological level, but not as much at museographic level. It is useless to state that the large majority of museums are encompassed within the first instance, since a consistent portion of the human artistic historical heritage is in any case linked, in some way, to religion. The theme, in these museums, is tangentially crossed, as one of the many annotations at the edge of the exhibited heritage; even when the didactic tool proves to be sufficiently informative, it is limited to information of a descriptive nature defined as an "observant view", that is an external view (at least within the aims, "objective").

In the same museological literature, the reference to the specificity of the religious theme in the museum is rare and in any case very recent (Patrick O'Neill *et al.* 1996, 2004, Paine 2000, Sullivan, Edwards 2004) and simultaneously the museum as a neutral, apolitical and objective institution has finally been called into question. Therefore the large museums of history and art simply brush over the religious issue, which deals with the sense of existence, with life and death, and with issues which are crucial: however the series of references and knowledge (that in any case are considered as "simple" tools for iconographic interpretation) are taken for granted and the said reference background finally seems to be deemed as secondary.

In the second case a descriptive and panoramic intent is evident, which necessarily implicates a comparative view and not simply an “observant” view.

Definitely, the theme is extremely delicate and requires a remarkable equilibrium. Very few cases are known in the whole world, but these are very significant: we can define these museums *anthologic*, aimed at showing the thousand faces of the ancestral need for God, the thousand forms with which mortal man has looked and favoured eternity. Every human being is fascinated by the origin and end; every human being brings inside him “the sense of eternity” and refuses the end for himself and for his loved ones: and this blurred need for transcendence gives origin to different beliefs. Museums which highlight a will so much disproportionate, through different forms which it has undertaken over time and in the places around the world can therefore be extremely poetic and educational locations.

Their approach, at least apparently, can be assimilated to that of the ethnographic historical museums: which aim to display, through the objects, the different faiths.

It results that the first *public* museum, about religion, in the world was the Museum of Religions (*Religionskundliche Sammlung*) established, within the Philipps University in Marburg, Germany, in 1927 by Rudolf Otto.<sup>5</sup> His successors followed his idea of a museum as a tool for the comparative study of religions, whose diversity in the world is represented by objects, images and reproductions.

The university context and the descriptive intent are the most favourable for an objective view of the collection, even though the same groupings with which the materials are displayed already indicate communicative and interpretative choices: for example where the different burial practices are compared or where the monotheistic religions, which represent the different evolutions of historically interconnected groups, are grouped together (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The fact of being displayed as a whole, independent, the religions of the southern eastern Asiatic, with the central role of Buddhism and its different teachings and to which a large space is dedicated, demonstrates the personal inclinations of the founder and his particular interests for the mysticism of those regions.<sup>6</sup>

However if we examine the display’s specific museographic choices, we note that the setting is based on “groupings” and that the objects groups are isolated in showcases whose spatial connection does not form part of a specific communicative project, like the colours, lights and all the other devices which are so important for the contemporary and modern museography. It has at its disposal several tools, which are now very articulated and refined, but the display manner, set-up and curator choices of a university institution give prominence to other aspects: amongst which the didactic presentation of scientific evidence and elements identified and studied.

It is also doubtful that such a museum has acquired over time a more inherent and ac-

tual value in relation to the contemporary political debate. Since it is exclusively concentrated on religions and it does not propose to display the cultures from ethnographic aspect or the arts from stylistic aspect, or a specific religion, its primary educational intent could really entail an education for tolerance and multicultural understanding.<sup>7</sup> However the doubt remains that true tolerance - which does not coincide with indifference - could maybe also give rise thanks to a less “observant” view, that is “closer”: a higher identification in the impulse that has generated so much beauty (and sometimes even very worrying practices and objects) could empirically indicate the way for a profound understanding which always includes participation.

However it must be highlighted that the presence of this museum (unique in Germany) within the university institution has evident repercussions on the currently proposed educational curriculum, which in fact dedicates particular attention to the disciplinary themes like “Visual representation of religion/s” and “Material religion”.

Another case among the few existing museums dedicated to all religions is the Saint Petersburg’s Museum of the History of Religion, which also dates back to the first half of the twentieth century: its origins are very different from the Marburg museum since it was founded as an anti-religious institution in 1932, a connotation which was lost with the collapse of the USSR, to initially become the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism (1954), and later the Museum of the History of Religion (MHR, 1990). Different successive researchers employed at the museum have always tried, even during the initial years, to concentrate the attention on the conservation and historical study rather than on the political and propagandist aspects and in fact the collection clearly portrays a “scientific” characteristic. The museum’s marked research vocation is evidenced by annual publications and conferences as well as through promotion of archaeological expeditions (for example on the Bosforo) aimed at exploring the formation of the archaic faiths.

The museum currently exhibits the different religious confessions, not only in Russia, but in the whole world, as eloquently evidenced by the collection groups: “History of Orthodoxy”, “Western Christianity,” “Religions of the East” - but also more specific sections like for example “Chinese folk pictures” or “Primitive Beliefs”.

The museum takes care, as much as possible, of the display update, also by technological and interactive exhibits - whilst always maintaining a high scientific level thanks to the integration of a good graphic system.<sup>8</sup> In addition the feedback from visitors confirms the “neutrality” of the presentation - which is a constant concern for the curators. Due importance is also given to the emotional and/or evocative setting (a new section on the Inquisition is being planned in the short term, which will be located in the basement area), utilised in various cases with undoubtedly effective solutions, like in the Buddhism Hall which reproduces a nirvana type scenario. The continuous updating

of its exhibition is a very recent constant of the museum. Here, in contrast with other museums, atheism is also taken into consideration as a religious orientation and a specific space is dedicated to it, modernizing and putting it within the social political context (e.g. how it is seen in Russia, due to its recent past related to anti-religious propaganda).

The museum's employees, which are very well versed in many aspects including those related to museological and museographic field, have also looked into the tools and methods for the museum presentation of the religious phenomena: on one side it is deemed that the presentation should be a sort of "scientific publication", detailing the origin context and lacking apologetic intents while on the other side it is deemed to be fully aware that the objects in the museum emerge from their sacred belief, becoming available for everybody but losing that emotional feel (their value lead back to material and aesthetic standards). To recover this aspect - which is so important from a religious perspective - the museum tries to involve, on a case by case basis, the representatives of the different churches: who are interested to intervene to control their image and at the same time their presence is able to give back to the objects a sort of "sacred aura". Here there is the perception of the number of religious replies to the same number of questions man has made over the millennia which have been provided over time and space and how none of them seems to be definitive.<sup>9</sup>

Paradoxically, a cultural context like to one at the Saint Petersburg's museum - where religion does not have a dominant role - has favoured the characteristic accepted by many as being "neutral", historical, scientific and anthological. In fact a museum opened many years after within a different context, the Saint Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow (1994), was immediately deemed very controversial.<sup>10</sup> It also aims at educating awareness and reciprocal respect, but there is a feeling towards it of having a higher involvement and greater debate.

The curators have always monitored in detail the reactions - sometimes very strong - of the visitors, who demonstrated the effect that religion has on the individual's life.

Many complaints were somewhat expected: some groups felt underestimated, other did not want to be physically associated with religions which they rejected, or criticised the narrative texts requesting that they should be rewritten. Many requested to take a position "against" specific religions and there were even cases of vandalism and physical "attacks" towards the exhibits.

Instead, other reactions were unexpected, showing how easy it is to demolish the museum's boundaries between *inside* and *out*, between object and subject: the case of the Muslim visitor who protested against the sale of alcohol in the museum's coffee shop was rather enlightening.

The museum is divided in three parts, respectively dedicated to a sacred art collection coming from different cultural backgrounds, to the human life cycle as interpreted and

celebrated by different religious traditions and to the religious history in Scotland. It represents more than 120 religious faiths, spanning over 5,000 years of human history. Still maintaining a scientific and anthological characteristic, the museum runs in parallel with the “observant” view an additional “participative” view, since it seems to wonder as well as the public. The explanatory texts try to give the “external” view of the curator as well as the “internal” view of the believer. The curators immediately came up with a series of queries of a historical and scientific nature: how to conserve a “living” heritage within the museum environment; how to contrast the sense of past which the objects acquire in the museum; how to reconcile the required selection (which is almost always based on aesthetic criteria) with the respect for the different opinions and sensibility; how to avoid any “judgement value” but at the same time retain the museum’s typical educational role. In particular, with reference to this last point, the curators are convinced that it is their duty to take a position in respect of religious beliefs which have justified (if not originated) devastations, slavery and genocides. Not all aspects deserve to be documented in the same manner, as if the Declaration for Human Rights was never enacted.

They are convinced that the museum should also have the courage to highlight contradictions and conflicts:<sup>11</sup> it cannot be a place without contrasts, since it reflects different convictions and above all, it portrays diversity and also celebrates it as a value. Mark O’Neill reflects on the collections’ religious content – as opposed to the occurrences in other cases – which can be explained much better by those who experienced it rather than by those who studied it.

The curators have always been very careful to public reactions taking into consideration and clearly informing them about the objectives and intentions, which is fundamental: the note at the entrance states “Our aim is to promote mutual understanding and mutual respect amongst people of all faiths and none”. They always explain their choices, explicitly declaring where and how they intend to establish the boundaries between religion, spiritual and secular and where they intend to relegate these aspects to a secondary level so that the objects’ aesthetic potential or other type of values can emerge. This particular approach, which still follows a “neutrality” trait, is confirmed by the visitors’ reactions. It was noted that they feel personally involved and also pushed to reflect on their personal faith. Others interact with the objects or show a reply which is typically devotional – or maybe, in this case, the set-up choices are not as yet very courageous or innovative as they should be: paraphrasing Mark O’Neill’s question, “is religion a museum object?”, we can say “can religion be enclosed in a series of showcases with subtitles”? Certainly the recent exhibition comparing the positions taken by the different religions in respect of crucial questions is much more fascinating, confirming that the objects bend towards the power of the narrative.

Logically speaking, also the “museum without location” belongs to this second typ-

ology of museums: the first virtual museum of religion is accessible online [www.VirtualMuseumofReligion.com](http://www.VirtualMuseumofReligion.com). However this introduces a new area for reflection which we cannot delve into at this point - even if we reserve the right to do so shortly in another place.<sup>12</sup>

The third type of museum is the one where the attention for museology and museography of religion should be more elevated. It is also the most popular (in some countries it has been widespread) and there are many comparative and coordination initiatives. A good basis for research are those sites which gather and present these museums,<sup>13</sup> whilst the real and proper debate and comparison is animated within associations similar to AMEI ([www.amei.biz](http://www.amei.biz)) in Italy or Die Deutschsprachige Arbeitsgemeinschaft kirchlicher Museen und Schatzkammern in Germany (which is a kind of Association of Museum and Church Treasures). A new inter-disciplinary mediation is being studied and promoted by Europae Thesauri, European Association of Treasures and Churches museums, that also wants to increase the involvement of the public in the awareness and understanding of the museum institutions. Finally, the interest to safeguard the minorities has already inspired large European projects like for example "RELIGARE", which wants to incentive the inter-disciplinary cooperation related to religious pluralism in Europe (<http://www.religareproject.eu>). Other networks have been organised on analogue thematic (e.g. religious sociology and religious mediatisation) but they do not provide a specific significance to museums. Naturally there are other local coordination entities at various levels.

First of all the identity of these museums is not defined once and for all and in reality it is not univocal. How can these be classified? To what typology do they belong? They cannot be strictly defined as historical museums, if some of the objects, at least in their potential function, are currently being used and especially if the conserved images are the object of an existing faith and of a practised devotion. However the memory theme - embedded in the same origin of the museum and in its reason for existence - is also founded in the majority of the religions (the catholic faith is perpetuated with the commemoration of the Last Supper and the continuity of the rituals is the basis of almost all the religions).

This type of museum, in contrast with the previous cases, does not have the concern of positioning itself as neutral, however it always resolves for scientific type objectivity. Among the museums dedicated to the religious heritage there will be monasteries, cathedrals and other religious centres where there is access to masterpieces, but also to Treasury museums and missionary museums. Those museums earmarked for the conservation of the identity of a precise minority will be included within this same category, like the Jewish museums and the *Waldesian* museums. Different typologies can also coexist within the same museum and the museological and museographic approaches can be very different.

However the most consistent group is the one of the diocesan museums, which relates to the territorial communities. It is about a very diffused typology especially in Italy, France, Germany and Spain. I would like to take this opportunity to summarily look at a few museographic characteristics of the diocesan museums within the Italian context.

They present the most diverse heritage, from a usage aspect, quality and period. There we find major artefacts but also popular objects of devotion, liturgical objects, very old testimonials and recent documents but many times have a lack of a real theme structure. Part of the research could branch out to deal with the organisation, systemisation, set-up and narrative adopted by these museums, since the *manner* in which the museum communicates, heavily influences the message and interpretation by the visitors. But above all, since *you can not abstain from communicating*, it is fundamental to master as much as possible the contents which will inevitably be carried also by the spatial set-up.

I believe that the lack of a specific museology will also have strong repercussions on the lack of a specific religious museography. This is confirmed by the fact that these museums, depending on the closest type of museum they resemble, from time to time, assume the form of a museum of archaeology, ancient art, history or interpretation.

The mostly used ordering choices are basically two. The first one follows a criteria which is possibly objective and scientific, with an approach which is very similar to the artistic historical museums: the criteria by excellence, which overrides the others, is the chronological one, which gives the opportunity to underline the evolution over time. The second one is related to thematic groupings that can be declined in various different ways: for example, a recurrent choice is articulated around the sacraments, or by key figures of the local religious history, or in relation to the specific devotion felt on the territory.

In the first group the exceptionality of the product will be documented, whilst in the second group additional space will also be provided to the series sequence (the repetition) of *normal* objects, therefore the most popular ones.

Inevitably, the first group will have observations aimed more at the exterior, stylistic and formal aspects of the artefacts, with particular attention to the art history and other emergencies; in the second group the faith content will override the aesthetic beauty carrying them.

In other words, notwithstanding that these are institutions which are not neutral, the first group will have the observant view whilst the second group will have the participative view.

A good example of the first group can be the diocesan museum in Turin, whilst the diocesan museum in Bergamo could be in the second group. It is interesting to see how much these museological choices will have repercussions on the museographic ones.

The diocesan museum of Turin<sup>14</sup> is housed in the Cathedral's large crypt: the striking

and accurately restored spaces are an invitation for silence; the objects are in front of each other within a symmetric display and unmoving balance; monumental showcases protect the precious objects whilst the texts, in an exemplary scientific and distinguished manner, provide the required information. There are no touch screen or projections. Here this space, the materials and the distribution will invite visitors to *observe* and the message being received / involuntarily / will narrate about a story which was already closed.

The diocesan museum in Bergamo is housed in the Palazzo Bernareggi, a former high-class residence, which does not show off any monumentalities within its ample and articulated spaces and does not rely on “atmospheric” devices. Simple showcases, basic but evocative settings, panels with projections and moderate light play / as well as the succession of various thematic groups / are an invitation to *participate*. The message being received is that everything is still alive.

From a museographic aspect, in Turin, the materials and especially the colours have an *architectural* significance; in Bergamo they also have a *symbolic* and *expositive* significance.

The first one is a “nice” museum of art and history; the second one seems more modest, but is really related to faith.

I would like to conclude by renewing the invitation for a higher consideration of the communicative capacity of the museographic choices: the distances between the objects, the reciprocal positions, the backgrounds and heights are signals thus communicating hierarchies and roles; colours, forms and materials can explain what and how to connect / highlighting differences and analogies. The light emphasises the objects and at the same time inviting the eyes to gaze on them, the setting defines an emotional space which has an enormous influence on the interpretation. Even the repetition has an interesting communicative value: if almost all the objects can narrate different stories (and all, in some way, legitimate), the manner to display them many times needs to be found to invite different interpretations.

The diocesan museums are / or should be / places for contemplation and reflection. As always when dealing with intangible heritage, made of values and significations, the *viewing primacy* should be reshaped in favour of other receptors: even though, in the museum, this still seems to be a very difficult objective.

<sup>1</sup> As evidently shown in the design of the Museum of Etienne Boullée, and in the same museum proposed by Jean Louis Nicolas Durand at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the generic definition of the “heritage of a religious nature” we find a large variety of collections, objects and situations. A systematic and rigorous terminological examination within this small universe was, a few years ago, aptly summarised by G. Varaldo, *Sull'arte sacra e i beni culturali religiosi*, in Minucciani 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Held at the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* in Palazzo Corsini in Roma and published by Stovel, Stanley-Price, Killick 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Refer for example to the UNESCO international convention to Safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

<sup>5</sup> Theologian and philosopher of religions, who in 1917 with the book *The idea of the Holy* marked the modern study of religions by trying to elaborate a “methodology of the religious sentiment”. During his numerous journeys and with the support of appropriate funding he managed to gather a considerable number of iconographic materials and artefacts coming from religions all over the world, valorising and differences and identities. He planned for a long time a museum in which to display this material and finally found the funding thanks to the celebrations of the four hundred years of the University. The museum, which continued to grow over time, is currently housed in the “New Chancellery” building. It is directly administered, to this very day, by the University under the supervision of the President of

the Department for the Study of Religions within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy, thus guaranteeing a continuous enrichment of the research.

<sup>6</sup> Objects and testimonials coming from India, China and Japan are displayed one near the other in a manner to favour the comparison between Induism, Confucian Taoism, Shintoism, Tenrikyo.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bräunlein 2005.

<sup>8</sup> However the availability of the texts in other languages is currently not complete and without any doubt this constitutes a handicap.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Stanislav Koutchinsky, Director of State Museum of the History of Religion, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

<sup>10</sup> Initially the building should have housed a visitors' centre for the Cathedral, but the project failed due to financial difficulties. The Municipal Council took responsibility for the works to be able to open, with the already existing resources in the collections of the Museums in Glasgow, a centre specialised in the religious theme. See O'Neill 2011.

<sup>11</sup> In line with the typical relationship between religion and contemporary art: a very tormented relationship which the museum has however chosen to document.

<sup>12</sup> Virtual museums are a great, new field that we're facing following V. Minucciani, *Il museo fuori dal museo*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Refer to the site [www.kirchliche-museen.org](http://www.kirchliche-museen.org); or, at one single country level, like the Spanish example at [www.museosdelaglesia.es](http://www.museosdelaglesia.es).

<sup>14</sup> See Cervellin, Maffioli 2011.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- R. Beier-de-Haan, M.-P. Jungblut (edited by), *Museums and Faith*, Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, Luxembourg 2010.
- P. J. Bräunlein, "The Marburg Museum of Religions", in *Material Religion*, vol. 1, issue 1, 2005.
- L. Cervellin, N. Maffioli, *Il Museo diocesano di Torino*, Del Graffio, Borgone di Susa (TO) 2011.
- S. Claussen, *Anschaungssache Religion: zur Musealen Repräsentation Religiöser Artefakte*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2009.
- J. Clifton, "Truly a Worship Experience? Christian Art in Secular Museums", in *Museums - Crossing Boundaries*, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Mass., 2007.
- K. J. Goodnow, J. Lohman, J. Bredekamp, *Challenge and transformation: museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, Unesco, Paris 2006.
- S. M. Hoover, K. Lundby, *Rethinking media, religion, and culture*, SAGE, London 1997.
- A. M. Hughes, C. H. Wood, *A Place for Meaning: Art, Faith, and Museum Culture*, Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 2010.
- S. Kamel, *Wege zur Vermittlung von Religionen in Berliner Museen*, "Studies of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin; the Museum für Europäische Kulturen, Berlin; Saint Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow", VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, Wiesbaden 2004.
- A. Lüpken, *Religion(en) im Museum. Eine vergleichende Analyse der Religionsmuseen in St. Petersburg, Glasgow und Taipei*, Lit Verlag, Berlin 2011.
- E. McKeown, "Religion and Museums on the National Mall", in *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, 2007, online, available on: [http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/webforum/112007/religion\\_and\\_museums.pdf](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/webforum/112007/religion_and_museums.pdf).
- V. Minucciani, *Musei fra immanenza e trascendenza: esposizioni e raccolte di arte sacra e beni culturali religiosi in Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005.
- "Musées et religion(s)", in *Musées & Collections Publiques de France*, no. 219, Association Générale des Conservateurs des Collections Publiques de France, Paris 1998.
- M. O'Neill, *Making Histories of Religion*, in G. Kavanagh (edited by), *Making Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London-New York 1996.
- M. O'Neill, "Religion and cultural policy: two museum case studies", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 17, 2, 2011, p. 225-243.
- C. Paine (edited by), *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion*, Leicester University Press, London 2000.
- M. Patrick, *La religion au musée*, L'Harmattan, Paris 1999.
- M. I. Roque, *O sagrado no museu*, Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa 2011.
- M. Shackley, *Managing Sacred Sites: Service Provision and Visitor Experience*, Continuum, London 2001.
- H. Stovel, N. Stanley-Price, R. Killick, *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage*, in *Religious Heritage: conserving the sacred*, conference proceedings of the ICCROM 2003 forum, ICCROM, Rome 2005.
- L. E. Sullivan, A. Edwards, *Stewards of the Sacred*, American Association of Museums, Washington 2004.
- J. Williams, *Sacred History? The Difficult Subject of Religion*, in K. Sloan, A. Burnett (edited by), *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, British Museum Press, London 2003.