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Pottery in Museums

- How, Why and What do we exhibit?

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Pottery in Museums: How, Why and What do we exhibit?

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Abstract
This thesis is a study of pottery in the museum world. Throughout the study, questions along the lines of how, why and what we exhibit are brought up and answered. The study is done through observations and interviews with seven different museums, four of which are located in Sweden and three in Italy. The author has also used museological literature and theories in order to strengthen the essay and show that the issues brought up in the observations are known since before in the field, but still exist in the museums today.

The exhibiting of pottery comes with several issues, such as overcrowding of displays, requirements of pre-knowledge from the visitors, aesthetical problems with broken, coarse or fine pottery and epistemological problems. Epistemology is a subject that seems to be partly ignored in the observed museums, despite it being general knowledge that fewer visitors will read the text the longer it is. Other epistemological problems that are brought up are the issues of text placement, vocabulary and actual mediated information. These problems are brought up throughout the essay and explained, with a smaller section that discusses possible improvements to them, which have been brought up by researchers in the field.

In interviews with curators of the museums, thoughts about what the visitors see and understand compared to what the museums want them the see are presented. Also their views on the possibilities of interaction with pottery as a mediator and whether they focus primarily on aesthetics or learning in the exhibitions are shown. This essay is not meant to be a decider between what is right or wrong concerning the exhibiting of pottery, but could be used as a stepping-stone towards such studies. This is a two years master's thesis in Archive, Library and Museum studies.

Key words
Pottery; Museum displays; Museum studies; Museology; Ceramics; Display techniques

Swedish abstract
Den här uppsatsen är en studie av krukor i museivärlden. Genomgående i studien kommer frågor som hur, varför och vad vi ställer ut tas upp och besvaras. Studien har gjorts genom observationer och intervjuer med sju olika museer, fyra belägna i Sverige och tre i Italien. Författaren har också använt sig av museologisk litteratur och museologiska teorier för att stärka uppsatsen och visa att de problem som tagits upp i observationerna är kända sedan tidigare inom fältet, men trots det existerar i museer idag.

Utställande av krukor medför flera problem, såsom överfulla montrar, krav på förkunskaper hos besökarna, estetiska problem med trasig, bruks- eller finkeramik samt epistemologiska problem. Epistemologi verkar vara ett ämne som delvis ignoreras i de observerade museerna, trots att det är allmänt känt att färre besökare kommer att läsa texten ju längre den är. Andra epistemologiska problem som behandlas är sådana som textplacering, vokabulär och faktiskt förmedlad kunskap. Dessa problem tas upp och förklaras i uppsatsen med en mindre sektion som diskuterar möjliga förbättringar av dem, baserat på idéer från forskare inom fältet.

I intervjuerna med curatorer från museerna presenteras deras tankar om vad besökarna ser och förstår jämfört med vad museerna vill att de ska förstå. Också deras syn på möjligheterna av interaktion genom krukor och huruvida de fokuserar främst på det estetiska eller pedagogiska i utställningarna visas. Den här uppsatsen är inte menad att skilja mellan rätt och fel vid utställandet av krukor, men kan användas som ett avstamp mot sådana studier. Det här är en två-årig masteruppsats i Arkiv-, Biblioteks- och Museivetenskap.

Ämnesord
Krukor, museimontrar, museistudier, museologi, keramik, utställningsteknik

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I would also like to thank Stefania Renzetti and Fanny Lind at the Swedish Institute of Classical Studies in Rome. Stefania has been very helpful in both arranging the interviews with the Italian museums and being an intermediary in the mail contact with those museums. Fanny agreed to be my translator in the interview with Crypta Balbi and did an excellent job.

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Although I cannot mention their names for anonymity purposes I would certainly also like to thank all the people who have agreed to do interviews with me and thus made this study better. Their insights have been very valuable to me and I definitely think the study has benefited greatly from the knowledge they shared.

Lastly I would like to thank my proofreaders. Thank you for putting up with my whim to write this in English and thus making proofreading harder for you. The terminology, although kept to a minimum, surely is not making it any easier and I am grateful for the time you put down into correcting my little oversights.

Perhaps out of line with sections like these I would also like to give a small shout-out to Världskulturmuseerna for their joint web based database for museum collections, Carlotta. It made finding examples of the pottery I am talking about in the essay smooth and easy.

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Part One

Introduction

The subject to this essay started to form in my mind a few years ago when I studied Egyptology.[1] Our professor was very fond of the art and archaeology part of the subject and therefore she thought it a good idea to bring us to the university museum to have a look at the Egyptian collection there. While interesting, the thought sprung in my mind that, "that is a lot of identical pottery". That thought stuck in my mind and reappeared during a course during my master's education. During the course we learned about museum pedagogy as well as exhibition techniques and in essence that added a shape to my blurry thoughts about all the pottery I had observed in museums.

The questions that started to form were along the lines of: "Why do we exhibit broken jars?", "What is the point in having ten almost identical pots next to each other?", "What do we expect people to learn from this?" and "How can we expect people to have the basic knowledge needed to interpret this?"

Digging deeper I formed more concrete questions to these thoughts. The International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of what a museum is got to be the real starting point for the questions since it essentially expressed my foremost concerns about exhibiting pottery. I quote:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of *education, study and enjoyment* (my emphasis).[2]

As you can see, I have emphasised the last four words here to point out which part of the definition I am interested in. While it really is the first of them that I have discussed above, the rest are also important and I want to explain why. *Education* is important because that is what museums are about, they are there as mediators

[1] I hold a B.A. in Classical Archaeology from Uppsala University.
[2] http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition [2013-11-11].

between the academic world and the normal world. Therefore it is important that one can understand what a museum wants to mediate through an exhibition or a specific object. *Study* is of course connected to *education* but is not necessarily bound to a school or university. Studying is just as important for working adults as it is for pupils and students because it stimulates the mind.

Although small and seemingly unimportant I have also emphasized the word *and*. The reason for this is because I want to point out that it does not say *or*, which would change the meaning of this quote completely. In other words, it is not up to each museum to choose whether they want to educate their visitors or if they want them to have a good time. Both are important parts of what a museum is. Lastly, *enjoyment* is what brings people to museums. Whether it is to spend a day with the family, to show off a special part of your country's history to a foreign friend or to simply get that monthly dose of culture. There are many reasons people visit museums, but certainly none of them is "to have a boring time because my life is too much fun."

Having the ICOM definition in mind it becomes a bit clearer to see in which direction the other questions are aimed. However, I believe that to understand it completely one also needs to have a basic understanding of how archaeologists view pottery and I am going to give a brief introduction to it. First off there is the *coarseware*. Essentially, this is everything that is not painted with figures or patterns. They may still have printed patterns in the clay, but the important part here is that they are supposed to be used, a lot. The other kind of pottery we are looking at is *fineware*. Fineware is, as the name suggests, more elaborate pottery meant for special occasions and for less rough conditions. For instance, one would not store food in fineware, but certainly in coarseware.

These are two ways that archaeologists classify pottery. Of course there are occasions where it is harder to tell to which category they adhere, but generally it is easy to see the difference knowing there is one. Though, for this study I have also added a third category, *broken pottery*. At first, this was just supposed to be a separate category from the other two that showed that not everything we exhibit in our museums is intact. However, after some consultation with my supervisor I changed the definition. The reason for this is that there are quite a lot of items in storages of museums and even in exhibits that you cannot tell for sure if they are in fact parts of pottery or if they are from other ceramic items. Therefore I wanted to leave this category rather open to be able to add in these sherds if I found it beneficial to the discussion.

The purpose of this essay is to examine why museums choose to exhibit such large amounts of pottery and to create a picture of how curators generally think around the subject. I do not wish to become the reaper who tells right from wrong, but rather examine the keywords *why*, *what* and *how*. The museums chosen are of archaeological and historical kind and my hope is that it will help to paint a more thorough picture of the thought process surrounding the material. Keeping in mind

that not all pottery is exactly the same and that one thus has to contemplate each object individually. The historical museums are: Historiska museet, Östasiatiska museet and Crypta Balbi, as well as Museum Gustavianum which is a historical university museum. The archaeological museums are: Medelhavsmuseet, Terme di Diocleziano and Villa Giulia. They are all chosen because of their pottery collections, which was determinant for including them in the study.

It should also be noted that the essay will be written in English, which is not the author's native language. However, since the study is international it can be considered necessary to also be able to mediate the study internationally.

The Field of Museology

As far as I know, the subject of *how*, *why* and *what* kind of pottery we choose to exhibit, has not been touched before this essay. Books, articles and essays concerning pottery in museums generally revolve around what the collections look like, what we can learn from them or what kind of pottery a specific museum has in its exhibitions. None of the texts I have looked at questions why it is even there in the first place.

There have however been several studies that concern the exhibiting, and more so the meaning, of the objects that we might call every-day-use objects. A rather recently released book is *Nyttan av en halv kalebass* (Eng. *Uses of half a calabash*) by Wilhelm Östberg at the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm, which discusses the issue from an anthropological perspective.[3] He points out that a lot of the objects in the book are made for every day use and that when we look at these objects we get a chance to see them with the same eyes as the original users, rather than through a researcher's eyes or as notes in a diary.[4] He also points out that "which the most common object at a settlement on the African countryside is […] one cannot know and one cannot generalize about a continent – but even so; I would put my money on the half calabash"[5] (my translation). This is of course regarding modern anthropological material, but the same is true for pottery, except perhaps that we *know* that it is the most common material found at archaeological sites.

Perhaps the closest study to this one that has been produced is the master's thesis "The New Archaeological Museum: Reuniting Place and Artifact" by Kristin Marie Barry. It is in fact not done within the subject of museology, nor within archaeology (although it is incorporated), but rather in architecture. She, as I, has noticed how the exhibitions usually look like, but she has a different perspective

[3] Östberg, W. (2012), *Nyttan av en halv kalebass*.
[4] Östberg, W. (2012), *Nyttan av en halv kalebass*, p. 10.
[5] Östberg, W. (2012), *Nyttan av en halv kalebass*, p. 63.

on how to change the museums. Prominent in her study is not pottery or the exhibition cases, but the general architecture of the exhibition halls and even the museums. She addresses pathing, space, lightening and such in order to both protect the exhibited objects and allow for visitors to study the objects in optimal conditions.[6]

The first chapter in the anthology *Museum Materialities* is written by the editor herself and discusses the senses and feelings that connect us with the objects in museums. The whole chapter is well written and I could paraphrase it all in order to emphasize why it is relevant for this essay. Amusingly enough though, Dudley includes a quote by Chris Gosden that sums it up nicely. He says:

> A building, a pot or a metal ornament has certain characteristics of form which channel human action, provide a range of sensory experiences (but exclude others) and place obligations on us in the ways we relate to objects and other people through these objects.[7]

Furthermore, Alexander Stevenson discusses, in chapter seven of the same anthology, the diversion that exists between art museums and archaeological museums, which exhibit the same kind of material, *i.e.* material with imagery that has to be interpreted. He shows some examples of interpretations done on objects and how they differ greatly. More to the point he questions whether these examples is where artistic and academic interpretation divide, where a visitor to an art museum may be content with the individual interpretation, but a visitor to an archaeological museum may be less satisfied with an unexplained artefact.[8]

In his chapter in Simon J. Knell's book *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, Richard Dunn discusses issues related to collecting practises and how that may affect future exhibitions. This chapter is interesting because by suggesting that museums have too much pottery exhibited, I also indirectly suggest that they have to choose more representative pottery for their exhibitions, which is a topic Dunn discusses indirectly.[9] He does not explicitly discuss pottery of course, but rather how curators have to select specific items to be part of the exhibitions, items that may not have been fitting twenty years ago and that will be outdated again in another twenty years. He explains how that is not important, because what is important is that the artefacts are relevant today.[10]

Further into Knell's book, Patricia Kell discusses the Ashmolean Museum and more importantly, how the objects in museums work as a sort of bridge that

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[6] Barry, K.M. (2008), *The New Archaeological Museum: Reuniting Place and Artifact*.
[7] Dudley, S.H. (2010), "Museum materialities: objects, sense and feeling", p. 5; Gosden, C. (2005), "What Do Objects Want?", p. 196.
[8] Stevenson, A. (2010), "Experiencing materiality in the museum: artefacts re-made", p. 109.
[9] Dunn, R. (2004), "The future of collecting: lessons from the past", pp. 62-71.
[10] Dunn, R. (2004), "The future of collecting: lessons from the past", p. 68-69.

connects the experts within a museum with the general public through mutual understanding – which in the case of pottery I question greatly.[11]

Graham Black discusses this topic in his book *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*. He says, "[…] most visitors need help to bridge the communication gap between themselves and the object(s)."[12] He also comments on the use of senses in museums, or rather, the usual lack of such. Vision is of course most commonly used, sometimes accompanied by the option to touch an object, although rare. However, the senses smell, taste and hearing are often neglected in museum exhibitions even though they are both essential, and a great help, to understanding an object fully.[13]

While earlier research has not discussed why pottery is exhibited, the matters of education and what objects mean to the common visitor has of course been on the agenda for several years by now, as part of the new museology. Literature regarding this subject is not limited to archaeological works. To understand it we also have to look at museological theories and even though these rarely even touch the subject of pottery, they certainly discuss similar topics.

Theoretical benchmarks and questions

My original hypothesis around the subject is simply that the people working with this are themselves archaeologists and thus very familiar with pottery, with its meaning and uses for us. Therefore they do not question whether it really is a good idea to exhibit pottery but rather which pot is the most important in the collection or how many pots they can fit into a specific showcase. I believe that since they are so used to the thought of pottery as something that can tell us a lot about a certain period or place, they do not ponder about whether the average visitor understands it or not. My questions are as follows:

- Why do we exhibit pottery?
    - Why do we insist on exhibiting multiple pots of exactly the same shape, material and with the same intended use?
    - What educational purposes does it have?
- Is there a clear difference between different kinds of museums (historical/ archaeological), between countries or depending on the size of the museums?
- What kind of material is exhibited? Coarseware, fineware or simply broken pottery?
- Assuming pottery is exhibited:

[11] Kell, P. (2004), "The Ashmolean Museum: a case study of eighteenth-century collecting", pp. 72-83.
[12] Black, G. (2012), *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 90.
[13] Black, G. (2012), *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*, p.104.

- How do the visitors react to it?
- What are the curators' thoughts around it?

These are of course a lot of questions and I want to point out that the first one is the most prominent for the study. The purpose of this essay is not to examine the archaeology of the objects. That will just be a necessary part of the greater goal, which is to look at the museology surrounding these objects. The way this differs is mostly in the way I look at the objects themselves. In an archaeological approach I would be looking at what these objects tell us about the past, how they differ from each other, what civilizations they stem from, and so on. That is not my intent here. What I will look at in this study is how these objects can benefit learning, how they connect us with the civilizations they stem from, the way they are portrayed along with what context they are presented in and also what amount of these objects are exhibited. It is a rather well-known fact in museology that the less space an object has the less important it is and *vice versa*. Therefore it is also important to note how much space the curators have given the objects they obviously find important enough to be part of their exhibitions.

Furthermore, and connected to Patricia Kell's discussion, Gaynor Kavanagh talks about how there is a sort of assumption in museums that objects tell their own story.[14] He rejects that and instead brings up a quote by S.R. Crew and J. Sims that says: "The problem with things is that they are dumb. They are not eloquent, as some thinkers in art museums claim. They are dumb. And if by some ventriloquism they seem to speak, they lie."[15] While I connect Kell's discussion more to my concerns about coarseware, I relate this quote specifically to the exhibiting of fineware. The understanding of fineware usually requires a deeper understanding of a region's older religion. In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, that would be mythology.[16] However, if you do not possess this information, you are left with either a rather stray explanation of what you see or, even worse, nothing at all.

Another concern that I have with the exhibition of pottery is that there does not seem to be a logical limit to it. Instead museums try to fit as much pottery into a showcase as possible, filling whole rooms with hundreds of nearly identical pots. Suzanne Keene has very similar concerns to mine and has asked Canadian museums about this. Their responses were in stout defence of the collections. Something that prompts Keene to say: "[…] Why not describe an institution that exhibits its entire collection as an 'Exhibition Centre'? That's fine, but let's not

[14] Kavanagh, G. (2004), "Collecting from the era of memory, myth and delusion", p. 120-121.
[15] Crew, S.R. & Sims, J. (1991), "Locating authenticity; fragments of a dialogue", p. 159.
[16] Beard, M. (1991), "Adopting an Approach II", p. 34-35. Keuls, E.C. (1985), *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens*, p. 34.

confuse it with a museum."[17] I am very much inclined to agree with Keene. If an institution wants to exhibit everything they possibly can out of their collections, then that is of course their choice, but they should not call themselves museums if they choose to do so. The reason for this is that the word museum comes with the expectation of education, something that just is not there in an institution that focuses more on exhibiting as much as possible rather than mediating what the exhibited objects really tell us.

Anthony Alan Shelton presents a discussion about aesthetic objects in his chapter "Museums and Anthropologies" in *A Companion to Museum Studies*. This discussion includes a quote by Edmé Francois Jomard, who rejected aesthetic approaches, where he says: "[…] there is no question of beauty in these arts […] but only in objects considered in relation to practical and social utility."[18] Relating back to my hypothesis I regard this as possibly the largest problem. Curators at museums regard these objects as beautiful specimens from a long lost past that they really want to show to the rest of the world. The objects may then be very aesthetic, but they will have no place in an exhibition, neither as a practical nor as a social object.[19] The problem is obviously not that they are aesthetic, I would even argue that it makes them more appealing to a larger amount of visitors, but that the only reason they are even exhibited is that they look good.

Rhiannon Mason mentions in her chapter in the same book Stephen Weil's article from 1999, "From Being *about* Something to being *for* Somebody."[20] That title suggests a change in museology that has not quite reached the world of pottery. Exhibitions about pottery are usually made in such a way that they are about the pottery itself, rather than being educational or even entertaining for the viewers. Further into the chapter she also brings up a rather modern fact about visitors, namely that they "do not come to museums wholly passive or as blank slates."[21] In a later chapter Susan A. Crane builds on this when she says that:

> We bring to the exhibitions those accumulated life experiences and maturity, those constantly changing iterations of the personal which construct our daily identities. We possess knowledge, which we deploy in the midst of the museum, equally as much as we gain knowledge and experience from the information and objects presented. *Even total ignorance of a museum's contents or mission does not preclude visitors from bringing expectations* (my emphasis).[22]

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[17] Keene, S. (2005), *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*, p. 35. More specifically chapter 3, *Collections*, pp. 25-44.
[18] Shelton, A.A. (2006), "Museums and Anthropologies: Practices and Narratives", p. 66.
[19] For a more in-depth discussion on social objects see Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010), chapter 4. In short it can be said that a social object is an object that encourages discussion among the spectators. For a different opinion of Simon's social objects, see Black, G. (2012), *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 146.
[20] Mason, R. (2006), "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies", p. 22.
[21] Mason, R. (2006), "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies", p. 25.
[22] Crane, S.A. (2006), "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums", p. 103.

The last sentence in this quote is extremely important to take notice to. It claims that a visitor, no matter the educational level, identity or class, will always expect something from the visit. As I said in the introduction, what the expectation in question is changes from person to person, but the fact is that it is there. Therefore we cannot just exhibit items in such a way that some of our visitors understand and can find use for it. We have to make sure that everyone can understand it, at least at some level. As most people who are aware of how museum exhibiting works will agree, ensuring that everyone understands everything at the same level is an impossible task and I am not going to suggest that it is what we should do.

To end this section, I find that not mentioning Pierre Bourdieu would be remissive. His theories about *habitus* are certainly very easily related to people's pull towards museums and since I in the above text has touched this a few times, explaining it further may be in its place. *Habitus* is what a human being gains when living in interchangeable milieus, her way of acting in and relating to these milieus becomes her *habitus*.[23] Which is also why not all people are drawn to the same kinds of museums, but indeed to the ones that have a connection to each person's *habitus*.

Additionally, Bourdieu's theories involve *cultural capital*, which of course also can be related to museums, but in a slightly different way. One way the human being can enrich her cultural capital is to visit museums and thus gain experiences of cultures different from her own.[24] The importance of cultural capital can very much be related to the subject of this essay – pottery. Pottery is something that has existed in all cultures for thousands of years. The look of it, the uses and the importance of it differ from culture to culture, but regardless of where a person is from she can always recognize that it is pottery – because it still exists today and is part of the lives of most human beings; probably most commonly as flower pots.

[23] Månson, P. (2007), *Moderna Samhällsteorier*, p. 406-407; Bourdieu, P. (1977), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 72.
[24] Månson, P. (2007), *Moderna Samhällsteorier*, p. 408; Bourdieu, P. (1986), "The Forms of Capital", p. 82.

Definitions

Pottery

The Oxford dictionary explains pottery as: "pots, dishes, and other articles made of fired clay. Pottery can be broadly divided into earthenware, porcelain, and stoneware."[25]

Coarseware

Coarseware as I define it in this study is all pottery that is used as every-day-objects. The definition itself varies a bit in archaeology and therefore it is important to mediate what I mean when I use the term in this essay. Using another word would have been preferable, but this word most accurately describes the kind of pottery I mean, so I chose to stick with it.

Figure 1. Egyptian coarseware pot with small inscription. See list of figures.

Depending on the location and the time period this definition changes. This is not because the material itself gets so much different, but because changes in economy and available supply also play parts. In Nordic archaeology for starters, it is rather rare to even find pottery during excavations, at least if you compare it to Classical archaeology.

The further back in time one goes, less and less pottery can be found from this area and if we are to use the same definition for coarseware as elsewhere, all of the excavated pottery would be coarseware. In Nordic collections, admittedly, pottery is usually for the poorer people while other materials have been used for the rich and therefore pottery is almost exclusively coarseware per my definition.

In southern Europe and the Middle East coarseware looks quite similar to the Nordic kind by my definition (Figure 1). However, there is a risk here for confusion between what could be considered to be fineware in Nordic archaeology and what I still think is coarseware in Classical archaeology, *i.e.* pottery, which is enhanced with images (Figures 3 and 5). In Nordic archaeology this differs from the more common bland layout, while in Classical archaeology this is sometimes considered fineware, even though it is not painted. I want to point out that in this es-

[25] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/pottery?q=pottery [2013-12-11].

say such pottery, in museums that do not concern Nordic pottery, will be considered to be coarseware.

Although I seem to have managed to give a scarce picture of different kinds of unpainted pottery, turning the eye to the Far East creates another problem. Above all China is the source of this issue. The reason for this is that China for large parts of the global history has been far ahead of the rest of the world, especially during medieval times. Therefore we can find pottery from rather early years (pre-500 AD) where both coarseware and fineware would be classified as fineware by my definition, because so much of the coarseware is painted.

In essence, no matter which museum we look at we have to look at the collections and compare the pottery within them. Comparing pottery between collections will not do and could create a conclusion to this essay that would not be logical in the real world. As a rule of thumb I consider coarseware to be pottery for everyday use or storage, such as a *hydria* or "water jug" (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Egyptian *hydria*, coarseware. See list of figures.

Shaw & Nicholson have an interesting way of describing dynastical and predynastical pottery in Egypt, which consists almost exclusively of coarseware and is thus applicable on the rest of the coarseware as well. They choose to explain it as "used for many of those purposes for which we would now use plastics".[26] This explanation reaches quite far in explaining the uses of coarseware, but I feel that I should add that urns also are added to this category, which contain bones or organs of dead humans and animals; as are *pithoi*, which are huge storage vessels usually measuring over a meter in height, used for storing food produce, *e.g.* grain or olive oil.

Rosemary Ellison is also adamant in making sure that we remember that not all pottery was made for keeping stuff in. In her article "The Uses of Pottery" she describes all of the different kinds of pottery that was used for food preparation, such as for instance sieves or funnels. She also points out that tasks such as perfume making or weaving requires several vessels not necessarily used for storage but rather for mixing.[27]

[26] Shaw, I. & Nicholson, P. (2008), *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, p. 253.
[27] Ellison, R. (1984), "The Uses of Pottery", pp. 63-68.

Porcelain

The Oxford dictionary explains porcelain as "a white vitrified translucent ceramic".[28]

Fineware

Fineware is generally easier to define than coarseware. Per my definition fineware is painted pottery in Classical archaeology. If it has images it is fineware no matter the intended use. In Nordic archaeology, fineware as I see it is rather scarce, but is generally pottery with images, even though they usually are not painted in Nordic archaeology.

Figure 3. Attic red-figure krater, fineware. See list of figures.

Once again though, the Far East poses a problem. Not only do we have the problem mentioned above with almost all pottery being painted from later time periods, but also the issue that arises during the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1271-1644 AD) where porcelain was not only mass produced but also painted with elaborate imagery. Porcelain had been around for more than 1000 years at that point and could at least until the dynasty before Yuan, the Song dynasty, have been considered to be fineware. However, it can hardly be considered to be exclusively fineware anymore during the Yuan and Ming dynasties when it starts to be mass-produced and intended for a larger part of the population.

Figure 4. Plate from China with blue paint on a white background, fineware. See list of figures.

On the other hand, just because a larger amount of people uses it, fineware does not simply become coarseware. Just as with coarseware, we have to compare the collections to each other. More elaborately painted porcelain should thus be considered fineware (such as Figure 4), while just coloured porcelain or even glazed normal pottery is now by comparison coarseware.

Because of the immense amount of different variations of pottery in the world I have chosen a specific kind of pottery to exemplify the common uses of fineware. This choice fell on red-figure pottery because it is a kind that is exhibited in most of the

[28] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/porcelain?q=porcelain [2013-12-11].

museums I have in my study. It first appeared in the late sixth century BCE and is a style where the painter paints not the pictures themselves but rather the background, thus leaving the figures the same colour as the pot, giving it the name *red-figure* (Figures 3 and 5).

Figure 5. Attic red-figure *kylix*, fineware. See list of figures.

The pottery made with this style was mostly plates, *kylikes* (sing. *kylix*), amphorae, kraters and so on, and was a sort of ceremonial pottery. *Kylikes*, plates and kraters of this kind are often connected to *symposia*[29] (sing. *symposium*), a festivity for male citizens in ancient Greece. Amphorae on the other hand are usually storage vessels and should hence be placed in the coarseware category. However, amphorae of this kind are used for a different kind of storage. The prizes at games in ancient Greece could amount up to a thousand gallons of olive oil for the first prize winner, which would be given out in red-figure amphorae.[30]

Broken pottery

Broken pottery is a category of its own in this study because I question its use in exhibitions at all. Broken pottery is essentially garbage, even to a person of ancient times since it has much less use once it is broken. It did have a niche when it was intact, but as a broken object it does not. An exception is when a sherd is used as holding place for writing, in which case the sherd itself becomes largely irrelevant but the writing is emphasized.

[29] "A private gathering for drinking and dining, and for competition in music, singing, storytelling, sexual allure, manners, taste, and argument." Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, p. 391.
[30] Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, p. 317-318.

I want to make it clear that I am fully aware of that pottery more often than not is broken when it is found, making full vessels a rare occurrence. I also want to point out that if a pot has been bumped and therefore has a visible defect I do not constitute it as broken. Broken pottery has uses for archaeologists in the sense that we can find out a tremendous amount of information from sherds, from provenance of the object to trade activity in the area. What has been stored inside it, what it is made from and how the creator made it. All of that is information the archaeologists can find out from broken pottery, but the common visitor neither knows about it nor has any particular use of knowing it since they cannot examine the objects themselves anyway.

I would also like to add that I consider sherds that have been reassembled as broken pottery. While it could be argued that these, after being reassembled, actually function the same way as intact pots do, they are still less appealing to look at; and enjoyment is an important part of the museum experience as well. Reassembled pottery often has scars of some kind – mainly glue – that makes them much less appealing to look at.

Figure 6. Broken and mended jug of white painted IV ware, broken pottery. See list of figures.

There are occasions when the conservators have had access to almost all of the original sherds from a pot and therefore have been able to reassemble it so that the scars are barely visible. In these cases they are about as good as non-broken pottery since the gaze is not immediately drawn to the scars, thus allowing them to retain their relative aesthetic appeal. The jug in Figure 6 illustrates a typical broken pot. The top part of it is missing so there is no way of seeing how tall it was. Also, it is missing so many small fragments from its body that the imagery is almost gone.

Reassembled sherds also have another downside, which is restricted to painted pottery. Namely that, since it is repaired, the original images are usually not intact and thus it is harder to interpret them.

Additionally, while doing the study I have encountered another case, which must be commented on. Namely when broken sherds are restored to the original state of the pot. Meaning that perhaps 80 percent of the pot that is exhibited is really a modern construction while only 20 percent is authentic. These should be considered as non-broken as long as they are coarseware, since the fact that they are broken is itself not a major problem when they have been restored to this point. The size, shape and similar can be seen again thanks to the restoration and thus it can be used for an educational purpose. The same does not go for restored

pots of fineware though, since the pictures rarely are restored, and it is much more evident that the pottery is broken.

Methods and Sources used

To carry out this essay I aim to use a qualitative method in the form of interviews with curators in relevant museums, as well as my personal observations of those museums. I want to use *deep interviews* as my method with a standardized but open questionnaire (see attachment 1) in order to get as much as possible out of the answers.[31] At the same time this will allow me to avoid having my own hypothesis direct the answers from the interlocutors.

Furthermore, this will allow me to ask each museum the same kinds of questions, but will not stop me from asking further questions if I feel that it is necessary. Obviously, this does not mean that I will ask leading questions, since this would ruin a lot of the purpose I have with interviewing museums. The option to ask inquiring questions is a failsafe that works two ways. It will lessen the risk of me interpreting what the museums say wrongly, as well as allowing thoughts to be aired that the standardized questions do not.

Additionally, it is important to know that the answers I get from the interlocutors not necessarily reflect the thinking process for all the exhibitions in the museums. Depending on who my contact person is and his or her role in the museum, the answers can be for all the exhibited pottery in the museum, or just the pottery in one specific exhibition. I will make this clear to the reader before the transliteration of each interview. This is not detrimental to the essay though, because the purpose of it is to show how museums think regarding the exhibiting of pottery and regardless of how many exhibitions the interlocutor has been a part of, I will still get a viewpoint on the matter.

A few additional notes about my method are that I will not be sending my questionnaire to the chosen museums before the interviews. I believe that this will allow me to get spontaneous and straight answers that will be easy to process and compare with the other museums, which is essential for the essay. Also, I will be using the recording device on my smart phone to make sure that the transcriptions are correct (given that the interlocutors allow it), as suggested by Ahrne & Eriksson-Zetterquist.[32]

Lastly, as can be seen in attachment 1, there is one additional question (the second one in the English version) specifically for the Italian museums that I am not going to ask the Swedish museums. My reasoning is, after being advised by

[31] Ahrne, G. & Eriksson-Zetterquist, U. (2011), ”Intervjuer“, p. 40-41.
[32] Ahrne, G. & Eriksson-Zetterquist, U. (2011), ”Intervjuer“, p. 53.

my supervisor, that the hierarchy is much more steep in Italian museums than in Swedish museums. Because of that it is important to make clear, not so much for the purpose of the essay, but for the reader, whether it is the museum itself or an outside source that has the last word in exhibiting objects.

My method of observation is the most standard of the four ways of observation: *the pure participant*, *the observing participant*, *the participatory observer* and *the pure observer*. In my study I will be *the participatory observer*, which means that I will be in a mostly passive state at the museums in question, solely observing the exhibitions. However, there is one important detail that differentiates this method from *the pure observer*, namely that I, by using this method, also can go out of my passive state and act in order to find out information that can explain the observations I make.[33]

If I were to use an even more passive method I might run the risk of getting an overload of questions unanswered at the end of the study. A more active method where I in fact participate in activities at the museums – for instance if I were to join a guided tour – would surely give me answers to some of the question marks I might find, but it may also prevent me from observing less obvious details.

What I will be observing is well-known museology-theoretical facts and as such the list is rather too long to be explained in full, but to describe some major points, what I will be looking at is:

- Length, position and information of textual signs. It is well-known that the longer the text on a sign is, the less likely it is that people will read it. The position also plays into this since fewer people will read a sign that is uncomfortable to read. Lastly, the information given is important because of the educational obligation that museums have.[34]
- Space versus crowding in the showcases. More space indicates that the objects are important, while overcrowding indicate the opposite, as well as making it harder for the spectator to focus on specific objects.[35] It is a well-known fact in the museum world that museums have very little space to work with in comparison to the amount of objects their collections house.
- Seating, generally in the museum but also in conjuncture with exhibited pottery.[36]

My sources are mostly going to be the chosen museums and their curators, but also literature from museum and cultural heritage studies, as well as archaeologists who have focused their work on museum collections. In the sense of the mu-

[33] Eliasson, A. (2013), *Kvantitativ metod från början*, p. 22-23.
[34] Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, pp. 39-46 and 110-114.
[35] Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, pp. 46-49. See also attachment 3.
[36] Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, p. 46.

seum curators being sources it seems self-evident since the interviewed people and thus their museums will become primary sources for the study. My observations will also work as primary sources, or rather; they will serve as mediators between the silent exhibited material and the readers of this essay.

Less evident is perhaps how literature can work as primary sources. Per definition they cannot of course. What they can do however is to give the same kind of observations as I make but for different museums, thus working in a similar mediating way as myself. Not all the literature I refer to in this essay is of this kind, but a select few are and – although they do not describe the same subject – I deem it important to include those to show that the observations I make in the chosen museums also can be made in museums in other places. The articles I have chosen are:

"A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum" by Catherine L. Cooper that describes the building of an exhibit, created in the modern era, of the sort that the museums I will observe inhabit. She describes the thought process for the cross-disciplinary team and points out positive effects of the completed exhibition hall.[37]

"Translating archaeology for the public: empowering and engaging museum goers with the past" by Alexandra A. Chan where she describes how a museum can teach archaeology to the average visitor in an understandable way. She points out why archaeological artefacts are so important to us, but at the same time explains that this is largely due to the questions the experienced archaeologists ask the material. By encouraging the average visitors to do the same they can reach the same answers as the archaeologists, thus making learning fun instead of a chore.[38]

And lastly, "The Museum of Carthage: A Living History Lesson" by Abdelmajid Ennabli that presents the site museum at the ancient city of Carthage. He describes how the museum is built and he does it in such a way that it is possible to make roughly the same kind of observations of this museum as I do with the museums in the study. There is one important thing to note about it though. This museum is a site museum and only contains material from this very excavation site, thus making their objective slightly different from the museums in the study.[39] I will return to these three later on as I discuss and compare the observed museums.

[37] Cooper, C.L. (2013), "A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK", pp. 467-490.
[38] Chan, A.A. (2011), "Translating archaeology for the public: empowering and engaging museum goers with the past", pp. 169-189.
[39] Ennabli, A. (1998), "The Museum of Carthage: A Living History Lesson", pp. 23-32.

Part Two

Study and Analysis - Swedish museums

Museum Gustavianum

Museum Gustavianum is the university museum connected to Uppsala University in Uppsala, Sweden. It is also Sweden's largest university museum. Being such, it has collections of not only archaeological material, but also anatomical, technological, historical and so on.[40] This is the only university museum in the study and as such the reader should be aware that the museum has certain issues that only concerns university museums and which may make exhibitions different than in the other museums. Therefore I ask the reader to be aware of that I, in some cases, have treated the information differently than I would have for any of the other museums.

Figure 7. The eastern exterior of Museum Gustavianum. Photo: Yvonne Backe Forsberg.

Observations

Since I, from previous experience, know fairly well what the museum's exhibitions and collections look like, I decided to start from the top of the museum where the Nordic archaeological material is exhibited.[41] The exhibition hall itself

[40] http://www.gustavianum.uu.se [2014-04-16].

[41] The room with Nordic archaeology is the smaller section visible on the bottom of the floor plan (attachment 2, plan 1). The larger room with the rest of the showcases described in the observations is the open left room on the top of the plan.

is not very large and the whole centre of the room is occupied by a reconstructed boat grave. I counted a total of four ceramic pots in this exhibition, all located in the same showcase.

The showcase itself was spacious and contained a rather well chosen mix of items where the pots were not emphasized but worked to enhance the context. Even so, I still lacked proper information about the exhibited pots. Instead, what the sign next to the showcase said was, in one case: *Clay pot, cremation grave, Viking age*. The descriptions of the other pots were similar. There are several problems with this information; apart from that it does not tell anything that an average visitor can find use for.

First of all, describing anything with the word *clay* is futile. Without knowing what kind of clay it is, or whether it is more sand-clayey or clay-sandy, the word clay does not tell us anything we cannot observe by looking at the pot itself. The description as a cremation grave is all good since it not only tells us where the material was found but also what kind of context we are looking at. Regrettably there is no explanation in conjunction with the showcase that actually describes how the cremation was done; information that certainly would be interesting to a modern reader who may only be familiar with modern cremation chambers. Lastly, although a minor detail, telling a visitor that this grave is dated to the Viking age without informing them about when that in fact was, cannot be seen as sufficiently educational information.

Having examined this I ventured downstairs to the hall containing the Egyptian, Nubian, Greek and Roman material. As I explained in the introduction, this was where the idea for this essay first sprung. Something I realised rather quickly though was that describing to the reader what I was looking at was going to be rather difficult. For myself I numbered the showcases, but since they do not have any numbers of their own I found it best to describe my way through the exhibition differently. When I entered the doors I immediately turned left towards the Nubian and Egyptian pottery. I then proceeded along the wall all the way around the exhibit.

The first showcase, placed against the wall, was crowded with Egyptian pottery and had no descriptions. Thus there is not much else to say about it. As Keene might describe it, it may be fitting for an Exhibition Centre, but not for a museum.[42] The case next to this one was rather different, suggesting that it might be newer. The exhibited Nubian pottery, a good mix of different pots, was accompanied by relatively good explanations, one bowl even having a handful of stones in it to symbolize food (which was explained). Unfortunately, that bowl was the only

[42] Keene, S. (2005), *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*, p. 35. More specifically chapter 3, *Collections*, pp. 25-44.

one that had a clear intended use. The rest of the bowls, although different in looks, may of course easily be deduced by the spectator that they too could have had symbolic food in them. However, one of the bowls did not have the usual rounded bottom but instead had a pointed bottom, seemingly making it impractical to use. This shape is not all too unusual in older (comparatively) Egyptian and Nubian pottery, but for the inexperienced viewer an explanation of its use may be favourable.[43]

The next showcase seemed to be parted in two, with the upper half being rather spacious with a good mix of objects, but like the previous case the intended use for the objects was unclear, although a good description of them was available. The lower part was contextualized as a grave, with a pot for perfume storage and three canopic jars for the dead person's organs; an altogether pleasing showcase.[44] Also the adjacent showcase was centred around a grave and there were adequate explanations for the pottery. Hence there is nothing to say about it other than praise.

The next showcase containing pottery also was contextualized around a grave and like a previous showcase it contained canopic jars for the organs of the dead. The previous one only had three though, while this one had a complete set (four). Therefore I did not comment on the lack of describing information about it in the last showcase, but here I will. While the description indeed does explain that these jars would have contained organs, it does not explain which ones, how they were matched towards the jars or the mummification process.[45] Although perhaps not connected to the pottery that I am examining in this essay, the information also told the viewer how the heart was left inside the body but that the brain was discarded. It could perhaps also be interesting to explain the reasons for that practice to an unknowing spectator.

Further into the exhibition hall was a showcase comparing an early Christian grave to a pagan grave. An interesting context in itself with a good mix of objects to describe it, but once again a lacklustre amount of information about what the items were actually used for.

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[43] Shaw, I. (2000), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 122-124. This is one of the many cases where pottery really shines through for archaeologists. The pointed bottom pottery, or *ovoid pottery* as Ian Shaw calls it, is mostly found from the time before the invention of the potter's wheel. After the invention of the potter's wheel the shape of the pottery turns more bag like, into the shape that we more commonly see.

[44] Canopic jars are ceramic or stone vessels for the burial of the intestines removed during the mummification ritual. The body would first be washed in natron solution after which the intestines were removed and thence dried, rinsed and bandaged before being placed in the canopic jars. Shaw, I. & Nicholson, P. (2008), *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, p. 67, 212.

[45] Evidence suggests that the practice first started during the 4th dynasty with the burial of Hetepheres, mother of pharaoh Khufu (Cheops). Later during the dynasty the organs of the buried came under the protection of certain gods. The goddess Isis protected the liver, her sister Nephthys the lungs, Neith the stomach and Serket the intestines. Shaw, I. & Nicholson, P. (2008), *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, p. 67-68.

The next couple of showcases depicted the excavated material from Sinda (on Cyprus) and Asine (in Greece). Both almost completely lacked information of any sort, with the Sinda case only having a more proper description for one of the pots, which has been reused as a lamp, and the Asine case only really containing two pots that could be considered in shape for exhibiting, the rest of the pottery were either broken pots or simply sherds.

A nice contrast to these two was the Cyprus showcase that came next, placed against the far wall. This showcase contained pottery of both coarseware and fineware, as well as figurines and a few busts at the far end to really emphasize the context of a clash between cultures. The shelves in the showcase were really well arranged so that each pot had a decent amount of space as well as the smaller pots being at a level where they were easy to observe, with the larger ones being either on the floor or further up, which was fine because of their size. The information given varied a bit in the display, from a couple of bowls that were described as specifically "milk bowls" to a *kylix* described simply as a "drinking bowl". The specified description as milk bowls was of course a positive addition, while the *kylix* ought to get an added line that explains what was actually drunk from it.

The next showcase with pottery shifted nicely from the Cyprus one, where there were mostly larger objects. This one contained a large amount of objects of smaller size, although certainly not cluttered. Once again the description for the *kylix* failed to explain what was actually drunk from it. On the other hand, the *hydria* in the case was properly described as a water jug. A small detail that I noticed though was that this specification only existed in the English translation, while the Swedish version only described the jug as a *hydria*, without the added explanation.

The adjacent case was a surprising one for me. A quick look at it told me that this one only contained a myriad of different coloured pots. As such, I would have expected it to be more of a show-off than an educational showcase. That was not the case because when I studied it closer I found that this was really to show the variety of pottery within the Mediterranean area. Also the information given about these pots was good, with information both of what kind they were and what their usage was.

Following this excellent showcase were however two that were not so (I had to walk past a few cases that did not contain any pottery). The first one of these two had lacklustre information about the pottery as well as a large amount of pure sherds, of which only one was there with the purpose of showing the writing inscribed on it. The other case did not seem to have been very well thought through. Although containing a handful of pots, the sole information given to them was that they were ceramic bowls. Certainly not a useful description for the average museum visitor, but hardly even so for the average archaeologist either.

At the end of the hall was another showcase with a grave context where the pots – with adequate information – were there to enhance the context. The very

last display was an exhibit about writing in ancient times, where a few pots were added to serve a somewhat different purpose. Two of them were there not because they had writing on them, but because their shape essentially mimicked letters from an ancient language (Linear B).[46] There was also a pot with Italic writing on it, possibly Etruscan but not necessarily so. Texts inside the showcase explain the interpretations of these writings. A nice ending to the exhibition hall that showed a use of pottery that is seldom emphasized in museums, even though text on pottery is not rare to see.

Interview

The person interviewed here had not been a part in the making of all of the showcases, but routinely guides in these exhibitions and felt comfortable answering questions about all the exhibited pottery. The interview was conducted in Swedish.[47]

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: Mainly Ethnology, with Egyptology and Classical Archaeology on the side, as well as some History.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: It is ceramics, not just pottery, but ceramics, that is found mainly during excavations; therefore it is the nicest looking things that are exhibited. Here the focus is on showing how a grave from prehistoric (pre-3100 BCE) time looks like. It contains material that is older than the hieroglyphs and instead they have an imagery, which is explained during tours. [We are sitting next to a showcase with contents from a grave when the interlocutor tells me this.]

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: Neither one is preferred over the other. What we look at instead is how intact it is. They have to fit within time periods and it has to be typical for the context.

[46] Linear B was an early form of writing Greek, which Michael Ventris showed in 1952. It is a language of syllabaries, *i.e.* with 80-100 signs standing for syllables. Shelmerdine, C.W. (2008), "Background, Sources, and Methods", p. 11-12.

[47] The interviews conducted in Swedish have later been translated to English by me to fit the template of the essay. Also, because of the length of the interviews, only the most relevant parts are shown in the essay.

On top of that we choose to neglect half pots so that we can glue them together later on if we find more sherds from that pot. That is much harder to do if they are in a showcase than if they are easily accessible in storage. [After this we head over to the Classical part of the exhibit.] Here there is a lot of imagery on the pottery.

Me: This requires knowledge of the Iliad and the Odyssey, but there are no explanations for this, what are your thoughts about that?

A: One does not have to understand everything one sees, and we discuss the amount of text all the time. Moreover you have to remember that we are a university museum and that the people who are interested in the pottery usually are those who are educated within the subject. If people want real explanations they will have to join a guided tour.

Me: About the explanation for the *kylix*, why do you not explain what is drunk from it?

A: One has to understand it. After all, one can drink anything from a *kylix*.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: We have such in the Asine and Sinda showcases, but I do not know why we exhibit those sherds. However, one has to remember that we are a university museum so not everything in here is made so that anyone can understand it. A part of it is made for those who are part of the university or in some other way are at another level [of education].

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: Because it is from a specific time period. We exhibit the pots because we do not have anything else to put there. It has to look aesthetical. I would never show this to a school class, they would fall asleep then. [We were talking about a specific showcase, the one that I explained in the observation as containing three canopic jars.]

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: No. We have a lot more pottery in storage. Besides we are a university museum and part of our mission is to have our material accessible for researchers and students, therefore we want to keep most of it in storage.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: Yes, certainly. The archaeological material does not look like so, but if it did we would. [We venture over to a showcase containing four models, 4000 years old (from the Middle Kingdom), depicting everyday work processes in ancient Egypt.] If we had more of these we would have exhibited them instead of pottery.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: The museum seldom gets reactions, especially about the pottery. Oftentimes it is about the texts or the mummy. Probably because it [the pottery] is something that people are familiar with, it is nothing new.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: One does not have to understand that much really. The imagery speaks for itself and the important thing to understand is where in time each showcase is from. What fascinates is that it is so old.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: Yes, for sure. The exhibition hall is rather old as it is so it cannot do that on its own. Instead it has to be through guides during tours and then it is more dependant on the guide than the object itself to create interaction.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: Yes, and we do not always agree on how to do it. It is popular today with hands-on, but it is problematic with such old material. Sometimes we can use stone axes, which are not so sensitive and that can be touched. We are not supposed to show stuff just for the sake of showing it, we are meant to tell a story.

Me: Most of the showcases in here are created contexts while the showcase with pottery up in the Nordic exhibit is from a specific grave, right?

A: Yes, exactly. That exhibit was remade, previously it showed material from the Stone Age and onwards, but we chose to remake it to show Valsgärde instead, which is one of our most important [Nordic] excavation locations.

Medelhavsmuseet

Medelhavsmuseet (Eng. "the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities") is one of five museums in the museum group called "Världskulturmuseerna" (Eng. "the National Museums of World Culture"). It is located in Stockholm, Sweden. Inside one can find varying archaeological material from ancient Greece, ancient Rome, ancient Egypt and the early Middle East.[48]

Figure 8. The entrance to Medelhavsmuseet. Photo: Yvonne Backe Forsberg.

Observations

Having been to Medelhavsmuseet[49] a few times before I knew fairly well what to expect in terms of exhibited pottery in the museum. Nonetheless it was an interesting experience to go through the museum and look at it with the eyes of a museologist rather than an archaeologist.

The first exhibition one enters in the museum is the Cyprus exhibition, which contains a lot of different objects and is not at all excluded to pottery alone. However, the showcases are almost exclusively overcrowded with material, which makes it rather difficult to distinguish what the signs are referring to inside the glass. The room where this exhibition is located is large and open, with the showcases placed so that they are screened-off from the Greek and Roman parts, which are also in the same large room. Hence it is hard to describe my way through the exhibition in detail.

Not only are the showcases in this exhibition crowded with pottery, but on top of that the spaces in between the pots have been filled with knives, spearheads, figurines and so on. This is of course a double-edged sword. On the one hand exhibiting items this way creates a rather comfortable context where it is easy to see how each object is connected to one another. On the other hand though, it also makes it hard to focus on a specific object.

The showcase itself becomes the object and thus we lose the potential educational part of the exhibition in exchange for almost nothing. Creating this kind of easily understandable context is of course very good, but only as far as the visitor understands the objects to begin with, something that requires the ability to study

[48] http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/medelhavsmuseet [2014-04-16].

[49] The Cyprus exhibit is in the large open part visible on the floor plan (attachment 2, plan 2). To the left of it on the plan is the Egyptian exhibit, with the small room with larger vessels being above that on the plan. The Greek and Roman exhibit is to the right of the Cyprus exhibit, with the Upper Gallery being on the floor above that.

them one at a time with an accurate and simple description of each object. The signs in this particular exhibition were of the kind that does not favour the average visitor. They were obviously taken straight out of a database and followed the pattern: *object description*, *category*, *provenance* and *date*. By "object description" I do not mean an in-depth description of the object but merely a single word pointing out which object in the showcase the sign refers to.

A nice contrast to this exhibition was the next room, which is found at the back of the museum. This room only contained a few vessels and although they were of the large kind they made the room feel more welcoming. The signs in this room were extraordinary in the sense that they not only described what each object were and which time period they came from, but they also contained a more detailed description of how the vessels were used. Another positive thing about this room was the fact that chairs was placed around the small room to allow visitors to sit down while looking at the pottery. Normally this would be an inconvenience since pottery has to be studied from a close distance, but because of the size of these vessels the ability to sit was a great addition, especially since it is otherwise hard to prevent museum fatigue[50] in museums like this.

That being said there were still a few things that bothered me in the room. First of all, the signs' positioning were rather ill chosen. I tried to figure out whom they were for but drew a blank. They were too low for an average size adult to read comfortably (I had to crouch) so I figured that a person in a wheelchair might be in the right height, but after having tried that it rather seemed like if the sign was for a toddler – which the language certainly was not. One of the signs was even slightly behind a vessel, making it rather difficult to read comfortably. Among the chosen vessels was one that was broken into pieces and then reassembled, both removing the aesthetical part of the experience and also, because the pattern was broken, failing to show how the full vessel would have looked like.

Another thing that bothered me in this room were the showcases themselves. The lightening in them seemed sub optimal for their purpose and the cases actually prevented the visitor from studying them fully. For one you were prevented from walking around them. You also could not look down into them to study the patterns inside or perhaps even see the markings from any liquid that may have been stored inside. Since this is what I myself like to do with pottery it probably

[50] Jeong, J.-H. & Lee, K.-H. (2006), "The physical environment in museums and its effects on visitors' satisfaction", pp. 963-969. Graham Black (2012) has in *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century* simplified their discussion and explains museum fatigue as "[…] a decrease in the visitor's ability to engage, followed by a rapid decline in the quality of the visitor experience; as a result, the exit becomes the most attractive element in the exhibition. Fatigue in a museum is both physical and mental. It is the result of the size of the museum or exhibition and related staying time, the complexity of circulation, the density and uniformity of display, overcrowding, noise levels and thermal discomfort", p. 66-67.

bothered me more than it would an average visitor, but nonetheless it prevented potential learning from being done.

I got a positive surprise when looking at the World of Myths/Symposium exhibition, which one gets to by exiting the small room and following the back wall past the gold room. It showed mostly fineware with images of scenes from the Iliad and the Odyssey.[51] Consequently the descriptions not only told me what each pot pictured but they also told me what they were used for, *e.g.* wine drinking, storage, mixing or similar. The only thing I really found myself lacking was what was actually mixed in a krater (see Figure 3), which is a large open vessel used for mixing wine and water. It was merely described as a mixing vessel.

Climbing the stairs to the Upper Gallery I told myself to keep an open mind, despite knowing what was coming. That hardly helped since the Upper Gallery essentially is everything that I dislike about many pottery exhibitions. It consists of a large number of showcases, each one containing a different context. From just pottery relating to different areas that look the same as one another to more elaborate ones such as every day objects or figurines.

What are completely omitted in this exhibition are signs explaining what anything inside the glass actually is. Folders can be obtained for information through text, but although they do explain something about the time these items come from, they do not in fact connect to any of them. Instead they tell stories about the circumstances of these objects, which would be all well and good, *if* there were in fact an explanation for these things in the first place, which there is not. Admittedly I can find it amusing to look at the different kinds of pottery and see the redware[52] and the bucchero,[53] and their brighter contrast from the southern Mediterranean, but the educational purpose in an exhibition like this is hard to see, except perhaps for a university class.

A brand new exhibition that opened its doors on February 22nd 2014 is the remade Egyptian exhibition. I was unable to see it the first time around because it was under reconstruction, but I caught it on opening day and the change from the old one was quite remarkable. One gets to the exhibition by turning left instantly

[51] Homeros, *The Iliad* & Homeros, *The Odyssey*.
[52] Redware (or red-figure) pottery is "a technique for painting pottery that was the direct opposite of *black-figure*: the background painted black with figures left the color of the clay. Contours and interior details were added with *relief lines* or dilute *slip* (original emphasizes)." Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, p. 391. For a description of black-figure see note 75, p. 60, in this document. For more information on red-figure pottery see for example Boardman, J. (1989), *Athenian red figure vases: the classical period: a handbook* and Boardman, J. (1975), *Athenian red figure vases: the archaic period: a handbook*.
[53] Bucchero pottery is a black (or sometimes grey) kind of pottery that was popular in Etruria. The making process built upon closing off the oxygen intake during the firing process to turn the red clay black. See Del Chiaro, M.A. (1966), "Etruscan Bucchero Pottery", p. 98.

when entering the museum proper and a carpet that essentially is a map of Egypt lies below the feet.

The first room was showing the pre-dynastical times of the region and as such most of the material was either pottery or stone. There was no sufficient information about these objects though and seemingly they were there to show what kind of material the museum has from these times. The showcases against the left wall were quite spacious and had decent contexts, but lacked information about the actual exhibited material. The one in the very right corner was not so though. Instead it was crammed with coarseware of different sizes and shapes; making it hard to both focus on individual objects and even to see some of the objects in the back. Which of course made them quite pointless.

The very next room did not contain any pottery, but the one after did. Judging it was a bit difficult because it was not a lot of it and some of it was there as placeholders for writings and not pottery *per se*. Because it was not a lot of it the pottery did obviously have enough space to not be crowded, but information about them was really lacking, explaining only what the pots were and not what they were used for.

The previous room worked as a sort of antechamber to the room that came after and which contained all sorts of stuff from ancient Egypt. From fishing tools or sewing equipment to jewellery and clothing. Pottery was almost exclusively used as contextual material in here. One particular showcase sparked some special interest though. It was filled with small bowls, jugs and jars, and showed different kinds of seed that would have been eaten in Egypt. Also oils or other food was explained for the pots. To clarify, since this is quite uncommon, the bowls actually contained these things and was not just put to the side or simply explained on a sign, making this a showcase one can really appreciate without prior knowledge of the region.

Downstairs in the basement were two rooms containing pottery. The first one had different kinds of canopic jars with semi-sufficient information. Like at Museum Gustavianum, it was explained what they were used for but not in great detail, leaving out information about what each jar would have contained. That being said, they were put up rather spacious and on the very top shelf making it easier to see them than it would have been if they had been on the floor.

The adjacent room had a huge showcase meant to portray what a grave would look like. Pottery was there of course and in large amounts, which was to be expected considering how rich Egyptian tombs usually look like. However, unlike when pots are used to show the contents of a specific grave, this was made to show how a tomb could look like and then the pots have no personal context at all. Therefore I consider it worse that there were no explanations at all for the pottery than if they were simply scraps from a grave. On top of that I found that the positioning of the pottery was not very well thought through. Some of the pots were

standing behind larger objects making them hard to see and making their use in the exhibition questionable.

Exiting the Egyptian exhibition was a small room depicting the Arabic culture. The exhibition that was here before it was remade used to be quite large, but was now reduced to one room. Thus it did not contain too much pottery. The pottery that was there was really disappointing though. Not a single full vessel was exhibited. Instead there was a glass case in the middle of the room filled with sherds of different kinds. Apparently (from the sign next to it) to show the different kinds of pottery in the Arabic world, as well as influences from China.

Interview

The person interviewed from this museum had only been part of the making of the new Egyptian exhibit and these answers are therefore about that exhibit alone. However, the interlocutor had also done some inquiring among the personnel about the Upper Gallery mentioned above and informed me that no one who had worked on it was still employed at the museum, but that the general consensus was that it is there mostly to be an aesthetical environment for people eating at the café. The interview was conducted in Swedish.

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: Egyptology.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: From my viewpoint it is mostly about choosing objects to tell a story. We want to create a three-dimensional story about Egypt. After that comes the design.

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: Coarseware, but it is a conscious choice based on the goal of the exhibition, which is to emphasize the average person. It was more important for the story we want to mediate to exhibit coarseware than to exhibit more aesthetical fineware.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: Yes, even sherds. It is to show how thick the pottery is in cross section. We also want to show on a chronological development and we have nothing else to exhibit. They are restored but one can still see the glue, so it is obvious that they are broken.

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: It is partly because we have so much pottery, partly because it is a part of the government's assignment for us to make the collections available; also partly because they look nice in a group and hence it is aesthetical, and partly because we want to show more objects. Lastly, in the case with graves, it is to show how they [the Egyptians] go from burying just one pot with food to a larger amount of pottery in the graves, which illustrates a different social order.

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: No, there is no space. Besides, I think we have what we want to display exhibited. There can be too much pottery and there are a lot of other things we also want to show. From the start I had chosen 2000 objects for the exhibition but I had to reduce the number to 1600 instead and there were probably a bit of pottery among those.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: No, we felt that this was probably enough. We are very dependant on pottery to tell a story about life in ancient Egypt.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: The exhibition is really new so we have not had the time to perform any surveys yet. About the red pottery I believe they think of it as beautiful. Differences in the contrast is also something I think they see, as well as how normal people had it during these times.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: We want them to learn about Egypt's cultural history. About how it was to be a normal human being in ancient Egypt. We also have films that show tasks that were carried out in the villages, so *life* is probably what we mostly want them to understand.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: Partly, through films and imagery on the pottery – that is explained. We have also thought about having a workshop where people can make pottery themselves, but we do not have an appropriate room in the museum that can stand water.

Me: If you had such a room, would you have it open for everyone, not just schools?

A: Possibly, if it was waterproof.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: Yes, the grave in the basement is created. It is a chronological mishmash of objects, but it is just to show how it really looked like in a grave. Visitors seem to appreciate that milieu more. Additionally, pottery gets a different role there so it is easier to understand how it belongs in the context.

Figure 9. Östasiatiska museet from the bridge leading to the museum. Photo: Author.

Östasiatiska Museet

Östasiatiska Museet (Eng. ”the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities”) is located on Skeppsholmen in Stockholm, Sweden. Like Medelhavsmuseet it is part of Världskulturmuseerna. It contains material from China, from ancient times until the twentieth century, as well as material from Korea and Japan. Most of it is archaeological material, but there is also an extensive exhibition of China’s literary history as well as exhibited material from the late king Gustaf VI Adolf who was a vivid enthusiast of archaeology.[54]

Observations

Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm has a lot of pottery.[55] Unlike in Western archaeology though, the Far Eastern archaeology is extremely varied because of how different the history is in the area. Although the first exhibition hall showing China’s history in many ways resembles a hall one might see at a museum about early

[54] http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/ostasiatiskamuseet [2014-04-16]; Mark, J., Classon, C. & Giordano, L. (2004), *Kungen som grävde*, pp. 14-16.

[55] The floor plan (attachment 2, plan 3) is read from the bottom up. None of the described exhibits are on the bottom floor; instead they start on the right side in the second picture. There are the two exhibits about China, with the one about Japan being on the floor above those. The Korean exhibit is to the far left on the upper level.

Egyptian history, early Aegean history or perhaps even Etruscan history; what comes in the following hall strongly differentiates from the usual progress in the West.

The first hall in the history of China, called "China before China" is an exhibition that by and large spoke well to my pedagogical interest. A large model of an early settlement is set up within the hall and is accompanied by both a short fictional story of the settlement and a note that encourages you to touch anything you want in the model. Another plus is the added Braille[56] so that even a blind person could read the story and touch the model. Additionally there are a couple of sherds fastened to the board so that a visitor can feel what pottery feels like and get a sense of connection with the material. All of this creates a great context to the rest of the exhibition that consists mostly of pottery.

I would even claim that a lot of the pottery is well chosen with a great variation. It is interesting to look at, especially since it includes pots that are unique for this period and region, vessels that are very high with a pointed bottom. On the other hand, the lightening of the corners in the first showcase is really lacking and like my concerns expressed in *Theoretical benchmarks and questions* (page 9) explains, there is really an extensive amount of pottery in this – admittedly large – showcase. This makes it hard to focus on one pot and to study it. There are also a bunch of smaller pots exhibited high in the showcase, making them slightly harder to single out and very difficult to study at all.

The museum has made a sort of band aid solution to this by adding a sign that highlights a few chosen pots in the showcase and actually explains a bit more about them. This prompts two questions from my side. First, if these are the pots the museum finds the most important or interesting to show, why does the museum not just show these, instead of crowding them together with twenty other pots? Secondly, with this added sign comes the opportunity of explaining what purpose each of these chosen pots had in ancient times so that the average visitor might get a picture of how a person at the time might use them, why are such explanations not provided?

In this same exhibition there is a showcase of a grave, complete with a skeleton and the urns around it. Yet again though, when I tried to find out more information about a specific urn there (one that was filled with skeleton parts) I drew a blank. Surely it would not have been hard or costly to add a bit more information about the actual objects in the showcase and a bit less about the man who happened to excavate the grave? The grave in itself is really a great exhibit; it is easy to understand for anyone and in the next hall one can read about how people were buried along with food. Which of course gives the conclusion that the bones I was

[56] Defined as: "a form of written language for blind people, in which characters are represented by patterns of raised dots that are felt with the fingertips", www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Braille?q=braille [2014-02-03].

looking for information about most likely are animal bones and that the rest of the urns in the grave also contain various things the dead will need in the afterlife.

That is something that I as an archaeologist can see and understand because I am used to seeing it and I know that is how it was done in for instance ancient Egypt. Could the average visitor come to this conclusion though? Considering that the lack of information in the first room is more likely to frustrate or perhaps even bore the common visitor rather than spark interest I doubt that person would connect the two showcases (which after all are in different halls) and come to the same conclusion.

In the next hall ”The Middle Kingdom” exhibition is located. I really liked the layout of this exhibition because it is still easy to follow all the way through even if you do not know anything about Chinese history. There are also small notes in this exhibition about a lot of the objects, which makes it a lot easier to understand what one is looking at. However, information about the pottery is once again mostly left out. I say mostly because I was pleasantly surprised when I saw that one of the jars was described as a “wine jar”. This is a very small detail of course, but it is all that it takes to change the thought from *oh, another pot…* to *oh I see, so that is like an ancient wine bottle?* It may even seem trivial to point out, but this is the kind of information that I miss for almost all of the exhibited pottery.

Jumping quickly to the Japanese hall, which is on the level below the Chinese hall, where a whole showcase contained different teacups and tea-caddies. Here one can easily see the similarities in simplicity. Instead of just exhibiting them as cups or pots the exhibitor has gone through the process of adding the word “tea” to all of the object descriptions. Once again this seems really trivial, but it is also what transforms the whole showcase to an interesting window into the tea drinking culture of past Japan and gives the pottery in the showcase an identity rather than being just another pottery collection in a museum.

Back in ”The Middle Kingdom” exhibition I really got to question my definition of fineware and coarseware explained in *Definitions*. The early age showcases showed a good variety of not only fineware and coarseware but also other objects, creating a great context for each window of time that these showcases represented. Further into the exhibition this changed though. The pottery started to be all painted and porcelain was added to the picture. Suddenly all of the pottery was amazing to look at and really showed the impressive skills of the past Chinese people. Small signs along the borders of the showcases explained either the names of the time periods or had some note about the objects inside.

The further into the exhibition I got the more obvious it got what the different pottery was used for. In the late Ming and early Qing periods it was clear to see that a cup was really a teacup or that a plate was a plate. Somewhere in the exhibition there was even a note explaining that glass had now entered the common

household but that porcelain was still being mass produced because it was more practical for tea drinking – a really interesting note that justifies the exhibiting of the pottery.

At the end of the exhibition hall I found myself thinking that some of the pottery could have been left out. Although a lot of it made up for a great story from the early dynasties of China up until the trading routes that connects the Swedish East Indian Trading Company with that part of the world I still felt that it was too much. The pottery was a great help in emphasizing the context in each showcase, but when some showcases showed only ceramics I found myself questioning why this apparently was so much more important than the earlier exhibited pottery.

The Korean exhibit really did not impress at all. Although my guess on the lack of content was that Korea shared a large part of its history with China, my concerns were still more about the exhibited pottery than with the exhibit itself. I hoped that the exhibit was still a work in progress because the notes accompanying each pot were put at a side of the showcase. Each note corresponded to a number – per usual – but unlike the usual exhibition technique it was not clear to which pot each number adhered. Visitors would thus have to guess relying on the information about the pots, which described what the pot looked like and what dating it had, but did not explain what it in fact was used for.

Interview

This interview was conducted in English with the English template, but without the second question about political involvement since this is a Swedish museum. The interlocutor was comfortable answering about all the exhibitions, but made clear that some of them had been created before the interlocutor came to the museum.

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: Anthropology, Art and Archaeology.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: The main point is learning so education is a very important aspect if not the most important aspect. Aesthetics are also important though because a lot of people look to the aesthetics in objects.

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: It depends on the message we are trying to get through. Korean ceramics are not always made as fine or perfect as Chinese pottery and you also have a Japanese movement around more coarse ceramics. I think if you look at the Chinese exhibit the previous curators have chosen mostly things that are nice to look at, but if a pot fits the message we want to mediate, it does not really matter if it is aesthetic or not. So I guess you can say it depends on what message we are trying to get out.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: Yes, we exhibit sherds. We have a bit of an exhibit about a man named Palmgren who specifically studied Chinese sherds so we have some sherds exhibited to talk about Palmgren (after the interview the interlocutor showed me a book about Chinese sherds, by Palmgren,[57] in a showcase). Other than that I think that we try to exhibit non-broken pottery as much as we can, but if it fits the concept of the exhibition plan we can surely exhibit sherds.

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: I do not think they are identical really. They may look identical but they may have different patterns or one may have handles while another does not.

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: We do not really question ourselves whether we want to exhibit more or less pots. Rather it is a question about the exhibitions we make and what fits into them. We may exhibit more if it fits the goal, but we may also exhibit less if pottery is not the best way to mediate our message of a particular exhibit.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: Perhaps in the Korean exhibit. At the moment it is very ceramics heavy because most of the material we have from Korea are ceramics. So there we might remove some pottery in favour of other material if we could.

[57] Palmgren, N., Steger, W. & Sundius, N. (1963), *Sung Sherds*.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: We want everyone to be able to learn something. On the one hand we might have young schoolchildren who may not even know of the regions they are looking at, but on the other hand we may have visitors in the form of collectors who know more about specific pottery than the curators do.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: In ”China before China” we want them to see the different shapes in the pottery there and to know about [Johan Gunnar] Andersson (the founder of Chinese archaeology).[58] It also talks a bit about Neolithic life in China and shows how life was like in the Neolithic. In ”The Middle Kingdom” we want them to see how the chronology changes material. Like during the Bronze Age, bronze was really popular. During the East Indian Trade Company there were imports of pottery from China and we display how such pottery looked like compared to domestic pottery at the same time. In the Japan gallery I think the concept is that every object tells a story.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: Yes, absolutely. We use pottery to talk about Gustaf VI Adolf. We can also talk about the history of an object or a collector over time by using pottery.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: Yes. There are discussions about what we can do with particular objects. We want to tell a story and we need objects to tell it so there is definitely a discussion about that. Or if we have a bunch of objects that we want to tell a story about we have to decide what story we want to tell.

[58] Fiskesjö, M. & Chen, X. (2004), *China before China: Johan Gunnar Andersson, Ding Wenjiang, and the discovery of China's prehistory: a companion guide for the exhibit at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities: bilingual edition, in English and Chinese*.

Figure 10. The main entrance to Historiska museet. Photo: Author.

Historiska Museet

Historiska Museet (Eng. "the Swedish History Museum") in Stockholm, Sweden, is focused on Swedish history from the Stone Age until modern times with the more heavy focus on important parts of the Swedish history; such as the Iron Age village Birka, the Vikings, the Medieval period and also a special exhibition dedicated solely to gold. Hence the museum has a strong archaeological focus, but it is limited to Nordic archaeology.[59]

Observations

Historiska Museet[60] in Stockholm has an unexpectedly large amount of pottery exhibited. Considering that it is a museum of Nordic history exclusively I thought that pottery would be scarce. That was not the case. Instead I found myself looking at pottery in several different exhibitions: Prehistories, Vikings and the History of Sweden respectively. Since it was divided across three different exhibitions I am going to share my observations for each one separately.

The pottery in the Prehistories exhibition was as one might expect mostly broken and not very pleasing to look at. While that did not encourage me, what the

[59] http://historiska.se [2014-04-16].

[60] The floor plan (attachment 2, plan 4) for this museum looks slightly messy. Regrettably there is little to do about that since it has more to do with the layout of the museum than anything else. I think that trying to explain exactly where the exhibits are would do more bad than good, but it might be helpful to know that the exhibits follow the out walls, with the large open space in the middle are actually outdoor areas.

museum had done to contextualize them was a positive surprise, although quite controversial. Among the grave goods, urns could be found containing the bones of deceased children. Of course there is an ethical aspect to this that could be discussed, but since it is not what this essay is about I am going to ignore that. Instead I intend to focus on the positives of that particular exhibiting style.

While looking at children's bones in a clay urn may seem macabre and perhaps even frightening to some people, doing so within the walls of a museum and in relation to other items from the era in which the children died, may make the experience seem all the better. And not only that, it makes it real. As Sandra H. Dudley puts it:

> What would it be like for visitors more often than not to be able to read […] but also to experience an embodied engagement with that object and thus form their own ideas and/or tangible physical connection with those who made and used it in the past?[61]

Furthermore, in chapter three in Dudley's book Andrea Witcomb describes a miniature model of Treblinka and the reactions people have of the dramatic sight.[62] It is a very pedagogical, although a bit crude, way of making people interested and engaging with the objects. It is in this way the urns containing bones of deceased children actually becomes a positive experience for a museum visitor, rather than a frightening way of exhibiting pottery which could be perceived at first sight.

However, not all of the pottery exhibited in Prehistories was accompanied by bones. All of it was broken coarseware and although the above-described urns were interesting to look at, the rest were dull and sometimes badly displayed. Young as I am I had no problem getting down to the floor to be able to examine the jars down there, but what if I was elderly or disabled? While I realise that pottery, and especially non-broken pottery, is very scarce for Nordic museums, aesthetics is a rather important part for the general visitor and looking at these pots would hardly please the average person. Win Yan Vivian Ting has made a study regarding what people look at when they study museum objects. Her results suggest that almost 60 percent (93 out of 158) of visitors will look to aesthetics first.[63] Important to point out here is that the other 40 percent do not necessarily neglect aesthetics completely; it is just not their first thought. On the other hand, these numbers show that almost 60 percent of Ting's subject base would not care for the pottery exhibited in this exhibition.

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[61] Dudley, S.H. (2010), "Museum materialities: objects, sense and feeling", p. 4.

[62] Witcomb, A. (2010), "Remembering the dead by affecting the living: the case of a miniature model of Treblinka", pp. 39-52.

[63] Ting, W.Y.V. (2008), "Communicating Chinese ceramics: a study of material culture theory in selected museums in Britain" in Ting, W.Y.V. (2010), "Dancing pot and pregnant jar? On ceramics, metaphors and creative labels", p. 190.

In the Vikings exhibition there was less pottery since times had shifted and tin, copper and iron had now partly taken over. There was still some pottery though and I found myself looking at a large jar, perhaps three feet wide that the museum had put in a glass showcase on the floor, with a bench next to it. While the exhibition technique was actually quite pleasing since it gave me an option to sit down and examine the object from above (an option that sadly is quite rare when it comes to pottery) I strongly questioned why that jar was there. Not only was it broken in a myriad of pieces and then reassembled, it also missed its bottom part so there was not even a way – despite it being (partly) reassembled – to see what the original jar had looked like. Nor was there any information about date, origin or what it had been used for. As an archaeologist I could guess based on the thickness, the height, the smoothness and similar, but would the average visitor be able to do so?

The History of Sweden exhibition was a mix of a different materials and eras of Swedish history from the end of the Viking age to modern times. Therefore the pottery also had different contexts throughout the exhibition. In the early age showcases the pottery was put up as if on pedestals, yet without any other information than description, provenance and date. On the positive side the pottery was mostly intact, but without a proper context (apart from other pots) or information about them there was not much one could learn from them.

Further into the exhibition the pottery changed as time had changed the purpose of it as well as added other materials for storage, *e.g.* copper. This is a golden opportunity for a museum exhibitor to create a strong pedagogical point in what happens over time in our country. Yet they had chosen (or omitted?) to completely skip it. Let me explain why an exhibition like this can be so much better than it is in its current state.

People who come to museums are usually not looking to be educated. If they wanted to be educated they would read a book or go to a class. They come to a museum because they want to learn, but being educated bores them.[64] By making it easy to see changes in time – like in this exhibition – visitors can come to correct conclusions on their own. However, with the lack of actual information and with the seemingly random distribution of objects in the halls, this becomes significantly harder to see.

A thoroughgoing problem with the whole museum was that the signs or information folders were as if picked straight out of a database. My concern is of course solely with the descriptions of the pottery. After only a few minutes I started repeating the same words to myself: "description, provenance, date". That was

[64] Wehner, K. & Sear, M. (2010), "Engaging the material world: object knowledge and *Australian Journeys*", p. 151.

all the information the museum provided for the interested visitor. If you wanted to have a clue of what you were looking at you had to go and grab a folder and look for the showcase and the item, only to find information that did not help you understand the object in any way. A typical description might have looked like this: “Earthenware, Stockholm, 900 AD.”

Interview

This interview was conducted in Swedish with a person who has only been part of the Prehistories exhibition in the museum. Therefore the answers in this interview are only answers to that specific exhibition.

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: Archaeology and some museology.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: Learning comes first and then the aesthetical follows. We mainly want to show the educational content but it also has to look aesthetical.

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: It depends on the question and what the purpose of the exhibition is. I believe one thinks about it, everything is not fit for exhibition, so perhaps one refrains from exhibiting an ugly object. If the object fits the question I think one would exhibit it though. As an exhibition producer I think one acknowledges that people rather look at something beautiful. In Nordic history we do not have nice Greek ceramics so we cannot exhibit them just for what they are, but what we have exhibited in the Stone Age exhibit is what is considered fine here.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: Yes, we do. It is with the purpose of telling a story. In one exhibition we made, we were to exhibit the earliest material we had from different regions, and the earliest we had from some of them was broken pottery.

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: In our case, if it is similar, not identical but similar, there is often the geographical representation to see and then one might exhibit several similar pots. Or if it is from a grave or a settlement and we want to show the material from those places. Sometimes there is also the mass effect, where exhibiting a large amount of pottery will instil awe in the spectator.

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: No, I do not think so. One would have to proceed from the question – we are no art museum. Our collections are partly exhibition able objects, which at the same time must be available for researchers to study.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: No, I do not believe so. What we have in our exhibitions all have a purpose so I do not think we would want to remove any of it.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: I am not so good on that part, but I think that pottery can be fairly boring to the average visitor. It is the story around it that is important; otherwise it is probably fairly dead objects.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: We want them to understand parallels between history and modern times and we want them to start reflecting over the material on their own.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: Yes, I do. We have a bit of that in our pedagogical work [with school children], but not in the exhibits. One upside with ceramics is that it is not very fragile so it allows for letting the visitors touch them. It is not something we are currently doing but it is a possibility. In the museum we also have something called an "Arkeotek" where one can do an excavation and I think one can also touch some sherds there. We used to have an open showcase with stone axes, which are very insensitive objects, but one was stolen. We had of course glued

them down, but someone had been here to reconnoitre and then came back to steal it.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: I do not think I am the right person to ask, but I believe you can do so. I am involved in a project right now that lets visitors choose objects that we then create an exhibit about. It has been popular for a while now to let visitors go into the collections and choose objects that we then tell a story about. I work a lot with the collections so this is all very new to me.

Study and Analysis - Italian Museums

Crypta Balbi

Crypta Balbi (Eng. "Crypt of Balbus"), located in Rome, Italy, is a city block cut out of the historic city centre of Rome. The museum is one of four different museums together recognized as Museo Nazionale Romano (Eng. "the National Roman Museum"). Crypta Balbi displays mostly material from late ancient up to early medieval Rome, which has been found at the site. It also shows the history of the building itself from ancient times until the twentieth century.[65]

Figure 11. The entrance to Crypta Balbi. Photo: Yvonne Backe Forsberg.

Observations

The layout of Crypta Balbi[66] makes it a tad hard to explain accurately how I moved in the museum, but the part of the building that houses the exhibitions is not very large so I believe the reader will be able to follow. Beginning my observation on the bottom floor I only found one room that contained pottery, which was situated on the left in the very back of the museum.

There were three showcases that contained nothing but sherds. The first was the one that greets you when you enter the room. It is meant to show how the archaeologists found the material that derives from the great fire in Rome, in 64 AD. It was merely a heap of sherds but along with a few bricks and other material it created an obvious context. An interesting way of using sherds that nullifies their less aesthetic nature.

[65] http://archeoroma.beniculturali.it/en/museums/national-roman-museum-crypta-balbi [2014-04-16].

[66] The floor plan (attachment 2, plan 5) itself is rather good here so a few points might do well enough for reading it. The larger picture is showing the full site of Crypta Balbi, while the smaller ones to the left show the different plans; with piano terra being the bottom floor, piano primo is the first floor and piano secondo is the second floor. The large showcase on the bottom floor that is described in the observations can be found at the number 7.

The second one was there to show family crests shown on the pottery and likewise, the third one showed pottery with girls names on them in order to show girls ability to write during the 16th century. Unlike the showcase showing remains from the fire these did not have a particularly emphasized context in the showcase itself, but it seemed like they were there more in order to give an example to what the texts in the room described.

At the back of the room was a large showcase that covered the back wall from side to side. In it was shown bowls, plates, cups and so on from the 11th to the 18th century AD. There were no descriptions of theses objects apart from the dating, nor explanations of their usage. Coarseware and fineware were mixed freely and by estimate 70-80 percent of the pottery in the showcase can be classified as broken pottery. Essentially, in its current state it belongs in a gallery rather than a museum, but by removing the broken pottery and adding descriptions to the full vessels, it could make for a pretty decent chronological display.

Since this was the only room with pottery on the first floor I then proceeded to the second floor where, in the middle of the first room, there was a large showcase on the floor. It was largely meant to show material found from each century during the excavations of the site. The pottery is almost exclusively coarseware and around half of them are broken. The showcase is parted in two and in the lower section are larger vessels, most of which are broken. However, two of these contain animal bones, which is a good addition because according to the information in the room, the objects in the lower section come from the kitchen.

What is really strange in this showcase, from an exhibition technique perspective, is that while the exhibitor has chosen to display so much broken pottery, some of the stuff that is not broken has been stacked upon each other. For instance, there are two plates on top of each other, with an additional bowl on top of those. Since this showcase has a context that emphasizes the time period the objects come from, there is some justification in exhibiting broken pottery here, assuming there is nothing else. However, only one of the time periods really have this justification. The part that shows findings from the first century AD contains only five or six objects, of which just one pot is intact. Also the two slightly broken vessels in the lower part that contain the mentioned animal bones can be justified, but the rest is just clogging the exhibit, especially considering that pots that are not broken are stacked on top of each other. Except for the objects found in the kitchen, no objects have any description explaining what they were used for.

Climbing the stairs to the third level I found slightly more pottery exhibited. The first showcase I encountered had three rows of pots, most of it coarseware but also some glazed, which in this period and time (8th century Rome) and following my definitions, is something I consider to be fineware. It seems like the exhibitor has tried to get as much pottery as possible into the showcase and around 70 per-

cent is really too broken to be exhibited. Removing this many, that is two thirds of all the exhibited material, would give the exhibited ones more space and would also allow the spectator to admire them better. There are of course 360 degrees of a pot that one potentially can look at, but when they are crammed into a showcase with too many other pots only 90 degrees are in view, which is a pity when some of them have looks that are rather unique.

The adjacent showcase has four rows of pottery, with the bottom level containing much larger pots. About half of the exhibited pots are intact. The showcase is rather spacious as it is, but there are no explanations at all for the material, save for a small sign that explains each level as "small amphorae for domestic use", "table ware", "cooking ware" and "amphorae" (for the larger ones at the bottom).

Just above this, accessible by some metal stairs, was a showcase with some glazed pottery. It was a rather spacious showcase with mostly intact pottery. On the opposite side of it were some additional pottery exhibited among some glass and other debris to show the poverty in Rome during these times. After the interview, the interlocutors went with me into the museum to explain certain parts of it and they told me that this particular showcase contained material that was not in fact found at the site of Crypta Balbi. They told me that the glazed pottery came from Forum Romanum and that they actually did have such pottery found at the site of Crypta Balbi, but that it was all too broken to be restored and exhibited. I found this to be very interesting since they thus had made a decision to not exhibit the broken material, but found a substitute for it instead of omitting it completely.

In the next room, down the metal staircase again, the showcase containing pottery had been done with the purpose of showing how widespread the material found in Crypta Balbi really is. Included are of course masses of pottery. The showcase is built with a heap of earth serving as a multi-layer ground, where the material, including a myriad of pottery, seems to have just been dumped. There are no other explanations for this showcase than the geographic region the objects are connected to. Interestingly enough there is another showcase in the very same room that contains "metal ware", so a comparison could certainly be done.

In the adjacent room there are just two showcases containing pottery. The first one has just an amphora with an accompanying explanation that says that a child has been buried in it (the bones are visible as well), which is sort of interesting considering that an urn should have been used rather than an amphora. Why it is so is vaguely explained by saying that the people took whatever material they could find (showing poverty). The other showcase has no explanations for the pottery but if one reads between the lines it is easy discernable that they are among the material from each of the graves that are displayed.

The next room certainly holds a lot of pottery, but the purpose is hard to see. The exception is a rather big showcase on the floor containing vessels

(coarseware) of a larger size from the whole of the Mediterranean, which shows the visitor how grain has been transported to Rome from all over the Mediterranean world. Thus the pottery is explained. The rest of the pottery in the room could use a cleanup though, since about half of it was broken pottery.

I really appreciated the ability to sit down every now and then in this museum. The room with the pottery on entry level had a long bench on one side of the room and the rest of the museum had chairs placed ubiquitously.

Interview

This interview was conducted with a non-professional Swedish interpreter who translated the questions and answers from Italian to Swedish and *vice versa*. Therefore there may be archaeological terms lost in translation or similar smaller errors in the transliteration. The answers that are displayed in this essay have thus gone through the translation from Italian to Swedish and thence to English to fit the language of the essay.

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: The interlocutors are archaeologists who have been part of the excavations; one of them is a restorer. [They added that there is always an architect working with them when they exhibit material.]

Q: How much control does the museum have over what is being exhibited? Is there a political interest in what you exhibit?

A: The museum has full control over what is exhibited. There is no political interest from outside the museum.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: The first criterion is on the time it adheres from and the second criterion is how broken it is. If it is not too broken we restore it in such a way that it is possible to break it apart again to the original broken state. We want the shape of exhibited pottery to be as clear as possible when we exhibit it. We focus partly on the exhibition technique but more so on the teaching aspect. We want children to understand what we mediate in the exhibitions.

Me: Which age are you adjusting it for? In Sweden the common goal is roughly twelve year olds.

A: Because of what is exhibited in the museum there is a requirement to understand the basics of Roman history to understand the museum, therefore the exhibits cannot be adjusted towards children smaller than twelve years old and perhaps they even have to be slightly older than that to understand it properly.

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: We do not exhibit one over the other deliberately. Instead we focus on their historical weight and choose mainly after that criterion.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: Yes, but there has to be a special decoration on it or similar. There has to be a particular historical weight to the specific object for it to be exhibited when broken. We still prefer to exhibit intact or restored material to broken pottery.

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: Often it can look identical to an untrained eye. For example we have a lot of white plates exhibited to show how much of it has been found. Not all of it is exhibited of course, but we want to show how much of it has been found [in comparison to other material]. We do not exhibit everything we have found. We have a lot of material in storage facilities so that an archaeologist or similar can get access to and study it.

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: No. The pottery is very important, but if we had access to more statues or other material we would have to be even stricter when choosing pottery to exhibit.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: Yes, but not a lot less since it is so important. The selection would have to be even narrower though. The pottery mirrors the every day life in Crypta Balbi because it shows that it was still in use.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: We think that a small preparation about the history is good, but also an average visitor should understand a fair bit because we have texts explaining things and also special pictures that show what is explained. Moreover, the exhibitions are built chronologically so that visitors can see how the material changes over time.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: We want them to understand how Rome has changed over time and mostly how every day life changed when Rome got poorer towards the 8th or 9th century.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: Not so much from the museum's side, but teachers coming here are often well prepared and pupils can sometimes get to touch material to feel the difference between different materials from varying times.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: We do not have any discussions. The rooms and the situation (the things in the museum has been found at the site) prevent such constructions. There are reconstructed milieus with the material they have though. Additionally, we try to recreate contexts with the help of visual graphics. We try to reconstruct the contexts in which the material was found, but not like it would have looked like in ancient times.

Figure 12. The exterior of Terme di Diocleziano. Photo: Lalupa.

Museo delle Terme di Diocleziano

Terme di Diocleziano (Eng. "The Baths of Diocletian") in Rome, Italy, is part of the same museum group as Crypta Balbi and is hence another of the four museums known as Museo Nazionale Romano. Located in the centre of Rome it is an impressive bath complex, the largest ever built in Rome and spanning more than 13 hectares (nowadays it is just 6.5 hectares). The museum contains archaeological material from the proto-historical region of Latium (11/10th century to the 6th century BCE). The museum also contains one of the world's largest collections of epigraphic material with some 10 000 inscriptions and is thus foremost an epigraphic museum.[67]

Observations

I accidentally missed the small staircase leading to the writings room when I ventured into the museum, so instead of starting from the bottom I began my observations on the second floor.[68] There I turned a right as I was coming up the stairs and went straight forward into the corridor. The texts there describe the really early Italian peninsula (~1000 BCE) and in the middle of the corridor is a showcase with a lone pot in it. It is obviously representing the material found from that early time. A great way of doing it, except there are no explanations for it.

Since the material found from this period usually is pretty scarce having just one pot – and a quite large one – represent all the material is a tremendous way of doing it. The observer does not have to focus on more than that one object and at the same time, the sheer size of it makes it interesting, despite it being coarseware.

[67] http://archeoroma.beniculturali.it/musei/museo-nazionale-romano-terme-diocleziano [2014-04-16].

[68] Although the floor plan (attachment 2, plan 6) shows numbers for each exhibit, the proto-history exhibit is not shown on the plan. The exhibit with epigraphic pottery is the one marked with II. To get to the proto-history exhibit one ventures through the corridor, next to number I, and heads up the staircase in the bottom left corner (not visible on the plan).

Also, since the position of it allows the visitor to move 360 degrees around it, a pedagogical opportunity seems to have been missed here. By adding some information about its use and accompanying it with some tips for signs to look for, it could make for a nice experience. Signs such as shape (open top, like a kettle), burned bottom, no images or colour, and such, might help the observer confirm on its own that it in fact is a cooking pot he or she is looking at, like the sign says (or should say).[69]

Next to this large pot are two smaller showcases with a pot in each one, both containing seeds. No explanations are available, but it is quite clear that these pots are not here so much in the essence of pottery but as holding places for the seeds. Further into the corridor is a showcase containing 9 vessels and 2 urns. They are part of two separate burial contexts and thus the urns are explained, but not the vessels. On a sign further away it says that such vessels probably were used by those who participated in the burial and were then left behind. Knowing that most visitors are not going to read the larger sign with text that explains this, I question the lack of this information in conjunction with the actual showcase.

In the adjacent corridor are exhibited a large number of graves, mostly to show how varied the ceramics are from this period (8^{th}-6^{th} century BCE). Most of it is actually intact – or well restored – but the first showcase is very crammed, which degrades the nice contextualisation with other objects in it. Proper information is also lacking (in English only texts are available). Even though the information is in Italian it is clear to see that it is in database format.

Tomb 224 in the exhibition, for example, has a *pyxis*[70] exhibited, which a text in the back of the showcase explains is really important information for us. What the text does not explain is why the *pyxis* is significant in the tomb, when it in fact tells us that the deceased person had wealth when she died, as well as telling us that it was a woman.

The following showcases also portrayed different periods, but they are much more spacious and one specific case even had glass silhouettes of the dead together with the pottery. A few broken pots are present, but definitely not a majority. However, in the middle of the corridor there is a showcase against the wall that contains exclusively sherds. The text next to it explains that it comes from a settlement that was totally destroyed in a fire, but it is hardly aesthetical.

In the back of the corridor is a pot like the one described in the first corridor. This one is so patched though that it is questionable how much of it really is authentic. In the showcases next to it are pretty much only sherds. According to the text next to them the lot is supposed to show material from a particular house that

[69] It is my own interpretation that this is a cooking pot, made for cooking liquid food over an open fire.
[70] ”A lidded cosmetics or jewelry box; occassionally a knitting basket.” Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, p. 391.

burned down. Exhibitions like this one are really questionable. There is no question of whether the material is important to us or not, but rather to the effect it has on a visitor.

Since all of it is burnt and broken, there is no aesthetic value in it. There are no shapes, so imagining their use is out of question. If the actual house was restored, or portrayed within the museum, there might be a sort of educational purpose in that it would show what archaeologists have to work with at the sites, before the material ends up interpreted and done in a museum. Sitting in showcases with no other explanations than that they are leftovers from a great fire is hardly educational (or enjoyable) enough.

I must also note that the absence of seating available in the second corridor took its toll on how much time people (including me) spent there. I observed several smaller groups of people just strolling along the showcases and returning, hardly stopping at any of them.

In the room next to the corridor there were even more grave contexts exhibited. These were different though – in an interesting way. The large broken pots that were exhibited here, and which I would normally say should not be exhibited, were placed inside the artificial stone wall of the exhibit. Thus the open section in the side of the pot was facing towards the observer, making it possible to see into the pot without looking from above. This way it allowed the exhibitor to also show that there were smaller jars and bowls within the larger pot when the grave was found, something that would be substantially harder if the pot was unbroken.

This seemed to be a really clever way of using broken pottery to its strength rather than just discarding it as broken. Perhaps there are other, similar ways, to use sherds and smaller broken pots in exhibitions in order to show them in use in a way the full vessels could never do.

When I climbed downstairs to the exhibit on the bottom level I realised that I had started at the right place in the museum, judging from the purpose of this study. Downstairs there sure was a bit of pottery, but it was all there in the essence of writing material. None of it was there to show the daily use of these pots, but rather how writing had evolved over time, mostly among the Etruscans.[71]

That being said, the showcases with pottery in this room were interestingly made because they were not focused on individual objects, but on the objects as a whole. Each showcase had just a few pots in them, but they all had well enough space and thanks to the design of the showcases, the observer could look at them

[71] The Etruscans are known to have existed as a culture from the 8th century BCE until the last settlement was defeated at the hands of Rome in 265 BCE. Le Glay, M., Voisin, J.-L. & Le Bohec, Y. (2009), *A History of Rome*, p. 6, 66. According to the British Museum (https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/e/the_etruscans.aspx [2014-04-16]), the Etruscans are only known as such after 700 BCE when their language was first written and it would take until the 1st century BCE until the Etruscans had been assimilated into the Roman World.

from two ways. Each case also only had one text for all of the pottery inside, explaining why they were exhibited and what could be seen.

Discounting the few showcases against the wall, which seemed to be under reconstruction, only one differed from this pattern. That was the showcase in the far left corner which only had sherds in it (keep in mind that all pottery in this room had writing on it) and where the lower part of the case had just a few sherds and an accompanying text like the other showcases; but the upper part had perhaps twenty additional sherds with no explanation – but with the writing on them clearly visible.

Interview

This interview was conducted in English, which is the 2nd language for both the interlocutor and me. It should also be mentioned that the pre-historic pottery on the second floor was not discussed in this interview because the interlocutor has not been part of building or designing it.

Q: Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?

A: Archaeology.

Q: How much control does the museum have over what is being exhibited? Is there a political interest in what you exhibit?

A: No there is no political interest, the museum has full control. The director of the museum has the main say in the question.

Q: What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery? Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?

A: This museum is connected to the university so in the beginning it had a very scientific target. Recently we have been trying to change the museum so it is easier for anyone to understand. We do not have a lot of beautiful objects, instead we have a lot of objects that should be talking but that are silent. We want to make it easier to understand it, so the main focus is on learning.

Q: Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?

A: It does not matter particularly. Because of the art of the museum we focus more on what is being said on the objects. Instead we focus on whether the text is full or not. We think it is easier for the average person to understand what we want to show if the text is easy to see. We also have a short, easily understandable text to explain the material in the showcases.

Q: Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?

A: Yes, we do that if it does not affect the text written on them. We also have a showcase with sherds that display different letters inscribed on each one of the sherds.

Q: Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

A: Because they are not identical. We exhibit them for their decoration and the decoration is different.

Q: Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?

A: Yes. We are an epigraphic museum so our interests lie not mainly with the material but with what is written on them. We also use pottery to complete information given by the inscriptions.

Q: Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?

A: Yes, on this floor [in the Archaic room] we have a lot more pottery than elsewhere. If we could know the full information from an inscription without the additional pottery we would not have to exhibit them.

Q: What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?

A: We did a study on this in the museum and we concluded that generally our visitors are more educated than elsewhere. If the average time for a visitor to stay in front of a showcase is five seconds, it was twenty here. Now we have changed our exhibitions to be easier for anyone to understand, so we would have to redo this study.

Q: What are they meant to understand?

A: It is not important that they look at everything. We do not want the museum to be one that you visit once in your life and never come back. It was the largest bath complex and we want them to know the monument. The main train station is called Termini, which derives its name from these baths, but the people do not know this. We study Latin and Greek in our schools and even though they often seem to think it is just to annoy them, when they come here they can see and understand that it was something that was actually used back then. Here they can use their acquired knowledge.

Q: The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?

A: It is hard to make people touch the material. I do not know about pottery because they are very delicate, but I can do that with stones. I often insist on this when I teach school children because to really understand the letters one has to touch them. If I could make it safe for the pottery I might use that too, but for now I am not using it.

Q: Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

A: Yes, we always have something to add. We do not want to give the impression that the museum is finished because it is never finished, we always discuss what can be changed.

Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia

Originally located on the northern outskirts of Rome, Italy, Villa Giulia was built in the sixteenth century and is today more properly known as Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (Eng. "the National Etruscan Museum"). It houses an extensive collection of archaeological and art objects from the Etruscans. Most of the material consists of ceramics or bronze objects, but there are also busts, epigraphic material, jewellery and gold from the peoples living in ancient Etruria.[72]

Figure 13. The inner courtyard of Villa Giulia. Photo: Yvonne Backe Forsberg.

Observations

In the entrance hall of Villa Giulia[73] there is a lone pot exhibited, a redware krater,[74] admittedly without an explanation for the actual object, but with an accompanying text explaining that this is to show visitors what kind of material that is being lost when non-professionals excavate objects on their own and then keep them. It is a beautiful piece and that has surely got a more serious impact on an admirer than would a broken piece of coarseware – even if that is actually more likely what people would find (and keep).

Before going further I would also like to point out that in this museum the texts are available in English, but the description signs in the showcases are only available in Italian, which means that I have had to rely on my knowledge of archaeological terms as well as the linguistic roots that connect Italian to English and other languages I have knowledge of in order to understand these signs. Therefore there may be information that I have missed due to the language barrier.

[72] http://www.villagiulia.beniculturali.it [2014-04-16].

[73] The plan (attachment 2, plan 7 & 8) is rather detailed and thus it may be enough to say that I followed the numbers from 1 and up. There is not much option to deviate from the way through the museum. It might be necessary to note that the arrow from number 5 is showing the way to the basement, where the described reconstructed graves are found.

[74] See note 52, p. 30, in this document.

Turning left one gets to a small room with showcases which all show a quantity of pottery. Several copper pots are exhibited here as well. The first showcase has a grave context where an urn is exhibited – and properly explained. The other showcases in the room are crowded with pottery. Three of them have admittedly mostly intact objects, but the fourth one has an abundance of broken pottery. On the way out there is another grave context showcase, which is set up in a way that shows how it looked like when it was found by the archaeologists. In it are a few pots of larger sized coarseware.

All of this pottery lack proper explanations and the general crowding in the showcases makes it hard to focus. The mix of objects is actually rather good, with fineware and coarseware, as well as different kinds of copper objects, but the lack of information explaining their use makes it all moot. Amusingly enough, there is one exception – a bowl-looking coarseware pot with perhaps thirty small holes in the bottom. That one is perhaps the most obvious object in the showcase (discounting daggers) and it is accompanied with a note that confirms that it in fact is a sieve.

In the first room in the subsequent long corridor, which in turn describes a select few of Etruscan cities, a large amount of pottery is exhibited. Most of it is fineware and even if most of it is unbroken (some of it can definitely be categorized as broken pottery) the quantity is just too much. Not only is it hard to focus on individual objects, but also the sheer amount of it in the showcases makes it hard to even see some of the objects in them. It falls along the saying of being unable to see the forest for all the trees. And while they may be nice to look at, it is very hard to find an educational purpose in something like this. Once again there are no proper explanations for these objects, neither the imagery nor their possible uses.

The room after has fewer objects. Much of what is exhibited here is Attic black-figure fineware,[75] which is really nice to look at and which in turn makes it even more important that each pot has enough individual space. In a few of the showcases there is the option to do that, for example the first case to the right, which consists solely of two large pots and one small. A side note in this room is also that in the first case to the left there is a coarseware pot that is described as an "amphora for the transport of wine".

The showcases in this room are generally good (discounting the lack of proper information). It is easy to see all of the material, but sometimes the amount is exaggerated and it is a lot of the same stuff. In this room there is also the strange phenomenon of stacking objects on top of each other, which surely works against the purpose of showing them.

[75] "A technique for painting pottery that depended on figures in black silhouette, incised detail, and added color." Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, p. 389. For more information see for example Beazley, J.D. (1986), *The development of Attic black-figure*.

The following room contains almost no pottery at all. The small amount in there is almost all of it broken and with bad descriptions. In the room there is also a staircase down to the basement where a couple of tombs are reconstructed. The first one is fairly interesting since the exhibitor has chosen not to explain it, but instead let it speak for itself. On top of that the pottery in it is covered with dust, a contrast to the normally cleaned pottery that museums have exhibited so that whomever looks at them can study them properly. It is clear that the purpose of this particular exhibit is not to study the pottery itself, but the tomb as a whole. The other tomb in the basement contained no pottery.

Going upstairs again and into the next room I found that once again there were a bit of pottery, but without adequate information. A few urns were there that thence are self-descriptive. The following room on the other hand had a lesser amount of showcases, which in turn was filled to the rim with pottery. On a whim I decided to count them and found that on an area of 1.5*1.5 meters (2.25 m^2) there were 28 pots in one and 26 in another.

Also the next room had this look with just a few showcases. The amount of objects in them could probably be lessened, but by and large it was not that noticeable – except the one in the middle that is. That one had a description sign that listed 40 objects, but some of the notes were for several of the objects and I estimate that there were in fact roughly 70 objects crammed into the showcase that measured 2*2 meters (4 m^2). Sure, there was a decent mix of different objects in it, and some of the objects (metal) were even melted together which of course makes it harder to keep the number down, but even so, expecting an archaeologist, let alone an average visitor to be able to systematically focus on each object in here is preposterous. It seems obvious that these are the kinds of showcases that Suzanne Keene is talking about when she describes them as belonging in exhibition centres.[76]

Even the following room has a pair of these crowded showcases. What is interesting in here though is that there are three smaller cases with just one fineware pot in each one, showing their great importance compared to the other pottery. On top of that two of them allows you to go all the way around them to study the imagery. Extensive textual explanations for each of them are placed on the showcases, but sadly they are in Italian so I do not dare guessing what it says. However, one of them mentions Kleitias,[77] who was a well-known ancient vase painter, thus definitely justifying its standalone place.

[76] Keene, S. (2005), *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*, p. 35. More specifically chapter 3, *Collections*, pp. 25-44.
[77] Kleitias lived in Archaic Greece (600-480 BCE) and was active around 570 BCE, he was a painter of Attic black-figure pottery. Pedley, J.G. (2007), *Greek Art and Archaeology*, pp. 195-197.

At the end of the corridor a staircase leads to an additional exhibit, almost completely consisting of redware fineware. In the introducing text to the exhibit is explained that these are from a very famous ancient Greek artist who introduced the technique of painting red-figure ceramics. In the middle of the passage are two smaller cases with one pot in each, once again displaying their relative importance. In the room are also a few pots that display Etruscan texts. The rest of the pottery does not have adequate explanations.

In the room there is a staircase leading to the next floor and immediately upon ascending it one is met with two rooms with pottery – some of it sherds. They are not here to display the pottery itself though but rather to display the Etruscan writing on them. In the following corridor there is just a minimal amount of pottery, there to show the pictures painted on them, which is connected with the other objects in the showcases (such as mirrors or washing scrapes). Hence they are enhancing the context in the cases they are placed in.

In the end of the corridor there are a few showcases with solely pottery in them. They are not as crowded as the ones on the first floor, but once again they mostly lack appropriate information; the exception being a chalice that is explained as having been used in sacrifices.

As one ascends the stairs in the room a great hall meets the eye. If there has ever been an exhibition hall in a museum, this is it. However, the texts on the way up to this hall explain that the exhibited material comes from an Italian collector and therefore I am unsure about whether to treat the Castellani collection as a museum exhibition. Granted it is in a museum and should thus be seen as such, but considering that it explicitly says that all of it is one man's collection, it seems unfair to jump to that conclusion. The hall itself is slightly turning to the left and all along the right wall is row after row with pottery, which in the end shifts to copper and bronze objects. On the left hand side is a number of showcases with pottery and metal objects in them.

Descending the stairs at the end of the hallway leaves you in a room with another myriad of unexplained pottery. A difference here vis-à-vis the rest of the museum is that here is extra information available for visitors who wish to know more. That information does not explain what the objects were used for, but what the archaeologists think about the exhibited material and what it can tell us.

From that room a spiral staircase leads you down to an exhibit constructed by professors and students and tells the visitor about Veii, the Etruscan city that lay closest to Rome. The first little room there has excellent descriptions for the exhibited pottery, which itself is just a small amount, thus lessening the confusion for the spectator. Sadly the pottery in the hall further in has not got the same neat information, but it goes back to what seems to be standard for the museum, where just the object's umbrella term and material is shown.

Throughout this observation section I have said time and again that the objects lack proper item descriptions. That is not entirely true. Much of the pottery in the exhibitions actually has information that describes their use. The problem is that it is not understandable for the average visitor, because it is explained in archaeological terminology. A few examples are that the visitor can read that a certain object is a *hydria*, but has to know that a *hydria* is a water jug. Some pottery are marked as *oinochoai*, which translates to "wine jugs" (for pouring wine) and there are also a lot of kraters, which I have explained above as mixing vessels for mixing wine and water. All of this is information that is easily accessible in the museum, provided that you know what the terms refer to. I wanted to point this out because the archaeologists who exhibited this pottery probably think that the exhibited material is explained since the terminology is common knowledge for them – but not for an amateur.

As a last thing I have to point out that the museum is very large and the lack of seating really takes its toll in the form of museum fatigue. It also shows in the amount of people that pass you as you look at the collections. In the beginning there is a constant stream but the further into the museum you get the less people there are, perhaps the most evident proof that people get tired and look for the exits. With so many showcases filled with fineware seating is even more important than if they were filled with coarseware, since it takes a longer time to examine a pot that is enhanced with pictures than if it is plain.

Interview

Regrettably, I was unable to receive the opportunity to interview anyone from this museum.

Improvements

Throughout the essay I have pointed out different things that I dislike about the current ways of exhibiting pottery, and here I would like to bring up some ideas that could work to improve these exhibitions.

The first issue that I want to bring up is the question of interaction, which also is one of my interview questions for the study. In the interviews I have asked the interlocutors about their views about the possibility of interaction through pottery. Generally it seems to be something they think can be done, but also that it is less optimal to have hands-on interaction in the exhibits. Having the hands-on interaction as a part of school visits and similar seems to be more acceptable.

Guillermo Fernández and Montserrat Benlloch have studied how visitors respond to interactive exhibits and their results are interesting, although not too surprising. Essentially, they have the visitors divided into three groups: singletons, groups of adults and groups with children. The singletons visit the exhibits alone and spend just enough time at each stop to read the text and then move on. In the groups of adults a different behaviour can be observed where most of them just glance at the texts, but they all interact with each other briefly. Some may even stop longer, like the singletons would. The groups with children show yet another behaviour where the interest is mostly focused on the hands-on possibilities, while the scientific parts of the exhibitions are mostly ignored.[78]

If we relate this study to the exhibiting of pottery we can see that while the interlocutors suggest that having pottery available for hands-on interaction in the exhibits is risky, not having them risks losing the children's interest in the exhibitions. In the interview with Historiska Museet the interlocutor told me about an exhibit they had with stone axes, which had to be cancelled due to stealing. That would be the foremost reason to why pottery should not be available for hands-on interaction. However, in my observation of Östasiatiska Museet I noted that there were sherds of pottery nailed down in one exhibit, thus allowing such interaction. Them being nailed down also lessen the risk of damage or stealing significantly compared to just gluing them to the surface.

In the essay I have commented several times on the importance of aesthetics in exhibitions and I have also mentioned Ting's study, which suggested that almost 60 percent of visitors look to aesthetics first.[79] While this is important to remember, and judging from my interview responses something the museum profes-

[78] Fernández, G. & Benlloch, M. (2000), "Interactive exhibits: how visitors respond", p. 59.
[79] Ting, W.Y.V. (2008), "Communicating Chinese ceramics: a study of material culture theory in selected museums in Britain" in Ting, W.Y.V. (2010), "Dancing pot and pregnant jar? On ceramics, metaphors and creative labels", p. 190.

sionals actively think about, there is such a thing as too much aesthetics. In "The 'expert visitor' concept" can be read that too much aesthetics makes exhibits seem cold, incomprehensible and unsurprisingly, perceived as too aesthetic and soulless.[80] Therefore it is important to keep a balance between aesthetics and learning approaches. Realising that aesthetics are vital to how most visitors accept an exhibition is great, but going too far will impact the learning possibilities from the exhibition and as mentioned about interaction above, lessen children's interest in the exhibits.

Furthermore, still along the lines of aesthetics, is space in and around showcases. This is also something I have been pointing out now and again during the observations and an issue that seems to be largely ignored in favour of exhibiting more objects, despite the idea of space not being a very new concern.[81] An example of this done favourably is the case of the ceramic owl Ozzy, which is described by Kevin Hetherington.[82] In the exhibit where Ozzy ended up was originally an important book, which in fact had its own showcase in a great spot in the museum. The swap is explained thus: "Plot's book is only really of interest to the expert, whereas Ozzy can be appreciated by all."[83] This is of course not pottery *per se*, but there are interesting pots that could take its place, as can be seen in my observations of, for instance, Villa Giulia (see pages 59-63).

The last thing I would like to comment on is texts. Time and again through the observations I have commented on how texts often are lacklustre, and it is hardly a problem that is limited to just the museums in my study.[84] What can museums do to make them better though? Mark O'Neill discusses the importance of creating a new epistemology in the museum world with the arguments that it would promote interdisciplinary efforts to find out the life stories of objects, it would encourage museums to tell stories about human destructiveness and creativity, and more importantly, it would lead to museums taking more responsibility for the quality of the visitor experience. He also argues that a new epistemology, with visitor-centred and flexible displays, would help museums to contribute even more to a tolerant, just and culturally enriched society.[85] Which after all is what museums are about. Dudley, working from O'Neill's text, says that:

> And while information is vital, might the conventional *emphasis* (original emphasis) on it rather than on the object, occasionally actually inhibit the varied possibilities of engagement across a socially extensive range of visitors, including those who lack prior knowledge of the

[80] Davallon, J., Gottesdiener, H. & Poli, M.-S. (2000), "The 'expert visitor' concept", p. 63.
[81] Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, pp. 32-66. See also attachment 3.
[82] Hetherington, K. (1997), "Museum Topology and the Will To Connect".
[83] Hetherington, K. (1997), "Museum Topology and the Will To Connect", p. 208.
[84] See for instance Chaniotis, A. (2009), "Cultural objects in cultural contexts: the contribution of academic institutions", pp. 150-152. The author discusses the lack of context that signs provide around the object.
[85] O'Neill, M. (2006), "Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums", p. 112, 114.

> objects they are looking at? To ask these questions at all, risks accusations of elitism or essentialism – but my objective is to explore the nature of objects and engagements with them [---].[86]

To simplify, she argues that the emphasis on information instead of the objects that is current in museums today, sometimes makes it harder for visitors who lack prior knowledge to properly engage with the objects. There is an aspect of elitism in asking something like this since it suggests that non-academics would not understand, but it is necessary in order to evolve the epistemology in museums.

Additionally, stories such as Cornelius Holtorf's article "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd", where he tells the story of a pot sherd found during an archaeological excavation, is an excellent way of telling the public why a certain item is important and thus justifying its place in the exhibition.[87] That can be done in a very academic way of course, like the way Michael Schiffer does it in a quote in Holtorf's article:

> Artifact life histories are usually divided into sets of closely linked activities called processes; in the case of a ceramic jar, processes include the collection of clay and other raw materials, clay preparation, forming the clay into a vessel, smoothing and painting its surface, drying and firing, transport, exchange, use, storage, maintenance, reuse, and discard.[88]

This quote is very informational, but uses a rather difficult language that does not do very well in an exhibition where the texts are supposed to be aimed at a twelve year old (like in Swedish museums) or a teenager (like in the Italian museums). Holtorf's article is in fact not a museological one, it is an attempt to write a story about an archaeological object in an ethnographical way, but nonetheless it is a way of telling a story that makes the object come alive. It is the way of telling a story that turns it from being just information about an object to turning the object alive and into a social object.[89]

[86] Dudley, S.H. (2010), "Museum materialities: objects, sense and feeling", p. 3. From O'Neill (2006: 111).
[87] Holtorf, C. (2002), "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd".
[88] Schiffer, M. in Holtorf, C. (2002), "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd", p. 50.
[89] Simon, N. (2010), *The Participatory Museum*, chapter 4.

Part Three

Discussion

It has been an interesting journey and a valuable experience to see the different ways museums choose to display and explain their pottery. My questions have been well received and considering how similar many of the answers are, seemingly well phrased. I want to take a few lines here in the beginning of the discussion to address one particular question though, that did not come through as I had expected it because of slightly poor forward-thinking on my part.

Namely the interview question, "Why do you exhibit several identical pots?", or "Why do we insist on exhibiting multiple pots of exactly the same shape, material and with the same intended use?" (in *Theoretical benchmarks and questions*, page 9). When I planned the essay and also when I made my observations I did it from a museological perspective, since this is a study in museology. Therefore I also expected the answers to automatically be museological rather than archaeological, which was an oversight, although not one too severe. What this meant practically though is that many of the answers to that question panned out quite differently than what I had hoped for. The answers mostly denied having identical pottery, and instead claimed that they were similar with visible differences.

I believe that the first line of the answer to the particular question in the Crypta Balbi interview describes quite well why this question posed to be a bit of a problem: "Often it can look identical to an untrained eye." With this answer they are both denying that they are exhibiting identical pottery and at the same time admitting it, but judging from their answer, they are not quite aware of it. As the reader can see on page 9 in this essay, this was in fact part of my original hypothesis: that archaeologists in museums are not fully aware of what the average visitor understands.

In the long run, the answers I got to this question essentially proved my hypothesis in four out of six cases (excluding Museum Gustavianum and Medelhavsmuseet), but the lack of clarification in the question made it look like if I was ignorant about the differences in the exhibited pottery. This is something that I noticed quite early and the obvious solution would have been to add a clarification

that made clear that the pottery looks identical to someone who is not familiar with archaeology. Doing this would have meant that I would have asked a different question for the later museums though, and then the answers would not have been comparable with the earlier ones.

Moving on to the rest of my theoretical questions for the essay (found on page 9), I believe that I have gotten appropriate and clear answers for all of them throughout the study and I want to start with the most important question: "Why do we exhibit pottery?"

To answer this question we have to look at the museological theories I have presented in the essay, as well as the answers in the interviews, that proved to be immensely useful. Starting with the interviews there seems to be a general consensus that pottery is *essential* to explaining early history, because that is the material that has survived even if it is mostly broken. While this is true, I also found it interesting that all the museums except Terme di Diocleziano thought that they had enough pottery exhibited, or rather that they did not find use for exhibiting more. Because of the nature of Terme di Diocleziano as a foremost epigraphical museum it is fascinating that they believe that more pottery (with epigraphy) would be beneficial to the museum.

Moreover, all the museums' answers seem to indicate that they believe that pottery is essential in showing the public how social order changes over time. How this is done varies greatly from museum to museum, which can be seen in my observations, but where I am of the opinion that Crypta Balbi has the most obvious way of doing it. However, to take into account is that this is partly due to the nature of the museum. Everything in the museum is taken from the site (save for the few pots that came from Forum Romanum) and therefore exhibiting the items chronologically may be more clear-cut than in other museums.

This does not at all mean that it is not possible to do similarly in other museums as can be seen mainly in the observations of Östasiastiska museet and the interview with Medelhavsmuseet. In the exhibition "The Middle Kingdom" a clear chronology has been made where it is easy to follow China's pottery evolution from the first dynasty until modern times. In the interview I did there the interlocutor even made it clear that it is exactly what they want the visitor to see: that material changes over time. In the interview with Medelhavsmuseet the interlocutor said that the goal of the Egyptian exhibit was to show the life of normal people of the time and that pottery was an essential part of showing that, especially in earlier history.

Also the literature shows that pottery is important in explaining life through history. Shaw and Nicholson describes pottery as "used for many of the purposes for which we now use plastics"[90] which together with Rosemary Ellison's article

[90] Shaw, I. & Nicholson, P. (2008), *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, p. 253.

"The Uses of Pottery" form a keystone in explaining why pottery has to be a part of museum exhibitions that attempt to explain the life of earlier peoples.[91]

On page 20 I mentioned an article by Alexandra A. Chan that describes how a museum can teach archaeology to the public. She takes the question of why pottery is important to a new level in that she questions not its importance, but what has to be done from the museums' part to make it easily understandable for the unversed visitor.[92] Holtorf's "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd" is a way of concretising Chan's idea by telling a simple story about what happens to a pot sherd from the moment it is found until it ends up in a museum (or as is in the case of Holtorf's sherd, is forgotten).[93] Following Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* it seems clear that using ways similar to what Chan suggests would help visitors improve their sense of *habitus* and increase their *cultural capital*.[94]

However, it cannot be done solely by helping the visitors ask the right questions. As O'Neill discusses in his article, a new epistemology for the museums is essential to making the exhibited material more easily understandable.[95] Kavanagh comments on how there is a sort of assumption that objects speak for themselves and rejects that by quoting S.R. Crew and J. Sims who say that: "The problem with things is that they are dumb […] and if by some ventriloquism they seem to speak, they lie."[96]

Throughout the observations I have often seen signs in a database formatation, which is better than nothing at all, but still could be improved. O'Neill, and Dudley with him, argues that the epistemology must change so that even people who lack prior knowledge of the objects can make sense of them.[97] Signs of a change towards a new epistemology can be seen in my observation of the downstairs room in Terme di Diocleziano, where the curators have started to redesign the exhibit so that the texts do not explain each individual object, but the showcase as a whole; a change that is also mentioned in the interview.

With this in mind I also want to take the opportunity to address another question: about whether there is "a clear difference between different kinds of museums (historical/archaeological), between countries or depending on the size of the

[91] Ellison, R. (1984), "The Uses of Pottery", pp. 63-68.
[92] Chan, A.A. (2011), "Translating archaeology for the public: empowering and engaging museum goers with the past".
[93] Holtorf, C. (2002), "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd".
[94] Carle, J. (2007), "Pierre Bourdieu och klassamhällets reproduction", pp. 406-408; Bourdieu, P. (1977), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 72; Bourdieu, P. (1986), "The Forms of Capital", p. 82.
[95] O'Neill, M. (2006), "Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums." See also attachment 3.
[96] Kavanagh, G. (2004), "Collecting from the era of memory, myth and delusion", p. 120-121; Crew, S.R. & Sims, J. (1991), "Locating authenticity; fragments of a dialogue", p. 159.
[97] O'Neill, M. (2006), "Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums"; Dudley, S.H. (2010), "Museum materialities: objects, sense and feeling", p. 3. See also attachment 3.

museums"? To answer this question I have resorted to using the observations and interviews alone.

The size of the museum does not seem to play a significant role in the difference between the museums. The exception that possibly could be seen is that Museum Gustavianum has a rather different look to it than the other museums, but when looking deeper into it the reason seems to be more because of its role as a university museum than its comparatively smaller size.

The differences can instead be seen between countries and in whether it is historical or archaeological. Looking at the historical museums in the study: Historiska museet, Östasiatiska museet and Crypta Balbi, there is an easily discernable historical chronology in them that is not there in the same way in the archaeological museums. Museum Gustavianum is also a historic museum but being a university museum its exhibitions are divided according to different subjects, rather than different parts of history (although that is a part within each exhibit).

The archaeological museums: Medelhavsmuseet, Villa Giulia and Terme di Diocleziano, are all divided in a different way than the historical museums. Both Medelhavsmuseet and Villa Giulia divide their exhibitions according to provenance, such as Greek or Roman, or different Etruscan cities. Terme di Diocleziano, like the historical museums, has a sort of chronological aspect to the museum, but more so the exhibits have different purposes – such as showing the evolution of texts or different roles in society, distinguishable from inscriptions.

The clear difference between the countries that can be seen is in the expectations the museums have on the visitors. Both the interviews with the Italian museums showed that they have a minimum amount of knowledge that people have to possess to understand the contents of the museums properly. It is hard to tell for certain whether this also is true for Villa Giulia since there is no interview from there, but the way the exhibitions are set up makes it seem likely that it is the case there as well. It should be noted though that in both the interviews the interlocutors said that prior knowledge is not adamant to understanding anything at all, but that the exhibitions are made assuming that the people observing them has some understanding of history.

In the Swedish museums the case is rather different. Generally there does not seem to be any expectations at all on the visitors, where perhaps Östasiatiska museet's approach to displaying Johan Gunnar Andersson is the most evident. Considering that he is seen as the founder of Chinese archaeology one would think that he is well-known, but I think it is quite reasonable for the museum to assume that he in fact is not. Not only because Chinese archaeology is not as big in Sweden as Nordic and Classical archaeology – or Egyptology – but also because someone who is not familiar with archaeology may not have heard of him for that reason.

In the interview with Medelhavsmuseet is explained that the visitors are meant to learn about the cultural history of ancient Egypt and how it was to live as a

normal person there. There are even films to make it easier to understand, essentially meaning that prior knowledge is in no way necessary to understand the exhibition. However, Museum Gustavianum yet again works as the exception to the rule. Even if some of the objects are explained well, others are not so, and as can be seen in the interview with the museum, the visitors either have to know some things or are expected to take a tour to get in the know of them – such as the case with imagery from the Iliad and the Odyssey, or the *kylix*.

Moving on to the question: "What kind of material is exhibited? Coarseware, fineware or simply broken pottery?" Evidently, all the museums are exhibiting all three of these to varying extents. Of all the questions in the study I think this one benefited the most from the method of both making observations and performing interviews. Through the observations it is easy to see what is exhibited, but the purpose is often lost because it is not obvious enough in the exhibitions. The interviews help understand what the exhibitions are meant to show and allow us to see differences in what is observed and what is meant to be seen. Interestingly enough the interlocutors often also have slightly different answers between the questions "What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?" and "What are they meant to understand?"

Essentially, what this means to us is that the museums are aware of that the information they want the exhibitions to mediate to the public is not going through fully. If we look at the observations I made of Östasiatiska museet we can see that generally the exhibitions are well thought out. In the Japanese exhibit there is a clear purpose of the teacups, which is easy to see for anyone. In "China before China" there is a lot of pottery, but disregarding the quantity, the pottery that is explained is easy to understand for anyone. "The Middle Kingdom" is in my opinion the by far best exhibition hall in the museum. The clear chronology and varied showcases makes it easy to understand the change that goes on over time even if the spectator knows nothing about Chinese history. In the Korean exhibit this scheme is as mentioned less evident and may be harder for the average visitor to understand than the rest of the museum.

Controversially, in the interview I got two rather different answers to the mentioned questions. The question about what the visitors understand gave an answer that suggested that there are two kinds of visitors: the ones who already know and the ones who do not. That means that the exhibitions also have to be designed so that the unversed visitors can get a grasp of the contents, but at the same time they have to provide stimulating material for the experts. The question about what the visitors are meant to see resulted in an answer that seems quite different from the first one, with visitors being expected to understand the change that is displayed in the exhibits. At a closer look though, a logical connection can be seen between the answers, where the answer to the second question in essence confirms the implication of the first question; and the observations also show this line of thinking in the museums.

I chose to discuss Östasiatiska museet here because I think that the museum stood out from the rest in the circumstances. The rest of the museums have the same sort of connection between the two mentioned interview questions, but the connection to what is observed is somewhat blurry. That is not completely because the connection actually is hard to see, but sometimes the nature of the observations makes the link hard to see.

To bring up the two most important examples we need to look at Medelhavsmuseet and Terme di Diocleziano. I have only observed and noted the exhibited pottery in the museums, which is in line with the purpose of the essay. However, the Egyptian exhibit in Medelhavsmuseet contains – as mentioned – approximately 1600 objects and a lot of that is not pottery, meaning that while the answers in the interviews and what is observed do not quite line up, it is evident that the exhibit is about the life in ancient Egypt; despite the pottery not being able to fully clarify that on its own. Terme di Diocleziano is a mostly epigraphic museum and therefore a large part of the objects in the museum is actually stone of one sort or another, with pottery just being added when there is nothing else to describe the course of history. The knowledge gained from the written word that is described in the interview is in fact quite clear when observing all of the material, but the pottery alone cannot cover it.

The above discussion brushes on the answers to "How do the visitors react to it?" and "What are the curators' thoughts about it?". Nonetheless I think there is room for more discussion about these two questions. Looking specifically at the interview from Historiska museet, the interlocutor expresses the thought that pottery is boring to look at for the average visitor. I would claim that it is not specifically boring, but rather that it is plain. Pottery exists in most homes today and is thus something that is not exceptionally interesting on its own, but rather in conjunction with other objects, which can be seen in "The Middle Kingdom" exhibition in Östasiatiska museet.

In the interview with Museum Gustavianum the interlocutor confirms this to an extent by saying that the questions the museum gets about the exhibits are usually about the mummy or the texts, but not about the pottery. In the interview with Medelhavsmuseet the interlocutor said that visitors had reacted to the pottery by saying that it is beautiful. In the end though it turns out that answering the question about how the visitors react to pottery is hard to do fully with the available answers from the interviews.

In "A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK" Catherine L. Cooper describes how the team decided and battled between themselves to achieve the end result.[98] The article adds

[98] Cooper, C.L. (2013), "A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK."

some meat to the bones after learning about how the curators in this study think about exhibiting pottery. She starts by explaining that they already from the start decided that they did not want to show the full history of the Mediterranean and that they instead were to interpret objects and create contexts for specific parts of the ancient world.[99]

I have in my study brought up the importance of aesthetics in exhibitions and Cooper describes their problems with that. She explains that the group on the one hand wanted to have fewer objects to show their aesthetics and on the other hand wanted to show as many objects as possible. They solved this by creating a sort of rhythm where some of the displays had fewer objects and others had larger quantities with the goal of obtaining a varying intensity in the exhibition.[100]

She also brings up the epistemological part of creating an exhibition. They did not want one of those large introductory texts to the exhibition but instead that the visitors should see the artefacts first. Thence they used smaller labels that immediately turned the interest towards to objects – very similar to what can be seen in the observations and interview of Terme di Diocleziano. Thus they had highlights of objects for visitors with low patience but also smaller labels with information for those who wanted to know more – like in the ”China before China” exhibition in Östasiatiska museet. According to Cooper this labelling system was very popular among the visitors.[101]

I believe that all of these aspects described by Cooper can be seen in the answers from the interlocutors, but that Cooper’s article makes it all come together more clearly.

With all these answers in mind we have come down to the last question: “What educational purposes does it have?” Pottery can have a vast amount of different purposes in museums as the observations and the interviews, as well as some of the literature, have shown. When looking at the answers gained through the interviews and articles such as O’Neill’s “Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums” or Chan’s “Translating archaeology for the public: empowering and engaging museum goers with the past”; it seems obvious that the question is not so much about how pottery can be a useful addition, but rather how to successfully make it useful.[102]

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[99] Cooper, C.L. (2013), “A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK”, p. 474.
[100] Cooper, C.L. (2013), “A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK”, p. 475.
[101] Cooper, C.L. (2013), “A case study in collaboration: displaying Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK”, p. 481.
[102] O’Neill, M. (2006), “Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums”; Chan, A.A. (2011), “Translating archaeology for the public: empowering and engaging museum goers with the past”; all the answers from the interviews are helpful here since all interlocutors expressed opinions on how they can work with pottery to make it a useful addition.

All of the interlocutors have in one way or another said that pottery is essential to teaching change to the public as well as showing how every day life looked like. I chose to ask the last interview question (about discussions around creating contexts) as a means to both deduce whether creating contexts is an acceptable procedure in archaeological and historical museums and to potentially get some examples of how museums use their material to create a learning environment. Although the question turned out to be slightly difficult it gave some great answers after further explaining to the interlocutors what I meant with the question.

All of the answers to the question are great, but I think three of them stand out above the others: the ones from Historiska museet, Crypta Balbi and Medelhavsmuseet. The interlocutors from Crypta Balbi did not understand the question at first, hence the sentence "we do not have any discussions". However, after realising what I was after they came up with a great answer that not only brought up the construction of milieus but also the addition of visual graphics to further explain the contexts of the showcases. Such visual graphics could for instance show the full version of an exhibited broken vessel.

At Historiska museet I learned of a project where visitors got to choose objects themselves that the museum would create an exhibition with. This is a concept that I have heard about during the education and therefore it was exceptionally interesting to learn that the museum is doing this. The potential for a great exhibition done this way is huge. With visitors choosing the objects, the museum is nearly guaranteed to exhibit objects that the average visitor finds interesting and at the same time they have the opportunity to create contexts that really fulfil the educational goals of the museum. Just exhibiting the objects that the visitors choose like in an art gallery would not do, but by creating contexts they get educational milieus with approved objects.

Finally at Medelhavsmuseet I learnt that the whole inner room at the bottom level was a created context of lots of objects mashed into a single large showcase. While my observations show that I was not quite happy with how this was done the interview explaining that it was made to show how a grave would have looked like (rather than the objects themselves), made me more positively inclined to it. The interlocutor also expressed the thought that visitors seem to appreciate the created milieu more than the factual displays where pottery often lacks cohesion.

A concrete example of how curators think can be found in "The Museum of Carthage: A Living History Lesson". The museum is explained as an archaeological museum of ancient objects, which are displayed with the purpose of being accessible to the public. Explanations and presentations are there to help spark interest in the visitors.[103] So far the curator (who is the author of the chapter) has ex-

[103] Ennabli, A. (1998), "The Museum of Carthage: A Living History Lesson", p. 27.

plained the same ideas as the interlocutors. However, further into the chapter comes this description:

> […] on to a room, symmetrical with the first Punic room, devoted entirely to amphorae. Fifty specimens of terracotta amphorae in various shapes and sizes show the abiding significance of a utensil that proved its use through the ages. Coming from different regions at different times, they give an idea of the navigation routes and trade flows even though the products they contained have disappeared, and offer a fine anthology of the development of design for daily use. In one corner there is a description of the whole history of barrel vaulting, an architectural feature that spread across the world.[104]

This quote is interesting because it is basically the same kind of observation that I have made in the museums I have visited, but this observation is made by a curator at the actual museum and it is very clear to see that the viewpoint of it differs greatly between us. I would claim that exhibiting fifty amphorae in a single exhibit achieves nothing else than showing off the sheer amount of pottery found at the site. The curator however sees it in a rather different way. To him this display of a large quantity of pottery symbolises the whole trade machine in the Mediterranean Sea; and the text supposedly explains this appropriately.

Once again this proves my hypothesis that museum curators are quite unaware of how much the general public really understands. What the curator observes is completely right and is in fact what experts see when they see the material. For an uneducated person the display is just a row of pottery. Assuming they read the text, which we know from Dean, as well as Fernández and Benlloch, that few people will do, they might understand more; but in itself it really does not tell the visitors as much as the curator seems to hope for.[105]

The final thing I want to discuss is interaction. It was not a question within the essay itself because it relied upon the concept actually being there. I did however include it in the interviews and it gave some interesting results. In the observations I only really noted one case of hands-on interaction with pottery (in Östasiatiska museet), but several cases where there were other forms of interaction.

Two of the museums – Museum Gustavianum and Crypta Balbi – said that interaction through pottery was difficult to do for the museum. The interlocutor at Museum Gustavianum claimed that it had to be done via a guide and that it was reliant upon that. The interlocutors at Crypta Balbi explained that they could not do it from the museum's side, but that teachers often came prepared and that the pupils then sometimes could get to handle pottery. Thus there is possible interaction, but neither museum thought it possible to have without the inclusion of an expert.

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[104] Ennabli, A. (1998), "The Museum of Carthage: A Living History Lesson", p. 29.

[105] Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, pp. 39-46 and 110-114; Fernández, G. & Benlloch, M. (2000), "Interactive exhibits: how visitors respond", p. 59. See also attachment 3.

The other four interviewed museums expressed very positive thoughts about interaction being done through pottery, but also that various circumstances made such interaction easier said than done. Most positive was the interlocutor at Östasiatiska museet who explained that it made interaction easier if they could present certain people through exhibited pottery. Both Historiska museet and Medelhavsmuseet shared thoughts about how such interaction could be done, but they claimed that it was not being done to that extent for the moment. At Terme di Diocleziano the interlocutor told me that pottery would have been used if there were a way to ensure the safety of the material, but that they for now only had interaction through stone objects.

Conclusion

The outcome of the study has been positive. By comparing museums of different sizes in both Sweden and Italy I have managed to show that the problems brought up in the literature and in this study by no means are limited to a single country. What is also evident from the study is that although these problems are known in the museological field, there are several reasons why they still exist in the museums. First of all, change takes time, and there are visible signs of change in the museums, but the process is visibly just in the early stages so far. Secondly, the personnel in the museums are mostly unaware of what the uneducated people really see and understand when visiting their museums, which is shown through the answers given in the interviews.

Furthermore, I have in this study shown upon the shortcomings in the exhibition technique that is commonly used in museums today, where there is a sort of consensus that as much material as possible ought to be displayed. Such concerns have been brought up before in museum literature, but in this study I have shown upon and explained concrete examples of these faults and why they should look differently.

I have also touched the subject of epistemology in museums in the study, because I think that proper explanations for the objects are essential to understanding them. Several of the articles that have been brought up in the essay have touched the same problem; with some of them (*e.g.* O'Neill) having presented reasonable solutions to these textual issues. This essay has added to our existing knowledge of this issue by both showing that this problem is consistent in the museum world (with the odd flake) and also that some of the personnel are aware of that change is necessary but also that others deem it unimportant.

The main purpose of the study was to examine why we exhibit pottery in our museums and what we hope to achieve by doing so. The answers gained in the essay are consistently those that pottery is essential to our understanding of the past; from being some of the only material still left from early settlements to

showing change over time to the spectators. It is also great as added contextual material. Thus pottery has an unquestionable place in the museums. However, the study has also shown that the sheer amount of pottery exhibited should be looked over and questioned further. That pottery has a justified place in the museums does not mean that overcrowding the displays can be overlooked.

Lastly, this study has attempted to show the possibilities of visitor interaction through pottery. The exhibitions themselves have shown rare signs of such interactions, but more so, we have taken part of the possible future interactive activities or display techniques the interviewed curators see as possible additions to the museums. Some of them are simple additions while others would require more advanced efforts to be achievable.

Summary

Pottery in Museums is a study on the *how*, *what* and *why* we choose to exhibit pottery in our museums. It is based on the hypothesis that museum curators often are so used to the material they are exhibiting that they do not question whether the average visitor understands the material or not. Through observations and interviews at a select few museums of historical or archaeological kind in Italy and Sweden, I have shown upon a large number of ways to display and explain pottery to the public. These museums are: Östasiatiska museet, Historiska museet, Medelhavsmuseet and Museum Gustavianum, in Sweden, and Villa Giulia, Crypta Balbi and Terme di Diocleziano, in Italy. The study includes answers to such things as: why pottery is so common in these museums, what the average visitors see and are expected to learn, as well as answers gained through both observations and interviews about the curators views on a chosen few museological issues that can be connected to the exhibiting of pottery.

Museological theory has shown us that texts in exhibits today often are inadequate for the general public, both in terms of information mediated and the actual given information. Such theory has also explained how long texts ought to be, where to place them and how advanced the vocabulary can be. In this study I have touched upon these things but not intended to dig deeper than to examine how the pottery is explained. In the study can be seen that the explanations for the pottery, in most cases, is sub par for the average visitor, but quite possibly enough for a well educated visitor. There are some exceptions to the rule though, where short informational texts shine through and provide even the uneducated spectator with enough information to understand what is exhibited.

After the observations and interviews with the museums there is a small section with possible improvements to the museums, inspired by literature from the field. These improvements are based upon issues I have brought up during the

study and are there to work as an explanatory part for how the general consensus is on solving these issues.

My results are showing that pottery is displayed mostly because it is the most commonly found material on archaeological sites and it is also often the only available material from older settlements. Through the study it is evident that pottery has a place in the museum world, but also that the question of how much space it can be allowed to take has to be questioned further.

Through the conducted interviews I have also shown upon how curators in the museums think about topics such as aesthetics *contra* learning, the possibilities for interaction with pottery as a mediator, as well as what the museums think the visitors see and understand in the exhibitions compared to what they want them to see.

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List of Figures

List of Plans

[106] http://www.villagiulia.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/171/percorsi-espositivi [2014-04-07].

Attachments

Attachment 1: Questionnaire

For Swedish museums

- Är interlokutören utbildad inom museologi/museipedagogik eller inom något annat ämne, exempelvis arkeologi?
- Vilka tankar har ni när ni ställer ut krukor?
    - Läggs fokuset främst på det utställningstekniska eller det museipedagogiska?
    - Finns det någon typ ni väljer bort? Väljer ni hellre finkeramik än brukskeramik eller *vice versa*?
    - Ställer ni ut trasiga krukor eller skulle ni kunna tänka er att göra det? Finns det ett syfte med det?
    - Varför ställer ni ut flera stycken identiska krukor?
- Skulle ni ställa ut fler krukor om ni hade tillgång till det?
- Skulle ni ställa ut en mindre mängd krukor om ni hade tillgång till mer arkeologiskt material som inte är krukor?
- Vad tror ni att den vanliga besökaren förstår när den ser materialet?
    - Vad är det meningen att den ska förstå?
- Den nya museologin förespråkar interaktion med besökaren, tror ni att ni kan uppnå detta genom utställande av krukor?
    - Har ni några diskussioner huruvida man kan skapa en kontext runt materialet man ställer ut?

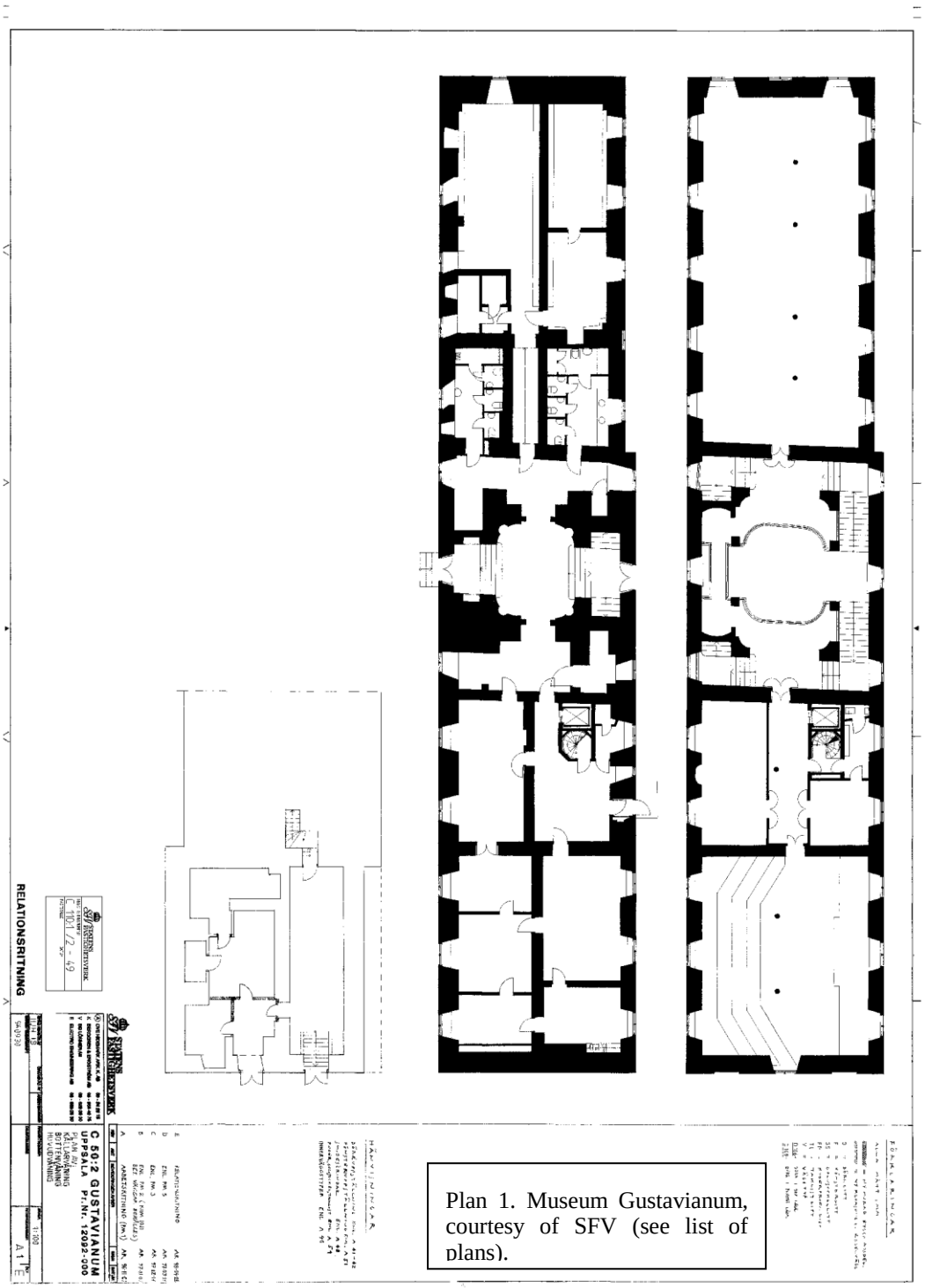
For Italian museums

- Is the interlocutor educated within museology or some other subject, perhaps archaeology?
- How much control does the museum have over what is being exhibited? Is there a political interest in what you exhibit?
- What thoughts do you have regarding the exhibiting of pottery?
    - Is the main focus on exhibition technique or more towards the pedagogical aspect?
    - Is there any type you do not exhibit? Do you prefer fineware to coarseware or the other way around?
    - Do you exhibit broken pottery or would you consider doing so? Is there a purpose with it?
    - Why do you exhibit several identical pots?

- Would you exhibit more pottery if you had access to it?
- Would you exhibit less pottery if you had access to more material of a different kind?
- What do you think the average visitor understands when they see the material?
    - What are they meant to understand?
- The new museology promotes interaction with the visitor; do you think there is a way for you to interact with the visitor through the exhibiting of pottery?
    - Do you have any discussions regarding whether you can create contexts around the material?

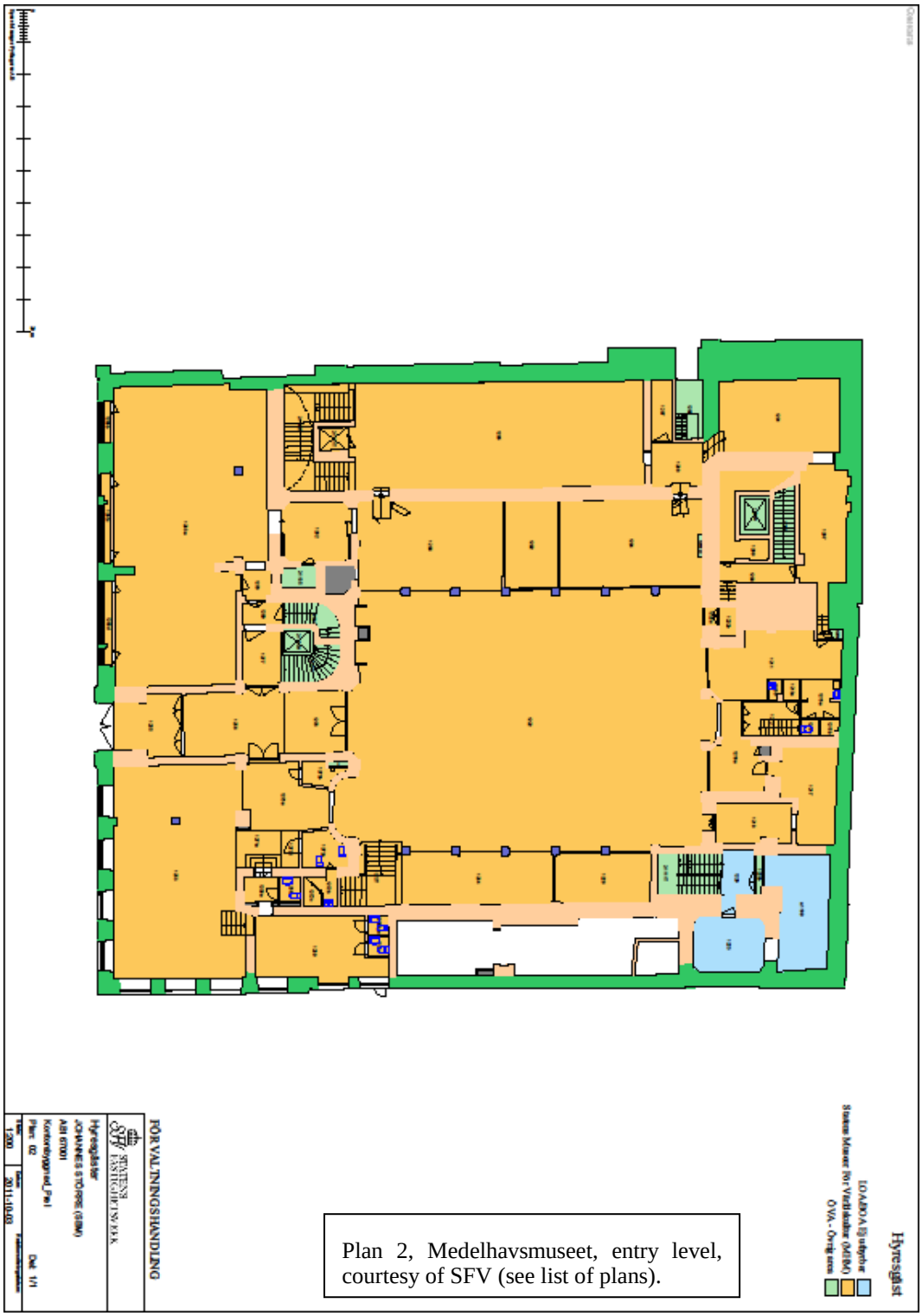
Attachment 2: Floor Plans

Museum Gustavianum

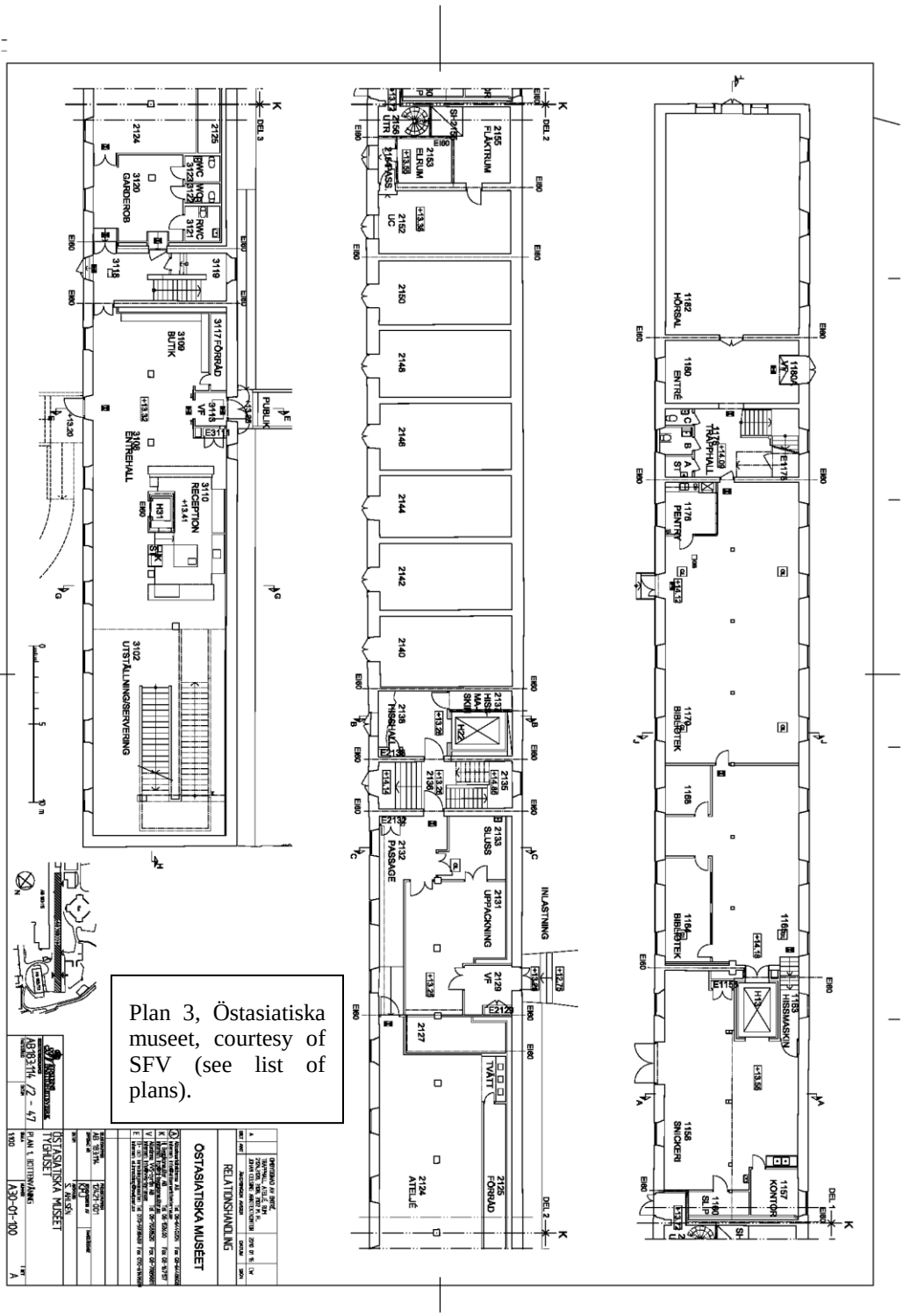


Plan 1. Museum Gustavianum, courtesy of SFV (see list of plans).

Medelhavsmuseet

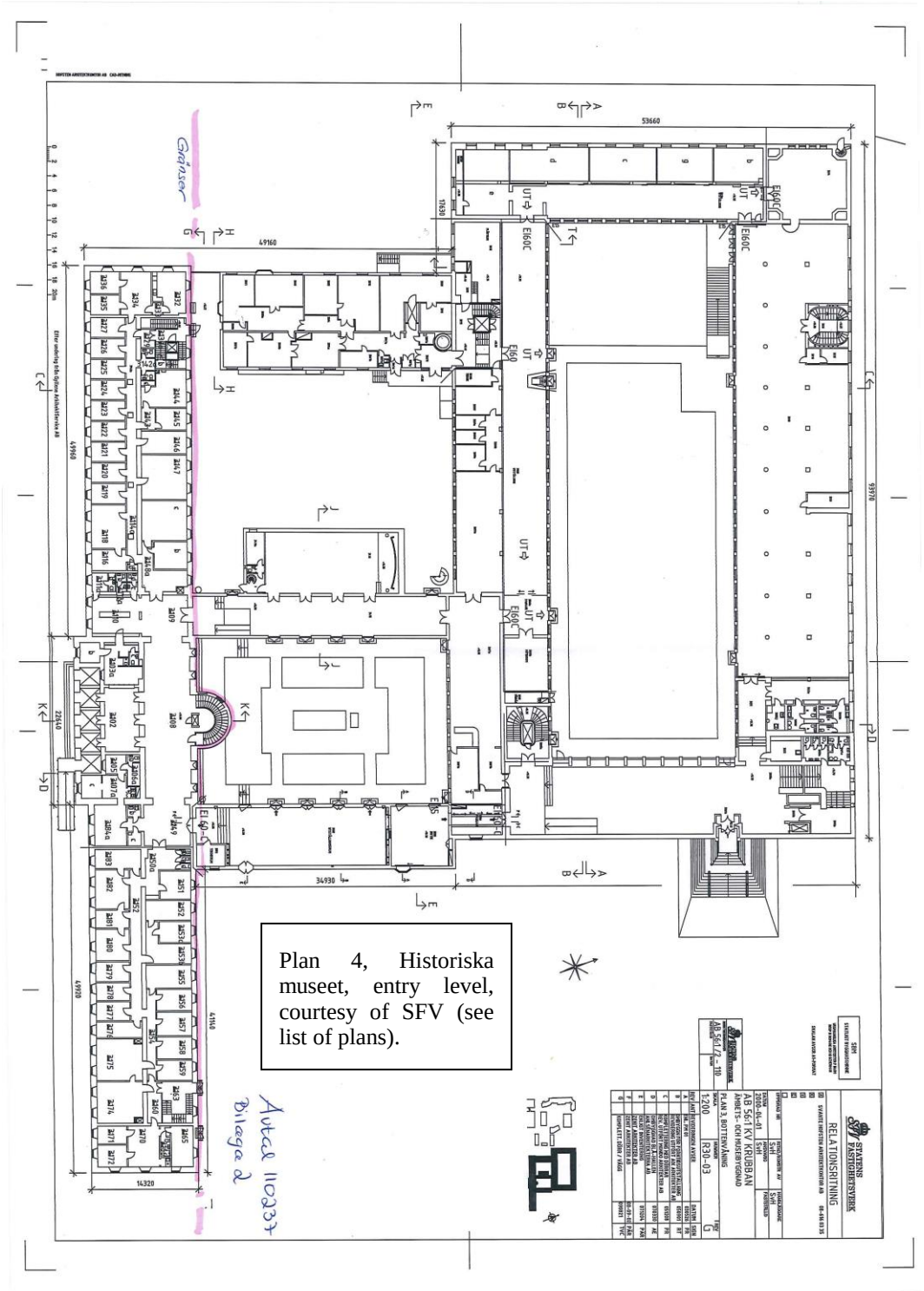


Plan 2, Medelhavsmuseet, entry level, courtesy of SFV (see list of plans).



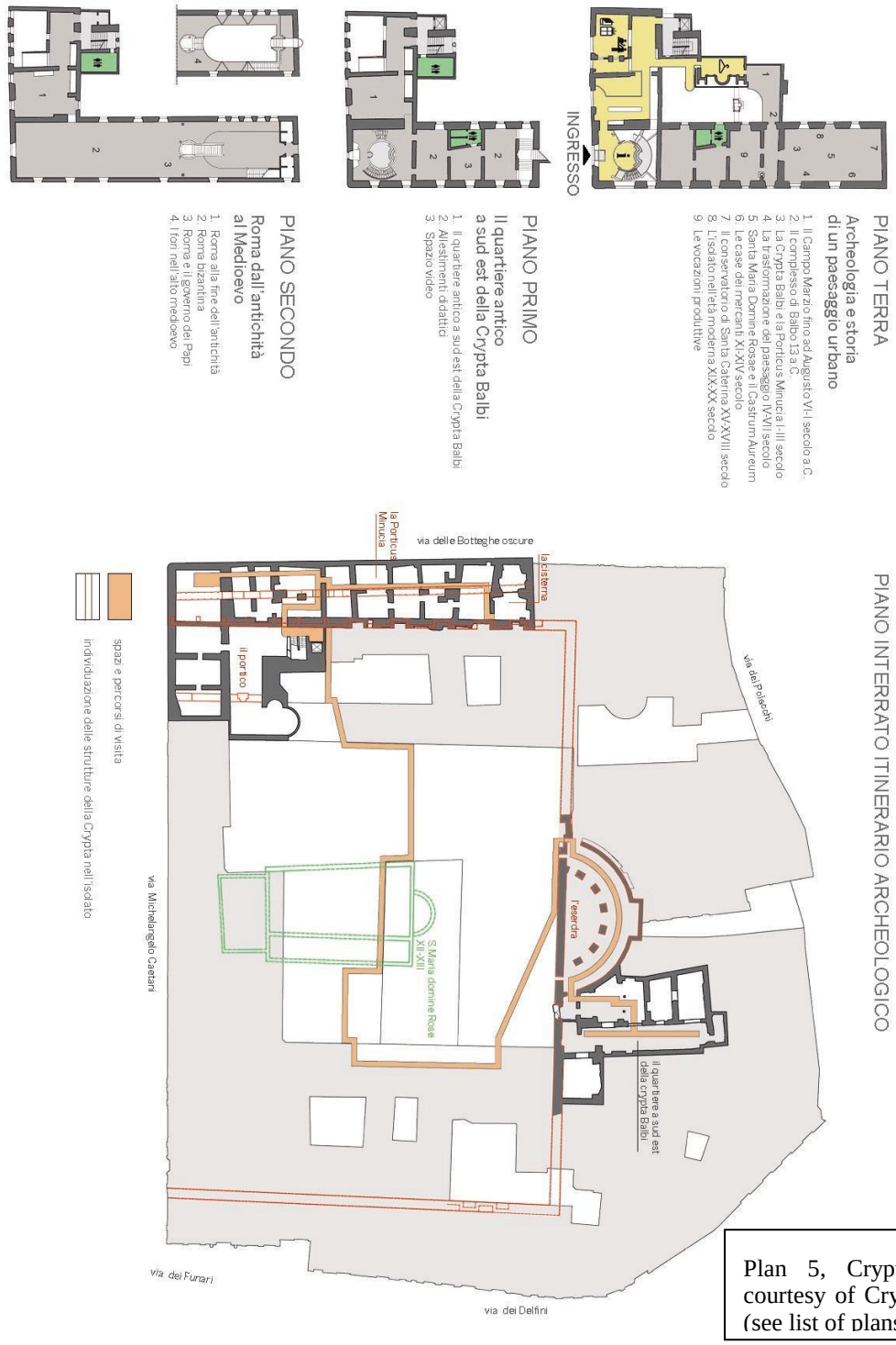
Plan 3, Östasiatiska museet, courtesy of SFV (see list of plans).

Historiska Museet



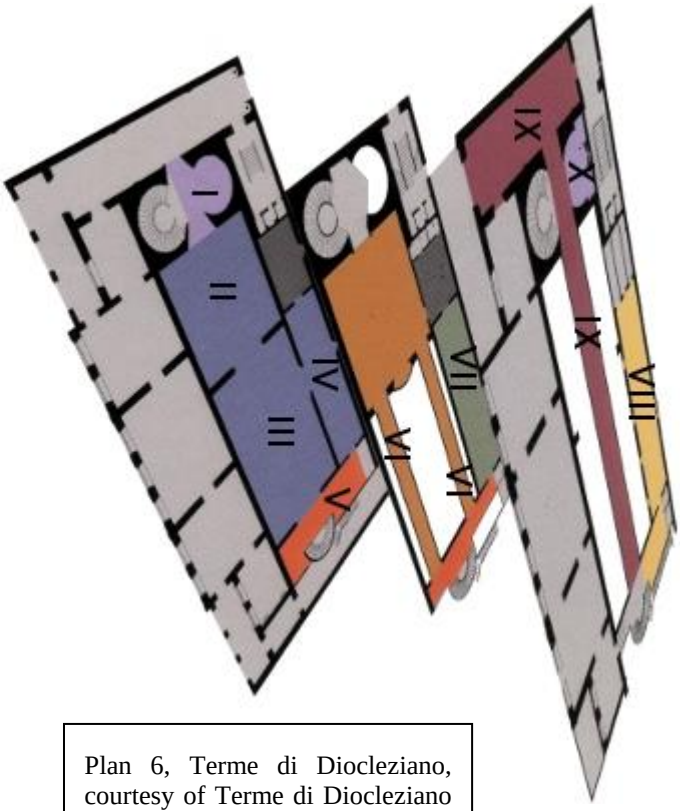
Plan 4, Historiska museet, entry level, courtesy of SFV (see list of plans).

Crypta Balbi



Plan 5, Crypta Balbi, courtesy of Crypta Balbi (see list of plans).

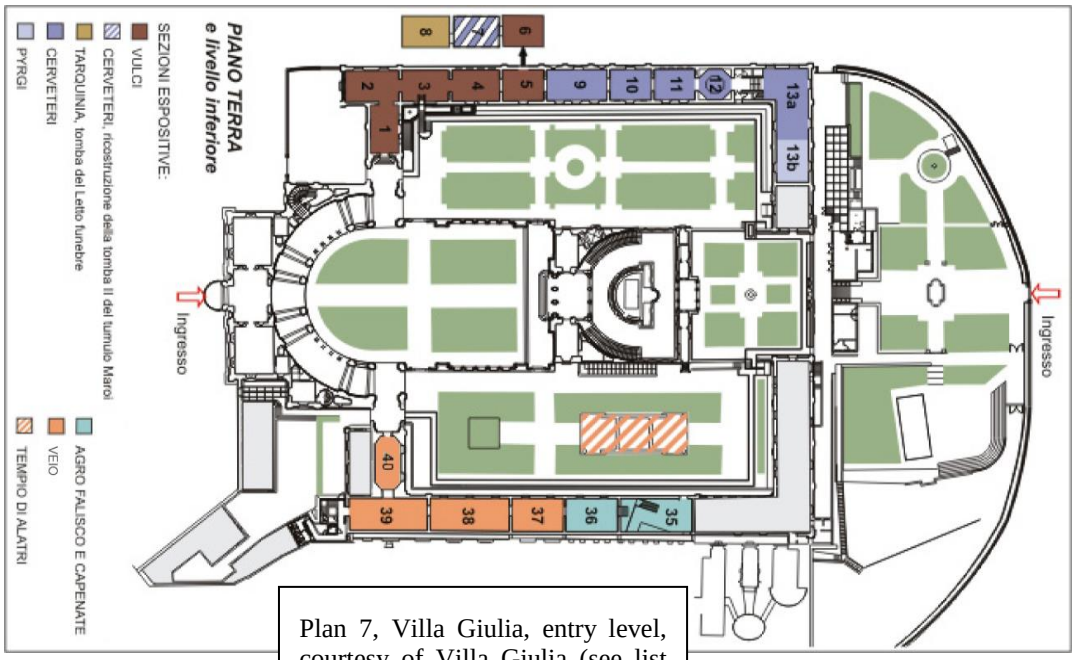
Terme di Diocleziano



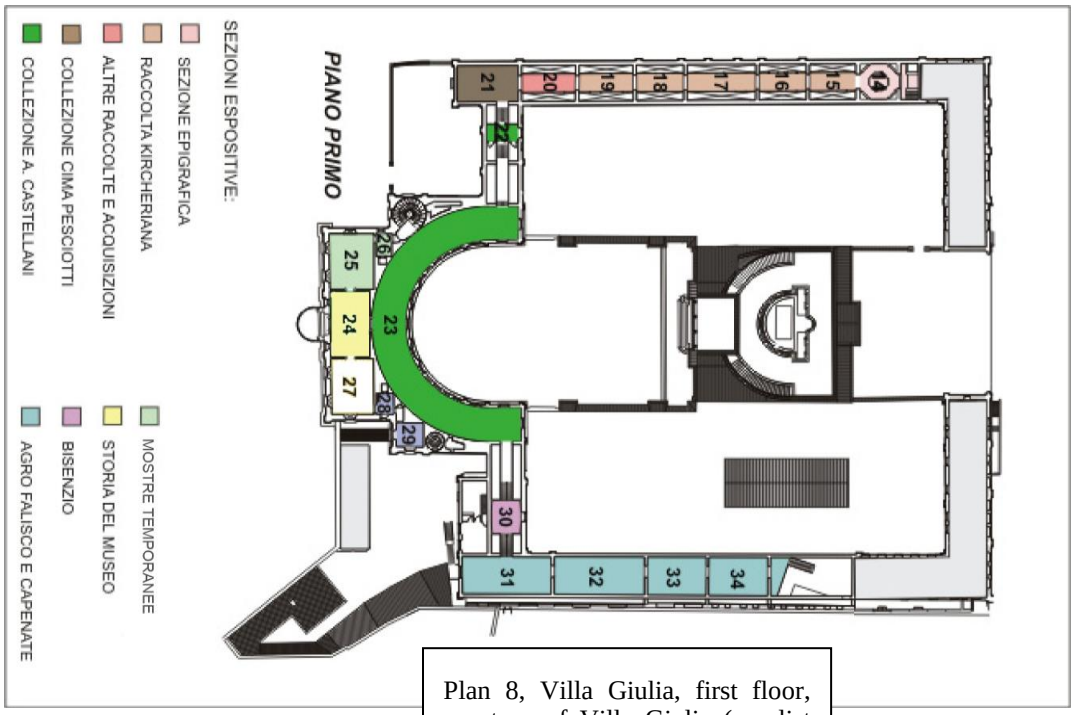
Sala I - La comunicazione scritta: le epigrafi
Sala II - L'età arcaica
Sala III - L'età medio-repubblicana
Sala IV - L'età tardo-repubblicana
Sala V - La figura dell'imperatore
Sala VI - La struttura sociale
Sala VII - Le istituzioni e le strutture politico-amministrative
Sala VIII - L'attività economica
Sala IX e X - Le religioni dei Romani

Plan 6, Terme di Diocleziano, courtesy of Terme di Diocleziano (see list of plans).

Villa Giulia

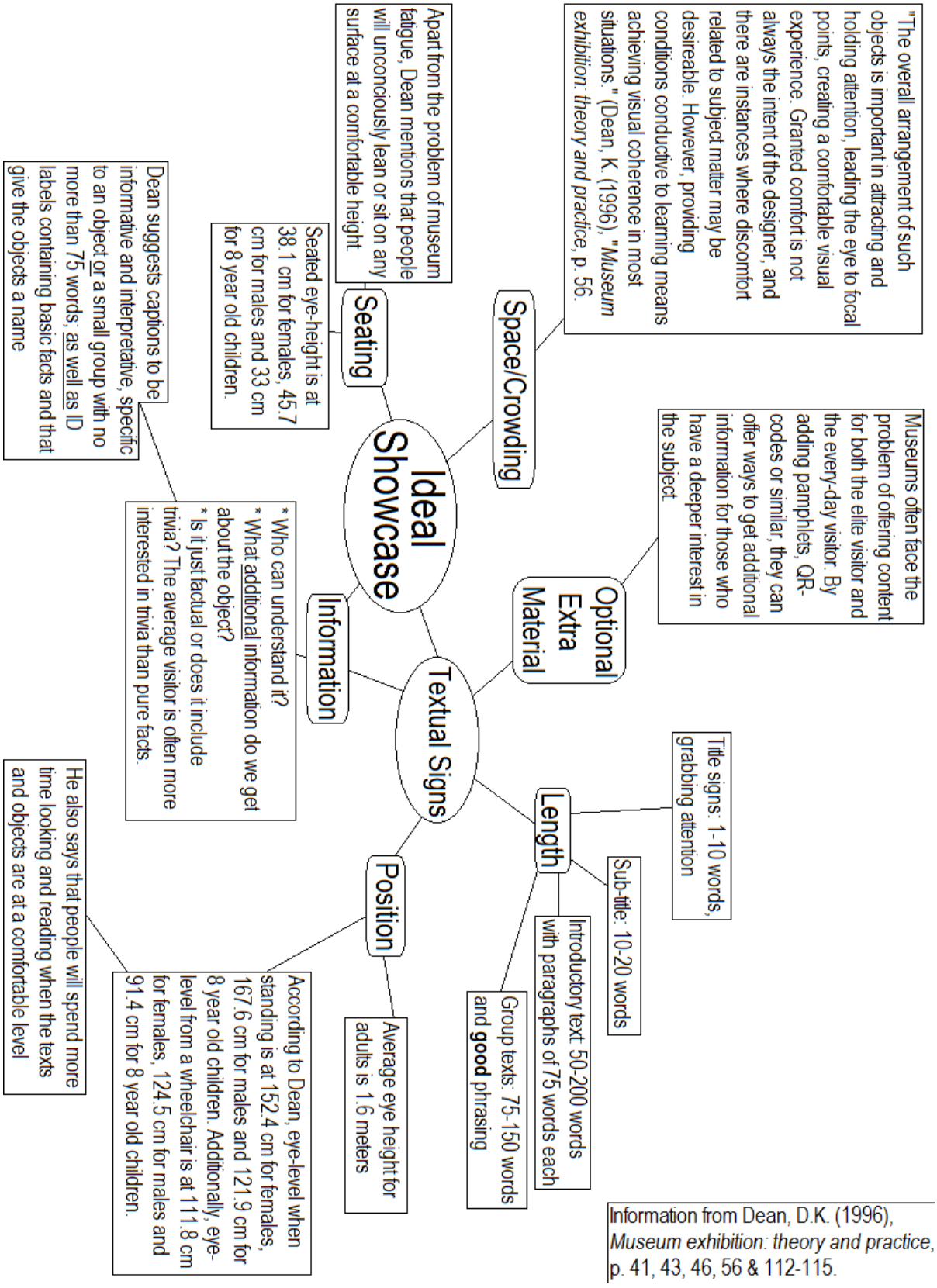


Plan 7, Villa Giulia, entry level, courtesy of Villa Giulia (see list of plans).



Plan 8, Villa Giulia, first floor, courtesy of Villa Giulia (see list of plans).

Attachment 3: Ideal Showcase



Information from Dean, D.K. (1996), *Museum exhibition: theory and practice*, p. 41, 43, 46, 56 & 112-115.