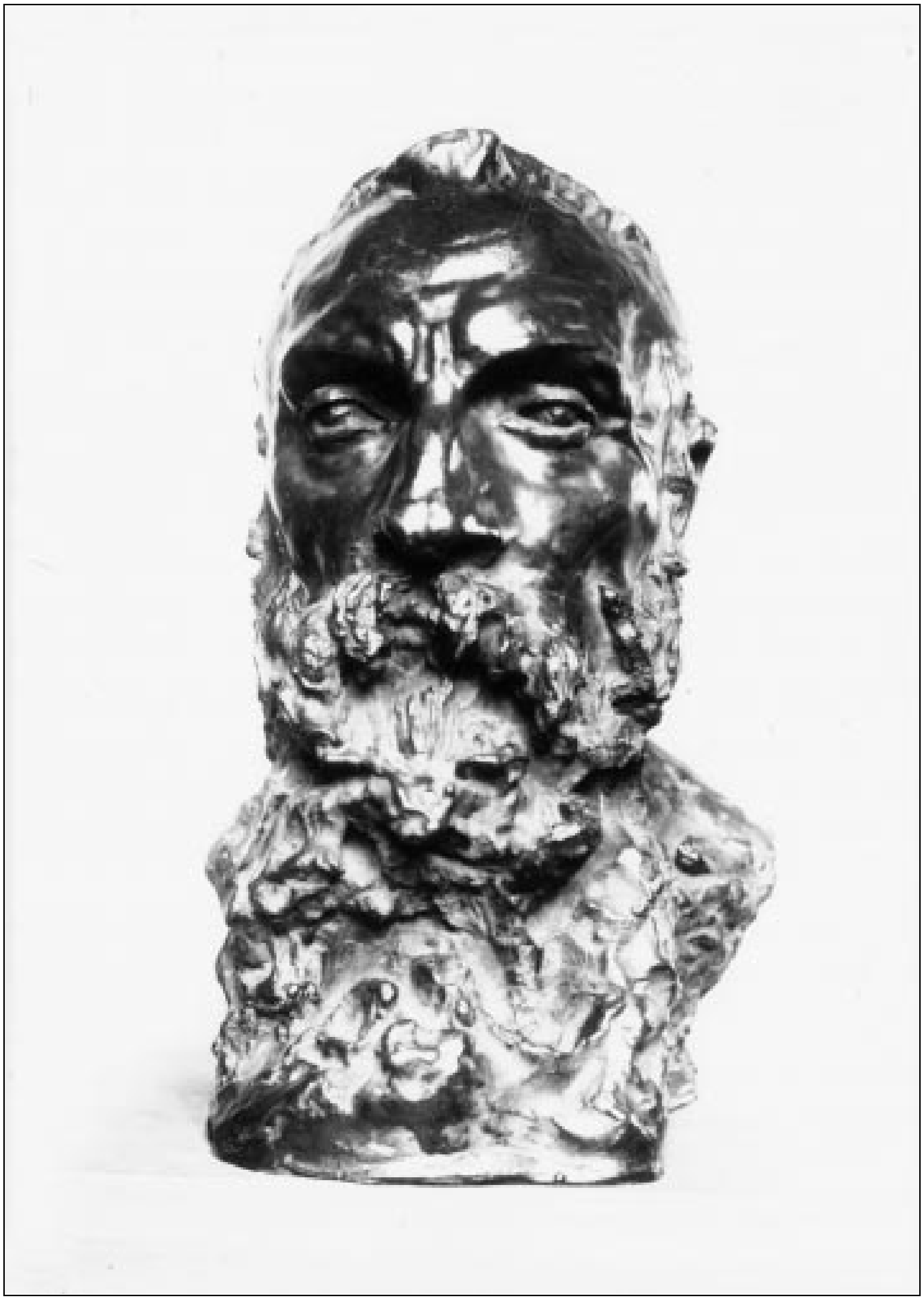
Museum International

Historic house museums

Vol LIII, n°2, april 2001



STOLEN

Bronze statue signed by Camille Claudel depicting the head of Auguste Rodin. Number not known. Dimensions: 40 cm high × 25 cm wide.

Stolen from a museum in Guéret (Creuse), France, on 31 March 1999. (Reference T 7782/GG.)

Photo by courtesy of the ICPO-Interpol General Secretariat, Lyons (France).

Introduction to historic house museums

Giovanni Pinna

In November 1997, a major conference entitled Abitare la storia: Le dimore storiche-museo *(Inhabiting History: Historical House Museums) was held in Genoa, the city of many palaces. On this occasion, the historic house museum, a rather particular type of museum, was extensively discussed for the very first time. The specific nature and values of such museums were highlighted. Over forty experts, who are responsible for palaces and more modest residences, came to Genoa for the conference. They debated aspects of restoration, security, teaching and communication. The conference participants took the opportunity to express their wish for the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to set up an international committee more specifically dedicated to historic house museums. They asked ICOM Italia, which was also present at the conference, to support their recommendation for the creation of the new committee, and this was done in 1998. Giovanni Pinna is the chairman of this newly created International Committee for Historic House Museums. He is president of the ICOM Italian Committee and also president of the ICOM International Committee for Museology of Historic Sites. A palaeontologist by training, he directed the Museum of Natural History in Milan from 1981 to 1996. He has published some sixty books and articles on various topics in the domain of theoretical museology as well as on the history and functions of museum institutions. His books include* Museo: Storia e funzioni di una macchina culturale dal cinquecento a oggi *(1980) and* Fondamenti terici per un Museo di Storia Naturale *(1997).*

The creation in 1998 of the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DemHist) by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), following the proposals put forward by ICOM Italia after a ground-breaking conference on historic house museums held in Genoa in 1997, was based on a number of scientific and cultural considerations relating to historic house museums. In particular, emphasis was placed on the fact that historic houses, when they are open to the public and conserved in their original condition (i.e. with the furnishings and collections made by the people who used to live in them) and have not been converted to accommodate collections put together from different sources, constitute a museum category of a special and rather varied kind. Historic house museums comply with museological and technical museographic constraints that are different from those used in other museums. Their category is different because historic houses may comprise sites of all sizes and kinds, ranging from royal palaces to residences of powerful personages, the houses of famous personages, artist's studios, rich bourgeois houses and even modest cottages.

The historic house is certainly an incomparable and unique museum in that it is used to conserve, exhibit or reconstruct real atmospheres which are difficult to manipulate (except to a very slight extent) if one does not wish to alter the very meaning of 'historic house'. The historic house museum is unlike other museum categories because it can grow only by bringing together original furnishings and collections from one or other of the historic periods in which the house was used. And, unlike the situation in most museums, the blending of furnishings and objects of many different kinds in the historic house museum requires the careful use of conservation methods that are consistent with variety. The structure of the historic house, the impossibility of changing its interior space or the furnishings and objects exhibited raises problems in terms of security norms, the organization of public visits and the safeguarding of the heritage exhibited. Last but not least, the significance of the historic house, in which emphasis is placed not on the value of individual objects but on the whole set of objects and its interaction with the spirit of the people who lived in the house, poses special problems in terms of communication with the public.

The power of history

But there is another aspect of the historic museum house which I believe must be addressed: this is the power of these museums, more than any others, to evoke history and put the visitor into direct contact with it. This aspect of the historic house takes on special importance against the background of another exclusive characteristic of the historic house, that is, its immutable significance and the impossibility of manipulating that meaning with the same ease with which objects can be made to tell different stories in other museums.

The historic house museum is 'fossilized': the furnishings and possibly also the layout and use of space are immutable and cannot be modified or altered without falsifying history. In many such houses, in particular royal palaces, visitors must find their way among different and often contrasting meanings and symbols. Palaces are notorious for changing hands according to the political vagaries of the regime of the country. For instance, in the royal palace of Naples, we find vestiges of the Bourbons, Napoleonic France and the

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

House of Savoy. The choice of emphasis on a particular occupant is therefore often political. Today in Italy, the choice has fallen on the Bourbons whose presence is far more evident than that of Joachim Murat and the House of Savoy. The choice is explained by the fact that this palace was the focal point of the reign of the Bourbons, but not of the House of Savoy (the presence of Murat was minimal); then again, the people of Naples today wish to rediscover their own historic roots as a way of countering a certain loss of national identity that has characterized the Italian Republic since the Second World War. This example reveals the strict limit to the manipulation of history which historic houses permit: however, it also reveals a fundamental aspect in the general context of the relationship between museology and power.

Museums have become extremely popular places to visit so much so that, in Europe at least, the most famous are staggering under the weight of visitors. Tourists of all types are thronging to the museums, wandering in herds and gaggles through rooms displaying paintings, archaeological vestiges or ethnographic artefacts, stopping *en masse* in the boutiques to buy postcards and souvenirs and flocking to the cafeterias for refreshment. In the great atrium of the Louvre under the pyramid, the noise generated by the hundreds of visitors is reminiscent of the sounds heard under the iron vaulting of a large railway station. Whatever their cultural background, tourists would consider it inconceivable to visit London, Florence, Venice or New York without at least a brief excursion to the National Gallery, the Uffizi, the Galeria dell'Accademia or the MOMA. No travel agency today omits a museum visit from its package tour of the major capitals. So museums are fashionable. They attract visitors. So much so that all a city known to be dull and unpopular need do in order to take its place on the regular tourist circuit is to construct a museum monument, even if it is bereft of any significant museum content.

Beyond the fashion of the moment, what is it that draws the public to museums? Why have these institutions, which in some cases have existed for several centuries, become so important today? The answer is simple and well known: museums accommodate the past, the traditions and the minds of people. They mirror the community and the nation, they are places in which the collective memory is created and preserved places where the members of these communities and nations find their own identity. In recent years, interest in museums has grown in inverse proportion to globalization, although at the same rate: the more uniform the world tends to become, the more its individual communities look for their own roots and specific characteristics preserved in museums. The members of communities and countries would seem to be seeking refuge from globalization and uniformity in museums, symbolized in their minds at least as the last bastions of specificity and diversity. For similar reasons, a tourist visit to a museum has become essential to discover and understand the specific features of the people of a foreign country.

A new museology

This surprising interest in museums has generated a new type of museology worldwide. Museologists, communications experts, architects and designers have begun to discuss the formal aspects of the museum, the organization of visitor flows, exhibition techniques and security, while economists and managers have begun to propose management models which are more or less economically viable. Sociologists, political scientists, historians and philosophers are also inquiring into the mechanisms by which objects communicate with visitors, the way in which collective memory is born and conserved and the social and political significance of museums.

The outcome of all this has been a profusion of museological manuals and treatises, conferences, courses specializing in new and old museology and also an incredible increase in the number of museums. But this has also been an opportunity for those who hold any form of power, or shape the destinies of the community, to become aware of the fact that museums are instruments of communication at least on a par with television and newspapers. The communication power of museums stems from their capacity to put across information through real objects which, by the very fact that they are real, are regarded by visitors as impossible to manipulate, unlike words and pictures. The museum therefore acquires, in the eyes of its public, much greater authority than the audiovisual media or the press. That authority derives from the fact that it is thought to hold the truth in every case.

In actual fact, things are not like that and the political use of museums by undemocratic, or barely democratic, regimes has taught us that the content of a museum can easily be manipulated. Because of its very authority, the museum is therefore a powerful instrument of pressure and political indoctrination. There is no country in the world, including the nations which pride themselves on having the most democratic regimes, in which dominant social groups, be they politicians, sociologists, economists, ethnologists or religious leaders, do not control or try to control museums and their contents. Museums therefore often become venues for ideological encounters, political confrontations and social tension places in which the factions of society fighting for supremacy tend to impose their own particular cultural model and vision of history.

Although it is difficult to define the mechanisms by which a power group uses the museum to exercise control over society, because of the many different paths that may be taken, the main lines of the phenomenon can be described. Excluding groups that seize power by force to set up autocratic regimes, control over society by a particular social, economic or political group is achieved by the growing authority of that group.

The history of power

Authority is not synonymous with consensus; instead, it creates a kind of legitimacy in the everyday management of power. Today any group can acquire authority and legitimacy the interpretation or manipulation of history; it acquires legitimacy by appropriating the history of the community and carefully building a linear history. By doing so, it claims to be the natural heir to that history and acquires authority based wherever possible on that history, laying down ever-deeper roots in the past. Museums as institutions which conserve history and the memory of history are ideal instruments for handling these two operations. In most cases, under the control of the established power, which acts by all kinds of different means (laws, personal selection, financing methods etc.), museums take measures whose ultimate purpose is to create an authoritative image for the ruling group.

It is in this framework that historic houses converted into museums take on special value and significance. More than any other kind of museum, the historic house museum in fact has the power to evoke and create links between the visitor and the history present in the house itself, or which it seeks to represent. Unlike other museums, the historic house does not derive its importance from a range of objects with a symbolic significance of their own. It is highly evocative because not only does it contain objects, it also embodies the creative imagination of the people who lived and moved within its walls, who made daily use of the objects that were the original furnishings. Seen in this way, the historic house is the symbol of events, epochs and regimes which cannot be eliminated without destroying the house itself.

The significance of the historic house is therefore either completely accepted or completely rejected. One striking example is what the Italian Government and the House of Savoy did at the dawn of national unity. Early in the second half of the nineteenth century, the governments and ruling house enacted a policy designed to destroy the symbols of the old Italian states by dispersing their cultural heritage. Items of that heritage were taken away and used to furnish the residences of the new rulers. The aim was obvious: to compose a new national unity by breaking up old political realities.

Conceptual challenges for museology

This small example underlines the importance of political symbols for both history and culture. It also explains why analysis and discussion are now a focal point in the committee created by ICOM. At present, the work of the DemHist committee is being pursued through a series of analyses whose purpose is to identify the characteristics of historic house museums and to discuss the problems connected with their management. Themes for further study and discussion must be identified. This will lead to a better understanding of the historic house museum while enabling solutions to be found for the new management problems arising in this diverse field.

However, identification of the themes and problems inherent in the museology of historic houses is possible only if the underlying object, whose themes and problems are evoked, can itself be defined, so making it possible to define the nature and functions of the historic house museum in its socio-cultural environment.

Definition of the nature and functions of the historic house museum is certainly one of the most delicate tasks which the DemHist committee will have to perform. It is essential to maintain clarity in a sector where public bodies coexist with private operators, and where foundations take action in terms of purely cultural missions alongside financial groups seeking to make purely economic use of the historic heritage of buildings. Moreover, the object itself varies in quality: very old and properly conserved historic houses coexist with coarse reconstructions.

Classification problems

By defining the nature and tasks involved, the committee may be able to arrive at a definition of the historic house museum as an absolute, entity. However, such an absolute definition, with the exclusions or inclusions that it implies, requires a broader knowledge of the varied world of historic houses, with an inventory and classification of the existing typologies.

To the best of my knowledge, no exhaustive classification of historic houses exists at present. In 1993, S. Butcher-Younghans proposed an initial classification of historic houses into three broad categories (*Historic House Museums*, Oxford University Press, 1993):

- *Documentary historic house museums* recount the life of a personage or place of historical or cultural interest in which the environments must contain the original objects, and if possible in their original layout.

- *Representative historic house museums* document a style, an epoch or a way of life. In these environments, settings may be reconstructed using items that are not originals: they may be either copies of the originals or pieces which did not belong to the house but were acquired on the market.

- *Aesthetic historic house museums* are places where private collection are exhibited that have nothing to do with the house itself, its history or its occupants.

A second approach to a classification was presented at the Genoa Congress in 1997 by Rosanna Pavoni and Ornella Selvafolta (published as 'La diversità delle dimore-museo: opportunità di una riflessione', in L. Leoncini and F. Simonett (eds.), *Abitare la storia*, pp. 32–6, Turin, Umberto Allemandi, 1998). These two authors saw an imperative need to break down the unity of the definition of the house-museum, and recognized instead several different subcategories: royal palaces, houses dedicated to illustrious men, houses created by artists, houses dedicated to a style or an epoch, houses of collectors, historic houses as a setting for contents, family houses, houses with a specific socio-cultural identity.

I do not wish to go into the merits of this classification, on which research is continuing. However, beginning with the Butcher-Younghans classification, I would like to highlight the fundamental difference between a historic house and a historic house museum: the latter goes beyond the edifice as such to include the collections and original furnishings. This integrity of the overall project gives the historic house museum an ability to evoke the past, which in turn makes it a monument of great social and political significance. In that sense, Butcher-Younghans' 'aesthetic historic house museums' certainly do not fall into the category of historic house museums. There is room for further discussion of 'representative historic house museums', although the most intransigent museologists warn us against the reconstructions of artefacts from old houses. They maintain that the transition from the mere reconstruction of furnishings to a kind of Disneyland reconstruction of medieval castles is all too easy, so manipulating history for commercial purposes.

While a definition of the historic house museum and a classification is currently the primary task of the DemHist Committee, other themes will have to be considered and other problems solved in relation to the museology of historic houses: the symbolic social and political significance of historic house museums; the historic gardens of historic houses; problems of restoration and conservation; the ethical problems bound up with total reconstruction and with the distortion of the original meaning of the house-museum; exhibition and visitor management; communication with the public; the interpretation and choice of history; the definition of the professionalism needed for management and development; the organization and management of staff; financial resources and the potential return on them; the use of the museum house for non-museum events; problems relating to security of the building, the collections and the visitors.

An agenda can thus now be defined for the future work of the Committee and the co-operation that will be necessary, beginning with a survey of existing historic house museums and their classification. Work can then progress to an analysis of the nature and functions of the historic house museum before finally defining what these houses are and discussing the countless themes and problems of which I have given no more than a first tentative list here. ■

Reality as illusion, the historic houses that become museums

Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas

A linear museological approach is only partially satisfactory when studying historic house museums. The complexity of the historic house as museum requires that the observer learn how to 'read' it both as object and as museum. House museums combine history and dream, suggests Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas, who is director of the Virrey Liniers Casa Museo Histórico Nacional in Alta Gracia, Córdoba, Argentina. She is a deputy member of the Argentine Committee of ICOM, and as an active member of ICOFOM has participated in symposia and congresses, both in Argentina and abroad. She has worked as co-ordinator of the Organization of American States (OAS) Project for setting up workshops for children in the National Museum of Fine Arts of Buenos Aires, Argentina. She was responsible for the museum department of the Cultural Heritage Authority of the Province of Córdoba, directed the rehabilitation of the museums of the Province of Córdoba and provided technical assistance on many occasions to museums in Argentina. She has given numerous lectures and classes and her published works include Importancia del Museo en la Educación*;* El museo como recurso didáctico en la Educación Sistemática *(The museum as a didactic recourse in systematic education);* Museos de hoy para el mundo de mañana *(Museums of today for the world of tomorrow);* Los museos y la crisis de los pueblos de identidad concurrente *(Museums and the Crisis of Peoples with Plural Identities);* Museos a la búsqueda de la memoria perdida *(Museums in Search of Lost Memory).*

Atmosphere

It is difficult for visitors in house museums not to be captivated by their highly evocative power. The historic house which is converted to a museum calls up feelings and memories in visitors more than does any other type of museum. It possesses a special 'atmosphere' which takes visitors back to other times and makes them wonder what other persons had transited through the same spaces they are now passing through. They cannot help wondering if the people who used to live in the house at times felt the same joys and sorrows they themselves have felt. More than a monument that celebrates a lost past, a historic houses is seen as a place where people have lived out their life.

This impact on the public, along with a particular type of mental and emotional reaction are produced by the presence and absence of the people who once lived in the house. But, above all, these houses are perceived as 'true reality' and therefore free of any kind of manipulation. As if in a time machine, visitors feel they are travelling to a 'frozen' past which also offers the possibility of a day of self knowledge during which they can learn about themselves. Coming face to face with the past gives us the opportunity to ascertain who we are and, more importantly, who we are not. As in perhaps no other type of museum, the house museum 'successfully generates a combination of cultural images which can convey feelings-perceptions, in addition to knowledge'.[1] It thus produces an intimate link between collective memory and personal memory.

Presentation or representation?

But this kind of sensitivity should not make us forget that, when objects are displayed in the context of an exhibition, they become transformed and acquire new meanings. And although each event encapsulates its own original characteristics and brings with it a full set of primary meanings, from the perspective of the present such original meanings are well-nigh ineffable. Annis Sheldon has said that museum symbols are '"multivocal" and "polyvalent" – that is, they speak with many meanings and in many combinations. They change with backdrop and grow with use. And it is precisely their plasticity, rather than their capacity to represent directly, that makes them central to human thought and action.'[2] Retrospective readings of past events end as constructions encumbered with the evaluations of the present.

The historicity of concepts is the historicity of both the historical and social meanings and modes whereby reality is constructed and expressed. We may return tirelessly to the events of the past, but they cannot be recovered in a definitive and well-defined way from the past in any single instance of retrospective return. On the contrary, they will remain the same happenings, albeit understood in each specific present time in a new and specific way. They are reconceptualized because every time that we return to them we take them back and update them with novel meanings dictated from the present, because it is from the present that we retrieved them.

Although the house museum seems to be almost untouched (which is never completely true, given that it must have passed through different hands, different uses and different restorations) and derives its atmosphere (for the most part) from the original objects of its owners, the fact that it is organized as a museum portrays a more or less clear purpose. Its objective is not

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

history or life *per se*, but portrayal of history or life; not the past *per se*, but its representation. Each room is stage managed in order to portray a theme. This choice of scenography as the driving force of communication is aimed at surprising visitors in a framework of strong sensory impressions which are to accompany the viewing of the object and strengthen its impact and message. Objectivity does not exist in the exhibition given that each object is displayed as an interpreted object, with emphasis being placed, in some form or other, on certain aspects.

It is important, almost vital, to place the object as much as possible in its original setting, in terms of the times in which it was produced. None the less, the past cannot be reproduced because it is not a concrete entity that can be re-created, nor are the objects hermetically sealed, with only the seal to be broken for everything to be revealed. 'We are more interested in processes than in objects, and we are interested in them not for their capacity to remain pure, always authentic, but because they represent certain ways of seeing and experiencing the world and life *per se*. . . . As a result, the quest for authenticity is not the final purpose of research in, and the restoration and dissemination of, heritage. What is aimed at is the reconstruction of historical verisimilitude.'[3]

Spaces of legitimization

As opposed to other types of museums in which emphasis is put on the signifying power of the objects and collections, and the building as container has to be adapted to the possible discourses and narratives, the chief purpose of the historic house museum is to ensure that the building is in all aspects at one with the more or less original collections. The symbolic value of this unity makes it a realistic benchmark of past time.

Seen as active or discursive social objects, house museums express values and meanings which are not shared by everybody living in the same period, but which have been used as representing the essence of historical identity. It is interesting to observe the way in which different social groups capture and set in order the events taking place on the basis of specific canons. 'Spaces which sanctify power reveal a tacit acceptance of an even more complex historical process: that of the emergence, in Western societies, of memory spaces regulated by civil society on the basis of specific criteria and to specific ends.'[4] In the exercise of this kind of control over historical knowledge, groups have always insisted that what they seek to do is to narrate things exactly as and when they happened, thus presenting heritage as an indisputable testimony.

The high symbolic value of historic house museums has led to their being used by

Photo by courtesy of the author

'El Paraiso', the house of Manuel Mujica Lainez La Cumbre, Sierras de Córdoba, Argentina.

Photo by courtesy of the author

Casa del Virrey Liniers Museum, Alta Gracia, Córdoba, Argentina.

different ideologies as simplified messages portraying cultural identity. 'In fact, they have often been used both to recover legitimate rights and to deny them to others.'[5]

In Argentina in the 1940s, for example, and because of a great migratory influx, the rulers of the time decreed what they called National Historic Monuments and transformed a number of historic houses into museums which were to serve as paradigms of national unity, embodying a certain concept of national consciousness and with a system representing the values of the state. This was a more or less covert form of political illusionism whereby the complexities of culture were changed into simplified messages concerning cultural identity, which were focused exclusively on highly symbolic objects at the expense of popular forms of cultural expression.

Although changes have taken place in the ways in which power relationships are expressed in present-day society, the museum *per se* favours the development of internal mechanisms of control of the reasoning and emotions of the 'public' at which it is theoretically aimed. The recognition that house museums customarily contribute to the process of manufacturing cultural myths would prepare the ground for realizing their great potential to examine and call into question invented traditions, distorted myths and conventional values.

The symbolic power of the container and other discourses

La Casa

'The marks of the sins which were committed here have rubbed off on me, making me dirty, corrupting me, and slowly stripping away from me, room by room, everything I possessed that was funny, beautiful and splendid.'[6] This citation is taken from the novel *La Casa* (*The House*) by the Argentine writer Manuel Mujica Lainez, who anthropomorphizes places by describing a mysterious relationship, almost one of complicity, between people and the place where they live. In *La Casa*, as a huge house which had belonged to the nobility is being torn down in Buenos Aires, he tells its story in the form of simultaneous narratives about the beings who once lived in it: ghosts and objects which contribute to the dialogue with its strange experience. Paradoxically, a few years after the death of the writer, his summer residence 'El Paraíso', located in a beautiful spot in the mountains of Córdoba, was converted into a house museum. Now the ghosts of not only the writer himself but of all the characters that he ever created live, including the phantom of *La Casa* in Florida Street.

As a result of campaigns waged for emancipation, civil wars, pauperization and the lack of interest in a past which was late in being reclaimed, many of the present-day house museum in Latin America have suffered from deterioration, changed owners many times, changed purpose at other times and, depending on the house, lost all or part of the original objects belonging to the owners. In these containers of what are mostly historical museums, an attempt is being made to create narratives which are consistent with the symbolic charge of the buildings housing them. What is narrated is not history, but different histories which often confront each other in a multiplicity of meanings that coexist in a single signifier.

The Museo de la Inconfidencia

The Museo de la Inconfidencia (Museum of Treason) in Minas Gerais (Brazil) is a good example of what is stated above. The building in which it is housed, the Casa de Cámara e Cadeia, was the headquarters of the old administration and housed the prison, and is one of the outstanding examples of the civil architecture of the colonial period. Built between 1785 and 1855, its extraordinary size and the fact that it was set among shacks built of mud and reeds led to violent criticisms of the colonial government. It was used as a state penitentiary during the twentieth century, and underwent a variety of changes. The museum was established in 1937 in homage to the proto-heroes of the new fatherland.

It should be explained that the name 'Inconfidencia Mineira' (Mining Treason) was given to the patriotic movement led by Second Lieutenant Tiradentes, who in 1789 sought to liberate Brazil from Portuguese colonial control. Tiradentes was hanged, and his body was exposed in the pillory at the entrance of the Casa de Cámara e Cadeia, the same house that today serves as a powerful symbol in the struggle against oppression.

Virrey Liniers house museum in Alta Gracia, Córdoba, Argentina

The priests of the Society of Jesus arrived in the territory of present-day Argentina in the sixteenth century, and in only a few years had established a system that left an indelible mark on the extensive area over which it exercised its influence. The city of Córdoba, which was founded a few years before their arrival, was the capital of what they called the Jesuit Province of Paraguay. They constructed the oldest church of Argentina in Córdoba, and built schools for the maintenance of which they organized Estancias (Jesuit farms) that were agricultural, stockbreeding and industrial establishments.[7]

The Estancia in Alta Gracia was one of the main Estancias which the Jesuits set up in the countryside of Córdoba. A house museum was created here in 1977, and is now named after another of its important proprietors, because its story did not end with the expulsion of the priests of the Society of Jesus. Rather than history being considered as a narrative of 'outstanding' events to be memorized, in this house museum priority is given to the concept of continuous process. The characters who once lived in the house are not presented as heroes to be venerated, but as social actors immersed in the social environment in which they were active.

The beautiful seventeenth-century Jesuit building plays the premier role. The contents of the exhibition it contains are designed to provide the visitor with the tools with which to understand and interpret the significance of the Jesuit farms in the context of the region. How

Photo by courtesy of the author

Museo de la Inconfidencia (Museum of Treason), Minas Gerais, Brazil.

did they function as units of production? What was daily life like for the Blacks, Indians and Creoles who worked in them, and how did the farms evolve over time?

The use of period pieces (such as iron tools and implements, seventeenth-century toilets and bathroom installations, nineteenth-century highland bedroom and Liniers kitchen), complete with dioramas, scale models, graphs, drawings and photographs, enable visitors gradually to discover who the successive owners were, how they lived and how their relationship with their environment changed over time.

What is most noticeable about this house museum is the emphasis put on displaying the types of work and aspects of everyday life whereby visitors can appreciate economic and social processes in a context devoid of ornament. As a result, the museum possesses an atmosphere which takes visitors back to other times in which they can identify with the social actors who have gone before them.

Meeting the Other

Fiction is portrayed as reality in these 'theatres of memory' that are house museums. This kind of stage-management provides, on the one hand, the indelible traces of those who lived and used the original objects and whose ghosts can still be felt, and, on the other, the meanings ascribed by conservators, researchers and museographers.

The object *per se* has no intrinsic value. The object is defined instead by its relationships with humankind which attributes different values to it. Moreover, these values change with time. When the objects are displayed in the context of the exhibitions, they are transformed and attributed to new categories. In terms of the meaning of the object as symbol, they oscillate between two worlds, namely the world from which they come, and the world created by the display. In the context of the house museum, an object's significance depends not on its stylistic, artistic or technological values, but on its capacity to be consistent with a narrative or discourse, and to transmit a message.

The challenge is to be able to show that such conceptualizations and their respective meanings can be communicated, since it is from the narrow and inherent background of our experiences that culture assumes fluent expression. The original context is never recovered in the house museum because we look at things with the eyes of today. None the less, the symbolic value of the objects on display is not an inherent quality, but one produced by the interaction between a subject, namely memory and the imagination, and the exhibition which is, at one and the same time, concrete reality and the representation of reality.

'Even though the visitor is assured that museum objects are praiseworthy, personal meaning remains *personal*. It is something that exists largely independently of the designer's message . . . In a fashion, each member writes his own script. The visitor travels in, about, and through a set of symbols, seeking to tie them together with associations and meanings – as if each visitor were author and star in his own play.'[8]

The challenge which this special type of museum must meet is to make constant efforts to draw near to the meaning of the objects which it exhibits by constructing discourses which should not confuse education with didacticism. Excessively structured discourses aimed at showing us the right way to see do indeed rob the museum of its quality of being a space of freedom and inner quest. 'Given that the house museum is a dream space, perhaps drawing near to the meaning of objects should be accomplished through poetics. The private world within dwellings yields a variety of different ways of collecting objects which can be subjected to historical analysis. The poetics of space would be a choice vein for understanding the state of dreams that museography creates with its collections of objects.' [9]

And in the final analysis, the magic that makes museums so appealing could come from 'the meeting with the Other, with what is hidden and can be intuited but not fully grasped by the intellect'[10] in the plastic framework in which the public creates their own spaces. ■

Notes

1. Morales Moreno and Luis Gerardo, '¿Qué es un Museo?', *Cuicuilco* (Mexico City), Vol. 3, No. 7, May–August, 1996.

2. Annis Sheldon, 'The Museum as a Staging Ground for Symbolic Action', *Museum*, No. 151 (Vol. 39, No. 3), 1986.

3. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas Hibridas*, Mexico City, Grijalbo, 1991.

4. Morales Moreno and Luis Gerardo, '¿Ensayo histórico. Museografia e historiografia'?, *Cuicuilco* (Mexico City), Vol. 3, No. 7, May–August, 1996.

5. UNESCO, *Our Cultural Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*, Paris, UNESCO/Oxford and IBH, 1995; 1996.

6. Manuel Mujica Lainez, *La Casa*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1978.

7. This is one of UNESCO's new World Heritage sites, inscribed at the meeting in Cairns, Australia in December 1999. It is officially known as the Jesuit Block and the Jesuit Estancias of Córdoba. The Jesuit Block in Córdoba, heart of the former Jesuit province, contains the core buildings of the Jesuit system: the university, the church and residence of the Society of Jesus, and the college. Along with the five *estancias*, or farming estates, they contain religious and secular buildings that illustrate the unique religious, social, and economic experiment carried out by the Jesuits in South America for a period of over 150 years in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – Ed.

8. Sheldon, op. cit.

9. Morales Moreno and Luis Gerardo, *La colección museográfica y la memoria histórica*, Second Symposium Reflecting on Historic Museums, Alta Gracia, Córdoba, Argentina, October 2000.

10. Norma Ruseconi, *Logos e identidad: retórica y semiología de fin de siglo*, Coro, Venezuela, 1999. (ICOFOM Study Series ISS 31).

Towards a definition and typology of historic house museums

Rosanna Pavoni

'Houses, however resplendent, are part of everyone's common experience,' and this, according to Dr Rosanna Pavoni, helps to simplify the presentation of history to the visitors of historic house museums. This article presents a starting point for defining house museums based on the wide professional experience of Dr Pavoni, who is administrative secretary of the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DemHist). The rediscovery of Renaissance forms and culture during the second half of the nineteenth century has been the basic theme of all her research, conferences, exhibitions, publications and professional activities for the past fifteen years.[1] *This theme, also linked to the history of collections and the evolution of taste in interior decoration, uses the artistic whole of the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan (Italy) (house and art collections) as a model and also as a source of very important documents. Dr Pavoni has written extensively, and has also edited works, on the Neo-Renaissance and on art collecting as exemplified in the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum. She has also founded, and is the editor of, the Italian/English publications of the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum under the title of* Appunti del Museo Bagatti Valsecchi (Notes of the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum)*, the fifth and most recent volume of which deals with the restoration of nineteenth-century decorative art and culture. Since 1988, she has been director of the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum.*

'Museumization' of the everyday

Any discussion of house museums today is bound to lead to reflection on the relationship between these two entities, that is, on the hybridization of two civic institutions with diametrically opposed objectives yet with a long history of relatively close contacts.

'This house looks like a museum', is a sentence we have heard a thousand times; it conjures up the picture of large collections of objects displayed in cold and inhospitable surroundings, and seems to mirror the complex relationship between the changeable aspect of everyday life and its permanent setting. This relationship was explicitly enshrined in the nineteenth-century passion – in form, if not in content – for collecting relics of the past and using them for a personal reconstruction of history displayed within the walls of the home. In this process, which treats interior design as a simple and recognizable tool of self-representation, the house was forced to abandon its potential freedom to accumulate all sorts of objects, and to change its normal appearance for a kind of 'museumization', reflecting the owner's approach in the reproduction of one or more styles.

On the other hand, this transformation of the home into the rigid structure of a museum gave rise to a debate, intensified during the second half of the nineteenth century, in the wake of which many museums of applied art came to adopt the atmosphere of the furnished environment typical of the home, in order to help visitors to a better understanding of the exhibited objects. An increasingly common sight in museums – and not only in American or British ones – are *period rooms*, simplified syntheses of an artistic style and taste, which, as an Italian critic put it in 1864, 'while effectively constituting a museum, look more like rooms that are still being lived in'.

The nineteenth century has thus left us with this ambivalent picture of the house; on the one hand, an inspirational model for the fitting out of museums, and on the other a result of the 'museumization' of history and of the past. In other words, the nineteenth century has bequeathed to us the following complex relationship: a house rich in history and steeped in the past; and a museum imitating the environment of the house the better to display its own treasures.

This relationship of mutual exchanges, though with some modifications and varying fortunes, has slowly and surely come down to us as a trend towards museums that increasingly resemble dwellings: some of the most interesting museographical experiences of recent times reflect renewed attention to the placing of decorative objects, that is, certain objects that are valued more highly than other artefacts from the same period, which can be displayed in one and the same room and which are in any case part of one and the same culture. It is against this background of renewed interest in the treatment of the home as a repository/instrument of knowledge and learning that the question of house museums is currently being debated.

In short, the house museum – I am referring here to a specific museological typology, a subject to which we shall be returning – captures the conservational and educational qualities of museums, and also the communicative, cognitive and emotional connotations of the house: the crucial question is to what extent and in what proportions these qualities should be combined, qualities that do not cancel

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

each other out but, on the contrary, reinforce and validate each other.


© By courtesy of the author

Bagatti Valsecchi Museum, Milan.

A working definition of historic house museums

This brings us to the actual definition of house museums. This subject was considered at a conference held in Genoa in November 1997 under the title, *Inhabiting History: Historical House Museums*. The following preliminary definition was produced:

> Museum-homes which are open to the public as such, that is, with their furnishings and collections, even if on successive occasions, which have characteristic colour schemes, and which have never been used to display collections of a different provenance, constitute a museographical category in every particular, and one that varies widely in typological respects. Briefly, the specific character of this type of building is the indissoluble link between container and contained, between palace/house/apartment and permanent collections/furnishings/ornamental fixtures.[2]

In this definition, the stress is laid on the integrity and historical accuracy of the immovable and movable effects determining the value of the residence and the degree of its 'museumization': as a result, the architectonic container, as meaningful testimony to the history (that is, to a particular history, a particular period, etc.), cannot be considered on its own as a characteristic of house museums, because such buildings must be habitable – witness the objects and furnishings reflecting the social rites and the private lives conducted in these particular surroundings. Habitability is thus assigned the role of relating in appropriate language the artistic, economic and social aspects of the history and of the cultural background of particular surroundings and epochs, aspects that would be lost with other approaches.

This raises the problem of the character of dwellings that do not fit into this definition of house museums even if they can boast a past and a prestige of considerable historical interest. These dwellings have lost – for a variety of reasons ranging from war damage and neglect by their inhabitants to improper use before their character as homes was recognized as an attribute of primary importance – their original features, not so much in architectural aspects as in their interiors. In these circumstances, the attitudes of those involved in the resulting discussion differ, and can be exemplified by two extremes encompassing a wide range of gradations. On the one hand, there are those who stress the historical importance of the habitation and its role in local and national records, and hence the need to restore everything that has been destroyed, the better to preserve the values and taste that combined to make the

© By courtesy of the author

Schloss Neuschwanstein, Füssen.

building well known. Decorations and furnishings are introduced *ex novo* on the basis of descriptive and photographic records, and sometimes, for lack of such documentation, on the basis of resemblance to undamaged contemporary buildings, or contemporary paintings.

On the other hand, there are those who stress the uniqueness and unrepeatability of what has ceased to exist and can therefore only be replaced at the risk of falsification by technical experts, the use of inappropriate materials, and an interpretative taste reflecting the achievements and the craftsmanship of one culture when dealing with other cultures and with other periods. This simplification, albeit extreme, enables us to take a further step in the search for a closer understanding of what we propose to define as a house museum: the conflictual nature of two diametrically opposed entities forces us to reflect on the different meanings of the term 'house museum' and hence on the multiple museological interpretations flowing from it.

We can speak of various types of house museum, each with specific educational and communicative qualities, and each reflecting a particular cognitive approach.

During the 1997 Genoa conference, we presented an initial checklist covering the most common types of current house museums, stressing the different characteristics resulting from, or contributing to, specific scientific and cultural objectives and the provision of a public service – objectives that change according to our definition of houses, and according to whether we want to stress the fact that people lived in them (including famous men and women), or whether we prefer to stress their artistic qualities as the product of a particular culture and of particular tastes (in this category we can include the houses of art collectors and of artists); or, again, whether the house is to be considered an explicit representation of a particular social function (a royal palace, for instance).

And so we can – for a given building – define a series of museological features that can be combined under the heading of house museums: from palaces, to the homes of famous people, the homes of artists, houses representing particular periods or styles, homes of collectors, family homes reflecting the passage of time and sedimentation of the history of generations, houses representing homogeneous social groups, to historic residences that have become settings for collections unrelated to the history of the residence itself.

This first attempt at typological differentiation is not meant to force the material into a rigid taxonomical straitjacket, but to bring out the variety and differences we meet when dealing with the identity and history of particular house museums.

Houses tell a story

In my view, we would do well to bear in mind the great narrative potential of houses – an interpretative potential that calls for great methodological rigour. In

© By courtesy of the author

Pucciniano Museum, Torre del Lago.

other words, with the help of the house and its rich array of objects, symbols and conventions, it is possible to convey to the visitor a simplified approach to history, art and architecture, because houses, however resplendent, are part of everyone's common experience. Hence, extending our approach, we can say that, a narrative runs through the house that is received by the public through fewer critical filters than are applied during visits to museums in general: the house is 'real' because it reflects a cognitive code that has been applied and tested in everyday life. Bedrooms, living-rooms, bath-tubs, kitchens, wallpaper and furnishings displayed in house museums are recognized as spaces and objects with a significance and narrative value of their own, a value that is beyond discussion because a room is allowed to be just a room and an armchair just an armchair. Hence, if the staff of a house museum decide to intervene in the fittings of the various rooms and make overall re-arrangements based on comparisons, complete reconstruction based on documents, or spectacular inventions, they will be telling a story that visitors will consider a true account, an authentic product of the culture and society the museum sets out to portray; something desired by the person or family who lived in the house; identical to the original, even if obviously created *ex novo*. Visitors, thus faced with the reassuring sight of a familiar place, will subdue their own critical faculties and their own cultural upbringing, and systematically fit what they see into an authentic picture: 'It's a real room; it's a real house.'

I wish to focus attention here on just one of the many approaches, one of the many keys to understanding house museums, the better to tap their extraordinary educational and communicative potential. And as I pointed out earlier, that potential gives rise to various manifestations: in the home of a collector, we are unlikely to find the table set for a meal, as if the owner were about to receive dinner guests, because in that kind of house, the visitor looks for signs of the collector's artistic taste expressed through the taste of the period on display, and that knowledge

© By courtesy of the author

Gustave Moreau Museum, Paris.

would not be enriched by such mundane matters as dinner tables.

Conversely, in a residence telling the history of a family, or rather one that, through a family, portrays the rituals and rhythms associated with living in that residence, the most familiar features of everyday life and with the most typical manifestations of life as lived in these particular rooms (now 'museumized') can be developed and underlined with the help of certain display techniques and preparations, including just such details as a table set for dinner or towels hanging in the bathroom.

Clearly, these different museological approaches lead to as many different reactions by visitors, and it is for this reason that the typology of house museums cannot be considered one-dimensional and fixed: it is wrong to prejudge the expectations of prospective visitors in the belief that they can be guided by suggestions, evocations and the display of special objects; it is undesirable even for staff and professionals, who will have difficulty in comparing notes on experience gained by completely different methods.

What seems, therefore, to be important during this phase of reflection on, and clarification of, the specific museological characteristics and qualities of house museums, is not so much the need to fit their various aspects into one standard parameter simply because of their shared structure as dwellings (and on this particular point, too, it is worth stressing how greatly, not only in architectural but also in habitational respects, city apartments differ from castles or from country houses). It is far better to devise a framework that reflects specific and different qualities and attributes, a framework in which every 'museumized' residence can be assigned a proper and clearly specified position and can therefore be compared with analogous house museums with which it shares similar structural characteristics, identical aims of communication and education, and concordant furnishing and restoration criteria.

Not every house is a museum: a checklist

This classification of the museological aspects of certain residences, though a great help in extending the suggested methods and in disseminating knowledge of this museological typology, must not, however, be allowed to create misunderstandings about the alleged absence of boundaries and the consequent extension of the definition of the house museum to every possible dwelling-type structure, on the grounds that it is a 'house': it is an absolute prerequisite of every museological building, no matter what field it covers, that it protect, conserve, display to the public, and foster scientific activity and lifelong education, and these qualifications also apply to house museums, however varied the uses to which they are put.

I believe that now is the time to take a first step towards a closer understanding of some crucial elements of this many-faceted museum typology. This first step, in my view, might consist in drawing up a checklist of essential features of the various subcategories of house museum for the purpose of classifying them in homogeneous groups: a first step towards greater clarity in professional circles and towards better communication with a public that will benefit from more explicit statements of the aims and the means employed.

Our checklist must include all the data constituting the framework needed to specify the character of any residence we examine, and must be able to explain either the specific nature of the collection displayed in a house museum or the methodological approach used in its conservation and in opening it to the public.

The first part of the checklist should cover data on the dwelling as a museum, while the second part should provide information on the residence before its conversion into a museum. The remainder of the checklist, composed of eight parts, would furnish details of the physical and intangible heritage of the residence prior to its conversion into a museum, and address museological and museographical criteria such as its particular use of space and its exhibition functions, set-up, conservation, documentation, scientific production, proposals for catching the visitors' attention and global end-purpose. The last part should give an overall assessment of the presentation of the museum-residence.

The first draft of the checklist was submitted to the participants at a meeting of the ICOM International Committee of Historic Houses (DemHist) in Genoa, Italy, 2–5 November 2000; that checklist with the accompanying comments following the meeting will be presented to the next DemHist meeting being held in Barcelona, 1–6 July 2001. For additional information, please contact pavoni@museobagattivalsecchi.org ■

Notes

1. See, for example, R. Pavoni, 'Introduction', in R. Pavoni (ed.), *Reviving the Renaissance: The Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Decoration*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

2. Luca Leoncini and Farida Simonetti (eds.), *Abitare la storia: Le dimore storiche-museo*. 1998, 201 pp., Turin, Umberto Allemandi. Rimando has used this text as the starting point for reflection on the museological typography of house museums. See in particular the essay by R. Pavoni and O. Selvafolta, 'La diversità delle dimore-museo: opportunità di una riflessione', ibid, pp. 326.

Conserving and restoring the Harawi and Al-Sinnari Houses in Cairo

Compiled from material provided by Bernard Maury

The preliminary studies conducted on Harawi House in Cairo (Egypt) in the 1970s added to the historical knowledge of the edifice. In addition, the work undertaken since 1986 has either confirmed certain assumptions or enabled discoveries that shed fresh light on the lives that have been lived in these houses. The technical achievements carried out in restoring the Al-Sinnari House, also in Cairo, are presented in the second part of the article. Bernard Maury was appointed to head the Mission française de coopération pour la sauvegarde du Caire Islamique (French Co-operative Task Force for the Conservation of Islamic Cairo). Museum International *wishes to thank Bernard Maury for providing the original material that forms the basis of this article.*

Harawi House in Cairo

In the famous *Description de l'Égypte* (1803–38), the scholars who accompanied the French expedition to Egypt named 600 houses in Cairo that were worthy of interest. But many of them no longer exist, after being abandoned and subsequently falling victim to the modernization of the town in the wake of a veritable demographic explosion. In 1933, E. Pauty listed only seventy of them in his inventory, *Les palais et maisons d'époque musulmane* (*Palaces and Houses of the Muslim Period*). By 1970, only twenty-nine of the inventoried houses were still standing. This disastrous situation required that the scientists and authorities in charge of the conservation of Egyptian heritage be alerted and take rapid action.

In 1970, following an initiative taken by the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS – National Centre for Scientific Research) and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with the support of the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (the French Institute of Eastern Archaeology) in Cairo, the mission d'étude scientifique des palais et maisons du Caire et de Rosette du XIV^e^ au XVIII^e^ Siècle (task force for the scientific study of the palatial dwellings of Cairo and Rosetta from the fourteenth to the eighteenth Century) was set up with the stated purpose of collaborating closely with the Egyptian Antiquities Authority to publish complete, detailed studies on the important residential houses in the two towns. The main hope of the Egyptian officials of the time, none the less, was that this would constitute the first step towards launching a major conservation and restoration programme.

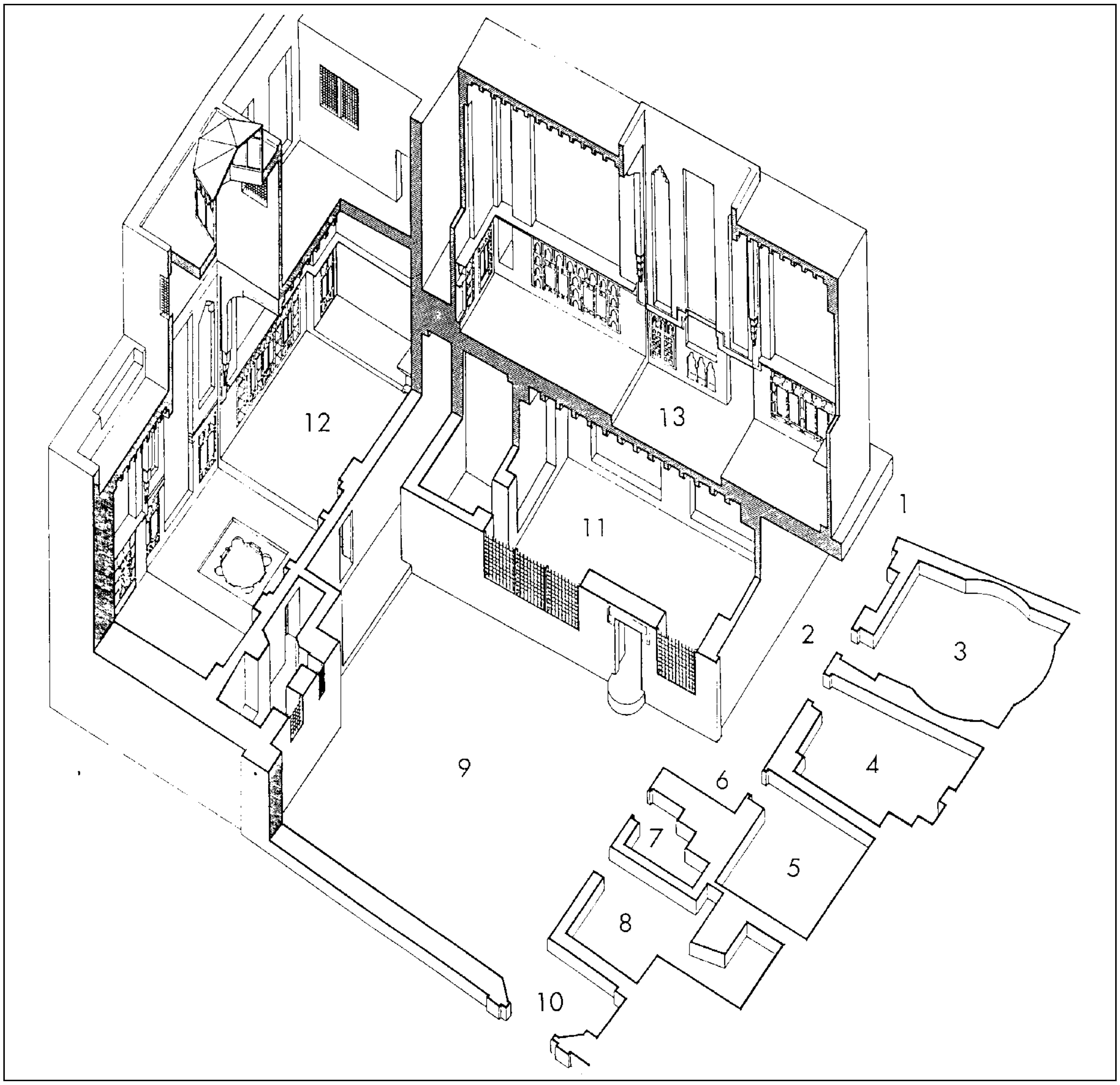
A full decade was necessary for the programme to take shape, during which time the detailed studies were carried out so as better to understand the architecture of the houses. The results of this research were published in a series of monographs.[1] In the 1980s, the appointment of Dr Ahmad Qadri to head the Egyptian Antiquities Authority ushered in a new restoration and conservation policy, given concrete status by the implementation of major projects. Dr Qadri appealed to all the foreign institutes working in Egypt, and France responded favourably by creating the Mission française de coopération pour la sauvegarde du Caire Islamique (French co-operative task force for the conservation of Islamic Cairo). On the strength of the results of its research work and the knowledge acquired on Cairo's indigenous architecture, in 1985 the French Task Force submitted a dossier suggesting six proposed restoration projects of varying importance. Selection of the projects was based on three criteria: historical, architectural and archaeological interest; a relatively good state of conservation; and a prominent location in the city. Harawi House, a large private residence, satisfied these three criteria and was chosen by general agreement. The two countries signed a protocol to define their mutual commitments. Egypt assumed responsibility for over half of the restoration costs (i.e. materials and manpower), while France, through the Ministries of Research and Foreign Affairs, took responsibility for the experts and management of the project.

An eighteenth-century bourgeois house

In accordance with the Antiquities Authority, the restoration of Harawi House was begun in January 1986. Built in 1731, this residence is located in the heart of a neighbourhood with an incomparable variety of Cairo's architectural wealth

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)



Axonometric view of Harawi House: 1 – Original entrance; 2 – Entrance corridor; 3 – Mill; 4 – Stables; 5 – Guest room; 6 – Covered porch; 7 – Haram staircase; 8 – Room fitted out during the nineteenth century; 9 – Courtyard; 10 – Porch of the nineteenth century second entrance; 11 – Reception hall; 12 – Mandaran reception hall; 13 – Qa'a*, reception hall for women.*

concentrated within a small area. It shares joint ownership with the Sitt Wasila House (seventeenth century); it is in the immediate vicinity of the Zeinab Kahtun House (fifteenth to seventeenth century), the Qa'a Ghannamiyya (fourteenth century), a fountain and a *wakala* (caravanserai), the Qayt Bay (fifteenth century). It is located very close to the Al-Azhar Mosque, founded in the tenth century.

The house is named after one of the last owners, 'Abd al-Rahman Bak al-Harawi, who left the property around 1920. The architectural variety evident in the structure can be classified into three distinct periods: the large reception room on the eastern side, possibly from the sixteenth century; the sections dating from 1731, comprising the majority of the house; and a second entrance on the north, added at the end of the nineteenth century.

As is the case with most of these residences, one enters through the courtyard, a beautiful open space which opens into all the parts of the house. The reception rooms are found on the eastern and southern sides of the house, and the kitchens and outhouses are in the rear quarters, to the south-east. A set of utility buildings, including a mill and a stable, was established in the south-western area of the property. The *mandara*, a vast reception room for men, occupies the entire eastern wing of the ground floor. The grandiose proportions and style of construction would seem to indicate that it dates back to the sixteenth, or the beginning of the seventeenth, century at the latest. It is thought that this room, the last remaining vestige of a very old residence that has now completely disappeared, was incorporated into the new buildings of 1731. It comprises three traditional spaces. The first is a *durqa'a*, a central area which commands access to other rooms, containing a magnificent octagonal marble-mosaic basin. Ventilation is provided by an opening in the ceiling, 14 m high. On either side of the basin are the *iwan*, two large, slightly raised spaces where the master of the house received his guests. Painted ceilings and polychrome cupboards built into the wall decorate each *iwan*.

Smaller in size, a second reception room occupies the entire ground floor of the south side of the courtyard; the floor, on one level only, is covered with large, identical limestone slabs. The coffered ceiling is quite noteworthy; the epigraphic wall writing found inside states that the 'blessed residence' was built by Ahmad ibn Youssef al-Sayarfi in 1144 of the Hegira (AD 1731). The painted decoration is a blending of two styles: the traditional geometric compositions of Cairo, and lush Turkish floral motifs. Light filters in through two large openings that overlook the courtyard. These are covered with a large *mashrabiyya*, lattice-work made from turned wood.

As with most of the eighteenth-century houses, private apartments occupy practically the entire first floor, which is reached by a single staircase on the western side of the courtyard. The apartments are composed of a beautiful traditional room, the *qa'a*, surrounded by a number of adjoining rooms. The *qa'a*, which is morphologically similar to the ground floor *mandara*, exhibits a particularly well-designed polychrome decoration, and the slate-blue colour of the walls sets off the floral patterns on the ceilings and woodwork to particular advantage.

These three rooms constitute the reception rooms of the residence, with various rooms of lesser importance surrounding them on each level. Restoration work was carried out on all the rooms, except for the service section at the extreme southern end of the property. It was in a very poor state of conservation, and, after the rubble had been cleared out, it provided a vantage point from which to plan the fitting out of the property.

The policy governing restoration

The conservation of Islamic monuments – and sites – in Egypt raises particular issues, inasmuch as most of them are the expressions of a living community. They are 'monuments', but they are an integral part of the city. Almost all the mosques are used actively for religious purposes, the historic caravanserais still play an important role in the economic activity of the medinas, and people still live in some of the traditional houses. With these considerations in mind, they were approached as underpinnings for daily life, forming an integral part of the dynamic life of the neighbourhood. As a result, and quite apart from the technical problems of restoration, there were many objectives to be achieved, including the important question of the use to which the restored Harawi House should be put.

Restoration work was carried out in such a way as to respect the building and restore it to its original state. Despite the three distinct periods of its existence, very few changes had been made in the structure over the centuries, apart from the reception room whose courtyard façade, previously open, had been completely closed up with three ribbed windows at the end of the nineteenth century. We thus did not encounter any major archaeological problems. The work primarily concerned the restoration of the accesses to the large rooms to their original state and the reopening of the façade of the large reception room. Technically speaking, by contrast, the very poor state of conservation of some parts of the house meant that major restoration work had to be carried out: sagging floors, gaping holes in walls and propped-up or missing ceilings had made it impossible to use the building. Moreover, clandestine occupants had caused much damage and contributed to the degradation and loss of much of the house's charming woodwork.

At each of the major stages of the restoration work, basic questions were raised concerning the quality of the materials used, the competence of the workers and how to finance the job. For the restoration to be entirely satisfactory, it was necessary to employ the techniques and materials used in the original construction. Initially, our choices and work had to be adapted to the limitations of the local resources made available to us, but this proved to be effective. Useful improvements were obtained with respect to the stone that was used. The stone known as *helwan*, at present utilized in all restoration sites, has the disadvantage of being light and crumbly and, as a result, vulnerable in the presence of humidity. It is by no means the same quality as the original stone used in the past, which came from Gabal Ahmar, a hard and slightly ochre-coloured stone of much beauty. The quarries have since been closed, so we tried to salvage stones from old buildings that were being demolished. We were able to find materials which matched the original stones, and the work we carried out on the foundation perfectly matched the older parts of the structure. This solution, which required some efforts, was also adopted by the Antiquities Authority for the initial restoration work on the neighbouring Sitt Wasila House.

© Collection Bernard Maury, Mission de Sauvegarde du Caire Islamique

The durqa'a *of Harawi House before restoration work.*

The same general procedure was used for woodwork restoration and we first of all set about to find the same pitch pine that had been used in the ceilings and woodwork of Harawi House. Antique beams were bought and, once reworked, used in the restoration of the woodwork.

We also forbade the use of cement in the mortars, a use which is unfortunately all too common in Cairo's restoration sites; lime was utilized instead. The workers on the site needed to be convinced, but the results obtained, both for mortar and plastering, rewarded our perseverance.

A series of fortuitous discoveries made during the work enriched our knowledge of civilian architecture, providing new data. We saw how water had been supplied to the building when a reservoir mounted directly above a well coping was laid bare on the eastern side of the courtyard. The water, drawn in jars, was raised by a pulley system and poured into a basin. This supplied a fountain in the basement, among other things, through gravitational force. Moreover, a system of pipes was found which led to the discovery that sophisticated sanitary installations had existed in the various buildings. The restoration work uncovered an entire complex of underground corridors containing the different pipes for latrines. These corridors, which are large and expertly fitted with stone, are located at a depth of about 3 m underneath the entire building, with a total length of over 80 m. They seem to have communicated with neighbouring houses in the past.

A gathering of experts

Harawi House demonstrated the importance of local manpower for successful restoration work and recognition must be shown for the efforts of the Egyptian artisans who were recruited by the Antiquities Authority, and with whom we rediscovered the techniques and skills of their predecessors. Whether we were working with stonecutters, bricklayers or plasterers, the results obtained were always very encouraging. But certain types of more specialized work, such as the reinforcement of the main structures and restoration of the painting and woodwork, required more specialized manpower from outside.

The costs of the restoration were high for the Egyptians, who assumed financial responsibility for local manpower and the purchase of construction materials, and apart from a subsidy obtained from the French during the last few years, we had to seek outside assistance in order to carry out indispensable work. The building programme comprised three major stages. The work began in 1986, with the restoration of the entire substructure of dressed stone. Starting in 1987/88, a long period of work began which was as indispensable as it was thankless, because it would remain completely invisible afterwards. This concerned the repairs of the main structures of the building, floors and roofs (the skylight of the *mandara*), the construction of numerous brick walls and the installation of electricity in the building. The most agreeable and satisfactory part of the work began in 1991/92, with the plastering of the walls, repair work done on the flagstones, the restoration of both the woodwork and painting, and all the work which would contribute to the final decoration of the building.

Our first task was to repair the sagging floors of the main rooms so that they would once again be accessible. Metal structures for reinforcement were inserted in the flooring of the first floor, from which we then hung the old joist ceilings of the ground floor. We could now lay the original paving stones of the first floor on a solid wooden base. The eighteenth-century ceiling of the *qa'a*, which was now no longer needed to bear weight, was thus rescued, and people can walk normally on the floor above. Moreover, the filling material yielded magnificent polychrome wood that had been part of an older ceiling and that had been re-utilized on the floor. This wood was restored and put on display in a room in the house.

The terraces were reinforced using the same procedure; very important restoration work was also carried out on the *mandara* skylight. In 1969, this light shaft was already in a poor state, with some of the beams sagging and the lantern having disappeared. By the time the work began, the entire structure was ready to collapse, the friezes on the under surface had become detached and the main beams were broken and ready to fall. Only the magnificent epigraphic writing could be saved, but given the state of decay of the wood, the only solution available was to take everything down and reconstruct an identical wooden ceiling. A detailed survey enabled us to carry out an error-free reconstruction. First of all, repair work was done on the upper masonry of the intermediate terrace by lightening the earth load, which was replaced by polystyrene, and by changing or reinforcing the defective beams. The upper faces of the ceilings were cleaned, given preventative treatment and damp-proofed with tar before the flagstones were laid using local techniques. Four metal girders had to be raised to a height of over 14 m by means of a central scaffold in order to close the 6 m^2 light shaft and re-create the skylight. A wooden floor was then placed on the metal structure, with the octagonal opening of the skylight in the centre. The other openings were fitted with *mashrabiyya* lattice-work and the structures bearing the skylight masked with the same wood used in the original piece.

Starting in 1991/92, the final stage of work began, which was to restore the magnificent interior decoration of the old residence. This work consisted of three separate steps. First, the plastering was redone to give a unified aspect to the main parts of the building and bring out more advantageously the volumes of the different sections. Next, the woodwork was restored to give each separate space a specific ambience. Finally, the painted ceilings and polychrome cupboards were restored. Because deadlines had been set, and due to the sheer quantity of woodwork to be restored, we hired the Compagnons du Tour de France (a very old guild of highly skilled craftsmen who work throughout France) to carry out the work. Using a small but efficient local team, remarkable restoration work was carried out on the ceilings, cupboards, doors and other woodwork, and the lost wall cupboards were constructed according to the traditional methods. The cupboards were virtually re-created where there had been only gaping holes in the walls previously. The structure of the cupboards were set into place, and doors were then added. Their geometric motifs were created through mortise-and-tenon joint assembly. The old *mashrabiyyas* were carefully restored and those which had been lost were made in local workshops.

© Collection Bernard Maury, Mission de Sauvegarde du Caire Islamique

The durqa'a *after restoration work.*

The Centre Régional d'Étude et de Traitement des Oeuvres d'Art (CRETOA – Regional Centre for the Study and Treatment of Works of Art) in Avignon, took charge of the restoration of the paintwork. Four contracts, lasting two to three months, with an average of five restorers each, were required to carry out the restoration of over 800 m^2 of ceilings and woodwork painted in the eighteenth century. The work was followed with great attention by Egyptian restorers, for whom this building site was a veritable workshop for training and exchange of expertise. Two restoration techniques were chosen.

The first is a traditional method, consisted in cleaning the painted surface using cotton buds soaked in a variety of cleaning products or solvents, as required by the individual surface to be restored. The second involves the use of micro-sandblasting (projecting microscopic abrasive particles at high velocity against the surface). This latter method had proved to be quite effective in the restoration of the paintwork of the communal hall of Akhmenu in the temple of Karnak at Luxor. It was decided to treat the cupboards and woodwork in the same way with micro-sandblasting. The woodwork was then dressed before the final application of patina.

A number of procedures were used in the final stages of finishing work. The walls were sandblasted so that the older stones would harmonize with the new; the old flagstones were pointed, and new flagstones and steps were installed; the slate-blue colour of the walls of the main women's room were cleaned and retouched, and a small basin was installed in the courtyard.

Open to the public

After the house had been restored, we thought that it should be given a function in keeping with its history and setting. To be sure, the proximity of the Al-Azhar Mosque and the presence of several historic buildings in the neighbouring streets would prevent any new deterioration. But giving it a social function would integrate it into the life of the neighbourhood and provide an additional guarantee for its conservation. It was finally decided to use the property for cultural events (concerts, conferences and exhibitions), and, on 25 September 1993, a delightful musical recital ushered in a new beginning for Harawi House, now open to the public.

Al-Sinnari House

'This building [has been] abandoned for half a century, with . . . sagging floors and collapsing ceilings. Certainly it is a colossal task, above all if it is to be completed in the amount of time available. It is a task which also requires very important funding. Everyone appreciates this and wishes it well. The challenge has been given, we are ready to take it up.' This was Bernard Maury's summary of the situation after a lengthy study of the state of conservation of Al-Sinnari House in Cairo, whose restoration has occupied me for the past few years. At the time, he felt that the successful restoration of Harawi House justified a rescue operation, even if it would be difficult, and for the partners, Egypt and France, the historic value of the site meant that the launching of a large-scale operation was worthwhile.

History of the house

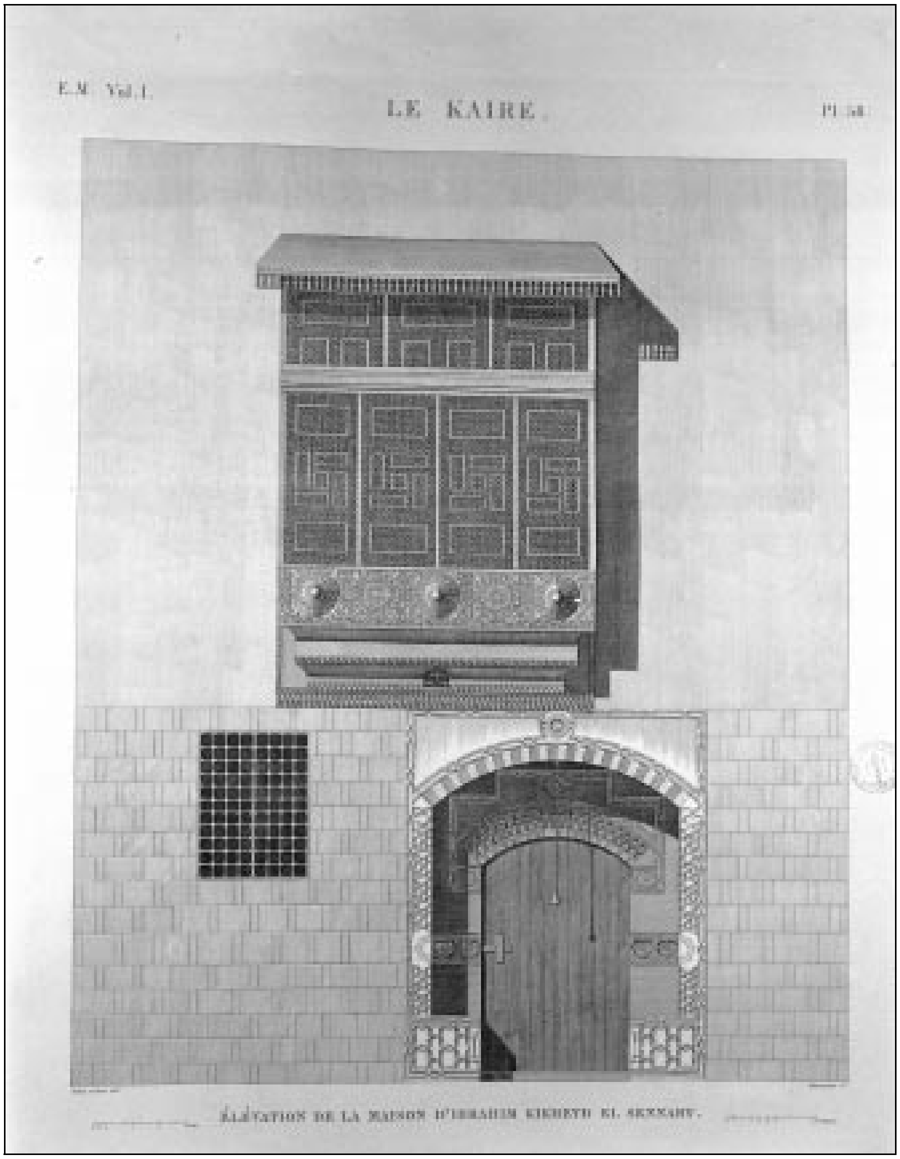
Located on the southern periphery of the old Fatimid[2] city, the gracious house that once belonged to Ibrahim Katkhuda al-Sinnari was built by a rich Mameluke towards the end of the eighteenth century. The gardens, and its proximity to the old canal, Khalig al-Nasr, made it an agreeable residence.

Without the descriptions left to us in 1837 by an architect from Marseilles, Pascal Coste, who spent some time in Egypt, it would be hard to imagine what these areas so sought after by the last Mamelukes looked like, so transformed are they by urban sprawl and the construction of new, modern quarters.

Summer houses were established alongside the canal, among gardens planted with vines, date-palms, orange, lemon and banana trees. People stayed there until November, enjoying the freshness of the waters and the perfume of the plants and flowers. It was Sultan al-Naser Mohammed, son of Kalawoon, who in 1324 had the canal dug that runs the length of Cairo. At the season of the Nile flood, which takes place from the tenth to the twentieth of August, water was introduced from the river by the breaking of a small dike built at the entrance of the canal, then the well-to-do inhabitants of the Capital brought their families to live in little houses or cabins, situated at the end of the canal, outside the city.[3]

Given these conditions, the survival of al-Sinnari's house is exceptional. It owes the fact that it did not succumb to the unfortunate fate of its neighbours, demolished one after the other and replaced by new buildings, to a historical past connected to Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian expedition.

Sheikh Abd al-Rahman el-Djabarti reports that around 1780, a black-skinned Berber, native of Dongola, left his country of origin and came to Mansura to be a porter, under the name of Ibrahim el-Asoued. As most Berbers today, Ibrahim soon learned to read, and procuring for himself some treatises on occult science, he wasted no time in gaining a certain reputation for predicting the future and writing talismans. El-Shaburi and some other Mamelukes struck up a friendship with this handsome black arrayed in dazzling white and took him with them to Upper Egypt. There he mingled with the entourage of Mustapha Bey el-Kebir whose confidence he won. He knew how to make himself indispensable to this emir because he had learned the Turkish language and for this reason was employed by Mustapha Bey for his correspondence and his affairs. A cunning master of intrigue, Ibrahim al-Sinnari [as he was now called] was so successful at stirring up discord between the emirs that Mourad Bey wanted to put him to death. Ibrahim ran away to the service of Hussein Bey for a time, but he continued to negotiate with Mourad Bey over the fortune which he had his eye on. He succeeded and Mourad Bey accepted him, visited him, loved him and made him his favourite. Ibrahim never left this master to whom he had access at any



Façade of the entrance of Al-Sinnari House from the Description de l'Égypte *(Vol. I, plate 58).*

© Collection Bernard Maury, Mission de Sauvegarde du Caire Islamique

Raised entrance to the house, Monge Passage.

hour. He accompanied him on his expeditions and voyages. Thanks to the prodigality of Mourad Bey, Ibrahim al-Sinnari was soon in possession of rents and revenues and built himself a house on which he spent considerable sums, in the al-Nasriya district, not far from the mosque of Sayeda Zeynab.

In the Naqsriya quarter, some other favourites of Mourad Bey had built their palaces, close to that of Ibrahim al-Sinnari. At the entrance of the narrow street which led to it, and today named cul-de-sac Monge [Monge Passage; Gaspard Monge, Comte de la Péluse, French mathematician (1746–1818), accompanied Napoleon on the Egyptian campaign; one of the founders of the Institut d'Égypte – Ed.], on the right was the house of Qassim Bey About Seif, a great lover of gardens, on the left Hassan Kachef the Circassion had just finished his, the fruit of his excessive plundering. In the spring of 1798, it seemed to the Mamelukes

© Collection Bernard Maury, Mission de Sauvegarde du Caire Islamique

Detail of the carved and decorated ceiling of the women's quarters of the Al-Sinnari House.

that there was nothing left for them to do but enjoy their riches in peace, going out to assassinate each other from time to time, as a partisan of Mourad Bey or of Ibrahim Bey, the deadly rivals, who were carving up Egypt.[4]

Following the landing of the French army in Egypt on 1 July 1798 and the capture of Alexandria, Bonaparte presented himself as a saviour of the Mamelukes and a friend of Islam. On 14 July at Embaba (the battle of the Pyramids), Mourad Bey was defeated and escaped to Upper Egypt while Ibrahim Bey escaped to Syria. With no one to stop him, Bonaparte marched into Cairo through the gate of Bab el-Foutouh.

The three Mameluke neighbours in the Nasriya quarter shared the fate of their masters. Their houses were requisitioned by Bonaparte where he installed his savants and his generals. The magnificent palace of Mohammed Bey al-Alfi had just been completed; Napoleon took it over to serve as his headquarters, accompanied by Generals Kléber and Menou. General Dupuy, named governor of Cairo, moved into the palace of Ibrahim Bey. After Monge, Berthollet and Cafarelli discovered the house of al-Sinnari, it was decided to create the Institut d'Égypte there, in the Nasriya district of Cairo. The naturalist Savigny, who studied fish, Redouté, who studied flowers, and the engineers Villers du Terrage, Jolois and Fevers all lived here. At the Institute, they set to work to 'reveal to Europe a formidable and magnificent Egypt about which it as yet knew nothing'.

Because of the harassment of the French troops by Mourad Bey and his Mamelukes, among whom was Ibrahim al-Sinnari, the latter succeeded in recuperating his wonderful house. But his triumph was short-lived; he was assassinated with other Mamelukes at the Citadel in 1801, at a meeting that was really an ambush organized by the Sultan of Constantinople.

The restoration project

This beautiful eighteenth-century house, which was successively occupied by Ibrahim al-Sinnari and then by the savants of Bonaparte's Institut d'Égypte, has scarcely changed since its construction, if one refers to the drawings and plans made by the members of the Institute. One can be equally grateful for the action taken by the Conservation Committee of the Arab Art Monuments to list the house as a monument in 1922 and undertake restoration work along the lines of the original character of the edifice.

Al-Sinnari House is composed of two fairly distinct sections: the ground-floor part of the house, with all the reception areas – courtyard, *maqaad*, *qa'a* – are on the western side, while secondary rooms of less interest are grouped to the east. The great door in carved stone, dominated by a grand corbelled *mashrabiyya*, reveals the imposing size and magnificence of the structure as the visitor enters. Behind the door, a zigzag entrance turns into a high, wide passage that leads to an interior court. Around the central marble fountain, diversity and balance characterize the façades enclosing a space covered only by sky, and light and shade alternate on porches and corbelled walls.

Oriented towards the north, the grand façade, which greets the visitor upon entering the courtyard, is entirely clad in dressed stone and presents a *tahtabush* on the ground floor, surmounted by a *maqaad*, two distinct reception areas reserved for men. On the second floor one passes through a beautiful door in sculpted stone to an interior staircase, rising from the courtyard by a flight of six rounded steps. Outbuildings and communication corridors occupy the other three sides of the courtyard. One notes, before continuing, the entrance to a great vaulted room, around the perimeter of which stone benches for the use of visitors were originally installed.

The *qa'a* or reception room of the private apartments is situated upstairs. It is above the *mandara* and the length of corridor giving access to the court, which serves as a basement. It has kept the classic division of older rooms, with central *durqa'a* situated over two raised *iwans*. It is lit at its two extremities by two *mashrabiyya*: the one overlooking the street is particularly fine and owes its beauty to the diversity of its panels. It brings out the ample proportions of the great *iwan* which it illuminates, as well as the usual wall cupboards in carved wood which surround it. With the exception of the small *iwan* the *qa'a* is covered by a magnificent coffered ceiling, pierced in the middle by a carved wooden cupola.

Although its plan is traditional, this *qa'a* contains several features worthy of note, of which the first is a *mashrabiyya* screen revealing magnificent woodwork, and separating a small *iwan* from the rest of the room. It probably served to filter the air captured by an enormous *malqaf*, or wind catcher , placed on the terrace which takes the place of a ceiling for this little *iwan*, the second unusual feature. Opening to the sky, it gathered in the cool northern breezes in the evening and wafted it to the interior of the *qa'a*, chasing out the hot air by its difference in density from other openings and the central cupola.

The third feature is the presence of a small, private *hammam* with a single entrance opening, curiously enough, into the reception room. The *hammam* is composed of two small rooms, each of which is covered with a flattened dome into which are cut star-like hexagonal apertures covered with coloured glass. The first room, also lit from the *qa'a* through a *mashrabiyya* grille, was for dressing and resting. The second was the steam room.

A second *qa'a*, smaller and more sober than the first, occupies the first floor of the east side of the courtyard, from which it is lit by a double balcony in *mashrabiyya*. A great cupboard with sculpted doors and surmounted by a cornice occupies the opposite wall.

Structural problems

'Ibrahim al-Sinnari would doubtless be unknown today, if the beautiful house which he built with the fruit of his plunder, near the mosque of Sayeda Zeynab, had not received guests for which it was not built. Destiny, which seems to have amused itself with al-Sinnari, wanted Bonaparte's artists and savants to pay the rent and save his name from oblivion and his house from the ruin which awaited both', concluded Georges Legrain.

No doubt these are the reasons that convinced Egypt and France, as well as UNESCO, to co-operate in the salvage of this unusual property. A protocol signed at the end of 1994 pledged their participation, and attested to their common wish to restore this monument. It was re-opened in 1998, the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Bonaparte's savants in the historic house.

But before undertaking the work of restoration on this building, one extremely urgent problem had to be solved. Serious water seepage has been threatening the basement of the house for more than half a century. In fact, already situated at a low point in Cairo due to is proximity to the old Khalig al-Nasr canal, the Al-Sinnari house is today below the level of Port Said Street because of the increase in the height of the streets. It is thus naturally prone to flooding. Various measures, among them successive fills, were taken by the antiquities service since the 1950s when the seepage was first noticed. But they been relatively ineffective, as the water level was 30 cm higher than the flagstones of the court! So drainage of the foundations of the Al-Sinnari house was imperative.

When the French Mission wanted to begin restoration work in January 1995, in spite of assurances given by the Egyptian authorities, they realized that not one of the drainage operations either in the district or in the house had been begun, even though, when the project of restoring the Al-Sinnari house was first conceived in 1992, everyone agreed that the water most probably came from drains that were no longer in functioning condition, and that the problem depended essentially on the Cairo municipal authorities, who should have taken charge of the drainage of the area. Only after drainage could restoration be envisaged. At that time the French made it a preliminary condition to embarking on any restoration.

The French mission then studied the problem in detail, using the advice and the know-how of engineers working on the construction of the Cairo Metro, with the participation of the Centre for Archaeological Engineering of the university at Gizeh. Several soundings taken inside the house revealed large quantities of ground water, the origin of which leaves no doubt: clean drinking water is leaking in through holes in the dilapidated plumbing system. These do not necessarily pass through the basement of the house and can even be fairly distant; but even small leaks will, in time, create underground channels, the origins of which then become extremely difficult to pinpoint. Thus the idea was to isolate the house and try to lower the level of the water within its perimeter by natural drainage.

The proposed project consisted, first, of re-establishing the original ground-level of the house, by evacuating the successive fills; this amounted to about 500 m^3. Then a draining girdle was put in place all round the house. This was to a depth of between 80 cm and 1 m below the level of the soil, creating a dam against the water coming from outside. An identical system of drainage ditches criss-crosses the interior of the house in order to collect residual water. The entire network of drains functions by means of natural gravity and the water gathers into a central collecting tank, which is evacuated into the city sewerage system.

Faced with the problem of financing this operation, and anxious not to get stalled in delays, we appealed for help from French firms operating in Cairo who might be interested in saving Egypt's heritage. The SGE-Campenon Bernard company was willing to take over the entire financial burden of draining Al-Sinnari House. Starting in mid-June 1995, the operation was finished by the end of the year, and the restoration work started in July 1996.

After having solved the water-seepage problems, the first significant operation consisted in reinforcing the walls. The lime mortar had been softened from water infiltration for almost five decades; and the removal of fill material, which had exerted stabilizing pressure on the walls, led to a weakening of the entire building structure.

In order to ensure that the two faces (interior, exterior) of the same wall were aligned and perfectly parallel, we had to drill holes of between 80 cm and 1 m in diameter and insert metal plates, which were then maintained on either side with internal tie rods. As soon as the structure of the walls had been made secure, we dismantled one wall at a time to replace damaged stones, using a set of metal girders which were held up on both sides by the metal towers supporting the upper floors of the house. Working in layers of about two metres at a time, we were able to rebuild all the bearing walls without touching the first floor and, at the same time, took advantage of the repair work on the foundations to put in place a bituminous sealing system. This colossal work, which lasted almost three years, is now invisible, and the main problem of the damp-proofing of the house has been solved.

Among the other major operations carried out, repairing the entrance door also required patience and ingenuity. The right side had sagged by almost 15 cm, and the damp and salt had eaten into the stone to a great height. As a result, its fine appearance notwithstanding, the stone was crumbling to dust, especially in the arch stones. The decision was made to replace all the damaged stones, again employing props right up to the roofs of the building. The bearing wall of the large wooden *mashrabiyya* was also changed, with the latter seemingly hanging in mid-air throughout the operation. The foundations, door jambs and arches, and the wall were all reassembled, one after the other.

Another example concerns the work carried out in the courtyard, mainly on the *maqaad* and *tahtabush*. Jollois's survey, showing what it looked like in 1789, was used as a guide. In 1995, the two lintels were broken and beyond repair and the upper window had disappeared, as had most of the stone joints in the upper sections. The same procedure was again used, the stones being dismantled one by one and new materials introduced. A new lintel was made by Egyptian artisans under the supervision of a Compagnon du Tour de France.

Although the work carried out on the woodwork was less impressive, it was no less delicate. The *malqaf*, a wooden structure forming a porch roof and facing north, is used to bring in fresh air during summer by forcing it into the main room below. The *malqaf* is a functional and decorative element which could not be overlooked in the architectural complex. The repair work done on it, which entailed major work on the structures (framework and bearing walls), took place under the policy of the consistent and comprehensive restoration of the house. The same policy governed the restoration and replacement of all the panelling and woodwork (doors, panelling, cupboards, murals, *mashrabiyyas*), including the reconstruction of the suspended balcony shown in the engraving by Jollois. Finally, the restoration of the painted ceilings of the Harawi and Al-Sinnari Houses was carried out by the same team.

The future of the house

How will Al-Sinnari House be utilized, once the restoration work has been completed? The idea of creating a Napoleonic museum, as was already suggested in 1916, has come up yet again. At that time, the house was occupied by Charles Gaillardot Bey, who installed his personal library and other documents relating to the Bonaparte expeditions to Egypt and Syria. He wanted to create a museum, and in response to repeated requests, the work was supposed to be undertaken by the Conservation Committee in 1934, with a prospect of inauguration in 1935. This project, however, was never carried out, and Gaillardot Bey's collections have since been dispersed. However, utilizing the house as part of a larger cultural complex has been proposed, and this suggestion seems by far to be the most attractive. ■

Notes

1. An initial series comprising five monograph volumes was intended for the publication of the research results as and when they were produced. The series was published by the Institut français d'archéologie oriental in Cairo (1974–82). A second series summarizes the research in two volumes and was published by the CNRS in Paris in 1982.

2. An Arab dynasty that ruled in northern Africa and parts of Egypt from AD 909–1171; it took its name from Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, from whom they claimed descent. – Ed.

3. Today, the Khalig al-Nasr Canal has been filled in and covered over by the major traffic artery of Port Said Street.

4. The historical research left to us by Georges Legrain in 1915 explains how this dwelling was chosen, with two neighbouring houses, for the installation of the savants of the expedition and the foundation of the first Institut d'Egypte.

Skokloster Castle – one of the world's foremost Baroque museums

Carin M. Bergström

Carin M. Bergström is the director of Skokloster Castle, built in the seventeenth century in Sweden, and open to the public today as a Swedish state museum. Several aspects of the technical and practical decisions requisite for historic house museum management are presented in this article, particularly as regards building structure, book collections, metal objects and fabrics.

Skokloster Castle was built by Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel (1613–76), a Swedish field-marshal who became one of the most powerful and influential individuals in Sweden during the mid-seventeenth century, when Sweden dominated central and northern Europe politically and militarily. Work on the castle began in January 1654. Wrangel had chosen this place – today approximately one hour's drive northwest of Stockholm – because he was born in the old medieval stone house at Skokloster, an estate which his father had inherited at the beginning of the century. For Wrangel the new castle at Skokloster was much more than a home. The idea was to create a reflection of the world and a monument to himself. And this is how Skokloster has always been seen.

With some 50,000 artefacts, paintings, furniture, glass and china, books, tools and weapons, along with an enormous archive, housed today in the National Archive in Stockholm, Skokloster provides a unique opportunity for scholars, as well as for the general public, to look through an open window on to the Sweden and Europe of 350 years ago.

For those of us working in museums and especially in the historic houses that have been transformed into museums or opened to the public, how to manage visitors is a problem. Until 1967 Skokloster was a private palace, but nowadays we have almost 50,000 visitors indoors and more than 100,000 people in the park every year. Because this is a state museum, as much of Skokloster's history must be exhibited for as many people as possible. This means that objects that had remained secluded for hundreds of years are now exposed in all their glory, it is true, but also to the daylight and dirt and dust. The rooms have to be lit electrically, and this causes damage, in particular to the fabrics. Physical wear and tear on the stairs, floors and furniture is increasing. It is an obvious difficulty that the identity of the house must be preserved, and the collections managed, in order to both display them and protect them. Not the least of the headaches is preserving the identity of the biggest object of all, the historic building itself. In the 1970s, Professor Ove Hidemark directed an important restoration project at Skokloster. One of the reasons why the owner was forced to sell the castle to the state in the first place was that the building was in such bad condition. In the remainder of this article we present some of the ideas that guided Professor Hidemark when he restored the castle, taken from the article published in the Swedish journal *Arkitektur* in April 1972.

The Skokloster Castle building

Both as a building and as an interior Skokloster represents a unique, untouched, seventeenth-century milieu. With a number of natural repairs and a few extremely discreet restorations, the palace today is an exceptionally rich source of knowledge about a way of life in the past. Each part of the current restorative works has become a journey of discovery into the building techniques and ideas of a past age.

The restoration programme for Skokloster Castle can in essence be summarized in the following four points:

- We want to help a rather fragile building in certain parts to continue life on its own conditions. These conditions have been determined not only by formal requirements but above all from a technological point of view.
- We wish to grasp the building as a whole and attempt to preserve its

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

identity, both as a structure of bricks and mortar and as illustrated history of culture. By this is meant a global approach to all the elements, from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century to our own era. The wear and tear to which the building has been exposed has been considered as a priceless quality and an important contribution to its historical dimension.

- It is our intention to interfere as little as possible, making neither additions nor touch-ups, to avoid interfering in all doubtful cases. We have instead decided to trust the fact that a building which has actually stood for 300 years can continue to stand in the future, even though according to modern standards and calculations it should already have collapsed.

- Where we are finally forced to interfere, we try to seek solutions which, as far as possible, might have been those of a seventeenth-century builder. We have tried to work *from the technical ideas and materials of that age,* avoiding the materials of our own time, which usually have a hardness and density which are extremely hazardous for the environment.

The building has thus come to be treated like a scientific preparation where the goal of restoration has been the maximum number of preserved or untouched parts. Interventions must be harmonized as sensitively as possible with the requirements of the building. The new parts must all the same be clearly distinguishable in their extent and as far as possible interchangeable and easily accessible to assist future maintenance and restoration ambitions. We required that any measures taken would be fully documented for future reference.

Photo by courtesy of the author

Skokloster Castle is located between Stockholm and Uppsala at Lake Mälaren. Field Marshal Count Carl Gustaf Wrangler began construction in 1654; it was completed in 1676.

The maintenance and care of the library and the metal and textile collections

Skokloster is part of an organization consisting of three museums; not included are the Skokloster Royal Armoury and the Hallwyl Palace in Stockholm, where conservators are also working. Paper conservator Ann Hallström, metal conservator Lisen Tamm and the textile conservator Kerstin Jonsson here present their views on the collections at Skokloster.

The libraries

More than 2,000 years ago in the days of the Roman Empire, preservation of books was difficult. We know from the architect and engineer Vitruvius that a library should not be built facing south 'because damp winds come up, which breed and nourish the worms, and destroy the books with mould' (Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, English transl. M. H. Morgan, 1914). His advice was that a library should be situated in the eastern part of the building facing the morning light, and he concluded that 'books kept in such libraries will not decay'. As a matter of interest, Carl Gustaf Wrangel owned a sixteenth-century edition of this very book and kept it in his library at Skokloster.

We should take Vitruvius' advice seriously, because warm, humid interiors create an

Photo by courtesy of the author

The vast, unfinished banqueting hall has been left as it was at Carl Gustaf Wrangel's death in 1676. Here you can learn about the construction of the building.

environment that is harmful to books. Books consist of paper, wood or cardboard, parchment, leather and a certain amount of glue. This makes them vulnerable to pests who feed on these materials. Lower temperatures and reduced relative humidity will prevent pests from thriving, and under these circumstances books can be kept for centuries, if they are handled with care. The main part of the 20,000 volumes in the Skokloster book collection proves this.

The books were collected by three different families from the sixteenth century until about 1840. Some of the books are very precious, while others are rather inexpensive in simple bindings of parchment or paper. Most of the bindings are originals and very few have been restored. The interior of the libraries was not changed after the nineteenth century, and the wooden bookcases with lattice doors were built around 1840.

In a historic building like Skokloster, with no radiators or central heating, it is difficult to reduce relative humidity to a satisfactory level. During the damp Scandinavian autumn, the relative humidity often rises to 70 or 80 per cent indoors. Repeated mould growth has been noticed in the book collection over a period of twenty years. Any occurrence of microbiological activity prior to this was not recorded. Earlier generations might have had better methods for preventing mould growth, or perhaps they where more tolerant to 'mildew'. In our experience, the best way to reduce the humidity levels in the building is simply to open the windows when the temperature outside is colder and less humid than inside.

Cleanliness is of utmost importance for preserving a collection. Dust attracts pests, holds moisture and increases surface destruction. If lubricants have been used on leather bindings, dirt and dust will stick even more readily to the surface. We know that neat's-foot oil was used some thirty years ago on parts of the book collection. However, it is impossible to see any of its supposedly preservative effects today, and because of our recurring fungal problems, we do not use any lubricants at all.

Commercial pesticides are not used either, but the enzyme menadione has proved to be an effective inhibitor of mould growth for a limited time, five to ten years, in the specific climate conditions that exist inside Skokloster. Frantisek Makes carried out scientific research to investigate the effects of the enzyme for use on antique leather at Skokloster in 1984.

The metalwork collection

The metalwork collections at Skokloster consist of two armouries, one large tool collection, household goods of many kinds and one small coin collection. Most of the common metals are represented here, such as iron, bronze, pewter, gold and silver. Most of the furniture has fittings of gilded bronze as well. The vast majority of these objects are also made of one or more organic materials, for example wood, leather or textile. One conservator worked part time with the maintenance and conservation of the metal collection.

The two armouries were completely conserved or otherwise cleaned during the 1970s. The rest of the metal collection had been treated prior to that time. Because the collection was not under the care of a professional curator for many years, it was decided to carry out a condition inventory for the metalwork. The inventory was begun in the Wrangel armoury, often with visitors present to watch as we worked. Generally, an object is removed from its display, and after a careful dusting with a soft brush, is thoroughly examined with the naked eye under a bright light. If at all possible, objects made of different materials are partly disassembled, that is, the lock is removed from the stock on each firearm to check that hidden metal surfaces are not corroding. Organic parts are examined for insect attacks, signs of fading, cracking and so on.

A form is filled out for each object, or a group of objects if the conditions are similar. Each artefact is then given a 'priority listing': 1, for active corrosion, mould growth or insect damage and in urgent need of treatment, 2, for objects that have loose parts or slight corrosion, 3, for objects that need cleaning or renewal of surface treatment, and 4, for those in a satisfactory condition. To date, now that close to 5,000 objects have been examined, we have determined that approximately 4 per cent are considered priority 1, and about 10 per cent priority 4. There seems to be a higher tendency for corrosion to occur if objects are displayed on exterior walls facing north, or are in or near windows. The open-display cold-storage conditions in which the collections are kept has been surprisingly harmless to some objects, whereas others have suffered irreversible damage.

Photo by courtesy of the author

The Count's bedchamber. The bedhangings are of silk damask embroidered with silver paillettes.

As an example of our standard treatment for simple corrosion problems on iron, the metal surface is cleaned with ethanol on cotton, corrosion crusts are removed with a scalpel, or, if thin enough, with paraffin oil on fine-grade steel wool. A surface coating of industrial mineral wax made for the under-sealing on cars (Dinitrol 81) is applied with a soft brush and allowed to dry for a minimum of 24 hours before polishing. Threaded parts on screws or bolts are brushed with mineral oil before reassembly.

The textile collection

The textile collection numbers about 4,500 objects dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. They include tapestries, articles of clothing, upholstery fabrics and a small linen collection. One curator and two part-time textile conservators care for the collection. In general, preventive measures are preferred to active treatment, as the original surfaces and materials are considered to be of greater historical value than a conserved or restored object. In exceptional cases, reconstructions have been made, for example the textile furnishing of some nineteenth-century beds in one of the guest rooms were reconstructed, as only fragments remained of the original textiles.

Skokloster is a historical open-display museum, where objects are not protected from dust or insect infestation in showcases, as they would be in a regular

Photo by courtesy of the author

Wrangel's armoury with the pinewood panelling from 1669.

museum. Good climate control is difficult to obtain without disturbing the authentic environment. As under any cold storage conditions, the temperature and relative humidity closely correspond to the outdoors, with some slight delay. At high relative humidity, in combination with bad ventilation and the occurrence of dust, mould growth is likely to occur. Indeed, fungal growth has been discovered on the reverse side of large tapestries, and their mountings have been altered to take circulation into consideration. The space between the tapestry and the wall has been increased to 15 cm, to allow the air to circulate more easily.

The visitors who circulate in any museum inadvertently bring with them not only their very welcome curiosity, but also an abundance of dust and particles from the outside. A preventive conservation measure is to have a floor-cleaning routine to minimize the amount of dust that settles on sensitive surfaces. To avoid an impregnation of dust and dirt on the textiles, they are vacuum cleaned with special nozzles at regular intervals by the textile conservators.

Apart from the cleaning staff, conservators of different specialities and curators co-operate in a project to 'clean, condition survey and maintain' the collections, working with one or two rooms per season. To start with, the room is emptied of all movable objects. The ceilings, walls, windows and floors are vacuum cleaned, but only the floors are wet-cleaned as well. Before the room is re-furnished, all objects are carefully dusted and condition surveyed on a standardized form. If considered necessary, mountings are adjusted or other improvements are made, before re-opening the room to visitors.

To protect the textiles from exposure to ultraviolet and visible light all windows have two sets of curtains, one dark green and the other one a light colour. The darker ones are pulled away when the room is shown to visitors, whereas the lighter ones cover the windows at all times. Another measure of protection from both light and dust is the manufacturing of custom-made furniture covers, preferably in a fabric similar to the original nineteenth-century covers, of which some are still in use.

Finally, to keep insect damage at bay, feromone insect traps are used and regularly checked to detect the presence of any moths or other harmful insects. For large-scale insect control, the services of Anticemex Ltd are used. Co-operation with the Swedish organization PRE-MAL (Pest Research and Education – Museums, Archives and Libraries) is also part of the strategy. Trials on long-term exposure to an oxygen-depleted atmosphere are currently being made at Skokloster, as treatment for large organic objects infested with moths. ■

Exhibiting and communicating history and society in historic house museums

Magaly Cabral

Any scientific or pedagogical operation concerning heritage is a metalanguage. It does not make objects speak, but it talks about them, in the words of Magaly Cabral. The historic house museum is not just a house that is a . . . museum. In historic house museums, the actual building, the collection and the person who lived in the house are so closely linked as to practically fuse. This makes for a relationship that is conducive to communication, according to the author. Magaly Cabral's analysis of the problems encountered in deciding what to communicate in setting up house museums is both pertinent and pithy. The anecdote about the Comte sisters' 'museumizing' their house by putting it under glass in France, and her comment that 'setting up an entire house in its original state is only the beginning of a long path', force us to reflect on the museological commitments involved in transforming living spaces into house museums. The author clearly 'intends to provoke some thought about the educational purpose of the historic house museum, taking into consideration some of the tools that help in the process of communicating with the public and with which objectives they are employed'.

Magaly Cabral, who holds a Master's degree in museum education, is director of the Memory and Documentation Centre of the House of Rui Barebosa Foundation/Ministry of Culture, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the DemHist regional co-ordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, former CECA regional co-ordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean and former Brazilian National Committee Treasurer.

What to communicate in a historic house museum

As everyone knows, each and every type of museum has three basic functions, namely, preservation, investigation and communication. The function of preservation includes the selection and acquisition of cultural assets; the function of investigation includes documentation – the necessary basis for investigation to occur; and the communication function includes all the diverse actions carried out in order to create a dialogue with the public: educational actions planned for any age group, exhibitions, publications, website, multimedia programme, etc. The three functions carry the same weight within the museum, although it is known that, at determined moments, or even by reason of choice, one function sometimes predominates to the exclusion of the others. This is to be avoided, as it seems to me that an imbalance in functions impoverishes museums. Taking as a starting point the supposition that a museum plans its actions seeking to develop the three functions in a very supportive manner, I shall nevertheless deal here only with communication.

ICOM has adopted the following definition: a museum is a permanent non-profit-making institution, providing a service to society and helping in its development, open to the public, and which acquires, preserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, in order to study, educate and provide leisure, the material evidence of humankind and its environment. Thus the museum is presented in a triple matrix: the museum is seen as a space/setting in which the person/subject develops a specific relationship with the object/cultural asset. Actions to develop the communication function develop themselves within the core of this relationship and, as a result, the artefacts give meaning to the object/cultural asset, which we shall term a 'document'.

In a house museum, the document (object/cultural asset) is the actual space/setting (the building), as well as the collection and the person who owned (or lived in) the house. These three references should always be taken into consideration when one thinks about communication actions for this type of museum. Building, collection and owner are not dissociated and, because of this, the relations established between them favour communication, allow greater interaction with the space to be visited and, fundamentally, enable the possibility of appreciating a determined historical period and the society that it comprised. The Rui Barbosa House Museum, where I work, could be taken as an example: the building, the collection and the owner are intimately linked. The house is a neo-classical urban construction from the mid-nineteenth century, in the Botafogo district of the city of Rio de Janeiro and which came to be occupied by the well-to-do noble and rich commercial families from the middle to the end of the century. The collection, made up of objects that translate the eclecticism that dominated the arts in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a reflection of this society in transformation. Finally, the owner was a liberal professional representative of the urban middle class that was in formation in Brazilian society during this period.

How to communicate in a historic house museum

One does not transform the walls of a museum into a book by sticking a large quantity of text on them. But the diffi-

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

culties appear to be greater in a historic house museum, which is usually set up as if it existed in one certain period of time, where somebody lived, or worked, or was born, etc. Bedroom, dining-room, study, library, and so on, are furnished as if they were in a particular era and, many times, the rooms are nicely decorated – even, at times, by famous artists – or 'interior-decorated' with wallpaper.

But thinking that a mere reconstruction of ambience – the documentary record – will make communication possible, because the reconstruction contains information, generation of knowledge or cognitive synthesis, is a great mistake. Life is not reproduced in a house museum, it is represented – like in any other museum, which is, *par excellence*, the space for representing the world and its things. Moreover, objects have histories and trajectories, and the reconstruction of ambience 'freezes' the objects into just one specific context.

In August 2000, I organized the fourth Seminar on House Museums, which was sponsored by the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation. Professor Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses recounted an anecdote narrated by Alexandre Vialatte in 1952, and reproduced by Dagognet in 1993, which clearly illustrates the illusion of reconstructing ambience to reproduce 'real life': the Comte sisters, who lived in the French provinces, felt that a museum of 'any kind of object' was needed. They wanted a museum that would be a museum in itself, a museum with the idea of a museum. So they bequeathed their own house, complete with all the objects and belongings, for this purpose. Everything was shut away behind glass. It was as though everything had been absolutely contextualized, as though nothing had changed places, or could be added to or removed from it. Professor Ulpiano comments that the Comte sisters had made the important discovery that the museum is essentially an institutionalized way of transforming objects into documents, but that it is not enough to intend to transform an object into a document, because physical insertion sets up a dialogue-picture of motivations, expectations and associations that could escape by chance, and that only the museum can offer in depth. So what movements and associations would be capable of enlightening what had been the space of an everyday experience? He concluded the anecdote by saying that a neighbour, who was in the habit of visiting the old house before it became a 'museum', would now be stimulated to see it through other eyes, but that nothing in the previous situation would have prevented this person from also scrutinizing the house in order to understand it. In accordance with Professor Ulpiano's thoughts, we may say that the Comte sisters' museum had nothing essential added to it, only the novelty of the occasion, which is at least something but it is still a far cry from everything! We may also say that by setting up an entire house in its original state is only the beginning of a long path.

And what leads to a historic house museum?

If the museum is characterized by the three basic functions already mentioned – preservation, investigation, communication – and, at times, by others that are attributed to it, it is also characterized by a multiplicity of uses by the visitors. Museums provide aesthetic pleasure, emotional delight, a space for daydreaming, the opportunity for evasion, imaginary entertainment. In a house museum, the image of whomever used to live there or own the house, associated with the collection and the building, exerts an attraction and fascination that acts on the imagination. The process of transforming an object into a document, which is the essence of museums, introduces references to other spaces, times and significations in a contemporaneity which is the museum, the exhibition and its user – something that the Comte sisters did not come to understand.

Using the most diverse tools – temporary exhibitions, publications, multimedia programmes, CD-ROMs, audio-guides, staged performances, visits for various age groups, etc. – museums can increase their possibilities for communication, provided that the actions developed from these tools seek a dialogical picture of motivations, expectations and associations. This is because no matter how varied the means, communication resolves itself at the human level, and a museum is a space for human relationships. As Márcio T. D'Amaral recalls, 'language and communication are one and the same thing. Communication is the essence of mankind; language is the essence of mankind. Mankind is social because it communicates' (1977, p. 31).

The educational role of the house museum

According to Castrillon-Vizcarra, 'the museum is a large centre where one can produce diversified cultural information through language, whether oral or written (guides, recordings, technical cards), or through codified signals (semiology)' (1986, p. 35). The museum is, therefore, a means of communication and an educational field, because in it, the relationships are articulated among human beings, mediated by a discourse that articulates cultural assets. The educational role of the museum will be consubstantiated in the discourse that the museum produces to articulate the cultural assets – the documents.


Photo by courtesy of the author

Rui Barbosa House.

Jacques Le Goff has recognized that memory can serve for the domination of human beings as much as for their liberation. The museum is a place of memory and a place of power. The museum is the 'house of memory' that preserves the objects of some of us mortals who, able to overcome the condition of being mortal, were immortalized. They will always be remembered, by the force of memory. The objects of other and more common mortals are abandoned to be forgotten. The power of the museum is to perpetuate certain mortals, by means of memory. The museum is, therefore, memory and the experience of absence.

But this is not to imply that one should necessarily understand the museum as a place for human creative and intellectual

Photo by courtesy of the author

Portrait of Rui Barbosa.

activities at the service of society, or as an instrument in favour of social development. Chagas, giving continuity to this reflection about memory and power, affirms that museums 'can be celebratory places for the *memory of power* or a tool interested in working democratically with the *power of memory*' (1996, p. 186). The former, he says, 'tend to be made up of slightly undemocratic spaces where the argument of authority prevails, where importance is given to the celebration of power or the predominance of a social, ethnic, religious or economic group over other groups' and, the latter are 'agencies capable of serving and of orchestrating individuals and groups of diversified social origins to better set out the solution to its collection of problems.'

The historic house museum is faced with this problem in a fairly dramatic way. For the most part, this type of museum conserves material 'leftovers', within architecturally spectacular buildings, that have been left behind by certain personalities who are thus singled out. The personal ties are a relevant and singularizing condition in a historic house museum, and the objects, one could say, are evidently of an ideological order. But if any object may function as a document, and if the document is the support of information, the cultural assets of a historic house museum could be, and should be, utilized as documents for the production of knowledge as sources that allow 'us to understand the society that produced these assets and the society that reproduced them as historic objects' (Meneses, 1994, p. 20).

Chagas says that frequently the historic house museum 'struggles between the preservation of these material leftovers and the (homoeopathic) dynamization of spirit, ideology, knowledge and action of these characters'. And he reminds us that many of these characters were controversial figures and agitators, who took a stand against the established order, stood up in the face of political and economic interests, fought for ideas and ideals, strove to build a fairer society, and, ironically, ended up mummified.

I borrow Chagas's words and make my summons: to what extent do historic house museums make an effort to be in tune with the stature of their owners? And he was not talking about ideals crystallized in the past, but ideas, ideals and practices that move with the times and that can be tapped at the roots.

The objects, the building and the owner's life – the cultural assets of the historic house museum – will turn into documents only if knowledge is produced from them. The idea that the object/cultural asset speaks for itself is outmoded. Nestor Garcia Canclini recalls that, just as scientific knowledge will never 'reflect' life, restoration or museography or more contextualized and didactic publicity will not abolish the distance between reality and representation. Any scientific or pedagogical operation concerning heritage is a metalanguage. It does not make objects speak, but it talks about them. He says that 'the museum and any other heritage policy should deal with objects, tasks and customs in such way that, more than exhibiting them, one should make intelligible the relationships among them, proposing hypothesis of their meaning for the individuals that see and evoke them today' (1994, p. 113).

Therefore, it is the investigation that will make cultural assets speak. It is the investigation that will assure a better communication with the public. It is worth noting that we are not talking here about the subordination of investigation to the needs of the field of communication. We are speaking about a mutual relationship of fundamental contribution. I would like to refer again to the importance of the three basic functions of a museum (reservation, investigation and communication) to be developed in a supportive manner.

How can the knowledge produced be communicated by means of the various available tools? It would be too ambitious to think that one could fully develop such a topic here: there would not be enough space, and we would need Hercules. Nevertheless, we can still highlight a few points which can be presented in the formulation of actions. For instance, various categories can be used to differentiate between museum visitors – age group, gender, education, occupation, interests, economic background and, above all, social background. We cannot expect that one single language will be sufficient for every museum user.

Another point is to be aware that the historic house museum does not preserve or restore the past. Apart from presenting the past as something special, as 'living history' – even introducing common people and everyday life in its dramatization – the historic house only shows how people used to live. It does not explain why they used to live in this or that way. As Professor Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses states, 'it looks as if the everyday experience stopped being the *locus* of the institution and effective production of social relations. There is no conflict, tension, just 'life' which is conceived, of course, in a purely kinetic way' (1994, p. 35). Very often you hear a visitor, while visiting a historic house museum, especially in more refined houses or palaces, commenting, 'Those were the days! They really knew how to live!' If the conservator or a guide is able to interact with the visitor, there may be the opportunity to establish comparisons that will link this 'idealized past' with the very real present. Here at the Casa de Rui Barbosa Museum, we point out that in the period when the house was inhabited by Rui Barbosa, there were dwellings which were shared among several families. One can still compare these families with people living today.


Photo by courtesy of the author

Library in the Rui Barbosa House.

Meneses calls our attention to the fact that 'the worst is that dramatization reinforces the illusion of that knowledge and observation [sensory perception] are covered up.' Does this then mean that we should abandon the possibility of putting on stage performances at a historic house museum? No. What we need is to be aware, as Professor Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses concludes by quoting Kavanagh (1986), that 'the staging of history should consist of an agreeable stimulus to knowledge; it should never, however, be mistaken for knowledge to be produced, for itself' (1994, p. 35).

Furthermore, the most important point is the clear definition of the educational purpose of the historic house museum, which, in my opinion, and in light of all that has been said so far, is to contribute towards a historical understanding, by means of cultural assets (building, collection and owner) transformed into historical documents, that is, investigated in a way that enables one to understand the society in which they were raised and used, as well as their relations with the present society. The educational proposal must be committed to people in constant transformation, making use of the methods that are available. Moreover, its aim must be to allow the participant (person/subject) to think in a critical and participative way about the message being received. And the best way to achieve this is through 'strangeness' or curiosity, questioning and asking. And not by simply giving answers.

Umberto Eco alluded to the possibility of a 'semiologic guerrilla' or a 'cultural guerrilla', and Chagas stated that 'an educational organization that could enable a specific public to discuss the message that it receives . . . could invert the meaning of this message. Or it could show that this message could be interpreted in several ways. Look, I am not suggesting a new and more terrible way of controlling public opinion. I am suggesting an action to impel the public to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation' (1984, p. 174).

In conclusion, I would like to affirm that very seldom do spectacular exhibitions achieve the educational purpose stated above. It is worth noting that spectacular exhibitions result from the rationale of the cultural market, which naturally requires, and so includes, cultural 'packaging'. Since the 1990s, the function of communication has predominated in certain museums (to the detriment of preservation and investigation), not as the basic function of each museum or even the museum's own potential, but basically possessing as its matrix the cultural market, which is, we should not forget, first and foremost, a market.

But historic house museums can and should surely be able to fulfil an educational purpose as long as their cultural assets (which can be considered texts) are transformed into documents and are open to a philological interpretation – that is, to be open to the study of a period of time through its texts and historical facts. Or, as proposed by Davis and Gibb, the museum should replace marketing with social responsibility, becoming accountable for 'providing the tools for individuals to critically explore the past and enable them to apply their skills to criticize and interpreter the contemporary society' (1988, p. 44). ■

Note

A brief bibliography of cited works has been prepared by the author and is available on request from *Museum International*. – Ed.

Versailles and its visiting public

Pascal Torres Guardiola

Pascal Torres Guardiola is curator at the Graphics Art Departement at the Louvre, and former curator at the Château of Versailles. The information concerning the choice of current cultural policy at Versailles was transmitted by Ms Beatrix Saule, general conservator and head of cultural services at the Château of Versailles.

To write on the subject of the reception policy at Versailles is a challenging task. To begin with, Versailles receives some 2,400,000 visitors each year. This figure comprises the visitors to the château, the Trianons, the gardens and the park, and includes the outbuildings of the château. In fact, the bulk of Versailles's reception possibilities are not centred on the château itself. The complexity of the site, which reflects the complex protocol of the Ancien Régime, was no doubt the prime consideration in the implementation of the renewed reception policy which has been the main management task of the Versailles public authority since its recent creation. To add to the natural and physical complexity of the site, there is another characteristic of Versailles which often leaves most of the public confused. The dual purpose of the site, as a place symbolizing history and an outstanding work of art, was enriched with a new museographic role under the government of Louis Philippe (1830–48), that of the representation of national history through the creation of history galleries. These collectively became a temple of heterogeneous elements, with the masterpieces of painting, the decorative arts, sculpture and architecture found side by side with minor works, whose sole virtue is often only a slight degree of documentary worth.

In short, although Versailles is one of the world's most renowned palaces, there is no denying that it is, above all, one of the least well known. The figures speak for themselves. Over 2 million of the yearly visitors (85 per cent) visit only the Grand Appartement du Roi (the Apartment of State) and the Galerie des Glaces (Hall of Mirrors), and spend no more than two hours in a place which they will, in most cases, never see again. The breakdown of the visiting public also demonstrates Versailles's power as a symbol of art and culture: 70 per cent of the visitors are foreigners and 30 per cent are French (including school groups). Of the foreigners, 25 per cent come from North America (United States and Canada) and another 25 per cent are non-French Europeans.

A total of 43,000 groups visit Versailles's *Grand Appartement* alone each year, which, taking opening hours into account, implies three groups arriving every five minutes. The management of this kind of visitor flow is an extremely complex task. The figure given above is an average, and it is obvious that, depending on the period of the year, the number of visitors quickly reaches saturation level. The flow of visiting groups is being well managed, but the same cannot be said for visitors buying individual admission tickets.

In the face of ever growing demand, Versailles has brought in two new techniques. The first is designed to relieve overcrowding by the creation of complementary itineraries, to ensure that the public is not all massed in the same places in the château at the same time. The second, audio-guiding, is now used by 10 per cent of the visitors in the Chambre du Roi (the Royal Bedroom), which is another star attraction.

None the less, the main problem at Versailles, at present, is that of the deteriorating visiting conditions.[1] Reflecting an economic inevitability that is familiar to cultural institutions, exploitation for tourist purposes in a way implies the negation of good visiting conditions. Just as our natural environment has proved almost incapable, over the past few decades, of regenerating itself in the face of the attacks from industrial exploitation which cares less and less about taking any responsibility for its actions, so artistic and

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

cultural heritage is powerless to protect itself against the abuses of exhibition. It is not for us to point fingers at presumed guilty parties, because we believe that the responsibility is shared among many structurally interdependent factors, including the profit motive of the private sector and ever-diminishing state funds.

A more positive approach would be to observe public reception policy at Versailles in the optimistic light of those aspects that have provided legitimate and effective solutions. In this way, everything that is being done to ensure a more even flow of visitors also enables the site of Versailles to become better known. The public promotion of the château is now summed up by the slogan, '*Visiter ces lieux autrement* (see Versailles differently)'. A multilingual Internet site has been set up so that visitors from many countries can prepare their visit beforehand. In addition, over 200 visit themes are being currently proposed by the Conférenciers des Musées Nationaux (official guides working in French museums), whose services are now used by 5 per cent of the visitors to Versailles. In the context of an active museum cultural policy, Versailles is also a place which serves to maintain traditional knowledge and the arts and crafts of the past a historic residence promoting a policy of authenticity. The activities of the fountain-makers, gardeners, cabinet-makers and gilders of today are a continuation of those of yesterday, and help maintain a living heritage which is rooted in the grandeur of the history of Versailles. ■

Note

1. This article was written before the devastating tornado that hit France on 26 December 1999, in which most of the trees in the park around the château blew down, creating a new set of problems in terms of visitor flow in what are now restricted areas. – Ed.

Pierre Loti's House: the balancing act between exhibition and conservation

Gaby Scaon

Can a museum become too popular for its own good? Gaby Scaon, curator of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire and the Pierre Loti House in Rochefort (France), discusses the problems involved in managing a historic house museum where the numbers of visitors simply cannot all be accommodated, giving practical and valuable suggestions. Gaby Scaon, who holds a degree in ethnology, has directed the Ecomuseum in the Brittany region in France, and has recently launched the cultural project and scientific programme for restructuring the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Rochefort along the lines of a museum of urban history. The author has published several articles on Pierre Loti's house, and has also published the catalogue Bleu*, a collection of twenty-two artists on the colour blue.*

An extraordinary dwelling place

The writer Pierre Loti is not one of the nineteenth-century French writers who are read over and over again. He was very famous in his time, but today's young readers probably cannot name his novels. The man's presence is still felt, however, and he has even recently reappeared in literary news columns. In fact, more than his writings, it is his personality which fascinates. Having been a writer (and French academician) as well as a traveller, naval officer, artist and photographer, he was a man of many roles who made life itself into an endless voyage.

The house in which he was born mirrors his singular individuality which was, at the same time, very much in tune with the tastes of intellectuals today. Loti wanted his house to be a display case, where the treasures gathered during his exotic adventures could be exhibited, and where his historical fantasies, along with the memories of his childhood, could be shown.

Out of a rather modest middle-class house, he managed to create a fantastic universe in which one finds side by side historical references (the Gothic Room, the Renaissance Room and the Peasant Room), Middle Eastern exoticism (the Turkish Sitting Room, the Arab Bedroom, the Mosque, and the Mummy Room); Oriental exoticism (the Japanese Pagoda, and the Chinese Sitting Room) and the more intimate universe of his own life (the Red Sitting Room, his bedroom, and his father's study).

All the rooms are bona fide installations, and are, indeed, artistically designed projects that were shaped by his peregrinations, the events which influenced his life, and the fashions of his time. The purpose of the house, which was his own design, was to halt the passage of time. It is as if the constant recollection of memories, dreams and travel adventures could prevent them from disappearing. Loti, who was obsessed by the flow of life's current, greatly feared the idea of death. He wished to freeze the passing moment, imprisoning it in an object or space from which it could be recovered when he wanted it. In this way he might say to himself that nothing had ever come to an end. Such is the meaning of this very original house which, far from being just another writer's house like any other, contains both the overall meaning of the literary work and the memory of a dandy influenced by Belle Époque *Zeitgeist*.

Pierre Loti died in 1923; at the time, the house was inhabited by his son, Samuel, who carefully preserved the memory of his father throughout the rest of his own life. He conserved most of Loti's creations, apart from the Oriental rooms, whose collections were dispersed in a variety of sales, and the Peasant Room, which slowly fell into disrepair. The remainder has changed very little, as can be seen from old photographs. In 1969, Samuel Pierre Loti-Viaud sold the house to the town of Rochefort, which made it a municipal museum that was opened to the public in 1973.

Only a small number of people knew about the house at first, and visiting it was more like a ritual for the initiated than a museum tour. Samuel Loti-Viaud's widow still lived there, occupying a small number of rooms. The house gradually gained a certain amount of renown, however, and in 1982 there were 15,600 visitors. The number of visitors continued to grow, reaching 44,000 in 1995.

The house owed its success, first of all, to its own identity as a house. It is so original

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

The Red Room.

that it was given more or less spontaneous media coverage: articles in the local, national and international magazines and newspapers followed radio and television programmes on local and national channels. Media attention reached its height when the programme *Thalassa* was broadcast live from the house, on the French national channel 3, in February 1995.

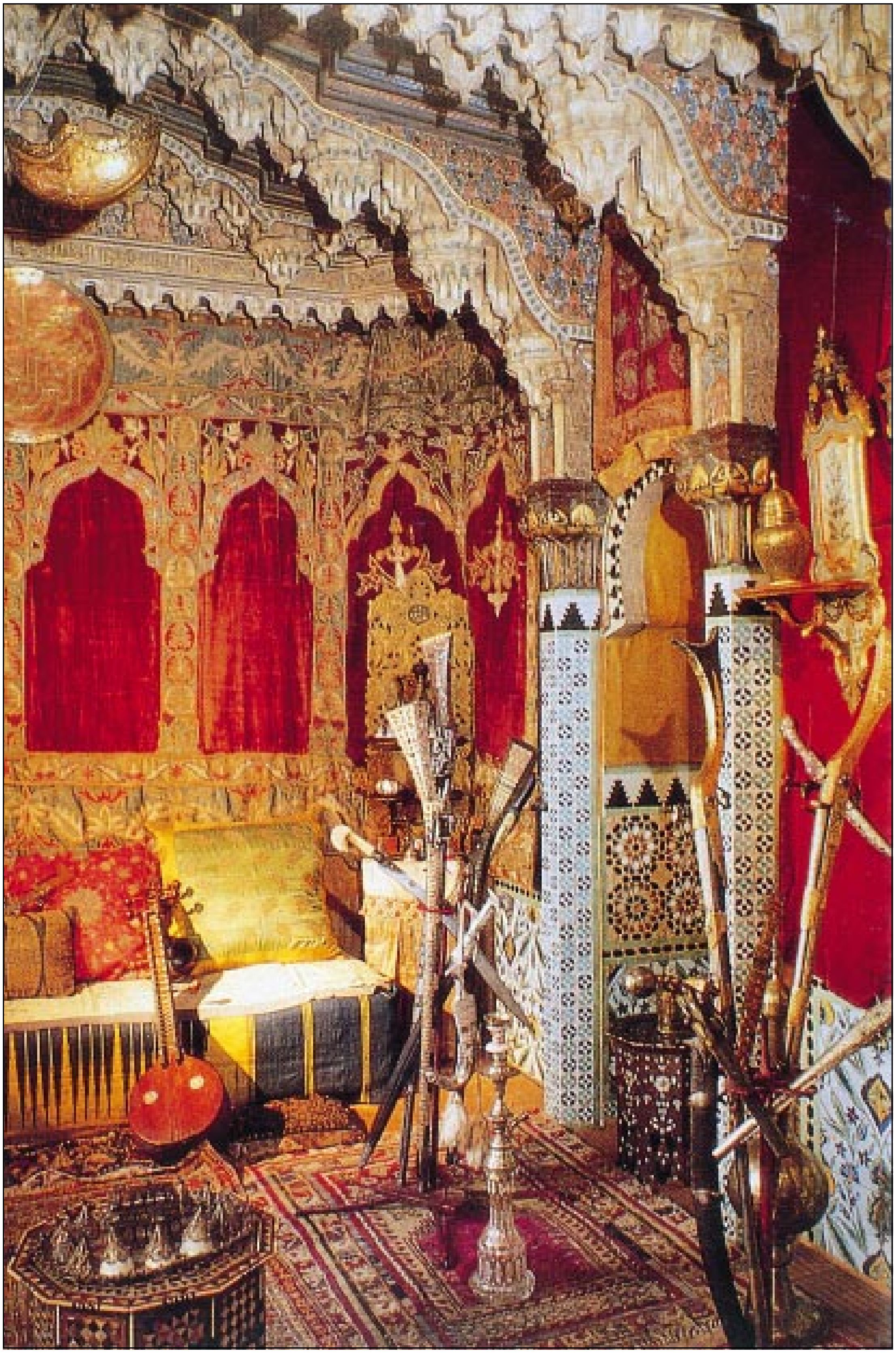
Brochures have also publicized the house, and the latest was published in 1999 by Patrimoine (Heritage) Editions. In 1986, the first biography of Loti, by Alain Quella-Viléger, which came after that of Lesley Blanch, rehabilitated the author, making a critical analysis which shed new light on Loti the writer and Loti the man. The house benefited from these analyses and began to be studied as en entity in itself. An inventory began in 1985, conducted by Marie Pascale Prévost Bault. This produced new elements and afforded better knowledge of the collections, although many mysteries still remain. Loti left no records concerning the creation of his installations, or the origins and transport of his collections. Finally, an abundant bibliography combining new editions or reprints of Loti's works, biographies and critical analyses have more or less released Loti from literary purgatory. The publication in 1998 of long, and previously unpublished, extracts from his diary was an event which put the writer in a more modern light.

In this way, the fame of the house and rediscovery of the author go hand in hand. A recent symposium, 'Les Méditerranées de Pierre Loti' (The Mediterranean worlds of Pierre Loti), showed that all had not been said, and many French and foreign researchers are beginning to study him. The interest is not likely to die out.

Rochefort – a haven for cultural tourism

Pierre Lot's house is located in Rochefort, a town with numerous tourist assets that has been rehabilitating its heritage since the end of the 1970s in an exemplary manner. This is an arsenal town, planned in the seventeenth century on a grid pattern. Much of the eighteenth-century architecture has preserved its overall harmony. The restoration of the Corderie Royale, the royal rope-making factory and an outstanding example of seventeenth-century industrial architecture, was one of the major reconstruction works of the Mitterrand era. With its period garden designed by the landscape gardener Lassus, the Corderie Royale attracts many visitors, only a portion of whom go inside the building to see the exhibitions. In 1995, there were 119,687 visitors.

After 1997, another centre of interest helped to develop cultural tourism in the town well beyond what had been expected. This was the reconstruction of the frigate *Hermione*, which was under the command of La Fayette when he crossed the Atlantic in 1780 to support the American war of Independence against Great Britain. The progress of the work attracted increasing numbers of visitors, and all the other tourist sites in the town benefited, including the Musée de la Marine (Naval Museum), the Musée de Médecine Navale (Museum of Naval Medicine), the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Museum of Art and History), the Musée des Métiers de Mercure (Museum of the



© Pierre Loti's House

The Turkish Room.

Commercial Trades), and the Conservatoire des Bégonias (Conservatory of Begonias). In 1999, the Corderie Royale – *Hermione* complex welcomed 421,343 visitors. The entire town benefited from what was primarily a boom in cultural tourism. The sea is only 15 km away and Rochefort, without being a resort town itself, has become a good place to discover heritage sufficiently near the coast for summer vacationers to visit.

Thus, in addition to the heritage aspects linked to the shipbuilding past and the homogeneity of Rochefort's architecture, Pierre Loti's house provided yet another image of the town, more homey, yet quite original at the same time. Such an image might have seemed contradictory in the austere setting of the white city of Rochefort, with its streets set at right angles and its Enlightenment architecture. But in fact, this image lies at the very heart of life in Rochefort. Since the very founding of the town, there has been a tradition of travel culture. Pierre Loti was one of the travellers, and his house is a fine example of the desires of peregrinating seafarers to have collections of their mementoes from 'elsewhere' displayed in their homes. The house is therefore an image of prestige for the town.

There are significant differences, however, between sites like the Corderie Royale and the *Hermione* site, and a house, especially in terms of media coverage and tourist management. The former are very large spaces that are relatively robust, and they could even be termed rustic. They are situated in an environment which can cater for many people. The house, on the other hand, is a restricted space which is fragile and extremely refined, and in which crowding quickly becomes unbearable.

Victim of its own success

The success of the *Thalassa* programme led to constantly increasing requests from individuals and groups to visit. The initial response was to try to accept everyone, but it very soon became obvious that the house was suffering as a result, and that just conserving the house for any visitors at all in the future would become risky.

Most of the rooms are rather small, and are filled with furniture and objects, none of which are protected behind or under glass. Very large groups of visitors imperil the security of the objects, and produce wear in the passages and on the objects in their immediate vicinity. High staff salary costs have made it impossible to provide an attendant for each and every room. All visits must be accompanied by a guide, but the guide is alone with his or her group, and this makes surveillance quite difficult. All the objects which can be attached, are attached, and since 1985 only two objects have been stolen, but it is difficult in certain spots to prevent visitors from touching things within their reach, and objects such as hangings are being degraded by constant friction. Moreover, the structure of the building itself is being degraded, partly as a result of the too frequent passages and the excessive number of visitors, resulting in vibrations and marks on the floors.

As a result, access to the house had to be restricted starting in 1995. The decision was implemented gradually, with visiting groups being initially restricted to 25 people (this number can be raised to from 35 to 40 at the height of the summer vacation season). The itinerary was already more comfortable for the visiting public and the guides, but this meant that visitors had to be turned away. The atmosphere in the reception areas thus began to suffer seriously as a result. The explanations given notwithstanding, disappointed people went away with a negative image, and during busy periods there was even a general attitude of aggressiveness that was sometimes difficult to control, and this lead to a high level of stress among reception staff.

In addition, the Rochefort Office de Tourisme (Tourist Office), which also received a great number of requests for seeing Loti's house, began to exert pressure for access to be granted to ever-larger groups, and they sometimes short-circuited individual visitors at times that had been, in theory, reserved for them. The pressure of the tourist demand therefore had to be resisted and precise timetables established, with seasonal variations in order to accommodate coach-tour operators.

This situation created a negative climate between the Office de Tourisme and the staff of the house. The former had productivity constraints, while the latter was preoccupied and uneasy about conservation. The production of rather alarmist studies concerning the collections and the sanitary status of the house heightened the concern of the conservators and alerted the municipality. Even stricter visiting conditions were established in 1997.

Visits were restricted to twenty persons, and at the height of the season there were departures every thirty minutes instead of every fifteen minutes. Conversely, the time slots for July and August were widened, and opening times are from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., without interruption. Finally, a reservation system was established in collaboration with the Office de Tourisme, which took over the responsibility for managing reservations. This collaboration was accompanied by alerting the personnel responsible for tourism to be aware of the fragility of the house, and training them in preventive conservation.

These measures meant that everybody was able to speak with one voice to disappointed visitors and that the atmosphere between the two structures was greatly improved. The reservation system also enabled a more positive response to be given to people when they were refused entry, since they could now be guaranteed the possibility of visiting at another time. With the system that was set up, twenty places were made available every hour or half-hour during the season, of which ten could be obtained by reservation and the other ten were available by direct access. Until 1999, the places obtainable through reservation were available until 5 p.m., after which they could be obtained by direct access. In fact, there were few evening visits, and there was often no one from 5.30 p.m. onwards during the season. In 2000, we extended reservations for visits up to 7 p.m., in conjunction with the Office de Tourisme. This made it possible better to spread visitor numbers out during the day.

In 1996, the number of visitors fell to 38,730, then to 33,766, and then very gradually increased again with the better spreading out of visitor numbers. In 1999, there were 36,328 visitors, and we would like to maintain the number of visits at this level.

Constant reassessment of reception services

The reservation system still needs to be improved. The main problem is that reserved tickets can be obtained, for the moment, only at the Office de Tourisme. We hope to be able to solve this problem very soon, particularly by means of new software. But in spite of shortcomings, the system has significantly improved reception services. Advanced reservations are encouraged in all communications concerning the house, and now even the public outside the immediate Rochefort region know about it. There are still people who leave disappointed, not having gained entrance, but there are now fewer of the long queues that had created such a bad atmosphere just a few years ago.

© Pierre Loti's House

The Renaissance Room.

When it is evident that visitors will have to wait for one to two hours to begin their visit, we suggest that they visit other nearby sites in the meantime. There are still peak times which are always difficult to manage: rainy days in August, when the summer vacationers on the coast abandon the beaches and take refuge in every museum available inland; the Journée du Patrimoine (Heritage Day); and the 'Invitation to Visit the Museum' Day. Despite wide publicity that visits for these last two events are by reservation only, many prospective visitors still come, hoping to be able to visit the house free of charge.

Until 1999, the admission ticket for Pierre Loti's house was also valid for a free visit to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Museum of Art and History), another municipal museum. Since February 2000, access to this museum, which is to be completely renovated, has been free of charge. The renovation project envisages associating it in the same building with the offices of Ville d'Art et d'Histoire (Town of Art and History) and the Office de Tourisme, within the general framework of encouraging visitors to discover the town. Co-operation between the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, the Office de Tourisme and Pierre Loti's house should be greatly strengthened as a result, especially with respect to reception services and the reservation system, the two buildings being only 200 metres from each other.

We try to be as flexible as possible with respect to opening hours. There are, of course, both summer and winter timetables, but during the intermediate periods of the short school holidays [February–March; spring break] and the long weekends in May [May 1 and May 8 are French public holidays – Ed.], visiting hours must be adapted to the number of visitors on a given day. These intermediate periods are much more difficult to manage, because we have fewer guides at our disposal compared with summer. In fact, we have three categories of guides: permanent staff comprising two guides and a manager who work every other weekend; seasonal staff recruited from students during the two summer months; and staff under short-term contracts, paid on an hourly basis during the intermediate periods. This latter category is, of course, the most difficult to manage.

The municipality has decided on relatively high entrance fees in order to slow down the influx of visitors. The normal high-season entrance fee is 45 francs for adults, visiting individually or in a group. The off-season fee is 40 francs for individuals and 30 francs for groups, in order to encourage coach tour operators to take advantage of slack periods.

These high rates mean that visitors expect a certain level of quality in return, and we have become increasingly demanding with respect to the abilities of our guides.

Rather than giving them pre-established guidelines for conducting visits, we prefer that they formulate what they say according to their own sensibilities, and we are better able to judge personality by a recruitment process during which the prospective guide performs for ten to twenty minutes in one of the rooms of the house. In this way, what is said differs from guide to guide, and the visitors who return several times (some do) have the impression of following different visits.

During the summer weeks, starting at 8.30 p.m., we propose a visit that lasts for at least two hours, for a maximum of six devotees. We permit these visitors to discover the rooms that are normally sealed off (the study and the library), and we show them the reserve collections. This visit is also available off season, if requested in advance. We always try to have at least one guide who speaks English, and conduct a visit in English, at midday, every Thursday in summer.

Despite all our efforts, the system here at our house museum is not yet perfect, but every year, we endeavour to improve it. Imponderables still exist, however, and are beyond our control. It is difficult to achieve an even management of visitor flows over time. One year never resembles another and the effects of the weather, catastrophes (storms, oil spills in 1999) and other more mysterious events can thwart all our forecasts. This year, for example, there were few visitors in September and we provided for too many guides, whereas the All Saints' Day holiday witnessed an unprecedented full capacity.

The provision of reception services for a house like this one is not an easy task, and we might tempted to say that a visit here should be earned. But this does not prevent us from constantly reassessing our way of doing things, in a continuous balancing act between the satisfaction of our visitors and the conservation of the house. The corollary to the improvement of reception services is the development of preventive conservation which has become one of our priority concerns. The action that we have undertaken in this area has trained staff in another form of maintenance and collections management. This action has also enabled us to prepare the ground for major restoration work, which we hope will begin in about 2003. ■

Note

1. Louis-Marie-Julien Viaud, known as Pierre Loti (b. Rochefort, 1850; d. Hendaye, 1923), a French Naval officer for forty-two years, member of the French Academy and known in Paris society as a dandy, wrote sometimes autobiographic novels evoking sea voyages and exotic, faraway places. These include *Aziyadé* (1879) and *Les Désenchantées* (1906), about life in Turkey; *Rarahu* (1880; it was renamed *Le Mariage de Loti* in 1882) about the South Pacific; and *Le Roman d'un spahi* (1881), which takes place in Senegal. *Pécheur d'Islande* (1886) is the tragic story of a French fisherman from Brittany's north coast (known as 'Icelanders' because of their long voyages to Iceland to catch codfish). One of Loti's most successful novels, *Madame Chrysanthème*, was not only a best-seller in its own time; it was also the source of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*. Loti passionately loved the places he wrote about, and in the impressionistic and powerful style of his writings, he showed remarkable talent for capturing local atmosphere. – Ed.

The Spanish royal palaces: compatibility management

Miguel Angel Recio Crespo

Royal residences, in countries where various forms of monarchy prevail, constitute a particular type of house museum, from the management point of view, because they are homes, not only historic houses. Careful administration makes it possible to juxtapose multiple usage into one location, on condition that a certain level of compatibility be taken into consideration. Miguel Angel Recio Crespo holds degrees in law and business administration. Since 1997, he has been director of the administrative board of the Spanish National Heritage and vice-chairperson of the executive board of the UNESCO-ICOM International Committee for Historic House Museums (DemHist).

Compatible uses

The royal palaces in Spain have usually been approached from the angle of art history, and thus a palace is described as a whole and analysed stone by stone. The dream of the monarch who ordered it built, the architect's conception, the economic outlay involved and what it represented are all examined, and construction, decoration, use by a dynasty and, sometimes, even the decline of that dynasty and of the palace itself are documented. The history and art of the palace have, until now, usually received the most attention.

However, in this article it is our intention to examine the Spanish royal palaces from the point of view of their current, everyday use as museums, administrative centres, places for research, cultural centres (concerts, exhibitions, lectures) and as points of reference for the people living near by. At the same time, they are places whose protected gardens and parks now provide an ecological function as recreation centres in large urban areas, especially in the greater Madrid metropolitan area.

An urban concept is expressed in the term *real sitio* (royal site) that is used to designate these places. It means, naturally, the palace itself, which is the central residential area and the focus of interest, but it also includes the actual physical place where it is located, which in earlier times constituted an autonomous court and nowadays provides a kind of protection for the main nucleus. The surrounding buildings, squares, streets, convents, churches and the like are informed by a similar artistic spirit and maintain a particular atmosphere that reflects a specific period in the history of Spain. In addition, the economic self-sufficiency that once characterized the sites is today reflected in commercial activities which, far from being refused, are encouraged as a source of income, the constant concern being to ensure the harmonious compatibility of activities in the management of the palaces.

These places are still being used today for the purposes for which they were originally designed and built several centuries ago, and this sets them slightly apart from the majority of palaces elsewhere, in countries where there is no longer a monarch connected to political administration. They are the private residences of the Spanish royal family, and they are also the institutional symbol of the country on occasions when they provide the setting for some particularly important event. The government frequently holds certain very important events in one of the palaces, such as bilateral summit meetings, international peace conferences, the signing of international treaties, and so on. The royal palaces are the site of official events or ceremonies involving the Spanish king and the country of Spain.

In addition to the royal palaces themselves there are also the *patronatos reales* (royal foundations), which are usually cloistered monasteries or convents founded by a monarch or member of the royal family and which subsequently received royal support and patronage. Today these buildings still house cloistered religious orders, and they combine within their spacious premises private areas for worship, prayer and spiritual withdrawal, and areas open to the public as museums.

In Spain, the relationship of museums and heritage with public institutions is based on a system of mutual co-operation. The existence in this country of a constitutional

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

system of administrative decentralization means that control over the royal residences, on account of their wide range of activities and uses, is divided among state authorities, autonomous or regional authorities and local authorities. The relationship with all these authorities, which recognize the distinctive purposes of the royal palaces, is therefore rather particular, and frequently involves exemptions and privileges. The status of real estate constituting the *Patrimonio Nacional* and its ownership by the state likewise comes with special privileges regarding use by public authorities on the basis of agreements or transfers of ownership that also involve particular terms.


Photo by courtesy of the author

Changing of the guard at the royal palace in Madrid.

Use by the King of Spain and the royal family

The palaces function, first and foremost, as residences for the Spanish royal family. But this should not give rise to any confusion about the ownership of the property itself. Article 132.3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution refers to the *Patrimonio Nacional* and all the properties that belong to Spain, but are assigned to the use of the King. They are the collective assets of the nation, that is to say, they belong to the Spanish nation and, consequently, to all Spanish people.

The present situation, which is legally and socially defined through the existence of a state body responsible for the management of the properties assigned to the Crown, is the outcome of a historical process that began with a situation where there were no clear dividing lines between the properties of the monarch, of the Crown or of the nation or even the private property of the King. The notion that such properties were the monarch's private possessions is reflected in the testamentary arrangements they made, although it is worth noting that from the sixteenth century onwards references began to appear to the so-called 'properties linked to the Crown'. Hence the royal testaments contained very clear provisions preventing any division or sale of the properties which, since the time of Philip II, were specifically regarded as being linked to the successor to the throne and not to the royal family as a whole. Nevertheless, in spite of several attempts at division, until the nineteenth century there was considerable confusion between the possessions of the Crown and of the state and even the private property of the monarchs. During the nineteenth century the various political regimes introduced regulations concerning this property with the aim of establishing such a division, although the very different legal arrangements that succeeded one another reflected the widely differing historical and ideological circumstances prevailing in Spain at the time. In the twentieth century the *Patrimonio Real* was even confiscated and transformed into the *Patrimonio de la República* (Second Republic, 1932–39).

The provisions in the present Spanish constitution have been supplemented and defined by the Law of 16 June 1982

Photo by courtesy of the author

Ambassadors presenting letters to the King of Spain at the royal palace in Madrid.

governing the *Patrimonio Nacional*, and which, *inter alia*, lays down clearly in Article 3 the purposes for which it is to be used. While it is clear that its use by the royal family of Spain is its main and most important use, there are three factors that help to define this more specifically:

- First, the palaces are to be used by the royal family in discharging the representative function assigned to it by the constitution and national laws.

- Second, the *Patrimonio Nacional* is organized separately from the royal household, although the inevitable interrelationship between them has led to the establishment of effective mechanisms for communication and co-ordination.

- Third, a board of administration that is constitutionally and organically distinct from both the Crown and the government has been devised. This body, which is independent of all other constitutional bodies (and thus autarchic), does not form part of the normal government structure and operates separately from it, though in accordance with the existing regulations regarding staff, budgetary management and accounting practices.

These uses of the properties of the *Patrimonio Nacional* take precedence over all other uses or activities. Thus, for example, an official event would mean that the property would be closed to the public while the event was being organized and held. Curiously, this type of situation actually benefits the palaces enormously, since it increases the number of visitors as a result of the publicity that such events produce. In addition, the public attaches great symbolic importance to the fact that these buildings are used for very real, official events.

Use for cultural and educational purposes

Careful management is needed to use these properties for cultural purposes. A system must be established so that the sites of particular interest can be visited by the public. Such sites, attracting as they do over 3 million visitors a year, may be regarded as veritable museums, regardless of the gardens and woodlands open to the public, and where hundreds of thousands of people can enjoy themselves for no cost at all. This particular use also requires the adaptation of palaces to cope with the flow of visitors, the adoption of conservation measures for both the movable and the immovable properties, the introduction of arrangements to make information widely available to the public, and the establishment of sophisticated security systems.

Cultural and educational objectives also involve the staging of concerts and exhibi-

Photo by courtesy of the author

tions, and publishing books, guides and catalogues. Furthermore, there are now plans to establish a Museum of the Royal Collections as a permanent exhibition giving the public an opportunity to see many objects that are now kept in store-rooms, in particular, tapestries and carriages, and also a large selection of items not on display in the rooms of the palaces. There are over 153,000 objects inventoried as belonging to the *Patrimonio Nacional*.

The problem that arises in administering the use of such items, either in the museums themselves, on deposit for other museums, on loan for exhibitions or for any other purpose is that their primary aim is to be available for the use of the royal family. Accordingly, and for historical reasons, the movable items located in the rooms of the royal palaces and, more specifically, in the Royal Palace in Madrid, which is regularly used for official events, do not usually leave

Regia Laurentina Library, Royal Monastery of St Laurent, the Escorial.

Photo by courtesy of the author

Royal palace, Jardin de la Isla, Aranjuez.

the premises and, if they do, for reasons of restoration or conservation, they are replaced with other objects of comparable age, quality and style.

There are also places of particular interest for researchers, such as the Archives of the Royal Palace and the Royal Library, whose abundant collections are an essential basis for any study of the history of Spain. Accordingly, special arrangements have been instituted to allow consultations by authorized researchers, either for the purposes of carrying out a recognized study or by agreement with universities and other institutions. Such consultations are carried out using microfilm and, increasingly, digitized copies of books, photographs or documents, which can be easily handled by researchers without damage to the original documents, although on occasion even the latter may be made available to researchers.

Environmental aspects

The law governing the *Patrimonio Nacional* was amended in 1995 to include a special reference concerning protection of sites of environmental significance. The text in question states that 'the Board of Administration shall ensure that those sites managed by it which may require environmental protection are so protected'. Such sites also involve the various possible uses listed above: they are used by the King; they are open to the general public; studies and research for scientific and educational purposes may be carried out; and they are exploited commercially. However, so as to provide for the environmental protection of certain areas that must be restricted, protection plans have been established for each of the various areas of forest and woodland belonging to the *Patrimonio Nacional.*

Commercial use

A full 75 per cent of the income of the *Patrimonio Nacional* comes from the state budget, and the remaining 25 per cent is generated by activities on site and the commercial exploitation of its properties. These sums are by no means insignificant, and they help to lessen the dependency on government budgets subject to restriction or variation based on macro-economic criteria and hence far removed from the investment priorities of the organization itself. The foremost of these priorities is for the maintenance of buildings already several centuries old that require constant and essential work. Income is provided mostly through museum admission charges, although other sources include rentals on accommodation situated around the palaces, charges for the use of premises or facilities and percentages of the profits of selected commercial activities.

The combination of such varied uses would be impossible to manage successfully were it not for the existence of three fundamental factors influencing this particular situation. First, service to the Crown represents a personal commitment on the part of all those who work for the *Patrimonio Nacional*; there clearly exists a special vocation which facilitates the tasks involved, especially the unexpected events and special situations that arise in the service of the King; sometimes such a vocation is the result of the transmission of knowledge and experience from parents to children, since it is by no means unusual to find employees who represent the third or fourth generation working in the organization. Second, similar situations exist in other countries, and the international contacts encouraged by both the construction of the European Union and the internationalization of relations are important when it comes to shaping policies within the organization. Examples of such trends are the participation of the *Patrimonio Nacional* in the Network of European Royal Residences, which, with Community funding, encourages exchanges of experience between the organizations responsible for maintaining royal palaces for similar purposes and the comparison of functions carried out under the auspices of ICOM, which has recently set up a working group on historic houses and palaces. The third main factor is co-ordination with the local authorities, since now, more than ever, the need to maintain high standards of service requires the involvement of many different entities.

Consequently, in conclusion, it is clear that the task of harmoniously combining the different uses of the Spanish royal palaces is being carried out efficiently and is well co-ordinated, since there is knowledge of the priorities and the ability to evaluate the relative importance of the different uses and, secondly, there is collaboration and agreement between the various institutions involved. ■

Heritage and 'cultural assets'

Giovanni Pinna

Vast numbers of tourists from many countries have visited Italy in recent years, and they frequently found a surprise waiting for them. Some of the most prestigious, state-owned museums – Uffizi, Brera, Capodimonte, Naples Museum of Archaeology or Villa Giulia Etruscan Museum of Rome – had a habit of imposing near-impossible opening hours on the visitors. The museums were normally open to the public an average of five hours a day (from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.), and four hours on public holidays (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.).

Visitors were also surprised to see how little these museums seemed to care about their visitors. There was nowhere to sit down and rest or take refreshments, there were no bookshops or boutiques to buy a museum guide or postcards showing the most famous objects and paintings. And many of the attendants in these museums showed no interest whatsoever when they came into contact with the public. Their indifferent attitude was all too often followed by very real acts of rudeness.

These elements – short opening hours, lack of services, impolite staff – are difficult for visitors to understand. After all, Italy is a country that promotes the exploitation of its scenic and artistic treasures in the name of the tourist trade. But foreign visitors would have been less surprised had they been aware of the interpretation that the Italian state has always given to the scientific objects, works of art, historical documents and monuments which constitute Italian *beni culturali*. This is a complex set of assets, symbols and traditions which are referred to in French and in English by the respective terms *patrimoine* and heritage. In Italian, on the other hand, the heritage is not considered as a single entity, but is broken down instead into component parts. In the official documents of the government, ministries and public administration, the cultural and historical inheritance of the Italian people is not referred to as *patrimonio culturale* (cultural heritage), which would be a perfectly correct term in the Italian language, but invariably as *beni culturali*, meaning 'cultural goods or assets'. Words are never used haphazardly in a given language; and *beni culturali* is the precise reflection of a particular interpretation of heritage and its social role. This interpretation is rooted in the policy that has been followed by the Italian state since the early days of national unity.

Using the term 'cultural assets' to designate cultural heritage essentially denotes three things: first, as I pointed out above, objects are not considered as an overall entity implied by the terms *patrimoine* and heritage, but are taken individually; second, the material aspect of the objects is given prominence and their symbolic significance is hidden; and third, the potential symbolic value is greatly diminished because cultural assets are not regarded as forming an overall entity, as is the case when the concepts of *patrimoine* and heritage are chosen.

This interpretation of the heritage as a complex of individual 'assets', almost entirely devoid of symbolic meaning, has invariably been adopted by the cultural policies pursued by every Italian government since the early days of unification. The same interpretation also underlies the organization of the Italian museum structure, which is derived from these policies.

How could a country, which is so rich in cultural, historical and social traditions, isolate its own heritage from its true context and, by doing so, undermine its historical and social content, and focus instead on the mere physical value of

ISSN 1350-0775, *Museum International* (UNESCO, Paris), No. 210 (Vol. 53, No. 2, 2001)

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA)

individual objects? The explanation is simple. When Italy was first unified, the new national government set up a cultural policy that was designed to destroy the symbols of the former Italian states dating from the period before unification. At the same time, it sought to construct and disseminate other symbols, namely those of a new nation.

While the state succeeded in getting rid of symbols, they failed in the attempt to create new ones. By the destruction of the symbols of the pre-unified states we do not mean physical destruction, of course, but rather the 'de-symbolization' of the inheritance of the old states through a kind of diaspora of cultural assets. In particular, the art objects collected in the residences of the old ruling houses were moved elsewhere and management of the cultural heritage was entrusted to the central government. This centralization was effected by establishing, with a few exceptions, state ownership rights over the cultural heritage, and through stringent control over the national territory. Thus a network of peripheral government administration offices was created on prefectorial lines, with 'superintendencies' whose role was to safeguard the heritage, and authority not only over the objects belonging to the state but also over those which were not in state hands. This centralized management resulted in the deliberate destruction of the symbolic and cultural significance of the heritage of the various Italian communities, and emphasis was inevitably placed more on the material aspect of the objects, as distinct from their signification in any historical context. This, then, is how 'heritage' was transformed into 'cultural assets'.

This cultural policy produced two separate outcomes. The ordinary citizens were removed from their own heritage and emphasis was placed on heritage conservation, rather than on use by the citizens themselves. The emphasis on conservation was certainly a positive outcome of state policy, in that it led to the creation of conservation institutions of an extremely high standard, such as the Central Institute for the Restoration and Fashioning of Stone in Florence. On the other hand, the negative outcome was an almost total absence of any kind of museum organization. However absurd this might seem, in Italy the state museums are not museums, but offices of the 'superintendencies', with no administrative and financial autonomy, no authority to manage their own administrative personnel and attendants and no scientific or teaching role. The state's restrictive interpretation of 'cultural assets' and 'guarantors of ownership' meant that museums became places where being open to the public was tolerated as a minimum concession – to the true owners of the public heritage themselves! It is a fact that citizens are often regarded as a dangerous source of potential damage to valuable objects.

Thus the impossible opening hours and the lack of services which until recently has caused non-Italian visitors to our museums to wonder. It also helps us to understand the museographic layout of many state museums, especially the Museums of Archaeology, which have survived as 'museum-storehouses' (each object being exhibited with its own inventory number, but with no explanatory material) or 'museum-necropolises' (strictly scientific exhibitions without any civic context; a frozen representation of how diggings are advancing in the course of history).

In the years immediately following the Second World War, this attitude to the

Italian state heritage underwent no substantial changes. Indeed, it seems rather to have been strengthened, as is demonstrated by the persistence of the notion of 'cultural assets' in the different names adopted, after the fall of fascism, by what had been the Ministry of Popular Culture. In the immediate post-war years, after the abolition of the fascist ministry, the Republic entrusted conservation of the artistic and historical heritage to the Ministry of Public Education. This continued until 1974, when the Ministry of Cultural Assets and the Environment was created in a what can only be termed a consecration of the separation of administration from public education. Later, this became the Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Assets. Most recently, in 1998, it was renamed the Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities. It was not until 1998, therefore, that the idea seems to have surfaced for the very first time that a policy for the cultural heritage must not only focus on 'asset-objects' but also on actions. However, what was regarded in Italy as a real revolution in the management of 'cultural assets' took place in 1993 with the adoption of the Ronchey laws (named for the minister who proposed them). A veritable revolution occurred in the Italian museum system, brought about by these new laws. For the first time in the history of the Republic of Italy, museums were not simply regarded as state strongrooms, they were seen as institutions open for public enjoyment. Restaurant services, bookshops and sales outlets for gadgets were now added to the exhibition spaces for the first time. This revolution in the management of the state museums (for years many museums outside the state ambit had broken away from these mummified museology practices and had already focused on cultural activities for the public instead) soon turned into concentration on the economic rather than cultural use of museums. Much attention was given to entrance fees, rights of reproduction and contracts for management of the new public services, such as bars, bookshops and teaching materials. As Italian state museums opened onto the outside world the idea of the 'asset-object' remained unchanged: the new services for the public were officially defined as 'additional services', suggesting that they were somehow secondary appendages to conservation, which still remained the main function of the museum and was regarded as far more important than educational, productive and cultural actions, let alone the wellbeing of visitors.

This explains that much that goes on in Italian museology still takes as the focal point of its action the individual physical object. The visitor is on the sidelines, and this makes it difficult to create the relationship between object and observer which, as is well known, informs the significance of heritage and makes it a source of cultural identity for the community. Thus the Italian museum has twice pruned the roots of the objects it contains: first, when it removes them from their place of origin and, secondly, when it prevents them from becoming part of a complex of meanings, in other words an integral part of the cultural heritage. ■

museum international

Correspondence
Questions concerning editorial matters:
The Editor, *Museum International*,
UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP (France).
Tel: (+33.1) 45.68.43.39
Fax: (+33.1) 45.68.55.91

Museum International (English edition) is published four times a year in January, March, June and September by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF (UK) and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (USA).

INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS: New orders and sample copy requests should be addressed to the Journals Marketing Manager at the publisher's address above (or by e-mail to jnlsamples@blackwellpublishers.co.uk, quoting the name of the journal). Renewals, claims and all other correspondence relating to subscriptions should be addressed to Blackwell Publishers Journals, P.O. Box 805, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1FH, UK (tel: +44(0)1865 244083, fax: +44(0)1865 381381 or e-mail: jnlinfo@blackwellpublishers.co.uk). Cheques should be made payable to Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

INTERNET: For information on all Blackwell Publishers books, journals and services log onto URL: http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk.

Subscription rates for 2001

	EUR	ROW	AMERICAS
Institutions	£85.00	£85.00	$133.00
Individuals	£35.00	£35.00	$50.00
Institutions in the developing world	£39.00		
Individuals in the developing world	£18.00		

Back issues: Single issues from the current and previous two volumes are available from Blackwell Publishers Journals. Earlier issues may be obtained from Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526, USA. Tel: 001 518 537 4700. Fax: 001 518 537 5899. Email: psc@backsets.com

Microform: The journal is available on microfilm (16 mm or 35 mm) or 105 mm microfiche from the Serials Acquisitions Department, University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 (USA).

US mailing: Periodicals postage paid at Rahway, New Jersey. Postmaster: send address corrections to *Museum International*, c/o Mercury Airfreight International Ltd Inc., 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001 (USA) (US mailing agent).

Copies of articles that have appeared in this journal can be obtained from the Institute for Scientific Information (Att. of Publication Processing), 3501 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104 (USA).

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Headley Brothers Ltd, Kent. Printed on acid-free paper.