
NEGOTIATING THE PAST IN THE **P**RESENT: ITALIAN PREHISTORY, CIVIC **M**USEUMS, AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE IN **E**MILIA-ROMAGNA, ITALY

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Abstract: The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the establishment of prehistoric archaeology as a scientific discipline in Italy, as well as the founding of the Italian nation state. Evolutionism, positivism, and a sense of national identity informed prehistoric research and the activities of individuals, such as Strobel, Pigorini, and Chierici, who are regarded today as the founding fathers of Italian prehistory. It is in this dynamic cultural and political climate that the civic museums of Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Bologna were created, both as a response to intense local archaeological activity and in reaction to the centralizing structure of the newly formed kingdom of Italy. These civic museums were among the first museums of prehistory in Italy and the products of the cultural and political climate of late nineteenth-century Europe. This article explores the circumstances surrounding the foundation of these museums and considers how the work of the first prehistorians and the museums' own histories, as civic and cultural institutions, continues to affect their role and management in the present.

Keywords: Bologna, civic museums, curatorial practice, Emilia-Romagna, Gaetano Chierici, Italian nation state, Modena, museology, prehistoric archaeology, Reggio Emilia

INTRODUCTION

In the last several decades, as the definition of the museum has broadened and museum practices have been questioned and redefined, museums have attempted to reconcile their reputation as élitist, collection-oriented institutions with a greater popular dimension. Service to the public as 'cultural facilitators' and educators, as well as the preservation and promotion of their communities' cultural heritage have taken centre stage among the goals of modern museums (the literature on these topics is extensive, see among the most recent: Falk 2009; Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 2007; Karp et al. 2006; Macdonald 2006; Watson 2007). Attempting to confront these challenges, museums have often redefined themselves, modifying their original role and function as they search for ways to remain relevant; as a consequence,

the urge to update and modernize modes of display and presentation of content has become a common trend among museums today. On the other hand, the preservation (much less restoration) of original displays and arrangement of museums' collections has rarely been a deliberate choice of the curators. In most cases, such actions have been either the consequence of a lack of resources, or predetermined by conditions posed by the founder (e.g. the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford or the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston). In striking contrast to recent trends in museum practice, however, some Italian curators have attempted to preserve and restore outdated museum displays in order to rescue the museum's past from obsolescence and present it as an essential component of its present identity. In doing so, they have looked back to the museum's past as a way to make suitable choices about its current management. Examples of such an approach can be seen in several, small civic museums located in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy: the Museo 'Gaetano Chierici' di Paleontologia in Reggio Emilia, the Museo Civico Archeologico Etnologico in Modena, and the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. After presenting the circumstances that led to the foundation of these museums and considering the dynamic cultural role that they played in late nineteenth-century Italy, this article examines how these museums have related their own institutional pasts to their roles in the present through the management of their original collections.¹

NATIONALISM, ITALIAN PREHISTORY, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CIVIC MUSEUM

The civic museum is a typically Italian institution. Its creation in the latter half of the nineteenth century is intimately connected both with the foundation of the modern Italian nation state and with the establishment of prehistoric archaeology, or *paleontologia*, as a scientific discipline in Italy. The majority of civic museums were founded after the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 in an effort to establish a national identity through the promotion of local history and archaeological activity. Rationalism, positivism, civic engagement and a strong sense of national identity informed the first decades of activity of Italian civic museums. As places for the preservation of the historical and cultural identity of local communities, the museums would thus collect and display the long history and cultural accomplishments of the newly formed nation state. As Skeates (2000:1) points out, 'the value of collected prehistoric objects as historical evidence became further elaborated during the 1860s, particularly within the context of intellectual and political discourses that developed alongside the formation of the Italian state'.

It is interesting to note that civic museums developed especially in the north of Italy, where archaeological activity had been more intense and where prehistoric archaeology played an important role in the process. In fact, it was the need for a proper place to preserve and display locally excavated archaeological material that led to the foundation of many of the civic museums in Emilia-Romagna. As in the rest of Europe, prehistoric research was beginning to emerge as a discipline in Italy in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see Díaz-Andreu 2007:368–397; Guidi 1988:3–37, 2000:25–27). As Díaz-Andreu (2007:368) has emphasized, 'the development

of scientific methods to study evolution in the natural sciences promoted a scientific approach to the prehistoric period'. Consequently these new methods, which reflected the positivistic ideas of the time, legitimized prehistory as a scientific discipline. In Italy the natural sciences played an important role in the development of prehistoric studies and many of the first prehistorians were also naturalists (Desittere 1988:23–44, 1991).² Prehistoric research found fertile ground especially in the Emilia-Romagna region and guided the activities of individuals such as Pellegrino Strobel (1821–1895), Luigi Pigorini (1842–1925), and Gaetano Chierici (1819–1886), who are regarded today as the founding fathers of Italian prehistory (Desittere 1984a, 1988; Skeates 2000). Desittere (1988) traces the beginnings of prehistoric research in Emilia-Romagna and its development from 1860 to 1875, showing the significance of the region in early prehistoric studies and in the dynamic research collaborations with contemporary European scholars (see also Peroni 1992:21). On a national level the new Italian state promoted cultural and scientific exchanges with the rest of Europe in the hope of establishing Italy as one of the most culturally progressive countries in Europe. Many young intellectuals and scholars working abroad returned to Italy, where they were offered new positions at universities and opportunities for research. It was contact with the rest of Europe that facilitated the diffusion of positivism and evolutionism in Italy (Desittere 1988:71).

In the years that followed the unification of Italy, civic museums were also part of a wider programme for the promotion of Italian culture, which aimed at establishing a national identity after centuries of division and foreign rule. In these museums national culture found strength in local civic pride and regional cultural diversity. In nineteenth-century Italy and throughout Europe, prehistory was used to promote nationalism by tracing the roots of a nation back to a very remote past, thus reinforcing the perception of a national identity. As Díaz-Andreu (2007:368) puts it, 'the acceptance of evolutionism had emerged as a major scientific theory to explain change... issues of nationalism, regionalism, and imperialism became intertwined with scientific theory and further nourished the interest in the remote past'. In some cases, archaeological research was regarded as a means to legitimize the ethnic origins and geographical boundaries of modern nation states, often in response to linguistic and cultural heterogeneity (Díaz-Andreu 2007:369–370).

In Italy some archaeologists embraced nationalistic sympathies and many became involved in the construction of the nation's past. For example, many prehistorians participated in the *Risorgimento* (the political movement that led to the unification of different states into the kingdom of Italy) and promoted interpretations of the archaeological evidence that legitimized the new state's existence (Desittere 1988:88–98). Important in this respect was the influential theory of Bronze Age and early Iron Age migration and cultural transmission developed by Pigorini, which argued for the movement of more 'civilized' cultures from the north to the south of the Italian peninsula and, as Skeates (2000:33) observes, thus 'emphasized north Italian supremacy within the new state' (on the 'teoria pigoriniana', see also Guidi 1988:29, 1996:110–112; Peroni 1992:31–33).

Prehistoric archaeologists, particularly in Emilia-Romagna, supported the annexation of the Duchies of Modena and Parma and the papal legations of Romagna to the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1860. Some of them, such as Gaetano Chierici and Giovanni Gozzadini, played key roles in the establishment of civic museums; others, such as Pellegrino Strobel and Luigi Pigorini (and Gozzadini), became members of Parliament after the unification of Italy. In 1860 three *Deputazioni di Storia Patria* for the Emilia-Romagna region were established in Bologna, Modena, and Parma. Their aim was to promote the study of local history and cultural traditions by publishing historical works, collecting information on local customs and dialects, and making archives accessible to scholars. These *deputazioni* also played a fundamental role in promoting archaeological activity and creating civic museums in the region (Desittere 1985:23–25; Fasoli 1984).

The history of the formation of the museums in Reggio Emilia, Bologna, and Modena illustrates how the birth of civic museums was tied to local archaeological research and the promotion of regional, as well as national identity. When viewed through the lens of late nineteenth-century Europe, it becomes clear that the civic museums in Emilia-Romagna were not only among the first museums of prehistory and pre-Roman cultures in Italy, but also the products of the cultural and political climate of the times.

THE CIVIC MUSEUMS OF REGGIO EMILIA, BOLOGNA, AND MODENA

The Museo Chierici di Paletnologia in Reggio Emilia was founded in 1862 (a year after the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy) by Gaetano Chierici (Fig. 1), a local priest and archaeologist, who, as mentioned earlier, was passionately involved in the Risorgimento (Macellari 1994; Peroni 1992:25–28). Chierici, who also had a deep knowledge of Classical languages and antiquities, became interested in prehistory in part due to his friendship with Luigi Pigorini, who would later establish the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico in Rome. Chierici attained international prominence through his rigorous stratigraphic excavations of the remains of the middle to late Bronze Age culture of the terramare, previously identified erroneously as Roman or Celtic (Chierici 1871). He also published extensively on local prehistoric sites and prehistoric technology (Chierici 1875), as well as on geomorphology and stratigraphy (Chierici 1877). In 1875, with Pigorini and Strobel, he founded the first journal of Italian prehistory, the *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*, first published in Parma and later printed in Reggio Emilia from 1877 to 1884 (see Guidi 1988:28; Peroni 1992:18–19; Skeates 2000:35).

The civic museum in Reggio Emilia, which was initially called Gabinetto di Antichità Patrie ('Cabinet of National Antiquities'), was enlarged in 1870 and changed its name to Museo di Storia Patria. It consisted of three sections (Desittere 1984b, 1985): the Collezione di Paletnologia, the Portico dei Marmi (a collection of local Roman reliefs and inscriptions), and the Gabinetto dei Reggiani Illustri (a collection of objects that belonged to citizens of Reggio Emilia renowned for their military or civic merits). The palaeoethnology collection was later renamed Museo 'Gaetano Chierici' di Paletnologia.

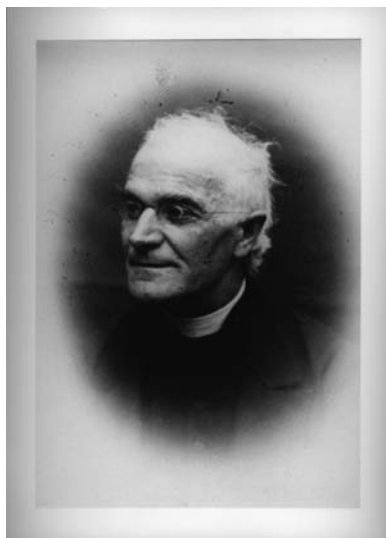


Figure 1. Gaetano Chierici, founder of the Musei Civici in Reggio Emilia (1819–1886). (Photo courtesy of the Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia.)

The museum represented the results of Chierici's archaeological research and curatorial choices. Chierici explained his vision of a museum of prehistory in the 1879 issue of the *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana* (Chierici 1879:178–179):

Intanto chi raccoglie per un museo paletnologico non dee pensare di fare opera grata ai curiosi, né rigettar cosa che sembri vile o da nulla...ma sol dee curarsi di aggradire agli studiosi, unendo quanto può attestare i fatti e rappresentarli integralmente ed ordinatamente, come portano le loro correlazioni e la continua successione dei tempi... le raccolte parziali di regioni circoscritte da tradizionali confini, come sono generalmente le provincie, possono piú sicuramente e piú prontamente recare il vantaggio che la scienza si aspetta.... Ciò tuttavia non esclude dai musei di provincia antichità d'altri luoghi, le quali anzi giovano ai confronti e a stringere i nessi della monografia della nazione; ma la raccolta locale dev'essere la base e il centro, a cui le altre parti rimangono subordinate.

[The one who collects for a palaeoethnology museum should not think of pleasing the curious, nor of discarding things of apparently no value... but should only seek to please scholars, bringing together what can demonstrate facts and represent them fully and systematically, as the relations among them and the succession of time reveal... partial collections from regions which are limited by traditional boundaries, as generally provinces are, can more certainly and more rapidly benefit science as it is expected... This however, does not exclude antiquities of other places from local museums;



Figure 2. *Museo Chierici di Paletnologia, Reggio Emilia: the display in 1886. (Photo courtesy of the Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia.)*

these on the contrary are helpful when comparing and making connections at a national level; nevertheless, local collections must be the base and the core to which other parts remain subordinate.]

The core collection consisted of material excavated by Chierici in Reggio Emilia and its surroundings, while artefacts from other Italian regions and parts of Europe were included as elements of comparison for a better interpretation of the local archaeological material. Objects were grouped first geographically, then chronologically and typologically in accordance with contemporary positivistic criteria and all objects were displayed (Figs 2–3; Desittere 1984b:495–496; Skeates 2000:33). Ethnographic material from Australia, the Americas, Asia, and Africa, donated to the museum by private collectors and local travellers, complemented the archaeological collections as typical of the comparative approaches of prehistoric studies of the time (Desittere 1985: 73–77; on the comparative method and ethnographic museums, see Cardarelli and Pulini 1986). Chierici's collections were exhibited at the Fifth International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology in Bologna in 1871 (see later) and the following year the museum was awarded a commemorative medal for excellence (Desittere 1984b:496–497).



Figure 3. *Museo Chierici di Paletnologia, Reggio Emilia, detail of case, date unknown. (Photo courtesy of the Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia.)*

In those years Bologna and Modena were also at the forefront of prehistoric archaeological research in Italy. Bologna in particular had gained international recognition after the discovery in 1853 of the remains of a previously unknown archaeological culture by Giovanni Gozzadini (1818–1887) in Villanova, a village near Bologna (Guidi 1988:26; Mansuelli 1984; Vitali 1984a). The ‘Villanovan’ culture – as it was later called – acquired great importance within prehistoric classification of that time, because it represented the earliest known material evidence of Iron Age Italy. Moreover, in 1862 Gozzadini discovered the Etruscan settlement of Marzabotto, wrongly interpreted by him as a necropolis, and in 1869 Antonio Zannoni (1833–1910) began excavations at the Etruscan necropolis of Certosa in Bologna, where he implemented rigorous documentation methods and excavation techniques (Morigi Govi 1984a; Peroni 1992:28; Vitali 1984a). The great interest generated by these discoveries led to the appointment in 1871 of Bologna as the site for the Fifth International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology (Vitali 1984b; Peroni 1992:18; Skeates 2000:31–33).

Significantly, it was the choice of Bologna as the site of the Congress that led to the creation of the city's civic museum. In 1871 the archaeological material recently excavated by Gozzadini and others, together with private donations, was presented to the public (Morigi Govi 1984b). Later, the collections of the University of Bologna were also included, and after a general reorganization, the civic museum officially reopened in 1881 (on the history of the museum, see Morigi Govi 1982; Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984). Gozzadini was appointed general director of the museum, while Edoardo Brizio (1846–1907), Professor of Archaeology at the University of Bologna (Fig. 4), became director of the archaeological section (later the Museo Civico Archeologico). Brizio decided to keep the materials from private collections separate from local findings:

... si curò anzitutto di tenere separati i monumenti rinvenuti nella città e provincia di Bologna da quelli di altra e sconosciuta provenienza. Con i primi, ai quali fu data, per quanto era possibile, una sistemazione cronologica, si ebbe in mira di presentare al visitatore il graduato svolgimento della civiltà nella regione felsinea dai tempi remoti fino a tutto il periodo romano. I secondi furono raggruppati secondo i loro caratteri archeologici e parecchi di essi offrono importanti elementi di confronto per meglio lumeggiare quelli analoghi provenienti dal territorio felsineo. (Brizio et al. 1914:15–16)

[... first of all it was made sure that the findings from the city and territory of Bologna were kept separate from the ones of different or unknown provenance. The former were chronologically arranged in an attempt to present to the visitor the gradual unfolding of civilization in the region of Bologna from its remote past up to the Roman period. The latter were grouped according to their archaeological characteristics and many of them present important elements of comparison which can be used to better illuminate similar materials from the region of Bologna.]

The artefacts from recent excavations in Bologna and its territory were exhibited in a prehistory section and a section with Villanovan, Etruscan, and Celtic material was displayed in a long hall on the second floor of the museum (Figs 5–6). Frescoes reproducing Etruscan tomb paintings from Tarquinia and other sites decorated the walls of the long hall (Sassatelli 1984). Gozzadini believed that they helped the public understand the life of the people whose objects (mainly found in tombs) were on display, while for Brizio they served as a didactic tool for his university lectures, which often were held in the museum (Sassatelli 1984:365). Objects from private collections, and thus not recently excavated in the region, were exhibited in separate Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Etrusco-Italic sections (Morigi Govi 1984c). In 1895 (Fig. 7), in keeping with current positivistic ideas and the emphasis on comparison and evolutionary sequences, a collection of prehistoric artefacts from different regions of Italy and Europe was added in what was called the 'Sala dei confronti preistorici' (Vitali and Meconcelli Notarianni 1984:435–440). The archaeological museum, thus enlarged and rearranged, gained immediate popularity. It



Figure 4. Edoardo Brizio (1846–1907), first director of the archaeological section of the Museo Civico in Bologna. (After Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984.)



Figure 5. Museo Civico, Bologna, Long Hall X with locally excavated Etruscan and Villanovan material: the display before 1888. (After Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984.)



Figure 6. *Museo Civico, Bologna, detail of the Long Hall X with wall paintings, before 1888. (After Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984.)*

became one of the most respected institutions in Italy and a model for other important museums (Morigi Govi 1982:16) such as the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico (1876), the Museo Nazionale Etrusco at Villa Giulia (1889) in Rome, and the Museo Archeologico in Florence (1898).

Similar to Bologna, the civic museum of Modena was first established in 1871 to provide a suitable place for the preservation and display of prehistoric material recently excavated, but also to coincide with the meeting of the International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology. In Modena archaeological activity had been very intense (on the history of the civic museum in Modena and the archaeological activities associated with it, see Baldini 1980; Cardarelli 1984a, 1984b, 1988:44–56). The core collection of the newly established museum consisted of local terramare material which had been excavated, with municipal funding, by Giovanni Canestrini (1835–1900), Professor of Zoology at the University of Modena.³

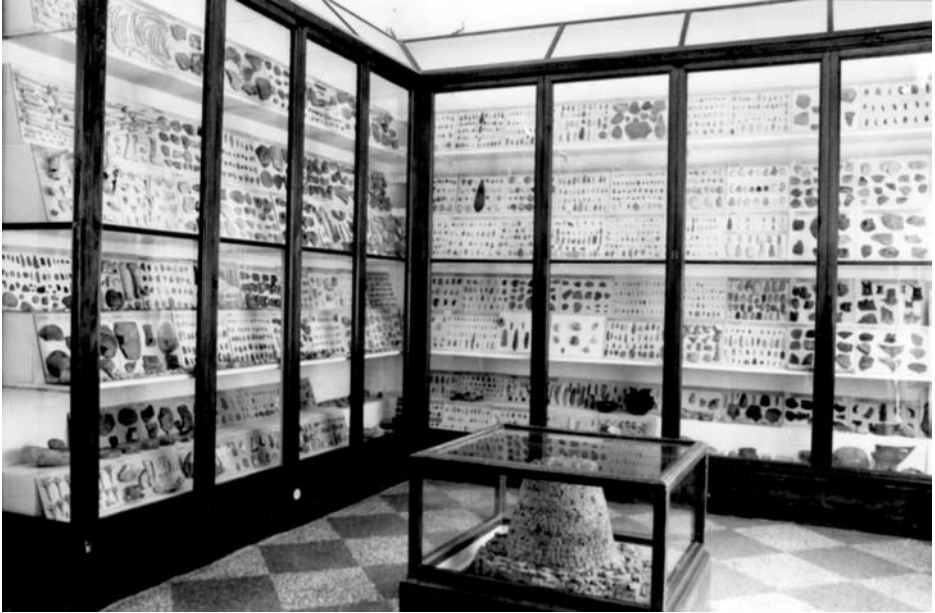


Figure 7. *Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Sala dei Confronti Preistorici. (Photo by author.)*

The Modena museum was founded by Carlo Boni (1830–1894; Fig. 8), who was also its director for more than 20 years. Boni's ideas concerning the nature of the civic museum and its function for the community can be considered a 'manifesto' of Italian museum practice in the period after the unification of Italy. He was convinced of the important role of the museum for the promotion of both local and national cultural identity. Boni believed that the museum should not only be a museum *of* the city, but also *for* the city; it should not only preserve the town's history and memories, but also act as a laboratory for cultural and economic development within the community. Therefore an 'industrial' collection began to be accumulated as a complement to the archaeological material. In order to draw a parallel between the specialized crafts of their prehistoric ancestors and nineteenth-century manufacturing, modern materials and products (such as tapestries, fabrics, terracotta ornaments, porcelains, and scientific instruments) were collected and displayed with the intent of inspiring and further stimulating local industrial activities in the name of progress (Cardarelli 1984a:505, 1984b:14–15). In the archaeology section artefacts were arranged in chronological and geographical order, then grouped based on typology, and materials from other regions of Italy and Europe were displayed as comparanda (Fig. 9). As in Reggio Emilia, in 1875 the museum was enlarged by the addition of an ethnographic collection intended to present the culture and life of peoples who could be compared to the prehistoric inhabitants of the Modena territory.



Figure 8. Carlo Boni (1830–1894), founder of the Museo Civico in Modena. (After Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984.)



Figure 9. Museo Civico, Modena, Sezione Archeologica: the display in 1886. (Photo courtesy of the Archivio Fotografico del Museo Civico Archeologico Etnologico di Modena.)

DECLINE AND RENEWAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A decline in local cultural enterprise had already begun at the end of the nineteenth century with the centralization of the administration of antiquities in Rome after the creation of the Direzione Centrale di Antichità (1875) and as a consequence of the dominating role of Luigi Pigorini within prehistoric scholarship and research (Cardarelli 1984b:16–17, 1999; Guidi 1988:52, 2000:26–27; Loney 2002:204–205; Peroni 1992:16–20, 30–37).⁴ In the first decades of the twentieth century the interest in prehistoric studies, decreased and local archaeological activity slowed.⁵ This has been related not only to the establishment of the Fascist regime, which emphasized Italy's Roman past, but also to the diffusion of new philosophical ideas (e.g. Benedetto Croce's theories, which disregarded material culture as a source for history and criticized the application of scientific methods to the social sciences and the humanities; Cardarelli 1988:53–56; Guidi 1988:78–79, 1996:112–115, 2000:27–29; Loney 2002:206–207; Morigi Govi 1984d). Moreover, prehistoric research was often driven by nationalist propaganda that strove to demonstrate the indigenous origins of the Italic people and thus establish the autochthony of later Roman culture (Skeates 2000:57). Although some museums expanded their prehistory collections in the period between the two World Wars (Skeates 2000:59–60), the civic museums of Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Bologna suffered a period of relative stagnation. After decades of neglect, a renewed interest in museums in the 1970s and 1980s generated resources for reorganizing and updating collections (Binni and Pinna 1989:70–73). At that time, museum professionals had to confront the public perception of the civic museum as an outdated institution that had lost its connection to the community. Moreover, they recognized that the gap between the interpretation of the original archaeological collections and current archaeological research had widened, while new museological approaches rendered the existing presentation of the archaeological material anachronistic (Comune di Modena 1987; Morigi Govi 1984d:477–480).

In Reggio Emilia in the early 1970s the museum director, Giancarlo Ambrosetti, after considering the importance of the Chierici collection for the history of the town's civic museums, as well as for the establishment of prehistoric research in Italy, decided that its original layout, including the display cases and labels, should be restored and its original informing principles reinstated (Ambrosetti 1975). The collection was thus preserved as an artefact of Chierici's work, as well as a witness to late nineteenth-century archaeological research and theories (Figs. 10–11). Objects added after Chierici's death were removed and the comparative ethnographic material reintroduced. To incorporate newly excavated material, instead of dismantling or updating the old displays, curators created new archaeological sections, which interpreted and presented findings according to more modern museological and archaeological approaches. The Museo di Preistoria e Protostoria (Fig. 12), was established to host the prehistoric material excavated after Chierici's death and was later expanded and reorganized between 1992 and 1993, while Roman material up to early Medieval times was displayed in the Museo di Reggio in età Romana, opened in 1998 (Roberto Macellari pers. comm. June 1999; Chicchi et al. 2004). More recently a plan for a major renovation of Palazzo San Francesco,



Figure 10. Museo Chierici di Paleontologia, Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia, early 1990s. (Photo by Claudio Cigarini, courtesy of the Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia.)

the building that houses the civic museums, includes a reorganization of the displays, with the exception of the Museo Chierici di Paleontologia and other original collections. Elisabetta Farioli, the current director, considers the preservation of the Chierici Museum a condition for any type of renovation or restructuring of the town's civic museums (pers. comm. June 2007; Chicchi et al. 2004:217).

Similar choices were made by nearby civic museums in Modena and Bologna. In Modena the display of the archaeology section was significantly modified in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the objects on display, greatly reduced in number, were selected for their aesthetic and educational value. Later, in the 1980s, the civic museum underwent a considerable reorganization, which included structural updating to the building, and remained closed to the public until 1990 (Buzzoni et al. 1983; Comune di Modena 1987; Skeates 2000:86–87). This renovation coincided with a reinstatement project that forced curators to re-examine the role and function of the museum. After considering multiple options, they agreed that the original nature of the museum should be revived by restoring its nineteenth-century

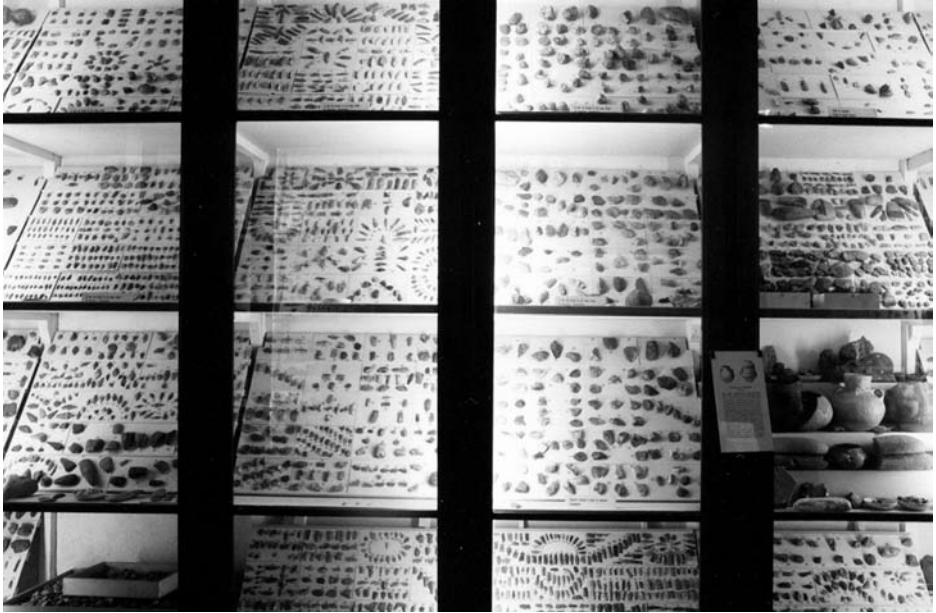


Figure 11. *Museo Chierici di Paleontologia, Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia: detail of the display in 2007. (Photo by author.)*

character as both a document of the museum's own history and a relic of nineteenth-century museum and curatorial practice (Comune di Modena 1987:7–8). In the archaeology section, the lack of detailed records of the original display after the latest modifications prevented a 'true' restoration of the nineteenth-century arrangement. Nevertheless, it was decided that the new display, although expanded with more recently acquired material, should reflect the criteria implemented by the first directors. Both original and new artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic period to the Middle Ages were displayed in the nineteenth-century cases and arranged as they would have been in the last century, although labels and panels were redesigned and updated with new information based on current research, including the objects' archaeological and historical contexts (Figs 13–14). The ethnographic collections, closed to the public in 1973, were also reinstalled in a similar fashion (Fig. 15). On the occasion of this renovation project a room was devoted to presenting the history of the museum during the seminal period from its foundation to the early years of the twentieth century (Andrea Cardarelli pers. comm. April and June 1999; Comune di Modena 1987:20–22; 2008:9–19). This room clarified to the visitors the cultural, social, and historical circumstances that shaped the nature and layout of the museum's collections in its early years and by so doing placed the creation of the museum within its cultural and historical context. In addition to that, since December 2008 the recently redesigned first room of the museum welcomes the visitors with a video (complete with an actor in nineteenth-century dress strolling



Figure 12. *Museo di Preistoria e Protostoria, Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia. (Photo by author.)*

through the restored galleries!) that informs them of the historical meaning of its present layout and the curatorial choices behind the preservation and restoration of past displays.

In the archaeological museum in Bologna, after a general reorganization in the 1980s, the section with local Villanovan and Etruscan material retained the nineteenth-century displays, with the exception of transferring some objects between cases and updating the information that accompanied them. Today, the layout of the space, the position of the cases and the frescoes on the walls are virtually the same as they were at the time of the museum opening in 1881, intentionally preserved as a tribute to the work of the first directors and excavators (Figs 5 and 16; Paola Giovetti pers. comm. June 1999; Morigi Govi 1984d:477–480). While the collections of locally excavated material remain unchanged, over the past 20 years efforts to provide more informative and effective displays have been directed mainly to the objects coming from private collections. In 1990 a gallery of Greek



Figure 13. *Museo Civico Archeologico Etnologico, Modena, Sezione Archeologica: the display in 2007. (Photo by author.)*

and Roman casts was opened to the public; in 1994 the Egyptian collection (one of the most important in Italy after Turin and Florence) was moved and the display completely renovated; and in the last five years the Greek (2005) and the Roman sections (2010) were rearranged and updated. Information technology complements the displays while some collections, such as the collection of coins and medals, are accessible only on line (Paola Giovetti pers. comm. July 2007; Morigi Govi 2009).

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MUSEUM

Mottola Molfino's (1991:9) definition of museum as 'documento globale della storia della società' represents a prevailing attitude among today's museum professionals in Italy. She interprets the museum, with its collections, displays, and underlying curatorial choices, as well as the edifice that contains them, as the product of the culture and society that created and then modified them through time. In this light, the museum can be seen as stratified, with overlapping layers of meanings and messages that have been accumulated since its foundation. These 'strata', all important in different ways, define the nature of the museum, which cannot be reduced to the objects that it contains. This explains Mottola Molfino's concern



Figure 14. Museo Civico Archeologico Etnologico, Modena, Sezione Archeologica: detail of the display in 2007. (Photo by author.)

over the loss of the original displays in many museums established in nineteenth-century Europe. Regretting the fact that attempts to preserve old museums were made only recently, she complains that often the layout of the collections was changed 'come in un department store' according to the latest fashions, as if its conservation was an intolerable provocation (Mottola Molfino 1991:51). Original displays survived only where there was no money to change them (Mottola Molfino 1991:51; see also Zifferero 2004:63). In a similar vein, she advocates the need for a 'ricostruzione filologicamente critica' of the museum, as previously suggested by Andrea Emiliani (1985:107), in order to respect its original value and meanings. Tracing back the history of the museum's origins as an institution is the only way for museum professionals to understand its distinctive nature, and only then is it possible to intervene and make appropriate management and curatorial decisions. In other words, the proper use or renovation of a museum should be based on the analysis and understanding of the museum's nature and uniqueness. In the ongoing debate on the future of Italian museums, museum professionals have agreed that the need to preserve each museum's history and identity is central to its present and future role (see Lenzi and Zifferero 2004). Fiamma Lenzi (2004:xi) expresses this approach well: '...sulla linea d'orizzonte del museo rimangono, ineludibili, a contrassegnarlo per sempre l'identità originaria e la vocazione



Figure 15. *Museo Civico Archeologico Etnologico, Modena, Sezione Etnografica: the display in 2007. (Photo by author.)*

con la quale ha visto la luce' [...the original identity and the vocation through which the museum was brought to light remain on the museum's horizon to mark it forever']. Moreover, Andrea Zifferero (2004:77) has advocated a national, or at least regional 'codice di fruizione', which would preserve and regulate the management of the historical collections in Italian museums, just as there are codes for the preservation of historic buildings. This would require identifying museums with historical displays (*allestimenti storici*) through a census based on a detailed analysis and dating of all the elements of the display.

In the context of the modern museum, the preservation of historical displays seems incompatible with current visitor-oriented and community-outreach models. This is especially true for museums like Reggio Emilia and Bologna, where the intellectual goals underlying these practices are not clearly presented to the public. As Lumley (1988:13) explains, 'the museum text needs also to manifest the meta-text, so that the very ability to read and make sense, as well as the choices leading to a particular display, are visible to the public'. One may argue that the absence within the displays of a clear statement providing the rationale that led the curators to preserve them hinders the effectiveness of this curatorial choice and almost contradicts it; visitors are not able to appreciate the displays as part of the history of the museum or evidence of past curatorial practices.



Figure 16. Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Long Hall X: the display in 2007. (Photo by author.)

CONCLUSIONS

In the civic museums of Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Bologna, the original curatorial practices, as well as the archaeological and interpretive theories that informed them, have been put on display. Nineteenth-century exhibits with their cases, mountings, labels, and classification system have become an 'object' to be preserved, restored, and presented to the public. Frozen in time and essentially unavailable for new interpretations, the museum too has undergone a process of 'objectification', becoming an artefact itself – in essence, becoming a 'museum of the museum' (Cova 2000:26). The academic training of curators in Italian civic museums, who have always been archaeologists, has undoubtedly influenced their curatorial choices, which celebrate the pioneering work of the early museum founders and draw attention to the significance of the original collections for the history of archaeology in Italy. These curators have thus selectively chosen a specific 'stratum' of their respective museum's histories to be restored – in this case, the 'glory days' of the nineteenth century – at the expense of preserving later twentieth-century rearrangements and interventions of these and other collections (which represent important strata in the museum's history in their own right, but are beyond the scope of this article).



Figure 17. *Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, new Prehistory Section opened in 2007. (Photo by author.)*

As noted earlier, the need to preserve the essence and original mission of these museums determined this choice. However, at that time, civic museums also played a leading role in establishing a strong relationship with their communities as centres of learning and promoters of civic identity. One might argue that by restoring this foundational layer of museum history, the curators have established a direct link to the past and reinforced one of the original roles of the museum as a reflection of local, civic identity (while at the same time expanding their educational outreach through innovative programming). Cardarelli (pers. comm. April 1999), the former director of the museum in Modena, expressed a similar sentiment in justifying the decision to resurrect the earlier displays.

This notion of continuity in function between modern museums and their institutional pasts has recently been highlighted by Conn (2010) in his discussion of American museums. Challenging Bennett's (1995) characterization of the nineteenth-century (European) museum as an expression of the authority of the ruling bourgeoisie and as a place to reform public behaviour, Conn (2010:206–210) argues that museums established at that time in America competed with one another to create a sense of local pride and civic identity. He notes that the public role of museums today and their attempt to foster civic identity represent a line of continuity between the present and their nineteenth-century past and that the boom in

museum building that characterized American cities in the last decades can thus be explained as part of a renewed interest in the civic functions of American museums at the time of their foundation (Conn 2010:231–232). Witcomb (2003:1–10, 165–170) too has highlighted elements of continuity in the history of museums, especially in their relationship with popular culture, and has observed that ‘contemporary museum trends have historical precedents rather than being a radical break with past practices’ (2003:165). She has also stressed the importance of maintaining traditions through the recovery of ‘what positive moments there are in museum histories’ (2003:9).

The curatorial choices made in the museums of Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Bologna reveal a similar continuity between past and present and represent a balance between tradition and innovation, between stasis and change. On the one hand, the significance of continuity and the reclamation of the past is embodied in the objectification and physical restoration of early displays – displays that arguably deny the possibility of rereading, which Hooper-Greenhill (1992:215) defines as the ‘radical potential of material culture’. On the other hand, although such curatorial decisions reveal an element of conservatism, they are not being made within a vacuum. To balance this approach, curators have also successfully implemented alternative ways of communicating to the public and making their collections available and intelligible to visitors and, by so doing, restoring the original role of civic museums as museums *of* the town and *for* the town. Thus, the museums have developed new exhibits and public programmes that are moving forward at a fast pace as the museums compete for community relevance in the twenty-first century. For example, in Bologna the Egyptian exhibit greatly contrasts with the static nature of the Villanovan and Etruscan galleries, while the development of a new (2007) section on local prehistory gave the curators the opportunity to contextualize material from recent excavations in the region in informative displays (Fig. 17; Paola Giovetti, pers. comm. July 2007; Morigi Govi 2009:26–57). In Modena the lack of space prohibited the creation of new archaeological displays; instead new excavated objects were partially incorporated within the restored nineteenth-century layout or made available to the public in temporary exhibitions. Moreover, to compensate for this space limitation and provide educational outreach to the community and local schools, the Archaeological Park and Open-Air Museum of the Terramara of Montale was created in 2004 as an extension of the museum. The park includes reconstructed fortifications and dwellings and a portion of the excavated area is preserved to introduce visitors to the stratigraphy of the site, as well as to excavation techniques. Additionally, the park offers activities of experimental archaeology, such as smelting, metalworking and pottery making (Comune di Modena 2009).

POSTSCRIPT

It is usually agreed that the museum is a site of memory, as the etymology of the word suggests, the site of the Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. The museum has been interpreted not only as a repository of objects, a place

for preservation, an educator and a mediator between the past and the community, but also as a site of the memory of itself, where its history and its identity should be preserved and reinterpreted in the present. Every museum is different; each of them has a different history to be told and to be remembered. If the museum is the result of ideas and meanings 'stratified' throughout its history, as suggested by Mottola Molfino, the need for the preservation and intelligibility of these 'strata' is better explained. Consequently, in this light, the choice of preserving the nineteenth-century installation can also be understood. The nineteenth-century galleries represent one of the layers of the museum's 'stratigraphy', and therefore an essential part of the modern museum, crucial to its present role. The choice of conserving its history and therefore its distinctive nature, even by 'objectifying' old displays when appropriate, should be considered and evaluated as a different way of thinking about the museum, not just as a cultural institution which serves a community, but also as a reflection of its own institutional past.

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NOTES

1. The foundation and history of the civic museums of Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Bologna have been well articulated by various scholars through publications of the museums themselves (e.g. Cardarelli 1984a; Comune di Modena 1987; Desittere 1984b, 1985; Morigi Govi and Sassatelli 1984). More recently, in English, Skeates (2000) has discussed the establishment and development of these museums in his study on the history of prehistoric collections in Italy from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The present author published a brief discussion of these collections in the journal of the Istituto per i beni artistici culturali e naturali della regione Emilia-Romagna (Cova 2000).

2. Pellegrino Strobel, for example, was a naturalist who published extensively on malacology and taught natural sciences at the University of Parma; he later became interested in prehistoric research (Desittere 1988:134–135).

3. Giovanni Canestrini was also one of Italy's first expounders of Darwin's Theory of Evolution; in 1864, he published with Leonardo Salimbeni the first Italian translation of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which stimulated debate between evolutionists and creationists both at a local and national level (Desittere 1988:40–43).

4. In 1875 Luigi Pigorini became the founder and director of the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico in Rome and in 1877 he was appointed first professor of Palaeoethnology at the University of Rome. Throughout his career he resisted the creation of new chairs of Palaeoethnology in the country and controlled *de facto* archaeological activities and research, as well as their interpretation, until his death in 1925 (Guidi 1988:27–28; 52–53, 2000:26–27; Peroni 1992:18).

5. Nevertheless, the fundamental works of Paolo Orsi (1859–1935) and Alberto Taramelli (1868–1939) on the prehistory of Sicily and Sardinia were carried out in these years, as well as the studies of Giuseppe Angelo Colini (1857–1918; see Guidi 1988:52–54; Peroni 1992:46–53).

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ABSTRACTS

Négocier le passé dans le présent : préhistoire de l'Italie, musées municipaux et pratique curatoriale en Emilie-Romagne, Italie

Elisabetta Cova

Pendant la deuxième moitié du 19^e siècle on a pu assister à l'établissement de l'archéologie préhistorique comme discipline scientifique en Italie, de même qu'à la fondation de l'état-nation italien. L'évolutionnisme, le positivisme et un sentiment d'identité nationale influençaient la recherche préhistorique et les activités d'individus comme Strobel, Pigorini et Chierici, considérés aujourd'hui comme les pères fondateurs de la préhistoire italienne. C'est dans ce dynamique climat culturel et politique que furent créés les musées municipaux de Reggio d'Emilie, Modène et

Bologne, d'une part comme réponse à l'intense activité archéologique locale et en même temps comme réaction à la structure centralisatrice du nouvel royaume italien. Ces musées municipaux figuraient parmi les premiers musées de préhistoire en Italie et étaient les produits du climat culturel et politique de l'Europe de la fin du 19^e siècle. Cet article étudie les circonstances entourant la fondation de ces musées et examine comment le travail des premiers préhistoriens et le passé individuel des musées, comme institutions municipales et culturelles, continue à avoir un impact sur leur rôle et leur gestion dans le présent.

Mots clés: Bologne, musées municipaux, pratique curatoriale, Emilie-Romagne, Gaetano Chierici, état - nation italien, Modène, muséologie, archéologie préhistorique, Reggio d'Emilie

(translation by Isabelle Kayser-Gerges)

Die Überwindung der Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart: Italienische Vorgeschichte, Regionalmuseen und kuratorische Praxis in der Emilia-Romagna, Italien

Elisabetta Cova

In der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jhs. wurde die Prähistorische Archäologie in Italien als wissenschaftliche Disziplin zeitgleich mit der Errichtung der italienischen Nation etabliert. Evolutionismus, Positivismus und das Gefühl der nationalen Identität beeinflussten die Forschung und die Aktivitäten von Einzelpersonen wie Strobel, Pigorini und Chierici, die heute als Gründerväter der italienischen Vorgeschichtsforschung angesehen werden. In diesem dynamischen kulturellen und politischen Klima wurden die Regionalmuseen in Reggio nell'Emilia, Modena und Bologna als Echo intensiver archäologischer Aktivitäten und in Reaktion auf die zentralisierte Struktur des neu geschaffenen Königreichs Italien eingerichtet. Diese Regionalmuseen gehörten zu den ersten Vorgeschichtsmuseen in Italien und waren die Produkte des kulturellen und politischen Klimas Europas im späten 19. Jahrhundert. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Umstände die die Gründung dieser Museen begleiteten und betrachtet, wie die Arbeit der ersten Vorgeschichtsforscher und die Geschichte der Museen – als regionale und kulturelle Institutionen – ihre Rolle und Lenkung in der Gegenwart weiter beeinflussen.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Bologna; Regionalmuseen; kuratorische Praxis; Emilia-Romagna; Gaetano Chierici; italienischer Nationalstaat; Modena; Museologie; Prähistorische Archäologie; Reggio nell'Emilia

(Translation by Heiner Schwarzberg)

Gestire il passato nel presente: preistoria italiana, musei civici e pratica curatoriale in Emilia-Romagna, Italia.

Elisabetta Cova

L'ultima metà del diciannovesimo secolo vide la formazione dell'archeologia preistorica come disciplina scientifica in Italia e la fondazione dello stato italiano. L'evoluzionismo, il positivismo e un senso di identità nazionale caratterizzarono la ricerca preistorica e guidarono l'attività di personaggi come Strobel, Pigorini e Chierici, che sono considerati oggi i padri fondatori della preistoria italiana. Fu in questo dinamico clima culturale e politico che i musei civici di Reggio Emilia, Modena e Bologna furono istituiti, sia come risposta all'intensa attività archeologica locale che come reazione alla struttura centralizzatrice del regno d'Italia recentemente formatosi. Questi musei civici furono tra i primi musei di preistoria in Italia e i prodotti del clima culturale e politico dell'Europa del tardo ottocento. Questo articolo esplora le circostanze della loro fondazione e considera l'impatto che l'attività dei primi studiosi di preistoria e il passato dei musei, intesi come istituzioni culturali e civiche, continuano ad avere sul ruolo e sulla gestione dei musei nel presente.

Parole chiave: archeologia preistorica, Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Gaetano Chierici, Modena, musei civici, museologia, pratica curatoriale, Reggio Emilia, stato italiano.

(translation by Elisabetta Cova)