# ARCHEOSTORIE JOURNAL of PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY



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## ARCHEOSTORIE<sup>™</sup> JOURNAL of PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

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### 'Multicultural Public Archaeology': A strategy to expand multicultural audience in Sicilian archaeological museums

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#### Abstract

Sicily is a multicultural fragmented museum. The aim of this paper is to outline a strategy to encourage the Sicilian archaeological museums to plan initiatives, strategies and policies in intercultural communication by analyzing the potential of multicultural public dialogue on art with visitors from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This work is inspired by the ancient art artifacts preserved in Sicilian archaeological museums, as well as by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 'Multicultural Advisory Committee' and its awarded initiatives designed to create relationships with local diverse communities. Archaeological Sicilian museums can give added value to the discipline by adopting the described approach, the 'Multicultural Public Archaeology': a neologism that synthesizes a new paradigm of communication, accounting for the multicultural complexity of Sicilian archaeological museums and their potential in enhancing people's understanding and appreciation of multicultural heritage.

**3 Open Access Peer Reviewed Keywords:** Sicily, Multicultural archaeology, museums, public archaeology, tourism

Every archaeological museum preserves traces of the complex historical and cultural relationships that stem between people and cultures, and that can therefore serve to promote the discovery of people's common roots and acknowledging feelings of friendship and connectedness. Museums offer tangible evidence of the artistic, philosophical and religious contacts among cultures that have determined the course of contemporary history.

Thanks to their complex historic past and the present globalization and migrations phenomena, all western-European countries are multicultural societies. Museums are consequently progressively learning how to show their multicultural treasures trough new narratives so to enable visitors to recognize their own specific identity in the museum cross-regional collections.

Sicily, for centuries a crossroads of people and cultures, is the ideal site for the initiation of this understanding: its central geographic and cultural role, that truly made it a global museum of European/Mediterranean civilizations, offers us various stimuli.

In this article, I will focus on the question of whether/how Sicilian archaeological museums are dealing with the notion of multiculturalism and if the diversities of Sicilian cultural heritage have an effect on the practice of museums.

This work is inspired by a striking example of art's ability to connect peoples and cultures: the so-called Charioteer (or Youth) of Mozia, now on display at the Giuseppe Whitaker Museum in the island of Mozia (Figure 1). In the seventies, a Greek marble sculpture was discovered on the island of Mozia, the earliest Phoenician in Sicily. The sculpture, one of the finest surviving example of Greek sculpture in the round, depicts a young man wrapped in a tunic that appears to be of Eastern origin; the style dates to the Greek 'Severe' style (460 BC). To this day, it remains an enigma for scholars (for a complete bibliography including the various hypotheses, see: Marconi 2014). Greeks from Syracuse sieged and then destroyed the island's original Phoenician city in 397 BC, but the

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Fig. 1. The Youth of Mozia (or so-called Charioteer of Mozia), Marble, 460 BCE. Giuseppe Whitaker Museum at Mozia, Sicily).

context in which the statue was discovered - a barricade of stones and detritus- lead to suppose that the masterpiece was purposely preserved by locals during the sack, as an object of cult value. Thanks to their foresight, the sculpture has come down to our day almost intact. The statue powerfully symbolizes a cultural bond that united two Mediterranean communities those that official history has only known as enemies and rivals.

Presented in the right way, this sculpture could tell its story in a way no history book ever could, and the story would be about how art can create intimate relations between peoples. In ways that are no less effective for not being obvious, art transmits knowledge of cultural bonds. These bonds may be the strongest and the most sincere, and at times, they may also be the least known.

For instance, French visitors can discover

familiar artifacts in an Sicilian art museum, and vice versa. With adequate information and assistance, they will manage to discover materials of genuine interest. Without it, visitors will risk having encountered part of their own history in a foreign country without even realizing it. Using an appropriate educational strategy, the multicultural content of museums can have a surprising effect on visitors and renew the same bonds between the various cultures that traversed Europe and the entire Mediterranean area. As an ultimate expected result, visitors may interact with collections at a subjective individual level. In this respect, the field of archaeology offers an essential and powerful precondition for the stringent implementation of this approach and the Sicilian archaeological museums, in particular, are a representative model for at least two main reasons:

- The specific pattern of cultural heritage preserved in local museums, that covers millenniums of transverse cultures;
- The need of Sicilian museums to increase their visitor trend (for official local statistics, see: Regione Siciliana 2017; according to Rapporto 2017, Sicily is at the 9th position in the chart of all Italian regions).

Unfortunately, most archaeological museums in Sicily are currently confined within a traditional old vision and do not successfully develop attractions that are capable of seducing visitors from a variety of cultural and geographical backgrounds. No emphasis is expressed about the multicultural history of Sicily and cultures are often shown as isolated and not connected blocks: the Greeks, the Phoenicians, the Romans, etc. Despite the fact that brand economy, both at general worldwide and local level, is spreading in cultural heritage, Sicilian museums need to be literally flooded with fresh and new energies aimed at managing ways to display their rich collections. It is important to underline that Sicily has a complete independent political and business administration in the field of Cultural Heritage and Environment. That means Sicily has its own Minister of Culture, which is not subordinated to the Italian Ministry of Culture.

With reference to the specific weakness of current Sicilian multicultural museum policy, an aggravating circumstance to be taken into consideration is given by the title of the Ministry itself, which in 2008 has introduced the term "Identità Siciliana" ("Assessorato regionale dei Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana") as a special entity to be preserved and protected by law.

The reason of this choice is not given. Clearly, it seems to reply to the separatist Northen Italy political propaganda rather than reflect an actual cultural Sicilian pattern: Sicily has not a unique identity to be connected to. This paper is a finger pointed at the failure of that political axiom that leads the Sicilian museums to solitary confinement and insularity.

The mere idea to protect a sort of "Sicilian cultural identity" is a dangerous fabrication of history and it also runs counter to the demands of interaction among cultures from migration and/or different religions and diverse lifestyles.

On the contrary, other museums at national and international level distinguish themselves thanks to their continuous search for artifacts from their permanent collections that will be of interesttomultiethnic audiences; then they adopt diversified modes of presentation based on the varied characteristics of their visitors. Museum programs that are open to multiculturalism are based on extensive research and analysis of local geography, residential composition, and trends of foreign tourism. They are also enhanced by close cooperation between the museum, local associations, schools and tourist guides, heavily emphasizing expository and editorial support (for a list of multicultural education and art websites, see: Reyhner 2016; for a bibliography, see: Museums&Web 2017).

In this respect, the 10-years long experience of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York withs its Multicultural Advisory Committee and its Multicultural Audience Development Initiative (The Metropolitan Museum Multicultural 2017) can be marked as a milestone in designing relationships between museums' collections and local diverse communities. We need an overall view so as to better understand the challenge of the Metropolitan's Museum program, particularly in social, cultural and environmental terms, and the positive impact of its model if suited in the Sicilian context: it should be recalled, in this respect, that after the disaster of 11 September 2001 - due to the enormous emotional effect of that terrible tragedy- American museums suffered a period of crisis, and the numbers of their visitors fell more drastically than had ever before occurred. Very soon after the terroristic attack, right in the heart of where it had its most obvious negative effects, the Director of the Metropolitan Museum, Philippe de Montebello, refused to cancel or postpone the planned Islamic art exhibition *Glass of the Sultan* and decided to go forward as scheduled, because "art is able to bring solace in a moment of distress" and "an exhibition of Islamic art can serve as a powerful medium of communication and at the same time offer a reassurance" (Houghton 2009, p. 110).

It is not a coincidence that the Metropolitan's multicultural program has been often awarded by the *Muslim Consultative Network Cross Cultural Engagement Award* as by other Muslim Associations. The great cultural alliance established by the Metropolitan with local diverse communities is also extended to African-American, South Asian, Asian-American, Hispanic-Latino, American Indian, and LGBT communities, trough a series of articulated meetings scheduled on a regular basis.

The theme of multiculturalism has been also analyzed in favor of those art museums that are perceived as imperialist appropriation by certain local communities and the idea of "museums as contact zone" has also been theorized as a dialogue space of sorts, for exchange, negotiation and communication (Gere 1997).

As seen, the discourse about multiculturalism in the museums' approach to the different local cultural audience have been deeply explored in the Anglo-Saxon museums context, for more than two decades (see: Bodo-Gibbs-Sani 2009; Caniglia 2010; Donley 1993; Goodwin Willson 2005; Kark-Perry 2012; Nederveen Pieterse 1996; Szekeres 2011; Waltl 2007). It is worth recalling the experience of the 'British Museum's multicultural mission', particularly devoted to investigate the risks of globalization in understanding the diversities of cultures (Jones 2009).

As for my direct experience, already in mid '90s the Antiquities Department at the J. Paul Getty Museum used to work very closely with the Education Department, in order to find the best way to introduce, e.g., the Classical (Western) art to the local Asian community, etc. The dialogue among the two departments and the local communities was continuous and very fruitful.

Unfortunately, while twenty years have passed, aside from the Museo Archeologico "A. Salinas" in Palermo, with its excellent recent performances and social events in its program (Bonacini 2016), in the context of Sicilian archaeological museums, the problem has yet to be properly investigated (except for Zisa 2010, a proposal project that received the European Commission Quality Stamped Award), which also drives the Sicilian museums into conflict with the new trend of many Italian universities in offering academic courses dedicated to museums and multiculturalism, as well as with the scientific debate on 'Public Archaeology' (for 'Public Archaeology' in Italy, see: Ripanti 2007).

Upon a web-based research, the Sicilian museums scenario appears even worse than it feels. A Google search of the Italian words "Sicilia museo multiculturale" and/or "archeologia Sicilia multiculturale" only came up with these:

1. Iparchi archeologici nel diritto internazionale (Sicilian Minister of Culture page: http://www.regione.sicilia.it/bbccaa/ dirbenicult/bca/L\_Parchi/I\_C.html):

"Archaeology, to be meant as the history of the territory and environment, is part of comprehensive moves to promote forms and models for fields having multicultural focus on the naturalistic and cultural areas."

2. Nuovi parchi archeologici a Segesta e Pantelleria: un passo verso la rivalutazione dei beni culturali in Sicilia (news online page: https://newsicilia. it/cultura/nuovi-parchi-archeologici-asegesta-e-pantelleria-un-passo-versola-rivalutazione-dei-beni-culturali-

in-sicilia/346018): "However, several Sicilian multicultural archaeological sites, virtually incomparable economical and cultural resources, have been often forgotten or left in extremely poor conditions in terms of maintenance and safety."

3. The "multiculturale" Italian term is used also by some Italian art press (see: http://www.arte.it/notizie/italia/ilbritish-museum-sbarca-in-sicilia-11435) regarding the "Sicily: culture and conquest" exhibition at the British Museum, 21 August-14 Sept., 2016. Probably, the term has been simply translated from the original English exhibition presentation. In fact, *"The Cultural diversity of Sicily"* appears as the very first words in the British webpage: https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/fwJCTv96HQLkLg (now merged in Google Arts&Culture) and *"Multicultural"* term is used several times into the British pages, as well as in the conclusive *"Sicily's unique multicultural milieu"* page)

No other relevant results are given, at the moment of this writing (August 2018). That reveals a huge lack of competition of the Sicilian museum policies in their power to appeal to a diversity of audience.

Also, the absence of any Sicilian museums into the *Google Arts&Cultures* gives us the clearest symptom of how the web is still an obscure entity for local public museums management.

With respect to multicultural themes, no conference or panel has ever been organized, up until the time of this writing (August 2018). The situation goes against all principles of sustainable management of cultural resources, both in general and specific aspects.

Nevertheless, archaeological Sicilian museums can give added value to the discipline in the matter. Moreover, it is possible to coin and originate the concept of a 'Multicultural Public Archaeology', which would be highly suited to the geographical and cultural complexity of archaeological museums in Sicily. This new philosophy can put Sicilian archeological museums at the centre of contemporary Mediterranean history by enhancing the pleasure of discovering the breadth of the museum's collections as well as common past roots with other cultures.

A good 'Multicultural Public Archaeology' approach is intended to contribute to the following main objectives:

- 1. Understand art as a powerful tool for creating solidarity and the growth of community among the various ethnic, cultural, and historical groups that make up both the residential and tourist audiences of museums;
- 2. Emphasize the artistic and cultural crossfertilizations expressed both in artworks and in the history of curatorial practices;
- 3. Develop itineraries for art and museum history that show how Mediterranean

cultural diversity is a unique and irreplaceable common heritage;

4. Establish contacts and connections between museums that already operate successfully in multiethnic contexts and museums that require further guidance in this respect.

To reach the goals, it becomes necessary to adopt specific strategies, such as:

- 1. Promoting community participation initiatives by designing multicultural exhibitions that are culturally, physically and visually accessible because they reinterpret art as part of the everyday life of communities;
- 2. Promoting through a variety of awarenessraising means the rediscovering and reshaping of a historical past-into-present overview of local heritages, both tangible and intangible, within the goal of creating historical and present day interconnections between the various cultures of the European/Mediterranean areas;
- 3. Enhance economic and tourist development by defining plans for attracting visitors, sustainable tourism and museum quality standards, with the collaboration of tourist guides, financial bodies and public administration;
- 4. Supporting the collaboration with schools and universities in the design and implementation of multicultural educational programs and courses.

Archaeological museums adopting а 'Multicultural Public Archaeology' policy should first encourage a series of forums and meetings with local communities, offering social bodies a new opportunity to recognize the multifunctional role played by Museums in this sector; this could thus be a common public platform to rethink the city's policies concerning the practice of multiculturalism and social integrations. In other terms, the 'Multicultural Public Archaeology' is a powerful tool to foster integration in the community at a social-cultural level: local and foreign people can share mutual respect for their differences, rediscover their past and present identities, enhancing a sense of equal rights. It would be also crucial to organize initiatives to connect multicultural student communities with the Museum activities and increase their engagement with the planning of new cultural programs, such as exhibitions, since the very beginning.

In order to make this cultural network possible, the Museum should create an 'Interdisciplinary Permanent Team' to work together in overcoming differences in language, culture and develop approaches to be adopted in future projects. By establishing a permanent communication network, for the purpose of realizing the potential of local museums from the perspective of European/Mediterranean intercultural dialogue, it will be possible to set the basis of international cooperation in conceiving strategies for the expansion of multicultural museum usage. Once designed, every single multicultural theme should be driven to produce a great impact on the web and social platforms. Underdevelopment of Sicilian museums is strictly rconnected to their practically non-existent relationship with the web, at any level (see analyses in Zisa 2012 and Bonacini 2012, both mostly still valid); as a supplement to this affirmation, at the moment of writing, no Sicilian museum is present in Google Art (search results for "Sicily" in Google Arts&Culture, accessed August 29, 2017), excerpt for a Wikipedia short mention of the Museo Archeologico A. Salinas in Palermo.

The 'Multicultural Public Archaeology' practices may also give positive effects beyond the museum activities alone.

Thanks to the creation of a communications network between museum and local bodies, it will be easy to stimulate and enrich the future prospects of each individual entity connected, such that they should be able to undertake new enterprises and programs autonomously.

As a particular added-value, the 'Multicultural Public Archaeology' strategy can also promote a cross-border cultural cooperation on an economical level, through the particular approach dedicated to creating new promotional tourist provisions, and the definition of plans to promote quality tourism, based on new itineraries enhancing people's appreciation of the multicultural history and artistic traditions.

#### Conclusions

The dissemination of the multicultural message by way of many examples similar to that of the Mozia sculpture -many of which have never been presented, let alone



Fig. 2. Archaeological Museum "A. Salinas", Palermo: poster of the 3rd "Letterature migranti" Festival.

explained, to the wider public- would help Sicilian museums' policies and strategies, tools and facilities, to increase their visitors. This "Multicultural Public Archaeology" approach can greatly promote a public understanding of the Museum as a vital body for local progress, in terms of education, economy and integration.

To sum up, a practical exemplum and an encouragement for the future, I want to underline the brilliant cultural activities of the Archeological Museum "A. Salinas" in Palermo, briefly referred to above as a rare model in the context of Sicilian museums' policies. For the first time, their exhibitions and events show a multicultural approach thanks to an enlightened

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management and staff. Of course, the theme of migrants in the Mediterranean sea presented in their 3<sup>rd</sup> edition *Festival delle letterature migranti*' (Figure 2) fits perfectly our case, as well the event *Viaggio in Sicilia. Maps and Myths of the Mediterranean*(Salinas 2017), just to mention a couple of events that make the Salinas the stimuli for a new promising scenario in Sicily. It is time to encourage - I hope this note will serve the purpose- any effort in rethinking the museum as a platform to show the past, the present and the future in a multicultural formula which is able to increase and educate visitors across Sicily, a unique multicultural fragmented museum in itself.

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