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Old Collection, New Connection: Integrated Reality with Virtuality for National Treasures and Significant Antiquities Housed at the National Museum of History in Taiwan

Dr. Chen-hsiao CHAI¹

Abstract

The past couple of years have brought about, literally, a “triple threat” – to National Museum of History (NMH hereinafter): a temporary shutdown for renovation, the relocation of its treasured artifacts as a result of the renovation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. To adapt to the changes, NMH explored and referenced possible solutions, and fulfilled its goal as the bedrock institution of sustainability to transform the world through “connection,” “engagement,” “innovation” and “inclusion.” In the process a new normal has gradually taken shape to dictate the way a museum continues its operation in these unusual times.

This essay explores how the NMH responded to multiple challenges through an adaptive exhibition module setup that integrated reality and virtuality for the exhibition of the national treasures and significant antiquities it housed, thus turning the crisis into a unique opportunity that maximized public interest, while unleashing the positive influence the museum has on the community, to be the source of strength for many in these times of uncertainty.

Keywords:

national treasures and significant antiquities, pandemic and museums, museum social responsibility, museum as contact zone, National Museum of History.

I. Foreword: The New Normal in the Museum Community During a Time of Multiple Challenges

The past couple of years have brought about a “triple threat” to National Museum of History (NMH): a temporary shutdown for renovation, the relocation of its treasured artifacts, and the breakout of COVID-19 pandemic. To adapt to the changes, NMH explored possible solutions, and fulfilled its goal as the bedrock institution of sustainability to transform the situation through “connection,” “engagement,” “innovation” and “inclusion”. In the process a “new normal” has gradually taken shape to dictate the way a museum continues its operation in these unusual times.

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This essay explores how the NMH responded to multiple challenges through an adaptive exhibition module setup that integrated reality and virtuality for the exhibition of the national treasures and significant antiquities it housed, thus turning the crisis into a unique opportunity that maximized public interest, while unleashing the positive influence the museum has on the community, to be the source of strength for many in these times of uncertainty.

II. Connection and Engagement

NMH closed down the premises in July, 2018 for renovation per its upgrade development plan, and for the first time ever, NMH transferred its prized collection in batches to the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum, the Institute of History and Philology ("IHP") under Academia Sinica, and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts for temporary safekeeping. The task was monumental and extremely challenging, as the transfer of such a significant number of treasured items needed to be executed with caution within a short span of time; the new collection storage for the items has not yet been established at NMH was a reality looming large in the mind of museum staff.

Interestingly, these challenges were what made the project so noteworthy. Starting in 2019, NMH began exploring a resource-sharing initiative for the artifacts to be transferred elsewhere for exhibition and in so doing, it engaged organizations in the museum community to get involved. Here are some of the co-events: "A Window to Eastern Chou: Eastern Chou Relics Excavated from Honan" with the Institute of History and Philology under Academia Sinica, in which artifacts excavated from the same site were presented together – "Square Hu with Coiled Dragon Pattern," "Animal-shaped Brazier Stand" and "Sword with Gold Hilt," along with ten other significant antiquities – on permanent display at Academia Sinica the highest-level educational institute in Taiwan (Fig.1).



Fig.1 NMH connected with the Institute of History and Philology under Academia Sinica to cohost "A Window to Eastern Chou: Eastern Chou Relics Excavated from Honan."

NMH also collaborated with the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum, the largest

national-level art exhibits archive in Southern Taiwan, to showcase the highly-cherished “Nine-storied Stone Pagoda” - in “Imprints of Buddhas: Buddhist Art in the National Palace Museum Collection,” also on a long-term exhibition basis (Fig.2)



Fig.2 NMH partnered with the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum to host “Receiving Enlightenment: A Nine-layered Pagoda Dedicated by Cao Tian-du.”

III. Innovation and Inclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak that took place at yearend 2019 wrecked the world, it also had a devastating impact on the museum industry, and the arts and culture sector. The effect of which is still being felt. NMH has quickly adapted to continue serving the community by connecting other museum establishments to host exhibitions for relocated artifacts, and launched “A Window to Eastern Chou: Eastern Chou Relics Excavated from Honan” (<https://vr360.nmh.gov.tw/EasternChou/>), a multi-perspective virtual tour featuring a 720-degree panoramic, cinematic videography (Fig.3). It’s an online exhibition enabled by digital technology that offers the audience a larger-than-life viewing experience, which transcends any spatiotemporal boundaries, allowing viewers to move about freely during the virtual tour on their laptop, cell phone or tablet, choose a perspective and location preferred, spend time in front of each and every artifact that attracts their attention, and enlarge the imagery however they’d like, in order to examine the detail and contour of the item. The setup allows the audience to be their own docents, and serves as a crucial exhibition information platform to multiply community service effects. Even with their physical locations closed, museums of all kinds are offering free online learning resources, access to their digital collections, virtual tours, and online exhibits—all invaluable opportunities to educate and connect people across the world. Meanwhile, this virtual visit has been stored in a digitized form and archived as a significant asset of the NMH. This online arrangement started trending in the museum community, and by taking preemptive measures, NMH succeeded in dissolving the restrictions associated with in-person visits, and creating a digital experience, gifting viewers a comfy museum tour in the comfort of their own home during pandemic lockdown.



Fig.3 Three national treasures along with ten significant antiquities of NMH on permanent display at Academia Sinica, the highest-level educational institute in Taiwan.

In 2021, NMH pioneered yet another initiative – “NMH Cloud Gallery” inspired by its virtual panoramic exhibition development program. The curator can easily click various pieces into place – from virtual exhibition space design, exhibit wall and artifact placement exhibition light projection, audiovisual and imagery introduction of the exhibit, to route arrangement of the tour – by elevating a two-dimensional space exposition into a three-dimensional virtual venue. Cloud Gallery actualizes the vision of user-friendliness and co-prosperity of all viewers, makes artifact information and museum collection interpretive opportunity more widely available, and gifts everyone the chance “to be their curator” – an experience many find enjoyable.

During the Lunar New Year, we at NMH made “the Year of the Tiger” the focal point of the exhibition to launch “Celebratory Exhibition for the Year of the Tiger in Cloud Gallery” (<https://cloudgallery.nmh.gov.tw/room/1/hj3y4p84qxcg9nddm>) that spotlights specific artifacts, tiger-themed curios, and items that communicate the festive mood of the occasion (Fig.4). The gallery was divided into three display areas. The exhibition began with a presentation of adorably-styled and vicious-looking tigers, featuring various feline-inspired imageries, which symbolized a new year of “bountifulness brought about by the felicitous tiger.” It then segued into the representation of tiger as a supreme being, inspired by colorful folk customs to continue the convivial motif. Finally, the exhibition highlighted the propitious note of a tiger-themed representation, and put the national treasures and significant antiquities housed in NMH on the center stage. The exhibits include: “Square Hu with Coiled Dragon Pattern,” an exquisite prized vessel featuring two crouching tigers that stick their tongues out; plus “Tiger-shaped Zun,” a priceless antique wine vessel featuring a tiger with a ferocious mouth and wide eyes, which highlights the form, spirit and significance of the tiger culture to the hilt.



Fig.4 "Celebratory Exhibition for the Year of the Tiger in NMH Cloud Gallery" that spotlights national treasures and significant antiquities.

This curation platform is different from the conventional virtual exhibition, in that it has elevated all the close-up photos of the gallery with an online, panoramic effect, promising the viewer an all-new virtual tour experience.

IV: Sustainability: the Power of Museums

In a nutshell, the virtual exhibition arrangement of NMH that took place following the transfer of the relics was inspired by "resource sharing for a win-win formula" for all the stakeholders in the museum community, as NMH initiated contact with museum and academic institutes to pitch in, and provide storage and exhibition solutions. The arrangement actually opened up a great exchange opportunity that facilitated additional resource-sharing programs. For instance, NMH's bronzeware and jade artifacts excavated from Tainan, now left in the care of the IHP under Academia Sinica, helped to facilitate a comprehensive research from another perspective to enhance their analytical value, while enabling the national treasures and significant antiquities excavated from the same site to be displayed in the museum at IHP with other priceless relics. Also, the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum is now able to treat audience in southern Taiwan to the invaluable items housed in Taipei-based NMH, which further dissolved the physical distance between cultural relics and modern viewers. In the process, the museum was the strategic partner that brought the audience, the museum industry and the society together.

Despite the pandemic and the shutdown, NMH was prepared and ready to connect with other museum establishments to continue with the exhibition upon the transfer of its relics; more importantly, it implemented a virtual panoramic tour setup that mimicked the onsite visit experience, developed an online curator platform for its cloud gallery to fulfill co-prosperity for all the museum stakeholders. Meanwhile, this hybrid exposition formula integrating the virtual experience with reality, is an acknowledgement of museum's sustainability and strength.

NMH defied challenges brought about by the renovation, the relocation of its invaluable relics and the pandemic to turn the corner: it forged exhibition partnerships, shared cultural resources, and encouraged an innovative exhibition solution that benefited all the shareholders. It also set a positive precedent for the museum industry of Taiwan and made the best use of resources available during a difficult time as a paragon of efficient and effective resource-sharing.

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The Saltmen of Iran – Cultural Heritage as Driver and Enabler of Sustainable Development and Growth

Natascha Bagherpour Kashani, Maruchi Yoshid

Introduction

Since 1993, mummified bodies of salt workers have been discovered in the salt mine of Chehrābad in Zanjān Province in northwestern Iran. According to research results, these human beings died in various mining accidents in Achaemenid (ca. 2400) and Sassanid times (ca. 1,400 years ago). During the archaeological excavations and research in the salt mine, which have been taking place since 2004, eight individuals have been identified to date. These were probably not the last victims of salt mining, as residents of the nearby village of Hamzehloo reported at least one other accident that is believed to have occurred at another location on the mountain about 100 years ago.

The human remains from historical times, some with full clothing and equipment, which have been uniquely preserved by the salt, are now the highlights of the *Zanjān Saltmen and Archaeological Museum* (ZSAM) and attract more than 50,000 international visitors to the small provincial museum every year (Fig 1).



Fig. 1 The well-attended exhibition room with the mummies in 2019 at the Zanjān Saltmen and Archaeological Museum (ZSAM)

Starting from the archaeological excavations a whole program has been developed called “the Patrimonial Projects”:¹ scientific research, the preservation and development of the excavation site, the structural support of the adjoining living people, the conservation and restoration of the mummies and organic finds from the salt mine of Chehrābad, digital and handmade reconstructing of textiles, exhibitions,² participation in the experts works etc. The challenge and responsibility of long-term

¹ Sponsors are: DFG, Gerda Henkel Foundation, German Federal Foreign Office, Prince Claus Fund and others. See: https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/patrimonial_projects, <https://www.archaeologisches-museum-frankfurt.de/de/die-salzmaenner-irans>, https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/die-salzmaenner-irans-das-kulturerbe-des-salzmumien-museums-in-zanj-n?page_id=96516 (all last accessed 09/15/2022).

² www.Tod-im-Salz.de (last accessed 09/15/2022).

preservation now also requires dealing with the saltmen as exhibits in their archaeological and social context, which lead to an ethical discussion forum.

With a grant from the German Gerda Henkel Foundation, Iranian and German archaeologists and conservators are recently modernizing the exhibition to present the mummies in the context of their working and living environments. This also includes the preventive conservation of the collection. That means improving the building envelope to stabilize the indoor climate on a passive way – so without using complicated climate technologies – to save energy and costs. An additional funding was received by the Prince Claus Fund to renew the electric installation as we stated a high fire risk that had to be eliminated immediately.

A third funding supported the so-called Open-Lab Project,³ which has made the preservation task itself a mediation topic in the museum, discussing the scientific, ethical and social aspects of dealing with the salt men of Iran in a dignified way. This project will be described in more detail here:

The salt mummies in the Open Lab and cultural preservation as a mediation theme in the exhibition. In the summer of 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, the salt man project received funding from the German Foreign Office. Under the title "Conservation of the Salt Men of Zanjān in Iran", the restoration and research of the salt men could be continued. The laboratory for this work was set up in the exhibition hall as a so-called open lab. However, due to the pandemic, museums in Iran were closed. As a result, the team allowed interested members of the public to access the lab through social media. Within four months, the saltmen's profile (Instagram: @saltmen_of_iran) reached over 900 followers around the world, but especially in Iran, showing the great interest of the young Iranian community in their cultural heritage (Fig. 2). Instagram activities continued after the project period, increasing the number of followers to 1600 by summer 2022.

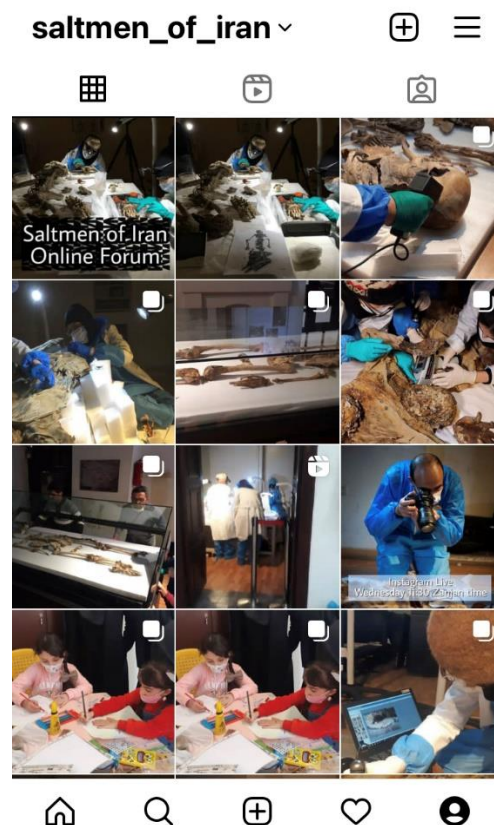


Fig.2 The Instagram account saltmen_of_iran gained 1600 followers until summer 2022.

³ The article "The secrets of the salt men of Zanzan" in the science portal L.I.S.A. gives insight into the restoration work with a video: https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/ankuendigungen?nav_id=9486 (last accessed 01.11.2022).

The Open Lab project used a variety of media and formats around the conservation-restoration theme of the saltmen. While necessary restorative cleaning work and sampling for conservation issues were carried out in the open lab (Fig. 3a,b), a diverse community was able to follow this work via Instagram and engage with the saltmen in an individual way. In this form, the offer was not aimed exclusively at a specialist audience or the educated museum visitor, but at all social media users to gain insights into museum work behind the scenes. The Open Lab project addressed the community directly and conveyed how valuable these salt men are for human history and how much effort and expertise from a wide variety of disciplines and countries go into researching and preserving them. The community thus learned the "whole story" and accompanied the conservators on their "research journey" into the microscopic structures of the salt men.



Fig. 3 a&b The Open Lab in ZSAM in January 2021 (image rights: NBK and ZSAM).

In the project also media was developed to interest children and young people, as there are games, a story with graphics and puppet plays (Fig. 4a,b).⁴



Fig 4 a&b The Puppetplay tells the story of Saltman 4 (image rights: NBK and ZSAM). *(arrange 4b smaller and e.g. arrange bottom left of fig. 4a)*

Reflections on the dignified handling of human remains in museums.

Another important topic of the Open Lab project was the dignified treatment of the salt man as a human being. In April 2021, a discussion forum was organized for this purpose with the title "From Underground into the Limelight - the Salt Man as Information Carrier and Storyteller" (Fig. 5). International experts in conservation-restoration, paleopathology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and osteoarchaeology working in museums, marketing, cultural agencies, and research institutions discussed the challenge

⁴ See the cultural importance of puppet plays in Khorasanian – Amini 2021.

and responsibility of treating human remains respectfully.⁵ Controversies and discrepancies in the treatment of mummified bodies on the one hand and skeletal remains on the other were also topics of discussion. Among other things, the format of the discussion forum addressed the "function" of salt men as storytellers and cultural "influencers" in social media, and how a large community can connect with salt men on a meta-level. There was also the question of marketing human remains as a highlight of an exhibition, and how the dignity of the deceased can be preserved in the process.



Fig. 5 Announcement of the discussion forum that took place in April 2021.

The discussions were based on the various international guidelines for dealing with human remains. The guideline of the German Museum Association of 2021, which illuminates the dignified handling of human remains in museums from various scientific perspectives and presents the discourse in a differentiated manner, points the way.⁶ It indicates that in connection with the preservation, research and presentation of human remains, different world views and value systems can clash on both a cultural and scientific level, but that these must never be set off against each other or devalued. Even if the display of human remains is accepted in Europe, "it can never be excluded that interests and concerns of third parties are affected in the presentation of human remains."⁷ Therefore, the recommendation to keep human remains in separate areas or, if possible, even separate rooms and to provide these with notices to avoid unwanted encounters of visitors with the human remains seems reasonable in any case.

It is important that the exhibition organizers critically question the content, context, and goal of the presentation of human remains regarding the purpose and benefit of the exhibition concept and consider whether the scientific content can be conveyed without presenting the human remains. The presentation should show respect for the dead by pointing out the special status of human remains, especially if they are still recognizable as skulls, skeletons or mummies.⁸

⁵<https://www.maleki.de/diskussionsforum-der-salzmännchen-als-informationsträger-und-geschichtenerzähler/> (last accessed Sept. 19, 2022). Discussants from Iran: Dr. Shahrzad Amin Shirazi, RCCC Tehran, Dr. Abolfazl Aali, ZSAM Zanjan, Dr. Firuze Sepidnahr, NMI Tehran, Dr. Esmat Zandi, MCHT Tehran. Discussants from Europe: Dr. Estella Weiss-Krejci, Uni Vienna (AT), Kirsten Mandl, Uni Vienna (AT), Dr. med. Lena Öhrström, Uni Zurich (CH), Elisabeth Vallazza, South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology Bolzano (IT), Diana Gabler, Berlin. Moderation: Dr. Natascha Bagherpour-Kashani, Frankfurt, Organization: Maruchi Yoshida, Munich.

⁸ Guidelines of the German Museums Association, dealing with Human Remains in Museums and Collections, 46-49, see above.

For example, the Iceman in the South Tyrolean Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano, widely known as "Ötzi", is presented in a niche that the visitor must consciously enter. The Iceman is there in a specially made ice cell that can only be seen through a small window. The ice mummy, which in fact is spectacular, is deliberately presented in a very restrained manner. This is for conservation reasons, but also gives each visitor the opportunity for a very personal encounter, a quiet "inner dialogue" with the Iceman.⁹ The reactions to the ice mummy are very different, depending on age and previous education, but overall, it can be stated that such an encounter with an ice mummy, whose individual facial features are still recognizable, does not leave the viewer untouched. This seems to be the decisive difference to a skeleton, which looks rather uniform to the viewer.¹

Despite their reserved, respectful, and objective presentation, mummies are always a sensation for outsiders; they attract the curious and onlookers to museums. This can also be observed in ZSAM, which has recorded higher, more diverse and international visitors since the installation of the Saltmen exhibition.¹ In other words, the mummies also represent an important economic factor for a city or region and are accordingly included in the tourist marketing concepts. However, it is important to respect the dignity of the dead and not to allow a proliferation of tasteless merchandising products. Here, too, the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology is exemplary; the Iceman is not shown as a mummy in promotional materials, but as a digitally reconstructed human being, so that "Ötzi" is always perceived as a person. Moreover, the presence of the Iceman is always linked to well-founded information, so that he is not misused as a mere "advertising face" for arbitrary merchandising products.

Against the background of the different perspectives and access possibilities in the dignified handling of human remains, the discussion forum organized as part of the Open Lab project can only provide a small insight into the various cultural and scientific perspectives.¹ As far as the "public" restoration and conservation of the salt mummies in the Open-Lab is concerned, it can be worked out from the discussions held that transparency is very important: the restoration and conservation of the salt mummies are part of the overall handling of human remains and, in the context of the Open-Lab, is part of the dignified presentation that has the purpose of making the meticulous process of expert restoration and conservation research visible and understandable to a wide audience. Through the careful uncovering of the equipment, clothing, and human remains themselves, information can be read that further reconstructs the living conditions and the circumstances of the accident. Conservation research based on the samples taken from the clothing and human tissue provide valuable clues to biological processes that contribute to either the preservation or decay of organic matter. The public accompaniment is intended to ensure the support and encouragement of the (world) public for the museum experts on site, who devote themselves every day to preserving the salt men, even under difficult circumstances.

Museum as a Place of Learning - Conclusion and Lessons Learned from the Open Lab Project with the Saltmen of Iran. The Open-Lab project was the first step in leveraging the mediation potential of the Saltmen through social media.¹ With the commitment of funding during the pandemic, the original project structure and planned project program had to be adapted to the realities of ongoing operations,

⁹ Mutually complementary statements by Elisabeth Vallazza, South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology Bolzano, and Dr. Firuze Sepidnahme, Iranian National Museum Tehran.

¹ Statement of Elisabeth Vallazza, South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology Bolzano.

¹ This finding comes from the review of visitors' books, as well as from the statements of the museum director Dr. Abolfazl Aali.

¹ The aspects and questions raised in the process, which were not conclusively discussed in the short time available, will be published in more detail elsewhere.

¹ We would like to expressly thank all those who made the Open Lab activities possible through their tireless efforts! Against all odds, we were able to in the period of about 10 months, build up an Instagram channel, organize Open Lab action weeks at the National Museum of Tehran and Zanjān Saltmen and Archaeological Museum, established an international discussion forum with professional conference equipment between Tehran and several cities in Europe and finally developed accompanying products that can be sold and displayed beyond the project period, distributed at the museums. Thanks to our colleagues in Iran and Germany: Maryam Aali, Mohammadreza Alikhah, Bahram Bayat, Niloofar Chalabi, Zahra Moradkhani, Alireza Rahmani, Jafar Sattari, Shahrzad Amin Shirazi, Hamed Zifar, Abolfazl Aali, Stephanie Menic, Pia Weber, Nicolas Schimerl, Thomas Stöllner. And a special thanks to our Foreign Office funders who, despite the pandemic, believed we could successfully implement the project and generously supported us financially.

so activities were more intuitive than systematic. A one-day professional introduction to setting up an Instagram channel was helpful in getting started in the digital learning space and avoiding common mistakes from the outset.¹ Therefore, this project also had a great learning effect on the project actors themselves, who reflected on their work as "heritage professionals" and asked themselves how the newly opened media can be harnessed to communicate the value of heritage and the importance of its preservation to the masses. As easy as the various apps make it to extend the museum as a place of learning into the digital space, the more difficult it is to fill this space with qualitative and equally engaging content, thereby inspiring a large community of followers and connecting with them on a lasting basis. In the exceptional pandemic situation, it turned out that the establishment of a (world-)open laboratory did not encounter any resistance from the Iranian authorities; this may be due to the pragmatic and courageous approach of the project actors on site on the one hand, but on the other hand also to the fact that this project represented a small ray of hope in times when public life was shut down and museums were closed.

In the project, the museum showed itself to be

- a place of learning and a place of science communication for all people,
- a place that can reach people with its topics even if they cannot come to the museum
- a place that deals transparently and openly also with critical views on the dignified handling of human remains.

In the future, activities will focus on linking the museum even more closely with the site: visitors to the museum should also visit the archaeological site, come into contact with the villagers, get to know the region, which is still strongly influenced by the geological presence of salt, and deal with current social challenges. This benefits from the Iranians' willingness to travel and their great interest in cultural trips, but also from the fact that Zanjān and the salt mine are on a popular tourist route, which international tourists travel even in times of crisis.¹ The Open Lāb project has also shown that the museum is a popular destination for local families as well as tourists, and that there is an understanding of the value of the salt mummies. Further projects therefore aim to support the enthusiasm of the local population for the protection and preservation of their culture by strengthening village structures, creating business opportunities, and further developing the potential of a museum as a socially relevant place.¹

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Ultimately, the ongoing projects represent the first steps in helping partner museums and their bearing authorities in Iran achieve their goals for human and socioeconomic development of the regions, quality education and social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and a peaceful society.

The projects around the salt men of Iran illustrate very vividly the link between the contemporary people and their cultural heritage. The salt men and their presence in the museums and their connection to the archaeological site create spaces for cultural transmission and intercultural dialogue, on a local as well as global level. Involving the society in preserving the heritage of the salt men contributes to education, social cohesion and sustainable development. The excavation and the process of conserving and developing a long-term preservation strategy raises public awareness of the value of cultural heritage and the understanding of the responsibility of all citizens to contribute to their care and transmission. This also fits the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, with one aim to make human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

The salt mine of Chehrābād and the heritage of the salt men might not be as famous as the Egyptian mummies or Iceman from Southern Tyrol but it is slowly evolving to be a driver and enabler of sustainable development and essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

¹ see also: Schöder, Angelika: Die größten Fehler von Museen bei Instagram -und wie man sie vermeidet, blog entry mus.er.me.ku, Jan. 9, 2019, <https://musermeku.org/museums-on-instagram> (last accessed: 9/24/2022).

¹ Even during the ongoing protests in the fall of 2022, European tourists visited the country, especially the cultural heritage sites in Shiraz and Isfahan (own observations on site and statements of local residents).

¹ For more information on the social function and potentials of smaller museums, see: Bagherpour Kashani, Natascha: Kleinere Museen - Ein Stimmungsbild, in: Museumskunde 2022, 12f.

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Connecting Historical Museum Collections to Contemporary Social Crises¹

Dana Vedra

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In my contribution, I would like to present our work – as the curators and historians of the 20th century in museums. Through our research we present the contemporary crisis to the public. At the beginning, I would like to introduce the institution where I work and in brief the history of our department. The Moravian Museum in Brno² is the oldest museum in the Czech Republic. It was founded in 1817. The items in the collection number more than 6 million inventory items. It remains one of the most important museum institutions in the Czech Republic. After the National Museum in Prague the Moravian Museum is also the second largest museum in the Czech Republic.

The Department of History was established in 1974 as a centre documenting the history of Moravia in the 19th and 20th centuries and for so-called documentation of the present. The main collection items focus on the Czechoslovak resistance during the 20th century, especially during WWI, WWII and the communist regime. We call the dissidents' activities from 1948–1989 “the third Czechoslovak Resistance”.

In 1990, the department took over the collection of the by-then closed Museum of the Labour Movement in Moravia. This museum represented a celebration of the communist regime. Interesting parts of collections are the gifts to Klement Gottwald, the first communist president of Czechoslovakia (1948–1953). The strong cult of the leader was analogous with that of Stalin in the USSR. This closed museum had a huge collection of amazing original posters from the 19th century to the present day. The posters are still being digitised and displayed in our exposition.

Our items are presented in the "Central European Crossroads: Moravia in the 20th Century" exposition, which was opened in 2017. This new permanent Moravian Museum exhibition maps modern history and reflects major events of the dynamic 20th century. Ten thematic areas trace the political, cultural and social history of this historic country, its institutions, cultural phenomena and important personalities, not only in the context of the history of the Czech Lands, but also of the whole of central Europe.

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² The official Czech title of the institution is the „Moravské zemské muzeum“



Fig.1 A new permanent exposition "A Central European Crossroads: Moravia in the 20th Century" in the Moravian Museum in Brno was opened in 2017. This new permanent exhibition maps modern history and reflects major events of the dynamic 20th century.

Source: Filip Fojtík, Moravian Museum in Brno

The exposition contains a number of interactive elements, including the projection of period film footage; each thematic section is complemented by touch screens with detailed information on the sub-topics of the period under review. In each period, space is also devoted to the minorities who lived here until 1945 (Jews, Germans, and others). This is still a sensitive topic for Czechs today. It is necessary to recall these minorities, who were an important part of the Czechoslovak community through the centuries. We have one of the few permanent expositions on the history of the 20th century in the Czech Republic. This period is still a problematic part of our history. The absence of presentation of the 20th century in Czech museums runs up against the emotions that the interpretation of the modern history of the Czech Lands represents for the public. There are still taboo topics that resonate in society and among the memorials (the expulsion of the Germans, the communist coup in February 1948, the Soviet occupation in 1968, the period of "normalisation", the Velvet Revolution, "the wild 1990s", etc.). The 20th century is not given enough space in school curricula. As a consequence, today's primary and secondary school students are alarmingly ignorant about 20th century history, yet we are still direct witnesses to the consequences of the historical processes of the last century, whose consequences we still bear. The Museums have tried to fill these white spaces.

The other exposition about the 20th century was opened in 2021 in the National Museum in Prague. I would like to focus on the challenges which currently face all museums today. I will demonstrate the best practice of our work with contemporary vs historical relevance. The global pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict generate very strong emotions here. The question of how the curator should

deal with these new social orders is becoming more and more pressing. On the one hand, we present collections that document the past. However, on the other, we are witnesses to and direct participants in events. One of these important mechanisms is to deal with the traditional conception of the museum as an institution defined only by space and the items stored in it. Thanks to the lockdown, activities have developed outside the buildings.



Fig. 2 Curators from the Department of History offer guided tours for Ukrainian refugees – these are students from the Centre for Foreign Studies at Masaryk University. They could better understand their own history and the deep relations between Czechoslovakia and Ukraine during the 20th century.

Source: Dana Vedra, Moravian Museum in Brno

Thanks to our PR Department and Children's Museum³, we have created many interactive games, virtual guided tours and videos. There we present items from our collections to the public. People can walk outside or sit at home and still explore their museum. We tell many stories, and show many items and pictures.

In 2021 the Department of History, in cooperation with the Memory civic association⁴, created a very interesting project. It was called "Paths of the Third Resistance." "Using your smartphone or tablet, you

³ This year our Children's Museum celebrated its 30-year anniversary.

⁴ The Memory civic association was established in 2008 by Miroslav Kasáček and Luděk Navara. The impulse for establishing the association was the effort to open up the past and to start a debate over the fate of individuals and whole families facing the pressures of the Communist regime. The basic activity of the association is the preparation and presentation of projects mapping out stories from the second

could walk in downtown Brno and read a lot of information about the history of occupied Czechoslovakia in 1968, and about strikes and demonstrations during the 2nd half of the 20th century. Everyone could explore the pictures and information from our items at each stop. The only thing you need is your smartphone or tablet and an internet connection. Thank to GPS navigation we created an app which could offer you information about the place where you were and show you more details about the story of a very painful part of the modern history of Czechoslovakia – the Soviet occupation in August 1968. Those interested could choose one of three kinds of trails – “Path of Faith”, “Path of Freedom” or “Path of the Occupation”. Every stop in these maps (trails, paths) shows visitors many interesting points from the history of the second part of the 20th century in Moravian metropolitan Brno⁵.

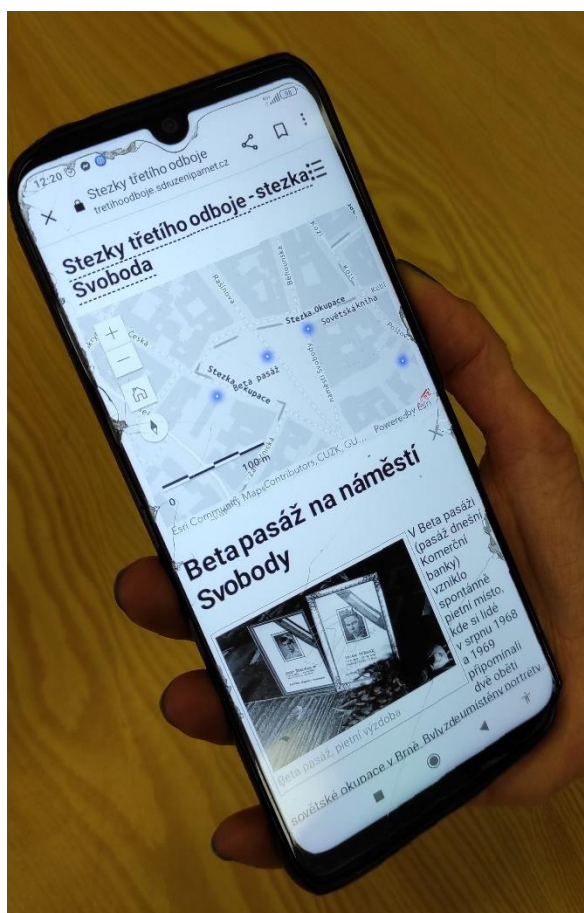


Fig. 3 A demonstration of the “Paths of the Third Resistance” interactive online map with e-guided tour through Brno. Visitors could choose one of the tours with their smartphone and walk downtown. During the walk they could see many pictures and information at each stop about the sad events during the Soviet occupation in 1968/1969 or other kinds of past resistance to the communist régime.

Source: Dana Vedra, Moravian Museum in Brno; <http://www.stezkytretihoodboje.sdruzeniipamet.cz>

Thanks to the online world, especially on our website and social networks, we have shown that the issue of health was an integral part of the daily life of our ancestors. Thanks to improvements in medicine and

half of the 20th century which have significantly affected the life of Czech society. The projects are implemented in various forms - exhibitions, TV documentaries, book publications, websites, mobile applications, school discussions, public debates. The association also organises international conferences dealing with Communist persecution and the history of the Iron Curtain. Viz <http://sdruzeniipamet.cz/ospamet/index.php/en/>

⁵ <https://stezkytretihoodboje.sdruzeniipamet.cz/>

technology we have forgotten that we have epidemics. Using the comparison with the Spanish flu, my colleague Lukáš Lexa has published a number of articles and studies. He has also presented his research on social networks. Here is a quotation from the conclusion to his research: "The present is also a test of the maturity of our state and civilization in general. It could bring to light problems that are sometimes overlooked. The Covid pandemic did not affect us as much as the Spanish flu did our ancestors a hundred years ago. Thanks to IT, we can work at home, keep in touch with friends and relatives, or have fun.... Will this experience inspire us to appreciate more the freedoms of everyday life?"⁶

Another big contemporary issue is migration. Observing the mechanisms of migration processes in the past can be applied to the current situation, which demonstrates similar parallels. The Russian-Ukrainian war and its subsequent wave of migration is a major social crisis. In the Czech Republic, a huge wave of opposition to Russia and solidarity with the Ukrainian people has arisen. Our collection items are presented with an analogy to the current crisis in eastern Europe. As we can see in an original poster by Alfons Mucha from 1923 and a poster against the war in Korea in the early 1950s. There are clear symbols of suffering – a woman with a child in her arms, a young child affected by the war. This degree of imagination is still preserved in posters and pictures from war zones today.



Fig 4. Original poster "Russia Restituenda" by Alfons Mucha (born in Moravia) from 1922. The poster appealed to the Czechoslovak public to contribute to the charity to help Russia after the cruel civil war and the famine in Ukraine. The imagining of a suffering woman with child as the real victims of the war.

Source: Moravian Museum, Department of History, Inv. Nr. A2500.

⁶ LEXA, Lukáš: *Více než aktuální reminiscence... Španělská chřipka 1918–1920* (translation: More than a topical throwback... the Spanish flu 1918–1920) In: Okolo Strážnice, Sborník Městského muzea ve Strážnici, Strážnice, Muzejní a vlastivědný spolek ve Strážnici, 2021, p. 90.



Fig. 5 An original poster „NO! PEACE WILL TRIUMPH OVER WAR“ (translated from Czech by the author of this article) from the 1950s against the Korean war. The imagining of a little child as the real victim of war is still current in contemporary conflicts.

Source: Moravian Museum, Department of History, Inv. Nr. A2016.

The Moravian Museum is also actively involved in helping Ukrainian refugees and supporting their country. In spring, it held a sales exhibition of paintings by Ukrainian artists, the proceeds of which went to Ukraine. Another example of our interaction with contemporary social crises can be seen in the pictures from the study visit of students from Ukraine, who are studying Czech and learning contemporary realities in Brno for the fifth month now⁷. They have a better understanding of their own history and the analogies between the Czech Republic and the Ukraine. They have an answer to the question of why the Czech population is particularly sensitive to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

Thanks to the presentation of the past through museum items, we can help the public to better understand why these processes occur in our civilization. Through our research, we can better conceptualize an event, monitor the mechanism by which it is characterized, and then apply that to the present. The 20th century was a very dynamic period, full of cruel conflicts. Two World Wars were a fatal redrawing of the global map. We must never allow people to forget this. It must be remembered that current events are the result precisely of a lack of human interest in latent problems. They then threaten to escalate into social crisis. The museum is the one of those important institutions in the world that has the power face up to social crisis and to offer the public information about its own past and present.

⁷ The paper was presented as a contribution to the ICOM General Conference in Prague on 26th August 2022.