



**From emotion to knowledge:
a path for an adult audience in the National Roman Museum – Baths of Diocletian
Project, Centre for Museum Education –University of Roma Tre, Italy 2004**

Partner 5: Università Degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy > Emma Nardi

1.Exhibition Concept

The National Roman Museum is the institution that preserves the archaeological heritage of the city of Rome. It is a body of collections that are particularly important and housed in different buildings. The epigraphic collection is preserved in the National Roman Museum - Baths of Diocletian, named after the monumental baths the Emperor Diocletian erected around 305 A.D. In the Renaissance, the area underwent major changes, which involved architects such as Michelangelo and Baldassarre Peruzzi. The collection represents a cultural asset of primary importance, not only for its great intrinsic value, but also for the location that hosts it. The Museum, designed by the architect Giovanni Bulina, is divided into three exhibition floors, for a total of 1,840 square meters where about 900 remains are displayed. It is one of the richest collections in the world which, in Rome, takes a particular added value, as the Romans



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

invented the art of epigraphy. The collection was put together, in large part, thanks to the acquisition of the finds of the Museum Kircheriano, built by the Jesuits at the Collegio Romano, thanks to donations and to a huge quantity of remains found in the numerous worksites which, when Rome was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy in 1870, were opened to turn the city of the Pope into the capital of the newly unified state. The *corpus* of epigraphs consists of approximately 10,000 stone inscriptions, almost all in Latin, and a similar number of everyday objects on which are engraved inscriptions of various kind.

2. Reception

Despite the high value of the collections, the number of visitors to the epigraphic section is particularly low, especially if you compare it both with that of the other sections or monuments, within the sphere of the National Roman Museum. In 2004, the Colosseum had over three million visitors, while the epigraphic section had 63,600. Therefore, it was thought not only to gather the socio-cultural characteristics of the visitors, but also to understand where the reasons for the lack of attractiveness of the epigraphic collection lay, in order to make it more attractive. Surveying the results of such investigation, it seemed clear that the gap between the educational level and the indication of the correct answer in identifying the fundamental message of the Museum, which was key in the above survey, represented an important element of reflection. It was highlighted that the mediation, made by labels and description panels, was not enough to express the main idea the museum wants to convey. The message of the museum is too implicit, since it is not clear, even to visitors holding higher education degrees. Replacing labels and panels, however, is an operation that could hardly be conceived: conservatives do not want to move from an approach which they consider correct from a scientific point of view and, besides, the costs of such an operation would be too high to carry. The Museum Management has, therefore, decided to propose a solution that, while leaving unchanged the museological arrangement, enables it to establish a more effective contact with the visitors taking guided tours.

3. Exhibition Design

The setting up of the National Roman Museum - Baths of Diocletian follows a chronological order and aims at illustrating, through the written documents, the social, political and cultural evolution center of Rome from the Archaic to the Imperial age through the Republican age. The time period covered is from the VIII B.C. to the third century A.D. Inside the historical periodization, the remains are organized by subject areas, taking into account aspects such as the social structure, institutions and religion. The survey was divided into two steps: first of all, the attempt was to understand the real comprehension of the Museum's main message by adult visitors who visited on their own. Afterwards, a path to be proposed to the public was developed so that, even though complying with the necessary scientific rigor, it could appear more captivating.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

4. Visitors Approach-Activation/Participation

Researchers at the Centre for Museum Education of the University of Roma Tre developed a questionnaire according to the traditional scheme, however inserting a question that apparently required expressing an opinion, while it was actually testing how visitors understood the goals of the epigraphic collection set up.

The question was worded as follows:

Indicate the statement that, in your view, summarizes the cultural role that the Epigraphic Museum plays:

- the Epigraphic Museum allows us to trace back habits and customs of the Romans through the inscriptions made by politicians;
- the Epigraphic Museum allows us to identify the architectural and artistic context to which the inscriptions belonged;
- the Epigraphic Museum allows assessment of the specific characteristics of epigraphic documents, documents of which Rome was the cradle;
- the Epigraphic Museum allows us to map the events of Roman history from the first century after Christ.

The questionnaire was administered to 150 visitors. Only 21% correctly answered: “c”. 27% gave the answer “a”, showing they did not understand the commissioning of the epigraphs, 18% answered “b”, because they did not get the problem of de-contextualization of the epigraphs; 11% indicated the response “d”, making a mistake in the chronological order. As evidence of the embarrassment that the question raised, 23% of the visitors did not provide any answer. The information gathered through the questionnaire determined that visitors were mostly full-time workers, that 63% of them hold a university degree and stayed an average of an hour in the Museum. Mediators reversed the traditional approach to the visit, which was guided, and in which a lecturer explained the path focusing on objects that were considered most significant. Two informal groups of 25 adults were formed, chosen to reflect the cultural profile identified through the questionnaire. The two groups visited the Museum, in different days, in the presence of three photographers. Without explanation about the collection, visitors were asked to visit the Museum in absolute freedom. After about an hour (the average visit time indicated in the questionnaire that had been compiled), visitors were asked to show the photographers the two objects that had particularly impressed them. It was interesting to observe how visitors, even when knowing each other, tended to go through the path alone or, at most, in couples. After this first step of the activity, visitors were gathered in the conference room of the museum where photographers projected images of objects that had been selected by them to be shown. For each object, visitors explained the reasons of their choice and, in particular, the emotion elicited by the object and what had brought them to privilege that object in particular among a vast range of options. They, then, answered other visitors’ and researchers’ questions involved in the experiment. It was thus possible to focus on the logic that guides visitors in dwelling upon a particular object, the associations they make, the criteria guiding them.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

In particular, visitors proved to be influenced by the three following elements:

- *the museological solution.* This is the case of the large sarcophagus, built between 130 and 150 A.D., reused to bury a scion of the senatorial class. The sarcophagus is placed in isolation on one of the walls of the first room on the first floor of the museum. The visitor who enters cannot avoid noticing and admiring its beauty;
- *curiosity.* Many visitors were struck either by objects evoking everyday life or of which they could not understand the function. It is the case of the steelyard, kept in the Museum because it had been engraved with both the name of two subsequent owners as well as with the state warrantee seal. A second subject that attracted the audience is the slave collar with the tag plate, engraved with an inscription that promises a reward to those who, in the event the slave escaped, would returned him to his master;
- *beauty.* For this simple but illuminating reason, visitors focused on a clay bust, built between the fourth and third centuries B.C. and found in Ariccia, which represents the goddess Demeter.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

5. Conclusion: “ From emotion to knowledge: a path for an adult audience in the National Roman Museum – Baths of Diocletian” project with respect to COP1 and COP2

Toolkit 1 – Making Europe visible. This experiment shows that only a field survey may allow researchers to reflect critically on the activities organized by a museum. Only this way, in fact, is it possible to overcome an ordinary approach according to which, if the public seems satisfied, it automatically means that the proposal was shaped from a cognitive point of view and not only from an emotional one.

Toolkit 2 – The Museum as a ‘social arena’. The museum has an education role and it can improve people’s comprehension skills.

Toolkit 3 – Bridging-the-gap. Mediators changed the traditional approach to the visit. Two informal groups of adults were formed, chosen to reflect the cultural profile identified through the questionnaire. The two groups visited the Museum in different days. Without explanation about the collection, they were asked to visit the Museum in absolute freedom and to show the photographers the two objects that had particularly impressed them.

Toolkit 4 - Synaesthetic translation and transformation of contents. For each object, visitors explained why a particular object stimulated in them some emotions and the reasons of their choice.

Toolkit 5 - Social web and interaction with new media. The project was documented in every part by photos, filming, questionnaires and interviews.

6. Further Literature, Links and Information:

Genette, G. (1986), *Figure III. Discorso del racconto*, trad. di L. Zecchi, Torino Einaudi.

Nardi, E. (2011), *Forme e messaggi del museo/ Shapes and Message of the Museum*, Milano, Franco Angeli.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



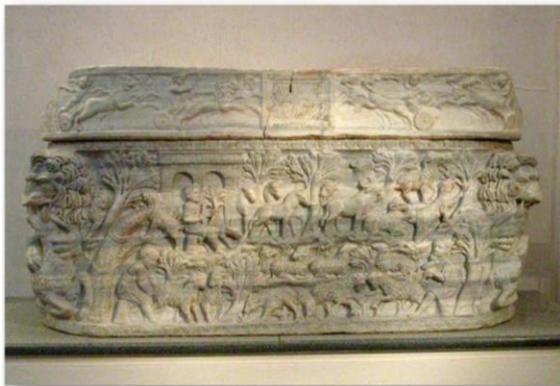
National Roman Museum – Baths of Diocletian. One of the rooms realized on the project by architect Giovanni Bulina



Visitors at the Epigraphic section at National Roman Museum – Baths of Diocletian



Visitor at the Epigraphic section at National Roman Museum – Baths of Diocletian



Sarcophagus with pastoral scene



Roman steel yard



Slave collar



Demeter's bust



Culture

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.