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Archaeological tourism and economic crisis. Italy and Greece

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ABSTRACT: Before the recent economic crisis, both in Greece and in Italy there was an extraordinary development in various kinds of urban activities. Some of them have considerably affected museums and archaeological sites and have made them more attractive to the new post-modern tourism of sensory and emotional character. The new Acropolis Museum in Athens was almost a symbol of this change, but also the new exhibition spaces in commercial centres and underground stations must be taken into account. In Italy a similar change occurred in some of its major towns, such as Rome, Turin, Naples, Cagliari and Reggio Calabria. The outbreak of the crisis has subsequently brought to a halt the proliferation of these initiatives and has induced critical reflections on what has happened and what may yet happen. Urban policies, gentrification and beautification processes must be reconsidered. It is no longer time for archaeology without finds and atmosphere without contents, accordingly to the post-modern model. However, the de-intellectualization of today's societies obliges even the most serious scholars to take into account the potential of some forms of edutainment, such as living history and re-enactment, which up-to-now have been under-evaluated and despised by archaeologists and historians.

KEY WORDS: Acropolis, Archaeology, Athens, Greece, Heritage, Italy, Museums, Post-modern society, Urban policies, Tourism

INTRODUCTION. THE PARTY IS OVER

It was as when a champagne cork pops out, with general joy, among toasts and smiles, in the certainty of a bright future. The Athens 2004 Olympics, so long expected, marked an important moment in the history of modern Greece: the redemption, visible all over the world, of a nation that had been mistreated for too long by the rest of Europe and that had been robbed not only of a large part of its marvellous Parthenon marbles, but even of the idea of the Olympic Games.

New and amazing structures, some of which not yet completed, from the Piraeus to the centre of Athens, among enormous cranes and tiring detours, gave the idea of an ease that had been won for ever. Streams of tourists wandered around the streets of the town no longer to see the Acropolis in two hours and then flee to some nearby island, but, for the first time, to admire and enjoy the fervour of the city: from the small and smart ateliers that had been opened almost everywhere by young and creative artists to the new gentrified neighbourhoods at the foot of the Acropolis, which, with their modern style and their sparkling nightlife, had outclassed the old Plaka, invaded by mass tourism.

It had to be a point of no return. But the cork that had been cockily shot to the sky disappeared for ever and the bottle was rapidly emptied. Only a few years later we clearly realized that the party was over and that even before there had been little to celebrate.

The sumptuous 2012 Olympic Games in London, with the astonishing Shard of Glass designed for the occasion by Renzo Piano, marked the end of a prosperous period, which, not only in Greece, was hoped to be only the beginning. Greece was pushed again to the borders of Europe and, once more, the northern countries of the continent, as at the time of the Grand Tour, flaunted their economic superiority to the southern countries, which for centuries had received (and often suffered) their cultural and archaeological tourism. Of course, the "Elgin marbles", whose return had been aired only a few years before, remain firmly within the solid walls of the British Museum and of the City. In contrast, almost for an ironic retaliation, some northern politicians have even dared to require a humiliating mortgage on the Parthenon as a guarantee for E.U. loans to Greece.

Some years later, Italy too experienced a similar evolution and now its situation, though better, is not so different. Therefore, we must try to understand what has happened and what may yet happen to our archaeological heritage.

THE RISKY APPEAL OF GLOBAL CITIES

The Athens Olympics, which concurred to cause the economic collapse of the country, has not entailed only damages. The new Acropolis Museum and the restyling of the Athens underground probably are the best and most durable spin-offs of that great effort. The mega-events — as are usually called the events of global impact, such as the Olympic Games and the World Expositions — often have very important effects on both economic development and urban restyling[1]. This is why they are so harshly contested by states and towns, for years and years. The cultural and tourist recovery of Barcelona, due to its 1992 Olympics, was a paradigmatic case that inspired not only some of the most important "global cities"[2], but also many smaller towns, which have used various kinds of events, including cultural festivals, to remould their urban organization, relaunch their economy on post-industrial bases and redefine their cultural role and their image.

For at least two decades, cities and towns have used events of any size to requalify their offer in the urban competition[3]. In Italy the example of Barcelona was successfully followed by Turin, where the urban renewal implemented in view of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games and their world-wide echoes have surprisingly

[1] Hayes &Karamichas (2011).
[2] Sassen (2004).
[3] Spirou (2011).

relaunched a town that had been deeply affected by deindustrialization and the consequent economic, social and cultural crisis. The town has opened many new cultural spaces, mainly for contemporary art, and has restored some important historical buildings, among which the wonderful royal palace of Venaria, which, after returning to its ancient splendour, has become a major tourist attraction.
Among the other main interventions, we can recall the renewal of the Egyptian Museum (one of the greatest Egyptian museums in the world), which had been entrusted to an Oscar-prize winner, Dante Ferretti, who emphasized the emotional and sensory aspects of the visit with suggestive plays of light and shade. The new arrangement, perfectly corresponding to the post-modern taste of new archaeological tourism, paying much more attention to the atmosphere than to the contents, has more than doubled the number of visitors, without great investments and new acquisitions. This case has immediately become a model for low-cost arrangements, slapdash exhibitions and false events, organized by public and private administrations in search of facile success.

Lights and shadows in the Egyptian Museum, Turin
(© Fondazione Museo Antichità Egizie di Torino)

In a few years Italy was inundated by museum events or even new small local museums, based less on the quality of their collections than on the attraction of their arrangements: sounds, lights, multimedia effects and, in the most sophisticated cases, even perfumes. For some years museums and sensory exhibitions, in both large and small towns, have become the latest developments in a low-cost cultural tourism, well integrated in urban marketing. Archaeological tourism has certainly benefitted from this trend: old-style museums, with their finds displayed serially, in a supermarket style, and presented with unreadable captions, have been supplanted by new emotional spaces, where the exhibition of the objects tends to be replaced by a romantic atmosphere with archaeological character or a generic sensation of antiquity. But these operations entail a risk: archaeology without finds and atmosphere without contents mark dangerous turning points in the policies related to the fruition of the past.

In urban restyling, cultural heritage, in its material and immaterial aspects, plays a crucial role. Many industrial areas already abandoned or about to be abandoned have changed their function, becoming places of production and consumption of cultural goods or spaces devoted to new leisure practices mixing culture, amusement and even shopping. Museums, theatres and cultural activities, even without any specific territorial policy, have rapidly seized areas no longer used: old sheds and factories have become fashionable centres of cultural events and night life. There has also been a refinement of post-modern aesthetic, which has been a lesson on how to appreciate even the most hybrid aspects of this cohabitation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUMS IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL AGE

In Rome, in 1997, there was the inauguration of a new exhibition space, the Montemartini Power Station Museum, which displays many fine Roman sculptures inside an early 20th century power station no longer in use. The sinuous forms of the statues and the whiteness of their marble contrast fascinatingly with the blackness and the hardness of the old metal machinery. Classical archaeology and industrial archaeology combine perfectly in a meta-discourse that, by connecting different historical phases, also acquires an important educational value as an invitation to compare experiences that seem to be distant. But, even visually, this museum strongly suggests the idea of a continuous process of stratification of archaeological objects, where modernity itself appears to be a historical result. In this view (interesting but risky for the identity of archaeological heritage), all is contemporary and archaeological at the same time. Anyhow, as occurs in the latest form of post-modern fruition of heritage, the museum becomes a “space” for events, where the visitors can live their archaeological experiences in a leisure context, together with other activities, such as jazz concerts and fashion parades.

Statues in a post-modern scenery: Montemartini Power Station Museum, Rome (photo Zeno; courtesy by Zetèma, Rome)

Similarly, in Athens, in the neighbourhood of Gazi, close to the Acropolis and near to the Keramikos, the museum of ceramics, and to the Theseion, the best preserved temple in the town, there is Technopolis, an industrial museum and an exhibition space: a great cultural complex, active since 1999, which was obtained from a radical renovation of the 1857 gasworks. But this operation, though interesting in itself, seems to be a slavish imitation of some contemporary foreign initiatives. In fact, Technopolis, even before the outbreak of the current financial crisis, was little more than an idea, in a context of requalification of the central neighbourhoods that had become poor or had been overwhelmed by mass tourism.

In a few years these areas have become a sort of leisure belt around the Acropolis, the reconfirmed identity symbol of the town and its main tourist attraction. Therefore, close to the Plaka, the old historical centre, oriented to respond to the most standardized demands of mass tourism, from "typical" taverns to souvenir shops, there was a rapid development of new economic and cultural activities, able to satisfy the claims of the European youth tourism (low cost but demanding in terms of leisure) and those of the traditional U.S. college tourism as well as the habits of the Greek youth.

In the same context we can analyze the experience of Athinais, a multipurpose complex in the centre of Athens, the result of the renovation, with a change in function, of an old silk factory situated between the neighbourhoods of Gazi and Psiri, in "the city's most vibrant area" (to use the proud words of its website). Here, at the time of the Olympic miracle, there was a proliferation of trendy bars, coffee shops and restaurants, avant-garde theatres, art galleries, clubs and modern loft buildings, which attracted, among others, a lot of artists. Athinais, a space of smart and innovative style, designed precisely to concur to the process of beautification of the town, houses a wide range of business initiatives, cultural activities and quality entertainments. In particular, the important Museum of Ancient Cypriot Art should be mentioned: a high-quality archaeological collection, supported by the Pierides Foundation, which also organizes interesting exhibitions of contemporary Greek and Cypriot art.

Most new cultural centres, which have developed in former industrial areas, present a marked multi-functional offer, which, however, cannot hide their limits: the lack of projects with a strong identity and a clear strategic objective, different from the mere financial speculation or the creation of new places of consumption. Anyhow, their hybrid character is a good expression of the "liquidity" of post-modern society[4].

As for Technopolis and Athinais, an aspect deserves a comment. Their merging of "traditional values with advanced technology and progressive design" has become an instrument of marketing, used to charm and attract possible customers by suggesting their inclusion in the global trends of consumption and, as for museums, a less boring and painstaking form of fruition, complying with the already advanced process of de-intellectualization.

This is quite evident in the case of Athinais. In 2008 this complex was once again renovated, by increasing its capacity and creating the Athinais Tower Lofts: 72 loft apartments "with premium services, exclusive privileges and a unique view of the Acropolis". This building, "challenging all conventions and assumptions regarding urban living", was projected to become "the new Athens landmark"[5]. Such an emphasis must not surprise. The requalification and relaunching of urban centres do not rely only on ingenuous cultural initiatives, as some intellectuals seem to believe, but require substantial economic returns.

In this context, Acropolis itself has partially changed its function. Owing to its incomparable cultural and identity value, it has also become an extraordinary scenic element that raises the price of the neighbouring areas.

The Athinais Tower, at least in its ambitious commercial offer, appears as a "double" of the Acropolis itself, the traditional landmark, whose image was constructed in centuries of identity and tourist use[6]. The Acropolis is presented as a mere element of

[4] Bauman (2000).

[5] From Athinais' website: http://www.athinais.com.gr (accessed on January 11, 2012).

[6] Yalouri (2001); Melotti (2011).

the urban landscape, which makes the view enjoyed from the new building more interesting and pleasant.
This is only one example of the role that the archaeological and historical heritage has assumed in the last decades. Even monuments, in contexts of rapid and uncontrolled development, end up being used to mark the otherwise more and more homologated global cities and to confer a "local" and "historical" flavour on their spaces.
This use of the monuments is part of a wider process of thematisation, where heritage and history are used to attribute a cultural identity to some activities with a distinctive commercial character. In the last decades, thematisation, in more or less sophisticated forms, has exerted a great influence on the collective imagery[7]. This operation responds at the same time to two different and contrasting needs of our society: on the one hand, consumption, which is not only stimulated but even invested with salvific functions; on the other, the increasing resistance to homologation. In fact, thematisation often plays on the sentiment of belonging and on local pride; therefore, it can become an instrument of identity claims[8].
In Athinais, thanks to the museum of Cypriot art, archaeology has been metabolized in the rich offer of the complex: an archaeological experience inside a space that was created to serve the new post-modern forms of cultural consumption and that, on the eve of the financial crisis, was envisaged to serve the investments in real estates. In other words, archaeology was included in its offer to make it more various and trendy and to attract other possible customers and consumers. But, in this way, archaeology risks losing its identity and, eventually, its interest. It is not by chance that, after the great advertising campaign at its opening and during the Olympic Games, this museum is facing serious difficulties. It is still present in the website of the Pierides Foundation and, without emphasis, in that of the housing complex, but it has already been almost forgotten in the tourist sites.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHISTARS

This is a crucial problem for this kind of experiences. Even in Italy many of the quite numerous museums and event spaces that have been opened in the last two decades as part of the offer of some commercial complexes have already been closed or risk being closed, or, even worse, get along, without enthusiasm, in a sort of identity limbo, waiting for new events or, rather, new financial support.
In Italy the financial crisis has struck even some of the main cultural institutions that have appeared in recent decades on the wave of the serial initiatives of urban beautification of that period. Among the most striking cases, we can recall the Maxxi, the impressive Museums of the Arts of the XXI Century, which some politicians wanted to create in Rome at any cost (even in the most literal sense of the word) in obedience to the principle that a city willing to play a global role and to attract more tourists must have an important museum of contemporary art and an iconic building signed by an archistar. Precisely for this reason in 1998, after an international competition, its project was committed to an Iraqi-born British architect, Zaha Hadid, the first woman to win a Pritzker Architecture Prize. But the museum, which was inaugurated in 2010, is already in very bad financial conditions and the government has even worsened the situation by appointing as its president a politician without any specific competence, Giovanna Melandri, the former minister of culture who had

[7] Lukas (2007).
[8] Melotti (2008).

followed its construction. Anyhow, the building has turned out to be a real masterpiece and, though inside it does not seem to be particularly suited to its main exhibition function, it deserves a tourist visit independently from its collection, as happens, to mention a well-known example, in the case of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.
Also the Mediterranean Museum of Nuraghic and Contemporary Art in Cagliari, Sardinia, was awarded to Zaha Hadid. This seems to confirm the present lack of autonomous innovative cultural policies in Italy and the consequent tendency to accept uncritically and reproduce the current international models.

An archistar museum: the rendering of the Mediterranean Museum, Cagliari
(image by Zaha Hadid Architects)

In fact, the encounter between contemporary art and archaeology comes within the trends of the international market of tourism and culture; moreover, it responds to the general renewal of the offer, fruition and communication in the archaeological field. Anyhow, this museum, too, is really fine, with its smart and sinuous forms, and concurs considerably to the process of beautification of a town, which, after remaining for a long time in a marginal position and before being overwhelmed by debts, had invested much in culture and urban image.
In 2010 the website "Sardegna Democratica" (Democratic Sardinia) welcomed the inauguration of the first wing of the new museum with emphatic words showing the salvific hopes raised by its construction: "Sardinia will be no longer only the Emerald Coast, no longer a land of the long-term unemployed on welfare, no longer a region near the bottom in the international classifications of education, no longer a land of sad emigrants, no longer a land of poverty and offended dignity! At last it will become an educated and cultivated land, where nature, culture, nuraghi and contemporary realities outline a future of prosperity for conscientious and responsible men and women"[9].
However, following an old Italian use (not unknown in Greece), museums and monuments are inaugurated more than once, even when they are far from being finished. In fact, that space-age museum is still in construction and the present financial crisis has seriously endangered its completion.

[9] Mongiu (2010).

The case of Reggio Calabria, an important town in southern Italy, is even more revealing. The town is experiencing a severe urban, economic, social and cultural distress. In such a context a restyling of its waterfront seemed to be able to bring new life to the town in a miraculous way. The project "Regium Waterfront", which envisaged the construction of an amazing Museum of the Mediterranean, was entrusted, once more, to Zaha Hadid. Her project, though not so different from the one she had designed for Cagliari, is quite stunning: the building is along the seafront and its design recalls a starfish and other organic forms.
The most interesting thing, however, is that for a long time nobody clearly understood what the museum should contain. The website "Culturaitalia" reflects both the enthusiasm and the unrealistic ambition raised by the project: "The two Riace bronze statues will be collocated inside it; a section will be devoted to one of the most famous men born in Reggio, Gianni Versace. Moreover, it will house a series of exhibition spaces, an aquarium, a library, offices, archives, an enormous shopping area, workshops of restoration and refreshment rooms"[10].
This presentation shows another crucial aspect of the new cultural and archaeological policies: museums, especially the archaeological ones, present a local identity value that the process of Europeanization seemed to have overcome. The financial crisis, together with the effects of globalization and the identity crisis of the "liquid" society, brings about a discovery of local, regional, national and even hyper-national claims, in a no-global and anti-European stance.
As for Reggio and its region, this identity function is played by the two famous statues found in the sea off Riace. The town defends (and exploits) them as proofs and symbols of its strong and ancient culture, even if really the statues are masterpieces of the classical Greek art and, at the most, could only confirm the inclusion of the region into the first processes of cultural homologation in the Mediterranean area. The statues, assumed as tourist brand and systematically used by the regional administration in its promotional campaigns, have even become an instrument of political negotiation and have been used to justify the construction of the new museum, in spite of the deplorable local financial conditions and the shameful state of neglect of the old National Archaeological Museum, which houses one of the best collections of classical art in the Mediterranean area. But, as we have seen, the town, completely overwhelmed by the "liquid" trends of post-modern society, attributes much more importance to the work of a couturier, Gianni Versace, who was killed some years ago in Miami, under dubious circumstances. In this case too, however, the serious financial and political crisis seems to have cast into oblivion the amazing project.

THE "LIQUID" ACROPOLIS

In Greece the new Acropolis Museum was conceived in a similar context. But this museum is a work of great national interest and has much more solid bases than the "signed" museums above-mentioned. Yet, also its design and construction were blamed, not only abroad, for its gigantic size, its disregard of the historical and cultural situation and its obsolete national spirit[11]. Moreover, the creation of the museum was devised as part of those projects of urban beautification and tourist marketing that have recently transformed the museum offer almost everywhere.

[10] Culturaitalia (2009).
[11] Plantzos (2011).

As for this museum, another important factor must be taken into account: identity pride. In fact, it soon became a symbol of the economic and cultural recovery of Greece, which had been received with honour in the European Community as a full member and had also stably become part (at least as was then believed) of the international financial processes and the new global tourism. Greece had begun to regard itself as something more than an object of that kind of international tourism, mainly coming from the Northern Europe, which was accustomed to look at it with the even quasi-racist eyes of the Grand Tour.

Old depot museums and old national museums, which idly imitated the temple structure of the British Museum (which, in its turn, had imitated the ancient Greek temples, in order to present itself as a temple of art and culture), were replaced by a new kind of iconic museum, designed with surprising forms and innovative solutions to become a new and quite visible landmark of the territory. The Parthenon, the identity fulcrum of ancient and modern Greece and the only Greek monument with a strong impact on the global imagery, was flanked by another monumental building, representing the recent success of the country.

The museum was also a challenge to the British government, to whom Greece had repeatedly demanded the return of the “stolen marbles" from the Parthenon (which the Greeks, of course, refuse to describe as “Elgin Marbles”). In fact, since the 19th century, this claim has periodically reappeared in some key moments: to recall the most recent, the entry of Greece into the European Community (1981), the European election (1994), the Olympics of the centenary in Atlanta (1996), the assigning of the Olympic Games to Greece (1997), the beginning of the new millennium (2000), the run-up to the Olympics (2004) returning home for the first time since their reinvention in Athens in 1896 and then the Olympics in London (2012). With the new museum Greece showed that the British government could no longer decently refuse the restitution of the marbles, pleading that the country was unable to defend and valorise its heritage, and in particular these pieces, representing approximately half of the surviving works of art from the Parthenon[12].

Initially there was the hypothesis of reserving a vacant gallery of the museum for those marbles, to recall the pillage and to stress the persistent sense of deprivation. But, in its final arrangement, the issue was dealt with far more elegantly, by shifting it to a higher level. Greece, while reaffirming its reasons, went beyond a claim of mainly local interest, by offering to the world a collection of extraordinary richness and beauty, displayed according to the latest international standard and the current post-modern taste.

[12] Hitchens (1987); King (2006); Melotti (2011).

Archaeological remains under the New Acropolis Museum, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

At the entrance of the museum, located only 300 metres from the Acropolis, a glass floor enables visitors to glimpse some byzantine archaeological remains. This immediately gives a stratified character to the entire complex and conveys a clear message: the museum houses, preserves and valorises the long-standing history of the town, of which the building represents the latest level. Passing through a wide hall, the visitor goes up to the first floor, following the stratified layout, which suggests the idea of a continuous ascending process: classical Greek culture itself is seen as the point of arrival of a long-standing historical process. The statues retrieved from the so-called *Perserschutt* (Persian debris) — a layer of architectural and votive sculptures of the Acropolis damaged during the Persian War of 480/479 BC — are displayed with sober elegance, as an army of enigmatic spirits, in a wide gallery, where the cement pillars themselves seem to be statues of the contemporary age. On the top floor, lastly, there is a gallery designed for the Parthenon Marbles, which displays the original pieces still in Greece and the copies of the missing part, clearly distinguishing between them. This gallery, which has a different orientation from the rest of the building, aligns almost perfectly with the Parthenon on the opposite hillside. The statues, the reliefs and the replicas are displayed in the same position as when they adorned the temple, which is fully visible from the great glass walls, with a powerfully evocative effect.

Originals and copies in the New Acropolis Museum, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

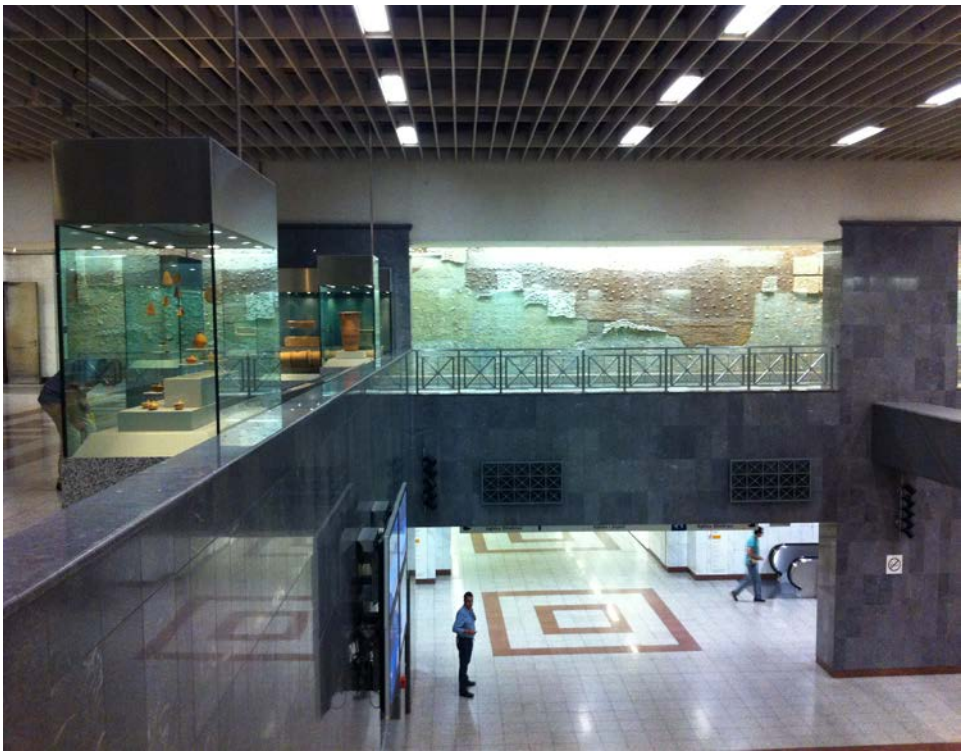
The gallery facing the Parthenon in the New Acropolis Museum, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

Originals and copies, monuments and finds, site and museum are closely interwoven: almost an epitome of what happens in post-modern society, with its surprising forms

of relative and hybrid authenticity. Moreover, replicas seem to solve the problem of the marbles in the easiest and simplest way. But the placard, unlike that of the British Museum, does not dwell on this issue. Visitors do not ask questions about it and guides and guardians ignore it completely.
The creation of this museum has considerably concurred to upset the country's finances, but the result, without doubt, is worthwhile. We can only comment that it confirms the traditional view of the museum as an institution principally appointed to preserve and valorise the heritage.

WHEN MUSEUMS GO UNDERGROUND

In fact, in Athens the most innovative archaeological structure is not this new museum, but the underground. When, in view of the 2004 Olympics, the city began to renew and extend its underground network, over 10,000 archaeological finds were discovered in the excavations: vases, lamps, toys, jewellery and other remains of the old city from the 17th century BC to the 8th century AD. Some finds were given to traditional museums, but others were displayed in custom-built niches in the mezzanines of the underground itself. Thus the Syntagma station, situated under the homonymous square, in the heart of the city, has become an exciting mini-museum, free and well-frequented (the Athens underground transports more than 500,000 people every day, almost 200 million a year).



Syntagma Metro Station, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

The scenic and cultural use of the underground stations is not completely new (among the main examples, we could recall the experiences of Paris, London and Moscow). But the Greek use is unique, though it has already found imitators elsewhere. Syntagma station has gone far beyond the mere exhibition of some finds in glass

display-cases: in its entrance to the underground, through a sheet of glass it is possible to see a vertical section of the ground, layer by layer, together with a grave, which, after being removed during the excavations, has been carefully reconstructed and replaced in its layer with its content: a nearly intact skeleton from the 4th century BC.
The effect is really intriguing. The underground space reacquires its initiatory value as a formative space, according to the ritual mechanisms of *katabasis* (in the Greek myths, the descent into the underground world). A transit space becomes a museum and an infrastructural junction acquires the dignity and value of a real cultural space. The traditional concept of the museum is completely reviewed in an extremely contemporaneous perspective: the temple-style museum, with a doorway surmounted by a classical tympanum, a chest of national identity and a mirror of national pride, becomes an underground open space, which does not even present itself as a museum, but appears as such, owing to the "liquid" spirit of post-modern society. It is no longer the citizen that ascends to the museum; it is the museum that goes to the citizens, who may not even realize that they are in a museum. This operation has two main interesting aspects. Firstly, the idea of an audience of museum users fades away: be they rich or poor, commuters and tourists, workers and students, nationals and foreigners, all live the same space in an indistinct form, but all of them live it in their own way. Secondly, this codifies a new way of using the cultural and archaeological spaces, which replaces the tourist gaze[13] with a quite involuntary gaze: here the fruition of the archaeological heritage becomes an unintentional practice[14]. In this huge post-modern space, archaeological tourism can even be accidental or subconscious. Anyhow, this has begun to be regarded as one of the most interesting tourist places of a town not lacking in them and has already been presented as such in some tourist websites.
Also the Monastiraki Station displays interesting archaeological finds. Really these objects could be turned to better account, but tourists catch their strange and estranging presence and stop to photograph them.

[13] Urry (1990).
[14] Melotti (2011).

Archaeological tourism in the Monastiraki Metro Station, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

The Akropolis Station, the most-used by tourists, since it serves the famous homonymous site and the new museum, is quite different. Along its platform walls the travellers can observe full-size replicas of the statues and friezes from the Parthenon, integrated into the design in the same way as the originals were on that temple. These replicas also act as a constant reminder of the missing pieces.

Copies of Parthenon statues in the Akropolis Metro Station, Athens
(photo by M. Melotti)

Copy of the Parthenon frieze in theAkropolis Metro Station
(photo by M. Melotti)

A similar operation was carried out in the new Athens International Airport. Here, too, a little archaeological museum houses the finds retrieved during the excavations made for its construction. This is conceptually quite interesting. Archaeology is inserted into a space that usually only function as a transit, waiting and shopping area. The museum is proposed as a leisure occasion, alternative to bars and shops, and archaeology is mainly used in a decorative way. Nevertheless, its presence itself entails a re-evaluation of archaeology as a form of "otherness": the "other" space of the airport — an initiatory channel of entrance into, or exit from, cultural systems — also becomes the "other" space of archaeology, entry channel into the world of the past and the dead.

The Archaeological Museum in the Athens International Airport
(photo by M. Melotti)

All these experiences confirm that archaeological tourism can even take place outside its traditional surroundings, in both the old and the new spaces of everyday life, including the so-called "non-places"[15], which, in these cases, the very presence of archaeological finds helps to make "our places", i.e. the places of our ordinary life[16].
Italy seems to follow the Greek example. In roughly the same years, Naples began to construct or renovate some underground stations and replicas of archaeological finds were displayed in some of them, together with installations designed by important architects and artists. As a result, also in Naples some underground stations present themselves as sophisticated spaces, in line with the latest trends in urban design (which unfortunately require expensive advice and substantial investments).

[15] Augé (1992).
[16] Martinotti (2003).

As in Athens, the excavations led to important finds. Among them, there were some well-preserved remains of ancient boats, which should become the basis of a new museum, and a Roman bridge, which a well-known Italian architect and designer, Alessandro Mendini, has brilliantly incorporated into the station building, just as a piece of contemporary art. Since 2005, mixing the Athenian model with the Italian tradition, some finds have been displayed in a subway between the Archaeological National Museum and its closest underground station. Instead, another well-known Italian architect and designer, Gae Aulenti, has placed some copies of statues from the museum in the same station, with a typically post-modern taste.

Archaeological copies in the Museum Metro Station, Naples
(photo by M. Melotti)

The archaeological gallery in the subway of the Museum Metro Station, Naples (photo by M. Melotti)

In Naples an interesting project of urban beautification, "Stazioni dell'Arte" (art stations), has involved many underground stations, which now exhibit more than 180 works, appositely commissioned to reputable artists. One of the main British newspapers has defined the central Toledo Metro Station, recently designed by the Catalan architect Óscar Tusquets Blanca, "the most impressive underground station in Europe" and has placed it, in its classification, above the sumptuous Komsomolskaya Station in Moscow and the innovative Solna Station in Stockholm: certainly a successful outcome in the urban competition. However, it is worth recalling one of its readers' ironic comment on the pictures of the stations published in its website: "Looking at the ones in Naples, perhaps, this explains why the city is nearly bankrupt. Instead of underground follies, they might be better spending money on, say, refuse collection"[17].

Something similar, as far as archaeology is concerned, has happened in Rome, where a new line of the underground is under construction in the great archaeological site of Imperial Forums. The project, still rather confused, prefigures some forms of valorisation similar to Athens'. For the moment tourists and commuters can only admire some finds exposed in old-style display-cases in two stations, Cyprus and Manzoni. The first arrangement is quite simple but interesting. The second, owing to the dust and the stupid ban on taking photos, is an example of what should be carefully avoided.

[17] toffeguy (2012).

The Roman wall under the Termini Railways Station, Rome
(photo by M. Melotti)

Roman Wall and McDonald's restaurant under the Termini Railways Station, Rome
(photo by M. Melotti)

Also the part of the Roman walls that may be seen under the floor of Stazione Termini, the main railway station of the town, deserves a mention. A small placard describes the remains, but, probably because of the overabundant archaeological

treasures existing in the surroundings, nobody seems to become aware of being in a tiny archaeological site. Curiously enough, this space is contiguous with a McDonald's restaurant: local authenticity and global culture live together, side by side, under the station. This situation could entail a very curious effect: real archaeological remains could be used to thematise an eating place. But neither the managers of that chain, nor the railway station officials (not to mention the Roman archaeologists) have up to now realized the commercial, tourist and educational potential value of this site.

LIVING HISTORY FOR A LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY

In contrast, the present economic crisis seems to have reinforced some practices of fruition and valorisation of the past that had been mistreated for a long time by Italian archaeologists and other experts, who regarded them as not sufficiently cultured and too commercial: living history and historical re-enactment, i.e. the activities mainly carried out in museums, archaeological sites and monumental areas by people dressed in period costume.

These practices respond to the sensorial and experiential demands of contemporary tourism and reflect both the general deterioration of historical knowledge and the tendency of post-modern society to interweave tourism, culture and amusement. History is less and less studied: what prevails are oversimplified forms of teaching and popularisation, in spite of the increasing interest in archaeology, regarded as an identity anchorage in the present sea of uncertain "liquidity". Therefore, our knowledge of the past is far more vague and fluid than it was only a few decades ago. Certainly, this knowledge is more fanciful and less rhetoric, but it is also much less critical and apt to face some slovenly or even grotesque operations, such as those of some popular TV programmes and magazines (in Italy, for instance, "Voyager", with its official magazine and website, which has deserved even sarcastic parodies in other TV programmes).

The political and tourist rediscovery of local identity has spurred the spreading of festivals with archaeological or historical themes and the emergence of some forms of slow tourism that unite archaeology and history with food and wine marketing, in the name of local traditions and cultural authenticity. In this context also living history and re-enactment have flourished. But the substantial diffidence of archaeologists and historians has left a free hand to the often superficial creativity of associations of amateurs and local administrations, which in these activities have found an easy and cheap way of displaying the real or presumed values of a territory[18].

As for these activities, Italy has already entered a critical phase, which the present crisis can only aggravate. Archaeological and historical festivals, living history and re-enactment proliferate in a serial way, town by town, village by village. This risks making banal and less and less attractive activities that otherwise could be a useful instrument of popularisation and tourist valorisation[19].

[18] Melotti (2012).
[19] McCalman & Pickering (2010).

Living history along the Appian Way, Rome
(photo by M. Melotti)

Moreover, in Rome archaeological areas are infested by legionaries, centurions and emperors who, far from proposing acceptable forms of re-enactment or living history, testify the thematic degrading of archaeological sites; all the more so, since these "ancient Romans for pictures" seem to be closely controlled by illegal organizations. All this discourages a serious academic reflexion on these activities and badly damages the few organizations that carry out a responsible work of historical popularisation (such as the association "Legio I Italica" in the province of Rovigo) or use living history as a useful instrument of experimental archaeology or archaeological education (such as the co-operative "Archaeodidattica" in Perugia and the association "Sirio" in Sutri).

In Greece the situation is not so different. Re-enactment with classical themes has a long-standing tradition, rooted in the 1896 revival of the Olympic Games and in the 1927 and 1930 Delphic celebrations. This tradition was then continued by the performances in costume of classical works in ancient theatres (which are also archaeological sites) in Athens and Epidaurus. Tourism has only accelerated a way of "typifying" these practices. As happens in Italy too, most historically themed festivals present a serial character, with stereotyped activities not particularly accurate in their archaeological and historical aspects. This is the case, for instance, of Rhodes, where every summer its rich medieval and chivalric heritage (which was already "re-invented" during the Italian rule) has become a stage for festivals and activities in

costume, which, with their "fairies, witches and dragons", according to the website of the Medieval Rose Festival, should "benefit the local community"[20].
I think that improving and promoting living history and, generally, the didactic activities in archaeological areas could benefit both Italy and Greece. Only clever and demanding kinds of edutainment could face the evil consequences of the process of de-intellectualization, meet the increasing sensory and experiential demands of young people and adults, and stimulate archaeological tourism in all its forms, from the most traditional, such as school tourism, to the most innovative and sophisticated, typical of post-modern society. Let me only add that these activities could also be an opportunity for providing work for qualified young people: a very important thing in this period of economic crisis. But, of course, they must be adequately administered.

A DANGEROUS SCENERY

The problem is exactly this: to govern the change. Cultural and archaeological tourism seems able to resist to the economic crisis: the European tourists, disorientated by the "liquidity" of the new Europe, rediscover the past as an identity factor and resume interest in the cultural heritage, while the new tourists, mainly coming from emergent countries with a strong economy (such as Russia, China, India, Brazil and Indonesia), have taken up the old kind of monumental tourism and consume the sites of the European heritage as iconic places to visit, and above all to photograph, before returning home.
With its resistance to the crisis, archaeological tourism is an important resource for both Italy and Greece; yet, it entails a threat. Public administrators and private operators (sometimes together with some academic researchers) compete in intercepting the valuable currency of those tourists, but, to attract them, they propose activities moulded to meet their requests, mainly oriented to leisure, shopping and emotions. Moreover, both the tourists coming from far-away countries and the increasing numerous members of the local population of non-European origin have historical and cultural backgrounds quite different from native Europeans; therefore, they tend to use our heritage in a rather different way.
This mix of crisis, de-intellectualization, tourism and sensorial activities is potentially explosive. In fact, there is something dangerous in this mechanism, which tends to increment the fluxes but is based upon the necessity of containing the costs, even lowering the quality level of the cultural offer.
The administrators, mainly without any specific competence in tourist marketing and tourist valorisation of heritage, have "sniffed out" the business and have rightly guessed the possibility of organizing successful events easily and cheaply. However, they risk transforming archaeological sites and historical towns and villages into theme parks. Too often archaeological sites become mere event spaces, housing initiatives that bring together territorial authenticity and sensorial activities, but are completely disconnected from the cultural and identity value of archaeological heritage. Only one example: Pompeii, one of the most important archaeological sites in Italy, even offered "Sounds and Tastes of the Suburban Baths", a real mozzarella-festival in the archaeological area. This "event", resulting from the collaboration between the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage of Naples and Pompeii and the city of Pompeii, was presented as the first of a series of joint projects of "tourism revival throughout the area", sponsored by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage

[20] Medieval (2007).

and Culture. In other words, these baths, "once known as a spa pleasure" and "famous for their erotic frescoes", have become the stage of sensorial courses, "linked to the sounds and tastes of the palate through the discovery of local tastes, from wine to cheese to pasta and confectionery products"[21].
Certainly, in a period of crisis, it is not always easy to resist the Siren songs, but, if we want to have still a history to tell, we must avoid the wrecking of our heritage on these rocks.

M. M.

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