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Editorial

Alan Tiller EDITOR

All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh-water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us? (*Life of Brian*, 1979)

Although it could be argued that this satirical quote from the Monty Python team may not be entirely accurate in a historical sense, it does highlight the remarkable legacy handed down from ancient civilisations.

The study of ancient history not only allows us to investigate the significant and inspiring achievements of ancient societies but it also assists us in developing a more detailed understanding of ancient cultures and how they have influenced Western civilisation and the modern world. The inclusion of Ancient History in the new Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Study Design is therefore an exciting and welcome addition to the curriculum. In this issue of *Agora* we introduce a number of themes and useful resources that will hopefully assist teachers seeking to introduce or extend the teaching and learning of ancient history within their schools.

In the Thema section Christopher Matthew explains how the fighting styles of the Greek and Persian armies (in particular the tactics of the hoplite) and their strategic planning influenced the second Persian invasion of Greece and the defence of Thermopylae in 480 BCE – where a small Greek force courageously held out the huge Persian Army for a number of days.

Frederik Vervaeke examines how honour, pride and shame in androcentric ancient Rome were strong and pervasive forces at all levels of social, political and military life. In another examination of ancient Roman society, Nick Frigo reflects on the status of women and the significant roles they played in the social and economic fabric of society, despite being ‘restricted in their freedoms due to the Roman idea of the role of women.’

In his essay on ancient Mesopotamia, Andrew Jamieson outlines some of the ‘ground-breaking developments’ – such as agriculture, writing, social complexity and the city-state system – that have contributed to Mesopotamia being considered the ‘cradle of civilisation.’ He also argues that the history of ancient Mesopotamia is ‘essential to our understanding of past and present cultures.’

Annelies Van de Ven examines how museums, as traditionally object-based institutions, can function as bridges between literary and material sources of knowledge. The *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition, which showcased a number of fine pieces from ancient cultures at the Ian Potter Museum of Art (The University of Melbourne), is provided as an exemplar of an accessible and engaging museum space in which students develop skills through practical experience and exploratory engagement.

In an article particularly relevant to the new VCE Study Design, Richard Long discusses some of the social, political and economic features of ancient Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period. Andrew Pyrcz considers the pivotal role the ancient Greek world played in the development of rational thinking and the beginnings of Western philosophy. His article outlines some of the key figures and philosophical schools of thought from the period, and how they ‘revolutionised the way people tackled the problem of understanding the world they inhabited and their place in it.’

In the Praktikos section, Greg Naylor outlines how students can study key aspects of social, political and economic life in early New Kingdom Egypt through a visual analysis task based on a painted scene from the remarkable Rekhmire’s tomb, which includes meticulous depictions of different cultures presenting tribute to the vizier. In the final article of this section, Ann Parry reviews a number of websites that offer extensive resources and quality teaching material to support busy teachers.

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Editor

Alan Tiller
a.tiller@htav.asn.au

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Alan Tiller

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Education Between Artefact and Text

How can museums, as traditionally object-based institutions, function as bridges between literary and material sources of knowledge, specifically with regard to the relationship between history and archaeology?

Annelies Van de Ven, PhD student, The University of Melbourne

Combining text and artefact has long been a struggle in the fields of history and archaeology.¹ Often this is attributed to the stunting effects of disciplinary isolationism, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond these academic barriers there are also the problems of contradicting sources, institutional dispersion of resources and variations in levels of preservation for literary and artefactual material. There is also a methodological disparity that exists. In the most extreme cases this juxtaposes radical materialism with purist text-based analysis. In the former the object is assumed to speak for itself as it is deemed to be objective in a way literature is not. The latter suggests that the object can only function as illustration of what is known from text, which is after all more communicative in function. The ultimate effect of these issues is a want of cross-disciplinary knowledge and historical interpretation. For museums the contest between text and artefact has manifested itself in the constant balancing act between the centrality of the object on display and the need for context. Too little context and the object becomes a mere curiosity, too much and the object loses its agency. How then can a museum reconcile these differences in their displays to the public, and what methodologies can they suggest that could be applied within a broader academic context?

The artefact and text debate defined

This paper will analyse the ways in which museum exhibits can contribute towards bridging the chasm that has formed between methodologies that are text-based and those that are artefact-based. This does not mean that it will conflate the interpretation of the object with that of text. This idea of object as text or reading objects has been discussed by a number of scholars, and extensively so by education specialists Scott Paris and Christina van Kraayenoord in their collaborative article on processes of constructing meanings in museums.² Though elements of this theory persist, for example in the use of the expression 'pottery reading' to describe the critical examination or interpretation of pottery, it has lost much of the methodological supremacy it held in early museological studies. In recent years it has made way for other theories incorporating elements of phenomenology and praxeology in which difference in experience is emphasised.

It is easy enough to follow Paris and van Kraayenoord in their assertion that objects like text are incorporated into a process of 'meaning making,' a process that is not neutral. The material to be exhibited has to be chosen by someone, by which means it becomes associated with that person. This is in addition to

OPPOSITE: Roman glass vessels from the first to third centuries CE from the *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

- 1 For a discussion of the relationship between history and archaeology, see the *Archaeology* magazine debate held in 2000 on the 'History and Archaeology Bulletin Board,' last modified 30 May 2000, <http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/history/board/index.html>.
- 2 Scott G. Paris and Christina E. van Kraayenoord, 'Reading Objects,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002); Scott G. Paris, 'How Can Museums Attract Visitors in the Twenty-first Century?,' in *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hugh H. Genoways (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 258.
- 3 Paris and van Kraayenoord, 'Reading Objects,' 223–24.
- 4 For an example of a materialistic and phenomenological approach to text as material, Jason Adams presented his paper 'The Res Gestae as "Stuff" or The Materiality of the Res Gestae,' at *Amphorae VIII* 2014 giving a case study from his own research in Roman Archaeology. His abstract is available online at http://amphorae.viii.weebly.com/uploads/2/5/6/4/25644883/amphorae_viii_programme.pdf.
- 5 'Archaeology,' La Trobe University, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/courses/archaeology>. Those studying the science of archaeology as well as a number of other subdivisions can also find courses within the Department of Archaeology and Planning.

the influence of the social conditions in which it was originally created and that in which it is currently being displayed. Finally as the writer develops a relationship with the viewer through text, so too do the creator and curator of the object with its viewers.³ What such an analysis fails to account for is the simple physicality of the object. While words can be transcribed, translated and republished often without losing the sense of authenticity attributed to them, an object is qualified quite differently depending on its setting and condition. There are methods of analysis, techniques and technologies that are applicable to objects and not text. For example, analysis of dimensions, chemical composition and archaeological context of rediscovery are all unique to objects. Though one can postulate that a text can similarly be approached through analysis of its taphonomy as a physical piece of writing on a material like papyrus, velum, clay or stone, these methods assume the text as an object.⁴

Ultimately, analysing objects requires a different skill set to traditional textual analysis. Thus, perhaps the best approach to the interpretation of objects in comparison to that of text is one that allows for overlap as well as distance. The two overlap in the subjectivity of engagements with the sources, yet are differentiated in the nature of this engagement, the way we use our knowledge and our senses to create meaning. However, this requires a broader skill set than the one that is required of most students going through academia and may necessitate a change in the academic system, one that could take its cues from the experimentation within museum education.

Academic isolationism

After entering university one of the first hurdles every student must clear is that of enrolment. Besides some administrative work this stage of entry also requires the student to choose a number of courses or modules. Though not always appreciated as such, this decision is quite defining for the rest of one's university career. The student must take into account personal interest, employability, timetabling and often external expectations. From that first instance and throughout the rest of their career, students are required to

repeat this process over and over again. Like a 'choose your own adventure' story, each module code submitted in part defines the parameters for the next choice the student is able to make. For students who choose to continue in tertiary education their undergraduate degree choices will ultimately dictate the parameters of their research. Their admission to research programs is, after all, often based on their assumed specialisation. This takes effect across the broad academic spectrum in choices of degree faculty – arts, science, business, etc. – but also on a smaller scale within those faculties, right down to individual disciplines like archaeology and history. The broad spread of subjects from which students are allowed to choose is both extremely liberating and slightly problematic. It allows students to sample a range of subjects before having to decide on their specialisation, but it also means there is a lack of standardisation in the skill set that may be acquired through any one degree. This plays out prominently in the rift between historical subjects with text-based analysis and those that are material-based – modules being clearly divided between the two camps.

It is important to acknowledge that each university has a vastly different departmental structure – in the United States, for example, archaeology is often placed within schools of anthropology or art history while in Germany it is primarily divided into eras and taught in the school of its corresponding historical period. Here in Victoria it tends to be counted with history or classics. At La Trobe University it is categorised under the School of Historical and European Studies,⁵ at The University of Melbourne it is part of the Centre for Classics and Archaeology,⁶ and at Monash University it is part of the Centre for Archaeology and Ancient Studies.^{7,8} As the faculty subdivisions differ across the world, the degree of cooperation between disciplines and methodologies also varies. However, the rift between text and object, between archaeology and history, seems to be one that pops up across vastly different institutions around the globe. So even within The University of Melbourne, despite the seeming partnership between historical, text-based subjects and archaeology in the

Victorian academic framework, it is difficult for a student to gain extensive knowledge in both fields during their studies. Though technically in the same school, the disciplinary division within our universities allows for a student to gain an in-depth knowledge of say the ancient Greek language and text without ever coming in contact with any ancient artefacts and vice versa. There are no requirements to enrol in an array of modules that cover language, translation, textual interpretation and artefact interpretation, and thus due to time and module constraints, especially at honours level, students are forced to confine themselves to one or two methodologies, with geographic and temporal frames depending mostly on staff specialisation and availability.

In recent years much energy has been invested into altering the status quo. The coursework element for postgraduates at The University of Melbourne has been one such attempt to broaden the frameworks of research students, especially now that they have been extended to allow the inclusion of languages.⁹ The courses allow participants to engage with students across the Faculty of Arts. However, students engaged in the program have run into much the same issues as those in honours, compounded by the fact that these coursework requirements are often seen as a distraction from research rather than an opportunity for enrichment. A more successful method has been the development of cross-disciplinary research centres. An example of this is La Trobe University's A. D. Trendall Research Centre for Ancient Mediterranean Studies, a centre that brings in staff members from a number of different departments in order to facilitate projects involving various fields of expertise and research methodologies.¹⁰ In such collaborations the effects of disciplinary isolationism can be reversed as academics from different disciplines share their knowledge, learning from one another while simultaneously educating a new generation of interdisciplinary researchers. Still, there is a lot of work and negotiation to be done before a new system can be implemented that accounts for the wide range of skills relevant to a humanities or social science degree. Museums, and other less formal and more importantly less

disciplinary-bound institutions, can provide guidance in this matter. Not only their material resources in stores of artefacts and text but also their specific working methodology and educational potential can lead the way for a new method of learning.

Curators or educators?

Museums have had a long, mutually beneficial relationship with the academic fields of history and archaeology.¹¹ Stemming from a similar antiquarianist drive, developments in either field were often quickly mirrored by the other. The collection-mania of early scholars was after all the main impetus for the creation of museums. Their desire for artefacts of past and foreign cultures lead to the creation of the 'cabinet of curiosity,' a collection of miscellany chosen for its aesthetic appeal or peculiarity, a project that could be designated as a type of museum prototype.¹² In the later nineteenth century such higgledy-piggledy accretions of objects gave way to meticulously ordered object-filled glass cases, reflecting what Conn has termed an 'object-based epistemology.'¹³ The taxonomical system that developed became the basis of museum practice, the 'language of museums' if you will.¹⁴ This system allowed objects to carry meaning, an informed arrangement of objects based on inherent qualities creating a full narrative. Exhibits told stories of sociocultural progression, reflecting positivistic methodologies and theories of sociocultural progression popular within academic circles. Though now quite out of fashion, this orientation towards objects has lasted in many museums, often in those with permanent displays of large assorted collections and a long history of practice. The British Museum's permanent collection is one such example, as is that of our own Museum Victoria.

Emily Duthie has termed the British Museum 'an imperial museum in a post-imperial world.'¹⁵ She used this appellation in regard to the British Museum's contested acquisition and repatriation policies, but it can also be seen in the manner of exhibiting their permanent collection. The inflexibility of curating such large collections often means that the displays have remained relatively static. This provides us with an interesting window onto

- 6 'Classics and Archaeology,' The University of Melbourne, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://shaps.unimelb.edu.au/classics-archaeology>.
- 7 'Centre for Ancient Cultures,' Monash University, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-cultures/>. Those studying the science of archaeology as well indigenous archaeology can also find courses within the School of Geography and Environmental Science.
- 8 'How do I study to become an archaeologist in Australia? (Victoria),' Australian Archaeological Association, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://australianarchaeology.com/study-options/#VIC>.
- 9 'PhD Coursework,' The University of Melbourne, Faculty of Arts, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/graduate-studies/research/commencing/phd-coursework>. Other universities in Victoria are also beginning to incorporate coursework components, such as Monash University, but this program is more focussed on professional development and academic skills, see 'The Monash Doctoral Program,' Monash University, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://www.monash.edu.au/migr/why-monash/phd/>.
- 10 'A. D. Trendall Research Centre for Ancient Mediterranean Studies,' La Trobe University, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/trendall/>.
- 11 I state academic fields so as to distinguish them from pre-modern practices that can be seen as forerunners of the modern disciplines of history and archaeology.

'The idea that visitors are mere passive audiences for museum exhibits has been abandoned as has the idea that objects independently impart meaning: communication is not a one-way process and neither is the display of artefacts.'

- 12 Hugh H. Genoways and Mary Anne Andrei, *Museum Origins: Readings in Early Museum History and Philosophy* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008); Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, *The Evolution of Library and Museum Partnerships: Historical Antecedents, Contemporary Manifestations, and Future Directions* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), 146.

- 13 Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 4.

- 14 Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 5.

- 15 Emily Duthie, 'The British Museum: An Imperial Museum in a Post-Imperial World,' *Public History Review* 18 (2011): 12–25.

- 16 Graeme Talboys, *Museum Educator's Handbook* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 1.

- 17 Leona Schauble, 'Cloaking Objects in Epistemological Practices,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 235.

- 18 André Desvallées and François Mairesse, eds., *Key Concepts of Museology* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 20–21.

- 19 E. Margaret Evans, Melina S. Mull and Devereaux A. Poling, 'The Authentic Object? A Child's Eye View,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 58.

the transformation of museums and curation practices, allowing us to reflect back on past practices and envision future developments.

Museums have come a long way from their utility as locations for 'the preservation and display of artefacts of archaeological and historical interest.'¹⁶ One of the main changes in museum practice in the last century has been the gradual 'dethronement of objects from their traditional privileged place as the centre of attention in the museum.'¹⁷ Much like the monopoly of text in the study of history, the object has dominated museum methodologies, especially those of archaeological and ethnographic exhibits, with little regard to other factors in the exhibit–visitor encounter. It is however this encounter, the practice of visiting a museum and contextualising it, that imbues its contents with meaning. Museum staff have become more aware of the importance of experience as well as the wide range of functions that museums encompass.¹⁸ They are regarded as spaces of leisure, places for daytrips or touristic escapades that break the monotony of the workaday life. They are also social spaces, a place to meet friends or strangers, and aesthetic spaces, where one can encounter artistic works, from the building itself to the works inside it. Perhaps most prominent to this paper is the museum's role in public education. As stated previously the idea that visitors are mere passive audiences for museum exhibits has been abandoned as has the idea that objects independently impart meaning: communication is not a one-way process and neither is the display of artefacts.¹⁹ The objects in an exhibit are meant to provide a springboard for further investigation and a focal point for discussion. They are not meant to 'usurp the visitor's own sense of meaning making,'²⁰ but rather give them the skills to negotiate their own understanding of the objects on displays and the themes that they represent.

This idea of learning being 'situated,' engaged in the process rather than

being the result of interpretation, has been theorised by Falk and Dierking as the Contextual Model of Learning.²¹ The model focuses on the museum as experienced by the viewer in their personal, sociocultural and physical context. It also traces the way knowledge is mediated from the initial motivations and expectations of the potential visitor, through the way people interact with the exhibit itself, to how their experience of the exhibit affects them and vice versa. In such a system each person visiting a museum takes their own prior knowledge into the museum and makes sense of the exhibit through an interaction between that knowledge and the displays, altering both the possible meaning of the exhibit and his or her own knowledge. The relationship between visitor and museum is changed as is the relation between the visitor and the sources of their knowledge prior to the visit. Through this potential for transformation and the flexibility of museum practice, the infinite mutability of collections to create a wide range of themed displays, curators and museum staff are in an ideal position to allow the development of a variety of skills. This was recognised as early as 1900 in the works of John Dewey who attempted to create an ideal university with an 'active learning network' in which theory and practice, arts and science, and object and text are combined to create an ideal education system.²² In his work the museum experience is central as it collects, channels and transforms knowledge, giving it applicability in the outside world. Rather than describing the modernist museum as an elitist bastion of absolute knowledge, his museum is one that is accessible, engaging and collaborative, qualities that are fundamental to the museums of today and are actively cultivated in the galleries and museums of Victoria.²³

A case study in balancing the scales

The Ian Potter Museum of Art is one such institution. As an institution connected to Museums Victoria as well

as The University of Melbourne, the gallery fits Dewey's description in its integration of scholastic knowledge and practical learning. Though in this day and age, it is not necessary for a museum to be connected to a university for it to be a centre of learning and research, the Potter benefits from its proximity to an entire team of professional and student curators, conservators and academics who engage with its collections and exhibits on a regular basis. Its practice of producing directed temporary exhibitions rather than general permanent ones and experimenting with exhibition spaces, composition, themes and tools further underscores the museum's position at the cutting edge of museum-education practices. In line with a number of other Melbourne museums, its focus is on creating 'learning opportunities that include emotional, aesthetic and interactive experiences.'²⁴ A sleek, modern urban space, the Ian Potter Gallery houses a number of exhibits every year ranging from ancient artefacts to contemporary outsider art.²⁵ Though each exhibit is carefully curated, of special interest to us is a modest space on the second floor of the building designated as the Classics and Archaeology Collection display.

As a self-proclaimed 'laboratory for art and ideas,'²⁶ the Potter has a very hands-on, minds-on approach to museology.²⁷ The archaeology collection is used for more than museum exhibits – it is also used for teaching through allowing students to handle objects not

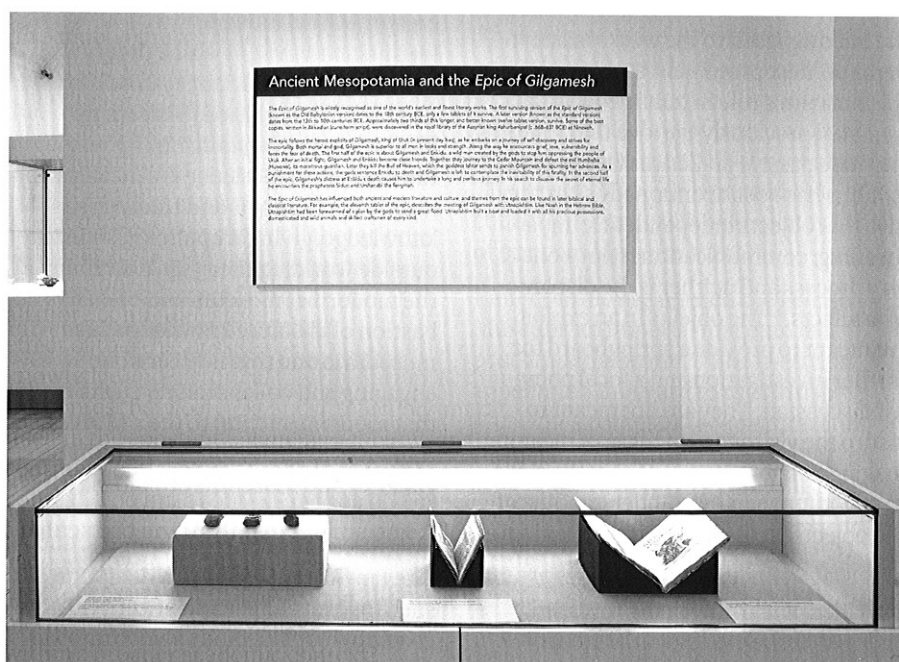
just view them.²⁸ Most of the collection was obtained through donation, but a large portion of the collection was acquired specifically for teaching and research purposes. The development of the Classics and Archaeology Collection allows students at a range of levels to engage with the material remains of cultures they read about in classes, giving a new context to their knowledge.

Recently the Potter launched an exhibit that illustrates this sense of 'object-based learning' in a very overt way.²⁹

On 28 October 2014, The University of Melbourne's own archaeology professor and curator Dr Andrew Jamieson opened a new exhibition in the Potter entitled *Between Artefact and Text*. The exhibition showcased some of the finest pieces of the University's Classics and Archaeology Collection in relation to four great epics – the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Tale of Sinuhe*, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* – and consequently four great cultures of the ancient world. The four subdivisions – Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome – were spread out equally across the exhibition space, each allocated to a separate quarter of the room. Each culture's material was laid out in a combination of a central long case filled with figural pieces in a number of different materials and a number of smaller stand-alone cases that could be circled in order to get a more detailed understanding of the object. This division between cultures was reinforced by the fragments of

BELOW: The *Epic of Gilgamesh* exhibit from the *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition.

- 20 Susanna E. Hapgood and Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar, 'Fostering an Investigatory Stance: Using Text to Mediate Inquiry with Museum Objects,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 173.
- 21 John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Co., 2000), 135–48. The contextual model of learning is revisited in the introduction to John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013), 23–34.
- 22 George E. Hein, 'John Dewey and Museum Education,' *Curator: The Museum Journal* 47, no. 4 (2010): 418–20; John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 100–07.
- 23 Des Griffin, 'Introduction: Learning, the Visiting Experience and the Art Museum as Educator,' in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, eds. Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2011), accessed 12 January 2015, http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Museums_education_introduction.html.
- 24 Janette Griffin, 'The Museum Education Mix: Students, Teachers and Museum Educators,' in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, eds. Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2011), accessed 12 January 2015, http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JGriffin_2011.html.





ABOVE LEFT: Collection of Egyptian artefacts from the *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition.

ABOVE RIGHT: Egyptian alabaster bowl from the Early Dynastic Period in Saqqara from the *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition.

BELOW: A set of Attic Lekythoi dating from the sixth to fifth centuries BCE from the *Between Artefact and Text* exhibition.



text in each culture's respective, most recognisable writing system – cuneiform for Mesopotamia, hieroglyphs for Egypt, the Greek alphabet and that of the Romans – as well as the information panels interspersed throughout the exhibit giving context to the pieces. The visitor, by circling the room in a clockwise fashion, travelled from the great civilisations of Mesopotamia to Dynastic Egypt, through the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Greek poleis, to the world of the Roman Republic and Empire. The oldest objects on display dated back to the late fourth millennium BCE while the most recent piece, a copy of a book entitled *Gilgamesh, King of Erech*, was only sixty-seven years old. The wide spread and variety in objects, including Greek vases, alabaster bowls, bronze arrow points, glass vials, terracotta votive statues and papyri fragments, even a number of published books, gave the visitor an appreciation of the variety of styles and forms that developed in the ancient world as well as their interconnection with and influence on later cultures. As the title suggests this interconnection is not confined to objects but extends to text as well. The exhibit worked through a

number of themes to allow a selection of interpretations and foci for the visitor to engage in based on their personal interest or research topic.

The museum pieces and the text that accompanied them were 'sites for interpretation and sources of information rather than the information itself.'³⁰ They were meant to show the process of reasoning that led to the creation of the exhibit, the ideas that inspired the assemblages on display. Besides a number of quite familiar themes in the world of museology – periodisation, geography, iconography, material, manufacture and function – the display also worked with language and text, something less common in archaeological exhibits. Scott Paris stated in his edited volume on the exhibit that the object is 'the starting point not the ending of a visitor's museum experience,'³¹ and in this case it is true in more ways than just the object encouraging reflection. In the exhibit any one object opened a nexus to a whole range of sources and methodologies, specifically engaging literature. The collection itself is designated as the Classics and Archaeology Collection, and the exhibit truly did that name

25 'The Ian Potter Museum of Art – The University of Melbourne,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au>.

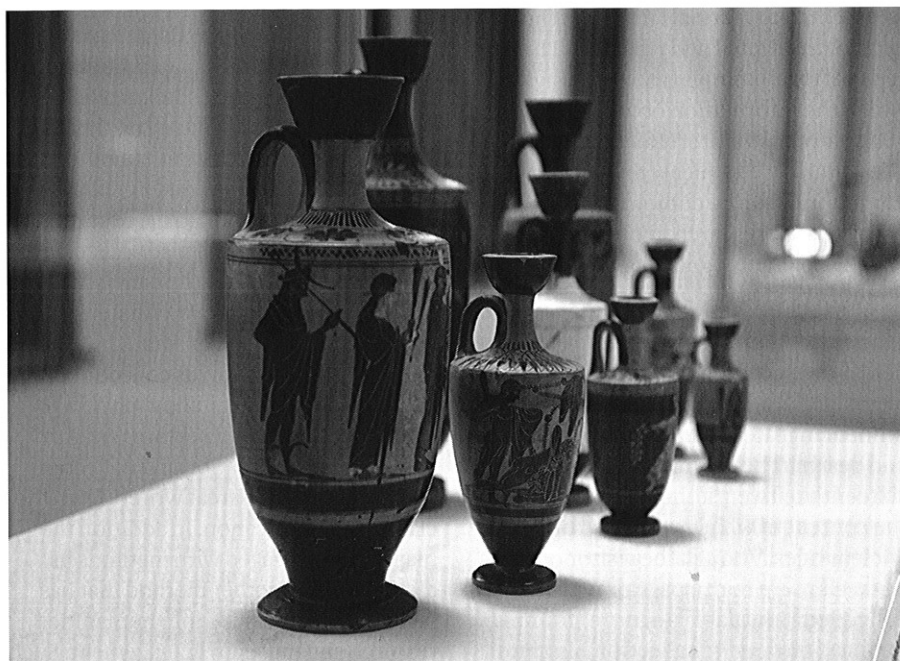
26 'About Us,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/the-potter/about-us/>.

27 Joanne Cleaver, *Doing Children's Museums: A Guide to 265 Hands-On Museums* (Charlotte, VT: Williamson Publishing, 1992).

28 Tim Caulton, *Hands-On Exhibitions: Managing Interactive Museums and Science Centres* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

29 Andrew Jamieson, 'Review of "Storage Wars? Solving the Archaeological Curation Crisis?" by Morag M. Kersel,' *JEMAHS* (forthcoming).

30 Robert Main and Kirsten M. Ellenbogen, 'Placing Objects Within Disciplinary Perspectives: Examples from History and Science,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 161.



justice. Based around four of the greatest literary texts to be transmitted to us from the ancient world, the exhibit strongly engaged with text-based methods in its conception and its interpretation. As Jamieson states in the blurb for the exhibit, 'the objects inhabit a realm created and reinforced by the unfolding narratives represented in the literature.'³² It is not just the literature that serves as a background for the objects, as is suggested by the snippets of text behind each subdivision, but the objects equally contextualise the literature. Both provide different insights into the practicalities of daily life and the prominent world views in the time of their creators – insights that are essential to conducting research about the ancient world.

In the study of the ancient world both sources must be attributed equal authority, and must work together to (re-)construct the past as accurately as possible. In the exhibit this cooperation was evident in the inclusion of text-based information provided in the text panels throughout the exhibit. References were not just made to overlap between figural iconography and scenes of characters from literature, but an attempt was also made to show the value of textual analysis in understanding more practical details of the ancient world, areas typically attributed to archaeological study. The panels on manufacture for example – bronze working, stone carving, vase painting and pottery – combined archaeological and literary sources with text fragments from the four great epics referencing these practices, the materials used and their symbolic meaning and function. These types of panels emphasised the ways in which the information obtained through analysis of material artefacts, methods like seriation, chemical analysis and taphonomy, can be conjoined with that of text-based research, including skills such as epigraphy, grammar analysis and literary criticism.

This mutual support between these two fields spans well beyond the ancient world, as both text and object then influencing later literature, architecture and design. The exhibit included sixteenth to twentieth-century books, the content of which was based on ancient tales. Though the visitor could not read more than a page or two of these collections, the date, language, grammar, publication details, collection history,

format and title provided the viewer with a lot of information. These could then be compared with one another and with contemporary texts and artefacts in the form of papyrus scrolls and inscriptions.

Additional methods were used to open up the debate to a wider public not as well versed in ancient history, archaeology or literature. More accessible in this case were the many allusions within the exhibit to biblical and specifically old-testament narratives that showed parallels to the narratives of other ancient traditions. This provided a lead in for comparative literary studies as well as a point of reference for a large percentage of the public with no background in ancient epic but a basic knowledge of biblical stories. The management of the collection in such a way, with objects being contextualised by more familiar texts, increased the significance of the exhibit not only in reference to the use for which they were created or the project within which they were uncovered but also in reference to wider frameworks of research and knowledge, ones not necessarily located in the fields of archaeology and museology, but also in conventionally more text-based disciplines.³³

Further bridging these two fields of knowledge in a manner accessible to wider audiences was the museum's public program. The program included the necessary tours and floor talks but also less conventional events.³⁴ Popular events included an evening in the museum exploring the food and wine of these historical regions as well as readings from the epics surrounded by the artefacts that informed, inspired and followed them.³⁵ Another great collaboration was the masterclass centred on the collection entitled 'Deciphering ancient texts.'³⁶ This was developed by the literary and ancient language experts Dr Andrew Turner, who also assisted in researching some of the panels for the exhibit, and Dr Sonya Wurster, in conjunction with Potter staff. This class engaged with the papyrus collections as both objects and texts, allowing people to explore the ancient texts in terms of excavation, preservation and collection practices as well as great writers from the classical literary canon. In addition the masterclass engaged with methods in digital media, another method that has had difficulty breaking into humanities research and museum management. Such

- 31 Scott G. Paris, 'Children Learning with Objects in Informal Learning Environments,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 44.
- 32 'Between Artefact and Text,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/exhibitions/exhibit-date/2014-10-25/exhibit-between-artefact-and-text>.
- 33 Ilka Schacht, 'Towards a Thematic Research Framework for Australian Historical Archaeology,' *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 28 (2010): 61.
- 34 'Floor Talk: Between Artefact and Text. Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome in the University of Melbourne Classics and Archaeology Collections,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VQLpqa>.
- 35 'An Evening of Food, Wine, Readings and Reflections,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/public-programs/past-events/fromyear/2014/toyear/2015/prgm-date/2014-11-20/prgm/an-evening-of-food-wine-readings-and-reflections>.

- 36 'Deciphering Ancient Texts from Papyrus to Digital Media,' The Ian Potter Museum of Art, accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/public-programs/past-events/fromyear/2014/toyear/2015/prgm-date/2014-10-12/prgm/deciphering-ancient-texts-from-papyrus-to-digital-media>.
- 37 Zahava D. Doering, 'Strangers, Guests, or Clients? Visitor Experiences in Museums,' *Curator: The Museum Journal* 42, no. 2 (1999): 74.
- 38 Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 4.
- 39 Jamieson, 'Storage Wars.'
- 40 Tony W. Johnson and Ronald F. Reed, *Philosophical Documents in Education* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012), 278.
- 41 Mammad Aidani, 'Exhibition and Inclusion in Public Space – Love and Devotion: From Persia and Beyond,' *Agora* 48, no. 3 (2013): 34.
- 42 Didier Maleuvre, 'A Plea for Silence: Putting Art Back into the Art Museum,' in *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hugh H. Genoways (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 175.
- 43 Gaynor Kavanagh, ed., *Making Histories in Museums* (London: Continuum, 2005).
- 44 Ellen Cochran Hirzy, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington DC: The American Association of Museums, 1992), 2.
- 45 Committee on Education, *Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards* (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2005), 6.
- 46 Main and Ellenbogen, 'Placing Objects Within Disciplinary Perspectives,' 161.

events, rather than being the exceptions within university education, should be emulated within undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Events that focus on transferable skills and cross-discipline integration rather than rote learning and isolationism.

Turning the tides

Rather than viewing institutions of learning such as museums and schools as business establishments accountable to students and 'visitors as clients' with 'needs, expectations and wants that the museum is obligated to understand and meet,'³⁷ or as ivory towers of knowledge disengaged from the wider world, they must be approached as collaborative projects.³⁸ As Jamieson himself states, 'all too often archaeologists, object specialists, registrars, collections managers, heritage representatives, conservators, museum curators and archivists work in isolation.'³⁹ I am not arguing for a cessation of specialised training. Rather I argue for academics and professionals to consider how a broader view on participation and skill-acquisition in education could enrich both disciplines. It would allow for better grounded research with more scope for collaborative large scale projects. Such initiatives have after all become indispensable as funding structures change to the exclusion of much individual enquiry. By constructing a model where knowledge is not passively received by learners, but rather constructed collaboratively, we can create a more inclusive education model, inclusive of people from various disciplinary and professional backgrounds and inclusive of a variety of methodologies.⁴⁰ This active engagement in new methods and with new people allows for a better understanding of how we interpret the context and content rather than just focusing on absorbing facts.

As the case study has shown, museums and galleries provide a public space, 'open to the possibility of encounters.'⁴¹ Its spaces are dynamic not only in the flexibility of display, but also the multivocality allowed in its interpretation. Curators, through constructing their displays in certain ways, are able to provide their audience with tools and sources for the exploration of the collection. It is then in practice, through the act of exploration,

that new skills are learned and deployed to create new interpretations. However, the museum is not the only space that can facilitate such developments. A university or school is equally capable of creating a participation, practice-based course alongside the more traditional lecture-style seminars. By engaging in activities such as reading groups and conservation workshops, students are required to make meaning for themselves, negotiating different knowledges and ways of knowing, and different skill sets. In an edited volume on twenty-first century museum philosophy, Didier Maleuvre argued quite fervently that museum exhibits should not be 'information booths.'⁴² His idea of 'performing' the act of interpretation, not just 'learning' about it, is a significant one both in museums and academia. If academics take on the same critique, suggesting links between various methods and sources, they could create an environment where students are stimulated to use their skills and the networks of knowledge exchange across disciplines and institutions to 'make their own histories' as it were, rather than expecting one to be served up to them.⁴³

Conclusions

The question now becomes: how can we turn the methods deployed in these exhibits into something that can turn the tide of disciplinary territorialism? The American Association of Museums published a report in 1992 in order to help museums 'expand their role as educational institutions without boundaries in order to reach broad audiences.'⁴⁴ This aim does not propose the 'dumbing down of exhibits' but rather the retainment of intellectual standards while 'sharing their resources for the advancement of knowledge and the nourishment of the human spirit.'⁴⁵ This implies that curators and other museum staff are responsible for creating exhibits that allow the visitor to engage with the objects and texts as sources that can be interrogated in order to formulate an understanding of the contexts being referenced.⁴⁶ The viewer, whether academic or not, is invited to ask questions, with the exhibition providing the resources, skills and tools to make informed interpretations and connect the displays with prior knowledge of objects, texts, people and events. It is meant to work with and simultaneously expand the perspectives

'Knowledge is not just a fact or figure at the end of an inquiry, it is the practice and the experience that comes from engaging with sources, developing skills and communicating the process to others.'

held by the viewers, providing them with the space to voice their ideas and exchange them with others. In the Ian Potter Museum of Art this pluralism of interpretation and method is fostered in the encounter between people, objects and text that occurs in the museum space. It must be recognised that in this setting the encounter with the objects and texts of the exhibit does not just change how museum staff see and enact their role in society, but it also changes the meanings of the objects and texts it references, and it changes the viewer.

An exhibition has the potential to alter the way in which the viewer identifies themselves, in relation to their former knowledge and perceptions, their understanding of the past, the perceptions of their peers and their expectations for future learning.⁴⁷ Thus by incorporating text and object into a single framework they transform the way that visitors approach these sources. By suggesting various methodologies to be used in tandem in the interpretation of any given knowledge set, they broaden the scope of inquiry that the visitor is able to make.

Like museums, education institutions, and especially universities, have the potential to 'afford and constrain certain interpretations.'⁴⁸ Rather than focussing on specific texts, dates, names and events that are deemed paramount to history, centres of learning have the choice to focus on a set of skills

that include the different sources and media that a student will encounter, in order to allow students to research and interpret for themselves. Though resources may not be available within a single discipline, by working with specialists across various disciplines, by creating interdisciplinary electives and skills workshops or cross-disciplinary research centres and establishing projects that traverse institutions, you would be allowing students to engage with a variety of themes and methods without being constrained by the faculty specialisations in their own disciplines or institutions. This is especially the case in matters of text and object-based disciplines studying the past where an exploration of different methodologies may actually provide a new and necessary viewpoint for a well-rounded understanding of the period being researched. Focussing on providing students with an insight into the skills available within their area of interest will not only make them better problem-solvers and more employable, but will also give them an appreciation for the skills of other disciplines, meaning that they in turn may seek out more collaborative frameworks for their own projects. After all, knowledge is not just a fact or figure at the end of an inquiry, it is the practice and the experience that comes from engaging with sources, developing skills and communicating the process to others.

47 Aidani, 'Exhibition and Inclusion in Public Space,' 33.

48 James V. Wertsch, 'Epistemological Issues About Objects,' in *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums*, ed. Scott G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 116.