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# *FOSSILI VIVENTI*: PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND COLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS IN LIBERAL ITALY

Abstract. This article offers a first survey investigating the practice of displaying objects belonging to ancient civilisations of the Italian peninsula alongside those of the peoples living in the African colonies – and beyond – during the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. I will analyse the development of the discipline known in Italy as *paletnologia* in close connection with the European context and how it was presented in museums through its association with artefacts belonging to the so–called *present–day primitives*. Finally, the article will conclude by discussing the paradigm shift happening at the time of the Fascist Empire.

Keywords: palethnology, prehistoric archaeology, ethnography, museums, Italian colonialism.

## 1. The rise of Italian *paletnologia* and its national and colonial context

Anthropologist Amiria Henare noted that, in a colonial context, the 18th–century voyages of geographical exploration were transformed in the 19th century, as Europeans began exploring time itself through geological and archaeological research, from specially–commissioned scientific missions to accidental excavations originally intended to build, among other things, railways[1].

In Italy, the birth of the nation and the exploration of colonial space and national soil coincided in time: the beginning of African explorations in the late 1860s and early 1870s[2] overlapped with a remarkable season of excavations and

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[1] See A. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, p. 163.

[2] See M. Carazzi, *La Società geografica italiana …* , A. Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale*, pp. 3–42 & F. Surdich, *Esplorazioni geografiche …* .

research in Italy[1] and two important intellectual developments, namely the paradigmatic shift away from the quest for the precious and curious objects of the Wunderkammern to *everyday objects*, which were assigned scientific and documentary value for the first time, as well as the development of *positivist disciplines* like *paletnologia* (prehistoric archaeology according to the denomination used in Italy), ethnology, and anthropology[2]. The following investigation will focus on the unprecedented importance of material culture – that of ancient Italic populations juxtaposed to that of contemporary non–European populations – on display in 19th– and 20th–century Italian museums and on how the debut and development of colonial expansion redefined, in its various phases, also the display of museums devoted to the prehistory of the Peninsula. In fact, the article explores how the display of exotic materials – particularly from former Italian colonies, but not exclusively – was juxtaposed with that of archaeological materials and how this related to nation–building[3].

The aim of this research is neither to offer an overarching account of the compromising of the discipline known in Italy as *paletnologia* with colonialism, nor to make a history of the discipline, or ethnographical museology. Rather, the research aims to highlight an intertwining of issues and chronologies in the layout of some Italian museums, offering a long–term perspective on the issue. While the history of the emergence of palethnology in Italy has been widely studied, this contribution will primarily attempt to establish a chronology, highlighting how the discipline evolved in relation to colonial expansion during the Liberal era and emphasising the individual trajectories of its main actors and how they took for granted the legitimacy of a comparison between prehistoric and ethnographic objects. While there are numerous studies on the Fascist period and the connection between the idea of race and archaeological evidence, the earlier period has been less studied, although it laid the foundations for the development of the former[4].

Italian national unity in the 19th century was achieved with many difficulties and with lingering problems[5]. The political unity required the construction of a common and cohesive linguistic and cultural horizon for the Italians, but also historical and prehistorical one[6]. The state's ongoing attempts at centralisation – including cultural and scientific centralisation – were the central theme at the time. The peculiarity of the Italian case, we'll see, lies precisely in its composite polycentrism, which, despite the frantic search for unity carried out through the Liberal and Fascist eras, saw considerable fragmentation in the scientific,

[1] See A. Guidi, *Nationalism without a nation …* , R. Peroni, *Preistoria e protostoria* & M. Barbanera, *Storia dell'archeologia classica in Italia*.

[2] See *Scienza e filosofia nella cultura positivistica.*

[3] For a first account on this see L. Laurencich Minelli, *Rapporti fra etnologia e archeologia preistorica …* .

[4] See S. Puccini & M. Squillacciotti, *Per una prima ricostruzione critico–bibliografica …* , p. 74.

[5] See C. Pinto, *La guerra per il Mezzogiorno …* , J. Schneider, *Italy's "Southern Question" …* & M. Petrusewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione*.

[6] See A. Guidi, *Nationalism without a nation …* .

cultural, and museological fields. Francesco Cassata and Claudio Pogliano believe polycentrism and the mosaic nature of the new Italian nation that came into being in the last decades of the 19th century determined its national character and Quintino Sella's project of verticalism[1]. It will be seen how this tension manifested itself as much in the location of the museums as in their contents in relation to the colonies as well as to the ancient Italic populations.

Once unified as a nation–state in 1861 – with the final event of the unification, the capture of Rome, almost ten years later in 1870 – Italy intended to compete with the other European powers in a new age of European colonial expansion. Its interests lay in the Mediterranean and in the Horn of Africa, a region yet to be colonised and with access to the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and newly–built Suez Canal (1869). Italy had arrived late to the so–called *colonial race* and its status as *the least of the Great Powers*, a position of relative weakness in international affairs, meant that it was dependent on the acquiescence of Britain, France, and Germany in its efforts at empire–building[2]. Italy's engagement in Africa began with the purchase of the Assab Bay (Eritrea) on the Red Sea by the Italian navigation company Rubattino (in cooperation with the Italian government chaired by Luigi Menabrea) in 1869 and the first explorations in Tunisia in 1875 and those in Ethiopia (in particular, the expedition to the Ethiopian highlands and the Great Lakes area led by Orazio Antinori, which started in 1876). Officially carried out by the Italian Geographical Society (SGI), such missions were organised and discussed with the Italian government[3]. In 1882 the Assab Bay was taken over by the Italian government, officially becoming Italy's first overseas territory. In 1890 the Eritrean colony was born. At the same time, Italy occupied territory on the south side of the Horn of Africa, forming what would become Italian Somaliland. Notwithstanding, in 1896 the decisive Ethiopian victory in Adwa thwarted the campaign of the Kingdom of Italy to expand its colonial possessions in the Horn of Africa until 1935[4].

Therefore, in the last decades of the 19th century, African artefacts began to flow into the museums of the newly founded Italian state[5]. The possession of artefacts from other cultures, and especially from the colonies, was in itself important because for imperialist nations such objects were physical symbols of their capacity to rule and master beyond their national borders. In general, the presence of exotic artefacts in museums helped to forge an idea of the Italian character as intrinsically dedicated to exploration and travel from the most

[1] See F. Cassata & C. Pogliano, *Introduzione.*

[2] See N. Labanca, *Un nero non può esser bianco* & N. Labanca, *Post–colonial Italy ...* & R. J. Bosworth, *Italy*.

[3] See M. Carazzi, *La Società geografica italiana ...* .

[4] See N. Labanca, *Oltremare.*

[5] See B. Falcucci, *Sources for Colonial Historiography ...* & E. Castelli, *La rappresentazione ...* .

remote times[1]. Colonial discourse and the events concerning the political role of Italy abroad[2] during the last decades of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century intertwined with historical discourses on the *Italic peoples* (Etruscans and other pre–Roman peoples and history), of fundamental importance in the creation of a national, collective imagery.

In December 1860, while Gaeta – the last stronghold of Army of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies – was still under siege[3], Bartolomeo Gastaldi (1818–1879), a geologist and archaeologist from Turin, visited the Museum of Antiquities in Parma to analyse its prehistoric materials[4]. This event represents not only the beginning of the institutional history of prehistory and protohistory in Italy, but also the start of archaeologist Luigi Pigorini's (1842–1925) career[5], who at the time was but a young curator of the Parma museum. Pigorini's official recognition as a leader of Italian pre– and protohistory came with the Fifth International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology. The idea of organising such a conference had been born in September 1865 at the second extraordinary meeting of the Italian Society of Natural Sciences at La Spezia, under the presidency of Bolognese geologist Giovanni Capellini (1833–1922)[6]. In 1871 Rome was proclaimed capital of Italy and the aforementioned congress took place in Bologna. The event was attended by some of the most prominent Italian scientists of the time, including Capellini, Pigorini, Giovanni Omboni (1829–1910), Emilio Cornalia (1824–1882), reverend Antonio Stoppani (1824–1891), and Paolo Lioy (1834–1911)[7]. In Bologna, the society also commissioned a special prehistoric section *in view of the ever–increasing development of the studies which aim to make us know the origin of humanity and the first pages of history*[8].

In addition to the presence of the Italian academy, the congress in Bologna was also attended by the most prominent anthropologists, archaeologists, geol-

[1] See B. Falcucci, *"Rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori" ...* , S. Patriarca, *Italianità* & *L' Italie et l'Antiquité ...* .

[2] Not only in Africa. L. Riall, *Hidden Spaces of Empire ...* , argues that even before the purchase of Assab, and long before acquiring a formal Empire, Italy built a global influence – and imagery – structured by the activities of overseas migrants.

[3] The Siege of Gaeta, where Francis II, king of the Two Sicilies, driven out by Garibaldi's Red Shirts, had taken refuge with his family and his court, was the concluding event of the war between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, part of the unification of Italy. It began on 5 Nov. 1860 and ended on 13 Feb. 1861.

[4] See F. M. Gambari & M. Venturino Gambari, *Bartolomeo Gastaldi (1818–1879)*.

[5] It is worth remembering that it was not until after Gastaldi's visit to Parma that naturalist Pellegrino Strobel (1821–1895), assisted by the young Pigorini, started the first systematic research into the *terramare*. See L. Pigorini, *Pellegrino Strobel e i suoi studi paletnologici*, L. Pigorini, *Le più antiche civiltà dell'Italia* & M. Bernabò Brea & A. Mutti, *La vicenda delle terramare.*

[6] Gaspare Bolla, *regio commissario* of the city, addressed the scientists at the La Spezia congress *to bring together so many isolated efforts and to make them the heritage of the nation, are the goals that you propose. This is the greatest service that can be rendered to humanity and the country* (*Seconda riunione ...* , p. 299).

[7] A front that, nevertheless, was not at all internally cohesive and was constantly debating every aspect of the discipline. See A. Guidi, *Storia della Paletnologia*.

[8] *Seconda riunione ...* , p. 295.

ogists, scientists, and naturalists of Europe. After Neuchâtel, Paris, Norwich, and Copenhagen, Bologna was chosen as the venue for the Congress because of the prestige of its university and the great impetus given to archaeological excavations in the city and the region at the time (especially those about the Middle–Recent Bronze Age culture's *terramare*)[1]. The Congress was characterised both by its high scientific profile and by the strong political and nationalistic influences at work within it. In fact, despite the historical phase of remarkable internationalism of scientists[2], in newly united Italy there was an attempt by politicians to instrumentalise science, including prehistory. The latter was expressed by the Minister of Education Cesare Correnti (1815–1888), who desired to link science and national unity with the intention of using the former to identify[3], in the remotest of epochs, the unifying moments which justified the latter.

The Bolognese congress, chaired by archaeologist and historian Count Giovanni Gozzadini (1810–1887), was held at the University in Palazzo Poggi under the protection of the Royal House, which, in addition to the pride of having achieved Italian unity, also claimed the title of defending and supporting secularism and the freedom of science. The Congress was perceived as a founding event. From this moment on, the intertwining of the nation–building process, the reconstruction of the country's (pre)history scientifically, the debut of colonial expansion, and the legitimisation of the new colonial possessions became, as we will see in the next sections, more and more evident, also marking an attempt to build a common idea of Italianness that could overcome the strong regional identities and particularisms of the peninsula[4].

Since its founding congress, Italian palethnology has been characterised by a strong link with scientific heritage, in particular with museums. In Bologna, an *exhibition of prehistoric anthropology and archaeology* was organised and sponsored by the Ministries of Public Instruction, Agriculture, and Commerce. Visits were organised at the Museum of Geology near the University and to the city's Museum of Antiquities, inaugurated on that occasion[5]. In addition, excursions were arranged to Marzabotto to see the ancient necropolis, Modena to study the surrounding *terramare*, and Ravenna *to visit its monuments*[6]. The following questions were discussed at the Congress:

> *1. L'âge de la Pierre en Italie 2. Les cavernes des bords de la Méditerrannée, en particulier de la Toscane, compareés aux grottes du Midi de la France 3. Les habitations lacustres et les tourbières du Nord de l'Ita-*

[1] See P. Strobel, *Le terremare e le palafitte del parmense*.

[2] See M. Kaeser, *Une science universelle, ou "éminemment nationale"?*

[3] See M. Brignoli, *Cesare Correnti e l'unità d'Italia* & R. Peroni, *Preistoria e protostoria*. Correnti was also among the founders of the Italian Geographical Society (SGI). See D. Natili, *Un programma coloniale*.

[4] See M. Tarantini, *La nascita della paletnologia ...* .

[5] See *Guida del Museo Civico di Bologna* & *Dalla Stanza delle Antichità al Museo Civico.*

[6] *Escursione a Marzabotto*.

> *lie 4. Analogies entre les Terramares et les Kjøkken-møddings 5. Chronologie de la première substitution du bronze par le fer 6. Questions craniologiques relatives aux différentes races qui ont peuplé les diverses parties de l'Italie.*[1]

Although there is no intention to provide a history of the discipline here, it seems interesting to note how, in conjunction with the unification of Italy and in connection with the other European colonial powers, in the early 1870s Italian palethnology had taken its first step in order to be institutionalised, represented in museums across the peninsula and significantly structured as a nation–centred discipline. An affirmation that occurred mainly thanks, as we'll see, to Luigi Pigorini.

## 2. Exhibiting *fossili viventi* and colonial collections at the *colonial debut*

In this section we will see what it meant for museum curators to display prehistoric and ethnographic objects in comparison and whether and how the opening of a colonial space affected – beyond the arrival of new materials – museum displays. Although until 1899, the year the mission to Crete began, the Italian state showed little inclination to carry out archaeological missions abroad, the initiative was nonetheless taken by geographical societies and private citizens and the materials collected ended up in museums on the Peninsula[2].

One of the earliest theorists of so–called *modern primitives* was the archaeologist John Lubbock (1834–1913), who in his 1865 essay *Prehistoric Times* ... compared the life of *modern savages* to that of the primitive men who inhabited archaic Europe. His hypotheses were based on *visual evidences* of the material culture of prehistoric peoples compared to that of *modern savages*[3]. Such a typological approach quickly spread and could be found in the Pitt Rivers Museum of Oxford as well as in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, satiating a widespread interest in so–called *living fossils*. In these museums, the *other* in the past (i.e. European) was juxtaposed with the *other* (i.e. non–European) who lived in an immutable present, a historical dimension different from that of Europe[4]. At the same time, however, contact with the cultures of their imperial dominators – technologically more advanced, but also morally superior – threatened to put an end to the *eternal habits* of the *primitive*

[1] *Congrès International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistoriques*, p. 9. French was the only official language of the Congress, and the proceedings were published in French as well.

[2] Italian archaeological activity in the colonies, however, was mainly concentrated in Libya as well as in the Dodecanese islands. In the Horn of Africa, archaeological activity was significantly lower and concentrated in Adulis (Roberto Paribeni) and Axum (Salvatore Puglisi). See M. Petricioli, *Archeologia e Mare Nostrum*.

[3] J. Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times* ... . Lubbock's work was translated into Italian in 1875 by Michele Lessona (1823–1894), professor of zoology and director of the Zoological Museum of Turin. See J. Lubbock, *I tempi preistorici* ... . The Italian version also included a chapter entitled *Intorno all'uomo preistorico in Italia* by geologist Arturo Issel (1842–1922).

[4] See A. Cardarelli & I. Pulini, *Il metodo comparativo* ... , J. Pickstone, *Museological Science?* & W. R. Chapman, *Arranging Ethnology* ... .

populations, considered to be *eterni fanciulli*, as Sergio Landucci highlights[1], erasing their customs and material culture. Hence the pressing need to preserve their cultures in museums. Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), curator of the Pitt–Rivers collection, wrote extensively about the need to musealise the material culture of contemporary *primitives* and *prehistorian men*:

> [...] *by comparing the various stages of civilisation among races known to history, with the aid of archaeological inference from the remains of the pre–historic tribes, it seems possible to judge in a rough way of an early general condition of man, which from our point of view is to be regarded as a primitive condition, whatever yet earlier state may in reality have lain behind it. This hypothetical primitive condition corresponds in a considerable degree to that of the modern savage tribes, who in spite of their difference and distance, have in common certain elements of civilisation, which seem remains of an early state of the human race at large.*[2]

Such comparisons between *prehistoric* and present–day populations were based on the presumed existence of universal stages of evolution[3], and allowed archaeologists to *collapse* space and time by bringing together the artefacts of geographically and temporally distant peoples[4]. Therefore, the study of living peoples still living in *primitive conditions* could shed light on those who had inhabited Europe thousands of years earlier on which very few sources were available. Although the Italian *etnografia comparata*[5] was not linked just to colonial geographies and chronologies (e.g. the journey of Enrico Giglioli in Australia and his visual comparative method, through which he sought to place Aboriginal people within an evolutionary racial taxonomy)[6], still it drew from them important resources and materials. It is from this assumption that I'll start my survey and analysis of the exhibitions of colonial and palethnological objects displayed alongside one another in Italian museums. This is an aspect not yet investigated by historiography, but one of particular importance to the Italian nation and building of the Italian Empire in Africa as well as for the history of the discipline of palethnography itself. Such premises about the so–called primitive state to which some populations were allegedly stuck, in fact,

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[1] See S. Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, pp. 199–200, on the idea of the eternal childhood of the *savages* closely linked to their *fetishism*.

[2] E. B. Tylor, *Primitive culture ...* , p. 21.

[3] See N. Coye, *La préhistoire en parole et en acte*, pp. 106–108. On the evolution of this idea, see G. W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951*.

[4] See A. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, p. 215.

[5] L. Pigorini, *Le abitazioni lacustri*, p. 89.

[6] See J. Lydon, *Veritable Apollos*.

will form the basis for subsequent theories of race and the fascist racial legislation in the colonies[1].

A fitting example of how the Lubbock's and Tylor's studies were declined in Italy is that of Giuseppe Bellucci (1844–1921), a precursor of the participation of archaeologists in a (proto–)colonial mission. Bellucci was in Tunisia with the Italian Geographical Society in 1875, when Tunisia was at the centre of the aims of Italian colonialist circles. Years later Bellucci wrote about Eritrean prehistory (1890) and Libyan ethnology (1915), comparing them with Italian prehistory[2]. In particular, Bellucci believed that there was a substantial similarity between the amulets (attributed by him to *an inferior man's mentality*[3]) used by contemporary North–African populations and those in use by ancient Italic peoples[4]. Bellucci, in discussing the use of iron in ancient European amulets as much as in contemporary North African ones, explicitly referred to the theories of Tylor, whose book *La civilisation primitive* (1878) he quoted, adapting it to the Italian colonial context[5]. The coexistence of ethnographic and palethnographic objects in the peninsula's museums is precisely linked to this cultural landscape, both European and Italian, and deeply connected to the country's late debut as a colonial power in Africa. How relevant Lubbock's theories were in Italy, in the peculiar intersection between the development of the discipline of palethnography, the beginning of colonial expansion, and the consolidation of national unity, is evidenced by the museums that we will consider in this section[6].

We will begin our analysis with the collection conceived and organised by Gaetano Chierici (1819–1886), clergyman, patriot, and one of the fathers of *paletnologia*[7]. In his museum in Reggio Emilia, next to the objects from the so–called *terramare*, a room was dedicated to the ethnographic artefacts from Tierra del Fuego and Amazonia collected by members of the Schivazappa family, juxtaposed with ancient Peruvian archaeological remains, collected in

[1] See O. De Napoli, *La prova della razza* & N. MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870–2000*.

[2] See G. Bellucci, *Amuleti ed ornamenti ...* & G. Bellucci, *Parallèles ethnographiquers*. On Bellucci see A. Romani, *L'interesse per l'Africa ...* , M. Petricioli, *Archeologia politica*. On the *colonial* and *scientific* meaning of the Tunisian mission, see A. De Gubernatis, *Lettere sulla Tunisia ...* .

[3] G. Bellucci, *Amuleti ed ornamenti ...* , p. 2.

[4] G. Bellucci, *Amuleti ed ornamenti ...* , cites some ancient Sardinian amulets, comparable according to him to some he recovered in Benghazi. Considerable racial prejudice weighed heavily on Sardinia at the time of Italian unification, linked to the alleged backwardness of its population. For an example of the narrative about Sardinia at the beginning of the new century, see A. Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna*. On the complex phenomenon of internal colonialism, see K. Mattu, *Colonialismo interno in Italia*.

[5] See G. Bellucci, *Amuleti ed ornamenti ...* , p. 8.

[6] The first translator of Tylor into Italian was G. A. Colini, Pigorini's assistant at the Rome museum.

[7] See L. Pigorini, *Gaetano Chierici e la paletnologia italiana*. On Chierici and his work, see A. Guidi, *La figura di Gaetano Chierici ...* . On the bicentenary of Chierici's birth the three volumes of the 100th issue of *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*, which collects the proceedings of the Conference in Reggio Emilia, 19–21 September 2019, were dedicated to him.

1884 by the army veteran Ernesto Mazzei (1843–1905)[1]. The objects collected in Ethiopia by Captain Vincenzo Ferrari (1831–1910) in 1885 were presented in the Museum as a precious testimony, being among the first Ethiopian collections to arrive in Italy. The collection consists of around 30 objects, including shields and daggers, horn vessels, bracelets, footwear, silk fabric, painted coptic canvas depicting the Mary with the Child, and a horse saddle complete with harness, labeled as once *belonging to the Negus*[2]. While clearly celebrating the *exploits* of local explorers and the rich and long history of the city's territory, such town museums also presented the objects of *present–day primitives*, suggesting to visitors their place in the world, different – and superior – to the peoples portrayed in the collections[3].

Geographically and scientifically close to the Museum of Reggio Emilia, the Museum of Modena also adopted the same structure. The Archaeological and Ethnological Museum of Modena was founded in 1871 by naturalist and archaeologist Carlo Boni (1830–1894) to find a home for the prehistoric finds that were emerging from the archaeological excavations in the Modena area (the so–called *terramare*)[4]. Excavations had begun in 1863, conducted by Boni himself and the naturalist Giovanni Canestrini (1835–1900)[5], professor of zoology at the University of Modena, first Italian translator, with Leonardo Salimbeni (1829–1889), of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* ... [6]. Once again, the ethnological collection was set up in order to *complete* the prehistoric collections, with the aim of stimulating comparisons between the peoples who had lived on earth thousands of years before and the *present–day primitives*[7]. In 1886 the collections were moved to the Albergo delle Arti in Piazza Sant'Agostino, which became the Palazzo dei Musei, where they can still be visited today. The archaeological collections were presented in continuity with the ethnographic ones from New Guinea, South America (especially Peru), Africa, and Asia, and remained substantially unchanged in their layout until the 1960s[8]. Of particular interest were the collections of Lamberto Loria (1855–

[1] See L. Riall, *Hidden Spaces of Empire* ... & G. Dioniso & F. Bigoni, *Ernesto Mazzei, un medico italiano in Perù*.

[2] Ferrari was a member – along with Chierici – of the pro–colonial *Society for Africa of Reggio Emilia*. See N. Quilici, *Gaetano Chierici e la Società Reggiana*, A. Fulloni, *II capitano Vincenzo Ferrari* ... & G. Fontanesi, *Un reggiano alla corte del Negus*.

[3] See G. Chierici, *Il Museo di storia patria* ... , R. Macellari, *La Collezione di Paletnologia* ... & A. Bertolini, *Don Gaetano Chierici e il comparativismo etnografico*.

[4] See C. Boni, *Notizia di alcuni oggetti* ... & I. Pulini, *Un Museo per la città*.

[5] Some finds from the Modenese *terramare* collected by Canestrini had been exhibited in Bologna on the occasion of the International Congress of 1871. On the collection, see G. Canestrini, *Sulle terramare del modenese*.

[6] It is worth remembering that the aim of this translation was to disseminate Darwin's work in Italy, but also to provide a correct version of the text for readers who had read the *Origin* in Clémence Royer's poor translation. This testifies once the strong links in human science – and in prehistory – between France and Italy. On the Italian translation of Darwin, the role of Canestrini and the comparison between the various translations in Europe, see B. Falcucci, *The «perfected races» and other mistakes* ... .

[7] See C. Boni, *Enumerazione delle armi* ... .

[8] See A. Cardarelli, *La formazione del Museo Civico* ... .

1913), gathered on two expeditions to New Guinea in the years 1889–1897, the Congolese materials collected by Giacomo Savorgnan di Brazzà (1859–1888), those of Luigi Robecchi–Bricchetti (1855–1926), the first European to cross Somalia from side to side (in 1890), and Ethiopian objects donated by King Umberto I[1].

If in the museums of Reggio Emilia and Modena the palethnographic comparative project is still traceable in today's museums' collections, the case of the Museum of the Etruscan Academy of Cortona is different in this regard. The Cortona Museum presents a rather uneven collection of prehistoric and protohistoric finds from the local area in Tuscany[2]. Few archival sources related to the collections are preserved and it is extremely difficult to determine the phases of its establishment. The Accademia Etrusca di Cortona was founded as a cultural institution of international importance in 1727, but its founders had already been active in archaeological collecting. Thus, as early as 1715 the discovery of a bronze *hoard* in a locality called *Il Sodo*, consisting of five axes and a spearhead of different chronological periods – from Recent Bronze Age to Early Iron Age – was reported and presented to the assembly of the Accademia Etrusca during the *Notti Cortiniane* in 1744. Later the objects from the *Sodo hoard* were mixed with others collected at different times[3]. It seems that around 30 Ethiopian objects found their way, at least for a short period, to the Cortona Museum[4]. Although the current curators have no information about this issue and the objects are now untraceable[5], at the beginning of the 20th century in the Museum of the Academy there were 29 objects from Ethiopia (mostly from the Oromo populations of South Ethiopia), consisting of jewellery, weapons, a shield, and some domestic objects made of horn. The objects were collected under unclear circumstances by Curzio Priami from Cortona, who worked at the *Gazzetta d'Italia* and later directed the *Gazzetta della Domenica* in Florence from 1880 to 1882. He exhibited alongside the Etruscan artefacts, thus emphasising that the focus was not on the object itself about which information had to be gathered but on its comparative function.

More Ethiopian objects were on display in the National Archaeological Museum of Umbria (Perugia), in this case the ethnographic artefacts of Orazio Antinori (1811–1882), Risorgimento patriot, wealthy traveller, expert on Africa, and self–taught naturalist. He collected them in the 1860s and 1870s in

[1] See Letter of the Secretary General of the Royal House Urbano Rattazzi to Carlo Boni, 10 Mar. 1890 (P. R. 1166, Archivio Storico Museo Archeologico Etnografico di Modena (ASMAEM), Musei Civici, Modena), Lettera from Pietro Moscardini to Carlo Boni, 12 Jul. 1889 (P. R. 1122, ASMAEM) & Letter from Luigi Pigorini to Carlo Boni, 3 Apr. 1890 (P. R. 1169, ASMAEM).

[2] Many scholars of the time considered Italy as a key place to grasp the transition from protohistory to history thanks to the presence of the Etruscans, who were chronologically close to the Bronze Age cultures.

[3] See A. Neppi Modona, *La nuova sistemazione del Museo ...* & G. Materazzi, *Il museo dell'Accademia ...* .

[4] See U. Giovannozzi, *Gli oggetti etiopici dell'Accademia ...* .

[5] In the Museum Guide of 1929, Ethiopian objects are not listed. See A. Neppi Modona, *La nuova sistemazione del Museo ...* .

Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia[1]. The collection included shields, cloaks, wedding decoration in leather and beads from the Bogos people from Ethiopia, some vessels, and liturgical objects, accompanied by a catalogue compiled by the explorer himself in 1862. The museum, as its name indicates, is an archaeological museum which contains Hellenistic, Roman, and Etruscan material as well as a prehistoric section. Although it does not appear that any scientific work had been carried out at the time on the comparison of the Ethiopian collection with those already in the museum, it is interesting to note that the juxtaposition of the two types of objects, contemporary ethnographic and archaeological, was indeed presented as plausible without the need for further scientific explanation[2]. Some more African objects collected by the aforementioned archaeologist Giuseppe Bellucci are also kept in the museum; however, the lack of archival documentation on the artefacts as well as the loss of the labels make consultation of African materials difficult and sometimes impossible[3]. Nevertheless, Bellucci's words on the motivations that drove him to his research in Libya, only a few years after the Italian invasion of 1911, are clear:

> [...] *existe une correspondance très étroite entre plusieurs amulettes, employée aujourd'hui en Libye, et d'autres employées anciennement, et quelquefois même actuellement, dans des différentes régions de l'Italie* [...] *l'Italie, occupant de nouveau la Libye, a rencontré sur sa route de populations à civilisation arriérée, correspondant à celle qui vivaient dans la Péninsule aux derniers temps préhistoriques.*[4]

The idea of juxtaposing the objects of ancient and modern *primitives* in museums survived the turn of the 20th century. For example, an idea of setting up an ethnographic museum in Milan was born on June 20, 1899, during a meeting of the *Council of the Patriotic Archaeological Museum*[5]. During a debate between its members on the fate of some natural history and prehistory objects, historian and senator Luca Beltrami (1854–1933), also driven by the Milan Commercial Exploration Society, proposed the formation of a *Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography* in the Castello Sforzesco[6]. At a meeting on May 23, 1900, archaeologist Emilio Seletti (1830–1913) reported on the palethnological material collected by Pompeo Castelfranco (1848–1921), which in his

[1] See R. Rossi, A. Barili & S. Gentili, *L'eredità etnografica di Orazio Antinori*.

[2] The last full exhibition of the material took place in 1983 to celebrate the centenary of Orazio Antinori's death. During the Umbria Jazz festival in summer 2017 stringed instruments from Antinori's collection were displayed alongside a selection of musical instruments from the ancient Greek and Roman periods.

[3] See A. Romani, *L'interesse per l'Africa ...* .

[4] G. Bellucci, *Parallèles ethnograpiquers*, p. 98.

[5] For a discussion of the Milanese museum, see B. Falcucci & A. Antonini, *Tra esplorazioni ...* .

[6] See *Verbale dell'adunanza della Consulta del Museo Patrio di Archeologia* (Archivio della Consulta del Museo Patrio, Milan, file 2471/1).

opinion would fit in well with the African ethnographic collections[1], which among others[2], were to be housed in the Castello Sforzesco: *Consultant Seletti adds that the prehistoric or palethnographic series in this Archaeological Museum would be in its place, as it is also the case of the museums of Como, Parma, Reggio, Bologna and the Chircheriano in Rome.*[3] Even in missionary museums, such as the Ethnographic Museum Missions of the Consolata in Turin, it is possible to find a similar structure to that described. The Museum was established in 1901 by priest Giuseppe Allamano (1851–1926), founder of the *Missioni della Consolata*, who directed his evangelical mission towards the Ethiopian region of Kaffa. In the museum, the archaeology section included artefacts from pre–Columbian cultures, including quimbayas and tumacos, and ancient Egyptian as well as Etruscan, and Greco–Roman artefacts, which were placed side by side with objects collected by missionaries in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya[4].

In 1900 archaeologist Antonio Taramelli (1868–1939), at the time a young inspector at the Regional Office for the Conservation of Monuments, acquired several materials for the Museum of Antiquities in Turin:

> *The Museum received conspicuous gifts, among them: a beautiful pre–Roman bronze sword, found near Palazzolo Vercellese and donated by Mr. Giuseppe Pigino; a beautiful series of weapons and instruments in flint and yellow quartzite, from Egypt and Somalia, donated by the English explorer Seton–Karr; and finally, an important and magnificent collection of stone weapons and ethnographic objects, from various periods, from the upper Congo and in particular from the country of the Niam–Niam and the Mombuttu, a collection formed by engineer Pietro Gariazzo, and generously donated by him to the Museum.*[5]

In the Turin museum materials from living African populations were therefore mixed with objects recovered from Italian *terramare* excavations, once again encouraging a comparison between *ancient civilisations* and *modern primitives*.

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[1] African collections included those of Robecchi Bricchetti and those collected by Giuseppe Vigoni in Ethiopia. Giuseppe, known as Pippo, Vigoni (1846–1914), was an undisputed protagonist of Milanese cultural and economic life at the time. Vigoni, after an adventurous youth spent travelling had, by the 1890s, assumed a key role in Milan: in addition to holding the presidency of the Society of Commercial Exploration in Africa, he was the city's mayor (from 1892–1894 and from 1895–1899) and president of the Council of the Patriotic Archaeological Museum, which in those years was working on the opening of the Civic Museums of Castello Sforzesco. See L. Robecchi–Bricchetti, *Somalia e Benadir* & G. Vigoni, *Viaggi*.

[2] See A. Mochi, *Collezioni antropologiche …* , p. 137: *The ethnographic material of the Civic Museum is provisionally piled up on the shelves of the storeroom, awaiting a forthcoming definitive arrangement; and, in my hasty visit, I was not able to see it in detail. However, I observed that there are very good pieces from Oceania and America; and that South and East Asia and Africa, especially Ethiopia, are also represented*.

[3] In: Archivio della Consulta del Museo Patrio, Milan, file 2492/1.

[4] To put these elements into perspective with the practices and historiography of Catholic missions, see *Collecting Across Cultures …* , M. Forni, *Racconti e immagini d'Africa* & E. Bassani, *African Art …* .

[5] *L'amministrazione delle antichità e delle belle arti in Italia*, p. 224.

## 3. Luigi Pigorini and the quest for a National Museum *of the objects of savage peoples* in Rome

If the proliferation of civic collections in Milan, Perugia, Cortona, Turin, Reggio Emilia[1] and the activity of the *Deputazioni di storia patria*[2] expressed the tension between local and national[3], on the other hand the establishment of Pigorini's National Prehistoric and Ethnographic Museum of Rome at the Collegio Romano[4] in 1875, thanks to the support of Minister of Education Ruggero Bonghi (1826–1895), marked a step towards the centralisation of culture in Rome. It was precisely this museum that became the true beacon for the discipline of palethnology in Italy[5].

In Parma, Pigorini had established a museum whose organisation was developed on the basis of similar institutions across Europe[6]: in particular, the main point of reference was the National Museum in Copenhagen, considered a monument to Danish unity, opened in 1819. Its directors, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788–1865) and his successor Jens Jacob Assmussen Worsaae (1821–1885), organised the first ethnographic section in 1841 alongside a prehistoric section. Objects from ancient Nordic peoples were combined with materials from living Arctic and American peoples to illustrate Denmark's national history[7]. In 1843 the Ethnological Society, inspired by the Danish group, was formed in London by the aforementioned Augustus Pitt Rivers, Edward Tylor, John Lubbock, and others[8]. From a very young age, Pigorini had been a corresponding member of societies and museums in northern Europe, from Berlin to Stockholm and Copenhagen. He then had the opportunity to visit these museums in Northern Europe in person on the occasion of the International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology in 1874, which

[1] On the role of town museums' collections in unified Italy, see S. Troilo, *La patria e la memoria*.

[2] See G. Bonfiglio Dosio, *Uomini, istituzioni e idee ...* , E. Cova, *Negotiating the Past in the Present* & C. Brice, *Antiquité, archéologie et construction nationale en Italie ...* .

[3] Who based, indeed, their local identity on the pre–Roman Italic peoples (like the Etruscans or the Ligures, for example), which were objects of investigation and exhibition in the already mentioned museums. This reassessment of local identities happened, only apparently paradoxically, in the very decades in which the unification of Italy took place and the capital was moved to Rome.

[4] Where the Kircher Museum, a public collection of antiquities and curiosities (the so–called Wunderkammer), founded in 1651 by the Jesuit father Athanasius Kircher, had previously been established. Before the opening of a colonial space, the earliest Italian museums that offered a comparative ethnology perspective relied on collections such as those of the so–called *Museo Kircheriano*. See R. Bonghi, *Istituzione di un Museo preistorico ...* & M. G. Lerario*, Il Museo Pigorini*.

[5] See C. Nobili, *Per una storia degli studi di antropologia museale ...* , E. Mangani, *Il Museo Nazionale Preistorico ...* & M. Biscione, *I musei etnografici come modelli del sapere*.

[6] See C. Marchesetti, *Commemorazione di Luigi Pigorini ...* .

[7] Swedish zoologist and archaeologist Sven Nilsson (1787–1883) published his book in 1838, translated into English in 1868 as *The Primitive Inhabitants of Scandinavia ...* . The book was edited by J. Lubbock, who in the *Editor preface* gave great merit in the advancement of the study of European prehistory to Nilsson and Thomsen.

[8] For an insight into the European cultural environment that inspired Pigorini, see E. Mangani, *Il Museo Nazionale Preistorico ...* , pp. 15–24.

he attended as Italy's representative on behalf of the Minister of Education[1]. Leaving Parma, Pigorini moved to the General Directorate of Museums and Excavations of Antiquities in Rome and in 1875, together with the naturalist Pellegrino Strobel and Gaetano Chierici, he established the journal *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*[2]. In 1876 he became director of the Museum in Rome, and in 1877 he took up the first chair of palethnology in Italy, at the University of Rome[3].

In a letter to Bonghi in 1875, in which Pigorini asked for a museum to be established, he recommanded *not to neglect what the living savages and barbarians produce, in order to be able to go back, from what is taking place before our eyes today, to what we cannot have seen; to find in the present the image of the past*[4]. At the time, it must have seemed, as Ugo Antonielli, director of the museum after Pigorini, noted:

> *almost foolish to undertake the task of collecting foreign and ethnographic materials, given Italy's position in terms of colonial domains. But our country also had its daring travellers and explorers; objects from distant lands are preserved in some Italian cities; it was possible to obtain aid from some charitable organisation, such as the Geographical Society, and so on.*[5]

It is therefore to be found, in spite of a situation regarding Italian colonial expansion that was certainly not as prosperous as hoped for, the idea that there were other resources and possibilities available to obtain objects from *barbarian populations* anyway: the initiative of private individuals, geographical societies, museums that already conserved such objects scattered across Italy.

In Rome Pigorini, inspired once again by the Scandinavian museums, began to work on the idea of a *national prehistory*, of which, we shall see, the comparison with *savage peoples* were a fundamental element. As a reference of the pervasiveness of the ideas promoted by Pigorini, there is an interesting letter from Senator Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823–1896, member of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Fine Arts at the Ministry of Education) that clearly states both the need of a national museum and the importance of a comparative approach:

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[1] See E. Bassani, *Origini del Museo ...* & R. Peroni, *Preistoria e protostoria*, pp. 32–33.

[2] See A. Pace, *Ippolito Cafici e il trio ...* .

[3] The Laboratories of Archaeology at the University of Padua hold Luigi Pigorini's private archive, which includes the seven photographic albums of the excavations carried out by Pigorini between 1888 and 1896 in the large *terramara* of Castellazzo di Fontanellato, close to Parma. The albums were found by chance in 1997 and have been studied by Giovanni Leonardi. The archive kept in Padua (where Pigorini spent the last two years of his life), donated by his family a few years after his death and consisting of 1483 letters and about 3000 sheets of notes on scientific and didactic subjects, sketches, drawings and photographs of materials, extracts and newspaper cuttings, can be considered the largest of the archives Pigorini put together during his very long career and, in fact, the only one that includes his private correspondence. The analysis of this material is beyond the scope of this work, however it seems useful to point out its presence to scholars wishing to explore the issue in greater depth.

[4] The letter is quoted in U. Antonielli, *R. Museo Preistorico–Etnografico ...* , p. 7.

[5] In: U. Antonielli, *R. Museo Preistorico–Etnografico ...* , p. 7.

> *It is of little or no use to possess many copies of the industrial products of those peoples, scattered over a hundred different cities, without a complete series appearing in any of them, with scholars being obliged, as now, to run from one end of the country to the other, when they need to examine what a given savage people can produce and compare it with the works of others. Until everyone in Italy is convinced of this, we shall have, as we have in fact, a great deal of ethnographic material, but as a mere object of curiosity, preserved in cabinets with which it neither has nor can have any relationship whatsoever, and regarded by everyone as a heritage of no value.*[1]

The aim of the new museum in Rome was therefore both scientific and political. It was necessary to find a synthesis of regional identities and to present a unified Italian identity, as Fiorelli insisted that even a museum *of the objects of savage peoples* had to advance a centralising and national project:

> *To remedy this misfortune, this Ministry founded an Ethnographic Museum in Rome, and several institutes have already come to the aid of the Ministry by sending duplicates of the objects of savage peoples, so that in the Museum itself several of the peoples of America and Oceania are now represented. Only one class remains absolutely empty, and that is the one of weapons and utensils of the families living in the heart of Africa, while a very rich series of their objects is preserved in an attic of the Museo Civico Correr of your city.*[2]

Pigorini himself called many times for an end to the fragmentation of Italian museums: *Only with everyone's work, will we be able to put together the complete history of our science in what concerns Italy.*[3] As Alessandro Guidi notes: *It is in this period that the scholar from Modena perfects his strategy, gradually marginalising the great majority of informants and local enthusiasts who constituted the heart of the discipline during its pioneering period, and thus creates a group of faithful scholars*.[4]

With his new museum in Rome, Pigorini showed a clear desire to compare the ancient peoples of the peninsula with modern *barbarians*, presented as *living fossils* who were useful for understanding the Italian past and the function

[1] Letter from Giuseppe Fiorelli to Venice's Mayor, 2 November 1875 (f. 194–1–35, b. 320, D. G. AABBAA, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome).

[2] Letter from Giuseppe Fiorelli to Venice's Mayor, 2 November 1875 (f. 194–1–35, b. 320, D. G. AABBAA, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome). Pigorini actually managed to obtain some African objects from the Museo Correr in Venice.

[3] L. Pigorini, *Note per la Storia della Paletnologia Italiana*, p. 6.

[4] A. Guidi, *Italian Prehistoric Archaeology in the International Context*, p. 114.

of prehistoric objects and the daily life of Italian ancestors. Since Pigorini believed that *as in individuals, so in nations the early stages of one's life are the same as those of others*[1], it was necessary to investigate the objects *manufactured by the savage and barbarian peoples living to find in the present the image of the past*[2] and *the bizarre and superstitious customs of modern savages*[3], which so closely resembled those of prehistoric men.

Concerning the collections of the newly–founded museum in Rome, the objects coming from the Italian colonies were those collected by Giovanni Miani (1810–1872) during his travels in search of the source of the Nile River in 1859–1872 and donated by the Museum of Venice and the Italian Geographical Society[4]. Such objects were added to the Somali objects of the consul in Aden, Giuseppe Bienenfeld–Roph, for a total of 18 pieces, including iron spears, wooden headrests, wooden spoons, a bow, and two shields[5]. In the meantime, the Ministry of Education endeavoured to provide the Museum with the collections collected in Sudan by don Giovanni Beltrame[6]. In 1883 the Ministry of Education acquired more than 600 objects from the collection collected by explorer Romolo Gessi (1831–1881) during his second stay in Africa (1878–1881) for Pigorini's museum[7]. The financial commitment for the purchase of the Gessi collection was so great that Pigorini had to refuse an offer from Mr Deschamps of Lyon, who offered him a *Somali collection*, candidly admitting that he had run out of funds for the current and subsequent years[8]. In 1885 Pigorini went back to enriching his museum, buying 45 objects (cat. no. 30751–30785) from Gustavo Frasca for 350 lire. The artefacts included spears, shields, knives, bows, and some furnishings that Frasca had collected on the Somali coast in January of that year[9].

The ethnographic collection of Pigorini's museum was so rich that in 1887 he wrote to Boni in Modena: *Your museum is very rich in terramare objects, and mine is for this part very poor. On the other hand, the museum I direct has*

[1] L. Pigorini, *Le abitazioni lacustri*, p. 98.

[2] Letter from Luigi Pigorini to Ruggero Bonghi (b. 182, D. G. AABBAA, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, ACS). In his letter, one reads also: *We still have today, in the infinite variety of human families scattered over the globe, portrays of the life, the customs and the arts of prehistoric peoples of all ages. That's because their customs and the degree of their material and moral development correspond to the manner of life and the degree of development of the primitive peoples. A collection of what pertains to savages and living barbarians would offer us a way to follow the system used by geologists even in prehistoric archaeology.*

[3] After: G. Chierici, *Capanne–sepolcri dell'età della pietra*, p. 110.

[4] See *Oggetti africani lasciati da Giovanni Miani di proprietà della Società Geografica Italiana* (fasc. 467, Archivio Storico del Museo nazionale preistorico ed etnografico Luigi Pigorini (ASMNPE), Roma).

[5] See *Verbale di deposito di materiali etnografici della Società Geografica Italiana presso il Museo Preistorico di Roma*, 1 maggio 1876 (fasc. 196–3–8, busta 322, D. G. AABBAA, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, ACS).

[6] See E. Mangani, *Il Museo Nazionale Preistorico ...* , p. 43.

[7] See G. A. Collini, *Cronache del Museo Preistorico Etnografico*.

[8] Letter from Luigi Pigorini to Mr. Deschamps, 1 September 1883 (f. 381, ASMNPE).

[9] See *Nota degli oggetti componenti la collezione etnografica somala di Gustavo Frasca*, 14 April 1885 (fasc. 188, ASMNPE).

*become a giant with regard to the ethnographic collections of Africa, Oceania and South America.* [...] *Let us benefit each other and common studies will gain.*[1] The two began exchanging lists of objects, both ethnographical and prehistorical. They were willing to sell or exchange with one another. Pigorini's acquisitions of materials from the Horn of Africa continued throughout the 1890s to such an extent that it is not possible to mention all of them here, except in summary form: gifts from the Italian Geographical Society continued[2], as did those from the army, the Royal House, private donors, and exchanges with other European and Italian museums[3].

Pigorini's work carried on into the new century. In June 1903, he gave a lecture at the Regia Academia dei Lincei on the migration of people in prehistoric and pre–Roman Italy. On that occasion he discussed some of the first populations travelling across Italy: he then stated that the origin of some of them was to be found in Africa. This *savage* population that moved across Italy during the Palaeolithic, he speculated, could be compared to contemporary Native Australians or the natives of Tasmania[4]. The most prominent example of this *wild* civilisation from Africa, according to Pigorini, could be found in the Verona area. In a very convenient way for the construction of a national identity, however, Pigorini stressed that a fusion between all Italian populations had taken place later on, resulting in the birth of a purely *Italian* population.

It is not my intention to discuss here the contraposition between Pigorini's theories and the Mediterranean theories that saw anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi (1841–1936) as their forefather[5]. Instead, I'd like to stress how the ongoing scientific debate was still closely mirrored in Pigorini's museum layout at the beginning of the new century and its juxtaposition of ethnographic objects and palethnographic finds. The ethnographic collections from the colonies were in fact enriched in 1907 by the donations of Gherardo Pantano (1868–1937), *hero* of the battle of Adwa, and Roberto Paribeni (1876–1956), who was operating at the archaeological site of Adulis in Eritrea, who sent some boxes of Eritrean artefacts to the Museum at Pigorini's express request and through the intercession of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[6]. A further donation came from the royal house of Savoy in 1911, part of which is still displayed in today's museum: two crowns in gold filigree and stones (cat. no. 83021 and no. 86093), a necklace in silk and gold filigree (cat. no. 86101), the complete clothing of the king–warrior with crown, cloak, a dress made of lion skin and black velvet (cat. no. 83007,

[1] Letter from Luigi Pigorini to Carlo Boni, 17 February 1887 (P. R. 964, ASMAEM).

[2] See *Prima relazione di Luigi Pigorini al Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione.*

[3] One aspect on which Pigorini concentrated his efforts was the collection of weapons of the African peoples to be compared with those of the ancient Italic populations. See *Lo splendore del guerriero ...* .

[4] See L. Pigorini, *Le più antiche civiltà dell'Italia*, p. 62. The idea was already present in: L. Pigorini, *Primo anno del corso di paletnologia ...* .

[5] See M. Tarantini, *Tra teoria pigoriniana e mediterraneismo*.

[6] See Correspondence *Acquisto di Paribeni Roberto per conto del Museo Presistorico Etnografico*, 1906–1907 (f. 343, ASMNPE).

83009, 86083)[1]. In the early 1920s, the museum, although in crisis due to a lack of space, continued to expand with donations from both the State and private individuals, such as that of Colonel Gaetano Ricciardi, a soldier in Eritrea, consisting of objects from Congolese, Somali (spears and shields), and Eritrean (weapons, shields, sandals, silver jewellery, two Coptic paintings, one of which is on display with cat. no. 86823) sources, and an Arab rifle from Libya[2].

We will see in the last section of this paper how even in the 1920s the debate on the populations of prehistoric Italy, carried on also through museums, became more and more influenced by nationalism and colonial aspirations, in particular by Fascist colonialism.

## 4. The rise of Fascism and Italy's *modern primitives* in the colonies

During Pigorini's funeral (1925), the Rector Luigi Lucatello (1863–1926) stated the following about the importance of the Museum, now named after its founder: *the Prehistoric–Ethnographic Museum, an immense collection of material, where the artefacts of modern savages stand in contrast to the miserable leftovers of the artefacts of primitive man, was conceived, founded, developed and brought to its present flourishing by Pigorini*[3]. Such a legacy survived the museum's founder, projecting into the Fascist and imperial era. Analysing the post–Pigorini era and how Pigorini's theories were debated after his death is beyond the scope of this paper and has been explored by other scholars[4]. What is interesting to emphasise in this concluding part of the work is the extent to which the terminology related to the *primitive* peoples colonised found full use during the fascist period: the *primitive* artefacts of the *savages* were displayed to justify their subjugation and invasion of their territories[5].

The Fascist government that came to power with Benito Mussolini in 1922 sought to increase the size of the Italian colonial possessions and to satisfy the claims of Italian irredentists. The fascist project was radically linked to the idea of the nation's ancient past and the people who had inhabited it, the ancient Romans above all but not only[6]. During the 1920s the so–called *pacification* of Libya progressed and fascists schemed for further expansion across the continent. The presence of Roman ruins in Libya was indicated in support of the presumed ancient Roman – and therefore imperial – origins of the Italians[7]. The Italian colonizers implicitly and explicitly compared themselves to their

[1] See *Un dono del Re al Museo del Collegio Romano*.

[2] See Letter from Luigi Pigorini to the State Secretary for Antiquities and Fine Arts, 4 July 1922 (b. 213, D. G. AABBAA, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, ACS).

[3] *Un maestro di scienza e di italianità*, p. 24.

[4] See M. Tarantini, *Appunti sui rapporti ...* , D. Manacorda & R. Tamassia, *Il piccone del regime*, D. Manacorda, *Per un'indagine sull'archeologia italiana ...* & G. Dore, *Antropologia e colonialismo italiano*.

[5] See R. Boccassino, *Il Museo etnografico*, p. 5.

[6] See *Les Étrusques au temps du fascisme et du nazisme* & M. Tarantini, *Archeologia e scienze naturali in Italia*, A. Tarquini, *Il mito di Roma ...* , N. Zapponi, *I miti e le ideologie*, P. Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo* & *Cultura della razza e cultura letteraria ...* .

[7] As we have seen Bellucci too did, right after Italy's conquest of Libya. See M. Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno*.

ancient Roman ancestors. North Africa was considered a *continuation of the past* and was placed in a position of alterity and yet proximity to Europe, *hence the topicality of the comparison with classical Antiquity, which itself was considered close (we come from it) and far away (we are modern)*[1]. During the 1930s, and especially with the invasion of Ethiopia, the discourse on the inferiority of the subjugated peoples became more violent, and the use of the word *primitive* and *fossil*[2] to describe them became more and more recurrent.

In 1930s museums, the artefacts of colonial subjects continued to be portrayed as present–day *primitives* and *savages*. In the guide of the Colonial Museum of Rome, established in 1923, the objects were described as *poveri* and *primitivi*[3]. Pippo Vigoni's[4] Ethiopian objects in the Museum of the Castello Sforzesco of Milan, testifying *le usanze selvagge*, were described as *tools that have remained in their primitive state to this day*[5]. The War Museum of Rovereto requested *primitive weapons, the more primitive the better*[6] from the Horn of Africa, while the Museum of the Carabinieri in Rome displayed *a primitive and naive composition by an unknown indigenous painter*[7]. With the comparative aspect disappearing, only the supposed backwardness of African populations remained on display.

Concerning museums founded and developed during Fascism, one striking case is that of the wealthy patron Maria Fioroni (1887–1970) from Legnago, in the province of Verona. Fioroni conducted archaeological research in the Veronese plain with excavations and recoveries of pre– and protohistoric objects, particularly in the area of the Valli Grandi Veronesi. She was responsible for the recovery of the first swords from the Recent Bronze Age votive area of Corte Lazise di Villa Bartolomea, the funding and excavation of the Ancient Bronze Age *palafitta* of Morandine di Cerea, and some surroundings in the area of the *terramaricolo* village of Fabbrica dei Soci. It is not by chance that in the late 1930s, Fioroni added collections from Italian East Africa – a small *museo coloniale* – to her multifaced museum[8].

Nonetheless, the question of the origins of Italian civilisation continued to fascinate Fascist scholars, like Ugo Rellini (1870–1943), pupil of Pigorini and later professor of palethnology at La Sapienza University in Rome, who in 1942 created the Museum of Origins and Tradition. However, Rellini, departing from his master's teachings, believed that the ancient peoples that followed one

[1] G. Boëtsch, *Science, Scientists, and the Colonies (1870–1914)*, p. 99.

[2] C. Pogliano, *Divisi, in nome della scienza*.

[3] G. Guida, *Il Museo dell'Impero d'Italia*, p. 14.

[4] On Pippo Vigoni see above, p. 136, n. 1.

[5] A. Pasetti, *La raccolta Vigoni al Castello ...* , p. 236.

[6] *Caro Perini*, Letter in an extremely confidential tone perhaps to Cesare Perini, former correspondent of the Museum in 1920, asking him to send indigenous weapons from his residence in Mekelle, 12 July 1937 (fasc. *Sala Coloniale*, Archivio Storico del Museo della Guerra di Rovereto).

[7] *Museo Storico dell'Arma dei Carabinieri*, p. 15.

[8] See B. Falcucci, *Bringing the Empire to the provinces ...* .

another in the Italian peninsula were exclusively of Mediterranean origin. Thus, he in fact ended up in conflict with the Aryan theories that emerged in the late 1930s[1]. Something of Pigorini's theories continued to reverberate even in republican Italy: Claudia Massari (1905–1971), curator of the Florentine Museum of Anthropology, titled her 1959 textbook *Corso di etnologia: etnologia antica, gruppi umani attuali, etnologia dei primitivi attuali, classificazione delle culture*[2].

In conclusion, as Radmilli thoughtfully pointed out, although continuing to feed on the myth of *primitive peoples*[3], Fascist colonialism and its scientists seemed to stop investigating the relationship between Italian antiquity and colonial ethnology with the same depth as the scientists of the previous generation. Taking the backwardness of colonial subject populations for granted, the scientists of the post–war generation stopped pursuing Pigorini's demands and in fact the new museum displays of the Fascist era seemed to ignore the issue altogether, reverting to a fragmentation of disciplines. Rather, an attempt was made to use Roman archaeology – and archaeology museums[4] – especially in the Libyan colony, to justify the imperial rhetoric of *the return of Rome*, embodied in the new fascist Italy, to its *ancient provinces*[5]. The excavations therefore focused on the Roman period, in a colonial and imperial key and – in continuity with the previous period, at least in this sense – of national legitimisation.

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[1] See U. Rellini, *Le origini della civiltà italica*. Mediterraneanism was the prevailing theory among the generation of archaeologists and curators that emerged after Pigorini. See M. Tarantini, *Tra teoria pigoriniana e mediterraneismo*.

[2] See C. Massari, *Corso di etnologia ...* .

[3] See A. M. Radmilli, *L'insegnamento della paletnologia in Italia 1877–1943*.

[4] See B. Falcucci, *'The issue of the Mediterranean ...* .

[5] See S. Troilo, *Pietre d'oltremare*.

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