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Viv Golding and Wayne Modest (eds.), 'Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration'. London. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc (Bloomsbury Academic), 2013.Pp. xv, 290. £19.99. ISBN 9780857851314 (Pbk)

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Is it possible to successfully bridge the gap between museums and diverse communities? The reviewed publication discusses how this difficult task could be accomplished. Written in academic style, yet vivid and captivating, this collective work engages the reader with its manifold content: seventeen chapters, written by distinguished authors, present notable case-studies from museums around the world. These give a profound view of how curators can collaborate with difficult-to-reach communities and vice versa. Even though all contributions are thought-provoking and beam with character and originality, because of space restrictions I have chosen to refer to specific chapters.

The order of the chapters is meaningful and coherent. For a start, Golding's paper on 'Collaborative Museums' (Chapter 1) has an introductory character. It is placed first because it defines culture, museums, and the role of curators, but most importantly because it reflects the wide spectrum of diversity within the community, from age and upbringing, to race, cultural identity, and even personal views. In fact, so crucial is this chapter for the comprehension of the topics covered in this book, that the reader

(particularly the less-experienced) should read it before any other contribution. After all, some of the key questions debated in this book are set in Chapter 1. Lively examples are also used to facilitate discussion, the objective of which is to set the cornerstone for the study of how constructive dialogue between curators and communities can be achieved; an issue thoroughly debated in the following chapters of the book.

For instance, in Chapter 6, Modest insightfully presents the challenges of engaging teenagers as 'co-curators' at the Horniman Museum, London, from 2010 to 2012. Teenagers worked together with museum curators in the set-up of museum exhibitions. Modest describes how the youngsters operated in these projects, from the moment they were selected, to their final contribution in the opening of the exhibitions. As he points out, the teenagers gained significantly from their engagement in these projects, enhancing their experience, knowledge and skills. Yet, at the same time, museums also benefit from such projects, as they are reformed and redeveloped through their interaction with heterogeneous communities.

A slightly different case-study of collaboration with the public is provided by Exell in Chapter 8. Her powerful contribution debates the level of authority communities should be offered when acting as decision-makers for museums. Firstly, Exell descriptively presents a very realistic image of modern Egyptology in the United Kingdom and abroad. Dominated by 'western stereotypes' and almost isolated from its African context, nowadays the Ancient Egyptian past is widely popularised by the media in the form of 'Egyptomania'. Moreover, even within academia, often Ancient Egyptian language 'outshines' the study of Egyptian archaeology; not to mention the polyphony of academic views concerning crucial issues in Egyptology. Therefore, when, in 2008, academics and the general public were consulted about how Manchester Museum should redevelop its Ancient Egypt galleries, museum staff were in the midst of a tempest of opposing views. As Exell pointed out, 'Whose Egypt should we display?' (page 134): the view of one academic cycle or another? Or a non-specialist interpretation? In the end, the new Ancient Egypt galleries

presented Ancient Egypt within an African cultural setting, although the work of Exell indicates that there are generally many more lessons to learn from similar experiences.

Still, if collaboration with teenagers (Chapter 6) and opinionated stakeholders (Chapter 8) is considered challenging, a museum co-operation with socially marginalised minorities, the culture of which is almost 'extinguished', should be seen as extraordinary. Brekke's contribution (Chapter 11), although somehow repetitive, stands out because of her phenomenal case-study. After centuries of discrimination by local society and government, the Norwegian Romani (*Tater*) were invited in the late 1990s to actively participate in the establishment of Glomdal Museum and the opening of a permanent exhibition, which was exclusively dedicated to their non-sedentary culture. The exhibition eventually opened in 2006, and the process of collaboration with the *Tater* has been allowed to continue.

Possibly one of the most pioneering works in the book is Chapter 12. There, Golding examines an unusual and fascinating topic which is somehow neglected in the field. Using a set of national and international case-studies (the work of Native American artist James Luna, graffiti artist 'Banksy', etc.), she explores how 'creolisation' and humorous notions in artistic representations and museum displays can make exhibitions more welcoming to difficult-to-please audiences, particularly young people and minorities. First, the definition of humour is not at all straightforward and receives an entirely personal dimension. 'Creolisation' (a term many readers may be unaware of) is seen in this chapter as the mixing and regeneration of culture in a comical way that is productively emphasised by irony in the museum context. These two values, as Golding indicates, are great crowd-pleasers; and so is her paper, with the relevant graphic descriptions of hilarious works of art, which is such a pleasure to read.

In another case-study (Chapter 14) also dealing with minorities, Fouseki and Smith explore some of the issues that arose when African-Caribbean communities were

consulted by museums as part of the 2007 bicentenary of Britain's abolition of the slave trade. Fouseki and Smith report that during the project debates and negotiations with these communities were not straightforward, but the dialogue was kept alive. In fact, the importance of persistent bidirectional museum-community collaboration is brilliantly highlighted by the authors. Additionally, this work is important because it raises the issue of 'intangible heritage': i.e. how the absence of material culture (as an example, the lack of objects in enslaved cultures) can be represented in museums. The latter makes better sense when Chapter 14 is read together with the final pages in the afterword (Chapter 17), which also deals with the subject. Chapter 17 features a very didactic dialogue between the editors and Susan Pearce (Museum Studies, University of Leicester). This dialogue nicely summarises some of the major points raised previously, while it adds the 'finishing touches' to the conclusions of the book.

The final impression is that the book is aimed at professionals, students, and anyone who is interested in cultural heritage, but a background, or at least a genuine interest in museums and cultural studies, is required. In places, the content appears a bit 'heavy' for the non-expert, but the endnotes and the use of examples in the main text elucidate any obscure discussions. Moreover, the images, presented beautifully in colour, enhance the chapters and make the book a page-turner, even for the amateur reader. Both editors and authors have met their objective to demonstrate the reasons why culturally diverse and hard-to-reach communities matter to museums, and at the same time why museums matter to such communities. All case-studies reflect how, in the 21st century, museums are moving beyond the visualisation of community and culture as something fixed and concrete. But will curators, collections, and communities ever be 'on the same page'? Opinions are so diverse and unpredictable, and cultures and communities are so heterogeneous, that satisfying everyone would be impossible. Therefore, the only way forward is the constant fostering of relations between museums and the public.