



## **The National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography “Luigi Pigorini” in Rome: the Nation on Display**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores Luigi Pigorini’s role in the creation and consolidation of *Museo Preistorico Etnografico*, established by the Italian government in 1875. Pigorini trained as both a naturalist and an antiquarian. Since the creation of the chair of *Paletnologia* in Rome in 1877, he was one of the first professionals in prehistoric archaeology in Europe. Taking into account Pigorini’s theoretical propositions, this paper aims to analyse his role in the creation of the national museum that still bears his name. In the rooms of a former *Collegio Romano*, Pigorini gathered a collection of prehistoric materials from different regions of Italy and ethnographic artifacts from all over the world. By displaying both the material evidence of *national* (pre) history and *universal* ethnographic materials, Pigorini created in the rooms of his museum, a national master narrative on the formation of the Italian people, measured against the evolution of mankind through stages of progress.

## Introduction

This paper explores the history of the *Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico* named after its founder Luigi Pigorini, from the point of view of political history, cultural institutions, collections and museum narrative. The chronological frame will consider its origins in 1875, five years after the capital moved to Rome, and the Jubilee of National Unity in 1911. Furthermore, I will use the biography of Luigi Pigorini, his role as a scholar and a museum director as the points of reference from which I study the complexity of the institutional activities developed by him.

The museum was located in the premises of the *Collegio Romano*, in the centre of the capital city from 1875 to 1923. The building no longer exists in its original layout, but the collections are now on display in the *Palace of Science* at the outskirts of Rome. Between 1975 and 1977, the historical collection of the Collegio Romano was transferred to the EUR district; this was designed by the fascist regime for the 1942 *Esposizione Universale di Roma*. Although this museum constitutes the largest Italian collection of prehistoric and ethnographic objects, the new location has had a very negative effect on his image and availability because of the distance from the city centre. The rare photographic evidence and the writings of the founder have been used as a valuable basis for historical reconstruction aimed at exploring the beliefs of the scholar and the cultural environment of the time but also to shed light on the original museum project.

In Italy, the civic values were very strong after the unification. People have long identified municipal and regional identities more than any appeal to national values. Therefore, it is interesting to discover the circumstances that allowed the establishment of such an important museum, with thousands of objects coming from every district of Italy, and from all over the world, in the period 1875–1911.

Furthermore, the history of the museum is woven into the tension between central and local identities, and therefore it is possible to trace out two different threads running through the museum narrative, primarily the main national one and at a lesser level, the regional one.

As stated by Pigorini, in different areas of the kingdom, it was possible to observe the survival of primitive ways of life, providing comparative material, focused on arts and traditions among the populations living in Italy. According to Pigorini, prehistoric populations moved from the North to the South of the Italian Peninsula creating new settlements; in doing so, they established the cultural basis, which connected the territory and shaped Italy. In this interpretation, the present and the past were tightly connected to the freshly established Italian unity. Hence, the discovery of diversified artefacts from varying groups was used to demonstrate communalities between different groups.

In 1875 a central board was created to manage the archaeological excavations and museums of the kingdom. The director Giuseppe Fiorelli supported the requisition of archaeological remains from many villages for the prehistoric museum recently founded in Rome. Pigorini also believed the museum had a special role in providing a place for scholars where it was possible to examine different habits and make comparison that could help the progress of science. The characteristics of human beings were extrapolated as consistent elements of uniformity through the objects collected and presented in showcases.

This study is based on primary sources; I studied Pigorini's archival records in Rome, Padua and Parma, and I researched several kinds of sources: museum memorandums, private and official letters and documents concerning symposia and scientific publications. The consultation

of these sources seems to confirm the hypothesis that museums are *the* critical tool for cultural studies, the key institutions for the exploration of national identities construction in Europe, in the second part of the nineteenth century.

### **Luigi Pigorini: the Present as a Picture of the Past**

In a newly United Italy, Luigi Pigorini was one of the pioneers of prehistory: starting from the documents of the archaeological excavation, he set out to collect and compare the testimonies of the “savages” and to investigate the first people who inhabited the Italian peninsula. The National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography was established in 1875 to present the results of this research and to shed light on: “how the Italian nation was born and raised.” (Pigorini, 1903: 69)

In the cultural context of late nineteenth century, the museum reflects the attitude of the scientists, who wished to analyse all aspects of mankind, from anatomy to psychology, from religious beliefs to lifestyles. In a similar way to flora and fauna, mankind was seen as a subject of scientific analysis and classification. Luigi Pigorini was an influential scientist of his time; who has been studied and critiqued. However, his contribution to the history of museography has not received enough attention; by establishing and organising a national museum he was indeed the father of an important cultural development and the co-author of a narrative about the origins of man. I will focus on the first stage of the museum’s history from its foundation to 1911, a date that marks a watershed in Italian cultural history, it was the year of the First Italian Congress of Ethnography, a unique opportunity for exchange among scholars of the disciplines that we now call “demo-ethno-anthropological”<sup>1</sup>.

The evidence of prehistoric populations and the “living savages and barbarians” were collected in order to compare the different stages of cultures development. The model of reference was provided by the prestigious museums of Scandinavian prehistory, and at the time designated as “high antiquity”. In these museums a systematic method of classification and comparison of findings was put on display. Pigorini had a real admiration for the archaeological museums of Copenhagen and Stockholm. According to him:

The scholar of palaeoethnology, in its investigation, follows the method of the geologist, who keeps in his mind the image of the past. In order to understand the early stages of our civilization, the researcher studies those people who are still on the first rungs of the ladder of civilization, the savages. Actually, the collections of their works help us to outline the framework of their costumes and give us excellent materials to study. In fact, today there are people who live in the prehistoric stage and, at the same time, they are our contemporaries. [...] Well, central to the Prehistoric Museum, as a demonstration of this distant era, is the concept of putting everything including the collection of weapons and tools that are needed in the wild and in all aspects of their lives. And that is precisely what made the savants of Denmark and Sweden founders of the new science and masters for all of us (Pigorini, 1877: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

The *Collegio Romano*, housed the *Institute of Education*, founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1550. It was best known for being the stage of the “Museum of the world”, and was designed by the Jesuit Father Athanasius Kircher in 1651. It contained collections of Roman and Etruscan antiquities, and among them a fine collection of Etruscan bronze sculptures and bronze mirrors (now in the Villa Giulia), Egyptian antiquities including mummies and large collections of natural objects such as minerals, skeletons of exotic animals, precious stones and minerals. These

collections included, in addition to the original archaeological and numismatic collection, the objects of non-European peoples that Catholic missionaries had sent back to Rome: scientific and musical instruments, exotic curiosities and wonders of nature, reminiscent of the North European *Wunderkammern*.

Describing the newly established National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography in 1876, Luigi Pigorini proposed a paradigm of knowledge based on sense, experience and positive verification in accordance with the philosophy of science deriving from Enlightenment thinkers. Furthermore, he stressed the usefulness of the collections cohesively connected both methodologically and visually “to establish the most detailed comparisons between the primitive antiquities of every country but also between the prehistoric and contemporary artefacts of uncivilized populations, who Pigorini called ‘barbarian’.” (Pigorini, 1876: 33)

This concept explains the origin of the term “paleo-anthropology” which was officially adopted in La Spezia in 1865, when French and Italian scholars gathered at the International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology. One of the leading voices of anthropology at the time, the French prehistorian Gabriel de Mortillet, argued for an historical continuity in France rooted in early prehistory leading towards the ulterior national unity (Richard, 2002: 182). Thus, the displays of prehistoric archaeology organized on the occasion of the Universal Exhibitions showed how the various nations interpreted the objects on display. As Nils Muller-Scheessel has pointed out, “much of the motivation for staging international exhibitions drew from the desire to outdo other nations”. (Müller-Scheessel, 2001: 400)

The “Pigorini theory” focuses on the study of migrations of Indo-European populations that established in Italy and founded Rome. Most of the attention was paid to local cultures all over the country, in order to provide elements for the new comparative science. Ideally, the motto of “unity in diversity” summarised the dominant political orientation, during the difficult construction of the Italian state. Those civic values that remained strong after unification, confirmed the uniqueness of the history of Italy in the European context. Municipal and regional identities remained more representative for the community than that of the Italian national identity. In order to represent the origins of man on the Italian peninsula he needed to show man in the context of all of his regional variants, giving special importance to similarities.



Figure 1: Prehistory Section . Photo Archives, Museo Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini”.

## The Project of a Lifetime

Born in Fontanellato in 1842, Luigi Pigorini spent his childhood in his hometown, which belonged to the Duchy of Parma. In 1856, when he was 14 years old, the passion for historical studies and interest in antiquities led him to collaborate with Michele Lopez, director of Parma’s Museum of Antiquities.

His scholarly qualities of curiosity for “various branches of knowledge” led him to dabble in epigraphy and to seek out resources in the area. In December 1860, Pigorini met Bartolomeo

Gastaldi, considered the forerunner of palaeontology. In the summer 1861, he collaborated with Pellegrino Strobel, professor at the University of Parma, achieving outstanding results.

Michele Lopez, Pigorini's patron, encouraged and supported him in study tours of other Italian regions and abroad. In addition, he put him in touch with friends and scholars in the field of humanities. Between 1863 and 1866, Pigorini had the opportunity to undertake study trips to Switzerland, Tuscany, Rome and Naples. In Papal Rome, the young scholar was tired of repetitive discussions about antiquities, and he recognised the urgent need to join and support the early practitioners of a science that was trying to challenge a well-established tradition. The battle between the proponents of archaeology as a science of history against the still influential antiquarians remained lively until the early twentieth century. Finally, the new generation of specialists and technicians, trained in the late nineteenth century with a scientific approach, became part of the new state administration.

The relationships established during his trips, helped Pigorini to keep in touch with the personalities involved in the archaeological field. The dense network of knowledge would prove extremely profitable when Pigorini had to gather information and materials to form the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. In Naples, he met Giuseppe Fiorelli, who was appointed Head of the Central Directorate of Ruins and Museums. In 1863 Fiorelli was appointed director of the Museum of Naples and *sopraintendente* of the excavations. He worked in the reorganization of the collections, elaborated catalogues and established a new museum in the Carthusian monastery of St. Martin, also started to give importance to the scientific publication of the *News of the Excavations*. Fiorelli shared with Pigorini the ideas that had influenced his reorganisation of the National Museum of Naples: the prehistoric materials had been clearly separated from Roman-Greek remains, following chronological and scientific criteria.

By the Royal Decree of 24 March 1867, Pigorini was appointed director of the Museum of Antiquities in Parma and excavation of Velleja. From 1867, when Pigorini took over the Museum of Parma, he implemented the positivist comparativism between ethnology and prehistory, modelled on the natural history museums. The ethnographic findings were presented as living fossils, and as such useful for providing information on paleoethnological cultures.

In 1869, visiting the Ethnographic Museum in Copenhagen, at the Fourth International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology, Pigorini gathered inspiration for designing the exhibition of the Museum of Parma and then for the Prehistoric Museum in Rome. In 1871, at the Fifth International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology of Bologna, Pigorini organized the National Exhibition of Prehistoric Antiquities, and requested the establishment of a national museum. In 1875, Pigorini left Parma to be part of the Directorate General of Museums and Archaeological Digs, just set up in the new capital of the *stato unitario*, Rome.

Before moving to Rome he founded, together with Gaetano Chierici and Pellegrino Strobel, the *Bulletin of Italian Palaeoethnology*, the first magazine in Europe dedicated to Italian prehistory.

In 1877 began the most successful period of his career. Pigorini enjoyed the esteem and support of prominent and influential people in Rome, including his wife's family, daughter of the famous naturalist Pier Paolo Martini, who had founded the Museum of Verona. Pigorini took care of his institute, but also received many donations from collectors, including Enrico Hillyer Giglioli, Guido Boggiani, explorers, including scientists from the ethnologist Lamberto Loria and

high politicians and even the crown prince and the king. His brilliant and rapid career was linked to important supporters, but also owed much to the fact that he was a passionate supporter of Italian unification. For half a century, he exerted complete control on prehistoric studies in Italy, through the leadership of the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography, but also through the *Bulletin of Italian Palaeoethnology*. Pigorini became a dreaded man, his behaviour gave rise to the nickname of *Squalus vorax* (voracious shark), and even his friends were impressed by his greed.

The publication, *Fifty years of Italian history* (1911) included Pigorini's short paper 'Prehistory', which traces the history of palaeoethnology in Italy from 1861 to 1910. He provided a summary of his activities as a founder of prehistoric studies in Italy as well as a comprehensive overview of studies and contributions of many scholars who influenced this new science. On October 1911, as part of the International Exhibition, the First Congress of Italian Ethnography was held in Rome, promoted by the Italian Society of Ethnology, which had been founded in 1910 by the ethnologist Lamberto Loria.

In 1912, Pigorini was appointed to the Senate of the Kingdom of Italy. By ordering the creation of a bronze bust, commissioned from the artist Ettore Ximenes, his pupils, friends and fans gave him a special tribute. It was placed at the headquarters of the Royal Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography, inaugurated on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1914. On this occasion, Pigorini stated that to make "the most productive and meaningful scientific heritage" was important to give a "breath of life to those museums that are limited to preserving antiquities" by paying greater "attention to what survives of the past generations in the form of superstitions and folk songs". In this context, he intended to emphasize the importance of the studies and initiatives of Lamberto Loria, who died prematurely, pointing out that there was still much work to be done for this museum.

Luigi Pigorini died in April 1925 in Padua. In the following June, a solemn commemoration was held in the Hall of the Royal Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography, renamed after him in tribute to his role in the creation of the museum.

## **Evolutionism and Positivism**

First in the prehistoric and ethnographic section of the Archaeological Museum of Parma, and since 1875 in the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography in Rome, Luigi Pigorini gathered and put on display the relics of prehistoric archaeology in a comparative scheme, along with non-European ethnographic objects to highlight elements that could help the understanding of the past predating the development of writing.

The Italian Renaissance saw the establishment of many collectors of antiques who were in fact the precursors of the prehistory. More particularly, developing out of the philosophical and political program of the Enlightenment, the comparative criterion began to interpret the history of human societies on the basis of an evolutionary model, and after the French Revolution, the museum as a scientific institution also began to assume the task of disseminating these results to a large and growing audience.

The *Société des Observateurs de l'Homme*, founded in Paris in 1799 had the aim of studying "man" in terms of his physical, moral and intellectual features. Thus bringing together all branches of knowledge in a single grand design. Comparative naturalists, doctors, philosophers, linguists, historians, scholars and explorers created museums of anthropology, using methods devised by

the natural sciences and mathematics. The establishment of the museum was the response to a double endeavour, firstly the need to base scientific research on the direct analysis of material data, secondly the social commitment to contribute to public education.

Denmark was the early laboratory of an innovative museological experience, providing the starting point for a scientific and cultural debate, which expanded throughout Europe with a decisive outcome on the formation of new disciplines. In the *Guide of the Museum of Northern Antiquities* (Copenhagen, 1836), Christian Jürgensen Thomsen explained the theory of three ages (stone, bronze, iron), which had been applied consistently in the renovation of the museum since 1832. The principle of comparison by analogy was chosen as the official criterion, guarantee of scientific observations, strengthened by the immediacy of visual communication.

At first, similarities between prehistory and ethnography were observed when the analysis of the habits and lifestyles of the first Scandinavian populations brought out elements comparable to those found related to the lives of primitive peoples. The Museum of Antiquities of the North used visual method: placement of objects with similar functions or similar shape to create comparison and connectivity between ancient and contemporary people. Moreover, the museum was connected to the cabinet that housed American artefacts from Greenland and the Americas. The *American Cabinet* also included the reconstruction of American environments and housing types.

Another privileged place for discussing new theories was the Ethnological Society founded in London in 1843. The Ethnological Society was a meeting place for scholars who were concerned with ethnology, prehistory and anthropology. Among the scientific purposes, the Ethnological Society was also promoting the collections of ethnographic material.

During the first World Exposition, held in London in 1851, the Ethnological Society prepared a section devoted specifically to ethnology. The whole plan was to gather evidence of material progress in many fields, an operation that led to stressing the importance of material remains such as tools in order to study and understand both the technological and cultural development of mankind. In the same year, Henry Christy, one of the most active members of the Ethnological Society, began a collection of ethnological objects focusing on habits of wild populations, while developing a growing interest in the prehistoric collections.

Since 1853, General Pitt Rivers had initially started a collection of weapons; and objects, with the intention of explaining the principles of evolution on the basis of material remains. Furthermore Edward Tylor emphasized the importance of Christy's Museum of Ethnography, in addition to the major contribution of General Pitt Rivers. With the completion of their museums, in the mid-nineteenth century, Christy and Pitt Rivers had laid the foundations for a systematic method of comparative analysis of archaeological and ethnological artefacts.

However, comparativism assumed the character of a real theoretical tool only in the 1860s, when the European scientific community officially recognized the scope of Darwinian theory. Some of the most influential members of the Ethnological Society, including John Edward Tylor and John Lubbock were declared Darwinists and greatly contributed to the systematization of the comparative method applied to prehistoric times. As indicated by the subtitle of his popular, *Prehistoric Times*, "as illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages", John Lubbock attached great importance to the comparison of antiquities and the customs of "wild" cultures arguing that the people most backward in terms of technology would

disappear while those more advanced would have a happier life. Luigi Pigorini personally knew John Lubbock, collaborating with him in 1869 to publish a paper on some important archaeological sites in the Lazio region.

Usually the archaeological and ethnographic museums in the nineteenth century showed artefacts in display cases named after the region where the objects were made or found. The information focused on the origin, the chronology, on the “analysis” of form and the technique of manufacture. The image of the civilization that was obtained in this way was inevitably fragmented.

As well as being partial, the image that the prehistoric-ethnographic museum offered was also heavily influenced by the selection of objects, highlighting an attitude of indifference to the values assigned to objects by their former users.

### **Search for Origins: “Waste of Activities of Daily Living”**

The museum played a key role in the development of a “new science” that was the palaeoethnology / prehistory, emerging through a difficult and vital relationship with classical archaeology.

In the eyes of Pigorini, the archaeological museums of Copenhagen and Stockholm were models of the greatest rigor and scientific correctness. Pigorini’s admiration for Scandinavian museums also extended to the exhibition rooms: “nothing disturbs the mind, nothing is idle”, unlike what can be seen in Italy, where historic buildings were richly decorated and ill designed to accommodate collections of different ages and nature. The most famous and admired museums were that of Scandinavian Antiquities of the North in the Prince’s Palace in Copenhagen. The main purpose of the Museum of Antiquities of the North was to show “when and by whom Denmark has been inhabited”, therefore showing the gradual progress of civilization. The prehistoric collections were complemented with ethnographic ones near a Cabinet of Classical Archaeology. The focus remained, firstly the nation’s history and, secondly, the relationships with foreign influences.

The search for origins had come to take into account such unusual materials as “waste activities of daily living”. Although this must have appeared as a strange notion to the layman, Pigorini believed that “there is nothing in the world that cannot be fertilized by genius.” (Pigorini, 1886: 7)

In addition, as a researcher he believed that in pursuit of knowledge one could not let “a chapter be abolished as useless because it lacks the splendour of the creations of art.” The example of the Royal Society of Sciences in Copenhagen was also considered important in the ‘history of positive studies’ for the variety and reputation of its components, experts in botany, zoology, geology and archaeology.

The Italian scholar had travelled with other scholars from different countries to examine the results of research and was markedly impressed by the methods. In the Museum of Northern Antiquities, art objects were displayed alongside other objects found in the same way replicating the original discovery to facilitate scientific analysis. Despite the fact that the economic and political conditions in Denmark were not conducive to devoting large sums to scientific research, thanks to public participation and visitation, collections were popularized and explained to a large

audience through the sale of written guidebooks translated into several languages, and also thanks to the activities of volunteers.

The dissemination work was also solid: lists of items sent or given away were placed in newspapers; writings on the antiquities and their importance were popular; conferences aimed at a wide audience were organized not only in Copenhagen but also in small towns. In addition, small collections were created in the provinces, in Episcopal cities, in schools of all levels; priests, teachers and farmers were versed in archaeological questions and could “keep watch on the findings”. Finally, the winners of Danish archaeological contests were those who showed a deeper involvement. Therefore, as Pigorini observed, the Museum of Northern Antiquities was born from a national sentiment.

In Italy, Pigorini argued, the first objective was to promote greater public interest in the collections of antiquities. He recognised the serious lack of instructions given to inspectors of excavations and monuments, “few of which are real archaeologists” and therefore would need guidance “to interpret what they see”. However, Pigorini admitted that after the establishment of the General Directorate of Antiquities in 1876, there was a significant improvement, despite the serious difficulties that had arisen from the overwhelming administrative work related to this scientific function. Writing in 1891, the scholar confirmed how strong his interest was in the growth of the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. In this report, the Director outlined the history of the museum and its principal conceptual guidelines: to look for evidence showing that the origins of the first peoples who inhabited Italy goes further back than what written history dictates.

The dwelling places and the tombs were the main sources of artefacts and information. As Pigorini stated, “It was necessary to find out and collect those antiquities for the museum, that would fill gaps in national history, to find in the most distant ages the features of our country when it was called for the first time Italy.” (Pigorini, 1891: 599)

To find out if “the primitive settlers arrived in the peninsula by way of the land or by the sea, from the East or the West” was necessary to conduct a “comparative study of the antiquities of every country”, for this reason, the new museum had to accommodate the archaeology of neighbouring countries “without regard to any geographical boundary”. It was through the knowledge of weapons and tools of early man that one could aspire to understanding his “way of life”. The possibility of observing the “wild man” still alive was considered of great help as he was very similar to the “first man”. He continues “they more or less resembled each other in all their acts. Therefore, investigating the habits and customs of the oldest people (observed through the wild people that had ‘survived’) one proceeds from the known to the unknown, up from what you see to what is lost in the mists of time [...]” (Pigorini, 1891: 604). Paleoethnology’s field of investigation limited itself to the periods prior to the development of writing, leaving room for classical archaeology.

Clearly outlining his procedure of how to study these new materials, Pigorini explained that in addition to geographical distribution, the paleoethnologist assigns scientific material to different periods, each of which receives a particular name. “It is then noted that in some places within the same country one can find “survivals” of the ancient times before “that country began a positive story” and these must continue to be addressed by the paleoethnologist rather than by the historian. Pigorini believed that a similar role was played by the scholar of folklore, who

“searches in the songs and popular prejudices the events that have been passed down to us about the ideas and religions of whole societies since disappeared, helping to establish more clearly the links between far removed ages and the following ages.” (Pigorini, 1891: 606)



Figure 2: Foreign Ethnography Section. Photo Archives, Museo Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini”.

## On Behalf of Patriotic Spirit

The establishment of the National Museum of Prehistory gave the Italian Kingdom a chance to compete with other modern European nations, and to celebrate Rome as its new capital, acquired in 1870 with the defeat of Papal State. In 1891, Pigorini recalled the remarkable short time that separated his set of proposals to the minister Bonghi made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1875, and their approval on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1875. As Pigorini wrote to Bonghi on this occasion, it was “extremely important” to discover the hidden evidence which “prior to the historical age, held Italy together from one end to the other”.

The museum was inaugurated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1876 on the birthday of both King Vittorio Emanuele II and Prince Umberto, who presided over the ceremony. Upon inauguration, the new museum was recognised as “a promise for the future”. The first visitors were however confronted with quite empty showcases, but there were labels for absent objects, proving the ambitions of its creators for its future. Thousands of objects and documents of exceptional value had been gathered in a very short time, Pigorini’s powerful position, and his museum idea aroused fierce controversy.

In 1877, one year after the opening of the museum, in the daily *La Nazione*, Paolo Mantegazza headed a lively debate. Mantegazza laid claims on the ethnographic collections from Rome. Arguing that Italy should have a one single national ethnographic museum and by underlining that there was a close link between anthropology and the study of ethnology, he claimed that its head office should coincide with the already existing Anthropological Museum in Florence. Pigorini retorted that “ethnology could not be born without paleoethnology ” and used the example of museum projects of many foreign countries in support his own.

An important aspect of the Museum’s early development was the decisive contribution of many *amateur* enthusiasts and collectors with whom Pigorini established profitable relationships, knowing that he could not count on any significant financial commitment from the state. Despite the lack of funding, Pigorini did everything possible to enrich the collections, and at the end of his leadership left a museum divided into 54 sections, with more than 170,000 objects, a specialised library with more than 5000 volumes, in addition to his own personal library, an invaluable documentary source for extracts received from around the world by his scientific correspondents.

His acquaintance with Giuseppe Fiorelli, whom he had met in Naples in 1865 during his first study trip and who had become general director of museums and excavation of antiquities, was crucial to the implementation of the initiatives undertaken by Luigi Pigorini. Fiorelli issued an official note throughout Italy to the inspectors of the individual provinces to request material for the creation of the new museum. His appeal was in turn extended to all individuals who were able to respond on behalf of patriotic spirit and the positive value of science. The official note, called *Circolare 458*, sent on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1875 was widely distributed. “Everyone” was invited to participate in the formation of the new Museum of Prehistory and to send material of scientific interest.

The response was overwhelming, activating an increasingly efficient movement that attracted people with the opportunity to acquire honours and titles of recognition. By the time of the opening of the museum, its goals were oriented to fulfil “the needs of science”, designed to help Rome become a “natural place for us to undertake all manner of archaeological studies” but also to provide a space for the study of “prehistory”. The interest was directed to the “origins” and “primitive stages of civilization”.

The method of classification used for the Prehistoric Museum was to allocate a section to each region of Italy and to every foreign nation to display their objects, and subsequently to make easy comparisons. He foresaw the need in relation to a fast-growing field of studies, because “every day” new discovery would continue to be made. This enriched the museum, and nations without discoveries to date still benefited from allocated space for future discoveries.

In the same official note, it was stressed that the study of prehistoric relics “should not be considered separately from that of the arts and customs of savages or barbarians living”, as these provide an opportunity to look back to “the dark ages of civilization”. The aspiration was to recover the lost past of contemporary Western societies, tracking evidence relevant to a scientifically reliable reconstruction. It is in the museum that a wide perspective of times and places could be produced for the benefit of scholars who could thus take advantage of the abundant material, organized according to a strict system of classification.

The Government, in turn, supported the progress of these studies but without enough financial resources, the need for concerted efforts was required in order to produce the “wonderful results that everyone should enjoy.” Giuseppe Fiorelli stressed the concept by saying that “the scholars travelling throughout Italy would find materials in their respective territories, and when in Rome, they could examine the same collections compared to the other”, this would clearly facilitate survey work. At the end of the note, Fiorelli declared himself “grateful” for the significant commitment, shown by the inspectors in each province, to the country and to science.



Figure 3: Italian Ethnography Section. Photo Archives, Museo Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini”.

## **The Pigorini Reports: Museographical Materials for a National Master Narrative**

A very precious source for research on the museum’s history and organisation are the reports that Pigorini periodically presented to the Minister of Education. In the First Report on the Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography, prepared in March 1881, Luigi Pigorini remembered the inauguration on 14th March 1876 with the presence of a small amount of objects on display, and how subsequently, thanks to support of the ministry, “the scientific material grew a lot”. Pigorini described the method of classification based on the clear division into two classes: “prehistory”

and “ethnography”. The first section included prehistoric remains, both from Italy and other countries; the objects were arranged according to a chronological order, and then to their provenance. The ethnographical section included ancient and exotic materials from all over the world, compared with contemporary artefacts of 'uncivilized' populations.

This undertaking encompassed all of the theories that were dear to Pigorini, confident that the youth of the new science, which he called a “little science”, might benefit from some indulgence, until it was completely settled. The significant increase of material that was hoped-for would permit for more complete classification, favouring the “scientific conclusions” that the museum expected. The urgent need to collect in order to fill the showcases and, therefore, to classify objects, was presented as the positivist approach of the museum, although Pigorini realised and acknowledged that the “abundance” of material that was constantly coming into the museum made it difficult to maintain “diligent classification.” The main struggle was not to let the eclectic nature of the collections become subjects of “wonder” that had characterized the natural history collections in previous centuries but to present them according to the strongest sense of scientific rigor. To structure the paleontological studies, Luigi Pigorini related the museum to the university teaching for which he was responsible since 1876. Furthermore, from the very beginning, the museum was completed with a library that collected publications of paleoethnological interest, fewer publications on the subjects of ethnography, because of their high cost, but also contained many gifts from foreign scientists and texts that Pigorini purchased over decades of study.

In the same report, Pigorini also took the time to indicate what was to be most important in the collections of prehistoric and ethnographic, giving a brief description. In the detailed account of what has been achieved, he emphasized the relationships established with the managers of European museums, as well as with individual scholars. The collections constituted a map of such relationships, and the exciting possibility of the scientific vision of the world through objects traded, donated or purchased. This related with a typical kind of museum master narrative, giving an interpretation of history in terms of progress.

Furthermore he began to intensify relations with American museums, including the Archaeological Museum in Wisconsin, but also with the anthropological society of Washington. Meanwhile, the anthropological museum in Buenos Aires had sent some articles from Patagonia.

With regard to ethnographic objects, the first group was composed of items that came from the Kircherianum objects and from cabinets of geology and zoology of the Royal University of Rome, but also the Archaeological Museum of Parma and the National Museum of Naples. Other items had come from the Italian Geographic Society and the Arsenal of Venice, on behalf of the Ministry of the Navy. Finally, the American section was built from famous collections gathered in Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from items shipped from the Catholic missions that had belonged to the collections Aldovrandi, Cospi, Vallisnieri, Institute of Sciences in Bologna and at the Collegio Romano.

Pigorini complained about lack of space, “room conditions have forced me to keep important material in a relatively narrow corridors, and in addition they had very badly lit, and here more than anywhere else I need to operate for the museum efficiency, thus shed light on its important collections.”

## Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, the study of disciplines like archaeology and paleoethnology, matched the displaying practices in museums. In some European countries, as well as in Italy, the museum performs a role that is at the core of the national narrative. Luigi Pigorini was the mind behind a national museum, aimed to gather as many objects as possible in Rome to enhance national prestige through scientific work. At the same time, the Italian Parliament engaged a vivacious debate on the preservation of monuments and on the organisation of museums, libraries and archives. The museum, as well as having a role in the collecting and preservation of collections, became a place of negotiation between science production and dissemination.

Pigorini wanted to recompose into a “big picture” the pieces of many local Italian narratives. In 1881, he proposed to set up a new section of the museum devoted to peasant industries, tools, ornaments and clothes but this request did not succeed. However, a new branch of science inherited this mission, Italian Ethnographic studies that appeared at the First Italian Congress of Ethnology (1911). Pigorini often said the museum must constantly renew itself, as a “living organism”, following the definition of William Flower, the English naturalist and director of the Natural History Museum in London.

In 1911, many initiatives took place in the capital during the International Exhibition, held to celebrate the Jubilee of Italian unity. Many collections, also belonging to the Pigorini Museum, were put on display. After the exhibitions, the items were packaged for decades, waiting to find an exhibition space, some were moved, and others went missing. The rising fascist regime gave much attention to classical archaeology with its mythological content, thus neglecting the empirical methods of prehistory and ethnography. In 1937, more than a decade after the death of Luigi Pigorini, the director Piero Baroncelli published the first guide of the museum, complaining about lack of funds and staff.

However the individual voice of the founder can still be heard in the present museum, which is managed under the tutelage of the Superintendence of the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography “Luigi Pigorini”. The main development lies in the existence of clearly separated sections of Ethnography and Palaeoethnology. The sources available for the analysis of the current narrative in the museum (programmes, disposition of objects, decors, lighting, scenography, guides, web texts and multimedia), allow us to assess the efforts to update the institution responsible for fostering two collections, two lines of research: an ethno-anthropological collection and a prehistoric heritage.

The museum's contemporary narrative attempts to bridge the gap between the times of the main, still appealing core collections brought together by Pigorini and the present museum, by providing an academic framework whose mission is to find a new master narrative, which could respect the development of both prehistory and ethnography as distinct disciplines. Actually, the old paradigm breakdown began with the crisis of the Evolutionary theory. The museum tries to present the information in a more neutral way that makes no claims about Italy as a geographical unity, meanwhile the museum as a district of the cultural heritage department is part of the national heritage management system. A critical reflexion about the museum has marked the eighties and nineties (Amore, 1993: 102-106). The reorganisation of the permanent exhibition rooms (Prehistory, Africa, Oceania and America) established clearly distinct display areas for

prehistory and ethnography, allowing them to coexist separately in the same institution. (Clemente, 2005: 7-8).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The subject would require a specific treatment that is not possible to give here, so please refer Massari 2004: 27-155 for a detailed overview.
- <sup>2</sup> L. Pigorini, 'Il Museo Preistorico Etnografico di Roma, Lettera al Senatore Mantegazza', *Diritto* 80, 1877, p.3: "Il cultore della paleontologia segue nelle sue indagini il metodo del geologo, che trova nel presente l'immagine del passato. Per intendere le prime fasi della civiltà nostra, importa indagare come esse si svolgano tra le popolazioni che trovansi tuttora sui primi gradini della scala e sono appunto i selvaggi, sono precisamente le collezioni delle opere loro, è il quadro dei loro costumi quello che può metterci sulla strada. Questa linea preistorica c'è ed è contemporanea alla nostra [...] ecco allora che accanto al Museo Preistorico, come dimostrazione di questa epoca lontanissima, sorge il concetto di mettere anche la raccolta delle armi e degli utensili che servivano e servono ai selvaggi in tutte le funzioni della vita loro. Ed è appunto ciò che fecero i dotti della Danimarca e della Svezia, fondatori della nuova scienza e maestri di tutti noi."

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