

CAN WE SHOW YOU THE SKELETONS IN OUR CLOSET?

Museum exhibitions with human remains in different European settings



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*Cover photo by J. Monnaie, 29/11/2023, study cranium specimen in the Palaeolithic collection of the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, St-Germain-en-Laye, France.

Keywords

Ethics, Exhibitions, France, Human remains, Museums, Portugal, Skeletons, Sweden

Title

Får vi Visa er Skeletten i Garderoben? Museiutställningar med mänskliga kvarlevor i olika europeiska omgivningar.

Abstract

Mänskliga kvarlevor förstås inte längre bara som föremål utan också som avlidna individer. Utställda mänskliga kvarlevor kan ha en suggestiv kraft som ger dem liv genom mötet med besökare, tillspetsat skulle man kunna säga att de befinner sig i ett slags limbo mellan liv och död. Denna studie jämför museiutställningar som innehåller mänskliga kvarlevor mellan tre europeiska länder.

Syftet med uppsatsen är att få kunskap om utställda mänskliga kvarlevor inom museer. Därför undersöker uppsatsen, genom en jämförande studie, utställda mänskliga kvarlevor med avsikt att besvara följande forskningsfrågor: Hur hanteras och vårdas och ställs mänskliga kvarlevor ut av museer? Kan skillnader ses mellan hur museer inbäddade i olika kulturella sammanhang utställer mänskliga kvarlevor? Vad ska museerna göra när det gäller mänskliga kvarlevor framöver? Vilka utmaningar kan man identifiera i museiverksamhet när man tar hand om mänskliga kvarlevor? Vilka policydokument följer museer när det gäller mänskliga kvarlevor?

För att få fram svar på dessa frågor används en kombination av utställningsobservationer och intervjuer. Studien grundar sig i två teorier: fenomenologi och institutionell teori. Resultaten från de undersökta museerna i Sverige, Frankrike och Portugal visar att mänskliga kvarlevor presenteras på flera sätt; in situ gravar (rekonstruerat), enskilda element, ledade skelett och ibland mumifierade kvarlevor. Genom analysen framgår det att museer är mer påverkade av den akademiska kontexten än andra eventuella kulturella faktorer. Det verkar förekomma en isomorfisk process i vilken museer alltmer liknar varandra och därmed exponerar mänskliga kvarlevor på liknande sätt. Fyra huvudelement observeras påverka utställningarna av mänskliga kvarlevor oavsett platsen; förekomsten av eller brist på etiska riktlinjer, transparens, syftet med utställningen och möjligheten att uppdatera utställningarna.

Denna studie lyfter fram några utmaningar i nuvarande museal praxis då det gäller visning av mänskliga kvarlevor i utställningar på museer som är etiskt lämpliga, både med hänseende till kvarlevorna och besökares upplevelser. Mänskliga kvarlevor är en oerhörd rik källa till kunskap som har potential att överföras via museer och kan på så sätt länka dåtid, nutid och framtid.

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1. Introduction

A famous Latin quote says: “Mortui viventes docent!” which translates to: the dead teach the living (Powell, 2012, p.669). Indeed, human skeletal remains have the ability to retell stories of the journey of humankind, societies and belief systems, but also more specifically about activities, diseases, warfare and even nutrition through scientific studies (Wills, 2022, p.417). Museums have, therefore, collected and displayed human remains for hundreds of years with a rather materialistic approach. From the 18th to the 19th century the curiosity for these remains increased and the first classifications separated museal objects into three categories: Artificialia, Exotica and Naturalia in which human remains were often placed within this last category (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.173). At the turn of the twentieth century, artefacts and human remains were exhibited in as large quantities as possible, creating huge displays often following traditional archaeological typologies and conventions (Clarke, 1972, pp.231-233).

It is also possible to learn about the past through human remains just as it is done with artefacts and the manner with which it is done can follow guidelines, be ethical as well as take into account the humanity of the skeletons (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.111). The issues regarding research, storage and exhibition of these remains have been at the forefront of academic discussions for several years due to the legal, ethical and scientific ramifications of these sensitive subjects which hold a great deal of potential (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022). In spite of human remains being such a rich source of information, the manner with which they are at times exhibited is problematic and can cause scepticism in the eyes of the general public (Clary, 2018, p.13).

This thesis strives to demonstrate how human remains are displayed, handled, and cared for within museums. The challenges, differences and similarities observed will be discussed and problematised. As aforementioned, human remains are a key to knowledge about many aspects of our past. Archaeological and anatomical collections of human remains are as any other archaeological remains non-renewable thus rendering them an invaluable resource for scientific research. However, they were once individuals as well and must thus be treated with respect, case by case.

1.1 Background

In this section, the various aspects which could affect human remains being exhibited in museums will be taken into consideration. Amongst other things, the guidelines from the International Council Of Museums will be addressed as well as the link that could be found between exhibited human remains and the existential dimensions of being human. Secondly, the research questions and aims will be presented and finally leading into the previous research in this topic on which this thesis will be built upon.

1.1.1 Human Remains in Limbo within Museums

Several specific case studies have argued that certain human remains ought not to be displayed in museums or even should be repatriated due to the significance they hold for certain communities which were not given the choice to keep the remains during the colonial era (Pardoe, 2013, pp.740-741). This side of the collections of human remains is often what the media focus their efforts on, while, on the other hand, it has been demonstrated that the majority of skeletal remains in museum collections were excavated following the development of cities. This type of “*inflammatory rhetoric*” can skew the image some people may have of museums (Pardoe, 2013, p.741). Therefore, most museums today work toward producing ethical guidelines, following recommendations from their government or cultural institutions with regards to human remains (Raä, 2020, Deutscher Museumsbund, 2013 & Dcms, 2005).

In the origins of modern museums throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, exhibiting remains that came from outside the Western world, often referred to as exotic, or any large array of similar bones was a way to display prestige for museums (Fforde, 2013, p.715 & Perazzi, 2011). Human remains were often treated with little care and dealt with according to scientific norms that were detached from ethical norms with regards to the treatment of skeletons as unique individuals worthy of a special kind of respect (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.169 & Observation II). Indeed, it was a highly materialistic approach that dominated the scientific practices then, something which was also reflected for example in museographic protocols. In this case, the museography will mostly refer to spatial organising: the display and layout of the collections, as well as the architectural conditions. The method of exhibition was certainly problematic but the acquisition and cataloguing of these skeletal remains was even more so. The traceability, provenance and general historical context of some remains demonstrates their

colonial heritage (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.11). Since the end of the 20th century, society and museums alike have evolved to move away from this colonial mindset (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.140). Nowadays, human skeletal remains tend to be exhibited with a clear purpose and in a respectful manner, not simply showing off as much of a collection as possible. Nevertheless, several museums are still rather reluctant to have them exhibited even though these human remains are stored in their collections (Nilsson Stutz, 2023, p.9).

This reluctance can be understood due to the ambiguous position human remains have in museums, they are between objects and humanhood. The ramifications of this situation have created issues for museums and other institutions alike which work with human remains (Novljanin Grignard, 2012, p.12). If they are considered as artefacts one can avoid ethical questioning of scientific experimentation and analysis of the remains but it might be difficult to escape the humanity and “spirit” carried by some remains such as skulls or mummies. It is thus often considered to be the responsibility of museums in possession of collections of human remains to manage them adequately (Raä, 2020, p.6).

On the one hand, a typical dictionary definition of human remains is as follows: parts of the bodies of dead people (Merriam-Webster, n.d. - human remains). On the other hand, some museum guidelines have presented it as: “*that once belonged to the body of a human*” (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.1). Here again the definitions demonstrate the interpretation of the remains as “have been a person” and not what they currently are. This nature of human skeletal remains should not be ignored, the problem will not be solved by avoiding to exhibit human remains, but rather museums ought to find the right individual or element to show, with appropriate text and a pedagogical mission to fulfil. There are strong arguments suggesting that origins, age, sex, or identities should not deter from exhibiting but instead encourage collaboration between museums and countries to transfer knowledge and keep remains for future generations (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.19).

1.1.2 International council of museums (ICOM) & Human Remains

In the latest version of the ICOM Code of ethics in subsection 4.3, which focuses on the exhibition of sensitive artefacts, they advise that:

Human remains and materials of sacred significance must be displayed in a manner consistent with professional standards and, where known, taking into account the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated. They must be presented with great tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples.

(ICOM, 2017, p.25).

The International Council of Museums has, therefore, provided guidance for museums to start thinking through common issues regarding sensitive materials such as human remains. The fact that human remains are in museums is not the issue at hand, neither is the question of whether or not they have been studied, but rather the manner within which they have been acquired, kept, handled and displayed. A significant portion of human remains that are in museums around the world today have been collected in ways that could be considered problematic: as gifts, in exchange for money, stolen, taken from colonies, etc. There are, however, also remains from well documented, legal, ethical excavations which have made their way to museums under completely different circumstances. Seeing a skeleton of a Neolithic European farmer or a trophy skull from Borneo for example might, therefore, not have the same connotations, since the history and provenance behind them may differ. Although the emotional response and evocative aspects may not be the same, much of it still depends on the framing created by the museum for the exhibition which is displaying human remains.

1.1.3 The Gap between the Living and the Dead

The growing gap between the living and the dead, predominantly in the secular parts of the Western world, ought to be bridged in order to enable a deeper understanding of our own mortality (Stone, 2010). It is a possibility, for the people who would desire it, to encounter death through bone chapels, sites of disasters, dungeons, the body world exhibition, etc.

Apart from the aforementioned outlets, museums are one of the primary locations where many people come into contact with death and its manifestation, another possibility is via archaeological excavations. These public locations where individuals can come into contact with human remains are often seen as responsible for the manner with which visitors experience this contact as it can evoke strong emotions and bring up challenging lines of questioning (Raä, 2020, p.18). Prior to

the improved hygiene levels and medical advances, which have extended human life expectancy, direct contact with the dead was experienced more often (Crawford, 2007, p.131). Today, many societies tend to attempt to keep death at arm's length: people die in hospitals far from others, funeral home owners or forensic specialists are often told not to discuss their professions to name only a few examples given by informant II interviewed for this thesis. Granted not all cultures or traditions worldwide handle death in the same manner. The degree of secularisation may play an important part in this. However, a significant amount of the population, partly through secularisation, has distanced itself from the dead (Stone, 2010, p.59).

Anxiety caused by being confronted with human remains appears to be twofold. On the one hand, one can notice the diminished contact with the dead while on the other hand, observing the shock occurring when one eventually comes into contact with the deceased. These reactions may transpire within one's network or families, inevitably awakening existential questioning regarding one's own mortality and the lack of understanding or acknowledging for that fact, but a related situation could also occur at museums when visitors are confronted with human remains (Stone, 2010). Although emotional responses to death are unique to each and every individual and dependent on context, the evoked feelings are inevitable and could be taken into account by experts creating exhibitions in order to provide displays which may solicit the desired encounter with human remains that are still providing knowledge (Tarlow & Nilsson Stutz, 2013, p.7).

It is quite paradoxical to think that for humans to understand and come to terms with mortality a certain contact with the departed is beneficial. Some museums and other similar institutions exhibiting human remains are sometimes part of the remedy to existential crises often present in more secular spheres. However, the avenues to do so are becoming increasingly limited and some may advocate for human remains to be taken out of museums as well (Clary, 2018, p.13).

1.2 Research Questions & Aim

The aim of the thesis is to study how human skeletal remains are exhibited in European museums; via the comparison of museums within three distinct cultural regions with regards to secularity. Moreover, the aim is also to gain knowledge on how to respectfully display them while still being able to transmit the knowledge skeletal remains can impart. The present thesis relies on empirical data gathered primarily through observation and benefiting from a slight historical-cultural perspective used as background to understand the continuity of the problem at hand (Gunnarsson Payne & Öhlander, 2022, p.33).

In order to fulfil this aim, the following research questions are necessary:

- How are human remains displayed, handled and cared for by museums?
- Can differences be assessed between how museums embedded in differing cultural contexts exhibit human remains?
- What do museums intend to do concerning human remains moving forward?
- What challenges can be pointed out in museal practices when caring for human remains?
- What policy documents do museums follow with regards to human remains?

1.3 Previous Research

In recent years, human remains in museums have come to be increasingly scrutinised by academic research. Researchers from a variety of backgrounds have come to analyse these types of collections from all angles. This thesis aims to give a museological perspective to historically oriented displays containing human remains. Moreover, there is a growing trend in academia to assess the reasoning behind the exhibition of human remains in museums: the ethical ramifications, the effect it has on visitors, the scientific purpose, the knowledge transmitted and many more. Here a sample of the previous research will be presented taking into account books, articles and other academic works.

In 2022, a work group published a book that was a decade in the making about the legislations, scientific interests and ethical challenges for the collections of human remains (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022). This publication focuses its attention on the issues in France first then expands it further to Belgium, Portugal, the United Kingdom and lastly the United States of America. They understand that human remains are apart from other museum artefacts through the evoked meaning they hold which is dependent on the type of remains (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.169). The authors are aware of this ambiguous status of human remains but also point to the lack of universal legislations or ethical regulations causing further practical issues for museums which are simultaneously questioned through the press: “What should be done about the skeletons of the Musée de l’Homme?” or even “What will become of all the skeletons you are digging up?” (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, pp.409-411).

A significant portion of the guidelines available for museums to care for human remains treat the topic of sensitive materials such as religiously significant material, remains belonging to groups which may want them repatriated, etc. If such remains are part of the collections, these issues tend to be addressed by the museums along with the concerned parties in the hopes of coming to a positive conclusion. Ardagna and Chaillou (2022, pp.183, 413) point out that advances in scientific research and technologies such as DNA testing, albeit valuable, can become the root of new problems for museums where remains could be identified as related to living people. This research provides an anchoring point for the comparison of the status of human remains within museums in several European countries, two of which are identical to the ones studied in this thesis and which are presented in the following section. Moreover, the content from this book touches on many key points relating

to several of the research questions, such as guidelines, ethics and the future of the collections of human remains.

Yet another example of the significance of human remains in the current academic museological discourse can be seen through the article published just last year by Simon Ekström entitled *museums as deathscapes* from the Journal of Nordic Museology (2023). As institutions, museums gather and present artefacts which have a relation to our ancestors and their human remains, in this fashion they are connected to graveyards and chapels or catacombs (Ekström, 2023, p.58). Museums are a public place where visitors come in contact with death that has been carefully organised in exhibitions. Through comparing two Swedish museums, the author explains the presence of the various facets of death and how those museums hoped to show skeletons as unproblematic museal artefacts (Ekström, 2023, p.60). This can be seen as insensitive to identify human remains as objects although it renders them much less controversial. Visitors tend to come to museums and are faced with their own mortality as skeletal remains mirror them. Thereafter, it is possible to appreciate how human remains are truly between life and death, object and human.

The article further discusses the role of museums in housing and displaying death through human remains but also other artefacts. The role of the exhibited remains is vital according to the two Swedish museums discussed here, the human remains are presented under certain conditions which are hoped to aid this contact with visitors;

Human remains were handled with (1) care and dignity, and that the museum (2) recognized the presence of the once living person in the exposed human bone-material, and that the display had (3) perfectly legitimate osteological or archaeological purposes.

(Ekström, 2023, p.68).

The aspects which museums focus on in order to legitimise the exhibition of human remains appear to be sensible choices which may reflect their collaboration within multidisciplinary teams and the use of guidelines for the handling of human remains as reference to their work. This same journal provided only a couple years back an article on the state of museal research in Iceland (Sigfúsdóttir, 2021). Through the acquired data the author encouraged collaboration between museums and academia as well as pointed out the lack of universally understood definition of what may be classified as museum research. Thanks to this museology oriented academic journal, the thesis may have factual information to use in the analysis of death presented in museums as well as the potential future of museal research while

understanding the position museums may be in today with regards to the lack of academic recognition or overarching guidelines.

Meanwhile, a thesis from Uppsala has evaluated the way people react to human remains being displayed (Aspeborg, 2020). The study focused on the visitors' perspective using walk-along and participant observation rooted in phenomenological theory. This theoretical perspective is the same as one of the guiding theories for this study. It is therefore valuable to have this previous research to understand the views communicated by visitors to these studied museums. Indeed, the museum goers expressed rather positive views of human remains exhibited in this study, so long as the remains were handled and displayed respectfully according to them, some even mentioned that it was a privilege to encounter authentic human remains as well as the pedagogical potential of this type of "artefact" (Aspeborg, 2020, pp.93-94). Although respect towards the human remains was a universal answer, the older the remains, or the more fragmented they were, the less visitors appeared to relate and care as much about the human remains (Aspeborg, 2020, p.95). It seems there are no defined lines between what human remains are considered as; may it be artefacts, objects, humans, relics, cult memorabilia, etc. The participants in this study rather denoted that the difference laid in the practices of the museum and the eyes of the visitors (Aspeborg, 2020, p.96).

A lot of the previous studies that have been conducted on human remains in museums tend to focus on how to manage the collections respectfully; that is to say acquisition, handling and deaccession (Aspeborg, 2020, p.8). The majority of guidelines and policy documents also focus on these aspects and have more in depth regulations for that than for the exhibition side (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, ICOM, 2017, Raä, 2020, Deutscher Museumsbund, 2013 & Dcms, 2005). The priority for many regulating documents and entities is on the majority of the artefacts and the manner with which they are preserved for the future. This would seem logical, however on the reverse of that coin the resources (time, personnel and money) tend to be aimed at public endeavours which are analysed very little in comparison to the managing and handling of the stored collections. This information is quite beneficial to be able to answer the last research question as it gives a more overarching viewpoint of guidelines and recommendations for museums in order to put this study in a global perspective.

A couple other authors have also been guiding throughout this thesis for scientific, philosophical and museological viewpoints on human remains.

Firstly, the archaeological and osteological perspectives are supported by two textbooks which present many features of the scientific value of studying and preserving human remains. “*The Oxford handbook of the archaeology of death and burial*” is a collection of chapters with different aspects of human remains in archaeology from the excavation, to the scientific research and including how knowledge is transmitted (Tarlow & Nilsson Stutz, 2013). Along with this, “*The archaeology of disease*” by Roberts & Manchester (2007) describes the potential scientific and cultural gain from studying human remains. This data is understood to often be gathered via museum collections of human remains. Moreover the resulting information is not seldom used by museologists in the creation of exhibitions, giving meaning to their choice of displaying a certain set of human remains.

Secondly, a doctoral thesis in philosophy and more specifically on the view of dark tourism, death and dying in modern society has framed the questions of an existential dimension relating to the human remains on display in museums (Stone, 2010). Through this text, Stone gives this thesis a perspective from a more philosophical standpoint (2010).

Lastly, a more nuanced perspective of museological research is given by the following authors. The article of Novljanin Grignard (2012) along with two very recent articles by Wills (2022) and Koustriava & Koutsmani (2023) provide different museal perspectives relating to human remains: the care, conservation, exhibition, accessibility and the challenges related to all of these activities. As aforementioned, in this thesis the displays of human remains are examined and through these articles, the authors provide supporting evidence to the data gathered and analysed here.

The research presented above demonstrates how complex the question of human remains is globally but more specifically within museums. This thesis focuses on a small part of the museum activities, that is to say exhibition of human remains in the hope of fulfilling a small part of the present research gap.

2. Methodologies

Two methods, namely observation and interviews, are used to gather and analyse information from culturally and geographically separated institutions which are not selected at random. The number of museums chosen was taken into careful consideration as studying more or less cases present different benefits: additional museums could bring more varied information while fewer museums allow for more in depth review of the acquired information (Lange, 2013, p.149). The research question, focusing on the comparison of museums with different backgrounds, demands a certain number to allow for comparison while not being too diverse. Therefore, an equilibrium between the necessary variety and in depth analysis must be attained in order to produce relevant discussion points.

Qualitative methods have been selected for this research over quantitative ones to answer empirical research questions. Observation or visual analysis of exhibits will serve as the primary method while interviews of a museum representative complete the information gained from the visual analysis. Interviews are used to collect further information after the observation phase on matters such as intended portrayal, upcoming changes, aspirations, or even ethical and practical guidelines regarding the treatment of human remains.

2.1 Where in the world is the research taking us?

Five museums have been a part of this study, one in Sweden, two in France and lastly two from Portugal. The attached world values map and data give a background to the second research question which aims to identify differences in the exhibition of human remains in museums located in different cultural settings as well as gives perspective on the choices of the three countries. The map below (fig.1) represents how countries around the world are influenced by differing sets of values which on the Y axis is a gradient between traditional and secular values while on the X axis the values present a range from the need to worry about survival all the way to self-expression. The map was created encompassing data from 111 countries thus far and the last update was conducted between 2017 and 2022 in Europe (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023). Therefore, data relating to this thesis is the most up to date available. The chosen locations, for this thesis, are equidistantly separated whilst remaining within the borders of Europe. The first is part of the light green Protestant Europe bubble while the other two are at opposite ends of the darker green Catholic Europe bubble (fig. 1). The values and traditions upheld in the differing geographical regions could be shown to influence the manner with which human remains are exhibited in their museums.

Indeed, it would stand to reason that changes in the environment surrounding the museums could alter the praxis of these institutions considering their embeddedness in society. The exhibition observation and analysis was chosen as the primary method as it could be used to compare human remains, which are very similar in nature, put in different situations. The methods used for the exhibitions are promising with regards to the knowledge that can be gained on the context of the museum itself and the culture it is embedded in. The exhibition analysis aims to provide information allowing the comparison and contrasting of the museal practices in the different European geographical regions which are all part of the Western world.

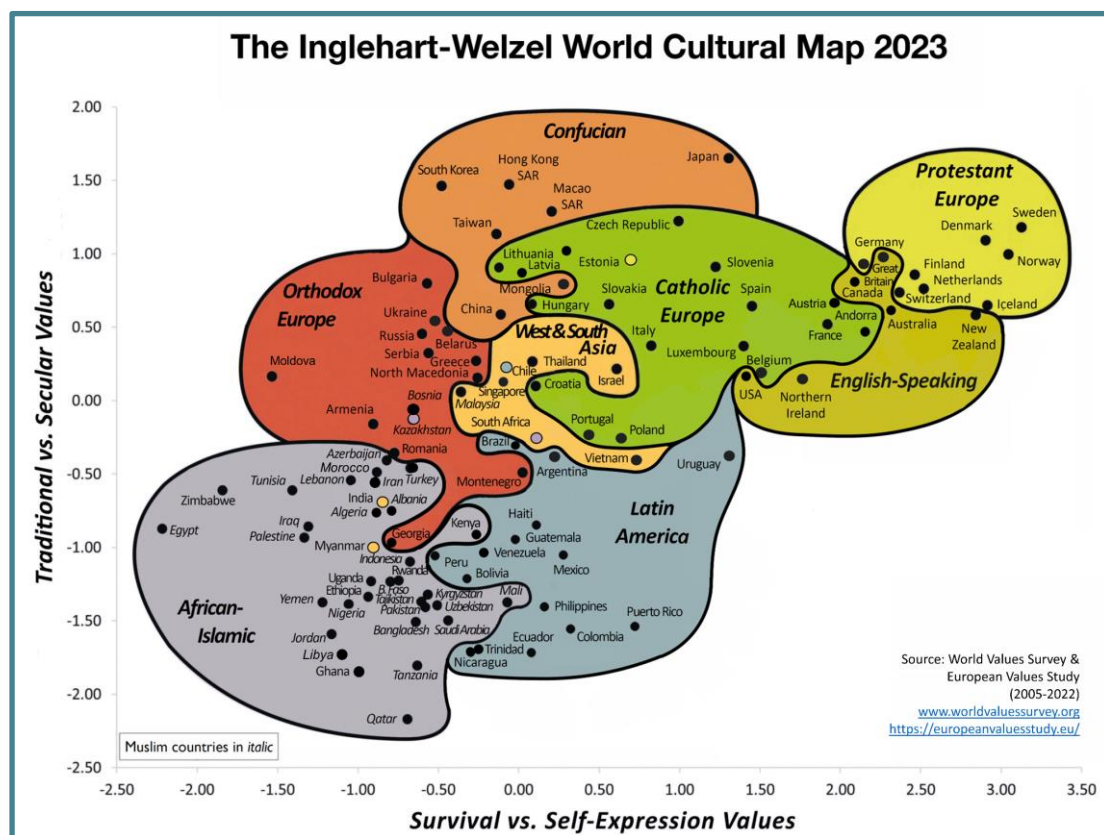


Fig. 1: World cultural map depicting the separation between the three lands chosen for the research. Portugal (0.5/-0.25) is very central, France (2/0.5) is further to the right and Sweden (3.25/1.2) is extreme right.

Therefore, the chosen countries for this museological study are rather separated geographically and culturally while remaining within Europe. Sweden, which represents northern Europe, is the first chosen country. It is the most secular and has evolved in a liberal context where values of self-expression and independence are central to society (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023). Presumably, the manner with which museum displays are composed may reflect these values. The second country is France, geographically central, where religion is still a part of many people's daily

lives (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023). Lastly, from the southwestern corner of Europe, Portugal will represent a more religious society, which maintains closer ties to countries with which they still share a language from their colonial past and some of these values may be visible in museums (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023). Portuguese research has at the same time shown a great interest for topics in the medical and scientific fields relating to human remains of which they possess great collections (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.350).

The comparison of skeletal remains in museums via the exhibition analysis and observation along with semi-structured interviews as methods of data collection aim to broaden our knowledge on museal practices which can a posteriori lead to updating or redoing exhibitions where human remains can become the heroes.

2.2 Observation through Exhibition Analysis - Let's See Here!

2.2.1 Method Description

The main method, observation through visual analysis, was adapted from the visual methodologies commonly used for objects. This method which has previously been utilised with images in art galleries is ruled by three conventions: the image must be critically studied, the social situation (display, creation) of the image and its cultural ramifications considered, as well as one's own background and behaviour when looking at the image (Rose, 2016, pp.22-23). In the context of museums, this method could be used to observe artefacts and in the case of this research, it is indeed utilised to analyse human remains on display. Therefore, the visual spatial analysis of human remains must assess their situation and context while being aware of one's own personal bias in order to observe with as much neutrality as possible. The manner with which human remains are exhibited can indeed create different reactions in people.

While studying the skeletal remains displayed some questions should be answered which are inspired from Rose's study of images and adapted to human remains (2016, p.374):

- What can we see? What parts of the skeleton? Anatomical? How are they displayed?
- Are there aids to help us understand the specimen (ex: a drawing, a reconstruction of a person, a video, etc.)?
- How does it relate to the surroundings in the room, exhibition and museum as a whole?

- Are the remains related to other artefacts?
- Is there a text description (digital or physical)?
- What feelings do the human remains evoke in the viewer?

Human remains as discussed above fall in a unique category that is in limbo between person and material culture. Although adapting a method of visual analysis of objects, the care and respect that human remains deserve will be preserved while conducting this research.

As aforementioned, data has been collected in 5 European museums, one in southern Sweden, two in France, in the Parisian region and lastly two in Portugal one in the Algarve region and the other in the capital, Lisbon. The exhibits were visited during the opening hours of the museums in order to observe both the displays of human remains but also potentially the reactions of visitors as well as if guides are presenting the exhibits to the public. In this way, a variety of information can be accessed simultaneously. Experiencing the exhibit and observing it before the interview has the advantage of being able to bring questions to light that are specific to a museum which could aid in completing the interview process. In order to save, present and analyse the data further, the displays have been photographed and notes taken along the way. Just as one records an interview in order to not miss a thing, the images and notes will allow us to return several times to the data and maybe even discover something that was missed at first (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022, p.115). The written information (exhibition texts and item specific information), the type of remains displayed along with whether or not the skeletal remains are displayed in relation to other artefacts will be collected during the observation phase. After the data collection, the number of photographs are reduced, sorted and organised into a manageable dataset on which the researcher relies for continuous interpretation during the discussion phase (Hoek, 2014, p.109). The goal with this method is to collect data of the current state of the human remains displayed to the public in the chosen museums. However, in order to assess the intentions of said museum for their exhibited human remains, this method is supplemented by interviews with personnel from these institutions. In order to be as unbiased as possible, the analysis of the exhibitions was completed prior to interviewing the personnel of the museum as their thoughts, comments or reactions may influence the interpretation of the observation of the human remains in the exhibition room.

2.2.2 Personal Bias

A certain degree of subjectivity is unavoidable with the visual study of human remains in museum exhibits. Through the shared humanity with the skeletal human

remains, emotional reactions, feelings or other reactions are unavoidable and can have either positive or negative connotations (Wills, 2022, p.417). An important factor in order to conduct research that is as unbiased and ethical as possible, is to critically think through the potential issues and be aware of the limits and lastly communicate these to the reader (Hughes Tidlund & Von Unge, 2022, p.49). On the one hand, having previously studied archaeology and osteology, I often feel very passionate about the reasoning behind scientific arguments for studying skeletal remains. Moreover, it is likely that I have a slightly different perspective towards human remains than a regular museum goer. On the other hand, I have witnessed the lack of care and respect that had been shown to human remains in the past which has sometimes affected museums today. This background has led me to this research with which I hope to find a balance between the complete detachment and materialistic approach to human skeletal remains and the blind disregard which would have these remains reburied or put back in storage, in turn losing the knowledge that our ancestors could bring us. In general, I find human remains endlessly informative, and to me human remains have a strong evocative power. They are easy to relate to just in their “natural” form, not staged, so I will endeavour to thoroughly analyse all angles as well as put myself to some extent in the shoes of typical museum visitors.

2.3 Interviews - May we Have a Word?

The second and complementary method to the visual analysis consists of interviews which have been conducted in person when possible. The hope is that the dataset collected will be more holistic utilising both methods. It is possible that the intent and final result of the museum exhibitions do not match. Alternatively, the museum personnel may have more information on the manner they wish to implement new exhibition methods or even simply update the current ones to create a greater possibility of knowledge transference.

The format for the interviews was semi-structured, which means that a plan for the topics covered as well as some specific questions are preemptively prepared. The interview template was then forwarded to the interviewees via email should they wish to prepare for the interview or collect data from colleagues if necessary. The interviews, which took place in several countries, need to account for potential sickness or unforeseen obstacles in the extraterritorial locations due to the limited time there. The program Microsoft Teams, which has an automated transcription feature enabling a significant gain of time during the study analysis and transcription, was used for the digital interviews (PR Newswire, 2022). If this option was not possible either, then an email, or series of emails, would have been

exchanged between the researcher and the interviewee to obtain the desired information.

The interviews were preferably performed at the museum where the observation took place, with a possibility to view the exhibitions containing human remains should explanations require them as support. Although the location chosen may not be without interference or eavesdroppers, it is helpful having the material observed close at hand for further questioning. Interviews can be done in an office but colleagues could interrupt, a café nearby can be distracting, etc. There does not seem to be a perfect quiet place but the most important is that the location of the interview is relevant to the material collected as well as a safe place for the interviewee (Troost, 2010, pp.65-66). The time for the interview was determined with the participant, it was either planned during work hours or directly after should the informant prefer that but in a professional setting since it is directly linked to their work (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022, pp.42-43).

In addition, the interviews were conducted with representatives of each museum where the observations of exhibited human remains were performed apart from one. The credibility of their words is reinforced through their profession and backgrounds but they could, nevertheless, have a bias towards the museum that employs them (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022, p.40). When reviewing their statements, this potential bias was considered. Objectivity or neutrality is not something that can actually be attained but if all are aware of the potential areas of unreliability then more care can be taken to focus on factual material when answering or preparing the questionnaire (Troost, 2010, p.134). An additional interview took place with a person working on recommendation for all museums in Sweden, providing therefore, a slightly different perspective.

An agreement form was given, reviewed, agreed upon and subsequently signed and dated at the beginning of the interview or prior to it by both parties. This form contains the purpose, approach and aim of the research, how the information would be treated, potential consequences and the guidelines for the interview (Hughes Tidlund & Von Unge, 2022, p.51). Once these requirements were met, it was preferred to be in contact with someone that has knowledge of the exhibits, the collections and coming alterations that may occur in the museum regarding human remains. Another factor to consider is the language, in the case of Portugal specifically. I speak French, English and Swedish fluently but my proficiency level in Portuguese is not as high. Therefore, it was preferable to conduct interviews with

someone within the museum that could communicate in a language I am fluent in, in order to avoid any confusion.

In order to be able to analyse the data, the interviews were voice recorded when possible with a voice recording application or, if online, via the Microsoft Teams program. After the conclusion of the interview process, transcripts were written in order to avoid the risk of misremembering or misinterpreting words said. The transcription was colour coded in order to analyse and discover themes within the results. If a part was confusing or the recording had any issues, the interviewees were contacted to ascertain the meaning of the unclear content. In the results, the content of the interviews was combined with the observations of the museums in order to give the reader a more holistic view of the human remains in the museum. Interviews used in the thesis text are either quoted word for word or paraphrased to aid the flow of the text as well as to avoid having too colloquial language or even unstructured sentences as it can arise in discussion (Troost, 2010, p.156). The material gathering followed a three step process: collection of data, analysis and interpretation aided by the theories chosen for this research (Troost, 2010, p.147). The data has the potential to show results that were unexpected, however both expected and unexpected information can result in knowledge gain about the human remains within museums.

The content of the interviews focuses on the museum (see annex 3); their aspirations, the past of the institution as a whole, the exhibited human remains and the guidelines regarding said remains rather than focusing on the personal experiences and opinions of the interviewee. In this sense, this research diverts from the usual ethnological study (Hughes Tidlund & Von Unge, 2022, p.62). The questions that specifically pertained to the person were minimal in number, and focusing on their expertise within the museal sector as well as with regards to exhibitions of human remains. Towards the end of the interview, a more open question was asked about what the interviewee feels, experiences, and understands about the displayed human remains in their museum which could lead to further questioning or awaken thoughts for further research (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022, p.34). The general order of questions was not the most important but rather the flow of the conversation to be as natural as possible so the person feels at ease. Granted, interviews and interviewees can be biased as we are all human beings, it is, therefore, positive that this method works in tandem with the observation of the exhibitions.

2.4 Presentation of the Museums and Informants

2.4.1 Museums

In this study five museum exhibitions containing displays of human remains were observed and analysed. The institutions are briefly presented here along with the dates of observations.

2.4.1.1 Observation I - Historical Museum -2024

Historiska Museet or Historical museum is located in Lund, Sweden. The analysis of human remains in the exhibitions of the museum took place on the 14th of February 2024 while the interview with museum personnel was conducted the next day. There are several reasons for choosing to work with this museum for this research. The first one is that the collections of the museum are similar in nature to those of the MAN. In addition, despite its size this museum has a significant collection of human remains. Lastly it is situated in Lund which provides a geographical advantage for the observation. This museum is the only one within Sweden which answered on time to gather data for this thesis and which displayed a significant amount of human remains. It was, therefore, beneficial to include it in the study.

2.4.1.2 Observation II - Museum of National Archaeology - 2023

The first museum observed was the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale (MAN) or National Archaeological Museum in St Germain-en-Laye, France. My internship also took place at this location as part of the museological masters' program which was conducted during the month of November 2023. It was rather fitting as they display human remains spanning a large time period and have large collections of these remains. This museum is at the origin of the idea for this thesis and was therefore the first one selected in this process. The exhibition analysis took place during the course of the internship. No interviews were conducted for this institution due to a lack of availability.

2.4.1.3 Observation III - Museum of Humankind - 2023

The Musée de l'Homme is a part of the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle or national museum of natural history, which aims to bring the spark of wonder and desire to learn to the public (Musée de l'Homme, n.d.). This museum, which is located in the centre of Paris, on the Trocadéro square and overlooking the Eiffel tower, is a museum that has the potential to be filled with visitors from around the world daily focusing its teachings on mankind. Thanks to this locale the museum

can reach people, be a meeting place and transmit knowledge about mankind which they do using a combination of techniques. This museum was selected because of the clear focus on human remains as well as the size and reach of its collections along with the geographical location fitting with the cultural value map. The exhibition analysis and interview for the Musée de l'Homme occurred with a significant time span elapsing between the two. The museum observation took place on the 11th of November 2023 while the interview was conducted in February 2024.

2.4.1.4 Observation IV - National Museum of Natural History and Science - 2024

On the 22nd of February 2024 both the observation and interviews were conducted in the Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência or National museum of Science and Natural history of Lisbon which is linked to the university. This museum has its roots in the Royal museum of Natural history and botany which was founded in the second half of the 18th century (National Museum of Natural History and Science, n.d.). It had similarities to several museums which had been previously selected and therefore, was chosen to be a part of this research. The museum is national as is the MAN, it is a natural history museum such as the Musée de l'Homme and finally is affiliated to a university in a similar fashion to the Historiska Museet. Moreover, the museum houses a large collection of human remains which is seldom exhibited nowadays; this was another interesting point for which the museum was chosen.

2.4.1.5 Observation V - Municipal Museum of Archaeology of Silves - 2024

The Silves Archaeological museum or Museu municipal de arqueología de Silves was visited on the 23rd of February where both the interview and observations were successively accomplished on the same day, in person. Silves is one of 16 Algarvian municipalities located in the southern part of Portugal, but is not a coastal city. This museum was chosen for their archaeological focus which can be related to the MAN in France and the Historiska Museet in Sweden. Indeed, the museums had material which possessed similar characteristics and followed the similar chronological patterns to these two.

2.4.2 Informants

Here will be briefly presented the five informants, four of which are affiliated with observed museums and the fifth one is a person from the Swedish National Heritage Board working with the question of human remains. All informants are familiar with how museums are managing the human remains and the processes related to the exhibitions of said remains.

2.4.2.1 Informant I - Curator of the anatomical collection at the Historiska Museet.

The interview for this museum was conducted and recorded via Teams on the 15th of February 2024. Although being in the same geographical location the informant preferred to have the interview digitally as it was easier for them to incorporate it into their schedule. The informant enlisted the help of a second person to provide additional information relating to the interview questions.

2.4.2.2 Informant II - Adviser for the care of human remains in museums at the Riksantikvarieämbetet.

The interview with this informant was conducted and recorded via Teams on the 2nd of February 2024 as the informant was in Stockholm at this time, and the researcher in Lund. This informant has worked in the museal sector for many years with human remains prior to moving to the National Heritage Board where they have been handling questions regarding human remains in museums. This person brings interesting perspectives to the research thanks to their profession which is embedded with the questions of human remains in museums for the whole of Sweden. Nevertheless, they are able to provide a view from outside museums. It is, therefore, a great asset to have been able to include this perspective. This informant was chosen for the input that could be gained from getting more in depth information from the Swedish National Heritage Board and the ethical recommendations they provide as well as another understanding of working with human remains in museums.

2.4.2.3 Informant III - Researcher & Teacher at the Musée de l'Homme.

The interview with this informant was conducted and recorded via Teams on the 2nd of February 2024. It was, unfortunately, not possible to come in contact with the informant to do the interview in person prior to leaving the Parisian region in the fall of 2023. There was a significant time gap between the observation and interview.

2.4.2.4 Informant IV - Professor at University of Lisbon & Curator of the Biological Anthropology collections at the Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência.

The interview was conducted in person on the 22nd of February 2024 in the museum in Lisbon. The informant took the time to prepare for the interview and was able to show the collections and explain how the museum has acted with regards to displayed human remains while showing the placement they would have had in previous exhibitions. This interview was originally planned to be only a dialogue about the museums' perspective on human remains and the reasoning behind the

removal of the latter from the public. However, the day of the interview the informant greeted me and expressed that one cranium remained on display.

2.4.2.5 Informant V - City Council archaeologist working with the Museu Municipal de Arqueología de Silves.

The interview was conducted in person on the 23rd of February 2024 in the Silves museum, in the room with the displayed human remains. This museum works closely with archaeologists and the city. The informant was able to provide a significant amount of data during the interview. Moreover, the informant had prepared a folder with scholarly articles pertaining to the human remains prior to the meeting which was given to me during the interview.

2.5 Ethical Reflections

The nature of this research means that ethics will come into play for both the living and the dead. In the course of this research, although not using names directly in the project, anonymity of the person will not be possible. Since the thesis focused on five specific museums, specific exhibits and projects working with human remains, it would be very difficult to maintain total anonymity. It is preferable to give credit to the informants interviewed for their contribution and mention how their profession and background validates their input (Hughes Tidlund & Von Unge, 2022, p.57). However, no names of the interviewees are used in the thesis. Both interviewee and interviewer have signed consent forms detailing how the interview would take place and the appropriate methods of communication between the two.

Secondly, this thesis studies human remains which are displayed in museums and a set of guidelines are to be followed by the researcher when visiting the various museums. The visitors to the museum should not be disturbed by the observation and an appropriate museal attitude must be maintained. It is important to show respect for the human remains in the data acquisition as well. In order to be able to fully describe and share the information gathered from the five museums, some images containing exhibited human remains in these museums will be used. The presence of these photographs benefits invaluablely the understanding of the results and argumentation.

3. Theoretical Framework...Through the Looking Glass

The theoretic framework upon which this thesis is based will take into account both phenomenology and institutional theory. These theories reflect on both the museum room and the reasons behind the manner in which artefacts are exhibited. Although not exactly linked to the research, these theories will lay the foundational elements to the study of human remains in museums which will aid in supporting the analysis, discussion, and future possibilities (Barmark & Djurfeldt, 2020, p.184).

3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that enables researchers and readers alike to qualitatively assess a place, situation, or object as methodically as possible; the walls of experiences and biases have to be broken down to better understand the various segments of the experience (Beck, 2021, p.2). In this instance, the focus on phenomenology will not be just philosophical but rather the theory that is labelled as phenomenology-as-qualitative-research or PQR which will help frame the observed displays of human remains. The goal is to understand the various phenomena surrounding these exhibited remains, the feelings and emotions it can evoke and how to gain meaning through them (Paley, 2016, pp.2-3). Undoubtedly, the effects and universe in which we are transported are intrinsically linked to who we are as people. The analysis of the exhibited human remains will apply mechanisms from a phenomenological perspective in order to better ground the visual observation and gather more scientific, rational data (Lange, 2013, pp.169-170). Aided of this phenomenological theory, it is possible to question the visual experience during the observation which is a seemingly natural, unavoidable response to skeletal remains and attempt to understand in a new light the observed data (Beck, 2021, p.2). The observation of the exhibited human remains will lean on the theoretical framings of phenomenology in order to be able to pinpoint more precisely the reasons for the evoked emotion, or “natural” reactions. The skeletal remains have a particular connection by which they hold a unique place amongst the museal artefacts.

In this research the phenomenological approach is also a part of the methodology, as part of the observations in museums gathers not only concrete data but also how the surrounding world interacts with the person visualising the human remains.

3.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, which in the past was referred to as the study of social constructs surrounding people, has recently established itself and become a significant tool of organisational theory which looks upon the very fabric of society (Meyer, 2021, p.126-127). All aspects of society's structures and infrastructures are to be understood through time and "actors" to help us grasp the causes and effects of our common evolution. These structures that regulate our social lives are known as institutions; they aim to aid the better functioning of our society.

There is a huge amount of potential definitions for institutions due to the use of the term in so many disciplines over time (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009, p.13). The concept of institution will, therefore, be defined for the purposes of this study in order to avoid any ambiguities and to promote transparency. Institutions grew as a response to the basic needs humans were faced with in their daily life within society. These social behaviours were then repeated, represented by material culture or architecture and finally safeguarded via oral and written traditions to pass on to the future generations (Chapin, 1928, pp.44-48). Today, institutions are understood as necessary establishments with a repetitive pattern which aid in the survival, proper functioning and maintenance of a social order via their presence and activities (Björklund & Silow Kallenberg, 2022, p.69, Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009, p.15, Greenwood et al., 2008, pp.4-5). Institutions may include medical, correctional, educational and of course the cultural institutions such as museums. The latter, on which the thesis focuses, has evolved in tandem with society and its institutions, both influencing one another to become what they are today. Through this paragraph the concept and origin of institutions has been narrowed down for the purpose of this research. When institutions are mentioned further, it will refer to this definition.

The basic human needs, which have evolved and been studied through the lens of institutional theory, are at the root of the norms, regulations, practices, functions and conventions that organisations follow to fit in with its surrounding environment (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009, p.20, 62). The first "modern" museum is said to be the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford which opened in 1683, thereafter other museal institutions appeared and grew in number (Clary, 2018, p.14). Academics in the western world were eager to display knowledge found abroad and human remains of interest such as mummies. Many museums were founded by universities hoping to promote their academic status and broaden their curriculum; therefore, the two institutions are intrinsically linked (Boylan, 1999, p.43 & Håkansson, 2020, p.446).

Museums, today, are attempting to move away from this pattern, they are nevertheless still greatly influenced by the scientific and academic sphere and less so by society and its values as a whole. Yet the institution of museums incorporates in their routine a greater input from the general public and includes them more now than it has been in the past (ICOM, 2022).

Thanks to institutional theory, it is possible to better grasp the reasoning behind the creation of certain types of exhibits, the care that was given to artefacts in general, and more specifically human remains within museums. Linking skeletal remains to institutional theory enables us to better understand the evolution of the displays of human remains. Things which may have been totally acceptable at the turn of the twentieth century, such as creating and displaying skull typologies, would be frowned upon by modern society. Through institutional theory, gathering information is rendered possible about organisations such as museums and bring to light how these structures are the results of the influences from the surrounding society (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009, p.108).

Imitations and the transmission of similar ideas from one institution to the next is a rather common practice in the museal world which is an aspect of institutional theory (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009, p.162). The process by which institutions grow to look more alike than different is called isomorphism and three different mechanisms by which this is attained have been identified (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.150). The first is *coercive isomorphism* whereby a political power influences change into organisations, secondly there is *normative isomorphism* which tend to occur when institutions want to attain a seemingly higher level of professionalism and lastly *mimetic isomorphism* which comes as a result of periods of doubt or uncertainty for institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.150). Some museums have unwittingly adhered to this last process due to the ease it provides when less resources are available. They may copy or mimic what other similar institutions have done, follow similar policies in order to focus on other matters and to save themselves time. Through this practice, museums may have a tendency to grow to be more alike.

On the one hand, this could benefit the organisational purposes, the understanding of exhibitions, the creation of regulating guidelines, as well as the exchanges of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, the museums lose part of their individuality and could, therefore, lose the interest of the public if all museums

everywhere become the same. Although this evolution is part of a natural process, museums remain vigilant and aware of the risks of becoming too alike.

4. Results & Analysis: Observation & Interviews

Through the combined use of the aforementioned methods, the research has gained insight basing itself on phenomenology and institutional theory in order to have a dataset from which information could be extrapolated. These comparative historical methods offer benefits from individual cases while giving the possibility to create some generalisation from empirical data (Lange, 2013, p.176). The observation and analysis of museum exhibitions enabled a significant data collection which was then completed with interviews of relevant personnel in order to assess the institutions' position and intentions for the present and future display of human remains within their walls. Exhibiting human remains is dependent on the missions of museums, on the individuals working there, on the collections available, etc. Every situation is, thus, rather unique. Museums tend to be aware that audacity and tenacity are required to be able to discuss sensitive issues. Emotions will be present but logic and context acquired through collaboration can bring an exhibition together (Informant II). The empirical information collected was compared between museums in order to gain further insight into the exhibition of human remains. Through this section the museums will be presented from north to south of Europe which also coincides with from the most secular to the most religious country according to the world value map (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023).

4.1 Swedish Museum

4.1.1 Lund University Historical Museum - Lunds Historiska Museet (SE)

In February 2024 the museum had 11 sets of human remains on display with a variety of presentation methods going from full anatomically displayed remains to single elements on a glass shelf. The Historiska Museet does not shy away from showing human remains in their exhibitions as seen through the number displayed in such a small museum or via some of their temporary exhibitions (anatomical collections exhibit - *Döden, ett Bekymmer*, 2014). Transparency on the contents of the collections along with a desire to enhance visitors' knowledge are at the origin of decisions to display human remains today (Informant I). There is a clear scientific and historically significant aim of exhibiting and, as is the case for a large majority of museums, only an estimated .01 percent of the human remains collections are shown to the public. The human remains in the collections of the museum are mainly from three contexts: archaeological, medical and ethnographic

which together amount to about 6000 individuals (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, pp.2-3).

4.1.1.1. Guidelines for Handling Human Remains

The manner with which human remains are displayed is very dependent on the exhibition. Although the museum has guidelines to follow for all collections containing human remains, the presentation of them as well as the exhibition texts vary greatly. Nevertheless, the manner with which the remains are cared for within the exhibition room and in storage is identical to any other artefacts, according to the informant I they are handled in the most optimal way possible. The Historiska Museet in Lund does not have climate controlled environments or display cases for human remains in the exhibition rooms as they do not deem it necessary considering the current Swedish climate and the age of the building (Informant I). The natural environment does not appear to fluctuate much. Since 1918, the museum has resided in this building which was originally designed to be the residence of the bishop (Ersgård, 2020, p.113). Human remains are displayed in the ethnographic, Stone Age, Iron Age, Skateholm and coin treasure exhibitions on the first and second floors with a significant amount of variety (Observation I). The difference between these could be related to the evolution of exhibition methods, the personnel responsible for the exhibition or the purpose given to the human remains on display. Are they exemplifying body modification, signs of diseases or cultural practices pertaining to death and burial or something else? A great manner to avoid any discrepancies would be to follow a set of guidelines when managing human remains so that the tasks become very systematic and irrespective of human interpretation.

The policy document of the Historiska Museet regarding human remains has the aim to promote the respectful care of said remains for which they rely on both guidelines from ICOM and the National Heritage Board (RAÄ - Riksantikvarieämbetet) to support their decisions (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.1). *“Human remains displayed in exhibitions should have a clear purpose for being there, they should not be used as props and a description of the context must always be available to visitors”* (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.4). The guidelines from this museum do not provide much more than this sentence, specifically addressing the exhibition of human remains. Nevertheless, the recommendations appear to be founded on systematic methods and respectful care towards both the individual remains and visitors. The National Heritage Board provides a little more detail which the museum can lean on when making decisions about human remains. According to the National Heritage Board,

skeletal remains should be exhibited according to the mission and message the museum wants to portray, taking note of climate and security requirements, giving appropriate context via exhibition texts filled with carefully checked and researched information which can be placed in such a way that visitors can choose to avoid them (Raä, 2020, pp.18-19). Moreover, there is a section displaying “*human remains of religious significance [for which] originating communities [could request] the withdrawal from an exhibition, [which] must be dealt with promptly, and with sensitivity and respect*” (Raä, 2020, p.9). Presumably, when planning an exhibition, museums would have consulted with persons linked to sensitive human remains with either religious ties or those belonging to minority groups in order to come to an understanding prior to the exhibiting of any sensitive material (Raä, 2020, p.19).

According to the guidelines provided by the National Heritage Board (Raä, 2020, p.10), policy documents composed by the museums ought to be available internally, externally and be kept up to date. The policy document of the Historiska Museet is indeed updated every five years or as needed should laws, rules or regulations in society change faster than the allotted time (Informant I & LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.6). The last one was published and put into effect mid 2022 (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.1). Nevertheless, there is already a new document being written which should replace the current one despite the five-year mark not having been attained (Informant I). A significant portion of the guidelines followed by the museum are taken and adapted from the National Heritage Board which provides guidelines for the care of human remains in museums, amongst other things, for Sweden as a whole (Raä, 2020).

4.1.1.2 Exhibition methods observed in the Historical Museum.

The displayed human remains at the Historiska Museet were divided into four categories for this study: sepulchres in other words a burial place, mummified remains, single elements as well as an articulated full skeleton.

SINGLE ELEMENTS

The majority of the displays consist of singular elements, three of which are in the new ethnographic exhibit. The skeletal elements can be used to exemplify methods of body modification, show signs of activities or pathologies that occurred when the individuals were alive. The displayed human remains also include relics, or curios. A relic can be defined as a memento or souvenir which often are human remains of a martyr or saint, for which a certain belief renders them more valuable

to the owner by association to said individual (Merriam-Webster, n.d. - relic). The term can sometimes be expanded to include remains of historically significant persons which are then treated similarly. All three singular elements from the ethnographic exhibition; a parietal bone (part of the cranium - see fig. 10), a tooth (see fig. 2) and an ulna (long bone from the forearm) fall under this relic category. The information available through the exhibition texts lets visitors know when the museum acquired the bones and tooth, the person to whom it belonged, location of provenance as well as a small historical background (Skatter från fem kontinenter, 2023).



Fig. 2: Tooth of the Duke Magnus of ÖsterGötland, son of Gustav Vasa, from Lunds Historiska Museet, in the exhibition “Skatter från fem kontinenter”.

In the Barbaricum exhibition, presenting the Scanian Iron age and Uppåkra, the displayed skeletal elements are craniums which are very evocative to the visitors. The man from Fjälkinge cranium displays body modifications in this case teeth markings (see fig. 3) while another skull from Silvåkra bog can attest to violence which could take place in 400 AD (Barbaricum – Uppåkra och Skånes järnålder, 2007). These craniums provide context for visitors to understand what material osteologists work with in order to postulate their interpretations. Moreover, digital apparatus placed in the display cases give more in depth information as well as additional pictures from different angles and potentially better lighting which can help understand the purpose of presenting human remains. The changing digital displays attract the eye and bring focus to the narrative of the exhibition, this is great as long as the device is not broken or unplugged.

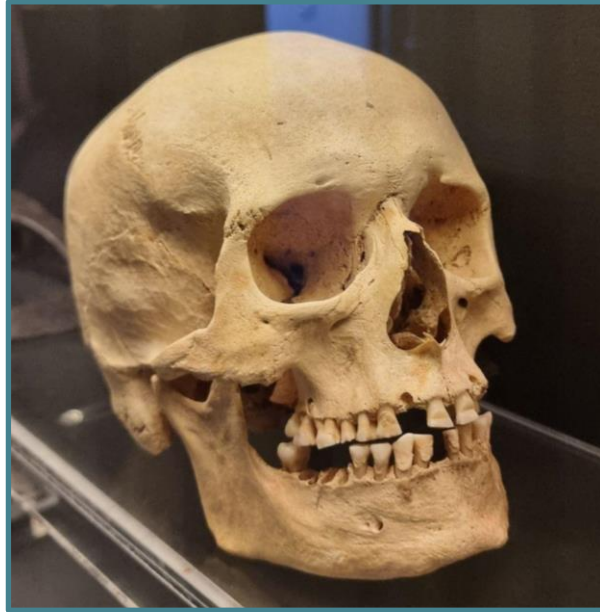


Fig. 3: Cranium of Viking age man from Fjälkinge with dental modification of the front teeth. Displayed in Barbaricum, Lunds Historiska Museet.

On the second floor, there are three craniums along with a couple post cranial elements on a jute cloth (see fig.4) in a case together which are there to portray the devastation of the 1710-1713 Plague in Olofström, Sweden (Observation I). The narrative attached to these human remains is rather poignant; the children displayed in the coin exhibition were found with coins in their pockets, simply buried with as little touching as possible due to the fear of contamination. This bit of information is all that is communicated to visitors about the remains themselves. On the other hand, the history of the Plague in the Scanian region of Sweden, the excavation and its findings are communicated more at length. My hypothesis for the human remains being exhibited in this room could be that the datation was done via the coins which were found in the deceased's clothing. However, there are no clear explanations to support this idea.



Fig. 4: Display with three craniums & extra post cranial elements (vertebrae, scapula, ribs) in the mint exhibition room of Lunds Historiska Museet.

Additionally, the display containing the skeletal remains has the Swedish text directly on the glass while only one copy of the English version is available in a basket mounted to the door of the room (Observation I). The latter version of the exhibition text is printed on laminated paper and contains all of the texts pertaining to this exhibition room. Finding this pamphlet was not intuitive as it was not highlighted in any way. Should the visitor find this leaflet, they still must figure out which text belongs to which display as is often the case with this type of translation aid. It is worth noting that the exhibition texts are available in another language, which can be helpful for non-Swedish speakers. Nevertheless, the style utilised can be misleading for museum goers, particularly if they confuse the texts between displays. The visitor could then leave with erroneous information even though the correct information was there.

SEPULCHRE - BURIAL

The second manner of presenting human remains is via displaying the skeleton and related artefacts as they were found in situ in their graves. The Historiska Museet has two such sepulchres, one is the Skateholm man and the other is a female from Oxie in the centre of the Stone Age exhibition room (Observation I). These are presented in displays closer to the ground to mimic the burial perspective.

The Stone Age skeletal remains (see fig. 5) are situated at an over the knee height and have been in the museum for almost a hundred years without being updated; the excavation and subsequent exhibition took place in 1928 (Stone Age room, exhibition text). The display creation for these remains is attributed to the archaeologist Otto Rydbeck, who was very influential for the museum; both in the exhibition rooms and for the collections from 1901 until his retirement (Ersgård, 2020, p.113). These remains are easily visualised from all angles as one can walk around the square glass display case. It is also well suited to large groups of visitors to be able to all stand or sit around the display and have a view of the skeletal remains, in this way it is a rather pedagogically thought out presentation. This could be advantageous for visitors coming to the museum for a guided tour, however should a person come to visit on their own, finding the information about this sepulchre would be more difficult as it is neither on nor near the display case but rather on the column to the right, as seen in the second image beside the presentation cases with ceramics (fig. 5 - right). This information is also only available in Swedish in this location.



Fig. 5: Female skeleton sepulchre from Fredriksbergs Gård, Oxie. Presented with artefacts in the centre of the Stone Age room, a display created by Otto Rydbeck, Lunds Historiska Museet.

The second sepulchre is completely recessed in the floor (see fig. 6), and situated in a back room which people who may find human remains disturbing could easily forgo. Visitors who choose to observe the Skateholm grave can go as close as desired and see the skeleton and artefacts from all angles. Although lights located under the glass lift up the contrast and details of this burial, the glass being one with the floor is easily scratched and dirtied (Observation I). It must be quite difficult to upkeep and some may also find it difficult to walk over a human skeleton in a grave. The exhibition text for this grave is available just behind the display in both English and Swedish: in depth information is given on the context of the skeleton, the narrative to the area, the osteological finding, the grave goods as well as the excavation itself. Moreover, a simplified drawing points out the artefacts present in the grave in order to distinguish them from the human remains. In spite of all these positive points, one caveat must be pointed out: the English description contains several spelling errors. Notwithstanding, the errors are not critical enough to stop visitors from understanding the text, it does, however, instil a seed of doubt about the veracity of the document or its scientific foundation.



Fig. 6: Skateholm mesolithic grave with male human remains and grave goods, sunken in the floor at the Lunds Historiska Museet.

ARTICULATED SKELETON

Thirdly, there is an articulated skeleton in the Barbaricum exhibition which is hanging vertically in a glass display case along with a few artefacts (see fig. 7). An articulated set of remains is defined as bones that are linked together at the *joints so that their relative position* mimics that of a living person (Merriam-Webster, n.d. - articulated). The cabinet containing this skeleton is a huge part of the scenography, taking almost a sixth of the wall space in the room. The exhibition texts are both in Swedish and English via monitors as well as stickers on the glass. The artefact placement is visually appealing and makes the eye travel to all parts of the display. Furthermore, several drawn reconstructions aid the visitor understand how the skeleton was as a person. All of these details along with a thoroughly constructed narrative, creates a sense of connection between the human remains and the visitors. Nevertheless, informant I postulated that if something were to be changed concerning displayed human remains in this museum, it would be to have a solution for this articulated skeleton to be displayed in a less damage prone manner. It is unlikely to be noticed by visitors but it is a vital part of showing respect for the human remains exhibited.



Fig. 7: Articulated Fjälkinge female skeleton from the 10th century AD, the tales from the grave in the Barbaricum exhibition, Lunds Historiska Museet.

MUMMIFIED HUMAN REMAINS

Lastly, the museum has mummified human remains on display: one mummified hand as well as a mummy and sarcophagus, both of which are in the new ethnographic exhibition (Observation I). The sarcophagus and mummy (see fig. 8) represent the third display of the ethnographic exhibition which can be seen just around the corner from the parietal bone from Descartes. According to the exhibition text, the mummy and sarcophagus are both real artefact and human remains but together are a construct of the guides for the catacombs in Saqqara from 1733. The acquisition story, however fascinating, displays a clear colonial influence of that time and how this rich cultural heritage was left to rest in the possession of Lund University. Modern techniques would allow for the mummy and the wood of the sarcophagus to be analysed in order to maybe understand their origins and even possibly discover where the feet or head of the mummy may be. The museum is now caring for this human mummy but the information accessible to a visitor is lacking. Neither osteological data nor provenance about the mummy,

sarcophagus or history of its museal life is available through the exhibition text. There is no information on whether steps were taken to study it or repatriate it.



Fig. 8- left: 4000 years old Egyptian mummy and 1500 years old sarcophagus from Saqqara displayed in the ethnographic exhibition at the Lunds Historiska Museet & Fig. 9 - right: Egyptian mummified hand collected in Thebes 1849, displayed in the ethnographic exhibition amongst artefacts from Egypt and other mediterranean countries, Lunds Historiska Museet.

The mummified hand (fig. 9) is presented in a glass cabinet at hip height with no less than 91 other artefacts as well as a mummified juvenile crocodile (Observation I). The amount, variety and distinct provenance of artefacts presented together is overwhelming. It is very difficult to understand a cohesion within this display other than interesting foreign items. It is problematic not to have more information as to the reason behind exhibiting all of these objects together or why so many artefacts need to be displayed with so little information in such a small space. All of the texts in this cabinet are printed on small papers and solely in Swedish.

IN THE EYES OF RENÉ DESCARTES, the interesting case of his Skull.

In part through pure coincidence, geographical convenience and differing cultural values, the museums in Sweden and France which were chosen to represent the different museographic possibilities for human remains both claim to possess the same individual. This example illustrates how human remains are exhibited in different countries with different values. Furthermore, it is exemplifying one of the challenges which museums are often faced with: unearthing the past within their collections to come to factual evidence.

The cranium on the left (fig.10) is the one presented by the Musée de l'Homme, in the display case other remains of apes and artefacts are also exhibited. The display is rather busy and was made to evoke colonial museography. On the right (fig.10), there is the parietal bone from the Historiska Museet which is displayed on a red

velour pillow and with the box in which it was preserved. The two are alone in the display case and evoke the cabinets of curiosity and they have a colonial aspect.



Fig. 10: René Descartes cranial remains Left - Cranium from the Musée de L'Homme & Right - Parietal bone from the Lunds Historiska Museet.

Indeed, the skull of René Descartes, French philosopher at the origin of “*Je pense donc je suis*” (I think therefore I am or in Latin *Cogito, ergo sum*), long thought to be in the hands of the French authorities and displayed at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, may not be genuine. While the long thought forged parietal bone (part of cranium), which was kept as a relic and passed down through affluent families in Scandinavia, may in fact be a genuine part of the skull belonging to Descartes (Manhag & Karsten, 2020, p.109).

4.1.1.3 Evoked feelings...

Some of the displays containing human remains did awaken negative feelings due to the context around the human remains seemingly disrespectful. On the other hand, certain displays containing human remains felt very purposeful and that knowledge was at the centre of the discussion. Through the use of phenomenological views it is possible to understand which parts of the exhibits of the Historiska Museet felt problematic intuitively (Zahavi, 2019, p.115). Some of the displays, mostly in the ethnographic exhibition, had typical signs of curiosity cabinets: busy displays, focus on the acquirer, relics, the variety of countries of origin for the artefacts, etc. Therefore, the form plunged the viewer into this feeling

of disrespect towards human remains. The phenomenological approach enabled the questioning and reflection of what felt naturally wrong in order to establish the elements causing this emotion. In the case of the latter, it was both possible to understand context and find a connection with the remains. The human remains appear to make sense in the context of the exhibit as well as a pedagogical tool around which visitors could gather and inform themselves on all aspects of the lives of our ancestors. Here again the phenomenological theory enabled the deconstruction of the experience for this second type of remains. They felt as though they were in their “natural” context, for example the sepulchres, there was an element of care and respect for the departed by their contemporary. Therefore, the feelings towards it are less jarring than that of the “curiosities”. Interestingly enough, it is the older exhibitions in the museum that appear to have been crafted with more consideration for the human remains and artefacts alike (Observation I).

This focus on a purpose or scientific reasoning in the exhibition rooms could be attributed to the priority which was put on research at the turn of the 20th century in the Historiska Museet. Indeed, at its origins the museum was geared towards scientific research instead of towards the transmission of knowledge through school visits, the rooms were therefore planned chronologically and typologically organised in order to ease the work of researchers (Ersgård, 2020, p.114). Already at the turn of the twentieth century, Otto Rydbeck advocated the collaboration between research and museums which was not only successful but also very innovative at this time (Ersgård, 2020, p.117). Collaboration between the museal world and academia is today a central aim for many institutions which is also promoted by the international council of Museums (ICOM, 2022).

The majority of the remains from which negative feelings arose were displayed in the new ethnological exhibition of the museum which is the newest part of the permanent parcours opened in 2023 and has for title “*Skatter från fem kontinenter*” (Treasures from Five Continents). The exhibition presents both mummified human remains, as well as single bones: part of the cranium from Descartes, a tooth and ulna (refer to fig. 2-8-9-10). Walking into the exhibition room situated on the first floor of the museum, a feeling of being drawn into a colonial museography was undeniable (Observation I). As previously mentioned, several elements played a part into this feeling: the chosen cabinets and the quantity of artefacts in them, the descriptions, the lack of scenography taking accessibility, inclusivity or language into account or even simply the name of the exhibition itself.

Guided tours could possibly render the experience of the ethnographic exhibition and the rest of the museum more positive. Guided visits tend to give more in depth information to the visitors on the exhibited human remains. However, it is dependent on the guide which is giving the tour. At the moment, the Historiska Museet has a pedagogue who is also an osteologist and when this person explains, she may focus slightly more on the human skeletons (Informant I). The information transmitted via guided tours as oral transmission can vary depending on a number of factors as all humans, pedagogues, can be affected by daily occurrences and change the narrative from one time to another. The visitors' experiences can, therefore, vary greatly both positively or negatively impacting the evoked feelings and acquired knowledge of the visit to the museum.

The Historiska Museet in Lund is filled with a patchwork of extremely different exhibitions. This institution possesses guidelines which provide four pillars meant to guide their actions (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.2). According to this document, they ought to care for and grow the collections, have an infrastructure suitable for learning and research, have public activities geared towards the collaboration with the surrounding society and lastly be a part of the cultural involvement for the university (LU Historiska Museets Riktlinjer, 2022, p.2). Considering these guidelines, how could such stark contrast arise when displaying human remains? Museums are nowadays in a complex position having to reconcile their past and present whilst upholding certain values such as being a meeting place, transmitting knowledge, doing research, preserving artefacts while being inclusive and accessible (ICOM, 2022). Nevertheless, inconsistencies have been observed in the Historiska Museet in Lund where exhibition texts are at times available in several languages while others solely in Swedish. Having only the one language available renders the exhibitions less accessible and may even be seen as a form of distancing from foreigners. Informant II stated that what makes a great museum is not good or bad exhibits as those will always exist, but rather the courage to work with human remains, to not avoid them and always strive to improve. This statement is dependent on whether the museum type calls for displaying human remains.

4.2 French Museums

4.2.1 National Archaeology Museum (MAN) - Musée d'Archéologie Nationale (St Germain-en-Laye, FR)

During an internship for the month of November 2023, the exhibitions with human remains of the MAN were observed and data collected to view the methods used by a museum of this size and importance. In comparison to the quantity of skeletal remains that were exhibited in the past, only 3 displays visible to the public during normal opening hours of the museum contain human remains (Observation II). In addition to these displays, a guided tour (1h or 1h30 minutes long) of the Salle Piette (fig. 11), containing the collection from Edouard Piette, which also has some human remains displayed in the same way since the turn of the twentieth century can be booked in advance (Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, 2024). This room can only be accessed via these special tours but gives an insight into the past of exhibitions, collections, how museums worked, etc. In my experience, this is a truly transporting experience which can put into perspective how far the museal practice has come in a short 150 years (Observation II). It is interesting to make note of the architecture, the colours in the room (burgundy, brick and beige), the cabinets, the corner of the fireplace slightly visible in the photograph (fig.11). A feeling of historical significance is palpable in the Salle Piette in contrast with the Musée de l'Homme which presents a modern style.



Fig. 11: Photograph of Salle Piette, MAN.

4.2.1.1 Exhibition methods observed in the MAN

In the currently accessible permanent parcours of the National Archaeological Museum, skeletal remains are presented in one of two ways: on the one hand sepulchres are displayed or on the other hand, specific single skeletal elements (Observation II).

SEPULCHRE - BURIAL

The first, sepulchres, are used to demonstrate the entire context which allows for the visualisation of burial practices and grave goods. The MAN has only one Neolithic sepulchre currently visible to the public. They previously had similar burial displayed from the Palaeolithic and Gallo-Roman periods. The galleries of which are currently under construction, the new permanent parcours could therefore display some of these remains once they reopen or alternatively choose to display something different. A sepulchre provides a concrete visual anchor in a certain period to enable the discussion of society, view of the world, beliefs, gender, craftsmanship, or even materials used. The human remains are usually shown as they were unearthed by archaeologists, a sort of in situ situation in the museum, which could be reconstructed or not (see fig.12). This specific burial was taken in a block from Cys-la-Commune; it is not staged by the museum (Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, 2024). In this instance, the Neolithic sepulchre is placed centrally in the first room of the permanent parcours (Observation II). Visitors come up a set of stairs, then through a long corridor at the end of which they finally immerse themselves in the first period presented right now in the museum. The glass display is at approximately 40 cm from the floor level in order to give the grave perspective. This position also renders the burial very accessible for people of all ages, and height as well as from all angles. Although the skeleton is very fragmented, visitors can still understand that it was a person and imagine the grave goods as worn by the person.



Fig. 12: Neolithic sepulchre half excavated, artefacts in the display as found in the grave, MAN.

SINGLE ELEMENTS

The second display method, which is to have just a skeletal element presented, is often cranium as they are the most evocative, especially to non-experts who may not be able to differentiate a vertebra from a tarsal bone. These skeletal remains are often used to describe more specific events such as the evolution of medicine and treatments, warfare, teeth used as tools, etc. In the MAN, the disarticulated remains displayed show how certain types of treatment such as trepanation could have looked on skulls, or exhibit results of trauma (see fig. 13). These elements are placed in a wall mounted glass cabinet in the back right corner of the Neolithic section. The skeletal remains are displayed together with artefacts and a very brief explanation is given about warfare, not mentioning any specifics relating to the objects present (Observation II). The remains all have a number linked to a material description such as for example: bone vertebra with silex.



Fig. 13: Vertebrae with silex arrowheads and trepanned cranium to display trauma and warfare from the MAN.

Following phenomenological theory, the experience of the display was taken down to the various elements which played a role in the feelings of the exhibition. The placement of the human remains in the corner of the room, more in retreat, could be seen as respectful of visitors who would desire to avoid the human remains during their visit to the museum. However, the position in the corner, in a crowded display case mixed with other artefacts could be deemed less respectful to the human remains themselves. Although less condensed than it would have been in early museographic displays, the presentation does not allow the skeletal remains to transmit knowledge to their full potential (Ekman, 2018, p.7 & Joly-Parvex, 2021, pp.8-9). Indeed, they disappear in the mass of objects, and in this way it seems as though their voice is muted. Simultaneously, a more central position could

be considered disrespectful, it is a dilemma which museums tend to be all too aware of. The human remains could also benefit from more in depth exhibition texts which could strengthen the aim of having them displayed and include them into the narrative the museum wants to portray.

The last exhibition method used by the MAN is closely related to the previous one as the skeletal remains are disarticulated single elements (Observation II). There is one suspended glass cabinet, between the Gallo-Roman and Celtic rooms (room VIII), with human skulls aiming to present previous museal practices common in the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries such as curiosity cabinets (see fig. 14). The display contains craniums, artefacts and excerpts from the inventory with the smallest amount of detail which illustrates perfectly typical dated museography. For visitors, although indicated as an antiquated model, it can be difficult to come face to face with these craniums that have not been explained in any way. Nevertheless, they do exemplify curiosity cabinets well.



Fig. 14: Three craniums with minimal information and inventory number if available, MAN.

The National Archaeological Museum is a major institution with collections of considerable prehistoric and historic significance which include over a thousand sets of different individual human remains. However, there are currently less than ten specimens exhibited. It has been a necessity for a great deal of the exhibitions to be taken down due to renovations of the castle walls, the putting in place of an elevator for increased accessibility to the exhibition rooms and last but not least a remodelling and modernising of the 1960 exhibition rooms. The museum does not seem to shy away from displaying human remains so long as a justifiable purpose is present as is the case in several French institutions (Informant III). With so many of the museum exhibition rooms to be renovated, it can be interesting to see what the future holds for the MAN.

4.2.2 Museum of Mankind - Musée de l'Homme (Paris, FR)

The exhibition analysis took place during a winter Saturday (11/11/2023); the museum was rather busy but no pedagogues nor school groups were present (Observation III). The interview which occurred in February 2024 was conducted online for two reasons; time constraints in November to get in contact and set up a meeting as well as the financial inability to travel to Paris for a second time during the data acquisition period for the thesis. Therefore, the meeting with the responsible for the human remains' collections did not take place in the fall in conjunction with the observation phase. The data collected via the interview was however insightful and brought an interesting dimension to the observed information.

The permanent exhibition, looking very modern through the use of newer technologies, interactive displays and accessible and inclusive museal methods, was indeed completely redone in 2015 by a team comprised of scientists, scenographers, curators and museologists (Informant III). The museum also presents temporary exhibitions that typically last about six months. The majority of the exhibition texts, throughout the museum, are available in French, Spanish and English but there are also audio guides and braille descriptions for visually impaired people (Observation III). This gives the impression that the project group really thought through accessibility during the creation of the permanent exhibition rooms. The aforementioned temporary exhibitions also focus on various aspects of human evolution but do not necessarily display human remains (Informant III). The last temporary exhibit was Préhistoromania which highlighted our predecessors' parietal art (also known as cave art or rock art) and our fascination with the subject. This was exhibited from the 17th of November 2023 until the 20th of May 2024 (Musée de l'Homme, n.d.). The choice of the human remains, the manner with which they are displayed, the exhibition texts written for them, the scripts for the pedagogues, or even the climate adaptations for specific remains are all elements that are decided by consensus within the project group (Informant III). Moreover, should changes to the exhibition be required either due to damage or to new information coming to light, communication is always open between various parts of the museum which in turn enables collaboration.

The Musée de l'Homme, although seemingly displaying a lot of human remains, only has a small fraction of the collections in the exhibition rooms. Each specimen presented, be it proto-human, primate or Homo Sapiens has a precise reason for being on display and depends on the scientific message that the museum wants to

portray (Informant III). Although being a part of the Natural history museum, which according to ICOM (2013, p.1) means that human remains should only be displayed under a very specific set of regulations, the Musée de L’Homme presents a significant amount of human remains.

The museum focuses on three distinct areas of the scientific evolution of humankind. First and foremost, the museum displays chronological evolution, which is depicted by a combination of moulded replicas & actual human remains (fig. 15). These remains consist of predominantly skeletal remains from Australopithecus to modern humans. Secondly, an array of cultures are presented through both artefacts and human remains which illustrate the range of traditions, cultures and human remains while colonial undertones are only minimally felt. The types of objects, here skeletal remains, and intentions given to them by their placement can influence the manner with which they are understood via phenomenological perspectives (Zahavi, 2019, p.56). The negative undertones were seldom felt through this more modern renewed exhibition. Lastly, the museum also shines a light on various scientific perspectives and museal representations dating back to the early years of the museum in 1939 all the way to the present with the modernised 2015 exhibits (Musée de l’Homme, n.d.). The newer museographic techniques enable all the senses to be activated throughout the visit while learning about humankind (Observation III). This threefold approach is giving visitors a holistic overview of Homo Sapiens thanks to exhibited human remains and artefacts which have been displayed with intent and care.

The human remains collections of the museum are divided into three categories depending on their origins: prehistoric remains, biological anthropological remains, and cultural anthropological remains (Informant III). In this section of the analysis as well as in the further museums from Portugal no subdivision of the remains presented will be used. In this case, the description of the exhibition methods of the human remains did not require as many photographs and in the last two Portuguese museums only one set of remains are displayed in each museum. There is therefore no need to have this supplemental separation.



Fig. 15: Chronological timeline of human evolution with moulded replicas of skeletal remains placed at estimated height. Each one is then explained at the bottom with text, images, placed in their geographical and chronological context as well as a stylised interpretation of the shape in white, Musée de l'Homme.

The diversity, quality and quantity of human remains in these collections enables transmission of knowledge both via the exhibition rooms and laboratories. In fact, a significant number of researchers from around the world are able to come and study at the Musée de l'Homme, this can be done via scholarly institutions or independent research (Informant III). The collections of human remains of the museum are amongst the largest in the world with approximately 735000 specimens with newly renovated research facilities (Musée de l'Homme, n.d.). The quantity is comparable to institutions such as the Smithsonian in the USA, British Museum in London, The Naturhistorisches museum in Vienna and the museum für Naturkunde in Berlin (Antoine, 2014, p.3, Museum für Naturkunde, 2023, Naturhistorisches Museum, 2024 & Smithsonian Institution, 2024, p.2). When human remains are chosen for exhibition from this substantial collection, the management process varies according to the age of the remains, for example Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon (European Early Modern Human EEMH) skeletal remains require more delicate care such as light and UV sensitive case, specific and stable climate

conditions or even gentler display supports which all aim to maintain the remains for future generations, while more recent remains have less restrictions.

The human remains in this museum are cared for meticulously and displayed with the purpose to impart knowledge on the visitors irrespective of their origins, age or educational background. The museologists follow ethical recommendations from the museum as there are no strict guidelines regarding human remains specifically. According to the informant III, the Musée de l'Homme has a logical and pedagogical way of presenting human remains to the public which is based on scientific data. The informant's main argument against the exhibition is that it may be too dense with information to be able to take in everything in one visit.

4.3 Portuguese Museums

4.3.1 National Museum of Science & Natural History - Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Museu da Universidade de Lisboa (PT)

This museum was the first one visited in Portugal and having communicated with the interviewee prior to going to the museum, I was informed of the vast collections of human remains of the museum which exceeded 2000 specimens. The museum management had, however, chosen to retire all displayed human remains from the exhibitions (Informant IV). The interviewee showed an interest in explaining the reasoning behind this change from displaying a significant number of human remains to their complete removal from the exhibition rooms. The meeting was set up despite the apparent lack of displayed skeletal remains as the perspective could be insightful to this research. Once there, the informant welcomed me and having conducted some research had discovered that the museum did in fact still display one skull (fig. 16). The cranium is a rare educational disarticulated specimen (Informant IV).



Fig. 16: Disarticulated skull model from 19th century, part of an exhibition dedicated to a naturalist named Francisco de Arruda Furtado (MUHNAC Digital, n.d.), Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Lisboa.

Through the revelation of skeletal human remains being exhibited in the museum, thoughts and questions arose as to the reasoning behind this particular specimen being displayed as well as the awareness of the management on this matter. According to the informant IV, the reason this specific cranium is still exhibited is that it is such a unique scientific preparation. The direction of the museum has decided that, in order to follow ICOM, ethical guidelines, and trends coming from North America, they would take away what they thought was all the human remains on display from the museum (Informant IV). Although there are specific recommendations from ICOM regarding Natural history museums there are no mentions of a need for systematic removal of human remains (ICOM, 2013). It is intriguing to ponder what other driving forces may be at play here. What could be motivating the direction of the museum to be so adamant about human remains, which trends from North America they may be emulating, are there fears such as activism due to the media coverage of art museum attacks or other motives yet to be uncovered. This policy to remove human remains from the exhibitions is quite recent (Informant IV). In the last decade, the museum still presented several exhibitions displaying human remains, the last one finishing in 2022. Moreover, the museum has not yet written their own policy document with regards to the care and handling of human remains. The decisions taken concerning human remains being displayed appear to be based on personal preferences of the current

management. Nevertheless, the museum personnel is in the process of writing a document which ought to detail such guidelines (Informant IV).

This last remaining human cranium is of a very scientific character based on the display method, surrounding environment, and the stand on which it is placed (refer to fig. 16). However, it is still exhibited and is used to illustrate the life of a Portuguese naturalist such as the likes of Darwin with which the former corresponded (MUHNAC Digital, n.d.). Visitors to the Natural History & Science Museum of Lisbon can understand what the naturalists were working towards as well as what it entailed thanks to these visual cues. This authentic cranium is displayed in a medical environment, an old part of a laboratory of which a glimpse is visible in the left side of figure 16. The experience was analysed phenomenologically and the manner with which it is presented creates a rather cold and distant feeling. Instead of imagining a person, the cranium appeared as a tool to gain knowledge, which had been used for teaching purposes (Observation IV). The manner with which this human skull is displayed evoked a more of an object/artefact vibe rather than the individual it once was. Indeed, the exhibition text explaining the cranium denotes: *“Exploded” skull model, presumably manufactured in France, 19th Century* (exhibition text). This shows the creation of an object or tool not the person behind the cranium. Although, it is likely the point of the exhibition to bring visitors to this scientific environment of a specific era, it could be construed as problematic due to the manner with which the human remains were handled in the past.

On the other hand, when the museum recently displayed an “object of the month” that was supposed to be a human femur in 2022, a cast was made and exhibited in order to avoid any ethical issues, despite the museum possessing the original in their collections. Informant IV, who has worked with the museum for over ten years, did not understand why the management had chosen to avoid displaying human remains at all costs. When human remains had been previously presented in this institution, they were usually enclosed in glass cabinets and if they were to be damaged, at least the oldest collections have been photographed and filmed (Informant IV). Therefore, it is possible to set an image in the display in order to remove, treat and preserve the human remains as the competence is present in the museum. If it is possible a moulded replica of the bones could be used as replacement as it was done for this object of the month.

Displaying and writing texts about human remains, as well as all other artefacts, is a collaborative process for the Natural History and Science Museum in Lisbon. Curators, a communication and exhibition team as well as the director all get involved in this procedure in order to give visitors the best possible experience filled with accessible yet informative data (Informant IV).

Being also a professor, the informant sees the value in transmitting knowledge through human remains. The vast anthropological collection from Portuguese cemeteries (1800-1980) situated in the museum in Lisbon is well documented and provides researchers a great base for comparative studies. In fact, the human collections are those from which the most academic papers are produced per year out of all collections in the museum (Informant IV). Moreover, the Natural History and Science Museum houses human remains from other countries, testament to Portugal's colonial past, which curators are now working with in order to determine the whole picture and assess whether or not these sensitive human artefacts ought to be repatriated. Therefore, an expert team working with the museum was created in order to manage the questions regarding these human remains as well as other sensitive objects such as cultural or religiously significant artefacts. This team meets regularly in order to continue this reparation process (Informant IV).

Lastly, the informant expressed their views on human remains being exhibited in museums. According to informant IV, the museum should not shy away from displaying human remains so long as a clear purpose to transmit knowledge is the aim. In the example of the object of the month, where the femur was replaced by a replica, the bone was neither strongly evocative nor was it from a questionable past. Indeed, informant IV explained: “*The femur suffered a fracture and it was operated in life, so it has a fixation using cannulated screw fixation*”. Visitors tend to respond positively to being able to see authentic human remains or artefacts rather than replicas. This feeling which is rooted in how the public may imagine the history attached to the object or individual, enables us to project ourselves and relate to the past in a tangible way.

4.3.2 Municipal Museum of Archaeology of Silves - Museu Municipal de Arqueologia de Silves (PT)

In this museum, visitors can encounter one set of human remains of a young man from the thirteenth century displayed in the more secluded part of the basement level of the museum (Observation V). The display case is almost level with the floor which gives the visitor an overlooking view of the skeleton placed face down

as to reconstruct the in situ position in which it was discovered (fig. 17). The minimal lighting and the position within the museum reflects on the care given to the human remains and enables visitors to avoid the skeleton should they choose to do so.



Fig. 17: Skeleton of a man found in a house within the castle walls of Silves that was shot during an attack linked to the Christian annexing of Algarve in the 13th century. Displayed in the same position it was discovered, face down in the Museu Municipal de Arqueologia de Silves.

Although this set of remains and a sepulchre both display remains as they were discovered by archaeologists, in situ, a different feeling is evoked by this set of remains. My immediate reaction was one of empathy for what a terrible fate this person must have come to face. In order to understand the experienced feelings, the attempt here was to deconstruct the situation, using phenomenology, to better grasp which elements played a significant role in the emotional response (Beck, 2021). Through this phenomenological approach to the skeleton, it was concluded that the experience was enhanced by the position of the remains as well as the height of the

display and low lighting. Moreover, the fact that the position we are seeing today is the one in which the individual died makes the experience more emotionally difficult. In the case of a burial, it is possible to understand that the deceased was taken care of and that they have people caring for them. This cannot be assessed through the Silves museum skeleton, on the contrary the untimely, traumatic death appears omnipresent when seeing this display (fig.17).

In the exhibition text, it was possible to read and understand that an attack had taken place, which left this individual dead. Through the scenography of this display one can imagine how the attack took place. The ease with which I could relate to the skeleton could be due to my osteological background, thereby I was able to see the person from the bones. On the other hand, it may be slightly more difficult for visitors to get a similar feeling as the remains are exhibited today. Granted, an excavation photograph along with a drawing of the remains' torso illustrating the trajectory of the deadly arrows are present but something seems to be lacking (Observation V).

According to informant V, the human remains are already a highlight of scholarly visits to the museum. It is thus possible to imagine that improving the manner with which the remains are presented could only be beneficial to the museum and the learning outcome of visitors of all ages. Unfortunately, a good majority of the exhibition texts are solely in Portuguese (Observation V). Having available translations of these texts in a couple languages at the disposal of visitors could make the exhibit more accessible and potentially attract a more diverse audience. In the newer (2022-2023) temporary exhibition, the texts are printed side by side in both Portuguese and English which already broadens the reach of the museum (Observation V, Informant V). The displayed skeletal remains have the opportunity to transmit knowledge gained from the osteological and archaeological examinations, it has, therefore, been a great anchor to the scenography, and guided visits presented by the museum about the twelfth century.

The skeleton is an embodiment of the rich cultural heritage from both Muslim and Christian perspectives of the city of Silves which is situated in Algarve. The remains are also significant for the museum specifically. Indeed, the archaeologists who excavated the skeleton are none other than the first director and architect for the museum, Mário Augusto dos Santos Varela Gomes, and his wife, Rosa Varela Gomes (Informant V). Moreover, this set of remains (see. fig 17) is a good illustration of the effects of the Christian crusades' attacks on this once Muslim

metropolis. The remains have been dated to the conquest of Silves and annexation to the Christian empire around 1248-1249 (Varela Gomes & Santinho Cunha, 1991, p.429). Through the archaeological context, osteological and pathological analyses, it was determined that the individual was male, between 24 and 26 years old, with a stature of 170 cm and possibly of caucasian ancestry (Varela Gomes & Santinho Cunha, 1991, p.431). The dental analysis showed a case of carious lesion, rare in this population, some general use abrasion on most teeth but also 2 missing teeth with remodelled bone indicating the knowledge of dental extraction methods (Varela Gomes & Santinho Cunha, 1991, p.432).

This interpretation of warfare and violence is supported by the osteological analysis of the human remains and through the artefacts found during the excavation of the space (Varela Gomes & Santinho Cunha, 1991, p.430). The display case containing the human remains also encloses some of these related artefacts such as ceramics, catapult projectiles, crossbow arrow heads and chainmail which are all tell-tale signs of a violent attack. These materials, metal, organic, ceramic and stone, require careful stable climate control (Atkinson, 2014, p.206). The museum conducts regular checks for the well-being of the artefacts and human remains alike, the case in which they are presented is climate controlled (Informant V). Humidity fluctuation is the biggest culprit of artefact degradation, more so even than temperature changes, therefore maintaining dehumidifiers and constant monitoring are a must (Atkinson, 2014, p.209). This is extremely important for this sensitive material especially considering that the museum is built around a well and the exhibited remains and artefacts in question are in a basement level so the humidity is quite high.

Although being the only set of remains on display in the museum, the collections of the museum include a significant amount of human remains which are all from archaeological digs in the Algarve region. Many researchers come to study the collections of human remains available via the museum (Informant V). The scientific data gathered could be interesting for the Silves municipal museum when renewing the permanent exhibits or when mounting temporary exhibitions.

The museum, which was inaugurated in 1990, was built specifically for the archaeological finds of the region and the permanent exhibition has not been renewed since (Observation V, Museu municipal de arqueología de Silves, 2024). However, attempts have been made to update and keep the museography interesting while not doing a complete overhaul. Currently, some modern objects such as

diecast model vehicles, tin men, legos, ballpoint pens, lighters or cans have been placed in the display cases along with a concrete mixture which visitors are supposed to find like a treasure hunt (as in fig. 18). These creations have also been added to the displays containing human remains. In 2020, an artist and a group of Algarvian museums created and displayed these objects in order to shock people into realising what kind of environment they would be leaving behind for archaeologists of the future to find (Backwards Archaeology: a Look into the Future, 2020). Visitors, such as children, react with interest and intrigue to this type of objects. Similarly, human remains often pique the interest of young visitors (Observation V). Presumably, they are drawn in by something which they do not understand but wish to do so.



Fig. 18: Silves museum permanent exhibition add-on, part of Backwards archaeology a look into the future, object of concrete mixture with bic ballpoint pen and small soldier toy, Museu Municipal de Arqueologia de Silves.

Although not yet updated, the museum has acquired a funding of 50 000 euros for renovations from the *Direcção Geral do Património Cultural* (General direction of Cultural Heritage). This is an opportunity to remodel and redo the scenography of the permanent exhibitions in order to bring it into the twenty-first century by December 2024. The archaeological museum has many avenues available to it during their remodelling to improve on how to exhibit human remains in order to make them more accessible and inclusive to their visitors. The history in focus might even grow to encompass more Muslim perspectives, thus being more inclusive of all the cultural heritage of the region (Informant V). Silves Municipal Archeological Museum has also been collaborating with museal institutions of the region since 2008 and has been a partner in “Museums with no Frontiers” since 2005 (Museu municipal de arqueología de Silves, 2024). All of these initiatives taken by the institutions are a testament to their willingness to elevate the potential of the museum and its collections inclusive of the human remains.

5. Discussion: What did we find out?

The research consisted of exhibition observation and interviews in three distinct European cultural regions which has produced some interesting and unforeseen data about human remains displayed in museums. Leaning on the comparison and contrasting analysis, some patterns have been detected in the exhibition of human remains in these museums. Although the results were not always as expected, some insightful information was systematically attained. The discussion follows the research questions in order to understand what knowledge was potentially gained through this study.

1. How are human remains displayed, handled and cared for by museums?
2. What challenges can be pointed out in museal practices when caring for human remains?
3. Can differences be assessed between how museums embedded in differing cultural contexts exhibit human remains?
4. What policy documents do museums follow with regards to human remains?
5. What do museums intend to do concerning human remains moving forward?

5.1 Did you see a Skeleton?

The first research question pertaining to the display, handling and caring for the human remains by museums is answered in the results and analysis section. Each museum was presented separately and the manners with which the remains are displayed explained and photographs given to aid as visual support for the reader to better understand the exact situation in the five museums. These studied museums, exhibit human remains in one of four ways: single elements, articulated skeletons, sepulchres and mummified human remains.

All types of human remains displayed are perceived differently depending on the phenomenological perspective of the visitor, the narrative and the scenography. Firstly, the remains may be in focus to present scientific contexts, diseases, trauma, etc. These tend to be much more staged and benefitting from a strong written narrative in order for the visitor to grasp its meaning. The presentation of these remains can alter the manner they are perceived. It can be from object-like feeling (Observation IV) to human remains who have retained their humanity thanks to their presentation (Barbaricum - Observation I). Secondly the skeletal remains could be displayed in the museum in the same position as they were found during

excavation; this could be a sepulchre or other remains which were not buried by their contemporary. The evoked feelings from the first are less jolting than those relating to human remains which were just buried by the sands of time with no one caring for them. Through the exhibition method and the positioning of the remains, the traumatic death can be evoked (Observation V). Thirdly, relics and curiosities evoke the most negative feelings as they were collected because of the interesting value of the individual or the prestige it could have brought. The manner in which the museum chooses to display these human remains as though they were still used as relics today is an element which plays a big part in the feelings evoked.

5.2 The Challenges of the Museum.

There are two main areas which seem to be challenging for museums when exhibiting human remains. The museums all hope to be respectful to the visitors and human remains as well as present meaningful exhibitions where the human remains have a clear and undeniable purpose for being displayed.

5.2.1 Transparency, Accessibility & Inclusivity

Respecting human remains entails recognising their worth and thus caring for them in a manner which is neither detrimental to them nor diminishing to their nature (Merriam-Webster, n.d. respect). In order to do so, one must take the following into account: handling, presenting, and explaining therefore showing respect for both the remains and the visitor. The way a person comprehends respect is connected to how one understands their surroundings as well as the environment which has influenced them. These perceptions affect the way we experience things such as artefacts or human remains. Through phenomenology, it is possible to analyse the elements which affect this sensation of what is respectful or not in museal practices. Caring for the remains is not simply how they are displayed and handled but also includes the appropriate environmental settings such as temperature, moisture and lighting. Museums are often considered to bear the responsibility of protecting human remains from environmental consequences as well as be prepared in the event of a crisis such as war or terror attacks. These topics tend to be discussed within policy documents for museums.

For museums to show respect towards the visitors can be understood as being transparent, accessible and inclusive. The first, transparency, is something that can be difficult for museums either due to the sensitive nature of human remains or because of the lack of information on the artefacts acquired a long time ago. Older museums would likely find this much more challenging having acquired collections

from all sorts of sources (ex: colonial) but also having had the need to move the collections during the two world wars, as it was the case for the MAN. It could be interesting for museums to take a chance and view all artefacts, even ones from a colonial past, but to present and explain under a new light.

Secondly, accessibility has been a predominant topic of discussion in the museal and cultural world both spatially and with regards to information. Although both of these provide value for visitors, many museums attend to spatial accessibility first while information is but a secondary consideration (Koustriava & Koutsmani, 2023, p.15). Despite the challenges for most museums that are not housed in recent buildings or built specifically for a museum to provide physical accessibility, it is higher on the agenda (Clary, 2018, p.17). Taking into account physical accessibility means that museums consider material adaptations such as elevators, ramps, lights, colours, contrasts, spatial awareness while the accessibility to information pertains to exhibition texts in various languages, audio guides to accommodate for varying degrees of literacy, material for all age and education differences.

Accessibility and inclusivity do go hand in hand, which brings us to the third point of this respect towards the visitors. According to the newest ICOM definition inclusivity is a key point for museums to focus on (ICOM, 2022). Museums may attain this goal through accurate information depiction, placement of human remains, aim to transmit knowledge to all groups, or even acquiring consent from related groups. Human remains exhibited within museums are today often done after consulting with the family or group to which the individual had belonged to as is recommended by the National heritage board in Sweden (Raä, 2020, p.19). This may be a possibility working with more recent remains but can be a two-part issue for museums with older human remains. If the remains are of a certain age, it would be much more difficult to ascertain the link to any living relatives in order to acquire the consent. Secondly, modern public museums as institutions have not been around for long in the grand scheme of things. It has been approximately 350 years (Joudrey et al, 2018, pp.73-75). It would have been difficult to explain what the human remains collected would end up being utilised for and exhibited, as these institutions are not what they were previously. The anatomical collection which now resides in the Historiska Museet in Lund came from individuals that died from diseases, executed or suicides, therefore, when the families did not claim the bodies, they were automatically transferred for learning purposes (*Döden, ett Bekymmer*, 2014). This system is no longer applied in Swedish society today. Society, through institutionalisation, has provided guidelines for individuals to follow and the

reciprocal actions to take part in this evolution, or social progress (Meyer, 2021, p.5). In this manner, museums have evolved and their methods and activities along with them too. How human remains are viewed by society has also evolved and the rights of human remains along with it. New perceptions and guidelines for human remains are at play today for museums to deal with.

Displaying human remains, honouring their history whilst being respectful of the visitors' experience is, as aforementioned, a task with which museums can struggle. The National Museum of Ireland, along with some other institutions have leaned toward separating the remains from the main part of the exhibitions, and setting them in a quiet, low light, sombre, secluded room which visitors could avoid should they choose to (Clary, 2018, p.17). In this way the museum shows inclusivity towards the feelings of visitors. In some of the analysed museums the remains were limited to a certain secluded section and could, therefore, be avoided should the visitor find the matter too sensitive (Musée de l'Homme, Archaeological Museum of Silves). On the other hand, some museums that simply moved into buildings not meant for exhibition purposes may encounter more difficulties rendering the exhibition space for human remains more secluded such as the MAN which is located in a residential castle and the Historiska Museet in Lund which was meant as a bishop's residence.

5.2.2 A Purpose & Narrative

The study of skeletal remains can give experts, such as forensic anthropologists, osteologists or physical anthropologists, a glimpse into those many aspects of the lives of our predecessors. The bones, often the only biological remains, will have been marked throughout the life of the individual from repetitive activities, the foods eaten, a fracture or sickness (Roberts & Manchester, 2007, pp.14-21). It is for example possible to see if a person was often rowing a boat, broke their arm and it healed well and in the end died with syphilis. This information can then be interpreted in a number of ways but the markers can be analysed and shown to the public in order to expand their general knowledge via museal exhibitions. All of the museums from this study have exhibited a small portion of their respective human remains' collections, all informants gave estimations of a number below one percent of the human remains being exhibited and therefore shown to the visitors. Nevertheless, these collections do not lay dormant; the Musée de l'Homme, and both Portuguese museums expressed the extensive studies that are constantly conducted with the human remains in order to further our understanding of Homo sapiens. This gathered knowledge finds its way to textbooks, classrooms, and

naturally the narrative of museum exhibitions retelling the journey of humankind through time.

The scientific reasoning behind the exhibited human remains provides reasons for museums to justify their displaying of a specific individual. Once purpose is determined, museum goers may benefit from this significant contact with our ancestors. This contact does not necessarily need to be morbid nor macabre entertainment but rather to be able to face the inevitability of our timely existence. Some people, often in the Western world, are visiting places where human remains are staged in a way to become a spectacle; this is known as dark tourism (Stone, 2010, p.3). Museums are institutions which are known to be centres of information transmission, and are a seemingly perfect alternative to this dark tourism. Indeed, museums are able to present human remains to the public; their institution is irrevocably intertwined with death, therefore, being a space which enables encounter with the dead, a deathscape (Ekström, 2023). Presumably, through this meeting, some people have the opportunity to come to terms with and better grasp their own mortality. Since it is no longer as common via other means, museums could be a manner for the public to visualise death neither in a morbid nor in an entertaining touristy way, even though a lot of people have had to confront death in the Western world since the COVID 19 pandemic outburst (Stone, 2010).

A manner that has shown to improve the amount learned by visitors from displayed human remains is through additional drawings or reconstructions which will feel more familiar to the visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, pp.24-25). In the Musée de l'Homme, the Historiska Museet and the Silves Archaeological Museum examples of the reconstructed drawings are observed. An image can depict how people may have looked by combining the human remains with the artefacts they were found with, this is particularly beneficial in the case of sepulchres. Without this it could be difficult for visitors to project themselves a mental picture of the remains as humans. On the other hand, creating an interpretation based on the material remains is just one potential view based on the clues that were left behind and could lead to potential bias based on the artist or group doing the recreation.

5.3 What is the difference?

The five museums of this study come from different countries, have different origins, size, worldwide recognition, budgets and affiliations. Nevertheless, the manner with which human remains have been exhibited is remarkably similar to one another. The museums do not seem to resemble the cultural surroundings they are embedded in but rather follow the museal academic models. One of the research

questions posed the query on whether or not the museums would exhibit human remains differently depending on the varying values of their cultural settings. According to the data acquired from these five museums, it appears that the exhibition style is not mimicking cultural patterns from their society but rather the academic, scientific community.

This sample of museum exhibitions of human remains suggests that museums are evolving in a process to increasingly resemble one another. This is known as one of three isomorphic processes of institutional theory by which institutions will cross away from the organised direct setting and model on systems that reach globally such as academia; this is a mimetic process (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.149 & Meyer, 2021, p.304). This type of behaviour is not a conscious or strategic one but rather part of a natural infrastructure evolution. When being uncertain about actions to take, museums in North America tend to look to European institutions for answers, meanwhile European institutions look to North America for guidance as well (Clary, 2018, p.14 & Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.319). The museums look for answers and precedence in each other, this mimicking technique is used when being uncertain about the best course of action and does not require as much manpower as the ideas are adapted, copied from other institutions, in this case museums (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.151).

Although museums are so closely linked to academia and to one another it seems as though not all participants are seen as equals. Communication and knowledge transference which is done within museums is seen as a form of research by several of these institutions (Sigfúsdóttir, 2021, p.89). Curating, managing and creating an exhibition which presents human remains to the visitors is, therefore, an inherent part of museal practices as a whole and a process which cannot be detached from the whole. Although the link between academia and the scientific origins of museums are quite evident for these institutions, they are struggling to find a voice or footing in the academic world. Unfortunately, museums and their research have been seen in the recent past as less than “real academic” work (Sigfúsdóttir, 2021, p.90). However, according to Sigfúsdóttir (2021), there is hope that guidelines and regulations regarding research in museums will be established in the near future.

No drastic differences in the museum exhibitions were observed. However, through the interviews a few differences were assessed with the informants. Neither the French nor the Portuguese informants hesitated discussing sensitive matters despite them all being affiliated with the museums they were interviewed for. These

interviewees had no issues exposing what they believed to be positive or negative about the exhibited human remains. In Sweden, on the other hand, the informants were much more reluctant and avoided answering altogether more sensitive subjects. The only change, they expressed wishing for, was to handle and display one full skeleton (see fig. 7) more carefully. The societies and institutions of the three countries could have influenced how the museum personnel was brought up in these differing environments. As seen through the world value map, people evolve in their own societies valuing more or less certain traditions which in turn influence their behaviours to an extent (Inglehart-Welzel, 2023). Some tentative suggestions, following the cultural differences, could propose that Swedish people are more reserved and discreet, therefore, preferring to abstain from responding to questions for which they are not certain of the answer. Whereas the values of the two other countries tend to lead to people being unapologetic and frank when expressing their thoughts.

5.4 The ethics that guide museums

Museums tend to have and follow ethical guidelines which are sometimes adapted to special cases. Furthermore, ethical regulations regarding human remains can provide a systematic treatment method that museum personnel can simply adhere to. A large majority of museums in Europe do conform to the regulations and recommendations of ICOM (2017). However, it is common for them to write their own complementary policy documents which leaves the respectful handling and dignified exhibition of human remains open to some degree of interpretation and negotiation (Ekström, 2023, p.67). Although ethics are primordial in the case of human remains in museums, these institutions have no reason to fear “codes of ethics” and go for an all or nothing scenario. These organisations such as ICOM, the National Heritage Board for Sweden, governmental regulations or even databases such as Europeana are there to guide museums which can choose to adjust the recommendations to fit their needs. The overarching global and regional guidelines provided by, for example ICOM, do give recommendations for the behaviour museums ought to aspire to if they are adhering to them. In a way, this process resembles the coercive mechanism from institutional theory whereby an institution above brings ideas upon the institutions below (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.150). This is more often seen through political situations where force comes from above, in this case museums choose to adhere voluntarily.

Some of the museums studied do not yet possess such guidelines which aid the personnel in curating, preserving, repatriating (should there be a need for it) or exhibiting human remains. It is therefore, rather challenging to manage all the

potential scenarios that may come their way. Alternatively to creating their own ethical guidelines, as aforementioned, museums may choose to follow the guidelines provided by outside sources. However, museums are unique institutions, filled with unique human remains and artefacts and so possessing and utilising one's own regulations is presumably more befitting.

The Historiska Museet in Lund has its own policy document and follows the Swedish National Heritage Board with regards to human remains. Meanwhile, neither the Portuguese museums nor the MAN have policy documents regarding human remains. Nonetheless, the Portuguese museums, not having any specific guidelines about the exhibition of human remains, their actions tend to mimic that of other institutions as seen through the interview of informant IV. This isomorphic process can be understood through these behaviours and similar ethical principles. The MAN also only follows what the government requires which as of date is limited. The current law concerning human remains in public collections is concerned with remains dating back to 1500 and forward that originate from outside the French territory for reburial purposes only (n°1347). The Musée de l'Homme follows these governmental regulations as well, but also has their own ethical recommendations. Despite these differences, the manner with which human remains are presented does not differ greatly.

Moreover, the previous research showed that the focus of studies with human remains did not lie with the exhibition but rather the storage and management (Aspeborg, 2020, p.8). Policy documents allot more space to the non-public side of museal practices (Raä, 2020, Deutscher Museumsbund, 2013 & Dcms, 2005). In a way, it does not seem surprising as the majority of remains are in fact in storage, so addressing this side of the equation addressed the bigger proportion of the remains. Nevertheless, the discrepancies between museums, their resources, collections, exhibition rooms, etc. are all affecting the manner with which human remains are preserved and displayed which in turn affects how the visitors may experience the deathscape of the museum.

The ethical dilemmas concerning human remains which stand between two worlds; the cognitive potential and identity remaining, demand that museums address some topics when managing their code of ethics or policy documents (Ardagna & Chaillou, 2022, p.14). The concerned topics as suggested by Ardagna & Chaillou are the colonial history of museum acquisition, the protection of the identity of persons in the collections as well as the statute of limitation on linking to living

groups, the question of consent which is discussed briefly above, the questions of respectful treatment of the deceased irrespective of their origins and finally restitution, repatriation and reburial (2022, Introductory chapter).

5.5 What's next?

Museums have had difficulties in keeping up to date with society's evolution especially in recent years as our societies are changing at a rapid pace. Institutional theory is a great tool for museums to be able to assess their standing and determine the best course of action. These institutions have the opportunity to attempt to stay up to date with their exhibitions but it is a challenging task which has been seen to be the cause of issues in all observed museums. If for example the museum chooses to update exhibition texts, this could also lead to challenges by creating a dissonance between the material and the newly given text, despite the potential gain of updating said texts. Presumably, museums are aware of the fact that things might change rather quickly, so in the event of a planned update to the museum displays, guidelines or exhibition texts, the curators tend to have the opportunity to alter things quicker should it become necessary. Regular meetings in some of the observed museums have been set up to discuss the need or not to move forward updates of exhibits especially when it comes to subjects as sensitive as human remains (Informant I & IV).

In this study, there was only one museum which intended to remove all human remains from the exhibition rooms but the remainder were hoping to improve the narrative and scenography of the exhibitions containing human remains in order to display something they could be proud of.

The renewal and care for human remains and artefacts alike is not a simple black or white question, it is unfortunately dependent on money which is an issue for many museums worldwide. The museums of this study fall under several categories: some communal, some national and others affiliated with universities yet all informants mentioned financial difficulties and restrictions. Museologist and museum personnel alike have an incredible will to improve exhibitions, organise collections, and gather data but there is a limit to how much one person can do. Moreover, there is often a strict financial limit to the number of people museums can hire, the allotted funds for renewing exhibitions, creating temporary exhibitions or loaning travelling exhibitions, maintaining storage and exhibitions that are present now, security, guided tours of the exhibits. Meanwhile, they are also concerned with renewing the storage facilities, the storage solutions and keeping up with the times. In reality when museums have the money to update their permanent

exhibitions they hope it will be there for fifteen to twenty years while it is likely to remain relevant for maybe three to four years only depending on the topic.

5.6 Our discussion comes to an end

Studying the manner with which human remains are exhibited in museums is not only interesting but can aid bridging the growing rift between the living and the dead in many modern societies. The latter tend to prefer death unseen and unheard, however, museal displays of human remains have the potential to bring together the present and the past, our origins and our future thus bridging the gap! Museums as institutions are centres of knowledge, meeting points and today often rather meticulous in their acquisition of accurate information which renders them a good candidate for sharing the histories of human skeletal remains without turning it to dark, macabre tourism (Ekström, 2023, p.64). There are five main areas which have been observed to be challenging for museums exhibiting human remains: transparency, purpose, having a set code of ethics, showing respect and finally having the opportunity for renewal of the exhibitions. Regrettably, some disgruntled visitors, complaining loudly, are unavoidable, meanwhile many other museum goers would enjoy an exhibition and say nothing (Informant II). Public opinions are a challenge for museums to work with, but as Informant II stated: “I believe in explanation!”.

6. Concluding Remarks & Future Possibilities

This thesis has shed a light on diverse ways in which human remains have been displayed in five museums up to today through the study of museum exhibitions in Sweden, France and Portugal. The selected countries are geographically separated and have distinct cultural values. Museums and the scientific community are aware of the extensive role human remains have to play for the development of scientific knowledge worldwide. This vast expertise is being communicated to the public domain through museums who give the opportunity to grasp the value of human remains for our collective cultural heritage. Indeed, skeletal remains are uniquely connected to us, being between people and objects and they, therefore, hold a unique place amongst museal artefacts. Through the use of two qualitative methods: exhibition analysis and semi-structured interviews, a comparison of human remains in museums has broadened our knowledge on museal practices which could a posteriori lead to updating exhibitions where human remains can become the heroes.

In our current society, museums have a lot to consider; they must grapple with anything from public opinions to climate change while focusing on finding educational purpose to the collections and finding themselves with the ever diminishing funds with which they must do an increasing amount of things. In the past, museums were an authoritative institution and what they presented was given as the undeniable truth, however diminishing it could have been. On the opposite end of the spectrum, nowadays museums must deal with ethics, sustainability, government regulations, internal and parent institution guidelines, both physical and cognitive accessibility, etc. Undoubtedly, museum personnel today have a lot of weight on their shoulders and comprehend that the work they do is for the future generations. Human remains which are a large part of the collections are not simple artefacts to manage but rather require multidisciplinary collaborative endeavours in order to achieve effective exhibitions. Numerous museums have chosen to rely on the International Council Of Museums, ICOM, which is a tool these institutions worldwide can nowadays depend on. Moreover, the knowledge base is much more readily available today through globalisation and the increased speed of communication and travel. This denotes the much bigger reach and broader audience that museums have than in the past where visitors included mostly academics and prosperous families (Clary, 2018, p.14). New subsets of the population and minorities can be included through this broader audience capacity.

6.1 Challenges & Further research opportunities

Challenges are a part of any process, and this study is no exception. In order for further studies in the same research field to benefit from the downfalls experienced, I would like to present one such issue here. Assessing the methods and theories used to frame the analysis and discussion of the results in order to identify potential unforeseen failures or limitations can be valuable (Barmark & Djurfeldt, 2020, p.187). If future studies were to be conducted with similar premises a recommendation would be to solely hold interviews in person and in the museum so that the phenomenological aspect of the study is still vividly remembered. Moreover, the flow of conversation is more natural and enables more in depth information to be gathered. From the evidence gathered in this thesis, there was a greater distance and more mechanical answering via video conferences such as Teams or Zoom which could be avoided through interviewing informants in person.

At the conclusion of the study of the exhibitions containing human remains in three countries, it is a possibility to continue expanding the net with the same types of research questions in order to encompass a larger territory and a vast array of values. On the opposite side of the scale, the research could be focused on gathering more nuanced data from within one set of traditions and assess how museums present skeletal remains within that one cultural zone. Moreover, the human remains in museums could be studied not only in the exhibition rooms but the entire collections; the ones on loan to other museums, the ones utilised in the laboratories for research and the remainder still in storage.

Further studies could be conducted following new lines of questioning: How could museal display of human remains be done in a way to awaken the positive feelings for the public? Can some phenomenological perspective studies be conducted with test groups in order to understand what triggers people so the museum can incorporate to their museography a respect for the living all the while still presenting and respecting our ancestors and their beliefs? Can museums present human remains so they can impart their knowledge and be respectful of everyone? Determining the challenges present in museums today could avoid unnecessary future existential crises. Human remains were all individuals like us living their lives, interacting, making plans, eating, dreaming of a potential future. They were all unique but are now part of our common history which museums have the opportunity to narrate with careful consideration. The stories told are vital and the light shining upon skeletal remains should never be dimmed as it brings us face to face with ourselves and our own mortality.

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7.3 Online Resources

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7.4 Field Observations

- **Observation I (2024)** *Historiska Museet*, Lund, 14th of February.
- **Observation II (2023)** *Musée d'Archéologie Nationale*, St Germain-en-Laye, November.
- **Observation III (2023)** *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris, 11th of November.
- **Observation IV (2024)** *Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência*, Lisbon, 22nd of February.
- **Observation V (2024)** *Museu municipal de arqueología de Silves*, Silves, 23rd of February.

7.5 Interviews

- **Informant I (2024)** *Curator of the anatomical collection at the Historiska Museet*. Lund, interview conducted and recorded digitally on the 15th of February.
- **Informant II (2024)** *Adviser for the care of human remains in museums at the Riksantikvarieämbetet*. Stockholm, interview conducted and recorded digitally on the 2nd of February.
- **Informant III (2024)** *Researcher & Teacher at the Musée de l'Homme*. Paris, interview conducted and recorded digitally on the 2nd of February.
- **Informant IV (2024)** *Professor at University of Lisbon & Curator of the Biological Anthropology collections at the Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência*. Lisbon, interview conducted in person on the 22nd of February.
- **Informant V (2024)** *City Council archaeologist working with the Museu municipal de arqueología de Silves*. Silves, interview conducted in person on the 23rd of February.

8. Figures

- **Figure 1:** World cultural map depicting the separation between the three lands chosen for the research. Portugal (0.5/-0.25) is very central, France (2/0.5) is further to the right and Sweden (3.25/1.2) is extreme right.
- **Figure 2:** Tooth of the Duke Magnus of ÖsterGötland, son of Gustav Vasa, from Lunds Historiska Museet, in the exhibition “Skatter från fem kontinenter”.
- **Figure 3:** Cranium of Viking age man from Fjälkinge with dental modification of the front teeth. Displayed in Barbaricum, Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 4:** Display with three cranium & extra post cranial elements (vertebrae, scapula, ribs) in the mint exhibition room of Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 5:** Female skeleton sepulchre from Fredriksbergs Gård, Oxie. Presented with artefacts in the centre of the Stone Age room, a display created by Otto Rydbeck, Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 6:** Skateholm mesolithic grave with male human remains and grave goods, sunken in the floor at Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 7:** Articulated Fjälkinge female skeleton from the 10th century AD, the tales from the grave in the Barbaricum exhibition, Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 8:** 4000 years old Egyptian mummy and 1500 years old sarcophagus from Saqqara displayed in the ethnographic exhibition, Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 9:** Egyptian mummified hand collected in Thebes 1849, displayed in the ethnographic exhibition amongst artefacts from Egypt and other mediterranean countries, Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 10:** René Descartes cranial remains Left - Cranium from the Musée de L’Homme & Right - Parietal Bone from Lunds Historiska Museet.
- **Figure 11:** Photograph of Salle Piette, MAN.
- **Figure 12:** Neolithic sepulchre half excavated, artefacts in the display as found in the grave, MAN.
- **Figure 13:** Vertebrae with silex arrowheads and trepanned cranium to display trauma and warfare from the MAN.
- **Figure 14:** Three craniums with minimal information and inventory number if available, MAN.
- **Figure 15:** Chronological timeline of human evolution with moulded replica of skeletal remains placed at estimated height. Each one is then explained at the bottom with text, images, placed in their geographical and chronological context as well as a stylised interpretation of the shape in white, Musée de l’Homme.
- **Figure 16:** Disarticulated skull model from 19th century, part of an exhibition dedicated to a naturalist named Francisco de Arruda Furtado (MUHNAC Digital, n.d.), Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Lisboa.

- **Figure 17:** Skeleton of a man found in a house within the castle walls of Silves that was shot during an attack linked to the Christian annexing of Algarve in the 13th century. Displayed in the same position it was discovered, face down, Museu Municipal de Arqueologia de Silves.
- **Figure 18:** Silves museum permanent exhibition add-on, part of Backwards archaeology a look into the future, object of concrete mixture with bic ballpoint pen and small soldier toy, Museu Municipal de Arqueologia de Silves.

9. Annex

9.1 ICOM Museum Definition

On the 24th of August 2022, the proposed new museum definition was accepted by ICOM Extraordinary General Assembly with a majority of over 90%, here is the new definition according to of ICOM:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

ICOM (2022).

9.2 Abstracts in English, French and Portuguese

9.2.1 Can we Show you the Skeletons in our Closet?

Museum exhibitions with human remains in different European settings.

Human remains are nowadays understood not solely as objects but also as deceased individuals. Exhibited human remains may possess a suggestive power that gives them life through the encounter with visitors, to the point that one could say that they are in a kind of limbo between life and death. This study seeks to compare the museal exhibitions containing human remains in three countries within Europe.

The aim of the thesis is to gain knowledge on exhibited human remains in museums. Therefore, the thesis investigates, through comparative assessment, exhibited human remains with the hope of answering the research questions which are as follows: How are human remains displayed, handled and cared for by museums? Can differences be assessed between how museums embedded in differing cultural contexts exhibit human remains? What do museums intend to do concerning human remains moving forward? What challenges can be pointed out in museal practices when caring for human remains? What policy documents do museums follow with regards to human remains?

In order to obtain this data a combination of exhibition observation analysis and interviews is used. These methods ground themselves in two theories: phenomenology and institutional theory. The results acquired from five museums in Sweden, France, and Portugal show that human remains are presented in several ways; in situ burials or sepulchres, single elements, articulated skeletons and sometimes mummified remains. Through the analysis we come to understand that museums may have been more influenced by the academic context than the cultural surroundings. Indeed, there appears to be an isomorphic process underway whereby museums grow to be increasingly similar to one another, and thus exhibiting human remains in similar ways. Four main elements are observed to impact the exhibitions of human remains; the presence of ethical guidelines or not, transparency, the purpose of exhibiting, and the opportunity to update the displays irrespective of location.

This study presents a few issues in current museal practices with regards to the display of human remains in order to enable their continued exhibition in museums in a manner which is ethical for both remains and visitors. Human remains are such a rich source of knowledge which has the potential to be transmitted via museums, thus bridging the past, present and future together.

9.2.2 Peut-on vous Montrer les Squelettes dans le Placard ?

Expositions muséales présentant des vestiges humains dans différents contextes européens.

Les restes humains sont aujourd'hui considérés non seulement comme des objets de musée, mais aussi comme des individus décédés, ce qui leur donne une place assez floue entre la vie et la mort. Les restes humains exposés peuvent posséder un pouvoir évocateur qui leur donne une certaine vie à travers la rencontre avec les visiteurs. Cette étude propose de comparer les expositions muséales contenant des vestiges humains dans trois pays européens.

L'objectif de la thèse est d'acquérir des connaissances sur l'exposition de vestiges humains dans les musées. Par conséquent, la thèse étudie, à travers une évaluation comparative, les restes humains exposés dans l'espoir de répondre aux questions de recherche suivantes : Comment les restes humains sont-ils exposés, manipulés et conservés par les musées ? Peut-on évaluer les différences entre la manière dont les musées situés dans des contextes culturels différents exposent les restes humains ? Que comptent faire les musées concernant les restes humains à l'avenir ? Quels défis peuvent être identifiés dans les pratiques muséales en matière de traitement de vestiges humains ? Quels documents ou directives suivent les musées en ce qui concerne les vestiges humains ?

Afin d'obtenir ces données, une combinaison d'observations d'expositions et d'entretiens est utilisée. Ces méthodes s'appuient sur deux théories : la phénoménologie et la théorie institutionnelle. Les résultats acquis dans cinq musées en Suède, en France et au Portugal montrent que les vestiges humains sont exposés de plusieurs manières ; des sépultures, des éléments uniques, des squelettes articulés ainsi qu'occasionnellement des restes humains momifiés. Grâce à l'analyse, il est possible de comprendre que les musées ont peut-être été davantage influencés par le contexte académique que par l'environnement culturel. En effet, il semble y avoir un processus isomorphe en cours par lequel les musées deviennent de plus en plus semblables les uns aux autres, exposant ainsi les restes humains de manière similaire. Quatre éléments principaux ont un impact sur les expositions de ces vestiges humains quel que soit le contexte géographique des musées ; la présence ou non de directives éthiques, la transparence, le but de l'exposition ainsi que la possibilité de mettre à jour les expositions.

Cette étude présente quelques enjeux des pratiques muséales actuelles en ce qui concerne l'exposition des restes humains afin de permettre la continuité de leur exposition dans les musées d'une manière éthique vis-à-vis à la fois des vestiges humains et des visiteurs. Les restes humains constituent une source de connaissances incontournable qui a le potentiel d'être transmise via les musées, reliant ainsi le passé, le présent et le futur.

9.2.3 Podemos Mostrar os Esqueletos no Armário?

Exposições museológicas com vestígios humanos em diferentes contextos europeus.

Os restos mortais humanos são hoje considerados não apenas como objetos de museu, mas também como indivíduos falecidos, o que lhes confere um lugar bastante vago entre a vida e a morte. Os restos humanos expostos podem possuir um poder evocativo que os traz à vida através do encontro com os visitantes. Este estudo propõe comparar exposições museológicas com restos humanos em três regiões da Europa.

O objetivo da tese é adquirir conhecimento sobre os restos mortais humanos expostos em museus. Assim, a tese estuda, através de uma avaliação comparativa, os restos mortais expostos na esperança de responder às seguintes questões: Como os restos mortais são expostos, manuseados e preservados pelos museus? Podemos avaliar as diferenças entre a forma como os museus localizados em diferentes contextos culturais exibem restos mortais humanos? O que os museus planejam fazer com os restos mortais humanos no futuro? Que desafios podem ser identificados nas práticas museológicas no que diz respeito ao tratamento de restos mortais humanos? Que documentos políticos os museus seguem em relação aos restos mortais humanos?

Para obter esses dados, utiliza-se uma combinação de observação de exposição e entrevistas. Esses métodos baseiam-se em duas teorias: a fenomenologia e a teoria institucional. Os resultados obtidos em cinco museus na Suécia, França e Portugal mostram que os restos mortais são exibidos de diversas formas; sepulturas, ossos únicos, esqueletos articulados, bem como ocasionais restos humanos mumificados. Pela análise é possível compreender que os museus podem ter sido mais influenciados pelo contexto acadêmico do que pelo ambiente cultural. Na verdade, parece haver um processo isomórfico em curso através do qual os museus se tornam cada vez mais semelhantes entre si, exibindo assim restos mortais de formas semelhantes. Quatro elementos principais têm impacto nas exposições destes restos humanos, qualquer que seja o contexto geográfico dos museus; a presença ou ausência de diretrizes éticas, a transparência, a finalidade da exposição bem como a possibilidade de atualização das exposições.

Este estudo apresenta algumas questões das práticas museológicas atuais no que diz respeito à exposição de restos mortais, a fim de permitir a continuidade da sua exposição em museus de forma ética, tanto no que diz respeito aos restos mortais como aos visitantes. Os restos mortais constituem uma fonte essencial de conhecimento que tem potencial para ser transmitido através dos museus, ligando assim o passado, o presente e o futuro.

9.3 Interview Template (English)

Interview Template:

(estimated time of interview: 20 minutes)

Hello, my name is Jessica and I will be interviewing you today for my thesis in museology. The question at hand is human remains in museum exhibits.

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been working in the museum sector?
3. How long have you worked in this museum specifically?
4. Where and what kind of human remains are on display in the museum? Cranium or post cranium, in sepulchre?
5. When were the diverse displays put in place? By whom?
6. What percentage of the human remains in the museum are exposed to the public?
7. How are the decisions taken to expose human remains?
8. How are the human remains cared for during the building process/while in the exhibit/ take down?
9. Does the museum follow ethical guidelines when it comes to human remains?
Does the museum have a policy document referring to the human remains?
10. If there is a policy document could I have a copy of it? When was it written?
How often is it updated?
11. If something happens (mould, fragmentation, tests, ...) to a part of the remains, how do you cope so that the narrative still makes sense? Replace? Image? Mould of remains?
12. Who writes the exhibition texts about human remains? Does anyone review them? Is there a public test group?
13. What is the aim/goal of exposing a specific set of remains? What kind of knowledge is gained by the public?
14. Are there guided visits of the museum exhibits? Is it done by pedagogues or external people (ex: teachers)? If so, do pedagogues give more in depth information about the human remains/context?
15. Does the museum house/ or has housed controversial sets of remains? Is there something planned for them? (lean in and explain their controversiality/ hide them/restore/...)
16. How do you feel about the human remains exposed in this museum and the manner with which it has been done? Would you do things differently?

– Thank you so much for your participation –