Public Memory under Construction

Exploring Religion in the House of European History in Brussels

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Located in the European quarter in Brussels, the House of European History (HEH) is a project which aims at developing a common historical knowledge of Europe. On the one hand, the museum intends to promote European identity by means of a shared memory; on the other, it seeks to establish itself as a place where citizens can interact with the »European idea«.[1] The emphasis on the link between memory and history, conceived as a particular kind of knowledge involving past events, enlarges the plan of the HEH beyond the domain of mere epistemological reflection. The very name of the museum – »house« – suggests a familiar setting that affects individuals directly, by involving their personal identity, a »home«. By choosing to be a »house«, the HEH presents itself as a place where individuals can encounter their own »family« histories in order to »nurture commonality«.[2]

This chapter arises from an interdisciplinary discussion between philosophy and the study of religion, our respective fields of research. First, Carla Danani offers a philosophical reflection to frame the discussion on the temporal and spatial interconnections between the concepts of the past, the performativity of a museum visit, and public memory within the HEH. After-

1 The question of how to represent European memory and identity in a museum was discussed in many publications even before the opening of the HEH: see Settele 2015; Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017; Remes 2017; Weiser 2017. For some early reviews of the permanent exhibitions, see Krankenhagen 2017 and Kesteloot 2018. They both offer a positive evaluation. See also Fickers 2018 and Lutz 2019, whose considerations are more critical.

2 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

wards, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati explores to what extent Europe's diverse history of religion is mirrored in the museum's narrative. We discuss the HEH as a place of memory, as a spatial performance of remembering[3] a common historical European ground with a special focus on the role of religion, which is represented in the museum in an ambivalent way.

1. The museum as medium for public memory

Time and space are both relevant for human beings and societies. These fundamental assumptions underpin the HEH project as it seeks to promote a shared European history. The HEH is analysed here as a place of public memory in which a shared historical narrative arises. First, we explore the past in its dynamic and multilayered relationship with the future. Second, we focus on the spatial features of the museum that impact visitors' movements and perspectives as they move throughout and interact with the HEH. Finally, we explore the concept of memory as a performance emerging from the guests' various interactions with displayed objects.

1.1. The past between pastness and »having been«

Paul Ricœur proposes a phenomenology of memory that helps to deepen the performativity of history in a museum by turning the past into a dynamic concept. Revisiting Martin Heidegger, the French philosopher emphasises a twofold property of the past. The past is »no longer there« (Heidegger uses *Vergangenheit*; the verb *vergehen* means to pass away) and, at the same time, the past is also »having been« (*Gewesenheit*, literally, »beenhood«).[4] Ricœur states »that the dialectic of ›having been‹ and ›no longer‹ [should] be re-established in all its dramatic force. Certainly, there is no doubt that the ›simply elapsed‹ bears the mark of the irrevocable and that the irrevocable, in its turn, suggests the powerlessness to change things.«[5] Introducing a morally neutral concept of debt, which expresses a heritage transmitted and assumed, Ricœur argues that even if facts are ineffaceable and that one

3 See Winter 2010.
4 Heidegger 1962, 429–434 (§ 73).
5 Ricœur 2004, 364.

can no longer undo what has been done, the sense of what has happened is not fixed once and for all.[6] He notes:

> In addition to the fact that events of the past can be recounted and interpreted otherwise, the moral weight tied to the relation of debt with respect to the past can be increased or lightened. […] to the idea of debt belongs the character of »charge«, of »weight«, of burden. […] Inasmuch as it obligates, the debt does not exhaust itself in the idea of burden either: it relates the being affected by the past to the potentiality-of-being turned toward the future. […] it relates the space of experience to the horizon of expectation. It is on this basis that one can speak of a rebound-effect of the future onto the past even within the retrospective viewpoint of history.[7]

The human experience of the past is neither substantial nor fixed. Whenever a past experience is considered as being lost, it is always lost in reference to the present and the future. (The basic temporal words »before« and »after«, for example, express this dynamic.) Memory operates by means of a heritage that can be defined as a »debt«. From a philosophical point of view, this leads to questions about the many ways in which memory is supposed to work: of what objects and events can we have memories? To which subjects do memories belong? How are memories shaped and what do they aim at?

Considering the role history plays in memory-formation, Ricœur points out that human imagination provides the opportunity to go back to a given moment in the past and to view it as having been lived by people of the past as their present – both the present of their past and the present of their future.[8] The consequences of this consideration can be extended to all humans at any time: »Knowing that people of the past formulated expectations, predictions, desires, fears, and projects is to fracture historical determinism by retrospectively reintroducing contingency into history.«[9] When we are able to imagine the many different perspectives that past peoples had to manage in their own present, we are reminded that people who occupy

6 Ricœur 2004, 363.
7 Ricœur 2004, 381–382. This is a possible answer to the question posed by Nietzsche 1997.
8 Ricœur 2004.
9 Ricœur 2004, 382.

»our past« possess(ed) human agency, capacity for initiative, and responsibility. This understanding discourages the »retrospective illusion of fatality«, which inhibits anything other than repetition. This is the enigma, or paradox, of the idea of debt, which can paralyse the power to act but can also motivate to take responsibility. This paradox occurs whenever and wherever there is an active recognition of heritage.

Historical knowledge can motivate a dynamic of responsivity rather than a merely apologetic posture. Ricœur rejects Marc Bloch's definition of history as a »science of traces«. Since traces have to be followed backwards to their point of initiation, Bloch's concept of history faces the past in a closed, circular way, according to which history is a mere referral of the past to the past. History, therefore, in Bloch's sense, is seen as a signifying narrative that informs but does not involve the audience in a responsive attitude.

Although critical of Bloch's concept of history, Ricœur nevertheless acknowledges that there are several valuable aspects of »trace«. First, a trace can be written or material; second, it can affect and impress »the soul«; third, it is a corporeal, cerebral, cortical imprint.[10] It is crucial to note that this approach to »trace«, which evokes the controversial relationship between soul and body, overcomes the traditional divide between materialism and spiritualism. Ricœur remarks that »as left behind, through the materiality of the mark, the trace designates the exteriority of the past […]. However, there is also a correlation between the significance of the followed trace and the efficacity of the transmitted tradition.«[11] Both trace and tradition are mediations between the past and us. They are linked together by those documents through which the trace becomes part of the tradition in the succession of generations who inherit them. The remnants of the past, such as archaeological sites, pottery shards, paintings, oral traditions and written documents, are linked to, involved and evaluated in, complex sets of testimonies, personal impressions and social frames (*cadres sociaux)*.[12] Ricœur assumes that humans engage with history within a lived experience, which always implies meaning-making processes. Thus, every experience is the experience of a living human body, a reality that is relational in itself: spatial, temporal, and societal.

10 Ricœur 2004, 15, 27–28.

11 Ricœur 1988, 229.

12 See Halbwachs 1980.

1.2. The museum as public space and social time

Museums as institutions assume different tasks. Not only do they conserve and preserve historical remnants from further deterioration, but they display them in front of a viewing public in order to offer opportunities to engage with the past and foster memorialisation. In the democratic regimes of the 21st century, museums are public spaces *par excellence* due to both their functions and the practices they host. Museums invite people to journey beyond their own private selves by calling their attention to a common heritage, constructing narratives to share, and offering a stage on which debates and negotiation can take place. These and other cultural experiences cultivated in and by museums are addressed – potentially – to everybody.

According to Jennifer Barrett, public discourse takes place in museums.[13] In Barrett's opinion, both material and immaterial cultural objects have to be involved in representing history and, therefore, in building places of inclusion. Today's museums are broad cultural centres that provide multiple services and events that are increasingly accessible to the public. Museums have also turned into significant architectural icons in many cities.[14] Museums are therefore institutions that shape public space.[15] They are places *within* which and *by* which public discourse occurs.[16] First, the museum itself as a public space functions as a spatial medium for the public sphere.[17] Second, the museum explicitly engages in meaning-making processes by curating and displaying certain objects. And third, the museum fosters encounter between visitors.

The museum provides a composite multisensory experience by gathering and utilising a broad range of media.[18] The concept of »experientiali-

13 See Barrett 2012, for a discussion of Foucault and Bourdieu and other relevant works.

14 Weil 2002, 181 remarks: »Because art museums became one of our most important occasions for public architecture […] to be institutions that embody some of society's highest aspirations, it has become commonplace in recent years to speak of them as successors in some sense to the great churches and cathedrals of earlier centuries.«

15 See Williams, 2007, particularly 77.

16 See Barrett 2012, 12.

17 See Putnam 2001.

18 See Jaeger 2020, 40–60, in particular 41: »In comparison to a more general reader response theory that relates to textual media, one must here ask what specific role the visitor has in history museums' representations, narrations, staging, and simulations of the past? What does it mean when the visitor moves through space and spatial arrangements, in comparison to the reader of a book who must imagine the spaces being narrated?«

ty« proves fruitful to examine the representational and narrative potential of an exhibition, which, despite being an historical event itself, always mirrors a historical experience. Experientiality – »an experience of experiences« – focuses on this paradoxical feature of a museum display. By offering visitors a »quasi-mimetic evocation of ›real-life experience‹«,[19] a museum exhibition[20] can be considered a »hybrid place« between a historical experience and the visitor experience.[21]

In the multimedia public space of a museum, references to absent facts (that is, past events and contexts; other places) may have different effects on guests. This happens because both the building and its design have been strategically deployed to guide and direct museum visitors. Sophia Psarra, an urbanist and cultural studies scholar, points out that »in terms of operational requirements, museum design has two fundamental problems to solve: a route structure that facilitates the encounter between the displays and the visitors, and spatial mechanisms that aid orientation and enable the building and the exhibitions to be seen as one whole.«[22] Her methodology for studying space relies on a »space syntax«, an analytical approach focusing on patterns of movement, and the use of cultural meaning.[23] This procedure, inspired by Bill Hillier, assumes that museum layouts determine patterns of use and that the logic of the spatial connections made possible through a certain design influences the way people move inside them and consequently outline representations of history and their related meaning-making processes.[24] Integration, a key point of an inspiring layout, relates to spatial elements that are close to each other and easily accessible from every part of the layout. Integrated areas stimulate movement, while segregated ones are less frequent-

19 See Jaeger 2020, 48, who refers to Fludernik 1996, 12.

20 Gadamer 1975, 267 deals with the hermeneutical significance of »temporal distance«, which is understood as a productive space and thus a fundamental part of the hermeneutical circle, not as an empty space. For more on the concept of »distance« see Pagliacci 2020.

21 Fludernik 1996, 12. See also Jaeger 2020, 40.

22 Psarra 2005, 81.

23 Hillier/Hanson 1984, 82–142.

24 As Hillier and Tzortzi 2006, 299, argue: »[…] the way in which spaces are connected to each other will inevitably influence the potential pattern of movement and, by implication, the way in which visitors explore exhibitions and are exposed to information and to each other. This has clear implications both for the pedagogical function of the museum and for its social function.«

ly used. Hence the main hall and the axes that link this space with the main entrance and other galleries are usually the best integrated elements in a museum; the top floors, which see much less frequent foot traffic, are generally »segregated«. Psarra draws attention to certain discontinuities of layouts, which are present, for instance, when integration is conveyed merely by visual media even in segregated spaces. The spatial structure of an exhibition determines the use of the different locations: it may produce rigid consecutive sequences inside the gallery or allow relaxed and informal experiences by means of circular movements. Psarra shows that the exhibition experience of the visitors implies views, routes, flows of movement across thresholds, and activities in spaces and exhibition rooms, but she admits that the spatial characteristics alone cannot determine how people use the layout.[25] Acknowledging the power of space does, however, enable museums to meet spatial, social and aesthetic objectives.

The notion of a museum's performativity refers to the various ways in which people circulate and occupy these buildings. It also refers to the messages conveyed by the exhibition itself. This means that a

> [n]arrative can be strongly or weakly structured. When strongly structured, it has orientation based on sequence and causality, establishing a hierarchy among its elements in terms of their position in the expression. A weak narrative structure uses interconnections to enable its narrative units to equally structure its meaning. The narrative message becomes, thus, »integrated«, including new latent messages arising from a number of connections. In the first case narrative favours temporal progression over space, and is grasped through time. In the second case it emphasizes relations that defy time, collapsing into an integrating frame of space.[26]

Multiple spatial links, permeability, and inter-visibility foster interactions between meaning-making processes as though they were compatible and continuous. In this way, the spatial structure establishes a thematic coherence. The spatial integration of content and its thematic coherence build a mes-

25 See Psarra 2005, 87. See also Bennett 1988 and 1995, 59–88 as well as Hooper-Greenhill 1992.

26 Psarra 2005, 89.

sage of history as a flow between periods, events and achievements.[27] Hillier underlines the social effect issuing from the balance established between the sequencing of spaces and choice:

> Like any spatial layout, a museum or gallery will generate and sustain a certain pattern of co-presence and encounter amongst visitors through the way it shapes movement. If a layout takes the form of a single sequence […] visitors will enter, circulate, and leave the exhibition in the same order. The limiting case is the »Indian file« in which we are always behind some people and in front of others, and there need be no variation in this, and so little change in the pattern of co-presence. On the other hand, a layout with a certain degree of structured choice, realized through an intelligible shallow core, will mean that visitors who enter the layout together will often split onto different pathways, and then re-encounter each other some time later, perhaps moving in the opposite direction, creating the churning effect we referred to earlier, and thus enhancing the social experience of the visit.[28]

A museum is itself an invitation to all who visit it. Moreover, when visitors can meet each other, they perceive being together, and experiencing the same place, and exploring the same topics. Even though space often remains in the shadow in academic debates, the mediality of museums is produced by spatial performance, which involves visitors in a distinctively synesthetic experience.[29]

1.3. Shaping und fostering public memory

The HEH aims at promoting European identity by means of a spatial practice that shapes memory. Edward Casey's phenomenological approach to memory assumes that remembering, regarded as an act of thinking, is intentional in structure. In this process, he distinguishes an »act phase« and an »object phase«, and divides »how« we remember from »what« we remember:

27 See Psarra 2005, 91.

28 Hillier/Tzortzi 2006, 299–300.

29 See Pallasmaa 2012. Sunstein/Thaler 2008 call this spatial feature a »nudge«.

> Each experience of remembering is thus diphasic, but the two phases are simultaneous and not successive. […] The act and object phases thus call for one another and are strictly correlative: no activity of remembering lacks an object remembered, and vice versa. Each phase is equally essential, since an actless memory is as unthinkable as a contentless remembering.[30]

What is to be remembered is performed in different ways according to the circumstances at hand. Regarding the act itself, there are multiple forms of remembering: remembering *simpliciter*, remembering that, remembering how, remembering to, remembering as, remembering what, remembering on-the-occasion-of, remembering the future. These are basic ways in which remembering realises itself as an act. For example, we can, and frequently do, remember single things in isolation from other things and events, as just this or just that (remembering *simpliciter*); but »in addition to objects and events, we [also] remember states of affairs – whole circumstances in which subjects (or subject-terms) are implicated in actions«[31] (remembering *that*). Further, people can remember how to effect a given movement (remembering *how*): »Yet it remains a very different thing to remember how to swing […] a club in the right way and to remember that I have once so swung it«. Remembering *as* connects the subject or topic of ascription and the ascribed property. As Casey points out: »When it comes to matters of memory, we almost always have to do with commixture rather than with separation. And not surprisingly in view of the fact that remembering is a paramount, perhaps the paramount, connective power in our lives!«[32]

According to Casey, to analyse remembering, four forms of human memory may be distinguished: individual, social, collective, and public.[33] This categorisation is very helpful to understand the aims of the HEH to shape and foster a shared memory. Individual memory refers to the person who is engaged in the process of remembering on any given occasion. According to Casey, a person is always the unique subject of the act of remembering and performs memory in several particular ways, recollecting different kinds of

30 Casey 2000, 151.
31 Casey 2000, 53–54.
32 Casey 2000, 187.
33 See Casey 2004, 20.

things. Human beings remember by way of being reminded, by recognising something, and by reminiscing with others. Considering that there is a distinctive body memory and place memory, as well as many acts of commemoration, »we are already beyond any model of memory as confined to the individual mind and its representations.«[34]

Collective memory refers to the circumstances in which different individuals, who do not necessarily know each other, recall the same event in their own way. This plural remembering has no basis in overlapping historicities or shared places, nor do people have to remember at the same time. What matters is having the same content in mind. Collective recollection, however, is not effected by members of existing clans, or regions, or by having projects in common.[35] The grouping is not based on a prior identity or a particular placement; it is formed spontaneously and involuntarily, and its entire *raison d'être* is a convergent focus on a given topic, which typically is an event, a thought, a person, or a nation. Moreover, people can share collective memory but remain completely unknown to each other.

In contrast, social memory denotes the processes of remembering of people who are already related to each other. It is held in common by those who are affiliated in some way »by way of family or friendship or civic acquaintance or just ›an alliance between people for a specific purpose.‹«[36] Three aspects characterise social memory: first, looking back at past events, for instance through members of a same family; second, a link to a common place where the past events were enacted and experienced; third, narratives of past events are performed in a common place.

While individual memory is indispensable at the level of personal experience,[37] collective memory unites people who do not know each other, and social memory, based on already shared commonalities, intensifies the personal process of remembering by enlarging the dissemination of memory beyond personal experience, and by including family history or other shared events. Introducing the concept of public memory, Casey provides a useful frame for understanding other dynamics of collective processes of recalling

34 Casey 2004, 21.
35 See Casey 2004, 23–24.
36 Casey 2004, 23.
37 See Casey 2004, 24.

past events. Public memory connects people who may not already be related to each other:

> »Public« signifies out in the open, in the *koinos cosmos* where discussion with others is possible […] but also where one is exposed and vulnerable, where one's limitations and fallibilities are all too apparent. In this open realm, wherever it may be – in town halls, public parks, or city streets – public memory serves as an encircling horizon. It is there as a *basso profundo* in the chorus of the body politic, its medley of voices. It is there, however, not just as presupposed but as an active resource on which current discussion and action draw […].[38]

Public memory is always under construction. It is neither homogeneous nor fixed, but »at least more or less the same, throughout [its] vicissitudes.«[39] Public memory happens in shared places; its conditions of possibility are the proximity of bodies, public debates, common – even controversial – topics, and commemorations:

> In contrast to other primary kinds of remembering – which can occur with people who are quite isolated from each other (individual memory or collective memory) or in already constituted groups (social memory), public memory occurs only when people meet and interact in a single scene of interaction.[40]

Casey's concept of public memory proves fruitful for approaching the HEH. The concept draws attention to memory as a permanent work in progress that involves people in practices of remembering past events, which is the point in addressing such a fluid and blurred entity as »Europe«. Furthermore, in this form of remembering Ricœur's discussion of the mutual relationship between past (as both »no longer« and »having been«), present, and future is crucial. Public memory concerns the past but is enacted in the present as it builds a common imaginary. It therefore influences the future, given the link between collective representations and social bounds. If it is not forci-

38 Casey 2004, 25.
39 Casey 2004, 25.
40 Casey 2004, 32. Here the interplay between public sphere and public space is of note.

bly reduced to a mere reductive repetition, public memory, as an open process, is a generative force within society. Because it is public, it potentially affects everyone. Because it concerns the past, it does not doom individuals to mindlessly repeat it. Rather, people can discover their own agency and responsibility in dealing with the past.

2. A museum for Europe

How does a museum as a stable, public institution foster practices that promote the concept of identity as a work in progress? In the following pages, we explore the strategy of the HEH in providing a place for public memory. First, we discuss the process of creating the HEH. Second, we focus on the layout of the permanent exhibition, the selected topics, and the implemented strategies of the museum's representation. Finally, we discuss the role religion assumes in it.

2.1. Creating a place for a European memory

On 13 February 2007, the newly elected 12th President of the European Parliament, the German Hans-Gerd Pöttering, a member of the Christian Democratic Union, proposed in his inaugural address to create a place »where memories of our shared history and of the work of European unification could be nurtured«.[41] The idea of a museum presenting the history of Europe to visitors in the European quarter in Brussels was promoted as an initiative that would shape a common memory in order to highlight and disseminate

> common values of European unification – human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, peace, and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity – as representing the progress of peaceful coexistence, particularly since the end of the Second World War and the overcoming of divisions within our continent. Furthermore, the House aims to promote greater involvement from citizens in political decision making in a united Europe.[42]

41 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

42 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

From the beginning, the HEH has been conceived as a place to promote historical knowledge about Europe as a whole, in order to respond to a certain »emotional and symbolic deficit inherent in the Construction of Europe«[43] and to involve the visitors in a narrative that unfolds during their journey through the museum. By walking through various exhibitions, visitors would be confronted with questions about what Europe is or could be.[44]

Promoted by the European Parliament, the HEH is part of a political strategy to increase consciousness about the significance and the values of the EU among its citizens. As a cultural practice, the new museum aims at fostering meaning-making processes about being part of Europe as a project in progress. In this tension between political programme and cultural initiative, the HEH can be understood as a place of negotiation between implicit and explicit ideas of a common European historical and cultural place.[45]

The process of realising the HEH lasted a decade. The museum was designed from scratch, there were no previous collections or buildings; just the idea of a house dedicated to European history for the purposes of stimulating identification processes with the union, and for discussing different facets of economic, political, cultural and symbolic European integration. Various actors and agendas contributed to the development of the project.[46] In 2008 the Bureau of the European Parliament appointed a Committee of Experts to draw up a concept for the HEH. Nine historians and museum experts from different European countries defined the aims and elaborated the basic concept. The initial idea of addressing all generations and promoting knowledge »of their own history and thus contributing to a better understanding of Europe's development in the present and future«[47] was further

43 Bottici/Challand 2013, 87. In their volume *Imagining Europe*, the authors emphasise the necessity of a shared symbolic integration to provide a European identity: »[…] no European integration is possible outside a symbolic network […].« (88). Kaiser 2017, 518, argues similarly with regard to the HEH: »The HEH as a major cultural institution to be housed in the Eastman Building close to the EP is a key project for attempts by EU institutions since the 1980s to strengthen the cultural basis for integration, enhance European identity and foster the legitimacy of the EU.« On the role of »mythological« narratives of the EU see also Manners 2010; Hilmar 2016.

44 For the influence of museums and the power of museal narratives on identity processes see Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, 139–143.

45 See Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, 14.

46 Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017.

47 Hütter 2018, 28.

clarified. The HEH would foster the idea that »a united Europe can coexist peacefully in freedom on the basis of shared values in a world of progress«.[48] The hope was that the HEH would increase participation in political decision-making. To achieve this goal, the Committee suggested that the museum avoid presenting the history of single nations. The idea of a common Europe was not to be conceived as the sum of single pieces, but rather as a common, transnational European phenomenon.[49] Moreover, the museum had to be accessible to all, which required all 24 languages of the European Union to be represented there.

Once the draft containing the agenda for the HEH, the *Conceptual Basis*,[50] had been approved by the Bureau, further steps could be implemented. The architectural competition for restoring and enlarging the chosen site, the Eastman Building, a former dental clinic built in 1935, was launched. In 2011 the Academic Project Team was appointed. With experts in history and museology from across Europe and chaired by the historian and curator Taja Vovk van Gaal, the Academic Project Team took the lead in defining the content and layout of the museum, as well as in implementing the *Conceptual Basis* into the museum and its permanent exhibition.[51] In addition, a Board of Trustees, composed of politicians, was entrusted with supervising the general management of the project. Eventually, the Building Team, was put in charge of the logistical aspects of the project.[52]

This brief summary of the implementation process of the HEH suggests the multilayered challenges of this remarkable undertaking. Among many problems, the following contested questions are particularly relevant for our study. First, is it possible to shape a common European memory and improve involvement and political participation by means of an institutional initiative by the EU Parliament? Furthermore, although it is sometimes taken for granted, it is still not clear what »Europe« is. There is neither a uniform »history« of Europe, nor is it possible to establish what events should be considered as »typically European«. Moreover, whose perspective should

48 Hütter 2018, 29.
49 Mork 2016a, 220.
50 Conceptual Basis 2018.
51 Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012; Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017; Pöttering 2018a; Hütter 2018.
52 The members of the different boards are listed in Building a House of European History 2013, 45–46.

be chosen to implement a museum about European history in many languages? All actors involved were well aware of the novelty and the difficulty of the task; in fact, as Andrea Mork, the Head Curator of the HEH states, »Europe has innumerable museums, but none about itself, at least not explicitly.«[53] The negotiation process that finally led to the opening of the museum on 6 May 2017 is well documented and discussed in an extensive scholarly bibliography.[54]

Given the plurality of possible perspectives and topics, as well as the fear of political manipulation, the responsible boards decided to base the project upon an academic approach. History and museology were considered the relevant academic disciplines for ensuring the consistency of the project, and scholars from all over Europe took part in the initiative. The aspiration of transmitting knowledge about history to enable citizens to better understand what Europe has been, is and shall be in the future was translated into a museum concept that locates the visitor in the centre. In the wording of the *Conceptual Basis*:

> Academic independence and the objective portrayal of history have top priority. The Committee of Experts is adamant that scientifically proven findings and methods are the basis for the work of the House of European History. The accuracy of its portrayal of history is an essential precondition for securing acceptance among specialists and visitors alike. The multifaceted and impartial presentation of historical facts and processes is vital if visitors are to be put in a position to form their own judgments and encouraged to discuss the issues dealt with in the exhibition. The guarantor of this independence could be a high-level Academic Advisory Board, comprising historians and museum specialists, which would supervise the work.[55]

53 Mork 2018, 129.

54 Meanwhile, the HEH has been presented and discussed in several academic contributions: see e. g. Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, particularly 138–184; Borodziej 2011; Augstein 2011; Breier 2011; Knigge 2011; Grau i Segú 2016; Hilmar 2016; Mork 2016a and 2016b; Fickers 2018; Mork/Christodoulou 2018. Conceptual Basis 2018.

55 Conceptual Basis 2018, paragraph 9, page 7.

For the permanent exhibition, a chronology was established with an emphasis on the 20th century. It also contained some information about the *longue durée* of Europe, and an outlook towards contemporary and future European matters.[56] The narrative linking the chosen chapters and topics should be comprehensible to everyone, and highlight various common aspects of Europe, with an emphasis on those influential developments which originated in Europe and continue to hold relevance today.[57] In temporary exhibitions, other topics and approaches would supplement and enrich the offerings of the museum, and address further aspects of the contested undertaking of presenting a European history. Particularly noteworthy is that the HEH did not own a collection prior to this undertaking, and thus had to simultaneously forge a consistent, comprehensible narrative and collect objects to convey it.[58]

2.2. The itinerary of the permanent exhibition

Visiting the museum today, the choices made by the Academic Project Team and adapted by the curators of the museum exhibition are clearly visible.[59] The narrative unfolds through six narrative themes in a chronological sequence (fig. 1). The first area provides knowledge about the origins of Europe, and, as we will see below, is especially important for this project's purposes of discussing the role of religion. The other areas are dedicated to modern and contemporary Europe, focusing on the 19th and 20th centuries with an outlook on future developments of the continent. Here is an overview of the different sections of the permanent exhibition:[60]

56 Vovk van Gaal 2018, 89: »The chronological approach recommended for the structure of the permanent exhibition encourages visitors to understand historical phenomena and events; the objects were recommended to be put in an understandable context and accompanied by modern audio-visual media«.

57 Vovk van Gaal/Itzel 2012, 79; Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012, 49.

58 About the effects of visual media and material objects in forging a concept of Europe see Wintle 2004; Drechsel/Jaeger/König/Lang/Leggewie 2010.

59 See the analysis of the museum's narrative in Hillmar 2016.

60 See Guidebook 2017 and https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition (accessed December 20, 2021).

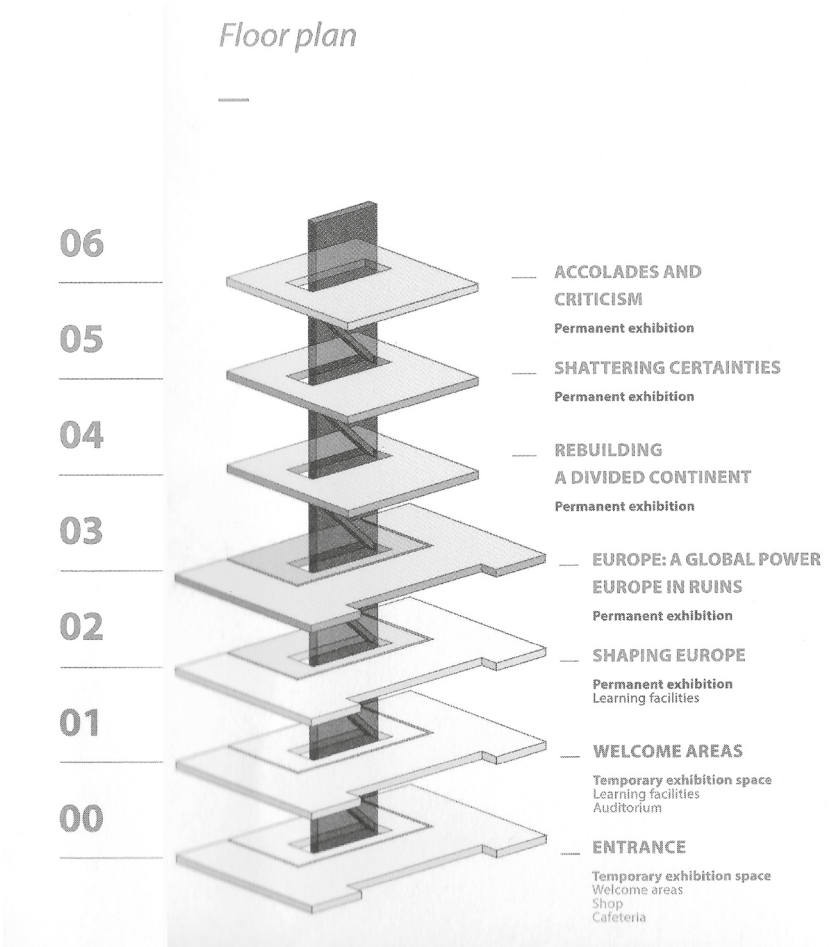

Fig. 1: Map of the House for European History, in: Guidebook 2017, 4–5.

The displayed objects,[61] audio-visual media in the exhibition, and other forms of museal mise-en-scène do not carry written titles or explanations. Entering the museum is free of charge. Each visitor receives an audio guide (a tablet and headphones) with explanations about the exhibits in all 24 official languages of the EU. As an alternative to the audio guide, a guidebook can

61 On the role of museum objects see Schärer 1999, 32.

be purchased in the museum shop. The printed guide contains only a small selection of the information but offers colour reproductions of the displayed objects. Visitors can therefore choose, according to time and interests, how deeply they will engage with a particular object or subject matter.[62]

The six parts of the exhibition are woven together in different ways. On a conceptual level, the chronological-development narrative constitutes a line throughout the various areas. For example, visitors start their explorations in Greco-Roman antiquity, and from there they are finally invited to explore the 19th and the 20th century, before being confronted with questions about Europe today.

Alongside the chronological axis, a massive sculpture ties together the different areas of the permanent exhibition by means of visual and material communication. The *Vortex of History*, designed by Boris Micka and Todomuta Studio in Seville, hangs at the centre of the staircase. This 25-metre work of art, constructed of steel and an aluminium-magnesium alloy, reaches across and into all the floors of the museum. It is composed of banners engraved with quotations from various texts and genres in a broad range of languages.[63] At the centre of the sculpture, the banners are condensed into a huge cluster. Some banners snake into different parts of the exhibition. The sculpture is therefore presented as an »organic living element that floats under the skylight« [64] (fig. 2).

The quotations engraved onto the vortex signify that there are multiple interpretations of Europe and European identity. The question of what Europe is or may be constitutes a leitmotiv of the permanent exhibition. This question is reiterated in each section in many ways and by means of different material objects, documents, images and audio-visual media. The visitors are is constantly invited to reconsider their position regarding this question.[65] Yet, the *Vortex of History* emblematises the difficulty of answering

62 Vovk van Gaal/Itzel 2012, 77.

63 The list of quotations can be found in https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/curators-notes-vortex-history (accessed December 20, 2021).

64 The quote is taken from a video on the website of the HEH: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-JXyfmPMp4 (accessed December 20, 2021).

65 About the strategy of the HEH to avoid a hegemonic narrative for Europe see Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012, 51. Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012 interpret deconstructivist tendencies in approaching a concept of Europe in museums as a counter-reaction to historical national hegemonic narratives, *Meistererzählungen*; see in particular 138–184.

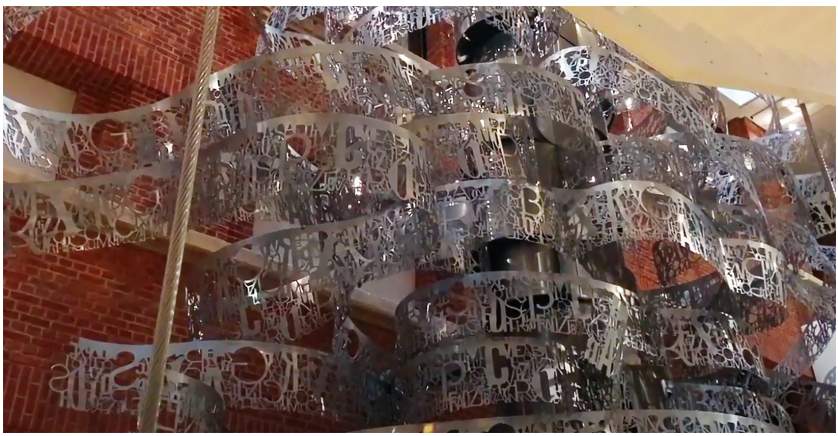

Fig. 2: *The Vortex of History*, film still, 00:10.[66]

this central query: the letters of the main corpus of the sculpture can neither be deciphered nor be recomposed into texts; only the single banners that unravel from the central part are readable.

3. Religion in the House of European History

Our chapter contributes to the general question of this book with a close reading of representations of religion and religions in the HEH. We are interested in exploring the role attributed to a phenomenon that is fundamental to understanding Europe and its history. The European history of religion is characterised by an intense exchange between different religious traditions and, within each, by a broad range of different ideas, negotiations, adaptions and transmissions of specific symbol systems. What is generally referred to as »Christianity«, »Judaism«, or »Islam«, as well as the rich and variegated panorama of different religious orientations, originated either in the continent or in the intertwining of travelling people and communities. European religious traditions and communities are marked by a vivid exchange of

66 Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-JXyfmPMp4&ab_channel=HouseofEuropeanHistory (accessed December 20, 2021).

differing worldviews, social spheres, and cultures.[67] Religion is a key aspect of European diversity. How does the HEH deal with this historical heritage?

3.1. Enriching diversities and blind spots

In addressing the question »What is Europe«?, Mária Schmidt, a member of the Academic Committee, writes:

> […] Europe has more often been united than segregated into small communities. It is thus important for us to point out the process of our shared memory, as our national cultures are thoroughly permeated by the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian tradition we inherited from past millennia.[68]

In fact, looking at the exhibition as it is today, it seems appropriate to follow this hint and consider the role of religion in the HEH by looking for references to both ancient Greek mythology, and the Jewish and Christian tradition. But although explicit references to Europe's religious roots are presented in the introductory area, *Shaping Europe,* religion is a rather marginalised topic in the HEH. In the main part of the exhibition, dedicated to the 19th and 20th century, Europe is represented from a resolutely secular perspective; religion is relegated to the private sphere. Religion has often been considered more of a cause of division than a difference enriching European society, and the HEH seems to reflect this take.

In the HEH, the positive value of cultural diversity and the possibility of uniting different nations and cultures is associated with multilingualism, highlighted by the use of 24 official languages. A banner from the *Vortex of History* emphasises the possibility of bringing different languages together with a quote attributed to Umberto Eco: »La lingua dell'Europa è la traduzione« (»The language of Europe is translation«). Pulled out of the argumentative context of Eco's work on translation,[69] the sentence remains ambiguous.

67 As an introduction to this field see Antes 2002; Elsas 2002; Gladigow 2009; Lehmann 2009; Pollack 2009; Rüpke 2009.

68 Schmidt 2018, 83.

69 https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/curators-notes-vortex-history (accessed December 20, 2021). See also Eco 2017.

Does the quotation in the HEH assume that language should consist in an effort to make a specific culture available to others? Or that it is always possible to transport a cultural constellation into another cultural setting? Or that differences can be overcome? Or that we only can mediate between differences that remain specific and incomparable? In any case, compared with the positive role attributed to the plurality of languages that vividly represent the cultural diversity of Europe, the elusive and cautious approach to the plurality of religious and/or other worldviews is striking.

The (over)emphasis on the academic perspective of the history of Europe is apparently correlated to an approach to cultures that is based on a »disenchanted« approach to history.[70] The HEH, then, seems to take for granted that there is a strong divide between religious (in particular, Christian) and scientific worldviews, the latter being associated with technological development and progress. This assumption is made explicit by the audio guide's commentary on the section dedicated to Humanism:

> Humanism is a political and social philosophy that emphasises the fundamental importance of the individual. It was a prominent theme of the Renaissance. And during the Enlightenment of the 18th century it developed into the belief that all individuals are equal and possess certain rights and liberties. In this sense, Humanism is a foundation stone of European culture and civilisation. In society, politics, art and science the focus on the individual would have radical consequences. Art became more realistic, with artists creating the new genre of portraiture and developing an understanding of perspective. Thinkers embarked in a scientific exploration of the world, based on evidence, gathered by the individual, not dispensed by religion, and in politics the belief in the power and the value of the individual would inspire 19th-century demands for self-determination and democracy. Is it everyone's right to act as an individual or is it everyone's duty to play a role in society?[71]

70 As a first introduction to the debate about secularism see e. g. Calhoun/Juergensmeyer/VanAntwerpen 2011.

71 Transcript of the audio guide *Humanism*, https://tinyurl.com/2bn563d7 (accessed December 20, 2021).

According to this view, the individual is an autonomous subject of society who is freed from the constraints of religion. Individualisation and emancipation from religious ideology are here directly linked with the foundation of modern Europe as a unique place of scientific, political, and artistic discovery. Religion is associated with an ancient heritage that once shaped the beginning of a European common identity, but, over the course of time, has lost its significance. In light of these tendencies, we now turn our attention to an analysis of those instances of religious traditions featured in the introductory area, *Shared Europe*.

3.2. A Greco-Roman myth as a foundation narrative

The showcases dedicated to the origins of Europe are introduced as follow:

> What is Europe? Geography shows us that Europe has never been a clearly defined space. The continent's name comes from the ancient Greek myth of Europa, a story that has been re-interpreted, like history itself, from various points of view over time. Europe is described through its achievements and traditions, but what distinguishes it from other continents? Can we say that we have a shared European past, when history has affected people differently? Can we find any commonality – a reservoir of European memory?[72]

A major aim of the project of the HEH is addressed here explicitly: the visitor has to be confronted with Europe as a contested concept. Therefore, the question »What is Europe?« cannot be answered in a univocal way. The text invites the visitor to think about a reservoir of European memory, which can be understood as a self-reflexive description of the museum itself – as both an institution collecting a repertoire, and as an exhibition performing memory through material things and a particular spatial design.

Following its influence on various attempts to define Europe since the Renaissance, the myth of Europa and the Bull is presented as a crucial common basis.[73] Yet, the interpretation of the ancient myth as a representation

72 Transcript of the audio guide *Shaping Europe*, https://tinyurl.com/2wz3x88a (accessed December 20, 2021).

73 Wintle 2004.

of Europe as a geographical, political and/or cultural entity does not always produce a consistent, coherent interpretation. In fact, the narrative of Europa and the divine bull has been associated with a variety of attributes and values in the course of the centuries.[74]

In the HEH, the myth is briefly recapitulated in the audio guide as a comment accompanying a selection of items representing or relating to the myth selected from different places and times in its reception history. Among them, the guidebook highlights: a replica of a metope from a temple in Selinunte (6th century BCE), on loan from the Museo Archeologico Regionale Antonio Salinas in Palermo and representing Europa riding the bull (fig. 3); the serigraphy *Europe on the Bull* by the German artist Timm Ulrich from 1972–1973, belonging to the HEH's own collection (fig. 4); and a replica of a kylix with the letters of the Greek alphabet (ca. 420 BCE, Boeotia) from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (fig. 5).

The audio guide provides a clear interpretation of the myth:

> Europa, a mythical princess from Phoenicia – today's Lebanon – is abducted by the Greek god Zeus, who appears to her in the form of a white bull. Having fallen in love with her beauty, he takes her to the island of Crete. Europe's name has been associated with this myth from antiquity to the present. It appears in art, literature, religion and politics, where the story and imagery are often reinterpreted to reflect the issues of the day.[75]

> At the core of the myth of Europa is the reality of ancient interconnections – both good and bad – between the peoples of Europe and those from distant lands. That Europe actually took its name from a mythological princess from western Asia is a testament to such contacts. As is the fact that the myth gives us glimpses into the historical development of the Greek alphabet, a development triggered by contact with the Phoenicians in antiquity.[77]

74 See Wintle 2004; Bottici 2009; Bottici/Challand 2013, 101–111.

75 Transcript of the audioguide *Reception of the Myth*, https://tinyurl.com/32vp8vc7 (accessed December 20, 2021).

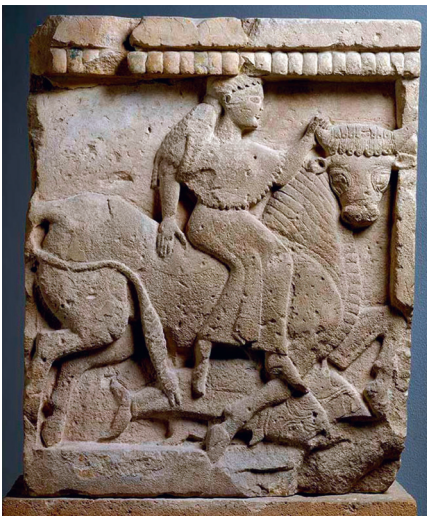

Fig. 3: Replica of a metope from Temple Y, Seliunte, Sicily, c. 580–560 BCE, in: Guidebook 2017, 12, fig. 1.

Fig. 4: Timm Ulrichs, *Europe on the Bull*, 1972–1973, in: Guidebook 2017, 12, fig. 2.

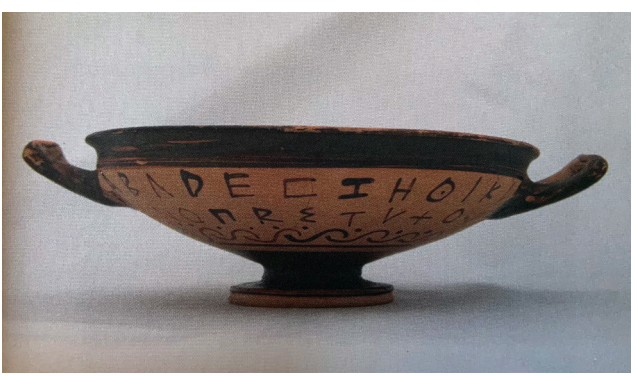

Fig. 5: Replica of a kylix, Boeotia, Greece, c. 420 BCE, National Archeological Museum, Athens, in: Guidebook 2017, 13, fig. 3.

The reference to this narrative – which evokes not only a peculiar ancient narrative but also a dense reception history in texts and images – in the introductory area of the permanent exhibition frames the question »What is Europe?« in very specific ways. First, the narrative is displayed as a founding myth which is mirrored in the very name of the continent. Second, Europe is a reminiscence of a »foreign« princess, indicating that Europe has always been in contact with other cultures. Third, Europe is a narrative undergoing permanent transformations and interpretations. From ancient Greece to contemporary art, various elements of the myth have been interpreted, adapted and transformed in different ways. Fourth, Europe and the alphabet are tied together in a privileged relationship: with the introduction of the alphabet, a »foreign« invention, Europe has developed a crucial skill of progress and development.[77]

The comparison between the ancient archeological objects and contemporary works may be read as programmatic in dealing with religious aspects: the divine Zeus soaring over the sea in the guise of a bull depicted on the replica of a metope is transformed into an animal in flesh and blood and the mythical princess into a printed map on its back in *Europe on the Bull* by Timm Ulrichs. The myth is cleansed of its religious meaning-making performance and transformed into a narrative that conveys the idea of a united (secular) continent. Thus, ancient religious figures like Zeus and Europa, as well as the narratives that preserve them, are presented as merely a part of an influential and productive cultural tradition that shaped the continent over millennia.

3.3. Christianity as root and limitation of Europe's unity

Besides the Greco-Roman mythical narrative of Europa and the disguised god, the introductory section, *Shaping Europe,* also explicitly addresses Christianity as a crucial tradition for understanding the roots of the continent:

> From its origins in the Middle East, Christianity extended its influence across the whole of Europe to become a defining feature of western civilisation. For thousands of years the power of Christianity in

76 Transcript of the audio guide *Cadmus and the Alphabet*, https://tinyurl.com/mv4trfjm (accessed December 20, 2021).

77 Mork 2016a, 224–225.

> Europe centred on Rome and the pope was immense and extended far beyond mere spiritual concerns. It permeated every aspect of life, influencing politics, culture, commerce, and law. Yet Europe's relationship with Christianity has always been diverse and complex. Christianity has frequently been deeply divided within itself, significantly in the division between Eastern and Western Churches and through the Reformation. Also Islam and Judaism have co-existed for centuries in Europe helping to define European life and culture. Today, despite falling church attendance and increasing secularism, Christianity remains embedded in daily European life with values, traditions, and cultures all reflecting Europe's Christian heritage. In an increasingly multi-religious Europe will Christianity remain in its dominant position?[78]

Christianity is introduced as an omnipresent religion that permeates nearly every aspect of »Western civilization«. The audio guide suggests that religion's influence extends beyond »mere spiritual concerns« to touch all social spheres. Christianity, however, is not precisely defined. It is assumed that all the museum's visitors are familiar with this tradition. The audio guide only notes that Christianity is divided within itself with reference to the principal schisms. Furthermore, Islam and Judaism are briefly mentioned as coexisting with Christianity. Other religious traditions are not mentioned; European religious plurality is merely associated with monotheistic religion. The text concludes by emphasising a European paradox: even when the numbers of believers are decreasing, Christianity keeps influencing society. The final question, perhaps rhetorical, poses a moral dilemma about the legitimacy of an alleged Christian cultural rule over a society shaped by secularism and religious pluralism. Overall, Christianity is presented as a worldview that belongs to the past: the exhibition tends to stress the fundamental difference and incompatibility between a religious and a scientific approach to Europe. This dichotomy is visible, for example, in the showcase *Mapping Europe*, which features the printed book *Cosmographia*, first published by Sebastian Münster in 1544, and later translated in several languages. The copy showcased at the HEH, a reprint from 1628 in German, is the latest reproduction of this famous work (fig. 6). The commentary states:

78 Transcript of the audio guide *Omnipresence of Christianity*, https://tinyurl.com/3d2jmn2f (accessed December 20, 2021).

Fig. 6: Europa as a female personification in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* from 1628. Website Exhibition Shaping Europe.[79]

> Maps created during the Middle Ages often disregarded geographical accuracy in favour of Christian messages and symbolism. In the Renaissance, the continent of Europe was represented as the Virgin Mary, an expression of its Christian identity.[80]

The map of Europe in this early modern book is embedded in an iconographic tradition of representing the continent in the guise of a queen, with the typical attributes of power: a crown (located in Spain), the *globus cruciger* (which corresponds with Sicily), and a sceptre.[81] In the context of the volume as a whole, this map is far more than an example of a Christian, inaccurate worldview. On the contrary, the document testifies to a rising interest in describing a territory according to humanist procedures and ideals.[82] Sebastian Münster's work is therefore an extraordinary example of a new

79 Source: https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/shaping-europe (accessed December 20, 2021).

80 https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/shaping-europe (accessed December 20, 2021) or Guidebook 2017, 11.

81 See for example the copper engraving by Matthias Quad, Köln 1587 or the representation *Europa prima pars terrae in forma virginis* in Heinrich Bünting, *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae*, Wittenberg 1588, plate 12. For reproductions see von Plessen 2003, 114–115.

82 For more information about this book see McLean 2007; Besse 2013.

way of dealing with geography and cartography. The reading of this document by the HEH appears forced, committed to an assumption that religious and scientific worldviews are per se incompatible. This problematic reading implicitly reveals an evolutionistic view of the European history of religion.[83] It also subtly implies a conception of historical developments that *inevitably* leads to a contemporary secular paradigm and a commitment to science and technology as a substitute for disused religious systems. The oversimplified presentation of Christianity, the superficial hints at Judaism and Islam, as well as the lack of references to the variety, plurality and dynamics of the many religious communities, traditions and interactions between them seem to be programmatic in this museal representation of Europe.

Religious traditions are neither well-defined systems of symbols, thinking, or practices, nor have they lost influence on European cultures across the centuries until today. Religious symbol systems interact with societies on many levels and constantly adapt to changes and transformations.[84] The introductory area of the HEH enters into the subject of religion disregarding the complexity of meaning-making and transmission processes but the attitude towards religion remains ambiguous. On the one hand, Greco-Roman mythology and Christianity are highlighted as fundamental, influential dimensions in which Europe is rooted. On the other hand, they are represented as ancient and medieval conceptions that (had to) disappear over the centuries: religions are, the HEH seems to suggest, in some way outdated, supplanted by the Enlightenment.

In the following areas, nevertheless, the HEH does contain references to objects or historical situations where religious worldviews, traditions and identities played a prominent role. These implicit references represent religion as a private practice. As an illustration of this kind of approach to religion, the object *Bomb-damaged Bible belonging to Kurt Geller* in the section *World War I* is particularly significant (fig. 7). The guidebook reads:

83 For a first introduction into this field see e. g. Rüpke 2009.

84 See Adriaanse 2016.

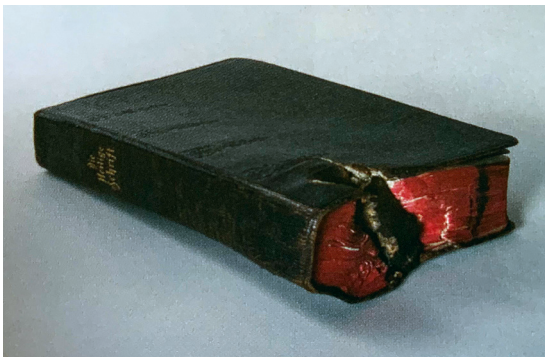

Fig. 7: Bomb-damaged Bible belonging to Kurt Geller, German Empire, 1914–1918, Private collection, Germany, in: Guidebook 2017, 39, fig. 3.

> The experience of war was different for each individual. Those who survived often felt it was divine intervention or just good luck, sometimes connected to a talismanic object. This soldier's Bible absorbed shrapnel from a bomb blast and saved its owner's life. Objects like this became treasured mementos of war, and survive in family collections across Europe.[85]

A soldier carried a Bible with him onto the battlefield, and he claims the sacred book eventually saved his life. The damaged Bible recalls not only an incredible story but expresses an individual relationship with a religious tradition, and a form of piety that may have offered a specific orientation to a person navigating a precarious situation. This reference to the role of a material thing – a sacred book – in an individual's life fits with a general tendency to approach religion as something that may be located in the private sphere of European secularised citizens.

Overall, the HEH approaches religion cautiously. It addresses Christianity and ancient mythology as religious-historical heritages that have permeated Europe in the past. In the itinerary of the permanent exhibition, they are represented, to a certain extent, as a cultural and symbolic basis upon which the idea of Europe as a common ground was consolidated in the past. To build a public memory that may facilitate a sense of belonging to Europe, narratives of cultural, linguistic, spatial and national diversities are interwoven with representations of transnational events and developments whose

85 Guidebook 2017, 39.

effects are still relevant today. Set against this background, the plurality of beliefs and religions as social phenomena seems to be disregarded because of their divisive potential.[86]

The variegated and multifaceted landscape of religious traditions and communities that characterises the European history of religion is neglected, despite the deconstructivist narrative of the HEH, which could have allowed a multifaceted and critical approach to this controversial dimension of human life. While the question »What is Europe?« is reiterated in all the areas, »religion« thins along the museum's itinerary and its memory fades out.

4. The role of diversity in the quest for European identity

In this chapter, we have approached the HEH as a public place dedicated to negotiations of public memory. This dynamic process is performed in the encounter between visitors and objects on display. Giving particular attention to European multilingualism, the permanent exhibition aims at addressing everybody, with the guide translated into all official European languages.

Staging memory as a process of negotiation demands an active response by audiences that may engage in a productive relationship with the selected topics overcoming the simple reiteration of knowledge about past events. By doing so, the twofold character of the past may be perceived: events that took place in Europe can be remembered as parts of a concluded history *or* as a common ground that opens up reflection about the present and the future.

86 In their analysis of the relevance of myths for providing a cultural and symbolic European identity, Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand (2013) explicitly question the role attributed to religion, which is identified with Christianity, by some authors like Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (2010). Bottici and Challand acknowledge that »[a]fter all, religions have always been and remain but one way to answer common metaphysical questions that human beings ask about their fate and lives. Religion can, therefore, serve as a bridge between social groups […]« (2013, 163–164). The authors conclude that »[t]he question of a multireligious Europe ought, therefore, to be taken seriously; this question is rendered more important with the enlargement of Europe toward an Orthodox East and a Muslim South-east. Thus, a thorough reflection on secularism should be undertaken, moving away from simplistic portrayals of threats in terms of religious Otherness (which eventually create a mythical homogeneous block opposed to another). This is true not only for those who describe Islam/Turkey as a problem for a European identity, but also for those who assume that ›secularism‹ is implicitly part of European self-understanding« (2013, 164).

This work of the museum representation is stimulated by multiple objects, showcases and multi-media installations that are meant to involve the visitors as subjects and are articulated on the fragile edge between engagement with or reception of certain contents, active response to or passive consumption of the staged narratives. The museum creates a tension between involvement and distance, particularly highlighting relationships, connections, data, and artifacts.

To allow the audience to engage in a process of discovery, interpretation and construction of a common identity, a focus on transformations, potentialities, and differences in representing European history is needed. Yet, religion, as a relevant factor in establishing and negotiating diversity, is neglected in this remarkable house.

In staging a history for negotiating European memory and, therefore, identity, some tensions emerge in the HEH's design (both as a space and of the exhibition). First, the spatial layout combines integrated with segregated areas. The staircase and the *Vortex of History* cannot counterbalance the chronological path that leads the visitor along the floors with the different chapters and narratives. For instance, while engaging with events of the 20th century on the fifth floor, the spatial contact with the origin of Europe three storeys below gets lost. Furthermore, the tension between transmitting knowledge and stimulating visitors to take an active role in negotiating »Europe« by means of a multi-media and multisensory experience is in some way overshadowed on the one hand by the audio guide, spoken by an omniscient eloquent narrator, and on the other hand by the glass showcases that create a strong physical distance between visitor and object. Finally, the museum narrative appears to be ambivalent in establishing a common ground for a European history, as more than the sum of single national narratives, and the multifaceted dimension of histories and perspectives. In dealing with religion, the museum allows three main approaches: a hint at ancient Greek mythology, a short note on Christianity as a monolithic and hegemonic worldview in the past and, eventually, religion as a feature of the private sphere of individuals in a contemporary Europe that relies on secular values, technology and science.

Public memory is always under construction and has to be negotiated by the transitory dwellers of the House of European History. This dynamic and provisional character of a process of memorialisation is inhabited by

the subject that engages in it. However, the permanent exhibition does not encourage visitors to explore and revisit the variegated European history of religion or to ask about the positive, cohesive potential of the religious communities, traditions and imaginaries that are vividly present on the continent. In the HEH, religious identities are considered as divisive and conflictual differences that, unlike languages, can apparently not engage in a fruitful process of exchange and reciprocal enrichment.

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