Introduction: Spaces for Shaping the Nation

National Museums and National Galleries in Nineteenth-Century Europe

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The aim of this volume is to take a closer look at the function of museums in the process of nation-building. As spaces of knowledge, national museums and galleries played an important role in conveying a national identity in nineteenth-century Europe, though the individual institutions differed in their precise function, in the orientation of their collections, and in their didactic approach. This volume examines the potential of such spaces to contribute to the formation and education (*Bildung*) of the nascent nation-states. In addition to the mediation of knowledge, this question concerns the originary purpose of the museums: why they were founded and by whom. While the chronological scope of the volume is the long nineteenth century, some authors extend their view to the present, accounting for the imperatives of national museums today. Across a breadth of case studies encompassing Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland, the contributors consider how national museums and galleries engaged with the specific nation-building process of the country in question.

Methodological Approach

Research on national museums and galleries is not new. Fundamental studies have addressed many such museums, whether from the perspective of the history of the institution and its collection or the architectural framework.[1] In addition, a number of conferences and projects have dealt with national museums and galleries from a comparative point of view. One of the first was the conference *Das kunst- und kulturhistorische Museum im 19. Jahrhundert*,[2] held at the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* (Germanic National Museum) in 1977. This was followed in 1991 by an international symposium at the

1 The relevant literature is cited in the contributions to this volume.

2 Deneke and Kahsnitz, 1977.

Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) in Berlin. There, twenty-five representatives of national museums and galleries presented on the history, contents, status, and future of their museums. This gathering resulted in the volume *Die Nation und ihre Museen*.[3]

Anniversaries are often the occasion for such publications, as with the recent one organized on the 150th anniversary of the *Museo Nazionale del Bargello* (Bargello National Museum), in Florence.[4] While such volumes tend to present the latest research on the museum in question, they lack a comparative view.[5] And they rarely define the basic terms, i.e. what constitutes a national museum or gallery and what their respective functions have historically been.

This is where the research project "European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen" (EuNaMus) came in, producing numerous publications on the subject between 2010 and 2013.[6] EuNaMus is based on the "Making National Museums: Comparing Institutional Arrangements, Narrative Scope and Cultural Integration" (NaMu) project, funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions of the European Commission in 2007–2008. The results of NaMu appeared in the 2011 volume *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*.[7] This publication was the starting point for EuNaMus, which investigated national museums in thirty-seven countries from a comparative perspective. In addition to the search for a common definition of the national museum, the project focused on the active and intentional processes of history-making in museums. Further to this point, EuNaMus looked at the potential roles of national museums in Europe today, in particular for forging understanding as well as a European sense of belonging. The reorientation of national museums in our time was also a topic of discussion at the conference on which the present volume is based.[8] And it is a question central to current museum work.[9]

The EuNaMus project's definition of the national museum, which we take up in this volume, aims to capture "the national museum in all its social, political and intellectual complexity, through a systematic comparative study of the formation of these institu-

3 Plessen 1992.

4 Ciseri and Wolf 2021.

5 Madsen and Jørgensen 2007.

6 Among the most important publications is Aronsson and Amundsen 2012, which provides a first definition of the national museum and discusses important issues related to its study. These initial findings led to the volume Aronsson and Elgenius 2015. Two publications present the national museums in the thirty-seven countries in detail: Aronsson and Elgenius 2011 describes and classifies the most important national museums for each country, whereas Poulot, Bodenstein, and Guiral 2012 deals with overarching thematic issues related to the individual museums.

7 Knell 2011.

8 The participants in the discussion were: Christopher Breward (Director of the Scottish National Museum), Daniel Hess (Director General of the Germanic National Museum), Thomas Lyngby (Head of Research and Curator of the Museum of National History Frederiksborg), Martin Olin (Research Director of the National Museum Stockholm), and Mette Skougaard (Director of the Museum of National History Frederiksborg). We thank Tobias Kämpf, from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg and the Germanic National Museum, for chairing the discussion.

9 Hess 2022.

tions as read in the context of the overall evolution of Europe".[10] In this sense, EuNaMus defines national museums as

> institutions, collections and displays claiming, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities. National museums are institutionalized negotiations of national values that form a basis for national identity and cultural underpinnings for the operation of the state.[11]

The function of a given museum as a 'national museum' therefore is not dependent on whether the word 'national' appears explicitly in its name; nor are there specific collection items that necessarily define a museum as national in character. The decisive factor lies instead in the role that the museum has played in the process of nation-building. Therefore, in order to understand the operations of the 'national museum' as such, one must first understand how the relevant museums fulfilled this role.

In this context, the present volume considers museums as educational spaces that conveyed knowledge about the nation and analyses the didactic methods entailed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill deals with these aspects in her book *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*,[12] showing how the knowledge conveyed varies according to the arrangement of objects. Thus, any decision concerning the presentation of objects in a museum is a decision to communicate a particular kind of knowledge. This process demands reflection and analysis in order to understand how museums function as spaces of education.

This important methodological tool has thus far been employed only sporadically to investigate the didactic intentions of object displays, and its application to past displays is also rare. An exception is the work of Jana Scholze, who takes a semiotic approach to analysing four museums in terms of how and with what ostensible aim the objects were arranged.[13] Julia Noordegraaf, for her part, takes the example of the *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen* (Boymans–Van Beuningen Museum) in Rotterdam to examine how the presentation of objects changed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She analyses the museum from the perspective of the viewer and refers to the installation itself a 'script' "in order to analyse the complex relations between such diverse components as people's ideas and intentions, material objects, buildings and visitor behaviour".[14] Meanwhile, Sarah Czerney adopts an approach from media theory to describe how the medium of

10 "European National Museums" 2013.

11 Aronsson, Amundsen, and Bugge 2011, 10. Knell 2016, 9, notes that a national museum or gallery "might be understood as an institution meeting some or all of the following criteria: holding and exhibiting all or part of the national collection of fine art, established by an act of parliament or government decree; funded at least in part by the national government; possessing a professional staff employed by the state; situated in government bureaucracy and delivering in policy areas in the arts; and designated or referred to as a national museum or gallery".

12 Hooper-Greenhill 1995.

13 Scholze 2004. The four museums are the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, the *zeitgeschichtliches Forum* (Forum of Contemporary History) in Leipzig, the *Tropenmuseum* (Museum of the Tropics) in Amsterdam, and the *Werkbundarchiv* (Archive of the *Werkbund* Association) in Berlin. In her contribution to Baur 2010, she summarizes her methodological approach once again, see Scholze 2010.

14 Noordegraaf 2004, 14.

the museum conveyed the self-image of the nation in the nineteenth century, before going on to address what role European national museums can play in this respect today.[15] Joachim Baur's anthology[16] presents other methodological frameworks for analysing the display of objects, including those that examine the museum as a historical source[17] or an ethnographic field,[18] alongside others that draw from theories of narrative[19] or cultural memory.[20]

This volume analyses the exhibitions in order to shed light on the didactic intentions that were pursued via the arrangement and presentation of the objects: How was the collection arranged? What relationships were established between the objects and the space surrounding them, i.e. pictorial programmes, ornaments, inscriptions, etc.? What principles of order and what presentation strategies were used? And finally, what impression was the collection meant to leave on visitors?

The specific educational mission of the so-called *Landesmuseen* (state museums) is also examined in the volume. How was regional history, art history, and cultural history conveyed in these museums? What objects were used for this purpose, what persons were referred to, and what important events were narrated? What aesthetic and political canon was to be conveyed to the population? How did such museums contribute to the self-representation and self-creation of the state?

In this volume, we focus on mediation in museums. With this emphasis, we ask new questions about the function and use of museums. We ask specifically how national identity was didactically mediated in museums in the context of the rise of the nation-state in nineteenth-century Europe.

The Function of National Museums and Galleries in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Over the course of the long nineteenth century, the countries that are now geographically part of Europe underwent an extremely complex process of state- and nation-building. This process did not follow any uniform pattern but rather was highly individualized. In Germany and Italy, for example, several states joined together to form a nation-state. The nations of Greece and Belgium, however, emerged upon seceding from an existing state system. By contrast, the national borders of France have for centuries been more or less congruent with a specific cultural and linguistic area. And there were nations that did not have their own state, such as divided Poland.

The process of what historians call 'external nation-building' was preceded by the anchoring of the national idea in the population, known as 'internal nation-building', which manifested itself in the cultural sphere (language, monuments, national festivals, rituals,

15 Czerny 2019.
16 Baur 2010.
17 Thiemeyer 2010.
18 Gable 2010.
19 Buschmann 2010.
20 Pieper 2010.

symbols, anthems, flags, etc.). Not only museums but also archives, libraries, and monuments functioned as sites of knowledge transmission about one's nation and its place in history.[21]

The so-called national museums played an important role in this.[22] Per the definition of the national museum given by the EuNaMus project, the present contributions examine not just national museums designated as such but also national galleries, historical museums, museums of cultural history, art museums, army museums, and *Landesmuseen* that were established in the states that merged to form the German Empire in 1871. The *Landesmuseen* had the same function as the national museums in neighbouring European countries. Here, however, the exhibition of the nation was concentrated on the respective federal state. One example is the *Bayerisches Nationalmuseum* (Bavarian National Museum), where the Bavarian nation of the Kingdom of Bavaria was to be presented.

Thus, different types of national museums emerged in various countries, differing in their function, collection focus, and didactic approach, but sharing the same function: the formation and representation of the nation. Against this backdrop, it is important to examine how museums and galleries fulfilled this educational role. How exactly did they contribute to nation-building and education in the nineteenth century? In order to understand how nation was communicated in museums and galleries, it is necessary to identify and interpret the different narratives. This requires an examination of the design of exhibitions and the presentation of collections. The question to ask is always: How was the visitor engaged by the display of the objects? What image of the nation did the exhibition convey to the visitor in concrete terms? What information did the visitor receive, and what information did they not receive?

Ideally, museums can be divided into two groups, although overlaps are possible. The first group consists of institutions whose collections were created with the aim of disseminating knowledge as widely as possible. These were often art museums (for example paintings galleries, sculpture collections, antique collections), which presented to the public collections of paintings, sculpture, and antiquities with the aim of shaping taste. In addition to these 'educational museums', a second group emerged with an interest in shaping visitors' notions of what constituted their nation. These encompassed, for example, museums of history, cultural history, and military history, as well as collections that focused on historical, cultural, or other elements seen as characteristic of a specific nation.

21 Jansen and Borggräfe 2007, 28–32. On the process of nation-building and the nation as a cultural construct, see the fundamental studies by Renan 1882; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1991; Hobsbawm 1991.

22 On the role played by national museums in the establishment, consolidation, and legitimation of nations and nation-states, see the crucial work of Pomian 1992; Kaplan 1994; Bennett 1995; MacDonald 2000; Evans and Boswell 2002; Knell 2011.

Shaping the Nation in National Museums and Galleries

Although museums that were designated 'national' employed various staging devices to didactic ends, certain recurrent themes and strategies can be identified across both of the aforementioned subtypes. The history of the nation was an important theme and could be told in different ways. Therein, one sub-theme was progress, manifested in the display of the nation's products, including folk and decorative arts; another was the nation's military victories. These and other themes were used to demonstrate the achievements of the nation.

As sites for displaying history, the national museums and galleries were the right place for this. It is important to emphasize that this was never a neutral presentation of history. Rather, a construction of history took place that was intended to convey a certain image of one's own history. It was thus a matter of staging a certain image of history and a certain view of select historical events. Thus, a specific narrative was exhibited in the museums.

To achieve this, various strategies of display were implemented in the national museums and galleries. Thus, in chronologically arranged collections, the visitor's own nation and own present were exhibited as the culmination of a certain cultural development. In this, the idea of progress became quite pronounced.

Another way of demonstrating the idea of progress was to present the objects in period rooms. This approach helped convey the original use of the objects and, at the same time, created a sense of atmosphere. The rooms were often themselves arranged chronologically, such that visitors could walk through the centuries and view pictures representative of the different periods. In this way, national history 'came to life'.

In collections arranged systematically by material (glass, ceramics, wood, stone, textile, etc.) or function, the objects of one's own culture or nation could be juxtaposed with those of another. This was often the case with folk and decorative arts, which were largely preserved in national museums, wherein the nation's own production techniques were positively emphasized in contrast to those of other nations. A similar possibility manifested in the presentation of paintings, which were hung according to national styles or schools. The objects were thus arranged according to their perceived quality and contributed to the formation of taste (*Geschmacksbildung*).

Another important aspect of conveying a sense of national identity was commemorating historical events that were important for one's own nation. This memory could be kept alive in various ways, for example, by displaying objects that were directly related to a particular event, such as weapons or other trophies that had been captured in the context of war. In museum installations, these objects were ascribed the status of national relics.

Another possibility was the production of history paintings visualizing key historical events. The museum thus became an illustrated history book. Portrait galleries, in which personalities of importance to the nation were depicted, had a similar function. Here, historiography took a personality-centred form. Like the memorial objects, the people depicted became representative of the narrative presented in the museum.

The Structure of This Book

This book proceeds in four parts, each consisting of case studies on national museums of the long nineteenth century. An introductory essay by Christina Strunck provides a framework for the volume by placing the representation of national values in a broader context. Drawing on examples from sixteenth-century Italy and eighteenth-century Britain, she investigates different conceptions of the nation and the ways in which these were visualized in architectures of display before the emergence of nineteenth-century national museums. She then presents the example of Anselm Kiefer's installation at the Panthéon in Paris, showing how this French national monument from the long nineteenth century is deconstructed in the twenty-first century.

This introduction is followed by Part 1, which deals with the concept of memory and the different ways in which it is thematized in national museums. Museums function as institutions of memory: on the one hand, they preserve memory, and on the other, they aspire to trigger certain memories in visitors. Memory is also an important aspect of the question of what was understood by a nation. The 'nation' defines itself as a group through attributions; it is an "imagined political community".[23]

Stefan Berger's essay explores the different types of memory that could be retrieved in national museums, with particular emphasis on 'antagonistic' and 'cosmopolitan memory'. The former is based on a clear distinction between friend and foe, between self and other. Cosmopolitan memory, on the other hand, invokes universal values, such as human rights, which emphasize commonalities. Berger explains how these two forms of memory were at play in the national museums.

The other contribution in Part 1 deals with the memory raised by certain objects exhibited in museums. Presenting three case studies, Ellinoor Bergvelt accounts for the narratives associated with objects as they entered and were arranged within museums. In doing so, Bergvelt speaks to the museum landscape that developed in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century under constantly changing political circumstances.

Bergvelt's contribution offers a useful transition to Part 2, in which the founding histories of national museums are discussed. Examples are drawn from countries where nation-building was difficult or not yet possible in the nineteenth century. In Italy and Switzerland, for instance, different states and cantons merged to form a nation-state, and this often fraught process also raised the question of what kind of national museum should represent the new entity.

When the nation of Switzerland was founded, one of the first things to decide was where to locate the national museum. Cristina Gutbrod examines the submissions of the respective cities and why Zurich was ultimately chosen. Meanwhile, in the newly formed state of Italy, it was immediately clear that Rome would be the capital. What was unclear, however, was how to establish a museum there that could serve nationalist ends. Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli discusses the pre-existing museums in Rome and what considerations informed the creation of the new national museums. Indeed, unlike in Switzerland, the nation was represented not by a single museum but by a multitude of museums, with various interrelations among them.

23 Anderson 1983, 14.

In this respect, the situation in Italy was similar to that in Poland, where again numerous museums were founded to mould and educate the nation's population. Unlike Switzerland and Italy, however, Poland was not a nation-state during the period in question. Therefore, the various 'national' museums, as Kamila Kłudkiewicz explains, served to keep alive the memory of a people. As a result, a large number of national museums emerged, both within and far beyond the borders of present-day Poland. Kłudkiewicz discusses their history and significance in the Polish nation-building process.

A national museum without a state was also an occurrence in Scotland. Christopher Breward traces the development of the National Museum of Scotland as well as the motivations behind its creation. In this context, he goes into detail concerning the function of the museum, how the objects were displayed, and what narrative of the Scottish nation they were mobilized to relay.

Breward essay's provides a transition to Part 3, which focuses on the educational and role-modelling function of the national museum. Thomas Lyngby's contribution examines the Danish national museum established in the burned and rebuilt Frederiksborg Castle. A defining feature of the museum is that it was founded by a private individual, Jacob Christian Jacobsen, who had also founded the Carlsberg breweries. As Lyngby explains, Jacobsen's aim was to create a place where people could learn about Danish history. To achieve this, the donor set up a gallery of portraits of important people and commissioned paintings of significant events in Danish history.

In Sweden, on the other hand, a number of national museums were established, with varying educational missions. These are presented in Martin Olin's contribution to the volume. The first such museum, in Stockholm, was a multipurpose institution housed in a new building; it consisted of the art gallery, the national library, the archaeological museum, the armoury, and the mint. The National Museum in Stockholm was a place of education. There, the public could see international art, for example: rather than exhibiting only Sweden's own history, the museum prioritized more general educational content. Meanwhile, the history of the Swedish nation itself was emphasized at the *Nordiska museet* (Nordic Museum) and *Skansen* open-air museum. The installation showed how the Swedish people had lived, with the aim of strengthening patriotism and the people's understanding of their own history. The Swedish examples are therefore ideal for demonstrating the different ways in which national museums can be used for educational ends.

At the *Bayerisches Nationalmuseum* (Bavarian National Museum) in Munich, various possibilities for educating the public were implemented in a single building. Two of the authors, Matthias Weniger and Raphael Beuing, address this institution. Weniger focuses on analysis of written sources describing the staging devices employed at the original location of the Bavarian National Museum. He explains in detail how the objects were presented and what narratives about the Bavarian nation they were intended to convey. Meanwhile, Beuing's text deals with the so-called specialized collections. These were galleries of decorative arts that were to serve as models for the craftsmen. In this way, the Bavarian National Museum was intended both to convey national history and to contribute to the training of makers through the display of illustrative material.

Finally, these detailed descriptions of the presentation of objects at the Bavarian National Museum lead into Part 4, which concerns framing and display strategies at the national museums and galleries. 'Framing' is understood to encompass all the strategies

implemented on and in the building to refer to the collections and their contents: the architectural style of the site, exterior sculptural programmes, murals in the entrance areas and the galleries, etc. I explore one such example in my own contribution to the volume, namely, the sculpture and painting programmes in the Halls of Fame of the military museums in Berlin, Munich, and Vienna. The images unfolded like a book on national history, conveying a particular narrative. Meanwhile, the sculptures depict important historical figures connected to this narrative.

Daniela Roberts compares the English and Scottish portrait galleries through the same lens. After recounting the origins of the two portrait galleries and the purpose each was intended to serve, she details the architectural and furnishing programmes that messaged a national narrative to visitors. In doing so, she closely analyses the programme of paintings and sculptures that, already in the entrance areas of the museums, provided a framework for understanding the collections.

In Paris, the contents of the *Musée du Sommerard* (Sommerard Museum) were framed not primarily in the area leading into the museum but rather in the exhibition rooms themselves, which took the form of period rooms. There, the objects were displayed in an 'authentic' setting. Estelle Gottlob-Linke describes this process in detail, explaining how each room was furnished and what story was to be told about the contents. The aim of Alexandre Du Sommerard's period rooms was to enable the visitor to experience French history first-hand. As the contributions to Part 4 demonstrate, framing strategies were crucial means of conveying national history.

Conclusions

This volume aims to take a fresh look at the emergence of national museums in the nineteenth century. It asks why, across Europe, different types of national museums were established and what educational missions these institutions pursued. The starting point for this investigation was the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* (Germanic National Museum) in Nuremberg, whose development and collection history was the focus of a series of doctoral research projects funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. The project also asked about similarities and differences between the Germanic National Museum and other national museums in Europe.

The present volume expands on this important research by addressing, through a broader comparative lens encompassing several European countries, the question of the educational mission of national museums and galleries in the long nineteenth century. This study fills an important gap in existing research, while also opening up new perspectives on museum work today. Only such a close examination of individual cases could effectively shed light on how the national museums contributed to the education and self-fashioning of emerging nation-states in nineteenth-century Europe, as well as what this means for work in and with museums in the twenty-first century.

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