Precursors to and Reinterpretations of the National Museum

From the Early Modern Era to Anselm Kiefer

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Every exhibition needs a framework. Frames or glass cases surround and valorize the works on display, whether paintings or objects. In addition, many exhibition designers make use of architectural devices that create sightlines in order to establish meaningful relationships between certain objects. Similarly, my paper is intended as a framework for this volume. It looks at what comes before and after the heyday of the national museum in the nineteenth century. In part 1, I will address the question of how the nation was represented within architectures of display before the emergence of national museums. In part 2, I will then analyse a twenty-first-century approach to the national museums of the nineteenth century.

As is well known, princely galleries count among the precursors to the modern museum. Much of the decoration of these galleries magnify the deeds of a specific ruler, most famously perhaps the *Galerie des Glaces* (Hall of Mirrors) at Versailles. Although such pictorial programmes were certainly important for the formation of a national identity, they are not the subject of this paper. Nor will I focus on collections or displays of national 'schools'. Instead, I intend to discuss mural paintings that actually visualize the nation as a community of people. By presenting three case studies from Italy, Britain, and France I will point out how conceptions of the nation, and their representation in architectures of display, changed over time.[1]

1 For a working definition of 'national identity', see Smith 2013, 7: "the reproduction and continuous reinterpretation of the pattern of values, memories, myths, symbols, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification by individual members with that pattern and heritage". As this paper deals with representations of the nation in the visual arts, it is also indebted to Benedict Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006, 6). For a discussion of recent theories on nationalism, see Hirschi 2005, 24–44.

The Gallery of Maps at the Vatican: Plurality and Unity of Nations

In the early modern era, the Italian peninsula was divided into numerous sovereign states, each with its own form of government. Although a unified nation-state – namely, the *Regno d'Italia* (Kingdom of Italy) – was founded only in 1861, in the Italian language the term *nazione* had been current since at least the fourteenth century.[2] The first Italian dictionary, the *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* of 1612, listed several occurrences of the word in the writings of Dante and Boccaccio. According to the *Vocabolario*, it had two separate meanings. On the one hand, *nazione* could denote 'birth' or 'origin' as an equivalent to the Latin term *ortus* or *origo*. On the other hand, like the Latin word *natio*, it could refer to people born in the same province or city.[3]

According to this definition, a nation was, in early modern Italy, a rather small entity: a community of people from the same place. Rome was filled with around fifty so-called national churches (*chiese nazionali*).[4] A third of them belonged to *nationes* from all over Italy,[5] for instance San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, Il Santo Sudario dei Piemontesi, and Santa Croce e San Bonaventura dei Lucchesi (places of worship for people from Florence, Piedmont, and Lucca respectively).

Between 1523 and 1978 the papal state was governed only by Italian popes,[6] while the papal court was dominated by cardinals from many different Italian regions who cultivated different 'national' identities.[7] The pope also had strong ties to his own hometown or province – a relationship that tended to influence his patronage of the arts as well.

The frescoes in the *Galleria delle Carte Geografiche* (Gallery of Maps; fig. 1), a 'visual encyclopaedia' executed in 1580/1581, were commissioned by the Bolognese pope Gregory XIII.[8] The maps on its walls were designed by the cartographer Egnazio Danti, who held a professorship in the pope's native city.[9] Although one of the maps stages Rome as *caput orbis*,[10] or 'capital of the globe', the pictorial cycle does not aim to represent the world as it was known at that time. Instead, it focuses entirely on the Italian peninsula, a topographical entity governed by many different rulers.

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2 From the thirteenth century, students at the University of Bologna were grouped by 'nation' (Dierse and Rath 1984, 407). Hirschi 2005, 177–242, analyses the ways in which Italian humanists discussed the nation.

3 "Vocabolario" 1612, 552.

4 Many of these buildings were studied in the collective volume by Koller and Kubersky-Piredda 2015a.

5 Koller and Kubersky-Piredda 2015b, 9.

6 See the list of popes with their birthplaces: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_popes (accessed 3 July 2023).

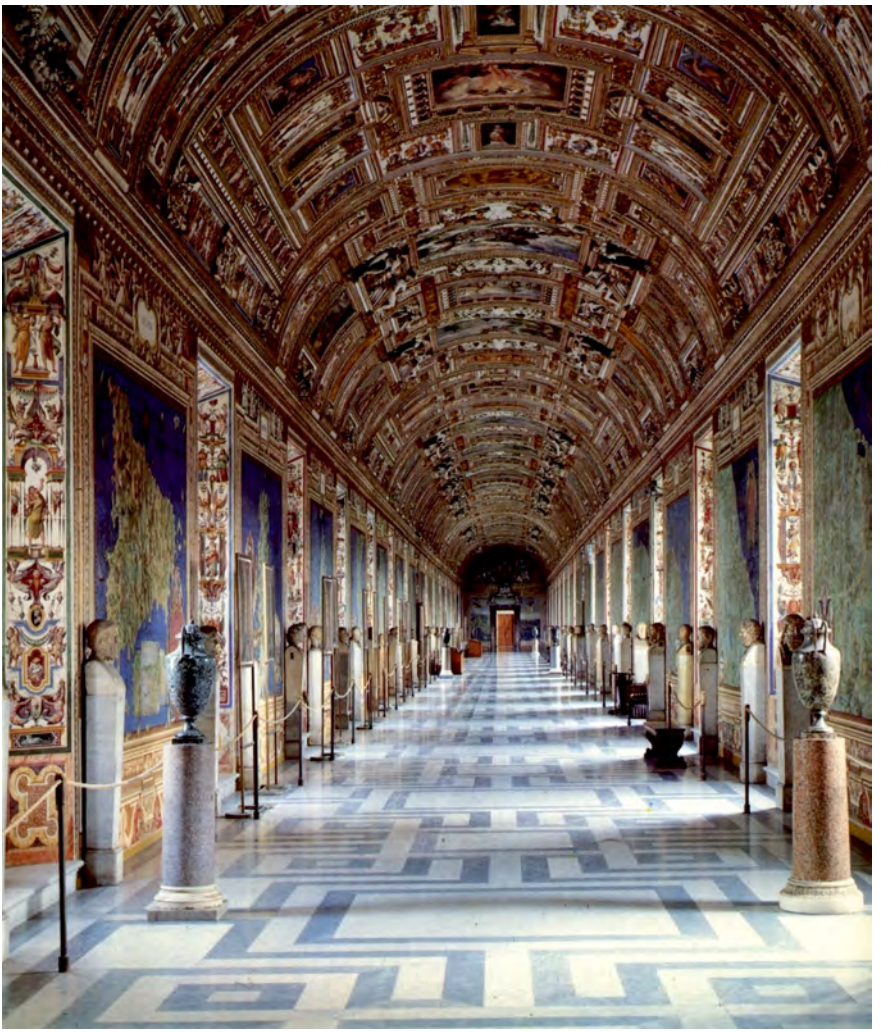
7 Koller and Kubersky-Piredda 2015b, 9, with reference to the relevant publications by Wolfgang Reinhard and Paolo Prodi.

8 Zollikofer 2008, 120, 128 (interpretation as *Bildenzyklopädie*, i.e. visual encyclopaedia). Zollikofer dates the gallery to 1578–1581, but the years 1578/1579 were entirely devoted to building work. The decorative campaign commenced only in 1580 when Egnazio Danti moved to Rome. See Fiore 1986, 660; Malafarina 2005, 5.

9 Fiore 1986, 660–661.

10 See the illustration in Malafarina 2005, 41.

Fig. 1: The Gallery of Maps in the Vatican Palace, with cartographic frescoes designed by Egnazio Danti, 1580–1581.



As the gallery was accessible to the pope's visitors,[11] each Italian guest, as well as successive popes, could discover their own 'nation' in this space. This created a sense of unity that was enhanced by the pictorial programme of the vault.[12] Its fresco cycle commences with two paintings that celebrate the superiority of spiritual over temporal power: Pope Sylvester baptizing Emperor Constantine and Constantine holding the reins

11 The gallery is located on the top floor of the Vatican Palace, leading up to a new private apartment for the pope: Pinelli 1994a, 47–51. A Latin poem written during Gregory's reign stresses that the rooms lying behind the gallery were strictly private, while the gallery itself was open to numerous visitors: Ferri 1994, 79.

12 On the iconography of the vault, see especially Schütte 1993 and Pineli 1994b.

of Sylvester's horse (fig. 2).[13] The latter scene refers to the so-called Donation of Constantine, a decree by which the emperor had allegedly empowered the pope to rule over the whole Italian peninsula.[14] By including maps of every region of Italy in his gallery, Gregory XIII implicitly endorsed the validity of the much-contested edict and thus his right to rule Italy in its entirety.[15]

Fig. 2: Anonymous painter, Emperor Constantine Holding the Reins of Pope Sylvester's Horse, ceiling painting in the Gallery of Maps.

The series of maps begins with a juxtaposition of *Italia antiqua* and *Italia nuova*, or ancient and modern Italy.[16] This was a feature of Danti's original pictorial programme, but as both maps were completely redesigned by Lukas Holste (Holstenius) in 1632, we have no means of forming a judgement on their original appearance.[17] In any case, it is

13 Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 408–409, 411–412 and II, 430–436.

14 According to Gambi and Pinelli, it is significant that the Donation of Constantine itself was not chosen for representation (Gambi and Pinelli 1994 I, 412). However, the text of the decree specifies that the emperor would act as *strator* (who holds the reins of the pope's horse), i.e. the depiction of the emperor in that role evokes the text of the so-called Donation (Fuhrmann 1968, 92). The relationship of this painting to the Donation is also underlined by Schütte 1993, 61–66.

15 On the controversies surrounding the so-called Donation of Constantine, see Fried 2005.

16 See the illustrations in Malafarina 2005, 24–27.

17 Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 178, 186 and II, 39–45; Malafarina 2005, 116–119.

clear that Gregory XIII wished to emphasize the continuity between the Roman Empire and the papal state.

During the pontificate of Urban VIII, an inscription was added to the map of *Italia nuova*, stating that Italy has always been considered rich in the arts and in scholarship.[18] A personification of the Church, crowned with the papal tiara, sits on top of the framed inscription.[19] Thus, the papacy symbolically presides over the cultural unity of Italy, which derives from a common ancient heritage. In this way, Urban VIII spelled out an idea already implicit in Gregory's pictorial programme, namely, that the many different nations of Italy actually form one large, all-encompassing Italian nation.[20]

The maps visualize the places of origin of the people of each nation, and in addition they show the members of these communities in action. Almost every map includes one or more historical scenes. For instance, the map of the duchy of Milan contains Hannibal's defeat of the Romans by the River Ticino and Charlemagne's triumph over the Lombards at Piacenza, plus the French siege of Pavia in 1528 (figs. 3, 4).[21] Depicting both ancient and modern battles in one and the same map stresses the continuity between ancient and modern Italy. Italy appears as a *theatrum* in which divine providence acts out various scenarios.[22] The maps, for their part, serve as *luoghi di memoria* (loci of memory) within a theatre of memory, inspiring interpretative discourses that could take shape according to the precise challenges facing each successive papal beholder.[23]

18 Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 193 and II, 49: "*Italia / artium / studiorumque / plena semper / est habita*".

19 See the illustration in Malafarina 2005, 27. I do not agree with the identification of the crowning figure as Pope Gregory the Great, the namesake of Gregory XIII (Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 193). Firstly, the tablet was clearly painted during the pontificate of Urban VIII (as the prominent presence of the Barberini bees indicates), and secondly the dove does not whisper in the figure's ear (as in the iconography of St Gregory) but hovers above the temple, which is the standard attribute of Religion. Cf. Ripa 1970, 429 (under the heading 'Religione'): "*Donna vestita d'un Camiscio, Stola, & Piviale [...] terrà con la sinistra mano, con bella gratia, un bellissimo Tempio*". Contrary to the hypothesis upheld by Gambi and Pinelli, the inscription therefore does not date from Gregory's pontificate but rather from Holstenius's campaign of 1632 (for this, see no. 17 above).

20 On the development of national sentiment in Italy, see Hirschi 2005, 177–242.

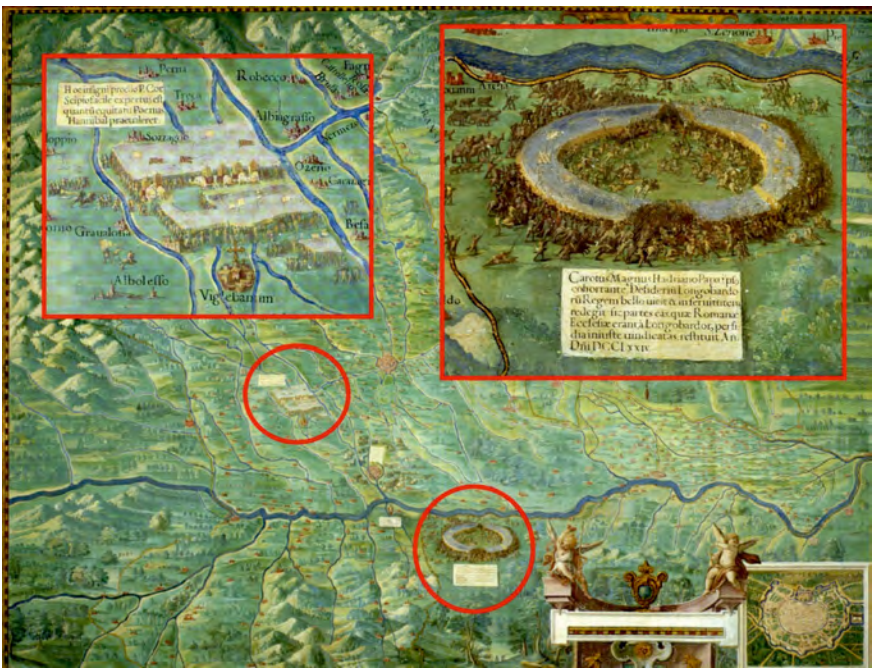
21 Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 282–289 and II, 215–222; Malafarina 2005, 135–136. The overlapping of events across different maps can point to historical parallels and to lessons that may be learnt from history. For example, this can be seen in the map of *Flaminia* (Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 325–334 and II, 293–299). The map commemorates the action Gregory XIII took against a form of banditism that was flavoured with political overtones (cf. Pastor 1923, 766–775). The same map includes Caesar's troops marching towards the river Rubicon, as well as a representation of an allegedly ancient inscription declaring that whoever crossed the Rubicon while bearing arms would be considered an enemy of the Roman senate; by doing so, Caesar began a civil war. Gregory's defeat of the armed rebels living in the same region is thus likened to quenching a civil war.

22 Schulz 1987, 108 and 226, no. 23.

23 On this concept, see Yates 1966; Bolzoni 1984; Kliemann 1993, 46–51; Meadow and Robertson 2013.

Fig. 3: Egnazio Danti and collaborators, Map of the Duchy of Milan Containing Hannibal's Defeat of the Romans by the River Ticino, Charlemagne's Triumph over the Lombards at Piacenza, and the French Siege of Pavia.

Fig. 4: Detail of fig. 3 with inserted close-ups of Hannibal's Defeat of the Romans by the River Ticino and Charlemagne's Triumph over the Lombards at Piacenza.



The scenes in the vault are meant to underline the role of divine providence. Above each map appears a miracle, whether the story of a saint or a scene from Church history that took place in the designated region,[24] thus pointing to God's impact on the course of Italian history. Particularly significant is the painting of Leo I driving away Attila the Hun, in that it casts the pope as defender of the Italian peninsula against a foreign, heathen nation.[25]

The goals of papal politics are triumphantly declared on the wall at the culmination of the gallery. These maps depict two recent naval victories over the so-called infidels in the Mediterranean: the liberation of Malta in 1565 and the 1571 victory of Lepanto.[26] In both cases, the papacy had been actively involved.[27] As these battles were fought outside the Italian peninsula, the pictorial programme of the gallery concludes with the idea that the divinely protected Italian nation is destined to defend Catholicism.[28]

All in all, the Gallery of Maps exemplifies the ways in which the concept of the nation was being negotiated during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. On the one hand, the programme refers to the definition of the *nazione* as a relatively small group of people from the same city or province, and on the other hand the paintings imply the existence of a much larger, pan-Italian nation. Despite regional particularities, this Italian nation is united through its common ancient heritage and a common culture based on a shared language and religion. By evoking the example of the Roman Empire, the paintings suggest that a united Italy would once again be able to control the world.

Precisely because the popes were elected and came from quite varied regional and cultural backgrounds, it was a clever move to focus the gallery's programme on the unity of Italian nations. After all, no matter who guided the papal state, consensus within the college of cardinals, as well as concord between the papal state and the other Italian territories, was essential for the success of a pontificate.

By showing the gallery to his guests, the pope could employ the paintings as a useful tool in his diplomatic negotiations. The overlapping of events across different maps allowed him to point out historical parallels and lessons to be learnt from history. The maps therefore acted as visual markers within a theatre of memory and as an admonishment to overcome the borders between single nations in the common interest of Italy as a whole.

24 Milanesi 1994, 103.

25 Gambi and Pinelli 1994, I, 306.

26 Ibid., I, 377–382 and II, 384, 392, 396.

27 Moretti 2020.

28 Strunck 2010, 135–137; Strunck 2011, 226–228.

The Painted Hall of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich: A Nation of Shared Values

The next case study takes us to Great Britain where the concept of a unified nation began to take shape during the sixteenth century.[29] In 1536, an Act of Union established a bond between England and Wales,[30] and in 1603 the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland were united under James I,[31] but only the Act of Union of 1707 created "one united kingdom by the name of Great Britain".[32] Although it proved difficult to overcome the cultural and political divide among English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish people,[33] throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century literary sources nonetheless celebrated a British 'nation'.[34] Christopher Wren, the architect of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich (fig. 5), wrote that "architecture […] establishes a Nation",[35] and according to his collaborator Nicholas Hawksmoor the Royal Hospital was built for "the Benefit and Honour of the Nation".[36]

Fig. 5: The Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich seen from the River Thames.

The Royal Hospital at Greenwich (today the Old Royal Naval College) had been founded in 1694 as a home for aged or injured sailors.[37] However, the utilitarian function of the structure was clearly subordinate to its propagandistic message. For early modern travellers, who approached London usually via the Thames, Greenwich came into view even before they reached the capital. Thus, the impressive hospital building facing the river served almost as a billboard that advertised the splendours of Great Britain as well as the power of its Royal Navy.[38]

29 Meyer 2003, 89–92.
30 Ibid., 90.
31 Galloway and Levack 1985; Galloway 1986; Brown 1992, 77–84; Ó Buachalla 1993; Mason 1994; Colls 2002, 34. On the prehistory of national sentiment in England, Scotland, and Ireland, see Marshall 2000, 13–14, 16, 20–21; Smith 2008, 93–98, 102–106.
32 Meyer 2003, 92.
33 See, for instance, Brown 1995; Ellis 1995; Morrill 1995.
34 For examples from this period, see Maurer 1996 and Strunck 2021, 47, 62, 149, 177, 249, 291, 294, 308.
35 Soo 1998, 153.
36 Hawksmoor 1728, 14.
37 Lucas 2019, 20.
38 Strunck 2021, 288–289. On the architecture of the Royal Hospital, see especially Bold 2000.

From the start, the Royal Hospital at Greenwich sought to rival the splendid *Hôtel des Invalides* in Paris, which served a similar function as a home for war veterans. It had been founded by Louis XIV, Britain's main enemy in this period.[39] The hospital at Greenwich was likewise a royal foundation and aimed to demonstrate that Britain's sovereigns took equally good care of their soldiers.[40]

Wren consciously emulated the *Dôme des Invalides*, which stands at the centre of the French hospital complex. However, he also aspired to outdo it by gracing Greenwich's skyline with two domed structures rather than one (fig. 5). The right (western) dome tops the vestibule that leads to the so-called Painted Hall.[41] This space forms the core of the entire building complex (fig. 6). Its significance is highlighted by the stairs that lead from the vestibule into the main body of the hall. Ascending these steps, visitors are literally transported to a higher, ostensibly nobler realm.

Fig. 6 (left): The Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich; view from the vestibule into the Lower Hall, with the Upper Hall beyond; Fig. 7 (right): James Thornhill and assistants, ceiling of the Lower Hall, ca. 1707–1714, detail: William III and Mary II triumphing over Popery and Tyranny while William offers the cap of liberty to Europe.

The Painted Hall imitates the architecture and decoration of the gallery of the Palazzo Colonna in Rome,[42] but the former was certainly not planned as a museum building. On festive occasions, it served as a dining hall both for the nobility and for veterans from

39 Cf. Gady 2015.

40 Strunck 2021, 289–291, 294, 314–315, 373.

41 See the illustrations in Lucas et al. 2019, 12–13, 27, 38, 40.

42 Strunck 2021, 298–303.

all ranks.[43] Meanwhile, in everyday life the Painted Hall was primarily a showpiece to be visited by sightseers. They could make use of a bilingual guidebook published in 1726, shortly after the completion of the hall, which was sold by the porters of the hospital and explained the pictorial cycle in both English and French.[44] Although Britain and France were no longer at war by that time, the inclusion of a French translation heightened the national rivalry that had been a driving factor of the programme from the start. The former French enemies were addressed in their own language in order to ensure that they properly understood the paintings of Britain's glory.

Based on the national subject matter and public accessibility of the murals, in addition to the existence of a didactic commentary intended for a wide audience, the Painted Hall can be seen as a precursor to a national museum. The central ceiling painting glorifies the joint rule of William III and Mary II, but it also references the war against France led by William in the 1690s (the so-called Nine Years' War, 1688–1697). A description of the ceiling published in 1715 points out that "the King tramples Tyranny under his Feet, which is exprest by a French Personage".[45] In fact, the crouching figure under William's feet holds a broken sword decorated with French fleurs-de-lis. Just below, a papal mitre can be seen toppling down (fig. 7). This arrangement alludes to the two catchphrases 'popery' and 'tyranny', which dominated British political discourse from the 1680s well into the eighteenth century. 'Popery' (Catholicism) and 'tyranny' (absolutism) were horrors Britons associated with continental European rulers, especially with Louis XIV.[46]

William's war against France ended in 1697 with the Peace of Ryswick, perceived as a British triumph. Accordingly, a white-clad personification of Peace hands William an olive branch, while he gives the cap of liberty to the kneeling personification of Europe (fig. 7).[47] This latter detail implies that William waged war for a cause even nobler than the national interest, namely, to bring liberty to the continent.

In interpreting Thornhill's painting, one must bear in mind that it was not created for William but rather during the reign of his successor, Queen Anne. As explained in a contemporary description, the huge galleys represented on either side of the vault allude to recent British victories in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713/1714), which occupied most of Anne's reign (fig. 8).[48] In this war, France was again Britain's main enemy. When Thornhill designed the ceiling, nobody could know who would eventually win. Therefore, the evocation of King William's past victory over France was meant to offer inspiration during the present conflict.[49] The central oval painting (fig. 7) visualized the values Britain was fighting for: liberty, peace, Protestantism.

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43 Ibid., 299.

44 "An Explanation" 1726.

45 Steele 1715, 192.

46 Strunck 2021, 272–274, 309–310.

47 Steele describes William III as "presenting Peace with the Lamb and Olive Branch, and Liberty expressed by the Athenian Cap, to Europe, who laying her Crowns at his Feet, receives them with an Air of Respect and Gratitude"; Steele 1715, 192.

48 According to Steele 1715, 193, the galley on the west end of the Lower Hall (fig. 8) depicts the "Blenheim Man of War", thereby pointing to the crucial triumph over France in the Battle of Blenheim in 1704.

49 Strunck 2021, 310–314, 316.

A closer look at the depicted warships reveals that they are surrounded by people, personifications, and goods evoking the British nation. For instance, the galley named after the famous Battle of Blenheim is accompanied by the personification of London held aloft on the shoulders of the rivers Thames and Isis (fig. 8).[50] The guidebook additionally mentions the River Tyne "pouring forth his Plenty of Coals",[51] thus illustrating the natural riches of the territory. Moreover, the guidebook identifies some of the figures on the balconies as famous Britons like Isaac Newton, John Flamsteed, and Thomas Weston.[52]

Fig. 8: James Thornhill and assistants, ceiling of the Lower Hall, ca. 1707–1714, detail: the galley "Blenheim" with personifications of London, Thames and Isis.

Thornhill's painting has strong national overtones because it shows a community of people associated with a specific territory and united in their opposition to a common enemy. However, for my purposes the Painted Hall is particularly relevant because it visualizes a concept of the nation that is no longer bound to a specific birthplace but rather to a set of shared values. This paradigm shift was necessitated by the fact that King William was not actually part of the British nation by birth.

Although he descended from King James I through his mother, William of Orange was born and raised in the Netherlands. He only became king of England as a result of the so-called Glorious Revolution, in which the legitimate but Catholic king James II was deposed (in 1688/1689). A large part of the British nobility preferred a Protestant king,

50 Johns 2019, 89; Lucas et al. 2019, 139.

51 Johns 2019, 92.

52 Ibid., 85–89; Lucas et al. 2019, 138.

and thus William was called to rescue them from the 'tyrant' James II. Whereas James had manifested marked tendencies towards absolutism, William guaranteed greater liberty through the Bill of Rights.[53]

Seen in this context, the central image of the Painted Hall is a manifesto of British values. The king triumphs over 'popery' and 'tyranny', or Catholicism and absolutism – institutions most contemporary Britons would have viewed with contempt. At the same time, he demonstrates his commitment to liberty and peace (fig. 7). Although he is not British by birth, William embodies the shared values of the nation: Protestantism and political liberty. This redefines the conception of a nation by separating it from a common birthplace and grounding it instead on the aims and ideals of the people who live together in a common territory. Accordingly, the country of origin of a monarch becomes less relevant than the values he represents.

This aspect was particularly important on account of the ongoing dynastic crisis. In 1701, the Act of Settlement stipulated that only Protestants could succeed to the throne. This finally led, in 1714, to the accession of a German, the Hanoverian George I, as king of the United Kingdom. Consequently, the pictorial programme of the Painted Hall concludes with a monumental portrait of King George and his family (fig. 9).[54] Within the large-scale composition, the king occupies a central, though rather small, space. Figuring much more prominently is the cupola of St Paul's Cathedral, which can be seen directly from the entrance to the hall. Once again this characterizes Protestantism as a defining trait of the British nation, no matter the monarch's actual place of origin.

While the Gallery of Maps at the Vatican extols Catholicism as a uniting force among the Italian nations, the Painted Hall posits Protestantism and opposition to 'popery' as defining characteristics of the British nation. In both cases, shared religious values are central to national identity. However, the conception of the nation itself differs markedly between the two. The Gallery of Maps celebrates individual regions and thus the attachment of each *nazione* to its birthplace. By contrast, the British nation is perceived as open to people from outside the British territory as long as they subscribe to certain shared values.

It goes without saying that reality did not always match these ideals. Just as there existed violent tensions among the numerous 'nations' on the Italian peninsula, Britain, too, experienced intense conflict among English, Welsh, Irish, and British people, not to mention deep rifts between rivalling Protestant factions as well as a high degree of suspicion towards people and ideas from continental Europe.[55] Both the Gallery of Maps and the Painted Hall present propagandistic images that were meant to create consensus and to evoke a sense of unity that was actually much contested.

53 Miller 1997, 68–75; Maurer 2002, 175; Pincus 2006, 69–74; Miller 2017, 337–338.

54 Johns 2019, 98–101; Strunck 2021, 316–325.

55 See, for instance, Brown 1995; Ellis 1995; Morrill 1995; Meyer 2003, 93–98, 102–108.

Fig. 9: James Thornhill and assistants, mural on the west wall of the Upper Hall, c. 1723–1726: George I and his family surrounded by allegorical figures.

The Panthéon in Paris: Reinterpretation and Deconstruction of the National Museum

My last case study concerns a twenty-first-century approach to the national museum: Anselm Kiefer's newly created works for the Panthéon in Paris. In 2020, the German artist installed two monumental canvases and six display cases in a setting that has continued to be highly charged with French national sentiment for more than two centuries (fig. 10).[56]

Like the Painted Hall, the Panthéon was not conceived as a national museum; instead, between 1764 and 1789 it had been built as a church dedicated to Sainte Geneviève.[57] Following the French Revolution, the former church served as a secular mausoleum for famous members of the nation and was accordingly named the *Panthéon*.[58] Its twofold function, as not only a memorial to national glory but also a burial site, clearly differs from that of a national museum. However, its nineteenth-century pictorial programme reinterprets the painting cycle of an earlier French national museum, the *Galerie des Batailles* (Gallery of Battles) at Versailles.

56 For a more detailed analysis of Kiefer's works at the Panthéon, see Strunck 2024 (forthcoming).

57 Ricolleau 2019, 19–30. On the architecture of the building, see Petzet 1961.

58 Ricolleau 2019, 33–55.

In 1833, King Louis-Philippe declared that he wanted to establish a new national museum at Versailles in order to display "all the national-historical keepsakes".[59] In addition, he intended to dedicate an enormously large gallery to the famous battles of French history.[60] This painted history book, realized through the cooperation of twenty artists and inaugurated in 1837,[61] presents the bellicose events in chronological order, starting with the Battle of Tolbiac in the centre of the north wall (fig. 11).[62] As that conflict had brought about the conversion of King Clovis, ultimately leading to the Christianization of France, it was deemed particularly significant.[63]

Fig. 10: Paris, Panthéon; view from the entrance towards the apse with Anselm Kiefer's paintings La voie sacrée *(at left) and* Ceux de 14 – l'armée noire – celles de 14 *(at right).*

Some decades after the completion of the Gallery of Battles, a decision was made to decorate the Panthéon with mural paintings. By that time, due to the turbulent course of French history, the building had undergone several changes in function. During the nineteenth century, it was used partly as a church and partly as a secular pantheon.[64] The murals were commissioned in 1874 while the building served a religious function.[65] This explains why religious subject matter plays an important role in the decoration.

59 *"tous les souvenirs historiques nationaux"*; Gaehtgens 1984, 62.
60 Ibid., 115.
61 For a schematic representation of the distribution of the individual paintings in the gallery, see Gaehtgens 1984, 398; on its inauguration: ibid., 89.
62 Ibid., 108–109, 122–125.
63 Ibid., 80.
64 Ricolleau 2019, 57–157.
65 Vaisse 1989; Macé de Lépinay 1997, 12–14.

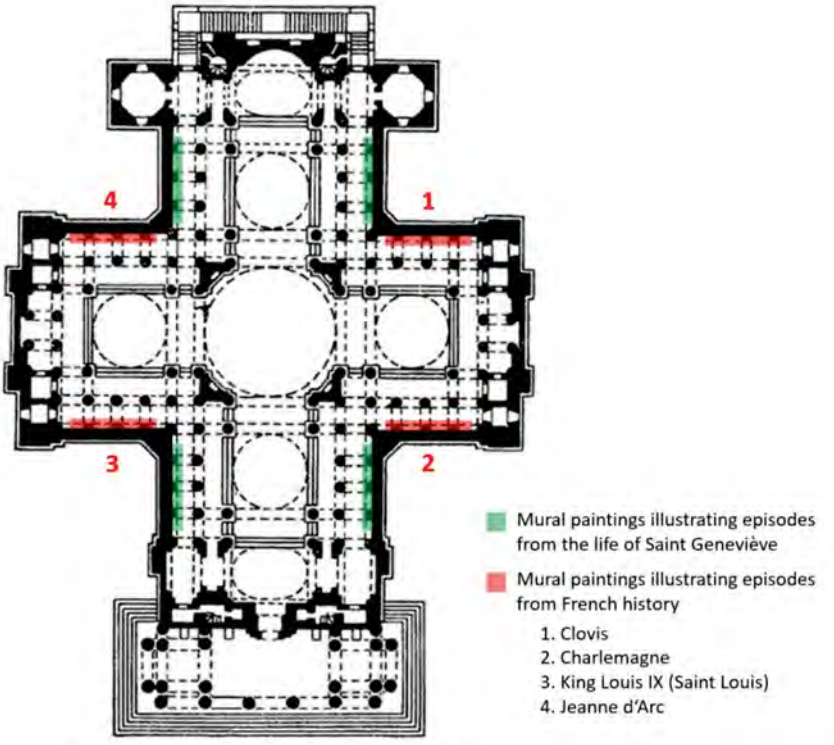
Four monumental paintings illustrating episodes from the life of the patron saint Geneviève are displayed along the main axis of the structure, which is built on a Greek-cross plan. In a somewhat subordinate position, on the walls of the transept, are four murals dedicated to glorious moments in the history of France (fig. 12).[66] Their protagonists are Clovis, Charlemagne, Saint Louis IX, and Joan of Arc, all of whom had already been immortalized in the Gallery of Battles.[67]

Fig. 11: View of the Gallery of Battles at Versailles, with Ary Scheffer's Battle at Tolbiac *at the far end.*

66 For a description of the programme by its author, Abbot Claude Bonnefoy, see Bonnefoy 1878. The printed edition of Bonnefoy's text is not dated, but according to Vaisse it was published in 1878 (Vaisse 1989, 255).

67 Gaehtgens 1984, 122–125 (Clovis), 130–134 (Charlemagne), 148–153 (Louis IX), 162–169 (Joan of Arc).

Fig. 12: Diagram visualizing the location of the nineteenth-century murals in the Panthéon.



The Panthéon's programme reinterprets the national museum at Versailles. The latter has a decidedly secular character; even in Ary Scheffer's *Conversion of Clovis*, there are no supernatural beings to be seen.[68] By contrast, the painting cycle at the Panthéon abounds with angels who symbolize God's protection of the French nation.[69] According to the author of the programme, Abbé Bonnefoy, the murals represent "the religious and national history of France".[70]

While the Gallery of Battles exemplifies an entirely secular conception of national history, Bonnefoy intended to visualize the connection between national and religious history. He wished to show how France had flourished under the benevolent protection of the Trinity and saints like Geneviève. Accordingly, above the paintings of religious history appears a continuous procession of saints from every region of France who protect the country as well as its people and its rulers (fig. 13). As each French visitor can recognize saints from his or her own region of origin, the depicted procession stands for the community of people who form the French nation. This focus on regional saints and the emphasis on divine providence are, in concept, quite close to the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican Palace.

68 See the illustration in Gaehtgens 1984, 122.

69 See the illustrations in Macé de Lépinay 1997.

70 "*l'Histoire religioso-nationale de la France*"; Bonnefoy 1878, 43.

Fig. 13: Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Encounter of St Geneviève and St Germain; above: Procession of French saints.

Bonnefoy's pictorial programme was by no means the last intervention to expand and modify the patriotic messages of the Panthéon. Over the centuries, monuments continued to be added to and subtracted from the space[71] – most recently when Emmanuel Macron announced his decision to honour the French participants in the First World War by admitting the mortal remains of the writer Maurice Genevoix to the Panthéon.[72] Genevoix's fame rests on the tetralogy *Ceux de 14* (Those of 1914), in which he describes his experiences during the war. Macron declared that, together with Genevoix, all French veterans of World War I would enter the Panthéon symbolically. He stressed that this included the soldiers from the colonies, known as the *armée noire*.[73] Moreover, *ceux de 14* were to be complemented by *celles de 14*,[74] that is, the women who had supported the soldiers.

71 Lebeurre 2000.

72 "Macron annonce l'entrée" 2018.

73 Macron 2020.

74 *Ceux* and *celles* are the male and female forms of the demonstrative pronoun in French – a gendered distinction that cannot be translated into German or English. The idea to include women in the presentation may have originated with Anselm Kiefer, who celebrated female heroines in some of his earlier works: cf. Schmutz 2007; Baqué 2015, 112–143 ("In Praise of Rebellious Women"). In fact, in an interview Kiefer attributed this idea to himself (Duponchelle 2021).

Macron expressly wanted a monument for the whole nation and commissioned Anselm Kiefer to create it.[75]

In November 2020, Kiefer's installation was inaugurated. It consists of two monumental paintings and six vitrines filled with paintings and sculptural objects (fig. 14). Whereas the display cases were the result of the public commission, the German artist added the two large canvases on his own initiative and donated them to the French nation.[76] One of the paintings is inscribed with the title *Ceux de 14 – L'armée noire – celles de 14* (fig. 14, B; see also fig. 10). This reflects Emmanuel Macron's wish to change the character of the Panthéon, conceived no longer simply as a mausoleum for famous men and women but rather as a democratic monument for the whole French nation.

Approximately half of this particular painting is filled by a perspectival view stretching towards the horizon yet barred by wooden structures resembling burnt vines or the long rows of crosses in military cemeteries. At the top of the painting, just in front of its surface, Kiefer affixed a railing from which hang men's and women's garments. They evoke the bodies of the victims.

Although Kiefer's monumental canvas hides the existing painting on the wall behind it (fig. 13), the former arguably echoes the latter. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's history painting has a similar centralized composition, with diagonals that rise from the corners to the centre of the landscape, but above all the crowning frieze of saints corresponds to Kiefer's empty garments.[77] In a way, the Catholic saints are replaced by the secular victims of war, the martyrs of our times.

Kiefer's six vitrines relate even more obviously to the nineteenth-century murals.[78] Some of the glass cases have transparent backdrops, allowing the paintings to be glimpsed through them (fig. 14, nos 2, 3, 5). They thus form a visual frame that enables us to see the nineteenth-century conception of the nation in a new light.

The vitrines reference the display principles of history museums, where historical objects are often placed in glass cases. However, these works by Kiefer do not glorify the national past – to the contrary. They are interventions that deconstruct the traditional conception of national history as exemplified by the monumental history paintings at Versailles and the Panthéon.

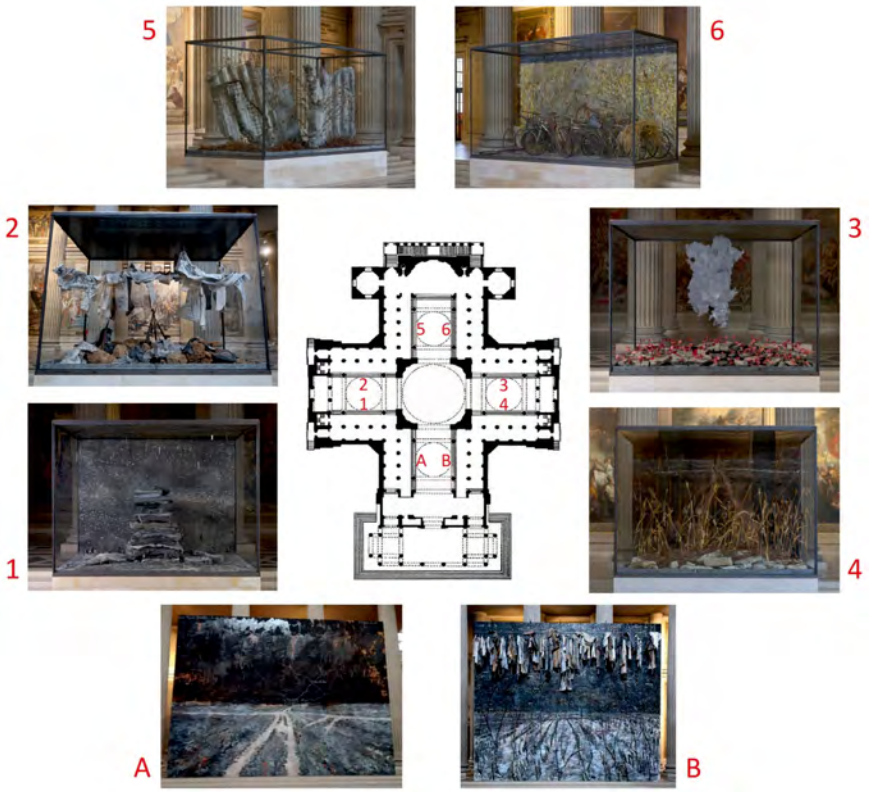
75 Macron's speech at the inauguration ceremony made repeated reference to the "nation" (Macron 2020). To complement Kiefer's work, Pascal Dusapin composed a score that integrates the names of 15,000 men and women who had died in the war. See Dusapin 2021, 37.

76 Cahen-Patron 2020; Lavrador 2020; Pietralunga 2020a; Pietralunga 2020b; Rykner 2020. Despite their enormous size, the support of the paintings is canvas: cf. Bruckner 2021, 8, 15.

77 On Puvis de Chavannes's painting, see Macé de Lépinay 1997, 40–41.

78 For a detailed analysis of the six display cases, their settings, and their relationship with the nineteenth-century murals, see Strunck 2024 (forthcoming).

Fig. 14: Diagram visualizing the location of Anselm Kiefer's works in the Panthéon.



If the Gallery of Battles aimed to celebrate national valour through the depiction of heroic battles, then the nineteenth-century murals at the Panthéon legitimated such battles by claiming that God had ordained them. For instance, in the scenes from the life of Joan of Arc, her heavenward glance, and above all the presence of an angel who hands her a sword, makes amply clear that she follows a course of action dictated by God himself (fig. 15).[79] The display case Kiefer has placed in front of this mural presents weapons, dirty garments, and three empty chairs (fig. 16). As the artist has explained, the chairs signify the Trinity[80] – which is conspicuously absent. In this way, Kiefer questions the strong sense of divine legitimation expressed by the murals.

79 On Lenepveu's murals, see Bonnefoy 1878, 28; Macé de Lépinay 1997, 34–35.

80 "Interview de Anselm Kiefer et de Pascal Dusapin" 2021, 9.

Fig. 15: Jules-Eugène Lenepveu, Scenes from the Life of Joan of Arc.

Fig. 16: Anselm Kiefer, Qu'est-ce que nous sommes, *display case placed in front of Jules-Eugène Lenepveu's Scenes from the Life of Joan of Arc.*

A similar relationship can be perceived between Paul-Joseph Blanc's *Battle of Tolbiac* and the vitrine positioned in front of it (figs. 17, 18). This glass case is filled with red poppies that evoke the wreaths made in remembrance of victims of war.[81] When standing in front of Kiefer's transparent case, one can still see portions of the *Battle of Tolbiac*. However, the main part of the conversion scene is hidden by a large slab of molten lead that

81 See, for instance, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day#/media/File:Cenotaph_London.jpg, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cenotaph.

hangs down from the ceiling of the case. This element gives Kiefer's work its title, *Émanation*.

Fig. 17 (left): Anselm Kiefer, Émanation, *display case placed in front of Paul-Joseph Blanc's* Battle of Tolbiac, *detail; Fig. 18 (right): Paul-Joseph Blanc, Clovis at the Battle of Tolbiac.*

Emanation is a philosophical and theological term with multiple meanings. On a basic level, it denotes consequences flowing from a certain (often divine) cause.[82] Blanc's mural visualizes a heaven-sent, positive force that helps Clovis triumph: a group of six angels descends and encourages the emperor by presenting him with a sword. Kiefer interprets this 'emanation' in a negative light, however.[83] The relationship between Clovis and the angels is mirrored and yet obscured by the lead slab, which seemingly flows from the heavens. The material can be perceived as a reference to the 'iron age' of war; it comes down like an oppressive rain that threatens to destroy the blossoms.[84] The artist thereby deconstructs the visual argument that the glory of France is driven by God's favour. On the contrary, Kiefer suggests that this kind of nationalist thinking has produced incredible amounts of suffering.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have provided a framework for looking at nineteenth-century national museums. I have focused on three pictorial programmes – from Italy, Britain, and France respectively – in order to discuss different conceptions of the nation. In addition, I have

82 Dörrie 1958; Kremer 1972; Hutter 1995.

83 Kiefer speaks of "*la menace que diffuse peu à peu d'un ciel de plomb*" ("Interview de Anselm Kiefer et de Pascal Dusapin" 2021, 11).

84 'Emanations' and the oppressive force of lead are recurring themes in Kiefer's oeuvre; cf. Arasse 2001, 231–232, 235, 241; "Anselm Kiefer" 2007, 44; Jungk 2020. The ancient myth of the Four Ages of the World, in which the 'iron age' was associated with warfare, was most famously codified by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, book 1, 89–150.

highlighted the ways in which religion was used to create a sense of national unity and purpose.

My first two case studies demonstrated how the nation was visualized in architectures of display before the emergence of national museums. The third and final case study took as its starting point a nineteenth-century national museum, the Gallery of Battles, and traced the reinterpretation and deconstruction of such nationalist imagery in the twenty-first century.

This process of transformation is highly relevant for the role of national museums in contemporary society. The conference from which this volume results was organized in cooperation with the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* in Nuremberg (Germanic National Museum), i.e. a national museum faced with the very same challenge: to update and deconstruct traditional conceptions of the nation, or risk losing touch with a twenty-first-century audience. Accordingly, our joint research project "Modellierung von Kulturgeschichte am Beispiel des Germanischen Nationalmuseums: Vermittlungskonzepte für das 21. Jahrhundert" (Shaping Cultural History: The Example of the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* and Curatorial Lessons for the Twenty-First Century) aimed to analyse curatorial concepts from the past 150 years of this museum's history in order to arrive at innovative ways of presenting our cultural heritage. The papers contained in this volume contribute new insights drawn from other national museums and can help fuel the 'reinvention' of these institutions in a spirit of democracy and cosmopolitanism.

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