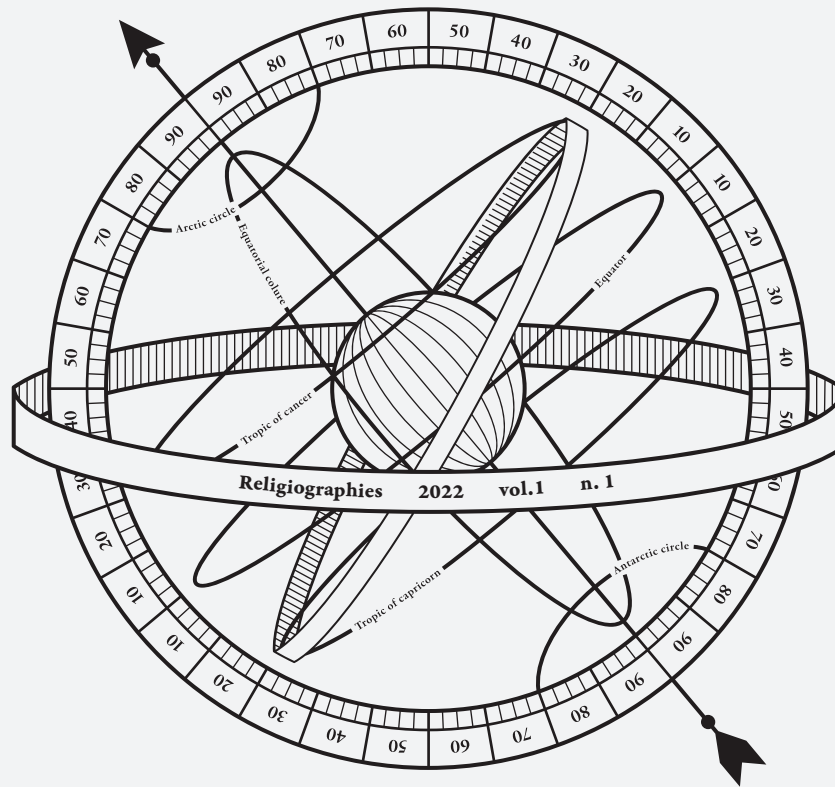# *Religiographies*

Special Issue
"Holy Sites in the Mediterranean, Sharing and Division"
edited by
Dionigi Albera, Sara Kuehn and Manoël Pénicaud

Heterography 2:

Writing in Three Dimensions: Heterographies of Shared Sacred Sites

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In 2007, the city of Marseille was preparing an application to become the European Capital of Culture. The person in charge of this endeavour invited one of us to collaborate on the drafting of the dossier to be submitted for evaluation. The latter presented a project for an exhibition on the sharing of holy places in the Mediterranean region, a theme he had been studying for several years. This exhibition project was included in the city's application, which was finally selected in 2008 by a European jury. In the following years, preparatory work was carried out to organise this exhibition, but in the end (due to budgetary arbitrations linked to the implementation of the initiative), this project was abandoned and did not feature among the official events of *Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture*. However, around the same time, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (Mucem) showed an interest in the subject. This new museum was then in an advanced phase of prefiguration work and was to be inaugurated the same year, 2013, in Marseille. For this kind of "museum of society" (*musée de société*),[1] where anthropology plays a leading role, in line with the *Musée national des arts et traditions populaires* (MNATP) in Paris,[2] we worked from 2012 onwards to conceive and organise a temporary exhibition. It took three years of intensive work with the museum's teams before the *Lieux saints partagés* exhibition was inaugurated in April 2015[3] (Fig. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1. Main visual of the temporary exhibition *Lieux saints partagés* (*Shared Sacred Sites*) at the Mucem, Marseille, 2015.
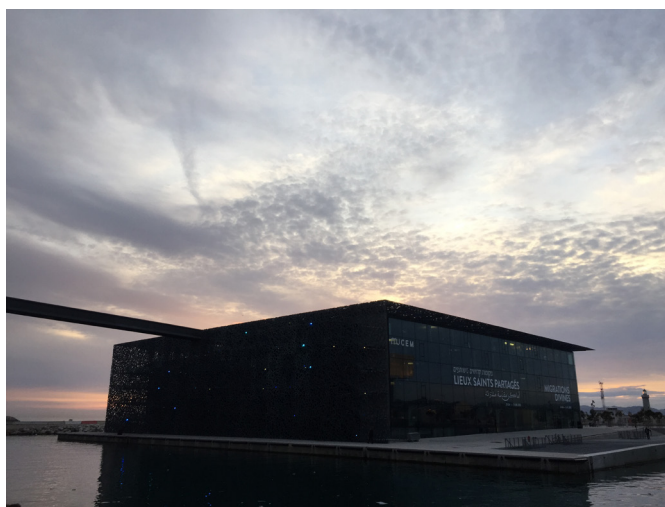

Fig. 2. The Mucem in Marseille, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

[1] The term "musée de société" is typical of the transformation of French museology during the last thirty years, without a clear equivalent in the English-speaking world. We use here the expression "museum of society" as a provisional translation. For further discussion, see below.

[2] From the 2000s onwards, the MNATP in Paris underwent a long and profound reconfiguration that culminated in the creation of the Mucem in Marseille in 2013. See Martine Segalen, *Vie d'un musée. 1937–2005* (Paris: Stock, 2005) and *Métamorphoses des musées de société* edited by Denis Chevallier (Paris: La documentation française, 2013).

[3] Between 2012 and 2015, Manoël Pénicaud was a postdoctoral researcher (Mucem-LabexMed) whose mission consisted in deepening the study of shared sanctuaries and carrying out the associated curatorship of the exhibition of which Dionigi Albera was the general curator. Isabelle Marquette, curator at the Mucem, acted as internal curator.

The exhibition was quite successful, attracting over 120,000 visitors in four months. Moreover, although no touring exhibition had been planned, several museums subsequently expressed interest in the theme. Between 2016 and 2021, revisited versions of the exhibition were presented in museums and/or art institutions elsewhere in France and in several other countries (Tunisia, Greece, Morocco, United States and Turkey).[4] The first adaptation was displayed at the Bardo Museum in Tunis (19 November 2016–12 February 2017), for the official reopening of this museum, hit hard by the attack on 18 March 2015 for which ISIS claimed responsibility (Fig. 3 and 4).

Fig. 4. Bardo Museum, Tunis, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 3. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, Tunis, 2016.

Subsequently, another version was shown simultaneously in three institutions in Thessaloniki (Greece): the Museum of Photography, the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, and Yeni Cami (23 September 2016–17 February 2017)[5] (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Κοινοί Ιεροί Τόποι, National Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

In parallel, the exhibition was also presented—in other forms—at the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* in Paris (24 October 2017–21 January 2018)[6] (Fig. 6 and 7), as well as at *Dar El Bacha-Musée des Confluences* in Marrakech (18 December 2017–19 March 2018) (Fig. 8 and 9).

Fig. 6. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, 2017.

Fig. 7. Scenography, *Lieux saints partagés*, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.
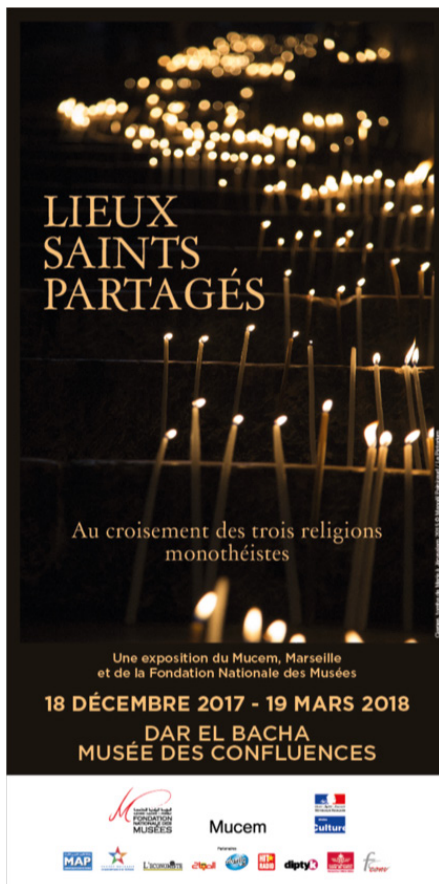

Fig. 8. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Dar El Bacha-Musée des Confluences, Marrakesh , 2017-2018.

Fig. 9. Showcase, *Lieux saints partagés*, Marrakesh, 2017-18. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

We then developed a new version presented simultaneously in three venues in Manhattan: the New York Public Library, the City University of New York (James Gallery) and the Morgan Library and Museum (27 March–30 June 2018)[7] (Fig. 10 and 11).

7

We again shared the curatorship with Karen Barkey, at that time a professor of sociology at Columbia University, without whom this project would never have been possible. See *Shared Sacred Sites* edited by Dionigi Albera, Karen Barkey and Manoël Pénicaud (New York: New York Public Library, City University of New York and Morgan Library & Museum, 2018).

Fig. 10. Main visual of *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, The City University of New York, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 2018.

Fig. 11. Scenography, *Shared Sacred Sites*, NYPL, New York, 2018. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

The exhibition has subsequently been shown at *Depo* in Istanbul (20 April–28 July 2019) (Fig. 12) and at the CerModern museum in Ankara (1 July–30 September 2021) (Fig. 13). Other projects are being developed in other institutions,[8] while some projects have been abandoned along the way, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

8

A less complex version was also designed in 2018–2019 for the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, a site built by Le Corbusier and classified by Unesco. Photographic versions were also presented at the *Rencontres Orient-Occident* in Switzerland (2018), at the *Maison Inter-universitaire des Sciences de l'Homme – Alsace* (MISHA) in Strasbourg (2019), at the *Institut Français* in Marrakesh (2022), at the *École Française de Rome* (2022–2023), etc.

Fig. 12. Exhibition, *Paylaşılan Kutsal Mekânlar*, Depo, Istanbul, 2019. Photograph © Serra Akcan.

Fig. 13. "Mavi Kalp / Cœur bleu", by Sarkis, *Paylaşılan Kutsal Mekânlar*, CerModern, Ankara, 2021. Photograph © Sébastien de Courtois.

9

However, at this point we were not complete neophytes, since we had been previously involved, in different ways, in the planning of exhibitions: *Dal monte al piano* (1991) and *Montagna in movimento* (2007) for Dionigi Albera; *Voyages Confrériques au Maroc* (2004), *La Méditerranée des Sept Dormants* (2011) and *Au bazar du genre. Féminin/Masculin* (2014) for Manoël Pénicaud.

10

We refer here to this notion as it has been developed since 2016 in several research seminars at the Idemec (CNRS-Aix-Marseille Univ).

Two types of innovation should be highlighted in this unconventional itinerancy. The first is that we have accentuated the project's modularity to adapt it to the country and the collections of the host museum, also with the aim of limiting the costs of transportation and insurance. This allowed extending the project to multiple sites. For example, by the end of 2018 it had been presented simultaneously in three countries. Moreover, this modularity made it possible to deploy the exhibition in three locations in the same city (as we did in Thessaloniki and New York).

The second type of innovation is that each stage involves a rewriting. The aim is also to adhere as much as possible to the specificities of the host institutions, which sometimes have different thematic orientations. For example, we have worked with museums that tend to focus on art from different periods (classical, medieval, contemporary) or on history or photography. We also took into account the geographical and cultural context of the region in which these institutions operate. In the Tunisian and Moroccan versions, for example, we emphasised the North African dimension of the exhibition, whereas in the Thessaloniki version, we highlighted the Balkan situation, and in Istanbul and Ankara we focused particularly on the Anatolian contexts. In other words, at each step, a new exhibition was presented, with a mix of common elements and new items.

Step by step, we have been immersed in (and sometimes overwhelmed by) a process that has forced us to move away from the classic communication tools of our anthropological discipline. While, in many cases, human and social science studies do not go beyond the borders of the academic world, our work on shared sanctuaries was different. Transforming it into a public exhibition was, in itself, a translation into a language other than that of scientific publications. Since we were neither museologists nor art historians, the two paths of specialisation in this area, we became exhibition curators in a rather empirical way.[9] We therefore had to cope with several challenges. Indeed, researcher-curators must reinvent their way of working, to address a large number of people. Moreover, they are called upon to take a stand, often on sensitive social issues.

We would like to outline here a reflection on this dual experience of acting as both anthropologists and exhibition curators. We will explore the making of this multifaceted project. How, as a researcher-curator, does one write an exhibition on religious themes? What are the challenges and difficulties? How does one adapt to different configurations, particularly in terms of collections, cultural contexts, and designing spaces? Based on concrete examples, this feedback offers a modest contribution to the development of a broader theoretical reflection on the writing of an exhibition.

1. Heterography and Expography

To begin with, the notion of heterography[10] can be of some help, providing a tool to elucidate this experience. From this point of view, heterography can be conceived as a set of "other writings," that is, a range of devices that differ from textual writing, and which in turn are able to convey the knowledge derived from ethnographic research. This is certainly a minor genre, but it has accompanied almost the entire history of anthropology, such that there is nothing revolutionary about it.

While the dominant style, in terms of academic prestige and power, has undoubtedly coincided with articles published in peer-reviewed

journals, and with monographs (more or less linked to the format of PhD dissertations), other forms of expression have been circulating for a long time as complementary media, such as documentary films, photography or, of interest in our case, exhibitions. Someone once remarked that the main difference between anthropology and sociology was that the former had museums, while the latter did not. This statement is probably excessive, but not without meaning.

One merit of the notion of heterography is undoubtedly that it links a vast number of alternative expressions under the same banner. All the more so since the flag chosen, that of writing, is certainly not trivial. This increases the weight and legitimacy of these expressions, which thus aspire to become forms of ethnography in their own right. We might add that this federating movement now resonates with our post-postmodern zeitgeist, characterised by a profusion of alternative experiments in terms of scientific expression, whether it be collaborations between researchers and artists, comic strips, or languages that are in vogue in the field of digital humanities, such as those used in websites, web-documentaries, or GIS storymaps.

The exhibition finds its particular place within the variegated and magmatic whole of heterography. But it should be immediately added that this place is rather broad and complex because the exhibition does not correspond to a single language. It is rather the art of assembling several languages. In this respect, an important contribution comes from the museologist André Desvallées, who in 1993 proposed the notion of "expography" to mean the writing of exhibitions[11]. For him, this neologism covers "the art of exhibiting," hence translating theoretical content by situating it in space.[12]

Writing our exhibition was undeniably influenced by the French museological tradition. From this point of view, *Lieux saints partagés* is what is defined in France as an "exhibition of society" (*exposition de société*), a category intended to "show in order to make us understand," according to the sociologist and specialist in museology Jean Davallon,[13] who distinguishes these exhibitions from so-called "art exhibitions."[14] Temporary or permanent, "exhibitions of society" are displayed in museums also known as "museums of society" (*musées de société*) in which "the criteria for choosing objects have shifted. It is no longer art or history that are put forward and that underlie the scientific approach, but the relationship of a community to artefacts. In 'museums of society', the principle of total understanding of the social fact prevails, in the sense of bringing to light all the ins and outs of a social fact. . . ."[15]

Both "museums of society" and "exhibitions of society" are the French expression of a wider process of transformation experienced by several anthropological museums around the world.[16] A number of these institutions have been more and more open to contemporary issues linked to social, cultural or environmental problems, such that they take on a civic and social function. From this point of view, an important role in the genealogy of contemporary French museology can be attributed to the ancestor of the Mucem, the *Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires* (MNATP), founded in 1937 in Paris by Georges-Henri Rivière.[17] Strongly influenced by ethnography and anthropology, this leading figure revolutionised the field of museums in France by giving full importance to material culture as direct testimony of contemporary social life.[18]

One of the particularities of the MNATP, was the practice of surveys,

11
André Desvallées invented this notion, in addition to that of "museography," as part of the thesaurus of museology that took shape in 1993 within the *International Council of Museums* (ICOM) and the *International Committee for Museology* (ICOFOM). See *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie* edited by André Desvallées and François Mairesse (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

12
Ibid., 599.

13
Jean Davallon, "L'écriture de l'exposition : expographie, muséographie, scénographie," *Culture & Musées. La (r)évolution des musées d'art*, 16, 2010, 229. Even in this case, there is no precise equivalent of "exposition de société" in the Anglophone museology tradition. We propose the expression "exhibition of society" as a provisional translation.

14
This categorisation is still relevant today, even if it could be slightly nuanced, since in recent years there have been partial hybridisations between these two forms.

15
Denis Chevallier, "Introduction. Les musées de société : la grande mue du XXIe siècle," *op. cit.*, 15 : ". . . les critères de choix des objets se sont déplacés. Ce n'est plus l'art ou l'histoire qui sont mis en avant et qui sous-tendent la démarche scientifique, mais le rapport d'une communauté aux artefacts. Dans le musée de société prévaut un principe de compréhension totale du fait social, au sens de la mise au jour de l'ensemble des tenants et aboutissants d'un fait de société. . . ."

16
For a recent discussion of the role of these kinds of museums in France, which also examined them from an international perspective, see the special issue "Les musées de société aujourd'hui : Héritage et mutations," *Culture & Musées. Muséologie et recherches sur la culture*, 39, 2022.

17
François Mairesse, "Un demi-siècle d'expographie," *Culture & Musées*, 16, 2010, 219–229; Martine Segalen, *Vie d'un musée. 1937–2005, op. cit.*; see also the temporary exhibition *Georges Henri Rivière. Voir, c'est comprendre* au Mucem, Marseille (14 November 2018–4 March 2019) and the exhibition catalogue *Georges Henri Rivière. Voir, c'est comprendre* edited by Germain Viatte and Marie-Charlotte Calafat (Paris: Mucem/RmnGP, 2018).

18
Starting in the early 2000s, our institution (Idemec, CNRS, Aix Marseille University) was a direct partner of the MNATP, and then of the Mucem that succeeded it. We have therefore drawn on this museology current steeped in anthropology.

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This practice of these "enquêtes-collectes" was inaugurated by Georges-Henri Rivière. See Germain Viatte G. and Marie-Charlotte Calafat, *op. cit.*; *Collectes sensorielles : Recherche-Musée-Art* edited by Véronique Dassié, Aude Fanlo, Marie-Luce Gélard, Cyril Isnart and Florent Molle (Paris: Pétra, 2021).

defined as "enquêtes-collectes": ethnologists carried out short fieldwork studies and brought back objects linked to a specific social practice.[19] This practice has been inherited by the Mucem. Therefore, in the years before our exhibition, we had the possibility to travel to Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia, Israel-Palestine, Italy and the Republic of North Macedonia, bringing back ethnographic materiality: artefacts, ex-voto, candles, rosaries, etc. (Fig. 14). We also collected sound and visual elements to use them in space-designing processes and/or ethnographic films displayed for visitors (Fig. 15).

MUSLIMS AT THE ST. GEORGE MONASTERY

Fig. 15. *Muslims at the St. George Monastery*, Manoël Pénicaud, Mucem-Idemec, 2015, 4 min 48 : https://youtu.be/5k-2_-niHdI.

Fig. 14. Display case with popular devotional objects, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

As in all "exhibitions of society," our objective was to transmit knowledge to the public. The decisive point is that, at the heart of the project, there is a guiding idea that is the result of academic research. Beyond that, several layers of writing are necessary to create the three-dimensional exhibition.

This writing process can be divided into several distinct phases. The exhibition project is written down on paper, defining the main ideas and an initial narrative structure. Next, an initial list of works and objects is drawn up to materialise these guiding ideas. This stage requires in-depth research in public or private collections, requests for loans with no guarantee of results, and the first evaluation of the insurance and transport costs. Thus, the first lists of works are often unrealistically optimist. Only the financial assessment and the availability of the items allow the project to coalesce in a more concrete (and generally more modest) way.

In French national museums such as the Mucem, the design phase of an exhibition is strictly standardised: the initial sketch (the project's intention) is followed by the preliminary design ("avant-projet sommaire," APS), then the final design ("avant-projet définitif," APD). The third phase concerns mainly the Production Department and tends to formalise the work contracts for constructing the exhibition. Behind this technical jargon, it should be noted that each phase involves more rewriting, the direct involvement of several museum departments, and a substantial amount of work. Spatial transcription begins at the sketch stage but is formalised at the APS and especially the APD stage, with the involvement of a professional scenographer recruited by tendering. As we will see in

greater detail below, this last role is essential in thinking about the layout of the project, according to a coherent itinerary—and, above all, one that can be taken by as many people as possible.

As we have seen, an "exhibition of society" is characterised by the interlocking of different formats and registers of writing: texts, images, sounds, artworks, several types of objects in three dimensions, etc. From this perspective, the articulation between textual writings and non-textual forms can be conceived in a complementary manner. Researchers, who are professional practitioners of academic writing, often find it difficult to detach themselves from it in favour of other formats. In general, they tend to explain everything through a text. Yet the exhibition medium is not a scientific article. Too many written texts (room texts, section texts, labels) can paradoxically hinder the understanding by the public.

In an exhibition, the texts are absolutely not the only vehicles of meaning. Recent studies have shown that many visitors do not read the texts very carefully, or at least not in their entirety.[20] Moreover, many visitors move around at will, without necessarily following the direction of the visit, and read the texts on the fly, often in a fragmentary manner. Therefore, the curator must also suggest the main ideas in other ways, especially through the works and objects presented.

That said, texts are certainly valuable and should certainly not disappear, as is the case in some contemporary art exhibitions. They are crucial to convey key ideas to the public, for example in the introduction to the exhibition, where they offer an initial tool for interpretation.[21] As far as texts are concerned, we have not hesitated to repeat certain ideas, adopting a spatially de-linearised writing style that is likely to reach (at least ideally) the greatest number of people.

The curator must then coordinate several forms of expression, rearranging formally heterogeneous elements: three-dimensional works and objects, still and moving images, projections, sound installations, etc. In terms of writing, this composite approach requires an adjusted syntax and grammar (Fig. 16). One should think not only through ideas and concepts, but also in terms of space and materiality. Ideally, every key idea should be spatially embodied, through a work, a document, an object, an image or a sound. To give an account of interreligious sharing, we had to learn to write, so to speak, in three dimensions.

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See Daniel Jacobi, *Les Musées sont-ils condamnés à séduire? et autres écrits muséologiques* (Paris: MkF Editions, 2017).

21
See Daniel Jacobi, *Textexpo. Produire, éditer et afficher des textes d'exposition* (Dijon: OCIM, 2016), 7.

Fig. 16. Virtual visit of *Lieux saints partagés* at the Mucem, Manoël Pénicaud, 2015, 3 min 29 : https://youtu.be/-_8cT4ksArw ; the soundtrack is a montage of elements collected around the Mediterranean.

22

We should at least mention the classic work on this subject: *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* edited by James Clifford and Georges E. Marcus (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986).

23

Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

24

Jonathan Gottschall, *The Story Paradox: How Our Love for Storytelling Build Societies and Tears Them Down* (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

2. Storytelling, Emotion and Interactivity

Heterography departs from the "orthography" of standard scientific production not only in the medium chosen, but also because it gives more space to narrative and emotional expression. Of course, these dimensions are not absent in the standard forms of ethnography. A few decades ago, post-modern scholars took great pleasure in unmasking the rhetorical devices scattered through the classics of anthropology.[22] Moreover, Clifford Geertz has convincingly argued that the anthropologist can be conceived as an author.[23] The control mechanisms put in place to monitor scientific production (academic reputation, peer reviews) can only partially check this trend. That said, the cursor shifts, more or less significantly, with heterographic productions (and especially with the subgenre of exhibitions), which move further away from the univocal precision of mathematical equations and get a little closer to poetic expression. In all these cases, however, an anchoring in facts and a pact of scientific truth are safeguarded. In other words, one does not enter the realm of fiction.

An exhibition cannot simply consist of the dissemination of scientific knowledge. To have minimum effectiveness, it must be organised as a narrative. In other words, we have never tried to make the exhibition a kind of simplified summary of an academic presentation, such as can be done in teaching, in a seminar, or in a Power Point presentation. We took a certain amount of data stemming from our research and faithfully reproduced it, while also weaving a story, whose purpose was above all a civic one.

The exhibition medium offers the possibility of reaching a wider audience, comprising people of different conditions and backgrounds, not to mention their religious or other beliefs. One of our aims was to try to challenge the public's common sense, by inviting them to understand the complexity of religious configurations, without giving in to the shortcuts and caricatures that are very present in mass media and social networks. We have constantly tried to talk about interreligious interactions by stressing nuances and applying contextualisation. With this approach, we adopted as much as possible a human-sized, embodied and sensitive approach.

Our exhibition was conceived in a particularly deleterious social and political climate, marked by terrorist attacks, an accentuation of identity-based tensions, and the rise of populist and extreme right-wing movements that capitalised on people's fears. The main incarnation of a threatening otherness had a religious profile, and above all the face of Islam. It should be remembered that the first edition of the exhibition took place in the year of the so-called "Charlie Hebdo" and "Hyper Casher" attacks in Paris, so the management of the Mucem expressed some apprehension about public reaction to our subject, also fearing security risks. However, no incidents occurred.

Nowadays countless stories have a great impact on millions and millions of people.[24] Most of them focus on processes of victimisation and on the projective identification of evil in threatening adversaries. Opposing these stories is far from easy. Such simplifications have undeniable narrative force and appeal, as many recent political events have extensively shown. Challenging these shortcuts with in-depth discussions that emphasise the complexity of the real world is certainly meritorious, but may prove inconclusive. Even patently absurd stories, like those popularised by QAnon and flat-earthism, often show a surprising degree of resistance to rational argument, and even to hard facts. Instead, we have tried

to show this complexity by embodying it, so to speak, in the exhibition, and by making the public discover it in a concrete way. The story we have tried to tell is therefore an implicit plea for peaceful, mutual knowledge and for reciprocal acceptance beyond religious borders.

Of course, we did not propose an irenic image of religions. We certainly did not forget the antagonisms and conflicts. But the materials we had at our disposal allowed us to construct an alternative story, which raised doubts and encouraged reflection. For example, one section showed the strong presence of the Marian cult in Islam, and its theological and devotional significance, which went against the preconceived ideas of many visitors. Above all, testimony concerning interreligious interactions inside the sanctuaries revealed behaviours that the public did not suspect in the least. They implied that repulsion of the other is not inevitable and suggested that when the conditions are right, people of different religions are able to pray side by side at the same sacred places. This idea was not explicitly expressed in the texts, but was allowed to arise from a visitor's experience. It was an impression of this kind that we hoped visitors could construct by themselves to some degree, moving through the contents we had organised in the space.

This approach was based on the deployment of a de-linearised narrative. Certainly, we suggested a main itinerary, but visitors could also move around as they wished in a space organised into different stations. Conceived as a metaphorical pilgrimage, this exhibition invited each visitor to make his or her own synthesis of the complex phenomenon of shared shrines, in the hope that he or she would emerge partially "transformed," as in a real pilgrimage seen as a rite of passage. The emphasis was on the human dimension underlying the various religious manifestations: on an existential vulnerability common both to the faithful encountered in the exhibition's various sections through the lens of an array of items, and to the visitors themselves. It was a way to foster, in the latter, something akin to a sentiment of existential *communitas*, a notion that Victor Turner associated, in several seminal works, with the personal feelings that social actors experience during the ritual process, and specifically during pilgrimage.[25]

One of the aims of *Shared Sacred Sites* was therefore to immerse visitors by metaphorically making them take up the pilgrim's staff to discover shared sanctuaries. At the entrance to the exhibition, at the Mucem and in subsequent versions, a large-scale projector showed human-sized silhouettes of pilgrims in shadow form, with which the shadows of the visitors merged. This visual installation was coupled with a sonic creation composed of sounds collected throughout the Mediterranean region, interweaving songs, prayers, voices, bells, muezzin, different languages, etc. At the exit, the public found this set of silhouettes at dusk, completing the loop of the visit (Fig. 17).

The success of this kind of exhibition depends on the subtle relationship between erudition, aesthetics and emotion. Such tension is central to this type of heterography, insofar as the scientific and didactic approach must be counterbalanced by a more emotional, sensitive, even poetic dimension. The emotion produces a driving force in the experience of the exhibition, and also in the understanding of the social facts presented.

A series of photographs and films resulting from our research was displayed throughout the exhibition, allowing visitors to experience an immersion in a number of ethnographic contexts. In the same way, devotional objects acquired during our investigations materialised the demands

25

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969); "Pilgrimages as Social Processes," in V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 166–230; Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

Fig. 17. *The Pilgrims*, video-installation, Mucem, 2015, 3 min 20. Graphic design by Gilda Sergé, L'œil Graphique, Marseille. Sound creation realised in the framework of an educational partnership with the SATIS Department (Sciences Arts et Technologies de l'image et du Son) and the laboratory ASTRAM (Arts Sciences Technologies pour la Recherche Audiovisuelle Multimédia), Aix-Marseille University. https://youtu.be/LcNzqPvGeIM.

26
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 191), 26.

27
Ibid., 26-27.

and expectations of the faithful.

In such an attempt to "take the public on a journey" *in situ*—and to give them the opportunity to see, touch and feel—the challenge that remains, obviously, is to find the best balance between emission (by the curator) and reception (by the public). To take these issues into account, we can capitalise on the work of Roland Barthes who theorised the effect of an image on the receiver, attributing an important role to the reactions and emotions this image can elicit. In particular, he developed two concepts that can be useful here.

The first concept is *studium*, which designates the interest we have in an image, based on its informative and descriptive dimension. This notion "doesn't mean, at least not immediately, 'study' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions."[26] The second concept is *punctum*, which punctuates or breaks *studium*: "It is not I who seek it out . . . it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. . . . for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."[27]

We argue that both dimensions singled out by Barthes also operate in an exhibition, not only through the reception of a photograph, but also through that of a film, a painting or an object. A successful visiting experience implies good complementarity between these two phenomena. An attitude based on *studium* is necessary to acquire a good deal of relevant information concerning the theme. The strong involvement of *punctum* is certainly rarer and represents the climax of the visitor's aesthetic and emotional experience. The problem is that it is uncontrollable from the curatorial point of view, as there is no absolute guarantee of the receivers'

INTERVIEW WITH
PAOLO DALL'OGLIO

Fig. 19. Interview with Paolo Dall'Oglio, Manoël Pénicaud, Mucem-Idemec, 2015, 3 min 28 : https://youtu.be/oKccDUeQ_F0.

reaction. Moreover, it is not an isolated work that necessarily produces this inner emotion, as this can also be generated by a set of elements that resonate with each other.

As far as possible, we sought to embody the content, flesh it out and give it a lived dimension, calibrating what we can reasonably expect to produce the effects of *studium* or *punctum*. This approach has probably hit the mark in several cases, as the guest books in the Mucem exhibition attest (Fig. 18). Many testimonials openly bear witness to a strong emotional reaction: visitors were touched, beyond our expectations, for example by the testimony of the Jesuit priest, Paolo Dall'Oglio, presumably executed by ISIS during the war in Syria (Fig. 19).

Fig. 18. Excerpt from the guestbook, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, Marseille, 2015.

Fig. 21. Thierry Fournier, Ecotone, video installation, *Shared Sacred Sites*, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Ankara, 2017- 2021. Created in 2015, this artwork evokes the digital desires that often overlap with the votive expectations of pilgrims: "A landscape is generated live by messages sent on twitter, read by synthesized voices and which all have in common to express desires: I would like so much, I dream of, my dearest wish... A camera moves in slow motion and infinity in this artificial paradise." https://vimeo.com/122249270.

Fig.20. Visitors Messages, *Lieux saints partagés*, MNHI, Paris, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

This led us to imagine other devices to record the public's reactions, such as a "wall of wishes" in Paris, inspired by those found in certain shrines, such as the House of Mary in Ephesus in Turkey (Fig. 20). More generally, interactivity is important in the visiting experience. One example is the work entitled "Ecotone", created by the French artist Thierry Fournier, which materialises a virtual landscape based on desires expressed in real time on the social network Twitter (Fig. 21).
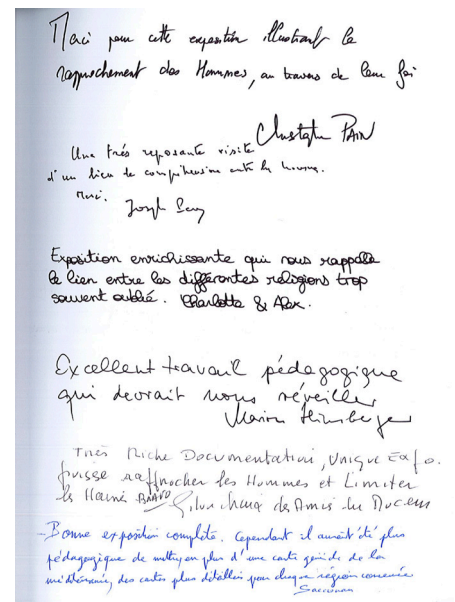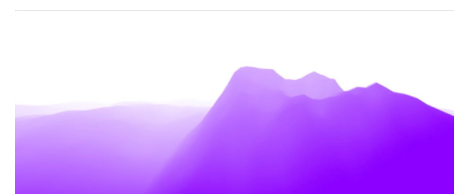
28
Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder." In *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1991), 42–56.

To describe our curatorial approach, two concepts can be referenced, *resonance* and *wonder*, which Stephen Greenblatt has put forward to describe the exhibition of artworks. He gives a clear and concise definition of both: "By *resonance* I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By *wonder* I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention."[28]

In our exhibition, a dimension of resonance was present in certain modest objects, such as ex-votos, which have the power to evoke the fragility of human live, with a constant interweaving of needs, requests and existential predicaments. Take, for example, an installation that reconstituted a fragment of the wall of wishes of the House of Mary in Ephesus, using votive materials collected onsite (Fig. 22), or the presentation of a series of ephemeral structures that expressed wishes to have a child, get married, or overcome illness (Fig. 23).

Fig. 22. A Muslim visitor intrigued by a Muslim rosary in the Wishing Wall, *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 23. Ephemeral wishes performed by Muslims, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

All these small objects embodied a series of existential experiences, clearly originating in distant spaces and different from the point of view of the cultural means of expression, but nevertheless representing the struggle with a set of concerns familiar to the viewer.

Conversely, the power to generate wonder in visitors was conveyed by certain items singled out by their uniqueness. Here we can mention an autograph by Denis Diderot, which mentions the double cult (Christian and Muslim) present on the island of Lampedusa in modern times (Fig. 24), as well as some splendid Muslim miniatures (Fig. 25) and rare Christian incunabula, such as the stunning panoramic view from Damascus to Alexandria, centred on Jerusalem, published in 1486 by Bernhard von Breydenbach in the first illustrated Holy Land pilgrimage journal to be printed (Fig. 26). Another example consists of precious manuscripts like the Morgan Picture Bible, which will be briefly presented below.

We should add that the distinction between resonance and wonder

Fig. 25. Miniature of Iskandar (Alexander) and the Prophet Khizr in Tarjumah-i Shāhnāmah (Book of Kings), 10th century, copied in Istanbul 1616–20, *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, Spencer Collection, 2018.
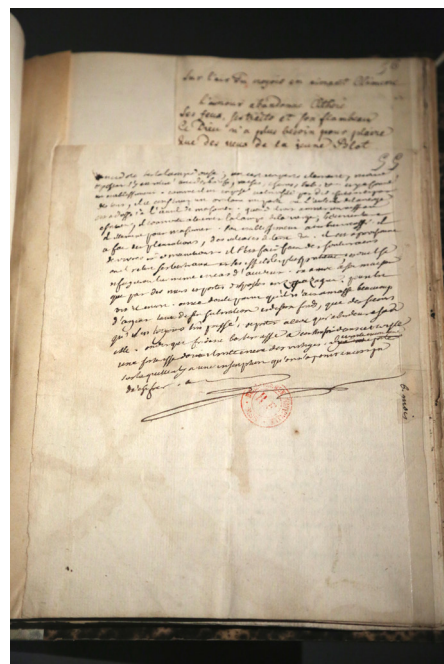

Fig. 24. Autographe de Denis Diderot, anecdote sur l'île de Lampedusa, recueil Mélanges de littérature, manuscrit, BnF, Paris, *Lieux saints partagés*, MNHI, 2017-18.

Fig. 26. Bernhard von Breydenbach, View of Jerusalem in Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam (detail, 1486), *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, Rare Book Division, 2018.

partly overlaps with that between *trace* and *aura*, as Walter Benjamin formulated it in a famous aphorism: "Trace and aura. The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us."[29] This dialectic between nearness and distance was a thread that ran through the entire exhibition and was materialised in various forms, thereby giving multifarious shapes to the texture of meanings we intended to communicate.

3. *Embodiment, Metaphor and Metonymy*

As already mentioned, works of art of various kinds find their place in an "exhibition of society" like *Lieux Saints Partagés/Shared Sacred Sites*. Art produces an aesthetic emotion, which is part of a broader phenomenon that potentially

29
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), M 16a, 4, 447.

In 2010, Annunciation Day (25 March) was established as a national Muslim-Christian holiday in Lebanon to promote Muslim-Christian dialogue. See Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Pratiquer le dialogue interreligieux au Liban. La célébration de la fête de l'Annonciation." In *Traversées des mémoires en Méditerranée. La réinvention du "lien"* edited by Maryline Crivello and Karima Dirèche (Aix-en-Provence: PUP, 2017), 97–107.

summons spiritual emotion—and obviously this does not only occur among "believers." One of our objectives was that every visitor should be able to find themselves in the mirror of otherness. From this point of view, three modalities of concrete use of this medium can be isolated in our exhibition.

The first modality concerns artwork as an *embodiment* of the theme at the centre of the display. In other words, there are cases where the religious imbrication is manifested in the object itself. One example is an icon of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, saints common to both Christians and Muslims, which a Syrian Catholic artist painted with the insertion of a deliberate Muslim marker (the dog that keeps them during their miraculous sleep) (Fig. 27). Another example is a work displaying more explicit Islamic-Christian significance, as shown in another Lebanese icon of the Annunciation that is framed on the left by a passage from the Gospel of Luke (27-30) and on the right by an extract from the Qurʾānic Sura Al ʿImran (29, 41–46)[30] (Fig. 28).

Fig. 27. Ossama Musleh, *The Seven Sleepers*, icon, Damascus, 2010.

Fig. 28. Noha Ibrahim Jabbour, *The Annunciation*, icon, Beirut, 2007.

Other examples concern architectural imbrications, presented through photographs, like those showing Greek churches that have sometimes kept a minaret, a trace of their previous conversion into mosques (Fig. 29), or the ancient Yeni Cami mosque in Thessaloniki, dedicated to the cult of the Donmeh (Jewish converts to Islam), which is known to contain Stars of David hidden in the interior decoration, and which was—as a cultural space—one of the venues for our tripartite exhibition in 2017 (Fig. 30). A final emblematic case is a jewel of medieval art, the Morgan Picture Bible, a leaf of which was exhibited at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York in 2018. This work is, in itself, a palimpsest written through its belonging to successive groups (Fig. 31). The manuscript dates from the 13th century. Its origins are unclear, but it has

Fig. 30. Mihrab And Star of David, Yeni Cami, Thessaloniki, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 29. Tower bell and Minaret of St.Nicholas Church, Hania, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 31. Bible of St. Louis or Morgan Picture Bible, Paris, ca. 1250, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, ms m.638, fol. 3r, purchased by J. P. Morgan, jr., 1916, *Shared Sacred Sites*, The Morgan Library and Museum, 2018.

often been linked to the court of the French King Louis IX (1214–1270). When it was first created, it contained only a series of images depicting scenes from the Bible. Some fifty years later, Latin captions were added, and quite certainly this happened in Italy. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the manuscript had travelled again and was in the hands of a Polish cardinal, the bishop of Cracow, who entrusted it, as a diplomatic gift for the Persian Shah, to a mission of friars that reached Isfahan in 1607. The Bible was presented to the Shah in the first days of 1608. At his court, captions in Persian were added to the Latin inscriptions. A century later, probably when the Afghans conquered Isfahan in 1722, the royal library was dispersed. The precious manuscript was acquired by a Persian-Jew, and a third layer of captions was added, this time in Judeo-Persian.[31] As a result, this wonderful artwork also harbours a complex work of intertextuality, displaying Christian, Muslim and Jewish points of view on the same image. It summarises, in an astonishing way, a web of interreligious relations distributed over an extended period of time. Looking carefully

31
For an insightful account, see William M. Voelkle, "Shared Sacred Stories and the Morgan Picture Bible," in *Shared Sacred Sites*, *op. cit.* 103–119.

32
Claudio Monge, *Dieu hôte. Recherche historique et théologique sur les rituels de l'hospitalité* (Bucarest: Zeta books, 2008); Dionigi Albera and Manoel Pénicaud, "Coexistences, interférences, interstices." In *Coexistences. Lieux saints partagés en Europe et en Méditerranée* edited by Dionigi Albera and Manoel Pénicaud (Arles: Actes Sud-MNHI, 2017), 16–23.

33
Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2003).

34
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit.

at it makes it possible to discover the biography of a wonderful object, which is a valuable condensate of centuries of commingling, despite disagreements, antagonisms, and conflicts between religions and societies.

The second modality is when a single artwork may be seen as a *metaphor* of interreligious conversations. From this point of view, we can mention the representations of the patriarch Abraham, who alone sums up the common genealogy of the monotheisms (Fig. 32). This figure symbolises the central theme of hospitality in both Genesis and the Qur'ān,[32] a theme that is prominent throughout the exhibition and constitutes one of its narrative threads.

Fig. 32. Section on Abraham at the Mucem. On the left, detail of Abraham lavant les pieds aux trois anges, by Émile Levy, huile sur toile, 1854, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

The third modality—central to deploying the exhibition's narrative—involves *metonymy*. This type of arrangement operates through the juxtaposition of works that, in principle, are heterogeneous or originate from different sources. Each signifier thus interacts with the others, the whole producing a surplus of meaning.

This process is certainly not new. In its genealogy we can mention famous experiments, such as the panels of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, in which Aby Warburg organised sequences of reproductions of artworks, without any textual support, thus creating a visionary project of art history only in images.[33] We can also mention the process based on the montage of quotations and short comments that marks Walter Benjamin's monumental work on Parisian arcades.[34]

In turn, we have tried to establish a "good neighbourhood" for works that sometimes have very different religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds. This allows the viewer to immediately perceive resonance between objects that, in principle, share no common elements. This device makes it possible to show an interplay of analogies, distinctions and mutual influences, without verbalisation, but by making it immediately palpable for the visitor's senses. To some extent, a web of relationships and transmutations becomes, so to speak, immanent in the arrangement and layout of the artworks.

For example, we have placed representations of the same holy figures

as they are portrayed in different religious registers. At the Bardo Museum in Tunis, we placed three sculptures evoking both maternity and the figure of Mary in dialogue. On the left was the Qurʾānic sura of Mary calligraphed by the contemporary artist Abdallah Akar, which materialises this character without representing her in an anthropomorphic way. In the centre was a Catholic statue of the Virgin Mary. On the right, a mother goddess from the Tunisian collections introduced a theme that has genealogical and semantic links with the Madonna figure (Fig. 33). This metonymic process makes it possible to show the complex relations between religions, an interplay of contrasts and familiarities, influences and transformations. Also in Tunis, another display case contained both a leaflet from the famous blue Qurʾān (tenth century) mentioning Jesus, and a sixth-century Christian ceramic tile with his effigy. It is also important to take into account the context: such a close association of Christian and Muslim materials is not common in Muslim countries today (Fig. 34).

Fig. 33. Marial Triptych, *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 34. Tile representing Jesus (6th-7th century, Bardo Museum) and folio of the Blue Qurʾān, Sura Ar-Zukhruf, verses 54-63 (10th century, Raqqada Museum), *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016.

35
Cédric Parizot and Douglas Stanley, "Recherche, art et jeu vidéo. Ethnographie d'une exploration extra-disciplinaire," *antiAtlas Journal*, 1, 2016: https://www.antiatlas-journal.net/01-recherche-art-et-jeu-video-ethnographie-dune-exploration-extra-disciplinaire/, DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.23724/AAJ.2.

36
Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind: The Nature of Human Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

37
Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

4. Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have tried to discuss the process underlying the making of the exhibition *Shared Sacred Sites* (*Lieux saints partagés*). The verb "to write" has been used several times to designate this process, itself understood through the prism of heterography, which brings together a set of "alternative writings" that researchers are increasingly making use of, without hesitating to cross the boundaries of creation. This movement is also part of the florescence of so-called "art-science" projects that combine mixed and interdisciplinary approaches, exploring new territories that are, in principle, "uncomfortable zones" for researchers.[35]

Being both curators and anthropologists, we are always keen to maintain the centrality of the ethnographic dimension by showing the pilgrim practices that constitute the heart of the phenomenon we want to describe. Our decision to rely on a heterogenous set of media (artworks, films, photographs, installations, collected objects, archives, texts, etc.) has led to a logic of combination and interlocking of different formats, discourses, and registers (Fig. 35).
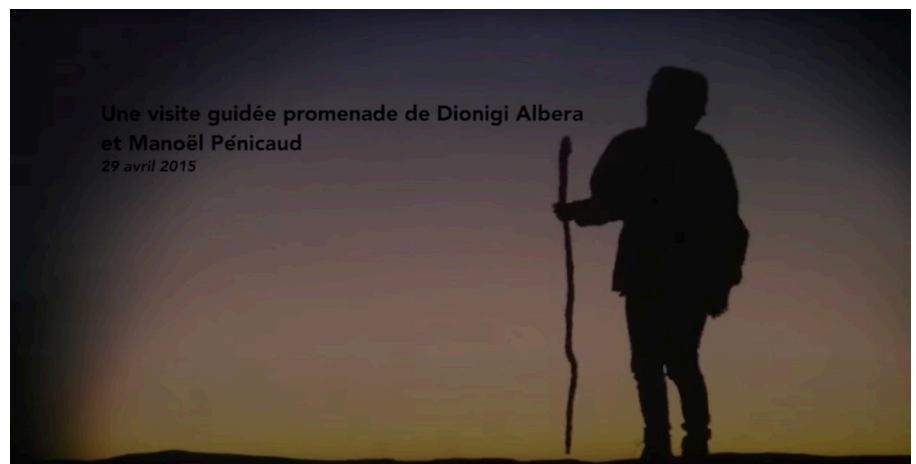

Fig. 35. Guided tour of *Lieux saints partagés* by its two curators, Mucem, 2015, 13 min 38 : https://youtu.be/lGOk-j3rh7Q.

These disparate elements must be coordinated, fit together in the most coherent way, and on several levels: scientific, informative, educational, aesthetic, experiential, etc. Modularity allows the assemblage of blocks, as in a three-dimensional puzzle.

This process overlaps with certain issues of the *bricolage* paradigm, insofar as one must constantly adapt pre-existing materials, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss' distinction between the "engineer" and the "bricoleur."[36] The staging of an exhibition calls for both the first orientation (conceiving a specific plan) and the second approach (adaptation, accommodation, compromise). Much more often than one might think, one has to "make do" with elements only partially controlled, like in the "arts of making" analysed by Michel de Certeau.[37] It is possible to expand Lévi-Strauss' reflection on bricolage and de Certeau's insights on the arts of everyday life by applying the perspectives developed more recently by Tim Ingold on the processes by which objects are made by *makers*, and the flow of materials conceived as "active" rather than passive. Ingold distinguishes between "hylemorphism" (a complex design, which is close to the engineer's model of Lévi-Strauss) and "morphogenesis" (a humbler design, where the object partly creates itself). The concept of morphogenesis is

stimulating for understanding the process of writing in three dimensions, with its subtle interplay between an intellectual project and the engagement with materials. In our case, the artworks and the objects can also be understood as partially active and performative. The *maker* (in this case the curator) is somewhat guided and inspired by the materiality contained in the artworks, even if this means modifying and adapting the initial project.[38]

Our account would be incomplete if we omitted the countless constraints and inevitable compromises that accompany the process of making an exhibition. Indeed, the exhibition is initially conceived in the abstract and in the ideal, but it is never this project that the public will ultimately discover. The initial plan is continually reworked, rewritten, modified, amputated and completed during the various phases of development. A desired artwork may not be available, or it may be too expensive to include, so an alternative must be found. Putting the material on display may involve extra costs, which the Production Department may or may not allow.

Putting an exhibition on display is therefore a succession of choices, arbitrations, compromises and accommodations that are not always the responsibility of the curator. In our case, we were sometimes encouraged to develop one aspect or cut out another, for financial or even political reasons. This is part of the rules of the game because, whether we like it or not, the host institution is also involved in orientating the exhibition and has the final say. The complexity of the decision-making process, and the involvement of several different players in this context, make it difficult to maintain the desired narrative, and sometimes require a subtle balancing of ingredients. Also, this naturally has consequences for the degree of explicitness of certain contents and, more generally, for the general narrative conveyed by the exhibition.[39]

Unlike most of the textual writing, the production of an exhibition is a collective process. Its production from A to Z involves input from many people, from conception to implementation. From this point of view, it would be possible to speak of co-writing. This is all the more true in our case, given that we have co-curated different versions of this exhibition in partnership with several Greek, Tunisian, Moroccan and American colleagues. Then, at the end of the process, each idea must be materialised in the space, and this requires input from a number of specialists: lighting engineer, graphic designer, sound designer, etc. Particularly important is the contribution of an architect-scenographer, who takes into account several practical aspects: feasibility, circulation of the public inside the space, accessibility for disabled people, size of the items, but also budget and logistics. The scenography is therefore a crucial phase in the whole process and plays a major role in the exhibition's identity.[40] But it also involves negotiations and compromises with the curators. At the Mucem, a labyrinthine layout of the exhibition was designed by Agence NC to convey the idea of a pilgrimage, but without imposing a direction of circulation: everyone could wander where they wanted and retrace their steps thanks to a side section that was connected to the other three. But very different scenography choices were made in later versions, creating different kinds of interplay between the ideas of circularity, verticality and horizontality.[41]

Finally, we should acknowledge that this adventure, ongoing for some years now, also entails a certain degree of serendipity. After the first venue in Marseille, we thought we had finished the job. The artworks had been

38

"This is not, of course, to deny that the maker may have an idea in mind of what he wants to make. […] even if the maker has a form in mind, it is not this form that creates the work. It is the engagement with materials. And it is therefore to this engagement that we must attend if we are to understand how things are made." See Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 22.

39

A full discussion of these issues is impossible in the framework of this article. We intend to develop it elsewhere.

40

The scenography or staging of the exhibition merits an entire article, as it raises so many questions on the conceptual, aesthetic, technical and even economic levels. See Marie-Laure Mehl, "La scénographie, une discipline à part entière," *Culture & Musées*, 16, 2010, 248–252, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/pumus.2010.1577.

41

We worked with the teams of the host institutions and several agencies, such as Atelier Maciej Fiszer at MNHI, Westerman Design LLC at NYPL, and Karşılaşmalar Agency at Depo and CerModern.

returned to their place of conservation, the entire scenography had been dismantled and at that point, we expected that the only tangible trace of the ephemeral product that is every exhibition would be the printed catalogue.[42] However, we received requests to display the exhibition elsewhere, in a way we had not foreseen. We decided to embark on this adventure. From one adaptation to the next, this led us to progressively conceive the formula of a "touring exhibition" which is fundamentally based on rewriting, adaptation and modularity. In other words, visitors to *Lieux Saints Partagés/Shared Sacred Sites* in Marseille, Tunis, Marrakesh, New York or Istanbul did not see the same exhibition. The substance and the guiding ideas were broadly the same, but not the artworks or the objects presented, nor the spaces and the scenography.

To conclude with a metaphor, the long process of creating and recreating this exhibition involved not only writing a musical score, but also composing (or at least attempting to compose) different orchestrations of it, and finally conducting various musical ensembles, always respecting, as far as possible, both the idiosyncrasies of a number of renowned soloists, and the inclination and willingness of the various musicians, who are all crucial to giving substance to the project.