DISRUPTING CONTEXT: MAKING A CASE FOR THE DIGITAL CURATION OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

S Masters & T Welman (Stellenbosch University)

This paper suggests that lessons can be learned from both the failed Red Location Museum, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa and the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, with regard to the curation of collections of classical artefacts in South African museums. Once considered more important, these artefacts have now fallen out of synch with the current museological trends to exhibit local and neglected histories. The antiquities are now cultural 'orphans', mostly boxed up and in storage, a sign of their lack of 'relevance' to the immediate South African context. Digitising the collection and creating a virtual museum of classical antiquities with open access will allow the pieces to be viewed without being offensive to their immediate context which currently views them as less relevant than before. In doing so it is possible to create new contexts for the reception, appreciation and ultimately, preservation of such orphan collections.

Fig. 1: Red-figured hydria and Corinthian aryballos from Iziko Museums of South Africa's collection of classical antiquities. Photo reproduced by kind permission of Iziko Museums of South Africa.

1   Introduction

This paper emerges out of research currently ongoing for an NRF Thuthuka-funded project entitled *Collecting classical antiquities in South Africa: Data, history and analysis c. 1820-present.*[1] The project investigates the 17 collections of classical antiquities that exist in South African museums, which fall into two main categories: public state museums on the one hand and university museums on the other. Collected mostly during the eras of British colonial rule and apartheid, this project seeks to ask key questions such as:

1.   How did these collections of antiquities get to South African shores?

2.   Did colonial and apartheid ideology play some, even if an indirect, role in the collection of such artefacts?

3.   Where are they now? (the answer is mainly in storage, especially in the case of state-owned collections); and

4.   Did ideology play a role in that process in post-transformation South Africa?

Another key issue that will be explored is what meaning — and future — do they have in the contemporary South African context, and if they have a future, in what form? The difficult issue that may ultimately need confronting is whether classical antiquities in South Africa — like the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the University of Cape Town campus — have literally outlived their shelf-life? Or is the context of the traditional museum no longer and for the time being, a viable context of displaying classical antiquities in South Africa? If not what does one do with these 'orphan' artefacts? Are there other contexts of display and avenues worth exploring?

2.   The importance of context

The importance of context in the interpretation and reception of texts — be they verbal and literary, on the one hand, or visual and artistic on the other — is something that has of course occupied scholarship in the humanities for some time. Even before Derrida made the claim that 'There is nothing outside of context' (Derrida 1988:136) we have been interrogating various contexts in various ways, coming to terms with how they affect meanings of texts or artefacts.

So, we know well that we cannot think about text without context, or more accurately context*s* since a text or artefact does not exist in only one context, but many. Contexts are broader than purely physical, but they include historical, social, epistemological and political contexts to name the most obvious ones. Context is of crucial importance, then, and contexts — never neutral — contribute meaning to any object of interpretation, whether textual or visual or archaeological.

During the course of this project, we have reflected on museum context(s) and audience(s) and how these may affect the success or failure of a museum's goal to reach an audience. Museums have a multitude of functions, but it is taken as fundamental that a museum aims to make connections with people, that the contents of the museum are made available and accessible to an audience. During this project we have also considered how an altered or reinvented context can alter, extend or increase the ability of the museum or collection to reach their audience(s).

Heritage discussions in South Africa have been ongoing since before the official date of transformation: the first democratic elections of 1994. However, the impassioned #Rhodesmustfall movement of 2015 has resulted in a recent heated re-emergence of the heritage discussion.[2] The #Rhodesmustfall campaign resulted in the removal of the statue of Randlord and colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes from pride of place on the University of Cape Town campus, and revealed many important things about the South African democracy in its 21st year, including how thorny and controversial the issue of heritage in the 'New South Africa' is. The campaign was in many ways *not* about the statue, nor only about perceived injustices at UCT, but the statue became emblematic of a perceived lack of transformation and the failure to decolonise certain areas of South African society. 'Cecil Rhodes' colonial legacy must fall — not his statue', said Siya Mnyanda in an article for the Guardian.[3] However, while some simply wanted to relegate the statue of Rhodes to the 'dustbin of history' simply for being Rhodes, for many, it was the *context* of Rhodes' statue, occupying a prominent position at the top of Jameson Steps, lording over the UCT campus, surveying his empire and legacy, in post-transformation South Africa that was particularly unpalatable. Rebecca Hodes pointed out how 'The statue's stand-alone persistence at the heart of the University's upper campus [was] itself a matter of wonder', and how it had continued to exist in this prominent spot 'unmediated by an oppositional placard

---

[2]   http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/
[3]   http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/25/south-africa-rhodesmustfall-statue

or sculptural riposte to the validity of Rhodes' vision'.[4] It was as much the monument's relationship with its context (both physical and socio-political) as its identity as Rhodes, that ultimately led to its violent removal.

Museums also operate in close relationship with their various contexts — be they physical, historical, social, economic, political and epistemological to name a few. To explore the question around how context can be conducive to the success of a museum in reaching an audience or how on the basis of context, this museological goal may fail, this paper reflects on three case studies: first the Red Location Museum, a museum of the struggle which is in New Bristol, Port Elizabeth, South Africa; second the vast collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Netherlands; and third, the collection of classical antiquities belonging to Iziko Museums of South Africa in Cape Town. We argue that lessons can be learned from both the failed Red Location Museum and the massively successful Rijksmuseum with regard to the curation of collections of classical artefacts in South African museums. Once considered important and worthy of display, these classical artefacts have now fallen out of synch with the current museological trends to exhibit local and neglected histories (such as slavery or the struggle narratives of the Red Location Museum for example). The antiquities are now cultural 'orphans', mostly boxed up and in storage, they are 'unseen' and difficult to access, a sign of their lack of 'relevance' to the immediate South African context. However, digitising the collection and creating a virtual museum of classical antiquities with open access — such as recently achieved by the Rijksmuseum — will allow the pieces to be viewed without being deemed offensive to their immediate context which currently views them as less relevant than before. In doing so it is possible to create new — and in fact global — contexts for the reception, appreciation and ultimately, preservation of such 'orphan' collections.

3   The Red Location Museum

The Red Location Museum of the Struggle, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, is a state-of-the art museum which has been awarded three international architectural prizes, including the prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Lubetkin Prize in 2006.[5] It is a highly relevant museum, with a very important story to tell and it has the trappings of a great museum that is fully in synch with current heritage ideology. However, like the antiquities, its collection

---

4   http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-03-13-the-rhodes-statue-must-fall-ucts-radical-rebirth/#.Vo57yr_e77w

5   http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/south-africas-red-location-museum-lands-inaugural-lubetkin-prize/579933.fullarticle

is currently unseen because it has been closed since 18 October 2013 due to community protests.[6]

It is situated in one of South Africa's oldest black townships. Begun in 2003, the museum was initially conceptualised as an apartheid museum but later redefined its identity as a Museum of Struggle, to differentiate it from the Apartheid Museum near Gold Reef City in Johannesburg (Slessor 2011:44). The New Brighton museum is strongly rooted in its own local environment. The area of New Brighton was highly politicised and a key centre of anti-apartheid activity and resistance during the struggle years (Findley 2005:136-137; Slessor 2011:42). The Red Location area within New Brighton, and the museum, both take their name from the red colour of the rusting corrugated iron shacks located near the museum (Slessor 2011:42-44). The historic shacks were once Anglo-Boer War (also known as South African War) concentration camp barracks constructed in Uitenhage by the English for Boer women and children, after which they were used as army barracks before being relocated in 1903 to New Brighton, which was a mixed race working class town, for use in what was called a 'model native settlement' (Findley 2005:136). This was in line with the Native Reserve Locations Act of 1902 but before the apartheid-era legislation, the Group Areas Act of 1950 which further segregated the area.

New Brighton residents were actively involved in anti-apartheid activity, the area was a hotbed of resistance and activism from the early 1950s onwards; ANC cells, banned and driven underground, met clandestinely in New Brighton to plan and discuss their civil disobedience campaign, and during police raids ANC leaders such as Govan Mbeki and others were often hidden by residents in shallow basements excavated under the Red Location houses (Findley 2005:136-137; Slessor 2011:42-44). The New Brighton railway station was also a significant site of defiance. In June 1952 members of the Defiance Campaign arrived at the train station at 5am in the morning to begin their campaign. They entered the station through the Whites Only entrance and were promptly arrested by police officers who were waiting for them (Findley 2005:136-137).

The physical site of the museum then — the Red Location in New Brighton — has strong struggle credentials which make it appropriate (on this level) as a location for a Museum of the Struggle. The placement of the museum in Red Location was in fact a community initiative: a few years after the fall of apartheid, local community leaders, including Govan Mbeki, began working on an idea to commemorate Red Location and its involvement in the struggle,

---

[6] http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/PE-residents-force-anti-apartheid-museum-to-close-20140731

as well as a plan to uplift the community and bring people (including tourists and their dollars or euros) into New Brighton (Findley 2005:138). One of the legacies of apartheid, of course, was the spatial isolation and relegation of non-white communities. Important civic buildings, such as museums, were normally located in the white city centres. The Red Location project, which in addition to the Museum, would also include an art centre and gallery, market hall, library, and conference centre, as well as housing and accommodation, aimed to break down such spatial divisions, invigorate a marginalised community, bringing work, tourism and a sense of pride to the area.

Findley, writing in 2005 before the museum had actually opened said optimistically:

> … the museum has had a curious effect on the people of New Brighton. Suddenly, their neglected and marginalised town is the location of a large, serious public institution. They are now part of the metropolitan area in a way they have never been. The civic urban sensibility this brings has inestimable value. To the quality of the citizens' pride in their place, once resting on the sombre community achievements of resistance and survival, has been added a pride in something tangible; a visible symbol of their struggle and the freedoms it achieved (Findley 2005:156-157).

The architectural competition, which was announced in 1998 was won by the Cape-based firm of Noero Wolff architects (Findley 2005:141). One of the selling points of the Noero Wolff design was its industrial aesthetic and its use of 'ordinary materials' such as poured concrete, corrugated tin and wooden poles which speak to its immediate environment in several ways. (Findley 2005:140-141). It is, as Findlay puts it, 'a celebration of the ordinary materials that the local people have scrounged over the years to keep out the rain and to hold the Red Location shacks together' (Findley 2005:141). With its saw-toothed roof, '… it is a nod to the factories across the railroad tracks from Red Location where the ANC first began to form among the auto-workers' (Findley 2005:141). However, the aesthetic is also purposefully very different from the architectural language of other existing colonial and apartheid era museums, libraries and civic buildings in South Africa which represented exclusion from public life for non-white residents of the country. The architect Noero puts it this way: 'most public buildings in South Africa were viewed with distrust since they were associated with the ruling apartheid government' (1999 quoted in Findley 2005:141). The new industrial aesthetic used for the museum is intended to be celebratory, utilitarian and welcoming to the community. It is coherent within its own landscape.

The interior of the museum has also been lauded as highly innovative and successful. Trying to avoid the narrative hierarchy of the Gold Reef Apartheid Museum where the story of Apartheid is told from one 'omniscient' or 'objective' point of view, the architects of the Red Location Museum have tried to design a spatial network for the main exhibition that presents multiple points of view on the same oppressive era (Findley 2005:144). It does this through the creation of a huge exhibition space within which are placed twelve equally sized rooms or 'memory boxes' (Slessor 2011:42). The boxes are closed on all four sides, have no windows, but only a door through which to enter and exit. The top of the box is open to allow light to filter in from above (Findley 2005:146). The concept of the memory box relies on the brightly painted trunks that migrant black workers in South Africa used to carry their possessions, but also their personal mementos from home (Findley 2005:146). These exhibition memory boxes each present a different perspective on apartheid, either telling a story of particular events, specific places or personal experiences through objects.

The memory boxes therefore are not 'official histories' but present human experiences and memories, they are perspectives on the lived experience of apartheid. The content of each box is not advertised from the outside, one has to enter the memory box to experience it, and visitors are left to make their own decisions about what to make of the content, how to interpret it, and also how to move between the boxes. There is no prescribed route between the rooms as there usually is in traditional museums (Findley 2005:146-148).

However, while the physical context, design, content and goals of the Museum are all exemplary, the project was beset with challenges before it even broke ground (Findley 2005:152-157). Findley describes several setbacks, delays and controversies. She elaborates on the processes of consultation that occurred between the local government and the community, who, she says, believed in the project so much that they chose the Museum, which would cost R30 million, rather than the 1500 new houses that that money could pay for in the town. She says:

> The mayor offered the citizens exactly that bargain: 1500 houses instead of one Museum. The citizens chose the Museum despite the fact that a large number of them continue in desperate living conditions ...' (Findley 2005:157).

This last sentence is telling. These deals were made in 1998, in a climate of optimism, hope and enthusiasm for the New South Africa. However, these sentiments soon gave way to resentment.

Fig. 2: Page that appears instead of opening times on the Red Location Museum's web-site. Image source: http://www.freewebs.com/redlocationmuseuminfo/contactdetails.htm.

The museum has now been closed for more than two years because of protests from the community, attacks on visitors, as well as the physical stripping of the building for materials for surrounding shacks that are hardly liveable.[7] The materials with which the museum is built are precisely the kind of materials that are useful to such a community. Having cost almost R30 million to build, the poverty-wracked community soon began to struggle with the incongruity embodied in the museum in their own socio-economic context. They ask: 'Why build a house for dead people when us, the living, do not have a roof over our heads?'[8] The museum website says that the museum is closed indefinitely.[9] Some other parts of the planned complex have not materialised. The Red Location Museum then, is a fundamentally good museum with relevant content in the wrong social, political and economic context. The mandate of the museum — to reach local and international audiences alike — has failed for a complex combination of reasons. Against a background where the needs of basic housing, hygiene and water are lacking, the incongruity of this well built and well serviced building stands in stark and unpalatable relief.

---

[7]   http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/PE-residents-force-anti-apartheid-museum-to-close-20140731.

[8]   http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/PE-residents-force-anti-apartheid-museum-to-close-20140731.

[9]   http://www.freewebs.com/redlocationmuseuminfo/contactdetails.htm.

4   The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

At the other extreme is the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, an established world museum in a first world context. The museum opened in its present building which is situated on Museum Square in Amsterdam, in 1885 and was recently renovated between 2003-2013.[10] Its famous collection needs no introduction; among the one million objects in the collection are Rembrandt's Night Watch, Vermeer's Milkmaid / Kitchen Maid, and Frans Hals' Merry Drinker and various other Dutch masterpieces. Of the one million paintings or objects, about 8000 are on display at any given time.[11] The Museum, basically a national gallery of Dutch painting from the years 1200-2000, has no issue with relevance or buy-in and support from local and international communities. Visitor numbers reflect this. The museum hit an annual visitor total of one million in 1975, and numbers have been growing since then, though they understandably dropped during the years of the renovation 2003-2013 when much of the museum and collection was inaccessible. The reopened museum has now exceeded all expectations with visitor numbers soaring to almost 2.5 million visitors per year in 2014.[12]

In 2011 the Museum began exploring the idea of making a large number of images from the collection available online — this in itself was not innovative, many world museums have begun digitising their collections and allowing them to be viewed online for some time. However, what was unique was the scale of the project, as well as the fact that these images would become freely available for downloading and re-using without restriction — to make them open access.[13] Joris Pekel (n.d:5) of the European Foundation describes this process:

> Not only did they make around 150,000 images available online, they made them available openly and in the highest possible resolution. The quality of the images is good enough to print on a bed cover, a poster or a wall, and it is communicated by the museum actively that this kind of use is allowed and encouraged.

---

[10]   https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation/history-of-the-rijksmuseum
[11]   ww.dutchamsterdam.nl/138-rijksmuseum-amsterdam
[12]   https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-welcomes-two-millionth-visitor;   https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-sees-record-attendance-in-2014;
       http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4512/Cultuur/article/detail/3813163/2014/12/17/Recordaantal-van-bijna-2-5-miljoen-bezoekers-naar-Rijksmuseum.dhtml.
[13]   These images are pictures of works that are out of copyright and in the public domain (in the case of the Netherlands, this is when their creator / artist has been dead for 70 years). So this would cover the majority of the works owned by the Rijksmuseum.

The scale of the project is massive: To date about 250 000 high quality images are available and the museum plans to continue to release about 40 000 images per year to their online open access platform until every item in its collection is digitised and freely available (Pekel n.d:5). The other impressive element is the openness of the policy for use in any way desired, including commercial endeavours. The museum allows these images to be downloaded for use in apps through an API (Application Programming Interface)[14] and through the Rijksstudio, where one can store and curate one's own 'exhibitions' and one is encouraged to use them to create artworks from the artworks.[15]

Making the images available for use in apps, online and for other creative outputs was an extremely bold step and one that did not happen overnight, it was of course a process and the museum co-operated with a variety of other organisations such as the Europeana Foundation, Kennisland, Wikimedia Foundation, the Open Knowledge Foundation, Apps4Netherlands and the Open Cultuur Data challenge (Pekel n.d:5-7). The project also evolved as time went on. Initially the Museum was cautious and wanted to exert some control of the users, for example 'they wanted to use a Creative Commons Attribution 3(CC-BY) mark on their material, as it required the user to attribute the item to the museum' (Pekel n.d:6). However, on advice from various open data foundations and groups, the museum even abandoned this requirement.

Another potential concern was a loss in revenue related to image rights. Initially in 2011-2012 the museum also sold images via their image bank (Pekel 2013). While the high quality images of about 2 mb were available for free, the museum charged a fee for the huge tiff files of about 150 mb. The museum indicated that they did not see a drop in this revenue at all, in fact, the opposite was true. The number of sales dramatically increased: the total revenue from images sales in 2012 increased to €181,000 (Pekel 2013). Again in a surprising and liberal move, the museum took a further step. They abandoned the sale of images altogether, making the highest quality images available for free (Pekel 2013).While €181,000 sounds like a lot of money, it in fact represents only 0.2% of the total revenue of the Rijksmuseum during that period.

One of the arguments against open access was the fear that people wouldn't need to come to the museum any more. If the entire collection is available online, with such excellent quality images as well as metadata, would they still actually visit the collection? As the visitor numbers indicate, actual feet through the door has almost doubled since this move to open access, so online exposure and availability of images has certainly not negatively affected the number of visits to

---

[14]   www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/api
[15]   www.rijksmuseum.nl/enrijksstudio

the museum itself.[16] Pekel (n.d.13-14) in fact argues that while it is impossible to accredit these increased numbers only to the online open access policy, the availability of the material does generate a sense of goodwill and piques interest in the museum — people are in fact drawn to visit the actual masterpieces in the museum having seen them online. He argues convincingly, then, that the reverse is actually true.[17]

This move to open access has, for the Rijksmuseum, in effect, opened up the collection to innumerable contexts of reception and consumption. The reach has extended exponentially and far beyond the website of the Museum. The material is now being shared and used widely in all kinds of online platforms such as Wikipedia or educational websites, and images are being used in all kinds of creative enterprises. The Rijksmuseum case is being held up as a model for cultural heritage institutions worldwide.

5   *The Iziko collection of classical antiquities, Cape Town*

The two rather dissimilar case studies — of the Red Location Museum and the Rijksmuseum — can provide useful perspectives on the collections of classical antiquities in the South African context, and on ways of allowing them to reach a broader audience, or in the case of the Iziko antiquities, any audience at all. The antiquities at Iziko were acquired over the course of the years 1850-1993 (this time period includes colonial and apartheid eras).[18] After being on display in the South African Museum and then the South African Cultural History Museum, the Iziko collection of antiquities was put into storage in 2003 when the Cultural History Museum building reverted to being the Slave Lodge, the goal of which was to memorialise the slave history of the Cape.[19] The antiquities collection currently resides in storage cabinets at the Iziko Social History Centre on Heritage Square, in Cape Town. The pieces are currently, then, seen by very few individuals apart from curators, and a few academics. As part of the Thuthuka project we are currently in the process of adding these artefacts to an electronic database, using the database

---

[16] https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-welcomes-two-millionth-visitor; https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-sees-record-attendance-in-2014; http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4512/Cultuur/article/detail/3813163/2014/12/17/Recordaantal-van-bijna-2-5-miljoen-bezoekers-naar-Rijksmuseum.dhtml.

[17] Other international institutions, such as the British Museum, also have many good quality images available online, with no negative impact on 'feet through the door'.

[18] This collection and its history is discussed in more detail in Masters 2016.

[19] *Transformation of Iziko Slave Lodge into slave memory centre,* Press release issued by Iziko Museums of Cape Town 05/25/2006

software Filemaker Pro. We are doing the same for the other collections of classical antiquities in the country.

During the course of this Thuthuka project we have discovered that, while a number of factors were at play in the decisions that sent these artefacts into storage, the shifts in heritage policy, driven by a new Afrocentric ideology certainly played a role. The White Paper of 1996 encouraged museums and heritage institutions to do a complete overhaul of their exhibits and the prevailing outmoded attitude to 'other' cultures. Other legislation followed, including the National Heritage Resources Act (act no 25 of 1999) [NHRA]; National Heritage Bill (1998); National Heritage Council Bill (1999a); and the National Heritage Resources Bill (1999) (Galla 2003). Acquired during the heyday of colonialism and apartheid, and quintessentially 'European' in origin, these classical artefacts have fallen out of synch with the current museological trends to exhibit local and neglected histories (such as the Slave History at the Slave Lodge and the struggle narratives of the Red Location Museum).

In the Thuthuka project we are calling such artefacts 'orphan objects', which we loosely define as museum objects that belong to the government, but originate in another country and in another era, and have fallen out of favour with the current museological status quo. During this project we are also investigating their potential perceived status as items of 'negative heritage' in Lynn Meskell's terms. Meskell refers to 'a conflictual site [artefact] that becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary' (2002:558) as *negative heritage*. These sites or artefacts can either be used to educate and inform, such as remainders of the Berlin Wall still standing in Germany, or if the sites are deemed completely unable to fit in with current policies or ideologies they are often destroyed or removed to a different context, for example images of Hendrik Verwoerd, which are stored at the Voortrekker Monument,[20] and the recent removal of the Rhodes statue mentioned above.

In this project, we are investigating whether one could go so far as to say that classical items in museums can be deemed offensive to a South African context, are they repositories of *negative memory*? Our initial response to this is that even though Lambert (2011) has argued that the classical languages played a role in the creation of British colonial and apartheid identities in South Africa, this does not carry over in a significant way into museum spaces. Although classical items were appreciated and deemed worthy of display, they were not highly sought-after items that were held up for their aesthetic perfection, nor were they actively collected by South African state museums. A study of acquisitions at Iziko

---

[20] http://mg.co.za/article/2011-06-17-finding-verwoerd-lifting-the-lid-on-dustbin-of-history.

for example, reveals that these items were acquired mainly through bequests and donations rather than through purchases (Masters 2016). We suspect then, that except for individual extreme views, for the majority of South African people, these specific items would not be perceived as negative heritage, but are more likely to be perceived in fairly neutral terms — as items of world history.

Yet, while not items of negative heritage, they are still 'orphans' and while the odd object is used in comparative displays here and there, for example, in 2014 a Greek amphora and an Etruscan bucchero ring askos appeared in the Design & Making [the story of food] exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope, they are mostly unseen, and unlikely to spend much time in the exhibition case in the foreseeable future. For now their current context — as part of a national museum collection in post-transformation South Africa — is unsupportive of their display in any of the actual Iziko Museum buildings. We compare the antiquities at Iziko (or belonging to other state museums) with the Red Location museum in that they are, while very different in content and for very different reasons, both unseen, neither are reaching any audience at the moment because of an unsupportive context. The Rijksmuseum example, however, presents the liberating possibilities that the digital realm can hold for museums and their collections.

An unsupportive context can be disrupted through the process of proper digitisation of the collection, with the goal of making decent images of the objects, as well as their metadata, available online, and possibly even with open access. There are many reasons to properly digitise a collection. The Digital Antiquity project states two of its goals as the following: 'One is to improve substantially the ease of accessing and using archaeological information. The other, equally important, is to provide for the long-term preservation of the irreplaceable records of archaeological investigations.'[21]

The Iziko antiquities, however, currently have a negligible online presence. The Filemaker database will achieve the goal of preserving the data related to these objects, it will not make the objects more accessible to the general public. The Iziko webpage refers to the classical collection briefly and includes two images — 'Isis bust' and 'Greek urn' — out of the approximately 250 items owned by the museum.[22] While Egypt receives much more coverage with various tabs and links to photographs of artefacts, relative to the number of roughly 500 Egyptian artefacts owned by Iziko, the website provides only a tiny proportion of photographs.[23]

---

[21] http://www.digitalantiquity.org/about/
[22] http://media1.mweb.co.za/iziko/sh/collections/ancclascult.html
[23] http://egyptinsouthafrica.iziko.org.za/

Digitisation of the collection of classical (and Egyptian) antiquities and making them available online will of course improve access to these objects for international scholars and the public alike. Several of the items in the classical collection, particularly the Attic vases, are high quality and worthy of international attention, but their inaccessibility means that they are seldom mentioned by scholars. One could even posit a moral argument for the digitisation of items in public museums. As public institutions, the museum has a duty to allow the public access to its collections — and what better way to do so than through the digital realm.

Taking the project a step further and making the images of the artefacts open access would further extend their audience and appeal. The example of the Rijksmuseum has shown that a liberal open data policy brings much interest and benefit to a museum institution. People are drawn to data / images that are free for obvious reasons, and their use thereof increases exposure to the institution. Scholars are more likely to include such images in articles and books, not least of all because the permissions process is much less complicated, or non-existent.

However, it is acknowledged that a comparison between Iziko and the Rijksmuseum is a disproportionate one in terms of scale and wealth — again, issues of context even if of a different kind. While the intention to digitise may well be there, the problem with making this a reality is of course overwhelmingly financial. Even if Iziko were to agree in principle, it is unlikely that there would be budget allocated for such a process to be conducted on an already marginalised collection. The funding for such a project at the moment would need to come from some external source. In addition, a move to open access might just be a step too far at the moment. If one were to follow an open access model as liberal as the Rijksmuseum, the potential loss of revenue from image rights may well make a difference to a smaller heritage institution such as Iziko.

Maybe the solution lies in between, in a compromise position articulated by Pekel (n.d.14-15):

> For this reason the previous setup of the Rijksmuseum — where they make good quality images freely available to popularise their collection, and charge for the master files — can be a good solution for cultural institutions. This way, a wide variety of audiences get unrestricted access to the material and can get more familiar with it. And they pay a small fee for the highest resolution. This way the public domain images are not hidden away from the public, so the institution lives up to its public duty, and it also allows the institution to still make a profit from the commercial sector.

6   Conclusion

To answer the question of what does one do with these 'orphan' artefacts it seems that their present and their immediate future lies in the context of the digital realm rather than the traditional museum vitrine. Antiquities are not current priorities for the South African government (Chirikure 2013:1) since problems, such as housing, poverty, healthcare, and education understandably take priority over 'non-essential' issues such as heritage, especially heritage that is perceived as 'Eurocentric' (Meskell 2002; Meskell & Scheermeyer 2009). With the renewed discussions emerging around heritage and decolonisation it seems even less likely that these objects will see their way into the museum case again very soon. Digitisation is the most viable context of display for these 'orphan' items of world culture — for the time being until perhaps a more supportive context develops once more. While it is no replacement for the 'real thing', the Red Location Museum has also 'gone digital'; you can at least do a virtual tour of the museum while the community issues are endeavouring to be solved.[24] When a more supportive context may develop for the antiquities we cannot predict. In the meantime, digitisation provides a good solution for various kinds of collections in South African museums which are not on display for a variety of reasons. Museums always have much, much more than they can ever display anyway, whether for practical or ideological reasons. The physical restrictions of the museum space can also be disrupted through the digital realm. The words of Rijksmuseum curator Lizzy Jongma (quoted by Pekel, n.d.:5) provide an apt conclusion: 'There is not a single physical space where all our heritage can be shown, but on the internet it can!'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chirikure, S 2013. Heritage conservation in Africa: The good, the bad and the challenges. *South African Journal of Science* 109:1-2.

Derrida, J 1988. Afterword: Toward an ethic of discussion. In *Limited Inc.*, 111-154. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois.

Digital Antiquity online. http://www.digitalantiquity.org/about/

Dutch Amsterdam website: www.dutchamsterdam.nl/138-rijksmuseum-amsterdam

Findlay, L 2005. *Building change: Architecture, politics and cultural agency*. London: Routledge .

Galla, A 2003. Transformation in South Africa: A legacy challenged. *Museum International* 51.2:38-43.

---

[24]   www.nelsonmandelabay.gov.za/VIRTUAL_TOURS/redlocation/Gr_redlocation.html

Hodes, R 13 March 2015. The Rhodes statue must fall: UCT's radical rebirth. *The Daily Maverick*. http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-03-13-the-rhodes-statue-must-fall-ucts-radical-rebirth/#.Vo57yr_e77w

Iziko Museums of South Africa press release issued 05/25/2006. *Transformation of Iziko slave lodge into slave memory centre*.

Iziko classical collections online: http://media1.mweb.co.za/iziko/sh/collections/ancclascult.html

Iziko. Egypt in South Africa. http://egyptinsouthafrica.iziko.org.za/

Lambert, M 2011. *The classics and South African identities*. London: Bristol Classical Press.

Masters, S 2016. Museum space and displacement: Collecting classical antiquities in South Africa. In Parker, G (ed.), *South Africa, Greece and Rome: Classical confrontations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meskell, L 2002. Negative heritage and past mastering in archaeology. *Anthropological Quarterly* 75.3:557-574.

Meskell, L & Scheermeyer, C 2008. Heritage as therapy: Set pieces from the new South Africa. *Journal of Material Culture* 13:153.

Mnyanda, S 25 March 2015. Cecil Rhodes' colonial legacy must fall – not his statue. *The Guardian Africa Network*. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/25/south-africa-rhodesmustfall -statue

News 24 website, 31 July 2014. PE residents force anti-apartheid museum to close. http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/PE-residents-force-anti-apartheid-museum-to-close-20140731

O'Toole, S 17 June 2011. Where apartheid statues go to die. *Mail & Guardian* online. http://mg.co.za/article/2011-06-17-finding-verwoerd-lifting-the-lid-on-dustbin-of-history

Pekel, J n.d. Democratising the Rijksmuseum: Why did the Rijksmuseum make available their highest quality material without restrictions, and what are the results? *Europeana Foundation*. http://pro.europeana.eu/files/Europeana_Professional/Publications/Democratising%20the%20Rijksmuseum.pdf

Pekel, J 2013. Case study: Rijksmuseum releases 111.000 high quality images to the public domain. http://openglam.org/2013/02/27/case-study-rijksmuseum-releases-111-000-high-quality-images-to-the-public-domain/

Red Location Museum website. www.nelsonmandelabay.gov.za/VIRTUAL_TOURS/redlocation/Gr_redlocation.html

Rhodes must fall website. http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/

THE DIGITAL CURATION OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES   99

Rijksmuseum website. History of the Rijksmuseum.
https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation/history-of-the-rijksmuseum
—— Rijksmuseum welcomes two millionth visitor.
https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-
welcomes-two-millionth-visitor
—— Rijksmuseum sees record attendance in 2014.
https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-sees-
record-attendance-in-2014
Slessor, C 2011. Memory and struggle. In *The Architectural Review*
http://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/2009-september-museum-
port-elizabeth-nero-wolff-south-africa/8622024.fullarticle
The Architect's Journal website, 26 June, 2006. Red Location Museum lands in-
augural Lubetkin Prize.
http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/south-africas-red-location-
museum-lands-inaugural-lubetkin-prize/579933.fullarticle
Trouw website. Recordaantal van bijna 2.5 miljoen bezoekers naar Rijksmuseum.
http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4512/Cultuur/article/detail/3813163/2014/12/17/
Recordaantal-van-bijna-2-5-miljoen-bezoekers-naar-Rijksmuseum.dhtml