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From the Earth to the Sky, from Material to Sign: ancestral techniques in Shipibo ceramics from Peruvian Amazonia

The Ethnological Materials Laboratory of the Vatican Museums has been a location of ongoing training for eleven years. Our work is mostly orientated towards the knowledge, conservation and sharing of the ethnological collections. This extraordinary experience enables us to continually face the challenges posed by a broad range of materials and techniques belonging to extra-European cultures through an interdisciplinary approach to conservation. The precious vases in the Ethnological Museum, sent to Pope Pius XI on the occasion of the Jubilee Year of 1925, are a rare example of the ancient and traditional technique of ceramic work of the Shipibo, an ancient and skilful ethnic group from the central Peruvian Amazonian regions of the Ucayali, which have conserved their artistic and artisanal traditions, now considered an example of Cultural Heritage. The ceramics, regarded as the most important expression of Amazonian indigenous art, are produced by women whose skills are passed from generation to generation. They are noted for their characteristic geometric designs, rich in symbolism and representing ancient beliefs. A preliminary study of the vases in the ethnological collection, carried out with the support of the Diagnostics Laboratory for Conservation and Restoration, will illustrate the context, the traditional technique of the production processes in all their various phases, their ethnographic-ritual meaning, the methods used for the primary maintenance procedures, the conservational problems encountered, research and diagnostic study. The decision to carry out these procedures on the collection of Shipibo ceramics was motivated by the need to raise awareness, and to transmit and deepen knowledge of the contexts in and modi operandi by which the works were produced, so as to identify and plan conservational solutions using the information acquired, to preserve the vases while respecting their cultural roots.

Fortunatina Cuozzo

Restorer, Ethnological Materials Laboratory, Vatican Museums

Fabio Morresi

Assistant, Diagnostics Laboratory for Conservation and Restoration, Vatican Museums



The Conservation of African Heritage and the communication network: EPA-project

L'Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA) which has the status of an international organization, is located in Porto-Novo, Republic of Benin. It is a postgraduate university institution, specialized in the preservation and promotion of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. For over a decade EPA has been dedicated to training and capacity building in conservation for heritage professionals in public and private cultural institutions from 26 sub-Saharan African countries. EPA also addresses many actors confronted directly or indirectly to issues related to conservation, management and promotion of heritage, in the exercise of their functions. Recognizing the key role that heritage can play in the sustainable development of African countries, and in view of the many dangers threatening this heritage in its various forms, EPA is dedicated to the relationship between training in conservation, the best practices it provides, and activities that promote communication through the emergence of active professional networks for a better sharing and professional solidarity. The presentation will discuss the role of communication and sharing in the management and conservation of heritage, particularly through a case study on the rehabilitation of the Royal Palaces (a Museum) of Abomey in Benin. These earthen palaces are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Aimé Gonçalves

Lecturer, African Heritage Conservation School, EPA



Huaca de la Luna Project, Huacas Moches, Peru

Huaca de la Luna (Temple of the Moon) is the main edifice of the archaeological complex of the Moche Temples (I-VII centuries A.D.), situated in the south of Trujillo and six kilometres from the sea, on the northern coast of Peru. Its geo-topographical location is a determining factor in the pathological of this architectonic and structural system with its polychrome surface. The structure is made of weak earth, worn and vulnerable. The desert landscape surrounding it accentuates the impact of the sun, rain and wind, generating intense abrasive erosion giving rise to loss of mass. Scientific research develops studies in the fields of archaeology, the environment, architecture, conservation, physics, chemistry and engineering. This is the purpose of the foundation of the Centro de Investigación de Arquitectura de Tierra (Centre for Research on Earth-Based Architecture), a pioneering force in the analysis and diagnosis of pathologies, and the study of the results of consolidation techniques and materials used. This type of conservation has been included in international papers and in the theory of Brandi. It is characterised by minimal intervention, avoiding aesthetic reintegrations, and the practice of preventative conservation and the consolidation of the original in its current state. Monitoring and maintenance are two systematic post-conservation activities which are carried out in the polychromatic areas exposed to tourism and in the unrestored structures.

Ricardo Morales Gamarra

Director of the “Huaca de la Luna” project



Clay Buddhist sculptures in Central Asia: conservation and restoration problems

The spread of Hellenism in Asia between the IV and III centuries BC converted Central Asia into the cradle of the artistic expression that is nowadays recognised as “Greco-Buddhist”. This new current, which emerged as a result of the contact between the Hellenistic and Buddhist traditions, was characterised by its extreme spatial dynamism (it covered regions of present-day China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan) and, temporally, by its constant transformation until the penetration of Islam in the VII century. Greco-Buddhist art achieved, in the field of sculpture, one of its most spectacular manifestations: earth was used as the principal material for the modelling of the monumental representations that embellish the walls of numerous temples and monasteries dispersed along the Silk Road. Most documentation of these sculptures was obtained due to the discoveries made by western explorers at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century, who made forays into the regions where the works are located for the geostrategic purposes of cartographical documentation. Many of these known examples disappeared and only a few fragments are conserved in various European and Central Asian museums, often facing serious problems linked to conservation. The extensive excavations carried out by Soviet archaeologists during the years 1960-90 and the recent reopening of the archaeological sites in Afghanistan and Xinjiang have brought to light extraordinary new evidence. As a consequence, there has emerged an ever more compelling need to study new strategies for the conservation and restoration of this patrimony. Indeed, although throughout the last decade we have witnessed growing interest among the international community in the field of conservation of architecture in raw earth and in the pictorial decoration associated with it, serious consideration of the conservation of earth-based sculpture remains almost nonexistent.

Mónica Lopez-Prat

Centre d'Estudis del Patrimoni Arqueològic de la Prehistòria, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona



Contemporary artists using raw clay in their work: conservation problems

Artists have always considered clay to be a particularly expressive medium, on account of its versatility and ease of use, enabling the preparation and trial phases for sculptures, then created from more durable materials. The practice of baking or firing the material in order to guarantee its durability was not always favoured in the past, as the natural effect of the dry earth, with perhaps the patina of a light veil of colour, was often preferred. It was perhaps also a choice motivated by the expressive freedom of those who wished to distance themselves from the technical impositions of working in ceramics, which impose aesthetic decisions on the artist on the basis of the stability of the work.

Nowadays, however, the system of working with the material has decisively evolved; it is precisely in the unstable and precarious strength of the material that artists seek the evocative meanings of our time.

This is therefore not simply a case of aesthetic and formal research leading to choices regarding the maintenance of the raw material, but rather of intentions strongly expressed and defended in order to justify the choice of an ancient material, earth, in its simplest and most immediate form.

From this there derives the need to substitute perishable elements, as in the case of Mario Mertz who used earth in Giap's Igloo at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and in *Object cache toi*, which belongs to a private collection in Milan. With regard to the work of Marisa Mertz, there is the need to conserve, using compatible, delicate and effective methods, the raw material she used in her sculptures and which resists in spite of their fragility. Examples of work will be shown, beginning with the consolidation of a sculpture by Mastroianni made of raw earth, which has deteriorated due to an accidental water leak in the deposit in which it was stored, and the cleaning work carried out by the Museum on a work by Brodski, periodically flooded with oil during the preparation of the installation at the "Museo del Novecento" in Milan.

Finally, the ephemeral use of clay will be documented by means of an animated film demonstrating the work in its progressive mutations, until the completion of the performance, at which point there remains just a small heap of earth.

Antonio Rava

Lecturer, Centro Conservazione e Restauro La Venaria Reale



Conservation at Lambytico, Mexico: the challenges of earthen architecture

Lambityeco, a late-classical site situated in the valley of Oaxaca, in Mexico, has brought to light both theoretical and practical challenges in the conservation of architecture and decoration in earth. Built around 900 A.D., the site is exceptional on account of its delicate architecture and decoration, both made of bricks and plaster; for years researchers have sought the best strategy for its conservation.

Among its decorations there are religious and funerary elements, such as the portraits of the people in tomb number 6, the ornaments on the Tables of the temple and the magnificent Masks of Cocijo, God of Rain, in the patio of one of the buildings. These ornaments have been subject to numerous restoration interventions over time, typifying the various criteria representative of different periods.

This document describes the vicissitudes of the elements which have survived to the present day. At the same time, it gives an outline for some new strategies for achieving a better conservation of this emblematic site.

Nelly M. Robles García

National Coordinator of Archaeology, INAH



Materials for the Conservation and Restoration of earthen objects: synthetic vs natural materials

The use of appropriate techniques for the conservation and restoration of earthen materials, is the success for its preservation. Specific criteria and a detailed analysis and diagnosis must be done in order to obtain proper results: original context during its discovery, and later conditions are one of the primary issues to determine materials and techniques for conservation and restoration interventions. Earthen cultural objects, either raw decorative surfaces or decorated post fired ceramic objects will react to its environment, if exposed without an inspection of climatic conditions. This paper will show different conservation experiences either with synthetic or natural materials, and the results obtained after conservation derived from the standards established for their preservation, in situ or in museographic display areas. The use of new scientific methods, such as nanotechnology, as well as micro-emulsions to revert decay and retrieve important decorative layers painted on earthen walls will be discussed.

Nevertheless, it is important to remark that materials are not the problem for conservation issues, but the use of them in conditions that will not give the result expected, due to wrong decisions in their application, thus, creating evaluation protocols to determine the correct techniques is a very important task before the conservation process.

Lilia Rivero Weber

National Coordinator for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, INAH



Mali: conservation intervention on Mosques made of earth

This presentation begins with a demonstration of the restoration intervention carried out on the Great Mosque of Mopti, selected by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) as part of its project for the recovery of traditional architecture in Mali. Priority was given to this project because in 1978 a thick layer of cement was laid over the upper part of the mosque, an intervention which over the years has caused serious repercussions on the state of conservation of the monument. This drew the attention of the authorities and associations of local artisans to the serious phenomena of degradation induced by procedures which, although undertaken with the best of intentions, may in some cases prove inadequate, and also to the need to reintroduce traditional techniques and materials, and more effective methods of restoration and conservation. On the basis of his own experience as an advisor to the AKTC, in this first presentation Guy Devreux will describe the negative effects that western cultures may produce in these countries with regard to the conservation of monuments, and will show how now it is now more appropriate to form a model of intervention combining personal experience with the recovery of traditional methods and materials.

Josephine D'llario will then illustrate the process of restoring the Great Mosque Djingarey ber of Timbuktu.

The Great Mosque Djingarey ber of Timbuktu was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988, along with the other two mosques of Sidi Yahia and Sankorè, and was the object of the programme for "Revitalisation of Architecture in Mali" of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

The city of Timbuktu reached its greatest splendour between 1300 and 1500, when it became the cultural axis of the Arab world and was so rich in gold as to be considered a sort of El Dorado of the period. The celebrated emperor Kankan Moussa (1312-1337) organised a pilgrimage to Mecca (1324) with thousands of porters and hundreds of camels. Upon his return he ordered the construction of the mosque of Djingarey ber (c.1326) by the Arab architect of Andalusian origin, Abu Ishaq Es-Saheli. It is a living monument, not only on account of the annual crépissage (roughcasting) carried out by the massons of the city and by the population before the rainy season, but also for the large and small modifications carried out throughout the centuries in accordance with the changing needs of the entire community, for whom the mosque is not only of cultural value but is also a point of reference for daily social life.

This introduction places emphasis on the importance of a restoration project of both an architectonic nature, and regarding the bas-reliefs present inside the mosque, carried out by means of a re-evaluation of traditional materials and techniques through constant dialogue with the elders of Timbuktu. This process will have the aim of rediscovering and rehabilitating ancient techniques and knowledge lost over time, a problem due mostly to lack of economic means and, at times, the indiscriminate use of “modern” materials, as such erroneously considered to be the best.

It is interesting to observe how the combination of restoration interventions with traditional techniques and methods may give rise to the development of a methodology specific to the location, durable and repeatable by local workers using locally available means.

The transmission of knowledge orally and by memory, an example of “intangible” heritage, has proved valuable not only for the implementation of the restoration procedure in itself, but also for enabling more detailed research on the original structure of the mosque, as according to the elders of the city, «it was said that there was another mosque below the one now visible to us»...

The surveys conducted on the sand flooring of the mosque immediately yielded interesting data, on the basis of which it has been judged necessary to proceed with trial excavations.

Pillars made of earth, produced using an excellent technique, have been found, leading to the hypothesis that they may belong to the original mosque of Es-Saheli.

Guy Devreux

Director of Restoration Laboratory for Stone Artefacts, Vatican Museums

Josephine D’Ilario, restorer



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The relationship between science and conservation

In the practice of the conservation of cultural assets, a fundamental question is the difficulty of basing choices on reliable data. The constitutive materials are different and variable within each work, to the extent that they are only vaguely predictable and often only in a qualitative sense. Scientific investigations often provide more of an indication rather than assistance in operative choices, leaving the greater part of the responsibility in the hands of the Restorer-Conservator, although the need for interdisciplinary collaboration with art historians and scientists is well recognised.

In this respect, the type of approach is therefore comparable to that of medicine, inasmuch as it contains a significant application-related component and extreme variability in the individuals under treatment. However, it is worrying to note the delay in the adoption of scientific methods in the field of conservation of cultural assets: concessions are easily made to simplifications based on purely aestheticizing approaches, often distorted by propaganda or market issues, which impede a deeper understanding of the item.

The approach to cultural assets should be based on structured scientific thought and the correct use of available information, regardless of the means available for obtaining it. Recent years have seen a general evolution of the profession towards greater awareness and intellectual rigour. Education and training paths have been standardised recently, leading also, in a certain sense, to greater uniformity in the figure of the Restorer-Conservator, and which may give rise to a critical approach leading to the adoption of a common lexicon and therefore to more clearly described and reproducible actions. Recognition of critical points, and especially of one’s own limits both in an operative sense and in terms of comprehension, may facilitate learning from errors and the accumulation of knowledge indispensable for shared progress.

This presentation offers a the basis of a general framework, with particular attention to the situation in Italy, with the aim of stimulating discussion.

Antonio Iaccarino Idelson

Equilibrarte s.r.l., University of Urbino



Conservation and display of a raw earth monumental complex in the Turkish Upper Euphrates: palace the 4th millennium at Arslantepe, Malatya

At Arslantepe conservation practice has always been observed: the remains of the robust wall structures made of raw earth – conserved at a height of over 2 metres and characterised by conspicuous layers of coverings – have always been, in the intervals between one campaign and the other, protected by provisional canopies, the construction of which has always been carried out with great care.

From 1986, the discovery of important remains of painted murals on the wall coverings has necessitated in situ maintenance rather than the usual practice of “detachment” for the transfer of some parts to museums; this was made possible through constant activity in the form of periodical controls and maintenance conducted by technical specialists from the then ICR.

The methodological conservational approach taken ever since the first discovery was made has been shown throughout subsequent years to be very positive: numerous and extensive remains of mural decorations, paintings and reliefs which were previously unknown have gradually been brought to light through meticulous micro-excavation work, and now constitute, overall, a work of exceptional importance. In recognition of this importance, and thanks to the financial contribution of the Turkish government, it has been possible to build a definitive architectural structure which functions to both protect the work and to enable the utilisation of the structures already brought to light. It takes into consideration the conservational needs not only of the monuments to be protected, but also the archaeological strata below, seeking to restore the original spaces, volumes, light and colours to public view; it should allow, through the progressive addition of new segments, the eventual protection of correlated structures in adjacent areas, to be brought to light in the future.

Following the inauguration of this “Open-air Museum” in 2011, the site has experienced intensive tourism. One year later the first checks were carried out on the efficiency of the conservational system; this was a significant test, which enabled the evaluation of how, in spite of exceptional events, in the presence of stable conditions and through the control and maintenance achieved by the joint project carried out by the University of Rome “Sapienza” and the ISCR, extremely fragile structures such as archaeological remains in raw earth may be conserved after their discovery, even long-term, provided they immediately receive adequate protection.

Marcella Frangipane

Lecturer, Department of Science of Antiquity, University of Rome “Sapienza”

Giuseppina M. Fazio

Restorer, Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome



Earth: from knowledge to use (La terra: dalla pratica del fare all'impiego)

Il manufatto è una testimonianza storica e materiale della cultura di un popolo piccolo o grande che sia. Il manufatto ha visto nella terra i suoi componenti e nell'uomo l'agente cioè il mediatore che li ha trasformati. I componenti essenziali sono materiali naturali, prodotto del continuo divenire di composti che hanno avuto origine dalle rocce magmatiche. La Terra e gli altri pianeti del sistema solare si formarono 4,57 miliardi di anni fa, con il raffreddamento si produsse la crosta terrestre. Nessuna roccia attualmente affiorante presenta questa età, mancano infatti i geocronometri, le rocce più antiche rinvenibili hanno un'età di 4,1 miliardi di anni. L'uomo si è così venuto a trovare immerso in un materiale “terra” che è composto da particelle e da organismi in esso presenti. Le particelle terrose sono in parte composte da minerali, in parte da elementi organici. Le particelle minerali si originano da un processo chiamato pedogenesi di disgregazione delle rocce. Sono quindi nate delle pratiche “del fare” che hanno portato all'impiego di materiali come l'argilla, i calcari per la calce, il gesso, le terre colorate etc. non ultimi gli estratti coloranti di piante. Alla base della produzione di un manufatto ci sono i “gesti”, oggi meglio noti come procedimenti semplici quali la macinazione, l'essiccazione, la cottura che, sopravvissuti fino ad oggi, rappresentano aspetti principali della

'biografia' di un manufatto e sono testimonianza del momento storico-materiale della società che li ha creati. Esistevano i materiali ma non il loro "sistema" che si è prodotto dall'idea. Si ripercorre quindi, la storia dei materiali dalla pratica di operazioni semplici "gesti" alla realizzazione di strutture complesse.

Ulderico Santamaria

Director of Diagnostics Laboratory for Conservation and Restoration, Vatican Museums



terra

Disaster risk management strategies in the activity of UNESCO and their implications in relation to different cultures

Disaster risk management of cultural heritage is a subject that has consistently been approached at international level methodologically and theoretically only in the last 15 years. This discipline includes complex climatic and environmental factors, such as examined by preventive conservation, but also those related to security, sociology, anthropology, sustainable development etc., to be combined into an "integrated disaster risk management".

This new discipline offers the possibility to investigate in multiple areas with a real holistic approach. Scientific exchanges with fellow architects, librarians, sociologists, biologists, botanists, conservators, engineers, firefighters, doctors, volunteers, etc., enrich its development.

The perspective of UNESCO concerning the disaster risk management follows the mandate of the United Nations linked to ensuring peace and security, which is closely linked to sustainable development. This means that not only the physical affect is considered, but the social, economic and the environmental impact needs to be addressed through the heritage sector; as part of development.

A Strategy for Reducing Risks from Disasters at World Heritage Properties was presented and approved by the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session in 2007.

In addition to the Strategy, a number of Workshops have been coorganised by the World Heritage Centre and other partner Institutions on the subject of disaster risks. These have resulted in proceedings and resource materials to help managers of World heritage properties build their capacity in managing disaster risks.

Cristina Menegazzi

Programme Specialist, UNESCO



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New conservation strategies for the Ethnological Collections of Vatican Museums

Locations change, collections expand, and conservation strategies become more refined.

Supporting the adaptation of functional spaces means promoting the communication of new content and values, consistent with contemporary sensibilities.

Since 1926, the year of its foundation, the Ethnological Museum has changed greatly. 2000 saw a radical re-evaluation of the collections including the activities of documentation, cataloguing and the study of the artefacts – an arduous task, considering that the collection consists of more than 80,000 objects – and more strictly conservational and technical aspects, which arose from the new forms of knowledge which have developed in the field of preventative conservation.

Since 2008 a new form of ordering has been put into practice, which favours an exciting new form of interdisciplinary collaboration and has been translated into the relaunch of the image of the museum.

From a more strictly conservational perspective, three large deposits have been created and brought under a stable thermo-hygrometric regime, destined to hold and guarantee the safe storage of over 15.000 objects which have undergone conservation treatments, and a restoration laboratory has been

established, which works full time on a rich programme of interventions for internal exhibitions and works on loan.

The Ethnological Museum is now a living body, with the well-defined vocation of becoming a point of entry and welcome, where study of the collections means also the recognition of cultural differences and the wealth that these differences bring.

In order for the museum to fully become an open space facilitating this type of encounter, and for this to take place while respecting the conservational needs of the delicate works present, often made up of organic or multiple materials, it is necessary for the museum to be re-evaluated in structural and function terms.

This communication aims to give a brief demonstration of the activities of environmental monitoring in progress and to present the new layout project that the museum is currently working on.

Vittoria Cimino

Director of the Conservator's Office of the Vatican Museums



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Ethnographic Objects: Polymaterial and Polycultural

Ethnographic objects have been preserved in ethnographic museums as documents of the cultural diversity of humanity. They present special problems to conservation due to the variety and combination of material from which they are made and from their transfer from specific environmental condition prevailing in the area of their origin to a museum environment. An additional problem caused by this transfer is rooted in the fact that conservation in the Western sense is unknown to most of this world's cultures, where objects are made to be used and possibly renewed for specific purposes other than their preservation as documents. By becoming part of a museum collection, these artefacts are transformed into objects answering to values of our own society, while at the same time coming into conflict with values and notions prevalent in their source communities, such as the traditional protocols of dealing with animate objects (or rather, subjects). These conflicts present a special case in the field of conservation ethics by raising the question whether we are preserving artefacts only as (poly)material objects or also as (poly)cultural objects reflecting usages and practices of both the cultures of the collectors and the collected.

Christian Feest

Lecturer, University of Vienna, Austria



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No Profit Life Beyond Tourism® Portal: Heritage and Contemporary Culture in the Service of Intercultural Dialogue and Territorial Development

Life Beyond Tourism is a way of thinking that implies – for the various territories – the interpretation and presentation of oneself to others; it implies dialogue and respect for diversity, using to this end the distribution chain of tourism, currently used almost exclusively for services and consumption and not for knowledge of the value of individual locations and their tangible and intangible heritage.

With the Declaration of Intentions signed on March 16th 2008 by the 59 representatives of universities and institutions of 21 countries, clearly indicating the time frame and methods for application, the Foundation has promoted the Non Profit Portal Life Beyond Tourism.

The Portal was created in order to introduce potential visitors to the character of a territory through its important cultural expressions: institutions (museums, institutes, foundations) and economic enterprises – even those which are less visible – the characteristics of which express the personality of a territory in facing change over time. In this virtual meeting place, heritage is interweaved with territorial development and dialogue between cultures, with protection and recognition of value, and also with the creation of opportunity for dialogue between cultures and respect for diversity.

In this way a framework for bringing together different cultures is formed, which with a database and search engine can provide a vision of what unites them worldwide, what has united them and what will unite them in the future. The emphasis placed on territorial development is intended to contribute consciously and creatively to the conservation of the spirit of a place, while the emphasis on intercultural dialogue enables the construction of bridges between cultures.

The Portal is an invitation to all to form a “movement of reflection”, bringing new substance, sense and widespread awareness to the importance of focusing on the overall picture rather than detail. It helps reflection on the relationship between the individual and the character of his or her own territory, and individual responsibility as part of that territory’s cultural expression; this role involves voluntary participation and awareness of the importance of being present and contributing to the visibility and comprehension overall, to enable better interpretation and presentation.

Carlotta Del Bianco

Vice President, Romualdo Del Bianco Foundation



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Yaodong – Tulou 窑洞 - 土楼. Models of habitation in Chinese earth

The special relationship with Nature expressed by Chinese civilisation has given rise to and supported through time the development of peculiar models of dwelling and architectonic forms which favour the use of natural materials such as, in particular, wood and beaten earth, associated with a form of spatial organisation which finds its primary references in the ancient geomantic practice of Fengshui.

These elements have inspired all Chinese architecture in all its official and popular, secular and religious, representative and daily manifestations. This presentation will analyse in particular the cave dwellings of Yaodong, excavated in the yellow loess earth along the course of the Huanghe in a semi-arid region; the origins of these structures date back to Neolithic cultures.

The second model of habitation under consideration is typical of the area south of the Yangzi River: Tulou, large buildings composed of groups of dwellings made of pressed earth.

These distinct “northern” and “southern” typologies clearly exemplify the responses provided by architecture and planning to the environmental and climatic conditions typical of these different areas.

Nadia Fiussello

Ethnological Collections, Vatican Museums



Chemical fingerprintings of ochre from different geographical sources

This paper presents aspects of the conservation of Australian Aboriginal art carried out at Artlab Australia, historically, recently and currently.

By way of background, and presenting examples of art inextricably linked into the landscape, indeed as part of the landscape, Artlab's historical involvement in the conservation of Aboriginal rock paintings is illustrated with the example of consolidation and preventative treatments carried out at Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu, Northern Territory in the 1980s.

Two recent treatments are presented: the major intervention and partial restoration of the 32 painted doors from the school-house at Yuendumu, also in the Northern Territory, and the restoration of severe damage caused to four canvases painted in 2007 as part of Yiwarra Kuju or the Canning Stock Route project from Western Australia. Both case-studies show the critical importance of understanding that landscape is an integral component of the painting.

Finally, current research into the chemical finger-printing of ochre samples from identified geographical sources with a view to examining museum artefacts and establishing provenances and trading networks is presented as a work in progress.

Andrew Durham

Director of Artlab Australia

