

HERITAGE EDUCATION BASED ON THE SCULPTURAL TRAJECTORY OF THE SETE POVOS DAS MISSÕES: REPORT OF A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE AT THE JÚLIO DE CASTILHOS MUSEUM (PORTO ALEGRE)¹²

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses heritage education based on a curricular internship experience held at the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, in Porto Alegre, observing the educational potential of the sculptures exhibited in its Missionary Room, enabling discussions regarding the indigenous presence and invisibility in history and the role of that set of images for one of the most traditional historical museums in Rio Grande do Sul.

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KEYWORDS: Missionary heritage; indigenous invisibility; heritage education; Júlio de Castilhos Museum.

INTRODUCTION

When analyzing teaching experiences in museological institutions, we can observe the innumerable pedagogical potentialities of the items on display for the knowledge of the history and heritage of the different groups represented there, as observed by Horta, Grunberg, and Monteiro:

Nothing replaces the real object as a source of information about the social relations network and the historical context in which it was produced, used and endowed with meaning by the society that created it. A whole complex system of relationships and connections is contained in a simple object of daily use, a building, a set of dwellings, a city, a landscape, a popular, festive or religious manifestation, or even in a small fragment of pottery originating from an archaeological site. Discover this network of meanings, relationships, processes of creation, manufacture, exchanges, commercialization and different uses, which give meaning to cultural evidence and inform us about people's way of life in the past and in the present, in a constant cycle of continuity, transformation and reuse, is the specific task of Heritage Education. (HORTA et al., 1999, p.7)

Based on this concept, this article aims to reflect on heritage education based on the report of an internship practice linked to the internship in teaching history discipline in the field of heritage education, studied at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Such educational practice took place in the Missionary Room of the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, where, through a dialogue exhibition, an attempt was made to develop with the students a reflection on the role of museums and their exhibitions for the construction of historical knowledge.

Based on this experience with elementary and high school students, this study aims to reflect on activities focused on heritage education through the reconstruction of the trajectories and paths of the five missionary statues displayed in the museum from the moment they were produced, in Jesuit missions during the 18th century, until the present moment, when they have already counted more than one hundred years as part of the institution's collection.

The discussions were based on two groups of texts: on the one hand, the works that dealt specifically with missionary art and its relationship with museums in the Rio Grande do Sul, such as those by Natália Thielke and Teniza Spinelli, and on the other hand, the broader works on heritage education and museums in History teaching, such as Francisco R.L. Ramos, thereby seeking to engage in a dialogue between these different authors. Based on these elements, possibilities for reflections on this theme are presented: the value of dialogue with students for heritage education and the importance of reflecting on the context not only historical but also museological of these works used in heritage education activities.

HERITAGE EDUCATION THROUGH THE QUESTION PEDAGOGY

They Seem Old.

That angel, over there, doesn't have a wing. And that other one is missing an arm.

Why these head are at the feet of this saint?

There were answers and questions as varied as these that the students asked when they entered the Missionary Room of the Júlio de Castilhos Museum and were asked about what called their attention the most in the statues displayed there. This was the introductory question for a series of other questions, which linked together, served to build the proposed reflection for the interventions carried out during the guided visits of schools to that institution. Between September and November 2014, about 30 classes attended the prepared activity, which lasted about 20 minutes and took place at a specific moment of the approximately one hour guided tour, conducted by the institution's interns. The purpose of the activity, elaborated from a heritage education discipline, was not to reproduce, in the Missionary Room, the explanations offered by the monitors who were conducting guided tours of the museum, but to enable a closer look at some specific present - and absent - aspects in that space, seeking to build, with the active participation of visitors,

thoughts on that experience that went beyond the mere exhibition of facts, dates and heroic figures. Unfortunately, this posture is still present in historical museums, and it produces in students questions about the very role of a museum in the formation of each one of them, in the formation of their identities and their views on history.

One of the principles that guided the elaboration of the activity was the notion of Heritage Education defended by the Heritage Education Coordination (CEDUC) of IPHAN: educational processes focused on cultural heritage, “socially appropriate as a resource for the socio-historical understanding of cultural references in all its manifestations, to collaborate for its recognition, appreciation, and preservation” (FLORÊNCIO et al., 2014, p.19). This is because the educational activity, elaborated based on the statues produced in the Sete Povos Das Missões, sought precisely to encourage students to think in what ways they present - and themselves, situated in this present, are related and linked to the multiple subjects of that past exposed in a museum dedicated to the history of Rio Grande do Sul.

Through questions about when, in what quantity, by whom and where those statues had been made, a dialogue with the students was built, based above all on their spontaneous observations about the missionary statuary than necessarily on their previous knowledge brought of the classroom, even though these also influenced the way the museum's sculptures would be observed. This proposal finds a parallel in one of the moments of the heritage education program developed in the region of the Fourth Colony, in Rio Grande do Sul, which consists in the contextualization of a representative object of social practice in the socio-political system of which it is part, through the setting up, both on the part of the teacher and of the students, of all the possibilities of relationship observed in it, seeking to broaden their reading "by discovering the meanings carried by this representative object and also the web of meanings - economic, social, historical, cultural, technological, affective, religious, etc. - in which it is inserted" (VILLAGRÁN, 2000, p.252). Thus, the activities developed in the Missionary Room revolved around a "pedagogy of the question", seeking to distance themselves from

an exhibition of knowledge resulting from an authoritarian relationship with the visiting students of the museum through a "dialogue made of inquiries involved in historically grounded issues" (RAMOS, 2008. p. 55).

THE SCULPTURES OF JÚLIO DE CASTILHOS MUSEUM ON MAP

At the time of this educational experience, there were five statues on display in the missionary room: in the center, the largest of all, of São Francisco Xavier. Next to it, with a more modest dimension, is Our lady of Conception. In the background, you can see an angel, standing, and another, hanging by cables that fall from the ceiling. A kneeling, looking at the sky Senhor dos Passos completes the collection. After students expressed their first impressions about the statues as soon as they entered the room - which sometimes manifested themselves spontaneously before being asked, while other classes needed a greater incentive to speak - they were explained what would be

done there in that environment: talk about those objects, thinking about what could be discovered about those angels and saints.

Through their initial observations, which ended up being about the state of conservation and the lack of some parts of the images, such as fingers, wings or arms, they were asked the second question, based on the appearance of those works: *would they be like the statues that are commonly seen in churches today, made of plaster, or would they look older?* - seeking to instigate them to realize that those statues, dating from the 18th century, traveled a long way before being in the Missionary Room. Thus, it was possible to observe the path taken by the students through this dialogue, passing from the observation of the most evident aspects of the sculptures, such as their preservation condition, to more subtle ones, observable from these primary aspects, such as how much the marks that these objects brought could tell about their long journey before reaching the museum.

The third question posed to them was about the number of these statues: the students were asked if those five figures were the only existing statues of that type or if they remembered having seen other specimens elsewhere. The youngest students, by the 5th or 6th year, liked to guess how many of those there would be in all: some start with timid numbers, 10 or 20 statues, and others were betting high: 1000. A survey carried out between 1989 and 1993, as Spinelli notes, cataloged 510 missionary images in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, through a project that united UNESCO, the federal government (through the National Foundation for Memory), and the government of Rio Grande do Sul. Most of these collections are kept by the Missions Museum, in São Miguel das Missões, which houses a fifth of the cataloged figures. The rest of them can be found in museums and churches in the municipalities of Santa Maria, Santo Ângelo, Santo Antônio das Missões, Bagé, São Borja, São Gabriel, Ijuí, Cerro Largo, São Nicolau, Porto Alegre, São Leopoldo, Uruguaiana and Rio Pardo, in addition to those belonging to private collections (SPINELLI, 2008, pp. 23 -24).

The purpose of the guessing game about the number of missionary pieces was, in fact, another: to show students that those five works in that museum belonged to a wider world and that small collection on display in the Missionary Room is part of a large group gaucho museums that house these pieces. To help in understanding the geographic distribution of these works, a map of the cities of Rio Grande do Sul which keep these works in museums, churches or private collections was created, accompanied by photos of the collections.

INDIGENOUS PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

After the students were introduced to the map, a question was made, linking the information gathered until that moment: these statues produced in the 18th century, regardless of the situation in which they were sculpted, seemed to have been part of some large project, being produced in a considerable amount, after all, more than five hundred of them have survived to the present. In possession of this information, the students

then proceeded to the next step: *who had produced such works?* For this, they were asked once again to observe the statues, this time trying to understand who was represented in them. The initial answers varied between “saints”, “people” and “angels”. Then, a reformulation of this question was necessary to be able to direct the dialogue to the point that had been planned, which was the ethnic group was being represented in those images, which ended up generating more accurate responses, especially when they observed a particular image of Our Lady Of Conception. Through her hair, the features on her face, the color of her skin, many students perceived the indigenous presence there. A longer look revealed the identification of the sculptors of those works that until then had remained invisible; showing that behind those Catholic saints was the work of the Guarani.

This was the opportunity created to enable a discussion about the indigenous presence in the history and identity of Rio Grande do Sul. Thus, it was possible to relate the statue of Our Lady of Conception (which at first seemed to the students just another statue inside that room, but a closer look revealed its

indigenous features) with the fact that, concerning elements of the very daily life of these museum visitors, at first they would also find it very difficult to identify the countless inheritances and continuous indigenous influences that they encounter daily. This moment was also an opportunity to, when naming the indigenous people related to those sculptures - the Guarani, to perceive the great diversity and differences between the indigenous groups and that most of the time they end up appearing a false homogeneity, hidden under the generic designation of “Indians”.

Finally, also at this moment, there was an opportunity to think about the historicity of indigenous people, particularly, the Guarani of the missions, showing students that their history did not begin or end with the missionary experience that occurred in the 18th century. For this, one more question was asked: *where had these statues been made?* This question was elaborated through another observation on the map prepared for the activity (Figure 1), which reveals that most of the cities where the missionary statues are exposed today are located in the

northwest of present-day Rio Grande do Sul, where the so-called Sete Povos das Missões were located. From this moment on, it was possible to comment on the missionary experience and the interaction between European Jesuits and the Guarani, taking into account what defined the IPHAN-RS superintendence, when dealing with the opportunity

To know other meanings attributed to the missionary heritage, by those who understand themselves as ethnic relatives of the old Guarani. For them, the value of the remnants is experienced in the present time, not as an allegory of overdue utopias, but as a significant place in a singular trajectory, in which their identity as a people was built and renewed each day. (IPHAN-RS, 2007. p.5)

Thus, through this quote, it was possible to demonstrate the presence of the Guarani both in the past and present and to show a very current example of the performance of this group through the struggle of the Mbya-Guarani of the region for the preservation of their heritage through the Registro de Bens de Natureza Imaterial.

THE PATHS OF THE STATUES

The next step in the dialogue with the students proposed the following reflection: *“if these statues, produced in the 18th century by Guarani Indians in missionary villages, were made in a region that today corresponds to the northwest of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, what are they doing here in Porto Alegre? How did they get here?”* With this, the students could perceive that the history of those images had not ended at the time of their production, but that, just as had occurred during their production, those artifacts kept immersed in a network of social relationships.

The arrival of the missionary statues in Porto Alegre took place in 1901 when they were loaned by the mayor of São Luiz Gonzaga to participate in the First Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition in Rio Grande do Sul and could be, for the first time, known by the society of Porto Alegre. In 1903, with the creation of the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, the statues were donated and became part of the institution's collection. When observing this

trajectory, students were invited to realize that the arrival of the statues in the museum, more than a century ago, did not end their history, and that the same object can be seen in different ways over time. Upon arriving at the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, which at the time had a much more naturalistic character than the historical profile it would have from the second half of the 20th century, the sculptures were integrated into the 4th section of the museum, dedicated to Sciences, Arts and Historical Documents.

This association of sculptures with the arts, at the expense of their history, marked the trajectory of artifacts in the institution. During this process, in 1954, with the foundation of the Rio Grande do Sul Museum of Arts (MARGS), the statues of São Francisco Xavier, Senhor dos Passos and of the Angel are transferred there, “thus raising a discussion about the status of the works: would they be artistic or historical artifacts?”, which would only be resolved with the definitive return of the three works to the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, in the early 1990s (THIELKE, 2013, pp. 7-8; 13-14).. Through these data, it was

possible to advance even further in the construction of these sculptures, enabling

To understand them as cultural artifacts that participate in the processes of (re) creation of social meanings, [which] requires an analysis of the biography of these sculptures. In fact, before they became musealized objects and considered patrimonial goods, the sculptures that make up the Guarani imagination had a previous life marked by phases of glory and decay, devotion and desecration, idolatry and abandonment (THIELKE, 2013, p.14).

The final moment of the pedagogical intervention started precisely from this interesting dispute between museums for the guardianship of this missionary heritage in order to highlight all the possibilities for reflection on the history of Rio Grande do Sul that we were having because we were looking at those figures as historical artifacts, and not simply dwelling on the aesthetic value represented by those works. In this sense, the sought approach brought the proposals of not taking the images as mere passive objects, whose meanings are only learnable by iconographic analysis, but rather as “artifacts that participate in social relations” (THIELKE, 2013, p. 3.).

From this, the conclusion of the intervention with each class started from the question about their opinion, after the dispute between an art museum and a history museum for the pieces, concerning the importance of objects like those being in the Júlio de Castilhos Museum, which is dedicated to the history of Rio Grande do Sul. With this, the objective was to highlight the students' link with those statues, which, being deeply involved in social relations and historical processes revealed to them their link with heritage and the importance of its existence and preservation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article sought to elaborate a reflection on heritage education through the development of four interconnected themes. Firstly, the importance of carrying out a dialogue with students on guided tours of museums and emphasizing their contribution to the construction of knowledge was emphasized. Second, it was noted that artifacts displayed in a museum should

not be seen individually, but integrated into broader networks, which include other institutions that also exhibit them. Then, the text sought to analyze the potential of missionary statues to observe the indigenous presence in history. Finally, through the trajectory of the statues since they arrived at the museum, they reflected on their importance for teaching history and heritage education.

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