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CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SELF-DETERMINATION OF A PERSON ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE MEMORY OF A STONE

Abstract: *this research aimed to analyze rocks from a culturological point of view. Author comes to the conclusion that attention to the environments affect cultural identity and improves self-esteem.*

Keywords: *memory, stones, dialogue, cultural identity, self-esteem.*

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КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ И САМООПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ ЛИЧНОСТИ НА ПРИМЕРЕ ПАМЯТИ КАМНЯ

Аннотация: *основное содержание исследования составляет анализ горных пород с точки зрения культурологии. Автор приходит к выводу, что внимание к окружающей среде влияет на культурную идентичность и имеет положительный эффект на самооценку.*

Ключевые слова: *память, камни, диалог, культурная идентичность, самооценка.*

It is a well-known fact than the city where one lives, the stones with which one is surrounded, affect one's life, one's aesthetic taste. And it seems to me it is high time we paid more attention to the environments we live in and tried to listen to «the memories of the stones» more attentively so as to not only expand our knowledge in the field of Art history, but also improve our self-awareness and self-esteem.

Recently I have been contemplating how many people of various backgrounds and occupations must have been walking along the cobbled streets of the old towns. I could not help but wonder: «How exciting would it be to join them and listen to the stories of their lives, would it not?» Yet, on the other hand, I do believe that the tales of the paving stones themselves might be no less impressive. If only they could speak...



Fig.1. The paving stones of the Old Town in Tallinn

Surprisingly enough, the latter is not so impossible as it may seem at first glance for, having visited various exhibitions of Modern Art, I have noticed that many artists have been paying attention to the «memory of the stones». And it can be argued that, on the whole, there are several ways of revealing their past.

Firstly, as we all know, some stones are already covered with inscriptions, such as Egyptian granite sarcophagi or Viking runestones mentioning Scandinavians who participated in voyages to Western Europe (for instance, the famous Kjula Runestone located in Södermanland, Sweden). And although it may not always be easy to decipher their messages, there are plenty of stones lacking even any of those. Yet if you listen attentively, you might hear what the stones are trying to tell you, as confirmed by Stephan Micus' album «The Music of Stones», featuring stone chimes, which was recorded in the Ulm Cathedral in 1989 [2], as well as by the creativity of a Swedish artist Cecilia Edefalk who has collected stones and given them voices that convey their state of mind and history. For example, the blasted stone is naturally quite shaken while the granite rolled by ice sheet tell us about his long life.

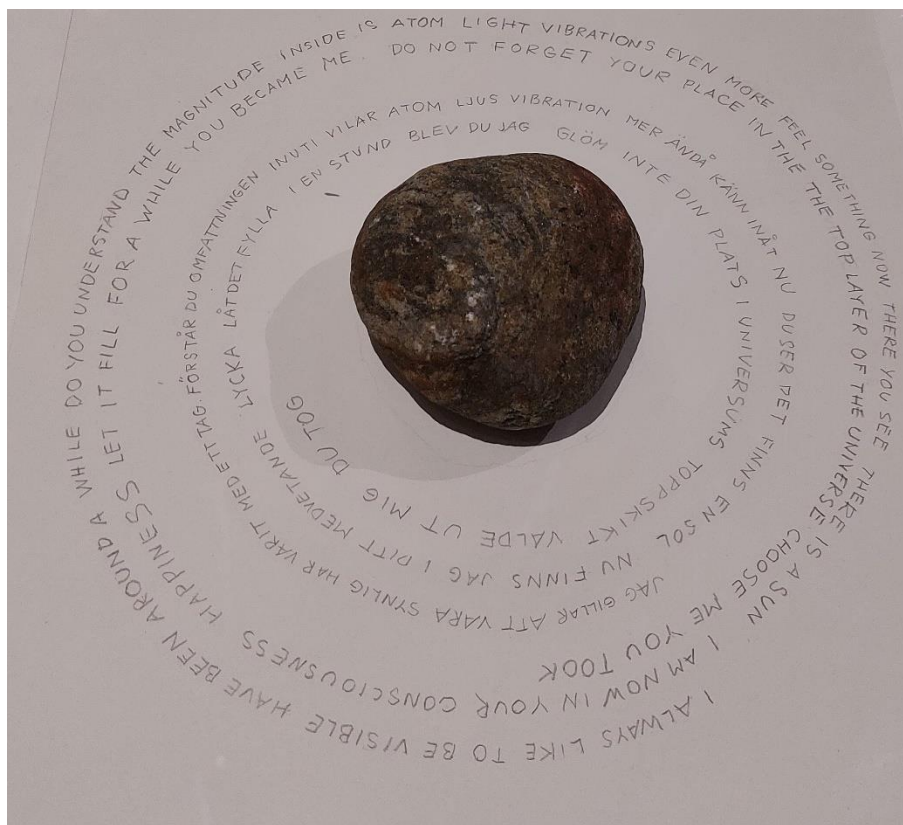


Fig. 2. Cecilia Edefalk. «Stones»

Moreover, in order to make the «voices of the stones» sound more clearly, one may also initiate a dialogue between the past and the present by exhibiting an object of Modern Art in a historic area, or vice versa – by presenting pieces from a bygone era in a new, contemporary context, and thus combine the «stones of the past» with the «stones of the present», metaphorically speaking [1]. Let us take as an example the Solovetsky Stone – a granite monument to the victims of political repressions in the Soviet Union located in the Trinity Square, not far from the place where the Old Trinity Cathedral – the oldest church in St. Petersburg – used to be, or the Egyptian Sphinxes, made of Aswan granite around the 14th century BC, adorning a quay at the University Embankment designed by Konstantin Thon in the 19th century.



Fig. 3. Tallinn. The Old Town

And in this regard one should neither forget about the marble (or granite) plaques, placed on the façades of the buildings, referring to the houses which used to stand on the site of the present day edifices (and / or to the outstanding people who lived there), nor underestimate the importance of preserving the elements of the old structures wherever possible, such as, for example, the outlines of the medieval arched windows complementing their modern counterparts, or the Browne Doorway – a rather peculiar monument that one may see in the heart of Galway city, in the Eyre Square, namely, a freestanding limestone entrance to the Renaissance house of the Browne family «leading to the past», as if inviting passers-by to move into another aesthetic dimension hidden from prying eyes [3].

Furthermore, the dialogue between the past and the present may be initiated not only between the participants residing in the same area, so to speak, but also among those who are separated by many miles, as, for instance, the Circus in Bath that was modelled on the Stonehenge and therefore is forever bound to the latter, or the sculptures of Castor and Pollux, flanking the entrance to the Horse Guards Manege in St.

Petersburg, which were designed to resemble the famous Fountain of the Dioscuri located in front of the Quirinale Palace in Rome.



Fig. 4. Malachite Vase, The Hermitage Museum

And yet, I am virtually certain that it is in a museum that one could truly appreciate the importance of the «memory of the stones» for only there does the symphony of their stories sound so vividly and emotionally. Suffice it to mention the Pergamon Museum in Berlin housing, among other things, the Pergamon Altar, the Market Gate of Miletus, the Mshatta Façade, the Victory Stele of Esarhaddon, etc., or the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg walking around which one may find not only antique marble sculptures, gems and cameos (such as the Gorzaga Cameo presented to the Emperor Alexander I by Joséphine de Beauharnais), but also Michelangelo's «Crouching Boy», Jean-Antoine Houdon's «Seated Voltaire» looking rather sarcastically at the visitors, «Cupid and Psyche» created by Antonio Canova, let alone numerous monumental vases made of semi-precious stones (malachite, lapis lazuli, jasper, rhodonite, etc.) which were distributed throughout the halls

of the museum according to the orders of the Emperor Nicholas I. And I quite agree with Mikhail Bakhtin that it is when a person turns from a passive contemplator into an active participant in this dialogue of cultures that the process of their self-determination accelerates enabling them to embrace their cultural identity, improve their self-esteem and become more successful in the future [1].

To sum it up, it seems to me that the preservation of cultural heritage may be considered as a «wedge stone» of our society since the stability and further development of the latter are largely determined by our attitude towards our history, our past. The variety of the approaches to achieve that goal corresponds to the complexity of the tasks set before us, as confirmed by the examples mentioned above. And I do hope that the next time you walk along the cobbled streets of the old towns, you will pause a little bit and ask yourself the same question as I did at the beginning of this paper, namely: «How exciting would it be to listen to the stories of those stones, would it not?»

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