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The Object of Archaeology: From “Marbles” to the Archaeological Landscape

Although the history of antiquarianism and the antique object amongst its material of study go way back, only with the emergence of modern archaeology and the modern museum in the 19th century antiquities, the objects of interest for a narrow circle of learned cognoscenti up to that time, gained mass appeal and were transformed into archaeological objects and museum displays. From bits and pieces of sacred and quotidian artifacts to intact tombs, from broken colossal statues to architectural fragments, everything that was ferociously dug by “early archaeologists,” often away from the museums they would be put on display, became archaeological objects. Building parts, architectural sculptures, structural and decorative elements, all of which were once parts of immovable wholes and specific locales have become free-floating “marbles” detached from their places and associated with the individuals who “discovered” them, as in the case of the (in) famous Elgin or Canning marbles, and were transported over long distances as portable artifacts to become objects of display in museums.

Antiochus I and the (culture) wars

Take, for instance, this stela (Fig. 1), an object among more than 4 million others, that, according to its website, make the collections of the British Museum. In mainstream archaeological, museological and art historical literature it is a commonplace to refer to such objects as located in that museum or this collection, dispersed among different locales. Their afterlife since the eclipse of their heyday is reduced to a simple problem of provenance. In this case the museum website specifies the “find spot” as near Samsat in Asia, Turkey, Southeastern Anatolia Region, and Adiyaman province. It is a 1st century BCE Commagenian relief depicting most probably “Antiochus I Epiphanes greeting the nude Herakles-Verethragna as his equal and proffering his right hand in a Dexiosis scene with Greek inscriptions on the two sides and back”¹.

Interestingly, the British never had official excavations in Commagene, the territory of the ancient kingdom in what is today’s southern Turkey, explored in the 19th century, by the newly appointed director of the Ottoman Imperial Museum Osman Hamdi Bey and the professor of sculpture Osgan Efendi in covert defiance to German engineer-turned-archaeologists Karl Sester, Otto Puchstein and Karl Humann commissioned by the Royal Prussian Academy of

¹ Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=426750&partId=1&searchText=samsat&page=1 (accessed 25 November 2017).

Sciences in 1882 and 1883 [2, pp.170–232]. Apparently the rival German and Ottoman teams, both of whom spotted the above relief, met by chance during their expeditions and spent an anxious, to say the least, evening together. Karl Sester appears to be the one who had first seen the colossal statues of the monument at the mount Nemrud, which was later explored by Otto Puchstein who became the one credited with the discovery of ancient Commagene. While the Germans were about to embark on a second expedition consolidated with the presence of the “Pergamene hero” Karl Humann, Osman Hamdi and Osgan Efendi, Puchstein’s report in hand, stole a march on them, arrived there before, spotted various pieces of statues, relieves, inscriptions and other fragments, made mouldings, took photographs and in haste made a publication based on their experiences [2; 4; 5].

Apparently, all along the imperial museum’s expedition was publicized in Ottoman papers. The sentiment seems to be that of victory embodied by a photography of Osman Hamdi stretched out on the newly found colossal head of Antiochus I like a trophy. Ottomans felt victorious. Consequently, in Turkish accounts of archaeology and museology the expedition has been sealed as the Imperial Museum’s, and Osman Hamdi’s first excavation whilst the archaeology literature valorizes Puchstein’s and Humann’s activities over those of their rivals. According to the journal *La Turquie* Osman Hamdi was reporting from the field the existence of some very valuable but *unfortunately not transportable* ancient monuments on top of the Nemrud Mountain [3, p.315, *our emphasis*]. Hamdi, who is known for his fervent opposition to the removal of antiquities outside the Ottoman territory, would not see any harm in their displacement when their destination was the Imperial Museum in Istanbul.

But before continuing with the history of imperial and national museums let us look at how our Commagenian stela ended up in the British Museum. The information on the website is quite laconic: we learn that it was donated by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1927 and was purchased by Carchemish Exploration Fund. The exact circumstances under which it was “found” by the Carchemish team during the turbulent years before and during WWI and the Turkish War of Independence in the town of Birecik some 150 km away from the village of Selik where it was spotted in 1882 are not clear. During this time borders were re-drawn, and the ancient Mesopotamian territory of Carchemish was divided between the newly founded Turkish Republic and the French mandate in Syria replacing the now defunct Ottoman Empire.



Fig. 1. Stela / oil-press. Front view. Commagene, 1st century BCE. Museum Number: 1927,1214.1. © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 2. Stela / oil-press. Back view. Commagene, 1st century BCE. Museum Number: 1927,1214.1. ©Trustees of the British Museum

Today there is a repatriation debate going on between the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the British Museum that bases its claim to ownership on a permission given by the French authorities in mandate Syria as the British excavation site happened to be left on the Syrian side. Our aim here is not to resuscitate the good old repatriation debates, which are often tinged with different levels of nationalism on one side and a covertly hegemonic fiction of a universal world culture on the other. As we will further dwell below, the Royal Museums in Berlin, the British Museum and the *Müze-i Hümayun* in the Ottoman capital as examples of 19th century modern museums were developing collections in the name of their nations and were no different from each other in their disregard of the specific landscape and the local practices and memory that might have accrued at the specific places such itinerant objects of modern museology come from. In their haste to become the “discoverer” of ancient Commagene both the Ottomans and the Prussians rendered the agency of the local inhabitants invisible while, in their travel diaries, inadvertently mentioning the Kurds who were actually pointing out the ruins and sites to them and had obviously always known about the ruins. Ironically the overlooked afterlife of the ruins has been somewhat violently marked on the Antiochus stela itself (Fig. 2).

The quite sizable hole in its center evinces its local appropriation as *spolium* and usage as an oil press. It is quite remarkable that this piece, part of a larger ensemble that initiated the aforementioned fierce competition of “discovery” among different nations was actually lying there all along under the eyes of the local Kurds who were using and moving it around for decades.

Antiquarianism and the 19th century museum

With this short preamble on a museum object our intention is to “de-familiarize,” so to speak, the assumptions and routine practices of modern archaeology and museology emulated not only by Prussians and the British but also the Ottomans; the displacement of antique objects from their geographical and topographical context, the disregard of their afterlife and possible appropriation by local people. Our aim is not to debunk either the Enlightenment idea of universal knowledge or the 19th century democratic ideal of education, i.e., making knowledge accessible via public museums. This is not, on the other hand, to say that we are not aware of the possible disciplinary and identity forming functions of such modern institutions, either. Our aim is, rather, to point to the blind spots in such practices alongside the shifts within the cultures of collecting from the 18th to the 19th century.

Standard histories of museology ascribe a seamless continuation between the 19th century modern museum and earlier antiquarian collecting in the form of cabinets of curiosity. Our contention is that there is a major shift between these two types of collecting, as we will see, manifested in the frequent crises caused by the arrival of newly acquired marbles in the museums of the 19th century. The former, the cabinet of curiosity (and the cabinet of antiquities for that matter) put together by the scholar or the antiquary had derived its meaning and purpose from the collector herself/himself who would personally study them. Antiquarianism that had in time become a pejorative term denoting a tedious pursuit of historical trivia and a kind of a “non-scientific” prehistory of modern collecting, has been reassessed by scholars such as Arnaldo Momigliano and Stephen Bann who detect an affective and materialistic way of engaging with the past that revolves around objects, more akin to today’s concept of historiography based on evidence, in contradistinction to the idealistic metanarratives of universal histories. Méric Casabaun had written:

That antiquaries are so taken with the sight of old things, not... but because these visible supervising evidences of Antiquity represent unto their minds former times, with as strong an impression, as if they were actually present, and in sight, as it were [8, 60].

Along those lines, Stephen Bann argues for the existence of a specific way of “viewing the past” that developed between 1750 and 1850 during which antiquarians “gave a strong affective character to the very process of historical and archaeological retrieval, and in so doing, no doubt contributed powerfully to the dominant myth of Romantic historiography — that the past should be resurrected” [1, p. 130, our emphasis].

Antiquaries were personally collecting modest numbers of materials, when compared with the modern museum, with which they were affectively engaged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This is different from how the collections of the modern public museums came about whereby an excess of material was ferociously collected for “national depositories” for public display often without much prior knowledge of the material, a contested process that often involved conflicting multiple actors and institutions. One crisis is particularly interesting in the case of the British Museum, which, too, was founded with the acquisition of three personal collections, those of Sir Hans Sloane, Sir Robert Cotton and Earl of Oxford, Robert Harley, in the 18th century. Yet in the early 1840s the so called “Xanthian Marbles,” collected by the British explorer Charles Fellows from what was once ancient Lycia in Ottoman Anatolia, when arrived caused a crisis in the museum.

Fellows, in a letter dated 1 August 1845 to the Trustees of the Museum protesting sculptor Richard Westmacott’s arrangement in the newly constructed “Lycian Room” wrote these:

...Seven years ago, I first discovered the remains of the ancient art of the Lycians in Asia Minor; since which time I have made it my study. You have thought fit to entrust me, during the two late expeditions to Lycia, the selection of such objects as I might think best, to illustrate this art in our National Museum. To forward this end, you appointed an architect and an artist to accompany the expedition. You have since become possessed of my remarks as to the position and history of the objects, and my suggestions respecting them. You have also drawings and measurements of all that I knew would be required. Without reference to any of these (the only authorities) you have

placed the arrangements of the objects with a gentleman who is ignorant of any information in your hands, who is about to pile together the monuments in some instances, and to separate them in others, without any knowledge of my object in selecting them, as illustrations of each other [7, p. 405].

And in response to an inquiry about the display of “the casts from ornamental portions of rock tombs” that he obtained in Lycia he claimed:

They are built into the wall [of the newly constructed Lycian Room], conveying no idea whatever of the tombs from which they were taken. In order to illustrate the art of the Lycians, as well as to understand the monuments that we possess, I think a reconstruction of the rock tombs, introducing those ornaments, is quite necessary; for this purpose I had casts made of all the ornamental parts, detailed architectural measurements made by the architect who went out, and drawings by the artistmen [7, p. 72].

Parts of the considerable number of material, i. e., 147 cases of sculpture including sarcophagi of several tons and forty seven cases of casts transported in three installments over the years from Lycia, were first put on display in the Phigaleian Room next to Elgin Marbles and in the Central Room, until the completion of the Lycian Room, a moderate sized east-west oriented hall jutting out from the west wing. In the Lycian Room Richard Westmacott, who was a Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy and operated as the advisor for the arrangement of displays in the museum, probably inspired by the artist James Stephanoff’s somewhat imaginary depiction of the Lycian material at their temporary location downplayed the presentation of what Fellows considered the indigenous Lycian examples such as the Pajava and Lion tombs together with other *stelae* and reliefs that did not live up to the aesthetic criteria of the time. Instead, Westmacott positioned the fragments of what was back then called the Ionic Trophy Monument (i. e., the Nereid monument) and most importantly for him, who was an aesthete and proponent of Greek art, thought to be Greek back then as the center of the display (Fig. 3). Accordingly, constituting the peak of the display were reliefs and friezes of the Ionic Trophy Monument arranged in horizontal bands and topped by a pediment opposite the entrance and at the end of an axis flanked by other Lycian material deemed more significant by Fellows. In contradistinction to Westmacott’s “picturesque” arrangement privileging Greek fragments over reconstructed tombs and monuments of some obscure Anatolian civilization such as Lycia Fellows favored the latter and advocated the reconstruction and separate display of the Ionic Trophy Monument.

As a matter of fact, two sketches in the Central Archive of the British Museum arguably by Fellows show free standing, obliquely placed objects in the middle of the room with enough space to walk around, which seems to be repeating the seemingly haphazard natural arrangement of an actual site. The intention to reconstruct rock tombs using casts as a backdrop in addition to the reconstruction of the Ionic Trophy Monument, which Westmacott vehemently rejected, and the display of inscriptions as well all point to an attempt to recreate the experience of the site in the museum space. To create a total, atmospheric display which would have provided a more spatial and peripatetic experience seems to be what Fellows had in mind when he talked about his “scientific” approach in contradistinction to Westmacott’s “visually pleasing,” static display of “timeless objects” often allowing only a frontal view.



Fig. 3. Xanthian Marbles “Sculptured sarcophagus, from the tomb near the Theatre of Xanthus” and “The Xanthian room just opened at the British Museum”. Journal cuttings in John Edward Gray and Maria Emma Gray, *A Collection of plans and views of portions of the buildings and contents of old Montague House and the present British Museum*. © The British Library Board, Maps_C_26_f_7-053.

The bitter quarrel between Fellows and Westmacott that revolved around the relative value of different ancient civilizations and aesthetic versus the then newly emerging “scientific” criteria for display, which effectively challenged the authority of what was, back then, considered pure Greek and led to Fellows’ parting ways with the museum and a Parliamentary inquiry might be the most publicized of such crises but was by no means unique. The furor caused by the Assyrian material transported to the British Museum around the same time by Austen Henry Layard, and even the early mixed reception of the “Elgin Marbles,” in Stephen Bann’s words, of those “epic lumps of stone” reveal the inevitable crisis of meaning and purpose in the 19th century “scramble for antiquities” whereby huge amounts of material without stable aesthetic or historic meaning were dumped in museums by individuals intent on convincing the others about the value of their “discovery” and who were personally after recognition and prestige. This was a different mode of collecting than that of the antiquary of the previous century for her/his “cabinet of curiosity.”

Archeological landscape

In the light of the experiences of the last two centuries how may we approach archaeological sites today? Rather than putting an un-proportional emphasis on “objects,” on portable “artworks” or narrowly defined ruins or sites a holistic approach that conceives such sites as parts of larger territories and larger landscapes might be one way to go. As summarized by Ömür Harmanşah, recent literature treats “landscape” as “a concept that spans the continuum between nature and culture”. Accordingly it is seen as “a physically and mentally constructed world made up of a constellation of meaningful, interconnected places where people engage with the material world around them.” Most importantly “it can never be a finished product, a static image, or readable text, but is more accurately a fluid and eventful environment that is always in the process of being made.” And, “although always changing, landscapes are not transient. They have memory; the sedimented materiality of a landscape offers a palimpsest of human activity and ecological processes that are registered in the depositional layers of the physical environment” [6, p.29]. The Conservation Proposal and Site Management Project (Commagene Nemrut Conservation Development Program — CNCDP) prepared by a team led by Neriman Şahin Güçhan for the whole Commagenain territory between 2006–2014 that aims to regulate the conservation, building and exhibitionary practices throughout the Commagenean “landscape,” and conserve the material on site as much as possible through most advanced technologies is in accord with such an approach (Ill. 92).

By way of conclusion we may also add that as part of the above mentioned project Yavuz Özkaya (of PROMET PROJE Ltd. Co.) designed a visitor information center and library building in Adıyaman (Ill. 93) in addition to nine smaller information centers at the major sites of Commagene such as Arsemia on the Nymphaesus, the Karakuş tumulus, the Cendere (Roman) bridge, Yenikale, Turuş necropolis, Haydaran necropolis, Palanlı cave, Old Besni town, the Roman bridge and the necropolis at Kızılin. Visitor centers provide a small-scale information booth, public toilets and a shady veranda all of which allude to the local vernacular architecture (Ill. 94). The design arranges car parking, pedestrian routes and information/sign-boards carefully for each site in harmony with the existing landscapes (Ill. 95, Ill. 96).

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Title. The Object of Archaeology: From “Marbles” to the Archaeological Landscape.

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Abstract. Although the history of antiquarianism and the antique object amongst its material of study go way back, with the emergence of modern archaeology and the modern museum in the 19th century antiquities, the objects of interest for a narrow circle of learned cognoscenti up to that time, gained mass appeal and were transformed into archaeological objects and museum displays. From bits and pieces of sacred and quotidian artifacts to intact tombs, from broken colossal statues to architectural fragments, everything that was ferociously dug by “early archaeologists,” often away from the museums they would be put on display, became archaeological objects. Building parts, architectural sculptures, structural and decorative elements, all of which were once parts of immovable wholes and specific locales have become free-floating “marbles” detached from their places and associated with the individuals who “discovered” them, as in the case of the (in)famous Elgin or Canning marbles, and were transported over long distances as portable artifacts to become objects of display in museums.

In our paper we trace the changing nature of the archaeological object alongside conservation policies by dwelling on two distinct Anatolian examples, those of Lycia and Commagene. The southwestern region and ancient civilization of Lycia was “discovered” by British explorer Charles Fellows at the beginning of the 1840s whose persistent appeal to the trustees paid off with the transportation of substantial amount of material to the British Museum, which were known as Xanthian marbles back then. In contradistinction, although earlier explored by Karl Sester and Otto Puchstein and about to be excavated by Karl Humann, the Mount Nemrud, part of the southeastern Anatolian region of ancient Commagene, was taken over in 1883 by Osman Hamdi, the authoritative director of the Ottoman Imperial Museum who vehemently fought against the exportation of archaeological material outside Ottoman territory. How did these two different attitudes to ancient sites and the archaeological object impact the later histories of these sites? We also look at the current situation, particularly the details of the project developed by PROMET PROJE for Commagene.

Keywords: Commagene; Lycia; Mount Nemrud; modern museum; antiquarianism; early archaeology; archaeological landscape.

Название статьи. Археологический объект: от «мраморов» до консервации на месте раскопок.

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Аннотация. История антикварного дела и определение древностей как предмета его изучения возникли задолго до того, как в XIX в. сложилась современная археология и появились музеи в сегодняшнем понимании слова. До тех пор древности были объектом интереса узкого круга учёных специалистов. Тем не менее, в конечном счете, они обрели массового почитателя, превратившись в археологические артефакты и музейные экспонаты. Всё, что безжалостно откапывалось первыми «археологами», часто вне всякой связи с музеями — от фрагментов священных и рядовых предметов до непо потревоженных гробниц, от разбитых огромных статуй до архитектурных деталей — все-таки, в конечном счете, попадало на музейную экспозицию и становилось археологическими объектами. Обломки сооружений, их конструктивные, скульптурные и декоративные детали, некогда бывшие частями единого целого, превращались в «мраморы», чей вид ассоциировался с личностью тех, кто их «открыл», как в случае с известными Эльгиновскими или Каннинговскими мраморами. Сначала их увозили в дальние края простым багажом, после чего они становились музейными экспонатами.

Авторы прослеживают сущностные изменения археологических объектов и параллельно рассматривают принципы их консервации, опираясь на пример двух анатолийских жилых сооружений, обнаруженных в Ликии и Коммагене.

С одной стороны, античная цивилизация юго-западной Ликии была «открыта» британским исследователем Чарльзом Феллоузом в начале 1840-х годов. Его постоянные обращения к попечителям Британского музея вполне окупились доставкой в музей значительного числа находок, ныне известных как мраморы Ксанфа. С другой стороны, в 1883 г. изучением ранее исследованного Карлом Сестером и Отто Пухштейном памятника на горе Немруд, в юго-восточной Анатолии, на территории древнего Коммагенского царства, который намеревался раскапывать Карл Хуман, занялся Осман Хамди, влиятельный директор Османского Имперского музея, непримиримо боровшийся против вывоза археологических материалов за пределы Османской территории. Как повлияли два этих противоположных подхода к древним памятникам и археологическим объектам на их дальнейшую судьбу? Наряду с историей памятников, рассматривается их современное состояние, акцент сделан на принципах проекта, разработанного PROMET PROJE для Коммагены.

Ключевые слова: экспозиция; консервация археологического объекта; Коммагены; Ликия; гора Немруд; современный музей; антикварианизм; первоначальная археология; археологический пейзаж.



Ill. 92. Archaeological landscape. From Arsemia on the Nymphaesus. Photo by Yavuz Özkaya, 2015



Ill. 93. K-ODAK — Main visitor Information center building in Adiyaman, Concept design by Yavuz Özkaya, 2015



Ill. 94. Remains of traditional vernacular houses. Haydaran village, North of Adiyaman. Photo by Yavuz Özkaya, 2015



Ill. 95. Visitor Information center proposal for Arsemia on the Nymphaesus. Concept design by Yavuz Özkaya, 2016



Ill. 96. Visitor Information center proposal for Arsemia on the Nymphaesus. Concept design by Yavuz Özkaya, 2016