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To whom does the past belong? Classical antiquity has been a topic since the Renaissance at the latest. Statues, temples, and pots that emerged from the ground, whether deliberately sought or discovered by chance, have aroused the interest of collectors and scholars. Objects were collected for the prestige of their owner and stories were elaborated to give them meaning. For centuries, archaeological discoveries have thus become cultural heritage, whether tangible (as treasures) or intangible (as knowledge). For whom? Classical antiquity was the preserve of an elite, whether a propertied class of collectors or an educated group of scholars. When cultural objects were transferred to public museums and declared national heritage, the public could enjoy the pieces, but knowledge of the past remained a privilege of the educated. With the growing awareness that cultural heritage and the way it is told, used, or presented says more about contemporaries than it does about the past, the development of community archaeology – also known as archaeology for the public – is now enabling a change in the way Classical Antiquity is communicated through specific narratives.

Collectors, scholars, travellers, and raiders

In fifteenth-century Italy, the Renaissance was marked by a renewed interest in Classical antiquity. The rediscovery of ancient authors and their widespread distribution through the printing press contributed to the development of a new consciousness among educated people: Antiquity was now perceived as a heritage. In addition to texts, an interest in objects also emerged. Soon antiquities were being unearthed all over Italy, especially in Rome. They quickly became a source of envy for the rulers, who saw in them a new instrument for their pres-

tige. All the princes of Italy and the kings of Europe engaged in fierce competition for the richest collections.[1]

Pope Paul II (1464-1471) collected many engraved stones, coins and small bronzes and was interested in the restoration of Rome's ancient monuments. However, he considered his collections as his own property and made no provision for their future. His successor, Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484), on the other hand, showed little interest in antiquities *per se*, but recognised the immense historical significance they could have for Rome. He donated various ancient bronzes kept in the Lateran Palace to the Palazzo dei Conservatori on Capitoline Hill, the seat of the city's civil power. Interestingly, the donation was presented as a "restitution" to the Roman people, suggesting that he considered these sculptures part of the inalienable heritage of the Eternal City. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Capitoline statues were by far the most impressive group of ancient statues on display in Rome. This was the cornerstone of the oldest public museum in the world, where artists and ordinary citizens could view the statues. This sudden fame quickly increased collectors' interest in antiquities, so much so that his successor, Pope Julius II (1503-1513), established a rival museum in the Vatican, marking the beginning of papal collections. Unlike his predecessors, he wanted the masterpieces he acquired to remain in the Church's heritage. In 1503, shortly after taking office, Julius II had a new architectural complex built on the hill of the Belvedere, behind the old Vatican Palace, to a design by Bramante. One of these courtyards was to house antique sculptures. The demand for antiques was very high in Rome at that time and Julius II was known for his desire to acquire the most beautiful and amazing antiques. In 1506, a statue was discovered in Rome that was destined for extraordinary fame, as it was immediately recognised as having been mentioned by ancient authors: the Laocoön, which Pliny the Elder (*HN* 36.37) said was "of all paintings and sculptures the worthiest of admiration". Julius II eventually won a fierce competition for the statue and the Laocoön soon moved to the Vatican to be placed in the courtyard of the Belvedere.

From Renaissance Rome to Napoleon's Paris, via the Florence of the Medici, the Naples of the Bourbons, and the Munich of Ludwig of Bavaria, many stories of this kind can be told, recalling the greed of crowned heads throughout Europe for the treasures of the past.

In addition to owning antiquities, it was also a matter of building up and mastering the learned knowledge that made it possible to describe and understand these objects. In addition to the large, princely collections, thousands of small collections were assembled throughout Europe.[2] These collections are known as *Wunderkammern* or "cabinets of curiosities", which numbered in the hundreds

[1] Haskell, Penny 1981; Beschi 1986.

[2] Pomian 1987; Schnapp 1996; Pomian 2003; Pomian 2020.

or even thousands in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. So, there was a need for new knowledge. What meaning should be given to these objects? How should they be interpreted? What stories could be told about them? A crowd of scholars formed around the collections. They were called "antiquaries", in the sense of possessors of knowledge about the life of the Ancients. One of them, the Frenchman Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637), gives this description of the world of antiquaries:

> Many people loudly scorn our studies, saying that they bring no glory to those who pursue them and no usefulness to others. The only ones who deserve such reproach are those who seek scholarship of a meretricious sort, or even worse, content themselves with collecting antiquities to adorn their cupboards and decorate their houses, only desiring them in order to be seen to possess them. On the other hand, there are those who are entirely praiseworthy and do not waste their time in any sense they research the antiquities, study them and publish them in order to throw light on the works of the classical historians, to illustrate the unfolding of history, the better to impress upon the minds of men its personalities and their deeds, and great events.[3]

Two figures of the antiquary stand out here: the owner and the connoisseur, who alone finds recognition in the eyes of Pereisc. Pereisc embodies a particular type of antiquary, for whom knowledge of objects comes before enjoyment of their possession. But it was not until the nineteenth century that the distinction between the dealer (who became an antiquarian) and the scholar (who became an archaeologist or art historian) was finally made.

For a long time, Greece was practically inaccessible to Westerners. In addition to the many difficulties and dangers of travel, the country was under Ottoman rule, which led to political and diplomatic problems. The first Westerner to venture to the East and bring back notes and drawings was Cyriacus of Ancona (1391-1452). A humanist and merchant, Cyriacus travelled the Mediterranean in search of monuments to draw and inscriptions to copy. Between 1427 and 1448 – i.e., before the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 –, he visited numerous sites in the Aegean. His descriptions and sketches are sometimes the only surviving evidence of monuments that have disappeared today. Cyriacus considered the monuments and inscriptions to be more faithful witnesses of Classical antiquity than the texts of ancient authors. With his intuition that material remains take precedence over other sources when trying to understand a past civilisation, Cyriacus was a pioneer of the archaeological discipline. The only legacy he brought back from his journey was a scientific one, not the antiquities themselves.

[3] Quoted (in translation) by Schnapp 1996, pp. 136-138.

With few exceptions, the first Greek antiquities did not arrive in Italy until the sixteenth century. This happened in Venice, thanks to its commercial and diplomatic relations with the East. In Venice, a city without ancient ruins, patricians, merchants, and cardinals built up their collections of antiques along the lines of the great Roman collections, but with objects and inscriptions that came almost exclusively from the East.[4] Venice was not only a place of arrival, but also a channel through which antiquities spread to the West.

In the seventeenth century the first Western travellers finally ventured to Greece. The tradition of the Grand Tour was born. [5]In England, the pioneer in this field was Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (1585-1646). It is said that he wanted to bring ancient Greece to England. To this end, he sent a network of agents to the Aegean to collect coins, gems, sculptures, and inscriptions, and he turned his house and gardens into a museum for the curious to visit. In France, Mazarin, then Louis XIV and Colbert had the idea of using the French ambassadors in Constantinople to expand their collections and libraries. Among them, the figure of the Marquis de Nointel stands out. He spent most of his legation, from 1670 to 1679, travelling around the country accompanied by a large group of scholars and artists. Although he wanted to give his journey a scholarly air, he collected antiques everywhere he passed with the greed of a collector. The ambassadors were eventually joined by artists and young men from the wealthy classes who completed their education with a trip to the Mediterranean.

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, a large-scale trend of exporting antiquities began in Greece, with the Ottoman authorities turning a blind eye. The era of the raiders began, with systematic plundering.[6] The Ottoman power was not strong enough to prevent the looting and therefore tolerated the spoliation of ancient monuments by foreigners. The name of Thomas Bruce, the seventh Earl of Elgin, the British ambassador to the Sublime Porte (1800-1803) will forever be associated with the removal of the Parthenon Marbles. Similarly, the French ambassador (1784-1792) and rival, the Count of Choiseul-Gouffier, instructed his envoy in Athens, the painter Fauvel: "Grab everything you can, and never miss an opportunity to get your hands on anything you can get your hands on in Athens and its environs. Have no pity, neither for the living nor for the dead".[7]

In the two decades before the Greek Revolt of 1821, the fall of the Parthenon Marbles was followed by several affairs that revealed looting of antiquities on a grand scale. The treasure hunt for Greek art was fuelled by the needs of the grow-

[4] Favaretto 1990.

[5] On the rediscovery of Greece, Étienne, Étienne 1992.

[6] Bracken 1975; Dyson 2006; Tolias 2011; Matthaiou, Chatzidimitriou 2012; Zambon 2014; Apostolou, Zambon 2022.

[7] BnF, Manuscrits, ms. fr. 22 873, fos 163-164, *Letter by Choiseul-Gouffier to Fauvel*, dated 14/02/1789, translated.

ing number of publicly opened collections in Oxford, London, Paris, or Munich. These early museums, seeking to hoard a universal artistic heritage were in search of ancient marbles whose splendour would add to their fame and to the glory of the state that possessed them, just as in the past popes, princes and prominent collectors vied for antiquities discovered in Rome. Since Greece was not yet an independent country, it could not prevent these transfers of cultural property. However, with the Greek War of Independence in 1821, all exports of antiquities were soon banned and Greece would reclaim its heritage. Another story, one that links nation and heritage, begins.

From independent states to international legislation

In the name of the freedom of peoples to self-determine, the nineteenth century witnessed a wave of revolutions. In this nationalist context, everything that could help strengthen the sense of belonging to a nation was used, including archaeological discoveries.[8]

At the end of the eighteenth century, Greece did not yet exist. Its present territory had belonged to the Ottomans since the collapse of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. However, the country's independence was won in the name of a Hellenic identity that has its roots in Classical antiquity and a prestigious ancient heritage. In this respect, Greece is an example of militant nationalism, that perfectly illustrates the process of building the identity of a modern nation on the basis of the past and cultural heritage. In 1827, the first government, outraged by the looting to which Greeks had fallen victim, formally banned all exports of antiquities, which were considered the "national property of all Greeks, being the work of the ancestors of the Greek people". In 1834 the Greek Archaeological Service was founded, and its efforts were immediately focused on the Acropolis of Athens, which was to become a national symbol. The following year, the Acropolis was opened to the public. The search for antiques had become a purely national affair of the utmost importance to the country. Since the Greek state could not handle its country's enormous cultural wealth on its own, foreign nations were allowed to establish permanent archaeological institutes in Greece, but their activities were strictly regulated.

In addition to the provisions made during the War of Independence, the first Greek law on antiquities was enacted in 1834, modelled on the edict promulgated in the Vatican States in 1820 and giving monumental remains and archaeological objects a clearly defined status.[9] The state was declared the owner of the antiquities, which in turn were designated as "national property common to all

[8] Hamilakis, Yalouri 1996; Hamilakis 2007; Tolias 2008.
[9] Voudouri 2008; 2010.

Greeks". The law recognised shared ownership between the state and the landowner for objects found on private land but confirmed full ownership by the state for antiquities found on public land. It also allowed the sale of antiquities within the Kingdom of Greece, but formally prohibited their export without state permission. Permission had to be granted by the state authorities, who could not refuse it in three specific cases: (a) the museums of the capital or the provinces possess "duplicates of the same kind and quality"; (b) the object to be exported was imported from abroad; (c) the Ephorus General declared the object to be "insignificant" and "useless to the state".

Despite the precocity of the law and the priority given to public ownership of the material remains of the past, the limited capacity of the young Greek state to act made the application of the law very difficult for a long time. The illegal trade of antiquities reached unprecedented levels in the 1870s and 1880s. Scholars in France even believed that the Greek law on antiquities was the cause of this situation. The following words come from Salomon Reinach, who wanted to denounce the "modern vandalism in the East":

> This is a very draconian legislation, which, like all laws of this kind, is doomed from the beginning to remain partly a dead letter [...] We will show how, for half a century, it has led to a situation in which there are hardly any authorised excavations that benefit the country, to an infinite number of illegal excavations that plunder it, to the mass export of small objects that can be stolen from surveillance, and finally, and above all, to a heinous vandalism in which objects too large to be exported are mutilated and smashed into pieces.[10]

The 1834 Act had indeed introduced nuances in the meaning and interest of certain antiquities, so that there was some leeway in the export of certain pieces. The term "duplicates" and the descriptions of "insignificant" or "useless" that the law associated with various objects deemed of no value to the state opened the door for all kinds of adaptations.[11] The concept is also found in the 1874 agreement between Germany and Greece on the excavation of the site of Olympia. Article 6, while recalling that Greece would have ownership of all finds, also provides for a possible transfer of "duplicate or repeated finds" to Germany. However, this did not happen until 1887, when the German ambassador Joseph Maria von Radowitz was able to bring some pieces to Germany. In the meantime, the debate had flared up in Greece: nationalists denounced their government for granting this excavation permit and spread the rumour that the excavators were sending the finds to Germany. All this explains why this clause, applied to the Germans for the Olympia concession, no longer appears in the concession granted to the French in 1887 for the excavation of Delphi. The agreement, which was finally

[10] Reinach 1883, pp. 137-138 (translated).
[11] Galanakis 2012a; 2012b; Mannoni 2022.

ratified in 1891, gave Greece ownership of all works of art, antiquities and other objects discovered during the French excavations. In return, French archaeologists would enjoy scientific property rights to the data obtained. The Olympia and Delphi agreements thus fundamentally distinguish between ownership of the objects themselves and ownership of the scientific knowledge gained from them. Echoing Fabri de Peiresc's distinction between the two types of antiquaries, this provision firmly established the ownership of the tangible cultural heritage in the possession of the Greek national heritage, while the ownership of the intangible knowledge was granted to an international and scientific audience.

In the summer of 1888, an interesting case of antiquities trafficking made headlines in Greece and France. Through the vice-consul in Paris, the Greek authorities asked the Directorate of the National Museums for a list of art objects of Greek provenance that had recently been acquired by French museums and for the names of the Greek intermediaries to be forwarded. Albert Kaempfen, the director of the National Museums at the time, refused the request. The matter took a political turn, however, when the Greek government insisted. As the *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* reported on 14 July 1888, "Gustave Larroumet, director of the Beaux-Arts, enumerated in a letter to the Minister of Public Education, the disadvantages of the Greek government's demands", which would have consisted of France applying the Greek law of 1834 on the protection of antiquities, thus substituting for "the deficiencies of the Greek administration of justice and customs". The French government took the matter very seriously and asked for a legal opinion. Emile Durier, a lawyer at the Paris Court of Appeal and president of the Bar Association, argued that the export of antiquities complained of by Greece was in fact neither a crime nor an offence punishable under French law. For the jurist, the Greek law "is highly arbitrary and contrary to natural law" and "the French government must not make itself the accomplice of the Greek customs officials, to seize what they have let pass".[12] The Paris press echoed this sentiment, writing: "Under our law, the export of antiquities is free, and every day ancient works of French genius acquired by foreigners cross our borders; we have never thought of declaring them national property and thus inalienable to their owners". The author of the paper cynically concluded: "Greek law speaks only of those objects that have been attempted to be removed; of those that have been successfully removed it is silent, and for good reason".[13] The case was tried! The seizures required by Greek law simply could not be carried out outside Greek territory.

The case is indicative of the French attitude and public opinion at the time towards the Greek law protecting antiquities. The affair is also an example of

[12] AN 20140044/48, *Letter by E. Durier to the Minister*, dated 2/08/1888, translated.

[13] *Le Temps*, 8/8/1888, p. 2 (translated); *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 10/8/1888, p. 3 (translated).

the difficult internationalisation of national laws to protect what had become a national cultural heritage. Following Greece's example, the Ottoman Empire issued the *Asar-ı Atika Nizamnamesi* Ordinance of 1884. These early regulations inspired most nations of the world in the twentieth century. Especially, after the wave of independence that began in the 1950s, the new nations were eager to protect their heritage and crack down on the ever-growing illicit trade in cultural property. In this historical context, the Sixteenth session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1970 adopted the "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property". By calling for measures to prohibit and prevent the illicit trade in cultural property, it created a common framework and strengthened international cooperation between states. The Convention entered into force gradually, depending on when it was ratified by the States Parties: Italy in 1978, Greece in 1981, the United States of America in 1983, France in 1997, the United Kingdom in 2002, Germany in 2007, Belgium in 2009, etc. However, the 1970 Convention has no retroactive effect and does not apply to antiques that have already been exported. To date it has been ratified by 141 states. The UNESCO Convention provides a globally binding legal framework that promotes international cooperation against the trade in antiquities, but also requires States Parties to take a number of measures on their territory, such as promoting museums, compiling national inventories, and implementing educational programmes to promote respect for cultural heritage.

The 1970 Convention also raises the issue of repatriation. According to UNESCO, the return and restitution of cultural property is a central theme of the Convention. Article 7 provides that another state should, at the request of the state of origin, seize and return cultural objects that have been stolen abroad from a museum, religious institution, or public monument. Although the case does not fall within the scope of the Convention, which has no retroactive force, the most famous demand for restitution is the campaign for the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, which intensified in the 1980s with the demand of the then Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri. The debate on restitution has been going on for decades between Greece and the United Kingdom. Both countries have developed arguments for the Marbles to be returned to Athens or to remain in London. For the Greeks, the Parthenon sculptures represent an important and central part of their cultural heritage. The Marbles are considered the most significant and symbolic link that modern Greeks have with their ancient ancestors. For the Trustees of the British Museum, the Parthenon sculptures are an important part of the story of cultural achievement around the world, that the Museum tells from the dawn of human history to the present day. In a way, the case of the Parthenon Marbles is a question of national interest versus the universalism of a global cultural heritage. But the debate also raises the question of the public.

From learned interest to an archaeology for the public

Although the marble fever of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries caused severe damage to the monuments, their display and study in Western museums enabled significant developments in the understanding of Greek art. Throughout the twentieth century, scholarly literature on Classical antiquity boomed, at roughly the same pace however as the Western public's interest in Greece and Rome dwindled.

Classical archaeologists have long been self-centred, pretending that the main purpose of the discipline was and always will be the advancement of scientific knowledge about the past. By conducting public research in the interest of scientific progress and by entrusting public museums with the task of enriching a nation's heritage, they have long firmly believed that they were fulfilling their duty as public servants. But what if archaeology's locus was not in the past but in the present?[14] Slowly but surely, professionals have become aware of the need to rethink their complacency about their mission and, in particular, to reconsider the distinction between mastering knowledge about the past and owning cultural property, a distinction that has been rooted in the history of the discipline for centuries. After all, the public wants its money back too! It is not enough to admire the treasures of the past in museums when it comes to defining cultural heritage. This is because cultural heritage today is less about the objects themselves and more about making connections between objects and communities through specific narratives. According to the Council of Europe's Faro "Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society" (2005), cultural heritage is a culturally determined and locally constructed concept. Forgetting this leads to a dead end. So, it is no surprise that the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece is now supported by a (slim) majority of Britons, even high-ranking politicians and renowned classicists.

In the editorial of the first issue of *Public Archaeology*, the first journal of its kind, Neal Ascherson wrote in 2000, alluding to the adoption of new perspectives by archaeologists:

> Even though the superscription of archaeology still generally takes the form of a dedication to the long-dead, it was now perceived to be an activity conducted by the living among the living, and even on the living. And it therefore followed that archaeology was a profession bearing all the obligations and rights of any other social actor in the present […] The idea of political and social responsibility had somehow to be reconciled with the new subjectivism, with the proposition that any widely-held and passionately-expressed view possessed a sort of validity even when it appeared to run against the 'scientific evidence'.[15]

[14] On the development of "community archaeology" and its principles, Dhanjal, Moshenska 2011.

[15] Ascherson 2000, pp. 2-3.

In 2017, in the editorial of the newly founded Italian journal *Archeostorie. Journal of Public Archaeology*, Cinzia Dal Maso called for a stronger engagement of archaeologists to re-establish cultural heritage among the population:

> Public archaeology has become increasingly popular in Italy: the word is on everyone's lips both in archaeology seminars and university courses, and many archaeologists are starting to share their results with the wider public and actively collaborate with non-archaeologists […] However, this trend has not yet become part of an accurate and scientific established practice. Rather, it is mainly the result of improvisation and good will.[16]

Although engagement with the public has increased among professionals, "scientific knowledge" and "archaeology for the public" do not always seem to be compatible. Many archaeology courses in European universities still do not pay enough attention to cultural heritage issues. They focus on the task of training learned specialists in the study of material products, who will be poorly adapted, however, to the huge labour market in the field of cultural heritage and the tourism industry. Many archaeologists still do not care what local people think about their work and do not know what visitors do on "their" (*sic*!) site outside of excavation periods, so the colonial skew of scientific archaeology persists. The usual focus on excavation and material studies is often accompanied by a general neglect of post-excavation work that benefits local communities and the public. However, by isolating scientific knowledge from community involvement with cultural heritage, this trend also helps to perpetuate – if not deepen – the divide between science and society, which in turn encourages a nationalistic use of cultural assets or, perhaps worse, a disregard for cultural concerns. On the contrary, those who research the past should be clear that they do so not for the sake of pure science – whatever that may be –, but in the name of the community, which means sharing the results of their research with citizens, if not involving citizens in the production of knowledge. Objects and places acquire their value through the telling of stories about them. Storytelling, then, is part of a scholar's job, because the negative consequences of a bad narrative – or no narrative at all – can be devastating in a world dominated by fake news and cancel culture, where a community's appropriation of the past is both a good thing and a constant challenge.

Cultural heritage has now become a central issue on the political and scientific agenda of the European Commission. This is partly due to the recognition that archaeological heritage can have a significant impact on the growth of local communities, whether by promoting economic development through tourism, assisting in the implementation of environmental policies, encouraging creative industries, or promoting the digitisation of cultural heritage, which underlines

[16] Dal Maso 2017, p. 1.

their importance for its protection, accessibility, and sustainability. Community archaeology initiatives taking place today offer a wide range of collaborations between professionals and lay people, that maximise the benefits of cultural heritage to society, grant the public the right to know, and create the symbiosis that characterizes citizen science. Although some cultural projects at archaeological sites are still short-lived and sometimes disappointing due to a lack of deep, long-term commitment from all stakeholders, they have long-term impacts, by continuously strengthening the bond between a community and its heritage, far beyond the usual pride of owning a cultural asset. After all, a cultural asset that is not constantly restaged as part of community building is also a dead resource.