

STEWARDS OF EMPIRE: HERITAGE AS COLONIALIST BOOTY

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Abstract

Stewardship and colonialism are tightly interrelated. It can be defined as a tendency that stemmed out of the need to appropriate, protect, and guard; it nonetheless resulted in the abduction, deformation, and isolation of heritage from the living populations, as suggested by Latin American and Near Eastern cases. In this paper, we study how colonialism has historically shaped museum stewardship against distinct heritage backgrounds. Selected episodes of stewardship are here used illustrating the twofold background of stewardship; both political and pseudo-scientific enterprise, where stewards, are not mere mediators between past and present, rather pivots of their governmental sponsors' political interests.

Keywords

Stewards; empire ; heritage; colonialism; Archaeology; Orientalism.

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Resumo

Curadoria e colonialismo estão estreitamente inter-relacionados. Pode-se definir como uma tendência que provém da necessidade de se apropriar, proteger e guardar; no entanto resultou em furto, deformação e isolamento do patrimônio de populações contemporâneas, como sugerido pelo caso da América Latina e do Oriente Próximo. Neste artigo estudamos como o colonialismo moldou historicamente a tutela de museus em oposição a distintas práticas de patrimônio. Episódios selecionados de curadoria são aqui utilizados para ilustrar a duplicidade desta prática; um empreendimento tanto político quanto pseudocientífico, onde curadores não são meros mediadores entre passado e presente, mas, sim, bases dos interesses políticos de seus patrocinadores do governo.

Palavras-chaves:

Curadores; império; patrimônio; colonialismo; Arqueologia; Orientalismo.

Introduction

Stewardship as defined in this paper relates to two tremendously problematic case studies where the career and colonialism are tightly interrelated tendencies seeking to appropriate and protect heritage. One could state that in the case of Brazilian and Near Eastern archaeologies, stewards were civil servants of their respective empires, collecting, encapsulating and abducting to the parlours of museums the heritage that would later somehow be related to their own. In the process of constructing their narratives of past and living populations, they have also deformed, and isolated heritage from the living societies, especially in Latin American and the Near East. We study colonialism's shaping of museum stewardship, in an exercise contrasting Brazil—where archaeological heritage was ascribed to 'stagnant and inferior' indigenous populations—with the Near East as 'Cradle of Civilisation' that glorifies a Western past and present.

Stewardship has a twofold background as a political and pseudo-scientific enterprise, where stewards are not mere mediators between past and present but pivots of their governmental sponsors' political interests, not neglecting the fact that the whole exercise also promoted them in the socio-political ladder. In the case of the Near East, the career developed during the early nineteenth century as an extension of the diplomatic endeavours of European trade agents placed strategically in areas of great commercial interest, local conflicts, construction of infrastructure, or posts for intelligence gathering. Paolo Emilio Botta (who excavated Khorsabad), Larsen (who dug Nimrud), de Saulcy (who had been searching for antiquities in Palestine), Renan (who was to uncover the Phoenicians) were all guided to their archaeological tasks due to the diplomatic mediations of the empires that funded them. Besides the archaeological monuments that were later shipped to their home countries, or housed at European museums such as the *Louvre* and the British Museum; they were also providers of first hand intelligence information to their consulates and even to emperors—such is the case of Ernest Renan and Napoleon III, during the 1860-1861 conflict in Lebanon. Scholars and diplomats were mesmerized with the Near Eastern monuments and past which to them contrasted with what they regarded as the decadent, backwards, fanatic, despotic, Islamic present. From this point on, the past was to be curated away from, sanitised from the living populations—initiating a tendency that survives until our days—the abysmal gap between the Near Eastern populations and their understanding of their antiquity. From the nineteenth century, until the end of the Mandate colonial governments—at least—in the Near East the multi-faceted role of the steward as a diplomat, civil servant, archaeologist, and intelligence provider remained constant. Different from Said (1978), we would not say

that it was/is only a socio-political ideological shadow over the career, it is business and could/can be regarded as part of career ascension.

The Brazilian scenario can be associated with the nineteenth century since after the proclamation of the Brazilian independence from Portugal, in 1822, D. Pedro I, Brazilian first Emperor invited naturalists—such as Langsdorff—and scholars from Europe to study the Brazilian wilderness and to develop explanations and alternatives for the progress of the newly created country. Langsdorff's conclusions are illustrative of the mentality of the time: the Indians were savages, nature too wild, and the country had no infrastructure. It was therefore necessary to “domesticate” the Indians, to overcome nature, and to build infrastructure. D. Pedro's son, D. Pedro II, took these measures as soon as he ascended to the throne. From the reports of the governors of the Brazilian provinces of the nineteenth century, specifically in the southern provinces that Indians were being reserved as land was allotted and offered to a new coming flow of Italian and German immigrants. Alongside with the attempts to colonise, modernise, there was an attempt to populate Brazil with a European population, believed to be more apt to promote industrialisation and progress. As the Indian and Black population was left out of the scenario and the future plans for Brazil, so were their past and their culture.

Amazingly, D. Pedro II developed—along his ideas for modernizing his empire—a taste for what was *en vogue* in Europe at the time, the predilection for oriental antiquities and the curiosity for the Near Eastern past, to the point of exchanging correspondence with orientalist of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*. Pedro II's next step was to follow the tendencies of Napoleon III, and to look for his own collections, found today at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. The Ancient Near Eastern civilisations' allure had captivated the sense of taste and aspirations for a past in the case of the two monarchs, and in the case of Napoleon III, archaeological pieces from the modern territory of Lebanon—from Renan's mission—were taken to decorate his palaces and chapels. It was the present, the veracity, and the living populations that bothered both monarchs. As Napoleon III aspired the glories of the Near Eastern past, he battled the pressures of the Ottoman Empire and Islam. As Pedro II aspired a civilised past, present and future for Brazil and for himself, he flirted with the Near Eastern civilisations; reserving the Indians in his territories, continuing enslaving Africans despite the international pressures for Brazilians to abandon slavery, drowning the cultural influences and inheritances of Indians and Africans into neglect, never to be considered part of the Brazilian cultural heritage until the twentieth century.

Although a great deal of the Brazilian ethnological collections started to take shape in the nineteenth century, these collections were not meant to explain the “civilisations of

Brazil”, they were rather related to the natural historical inquiry, a nineteenth century scientific aura and rhetorical lustre to cover up what was before referred to as savage, devoid of civilisation. Why collect the “uncivilised”? Were collections only targeting civilisations? Collecting in the context of colonisation has more to do with a power strategy for dispossession and control, than that of the content or relevance of what is being collected. The exercise of forming collections was most of the times an extension of the state and its colonising agents. In the case of Brazil Marechal Rondon, first formed the collections that are sitting today at the Museum of the Indian in Rio de Janeiro, in the late nineteenth century. Rondon was a natural scientist and also had a military officer, and was set on a mission between 1890-1898 –soon after the Republic was established –to set telegraph lines in the central regions of Brazil and to guard its frontiers. The Indian ethnic groups that were regarded as an obstacle to the establishment of the telegraphs were consequently “pacified” or massacred. Rondon’s work extended to further projects for telegraphic lines and the military surveillance of the frontiers extending to 1915. By then, his mission had formed ethnological collections of populations that no longer existed, and they became the embryo of the first national collections of the later Service of Protection of the Indians. Stewardship was again to be found in connection with the state, as a patronizing agent having the use of collections and material culture as accessories to subjugate the “sub-other”, to appropriate others past, and to control other, among other things...these are common denominators whenever we look at the nature of collecting in the Near East and in Brazil.

From the archaeologists’ self-critical perceptions today

The role of archaeology and material culture in general in the construction and legitimation of cultural identities has become central in archaeological theory and practice in the last few years (Jones, 1997), particularly since the demise of communism. The relationship between archaeology and the construction of identities has been at the heart of the discipline from the start, in the nineteenth century, but it was only with contextual, post-processual approaches that a critical assessment of this relationship has become common currency. However, the sprout of nationalisms in Europe and elsewhere in the world and the spread of globalisation as a popular interpretive framework contributed to the realisation that identity building and material culture were to be interpreted as inextricably interrelated (Funari, Zarankin and Stovel, 2005).

In this overall context, colonial discourse theory is particularly relevant. Originally, since the 1970s at least, colonial discourse theory focused upon the power of colonial ideology and how rhetoric and representations helped in the historical process of imperial domination of subjected peoples (Hingley, 2000: 6). Such thinkers as Edward Said (1978) and Bernal (1987) had shown how the subjugation of peoples by colonial powers was built as a complex set of so-called scientific description of strength and weakness, colonialists and colonised. The past has been used to substantiate strong colonialists, such as the British and the French, as opposed to weak natives, be they middle-easterners, Indians, Africans or Native Americans. The role of material culture in shaping these imbalances was not marginal, but social thinkers were first and foremost concerned with scholarly narratives by social scientists and other students of society. The focus was also on how Indo-Europeans were invented as superior to Semites, even though the other subjected peoples were in a way associated to the traditional inferior, the Semites.

Material culture studies did turn to colonial discourse analysis only lately and this move in archaeology is related to a critical approach to the history of the discipline, as most notably proposed early on Trigger (1989). Unlike earlier internalist accounts of archaeology, the history of the discipline has been increasingly situated in the changing social, cultural, and political circumstances of society as a whole. This innovative approach considers the historical conditions that have permitted the existence of the discipline as well as the circumstances in which knowledge has been produced (Patterson, 2001: 5). This move led to the publication of several books, edited volumes and papers on the such subjects and archaeology and nation building (Díaz-Andreu & Champion 1996 with earlier references; Olivier 2001, from a French perspective; on Brazil, Funari: 1999).

The aim of this paper is study colonialism's shaping of museum stewardship in two different colonial contexts: Brazil and the Middle East. We take a critical view of society and our own scholarly role. Conflicts in the past and conflicts in the interpretation of the past is a growing concern in the discipline. Society is always characterized by conflict and, grounded in a dialectical epistemology, the experience of past peoples is considered as part of an on-going social confrontation between social actors (McGuire and Saitta 1996: 198-204). Exploitation generates a continuous, open conflict and inner contradictions in society (Saitta, 1992), and the forces of domination and resistance are ever-present (Frazer, 1999: 5). The interpretation of these conflicts is malleable and subjective (Rao, 1994: 154), and historical archaeologists can view the past as a set of complex texts, intertwined to form a discourse (Hall, 1994: 168). If conflict and subjectivity are part of both evidence and the interpretation of evidence, a variety of views are inevitable, and archaeologists cannot avoid taking a position.

Traditionally, archaeologists considered that cultures are neatly bounded homogeneous entities (Mullins, 1999:32). This idea comes from the well known and by now classic definition created by Childe (1935:198): “Culture is a social heritage; it corresponds to a community sharing *common* institutions and a *common* way of life [emphasis added]”. This definition implies harmony and unity within society, a commonality of interest and thus a lack of conflict (Jones, 1997:15-26). Homogeneity, order, and boundedness, have been associated to a *a priori* assumption that stability characterizes societies, rather than conflict, a clear conservative *Weltanschauung*. It is also a non-historical approach, implying that all Catholics are, were and will be superstitious, or that all the Muslims are, were and will be prone to despotic rule. However, a growing body of evidence and critical scrutiny of social thought has challenged this traditional view, considering society as heterogeneous, with often-conflicting constructions of cultural identity.

The kaleidoscope cultural contexts and overlapping hues of perceptions

Our own standpoint is to be interpreted in this theoretical framework. We are no neutral observers; we do not claim to describe stewardship history as it really happened, *wie es eingetlich gewesen*, to refer to the famous von Ranke’s early nineteenth century positivist pledge. We speak not from a homogeneous standpoint, as ‘pure’ representatives of a nationality or political credo. We are both Brazilians, but also Italian (Funari) and Lebanese (Mourad), male and female, both educated by the Americans, but with different religious backgrounds, both with the experience of living and working in different countries, in different continents. We share however a critical approach to social life and the academia, we both pledge for knowledge in interaction with social actors, particularly communities in their diversity, such an important value:

On ne peut se dissimuler qu'en dépit de son urgente nécessité pratique et des fins morales élevées qu'elle s'assigne, la lutte contre toutes les formes de discriminations participe de ce même mouvement qui entraîne l'humanité vers une civilisation mondiale, destructrice de ces vieux particularismes auxquels revient l'honneur d'avoir créé les valeurs esthétiques et spirituelles qui donnent son prix à la vie, et que nous recueillons précieusement dans les bibliothèques et dans les musées parce que nous nous sentons de moins en moins capables de les produire. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Le regard éloigné³

³ Paris, Plon, 1983, p. 47.

Before going to our two case studies, we must first state what we consider to be 'stewards of empire'. Power relations are at the heart of social life and stewardship is a concept deeply imbedded in power. Steward, from its inception, is someone who *controls, under the orders of a master* or authority, people and things and so stewardship is the office of administration of power on behalf of someone or some political authority. In our case, the authority is empire, the rule by strength, discretionary power: *imperium*. As we shall see, the archaeological stewardship has been imbedded in asymmetric power relations, where custodians, on behalf of discretionary rulers, controlled the representations of the past. Recent challenges to those imbalances and the role of the inclusion of diverse social groups within the people are also dealt with.

Traditional stewardship in Brazil and recent trends

Prehistoric remains have been studied since the mid nineteenth century due to several factors, not least the importance attached by the imperial authorities to forging a Brazilian national identity. As the Brazilian independence was not only peaceful but also brought forward by Portuguese royals, Indian roots were used to forge a new identity, mostly superficial, but in any event, the Court in Rio de Janeiro was keen to introduce a native image to its European world outlook. Emperor Peter the Second, a scholar himself, supported the moves by intellectuals to prop up the idealised. In this context, the National Museum, in the Court City of Rio de Janeiro, included European and Indian heritage and the old city of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the whole Portuguese Empire for a number of years following the invasion of Mainland Portugal in 1808, would never lose its attachment to a cosmopolitan outlook. Archaeological stewardship was thus a clear Imperial strategic project:

With the end of the monarchy in 1889, Rio de Janeiro continued to be the capital, until 1961, but the political and economic power went to the West and to the South, as the Republic was dominated by the Paulista aristocracy, first coffee planters and later industrialists. The ethos of the Paulista elite paid less attention to the noble Indian image, as historically Paulistas, even though descendants of Natives and Portuguese themselves, were sworn enemies of Indians, and Paulistas were known as "Indian raiders" themselves. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the drive against Indians accentuated and the collection of archaeological remains was not particularly common. The stewardship of archaeological material in the most active Museum in this period, the Paulista Museum, at São Paulo, was put under the guidance of Hermann von Ihering, who himself advocated the extinction of Native Brazilians. Von Ihering was an archetypical steward of the empire; in that he collected remains of

Indian tribes and at the same time campaigned to the destruction of their descendants still alive. The 1930s witness several political and economic changes, as the central government for the first time in the Republic established a policy of heritage management, linked to a new conception of National identity, not far from the nationalist principles imported from Fascist countries, notably Italy and Poland. A National Heritage Office was established and the main concern has been with the preservation of high style architecture, sculpture, painting and other learned arts. What was under the custody of archaeology stewards were elite material culture, male, learned, according to a normative conception of social life.

After the restoration of civilian rule in 1945 prehistoric remains, left a bit in the shade during the heyday of nationalist ideology, came back particularly in the actions of humanist and political activist Paulo Duarte who, despite being a member of Paulista elite, defended for the first time the need to protect humble prehistoric remains. Paul Rivet had influenced Duarte and the *Musée de l'Homme* and his humanist approach lead him to propose the protection of shell middens, so common in the Brazilian coast. Duarte was able to propose a law for the protection of archaeological sites, approved by Congress in 1961 and still in force today. The military coup of 1964 put an end to an era of growing concern for Brazilian roots and diversity, and Duarte's efforts were dashed, as he was first left with little funding and later, in 1969, he was expelled from the University (Funari, 2002; 2003). The restoration of civilian rule enabled pluralism once again to blossom and heritage was enlarged to include again Natives remains, but also black and ordinary people's material culture too. Town councils, State assemblies and the National Congress enacted several laws regarding the protection of heritage, widening the whole concept of cultural property and enabling even ordinary citizens to appeal in court to protect heritage (Tavares, 1998). However, the stewardship of archaeological collections remained the preserve of a small number of stewards, most of them assuaged by several years of authoritarian rule.

The Near Eastern case and the extremes of civil conflicts in Lebanon

Eyes were drawn towards the Near East monumental remains due to the inevitable associations with the biblical narrative and landscape and philology, the study of biblical geography dating back to the seventeenth century only enhanced these relations. At first finds were taken as souvenirs by travellers, a tendency that gradually developed into extensive collections by local diplomats, later donated to European museums, and awakening institutional aspirations to enrich existing assemblages. The growth rate of European museum collections throughout the

nineteenth and twentieth century are proportional to the European diplomatic, political and economic infiltration in the Near East during Ottoman rule; and culminating in direct mandatory colonial rule—in the cases of England and France. Despite the creation of the Ottoman Antiquities regulations dating back to 1869, museums did not seize to purchase objects from local antiquities dealers, and diplomats never gave up on excavating illegally to constitute personal collections. Whenever it came to the scientific development of archaeology in the Near East by the mid-nineteenth century, local dealers and diplomats had far more extensive knowledge than the bureaucratic scholars from various backgrounds that took interest in excavating. As vestiges were unearthed, the 'Cradle of European Civilisation' began to take shape in the minds of the westerners. At the same time there was a cleavage between the views of philologists, associating the Orient with the Semites, the asymmetric inferior of the Indo-European languages and consequently peoples; and the stewards of oriental remains, marvelling at such a glorious, monumental past, connected to them through the history of Christianity and the classical pasts.

The political conditioning of the past and the vestiges became more accentuated as French, English, German, Russian, and Danish diplomats infiltrated the local religious communities, taking sides in local conflicts, to exploit local human and natural resources, and to get hold of better positions in the local economy. Locals took turns ascending to power and declining by becoming allies of foreign powers to get the best opportunities at their own petty interests. This is how a network of European and Ottoman coalitions with the local religious communities—Catholic, Orthodox, Sunni, Shiite, Druze—maintained the growing and industrialising Levantine communities under economic control; either by direct Ottoman colonial rule, or indirect semi-colonial European interference. Europeans got involved in the local trade, political, religious-sectarian conflicts and in the modernisation of the Ottoman provinces with the construction of roads, and railroads that led to the discovery of most of the sites that are known until present. As the past was unveiled, identities were shaped according to the socio-political aspirations at hand.

In the case Lebanon illustrates these patterns throughout the nineteenth, and into the twentieth century. Between 1860-1861 there was an attempt of genocide during a civil conflict between the Maronites and Druzes who were competing over local rule. As the French took the side of the Maronites, and the Ottomans took the side of the Druze, the local conflict ended up in a succession of massacres of the Christian populations. As European powers had been too measured to interfere in the conflicts, they were most willing to put pressure on the Ottomans to form an autonomous province within the Ottoman province of Syria. Out of this episode in the history of Levantine conflicts, one can understand the sectarian conflicts involved in the creation of borders of modern states, the European influence in such exercise, and the creation of the

archaeological scenario of these lands including the first attempts to delineate the profile of ancient identities according to material culture. The combination of these ingredients became the Near Eastern legacies in problematic ethnic-religious conflictive nation states highly influenced by the identities constituted by the production of knowledge in archaeology.

In Lebanon, by the early twentieth century, Arabism that had taken shape through the American missionaries, and Phoenicianism which took shape through the Oriental department of the French Jesuit university, were blooming as Anti-Ottoman Christian movements. Not rival movements, at first, but grew into severe antagonism during the French Mandate, by the end of World War I. With the collapse of the Ottoman regime, the alliances changed culminating into a roughly Maronite-Phoenician-Lebanist nationalist front, against an Islamic-Arab-Arabist nationalist front, against an Orthodox-Arab/Phoenician-Syrian nationalist front. By the end of the French mandate in the 1940s, the nationalist groups had not yet come to terms and acceptance of the newly created Lebanese state. Lebanists justified it as the resurrection of Phoenicia, a state that was not newly created, but that existed for the last six thousand years. Ironically, they did not have the means to prove such existence, not even forging interpretations on the data. After all, the French archaeologists had created the whole myth of Phoenician identity stretching to the twentieth century. The allegory reached its ultimate definition in Georges Contenau's *La Civilisation Phénicienne* – and the all the finds had been appropriated by France, to be found primarily in the *Louvre* collections; curated by Contenau himself. The allegories of identities in Arabism and Syrianism are not distinct in the extent of political and academic manipulation; and were paraded as political-nationalist propaganda and myths of origin that perpetuate sectarianism.

Conclusions

In the last twenty years or so, after the restoration of civilian rule in Brazil in 1985, archaeological stewards have been confronting complex dilemmas when rulers and ruled (Ucko, 1990: xx), or people excluded from power, as we should call them, compete for their services. Archaeology is the only social science that can provide access to all social groups, not only elites, but also peasants, natives, nomads, slaves, craftsmen or merchants (Saitta, 1995: 385) and for this reason ordinary people could recognise themselves in what we as archaeologists offer them. Furthermore, the sprouting of interest groups, such as female, black consciousness, gay, and several other movements struggle to be included and the archaeological stewards are still lagging behind these social demands. For the last decades, anthropologists, historians

and other social scientists have been keen to study the excluded and to address a variety of audiences. Natives have been active interlocutors and scientists have been campaigning for the rights of Indians, particularly for the demarcation of indigenous peoples' lands. Blacks are in a similar situation, and now some school textbooks mention Natives, Blacks, ordinary poor people, immigrants and other excluded strata, both in the present and the past. Environmental concerns have been also addressed by different sciences, as is the case with urbanism and vernacular architecture from a perspective of poor people. Feminists, female movements as well as several other groups have been interacting with social scientists. In Brazil, archaeological stewardship has a chance to catch up, in the next few years, and play a role in fostering inclusion, dialogue and diversity, instead of simply serving a dominating master.

One would also hope that such tendencies will reach the shores of Near Eastern archaeology and a healthier relationship with the past, identities and material remains. The problems of state formation, internal problems and foreign invasions (the later one in Iraq, by foreign armies aiming, supposedly, to liberate the people and democratise the polity) does not allow Near Eastern populations to be as hopeful with the ongoing colonial legacies of the nineteenth century. In the case of Lebanese heritage management, the political implications of archaeological identities and their widespread use became common currency to all social classes and members of society. After all, in such a highly politicised sectarian society, having a confessional system and a sectarian constitution—one must choose a 'side' not only to be someone, but to hold a place in power in society and specifically in the work force—since jobs and political posts are also reserved to certain sects. It is interesting to mention, at this point, that even the posts at the Antiquities Department in Lebanon are to be held according to religious sects. The post of Director of Antiquities could never be held by a non-Christian. This illustrates the drawbacks imposed by a sectarian system of government, that despite innovative ideas provided by the academia—does not allow the flow of new ideas and primarily of social inclusion.

The—roughly—two decades of the Civil War in Lebanon, did not help the Lebanese insularity that had allowed only a few excavations to be held after the end of the French mandate. The legislation dates back to its ultimate draft of the 1930s, and the Museum attempts to decentralise—opening small exhibitions such as the one in Baalbek and in Byblos—with great difficulties and what seems to be a lonesome attempt, since it is prioritising tourism. The public seem politically attached to the archaeological discourse of identities disregarding material remains, sites, and monuments that are used as icons calling the attention of tourist, that can take them home as souvenirs. Today, archaeology in Lebanon shifts slowly from a socio-political purpose to an economic asset. In both cases, they do not offer social inclusion or a health relationship with the past. These relationships mirror the conditions that

the state offers its citizens, the extent at which the regime promotes social inclusion and the body of laws guarantees social-religious-ethnic equality.

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