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The Lure of the Artefact? The Effects of Acquiring Eastern Mediterranean Material Culture

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21 THE LURE OF THE ARTEFACT? THE EFFECTS OF ACQUIRING EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MATERIAL CULTURE

MORAG M. KERSEL

Abstract

The relationship between people and things is a crucial avenue of investigation in understanding past cultures. While the social aspects of material culture have come under closer scrutiny over the past few decades, what remains largely unexplored is the correlation between collecting archaeological artefacts and the destruction of the archaeological landscape to supply that demand. Understudied also is the transformation of the archaeological entity. An examination of the social contexts and the consequences of consuming material culture is integral to a fuller understanding of archaeology in the eastern Mediterranean. The interplay of these spheres provides an intriguing lens for the examination of the lure of relics from the Bronze and Iron Ages. To be as pervasive as it is, consumption is likely to serve multiple motives and involve a variety of stakeholders, ultimately resulting in the destruction of the archaeological record. Many of the motivating factors behind the collecting of eastern Mediterranean materials echo the rationales of early archaeological practice in the region – a desire to establish a connection to the land and the past through material manifestations; and a desire to save the past. Artefacts from this part of the world have long held a fascination for pilgrims, tourists and locals, which can often be tied to a substantiation of faith based on the material past. At the same time, the archaeological artefact, once removed from its context, acquires a new facet to its object biography – that of looted artefact. Employing case studies from Greece and Israel, this chapter examines the collecting of archaeological materials, the deleterious effects on the archaeological landscape and the object biographies of those artefacts enmeshed in the trade in antiquities.

Introduction

To be as pervasive as it is, consumption – that is, the acquisition of archaeological artefacts – is likely to serve multiple motives, and involve a variety of stakeholders. This demand for artefacts may ultimately result in the destruction of the archaeological landscape or the theft from museums. As part of my study into the effects of the

trade (legal and illegal) in antiquities on the archaeological record, I established a causal relationship between the looting of archaeological sites (supply) and the consumption of archaeological artefacts (Kersel 2006a). Much of the data and background research are the result of investigations conducted over a period of 10 years in Greece, Israel, Jordan and Palestine. More than 200 interviews¹ were carried out with various stakeholders involved with the illegal and legal antiquities trade (in Israel, it is legal to buy and sell artefacts in accordance with the 1978 Antiquities Law) in the east Mediterranean in order to assess the efficacy of current legislative practices in the aforementioned countries. In order to understand better the connection between supply and demand, and to comprehend the market and the desire for archaeological artefacts from the eastern Mediterranean, it is necessary to investigate the desire to collect cultural material. What motivates collectors? Why do people want archaeological material from this region? Does this practice have any bearing on the archaeological landscape? What is the lure of the artefact? Employing case studies from Greece and Israel, this chapter examines the collecting of archaeological materials, the effects on the archaeological landscape and the object biographies of those artefacts enmeshed in the trade in antiquities.

Why Collect?

At the end of the three-part artefact commodity chain (production–distribution–consumption) illustrating the trade in antiquities is consumption: someone or something (a museum, an educational institution, etc.) creating consumer demand for archaeological material. In the eastern Mediterranean, consumers can be broken down into two broadly defined categories: low end and high end. Low-end consumers are typically tourists, students and religious pilgrims to the area who want to leave with a small, rather inexpensive memento or gift of their trip. These keepsakes must meet the requirements of what Graburn (1976: 15) defines as low-cost, portable, dustable and, most importantly, understandable (see Figure 21.1 for

FIGURE 21.1. Example of a tourist (low-end collector) keepsake. Photograph by Morag M. Kersel.

an example of a tourist keepsake). For our purposes, these souvenirs of the trip are what Gordon (1986) refers to as 'symbolic shorthand souvenirs' – those artefacts manufactured in the past, which evoke a message about an associated place or person.

Evocative significance is often of equal importance to the high-end collector in their desire to possess the past. High-end consumers are traditionally wealthy individuals, museums and educational institutions willing to make large financial investments for the highest-quality pieces representative of a particular period and place. While there are some fundamental differences in the way in which low-end and high-end collectors carry out their purchases, the psychological and sociological factors affecting their acquisitions may be very similar.

According to Schwartz (2001: 633), 'collecting has existed for as long as humans could conceptualize the idea of beauty. The acquisition of a beautiful object would guarantee present and future enjoyment'. Pleasure (real or imagined) attained through owning objects is a major impetus for many collectors. These sentiments are patently evident with collectors of eastern Mediterranean material. Many of the motivating factors affecting collectors of archaeological material from the eastern Mediterranean echo the rationales for early archaeological practice in the region – a desire to establish a connection to the land and the past through the material remains. The collector often attempts to recreate the past through the purchase of artefacts and may variously view themselves as connoisseurs, heroes, public servants, saviours, tourists and harbingers of class.

By its very nature, collecting is paradoxical. Simultaneously, it is rational and irrational, deliberate and random, cooperative and competitive, passive and aggressive, stressful and calming. It can evoke thoughts of self-worth and importance while at the same time

inducing feelings of inadequacy when an opportunity is missed or a competitor is more successful. Studies have posited an assortment of interrelated motivations for the general concept of collecting, ranging from the financial, psychological and sociological to the aesthetic and cultural.

Most theoretical considerations of collecting (see Rigby and Rigby 1944; Eccels 1968; Baekeland 1981; Storr 1983; Stewart 1984; Haraway 1985; Ellen 1988; Danet and Katriel 1989; Pomian 1990; Formanek 1991; Olmsted 1991; Baudrillard 1994; Clifford 1994; Muensterberger 1994; Belk 1995b; Pearce 1995; Long and Schiffman 1997; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Schwartz 2001; McIntosh and Schmeichel 2004) agree that, in the final analysis, collecting is about control. Clifford (1985: 238) suggests that the act of collecting is predicated on a particular view of owner-object relations as based on domination. The owner of the object is dominant and is imbued with power through ownership. Israelis buying artefacts looted from Palestine assert their dominance over the collective cultural legacy through authority over the downtrodden Palestinians, many of whom have resorted to looting as a means of economic survival. Simultaneously, Palestinians loot archaeological sites as a means of resistance – eradicating any presence of a tangible Jewish connection to the land (Abu el-Haj 2001; Kersel 2007). Said (1978) accuses Napoleon's forays into Egypt and the Levant of being the quintessential model of scientific appropriation of one culture by another. Napoleon participated in what Schildkrout and Keim (1998: 30) refer to as trophy hunting in which large collections of artefacts represent a tangible means of showing conquest, domination and penetration. For the low-end collector, the act of purchasing an artefact in the marketplace can also convey dominance over travel, leaving their known comfort zones for destinations and adventures unknown. The bought antiquity signifies conquest over a distant land.

The practice of collecting has alternately been described as glorified consumerism (Danet and Katriel 1994) and the ultimate in luxury consumption (Belk 1995a). The *nouveau riche* often regard the purchase of art and antiquities as a way of gaining legitimacy and standing among the old families of the aristocracy (Muensterberger 1994). The desire for social distinction or what Moulin (1987) refers to as the 'snob factor' is a very important motivator for collectors. In their landmark study on Cycladic figures, Gill and Chippindale (1993: 634) discuss the snob factor: 'Antiquities, like other works of art, are one means by which mere money, even in vulgarly acquired form, can become a fine proprietorship'. Possessing some special, generally unavailable items instils status on the self and envy in one's associates. Collections are also a means

of demonstrating or claiming high social status vis-à-vis non-collectors as well as other collectors; the distinctiveness of the collection brings distinction to the collectors (Baudrillard 1981; Bourdieu 1984).

Collecting, then, is the essence of materialism. It involves acquiring, choosing, possessing and shopping. Collectors create, combine, classify and curate to produce collections. Clifford (1988: 218) states that collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions and the rule-governed territories of self. The gathering of objects together in a collection makes a concrete, visible statement about the collector's personal hierarchy values. 'The great collector has a sense of destiny, a feeling that he is mankind's agent in gathering and preserving what otherwise might be heedlessly dispersed' (Meyer 1973: 187). Through objects, collectors have the ability to keep alive the collective memory of the past, which otherwise might be forgotten or wrongly interpreted (Rigby and Rigby 1944).

Whatever the motivation (psychological or sociological) and whoever the collector (low end or high end), there is little question that collecting is much more than the simple experience of pleasure. If that were true, then one ancient artefact would satisfy (which is sometimes true of the low-end collector) the collecting instinct. Why do people collect material from the eastern Mediterranean? There is a distinctly individual and often wide disparity in the incentives that motivate collectors.

Alluring Artefacts

In his work, *The Strange Life of Objects*, Maurice Rheims (1956) suggests that 'the passion for an object leads to its being construed as God's special handiwork'. This sentiment is particularly true for artefacts from the Holy Land where, according to many believers, the pieces are god's handiwork, possibly even held by Jesus. The collecting of artefacts has a long history in the region, which is often tied to the substantiation of faith based on a material past. Jews were already devoted to the region and had been for centuries, but with the spread of Christianity as an accepted religion came hordes of Christian pilgrims eager to be closer to the Holy Spirit through relics from the Holy Land. 'Useful for both biblical contemplation and as talismans to ward off ill health and bad fortune, ancient artefacts from the Holy Land quickly became status symbols for simple Christian pilgrims and wealthy aristocrats alike' (Silberman 1989: 131).

From their origins as relic gathering by pious pilgrims, archaeological artefacts from the Holy Land have been powerful signifiers of ideological meanings and reflections of political and social relationships (Shenhav-Keller 1993: 183). Low-end and high-end collectors alike seek a

FIGURE 21.2. Licensed antiquities shop, Old City, Jerusalem. Photograph by Morag M. Kersel.

concrete connection to the past, further defined through the filter of their nationality, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Archaeological material confirms an unbroken continuity, a past that cannot be separated from the present and one that conveys a powerful link to the future. Few low-end collectors come home from a vacation without something to show for it. Souvenirs are tangible evidences of travel that are often shared with family and friends, but what one really brings back are memories of experiences. As visual anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1973: 17) so succinctly states:

The connection between symbol and things comes from the fact that the symbol – the word or picture (or artefact) – helps give the ‘thing’ its identity, clarity, definition. It helps convert given reality into experienced reality, and is therefore an indispensable part of all experience.

The plethora of antiques shops is a testament to the archaeological artefact as souvenir, as an indispensable part of the tourist experience (see Figure 21.2).

The subsequent rise of antiquarianism led to a new secular interest in the area. The once purely religious interest in the east Mediterranean began to give way to a more down-to-earth curiosity about its artefacts,

monuments, plants, people and ruins. Those on the Grand Tour collected to fill their cabinet of curiosities rather than expressly for religious reasons. Explorers avidly collected samples of Classical statuary, coins and pottery. Collecting during this period adhered to a strict canon of 'acceptable' mementoes, and the figurines of the Cycladic islands, which did not conform to the 'collecting ideal' for Greek statuary, were often disregarded as collectibles (Gill and Chippindale 1993: 602). While not all objects were valued equally, scholarly understanding of the history of the region was for the first time independently expanded through the study of material artefacts. But this continued, albeit that changing interest in the material remains resulted in ongoing looting and the acquisition of artefacts both legally and illegally.

During the early part of the twentieth century, the relationships between archaeology, collecting and artefacts changed dramatically. The establishment of scientific archaeology, concomitantly with the establishment of new Middle Eastern states and the rise of nationalism, led to more rigorous field methods, systematic recording of finds and laws to protect and to keep objects within national boundaries. Desire for artefacts from the Holy Land continued in a similar vein, while figurines from the Cyclades became the muses for a variety of artists. The Cycladic form could be seen in the works of Brancusi, Giacometti and Hepworth, resulting in what Gill and Chippindale (1993) refer to as 'esteem for Cycladic figures'. The collecting public became increasingly interested in the prehistoric Cycladic figurine (Figure 21.3). Unfortunately, this esteem coincided with a rise in looting of archaeological sites in the region. While motivations for collecting and the protection of archaeological objects evolved through time, the perceived (real and imagined) value of these items also changed with the period, the person and the place.

The Transubstantiated Object

As artefacts are collected, they undergo a series of transformations – utilitarian and metaphorical. The object manufactured in antiquity for a particular purpose becomes an archaeological artefact through its purposeful or unintended deposition in an archaeological context. Sometime later (days, years or centuries), the object is recovered through scientific archaeological excavations, through agricultural practice, though development or through the illegal looting of a site. The artefact may then become the object of scientific inquiry, an economic commodity sold in the marketplace, a revered museum piece or a signifier of past adventures.

The value of the object can range from the symbolic, to use, to exchange (see Baudrillard 2001; Kersel 2012). The

FIGURE 21.3. Cycladic figurine replica. Photograph by Morag M. Kersel.

value can be mutable, transitory and evolving for the collector. In the acquisition of artefacts where money changes hands, the economic exchange itself creates value for the artefact (Appadurai 1986). No longer the utile, ubiquitous lamp for lighting a darkened room, the collected oil lamp with the menorah stamp becomes a desired item used to confirm the Jewish past. The artefact's meaning is transformed from one of function to one that is socially or ideologically based in its contemporary context. The lamp is unlikely to be again used as a lighting device, and it is now a metonym for the existence of ancient Jews in the Levant.

The one-time grave good, perhaps once part of ritual practice at the Early Bronze Age site of Kavos on the Cycladic island of Keros (Figure 21.4), is now a venerated much sought-after piece in the market, as witnessed recently by the record-breaking sale of the complete piece sold at Sotheby's auction for US\$1,022,500 (Page 2008), realising more than double the original estimate. Unlikely to be used as a grave good or ritual object again, the Cycladic figurine of the Spedos variety is now equated with wealth, class, esteem and victory in the marketplace. The purchaser, Hicham Aboutaam, stated that many people at

FIGURE 21.4. Early Bronze Age sites of Kavos and Dhaskalio, Keros, Greece. Photograph by Morag M. Kersel.

the sale congratulated him on the purchase (Page 2008), reinforcing the trope of collector as victor. Artefacts in the marketplace carry both overt and covert meanings for the collector.

Collected artefacts may display certain symbols (such as the menorah on the oil lamp) and evoke a specific moment in time (the year zero), but the act of collecting can also change the value of such items. Value may be enhanced through contagion, where the collector establishes a magical connection to the artefact's creator or prior owner, through acquisition and handling of the item (Belk 1995b). This phenomenon was evident at an antiquities auction I attended in Tel Aviv. Many of the buyers (comprised of both low-end tourists and high-end collectors, foreigners and Israeli nationals) were only interested in pieces that were from the collections of Teddy Kollek (former mayor of Jerusalem) or Moshe Dayan (military leader, member of the Israeli parliament), pieces that were enhanced with the celebrity status of former ownership by a famous Israeli. The gentleman seated in front of me bid on every item from the Teddy Kollek collection, irrespective of its condition, price or time period. Contagion allows collectors to bask in reflected glory. By purchasing a celebrated object, the collector may accrue self-benefits simply by aligning the self with the object – possessions as extended self (Baekeland 1981; Belk 1991; 1995b; McIntosh and Schmeichel 2004), reinforcing the celebrity and snob factors associated with previous owners of artefacts and perceptions of consumers identified by Gill and Chippindale (1993) and Moulin (1987), both discussed earlier in this chapter. Whatever type of real or perceived value of the artefact to the consumer, why shouldn't people be allowed to collect artefacts?

A Problem With Collecting

Recent studies have illustrated a causal relationship between the demand for archaeological material and the

excavation (both legal and illegal) of the archaeological landscape in order to provide saleable items for the market (Smith 2005; Hollowell 2006; Kersel 2006a; Luke and Henderson 2006; Roosevelt and Luke 2006; Kersel 2007; Bajjaly 2008; Hamdani 2008; Kersel *et al.* 2008; Webb and Frankel 2009). There should be little or no doubt that the demand for artefacts leads to the destruction of the archaeological landscape, theft from museums and religious institutions and the ongoing loss of knowledge and access to the past. Webb and Frankel (2009) provide an excellent overview of the harmful consequences to the archaeological record due to the looting of a Bronze Age cemetery complex at Deneia on Cyprus. The quest for inscriptions for the museum buy-back in the Ghor es-Safi may have increased looting in the area (Kersel 2012; Politis 1994; 2002), just as the demand for a particular type of coin by a tourist in Jerusalem led to the further looting of sites in the Hebron region (Kersel 2006b). Reports have also linked the acquisition of artefacts to terrorism (Kaplan 2005; Blood Antiques 2010) and even murder – in his account of the intrigue surrounding the Sevso Treasure, journalist Peter Landesman (2001) suggests that Jozef Sumegh and two associates were murdered as a result of their involvement with the illegal unearthing of the silver hoard. Interestingly, collectors continue to decry any negative associations with the destruction of archaeological sites or the connection to terrorism, turning a blind eye to the difficult questions surrounding the object's history.

A Problem With Collectors

With the plethora of studies available linking demand for archaeological material to the destruction and theft from sites and museums, it is clear that further research into the motivations and desires of collectors is warranted. In their groundbreaking article on the effects of looting in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Ilan *et al.* (1989: 42) state that

the bulk of antiquities sales are made to low-end souvenir buyers in Jerusalem's Old City. In their analysis of the trade of antiquities in the late 1980s in Israel, they estimated that 80% of the people entering antiquities shops were tourists, and 67% of those bought an antiquity, usually of less than \$20 in value (Ilan *et al.* 1989: 42). These statistics bear similar resemblance to today's situation in Israel. Through interviews and observations, I determined that most of the people entering antiquities shops in Israel are tourists, and a little more than half usually come away with something, a memento of their visit. Statistics on high-end purchases are much harder to gather for the region, given the secretive nature of the trade and transactions when large amounts of money are being exchanged. The purchasing power of low-end and high-end collectors of archaeological material is important to the respective economies of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The sphere of influence of these consumers is evident in the framing of legislative policies (Kersel 2008), the looting of archaeological sites and the tourism industry.

The following case studies illustrate the varied high-end collecting personae and rationales involved with the acquisition and longing for archaeological material from the eastern Mediterranean. Parallels exist in the practice of collecting, the material collected, the personal motivations and the ethically dubious methods of acquisition in each of these studies. The end result, however, is a loss of knowledge about various aspects of the past and a destruction of the archaeological landscape of the eastern Mediterranean.

Moshe Dayan, the Israel Museum and the Quest for an Israeli Past

For the better part of three decades, renowned military leader and politician Moshe Dayan (1915–81) collected antiquities. Through purchases from antiquities dealers, gifts and his own illicit excavations, Dayan amassed some of the most astounding pieces unearthed in the Levant. He purchased artefacts and pillaged archaeological sites in the name of humanitarian interests in order to save the antiquities from destruction (M. Dayan 1978). Initially, Dayan's obsession with antiquities was related to the nascent state of Israel and justification of the state's existence.

Raz Kletter (2006) documents no less than 35 sites illegally excavated by Dayan in his voracious quest for artefacts, but the anthropoid sarcophagi of Deir el-Balah provide some of the most intriguing evidence for the consequences of an unbridled passion for collecting. Dayan was a tyrant who used his military clout, reputation as a war hero, and standing as a respected cabinet minister and later a member of the Knesset to 'persuade' archaeologists, military personnel, ordinary individuals and even

10-year-old boys (Kletter 2006) to aid in his quest for artefacts from the past. In a personal interview with archaeologist Trude Dothan, she described an almost *quid pro quo* effect of dealing with Dayan: 'He provided my excavations with access and military protection at Deir el-Balah when working in the unstable Gaza Strip. I was diplomatic about his past investigations into the area to recover anthropoid sarcophagi'. At the opening of the Dayan exhibit at the Israel Museum, Professor Dothan was the invited keynote speaker; her discussion of Dayan's unauthorised activity at the site was discreet (Silberman 1989).

From all accounts, it appears that, after 1967, Dayan moved from a collector motivated by an attachment to the land through artefacts to what Rotenstein (1997) refers to as an economist/materialist collector, one whose main ambition is to amass a collection in order to realise profits. He was a victim of what Marx (1963) and Adorno (1991) refer to as commodity fetishism. The artefacts with exchange value, as previously mentioned, were fetishised for the amount of capital they could realise upon sale. At this stage, Dayan was no longer fascinated by the figurine of the Iron II period but was single-mindedly focused on its income-producing potential. The exchange value dominates the use value (either the original or symbolic use). Dayan's grandson describes a scene where they were examining some scarabs 'like experts evaluating the merchandise' (S. Dayan 1991: 20), reinforcing the merchant image. Kletter (2003) reports that Dayan sold surplus items from his collection to fund various aspects of his life, including his daughter's wedding. When asked by a fellow Knesset member about how an artefact bearing the label 'from the collection of Moshe Dayan' appeared in a New York town house, Dayan admitted that he sometimes sold pieces but was always careful to sign the bottom of the artefact as coming from his collection, as if absolving himself of all blame (Kletter 2003) but in fact adding value to the artefact through the celebrity or snob contagion mentioned previously. Collecting is not always about the piece but the associated meanings, a phenomenon I witnessed while at an antiquities auction in Tel Aviv. Highlighted in the auction catalogue description was the association with Moshe Dayan (Image 252 *Ancient Coins and Antiquities Catalogue* No. 30, 2003). By purchasing an item, the collector may accrue benefits simply by aligning him or herself with the Moshe Dayan collection, thereby basking in reflected glory.

Throughout his collecting history, it was assumed and verbally confirmed by Dayan that his collection would pass on his death to the Israel Museum (M. Dayan 1978), essentially the State of Israel.

At one time I was innocent enough to believe that he [Dayan] would donate it, states Yaakov Meshorer, friend of Dayan and curator at the Israel Museum. At a certain stage unofficially,

he [Dayan] told me 'Let me enjoy it, and after my death it will come to the museum'. (Aarons 1982: 28)

This was corroborated in recent ethnographic interviews with archaeologists and museum professionals in Israel. 'We allowed him to dig because we were sure that in the end all of the pieces would come to the museum' (Archaeologist 23). In the end, the artefacts did go to the museum – but with a price tag. Dayan's widow, to whom he bequeathed the antiquities, offered the entire collection to the museum after his death for US\$2 million. After much debate and discussion, a donor to the Israel Museum contributed US\$1 million of the requested amount. The rest Rachel Dayan bestowed to the museum, perhaps compelled to donate part in order to rehabilitate the reputation of the collection and the collector (Aarons 1982: 28). In his account of the controversial 1986 museum exhibition opening of *The Dayan Collection: A Man and His Land*, Silberman (1989) describes the protests and public outcry over the validation of Dayan's reprehensible practices through a state-sponsored public exhibition. Silberman (1989: 126) speculates that this incident may have served as a catalyst in examining the antiquities laws and practices of cultural heritage management in the State of Israel (further discussion in Kersel 2006a).

Debate over the practices of Dayan and the purchase of his collection still rages. Opinion is divided over the acquisition and disposition of the collection, but few in the Israel Museum are willing to discuss the issues. As part of my ongoing research project, I approached a curator at the Israel Museum about the possibility of an interview to discuss museum acquisitions and the market, but was told, 'I am sorry but I am not a specialist in this subject' (Museum 5). In response to questions about whether the exhibit condoned the collecting style of Dayan, Martin Weyl, then director of the Israel Museum, stated 'Not at all. My job is to collect and exhibit. It's not my job to enforce the antiquities laws' (Silberman 1989: 128). This sentiment is not uncommon in the museum world, a sphere recently embroiled in various dubious artefacts acquisitions (e.g. the case of the Euphronios krater and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the recent artefact repatriations to Italy by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles).

This position of the museum community, an avowal of apoliticality, was also evident in the responses of employees at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) to the request by Palestine and Jordan to Canada to seize the Dead Sea Scrolls in 2009. On loan from Israel, the Dead Sea Scrolls displayed at the ROM were at the centre of contested ownership claims by Palestine and Jordan. Reaction to the seizure request was surprisingly consistent in its uniformity: 'I can't answer that question', said Mark Engstrom, the ROM's vice president of collections and research, when pressed for details on the Palestinian claims. 'The

museum's not the right forum for a political debate', claimed Julian Siggers, the vice president of programs at the Royal Ontario Museum. At the same time, the curator of the exhibit, Risa Levitt Kohn stated, 'I am an ancient historian. I can tell you about the past'. Israel Antiquities Authority curator Hava Katz opined: 'I am an archaeologist. All we do is cultural activities'. Each in turn claiming neutrality that was above the fray of politics engulfing the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (Kaminer 2009); each claiming a stance of scientific exceptionalism, as defined by Pollock (2008) – reinforcing the trope that collecting remains outside the messy arena of politics and law.

Most collectors, low end or high end, attempt to maintain political detachment, preferring to avoid the sticky associations with law and politics, both of which may impede their collecting forays. This is true not only of collectors of Near Eastern material but also of those who collect artefacts from Greece, as the following two case studies will illustrate.

Collecting the East – Shelby White and Leon Levy

'Two decades ago [the early 1970s], we raised our hands at an auction and became the owners of a Roman Head of a Philosopher. We bought an ancient sculpture but scarcely realized then that it would mark the beginning of a collection' (White and Levy 1990: ix). With this first purchase, the collecting odyssey that would involve thousands of dollars, initiate an archaeological publication program, sponsor excavations and provide artefacts for museum exhibitions, as well as long-term loans, was launched. Discussing their collecting practices, White (1998: 170) states, 'as collectors we believe we are preserving and expanding knowledge of the past. We didn't think of ourselves as collectors when we bought our first antiquities'. Shelby White and Leon Levy (the latter now deceased) are consummate collectors, but are embroiled in some of the fiercest ongoing battles for the restitution of archaeological material – the Weary Herakles (recently resolved with the repatriation to Turkey of the top half of the marble sculpture owned by White and Levy) and the Icklingham Bronzes (for a detailed discussion of this and other issues surrounding the ethics of collecting cultural property, see Renfrew 2000 and Chippindale and Gill 2000). White and Levy may have 'stumbled' into collecting, but they established themselves as leading experts in the collecting world and have amassed one of the most impressive collections of archaeological material.

By their own admission, White and Levy (1990: ix) state: 'Our curiosity then led us to wonder about the civilizations and the antiquities that came before and followed that of

ancient Greece'. While they began collecting with Classical art, their growing interest led them to earlier examples of Greek art, which included Cycladic figurines. However, they placed limits on their practices: 'our collection had to stop somewhere and does not include any Egyptian art' (White and Levy 1990: ix). Why? In their examination of White and Levy's collection exhibited at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gill and Chippindale (1993) suggest that White and Levy are privileging and idolising Greece over more academically logical progressions of the collection. 'The collector, like White and Levy who wishes to extend backward from a nucleus of Classical material, has a choice between a cultural continuity, which leads toward Egypt, and a geographical continuity which leads toward Cycladic' (Gill and Chippindale 1993: 648). Gill and Chippindale invoke the debate inspired by Bernal's (1987) *Black Athena* (for criticism of Bernal, see Early 1998; Lefkowitz and Rogers 1996) as influencing – consciously or subconsciously – the collecting choices made by White and Levy. Rather than choose Egypt, a cultural continuity as espoused by Bernal (1987), White and Levy have chosen a geographical continuity or perhaps a Classical continuity and the high ideals that are associated with the birthplace of democracy.

In his introduction to the *Glories of the Past*, the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition showcasing some of White and Levy's more treasured possessions, director Philippe de Montebello (1990: vii) discusses the personal vision of White and Levy: 'They are not innocents in the game of collecting but passionate, educated, cultivated consumers who have brought together a remarkable collection in a short period of time'. White and Levy are excellent examples of collectors who exhibit some of the classic characteristics of a need for public acknowledgement of their prowess vis-à-vis their artefacts. Acceptance of one's collection into a museum exhibit, or in some instances even creating the museum from a collection, is the ultimate in legitimisation of the activity (Hughes 1987). The act of exhibiting validates both the collector and the collection by instilling an authenticity to the pieces and reaffirming the collector's intelligence and expertise.

White (1998: 172) maintains that when they buy objects, they routinely check the relevant registers (Art Loss, FBI, Interpol) to determine if the artefact they are purchasing has been reported missing, looted or stolen. Checking a register is a defence often proffered by consumers (the J. Paul Getty Museum among them) of archaeological material, but the listing of a stolen artefact does not prevent its appearance in the market and its subsequent purchase by collectors. In a recent exposé of the Greek antiquities market, the documentary *Network*, Jerome Eisenberg, director of Royal-Athena Gallery, discussing the discovery of looted

items from the Corinth Museum theft in his galleries' inventory, states: 'When I was considering the purchase of these pots I checked with the FBI register and they weren't there so I bought them' (Kaspiras 2005). Later, it was discovered that the aforementioned pots were stolen from the Corinth Museum, and Eisenberg returned them to the Museum. High-end collectors like White and Levy, dealers and museums often assert that they are concerned with the entire story of an artefact from its creation, through the previous owners, to its final resting place. But can White and Levy ever really know the complete histories of the objects in their possession? Gill and Chippindale (1993: table 15), in their analysis of the provenience of material in the *Glories of the Past* exhibit, show that of the 230 pieces in the exhibition, 94% are of unknown provenance (the archaeological find spot) using such descriptors as 'said to be', 'possibly' and 'unknown'. By purchasing material on the art market with suspect provenance, the find spots, histories and archaeological associations of these artefacts are only speculative, never certain.

For some people, such as White and Levy, the pleasure of amassing objects is increased by knowing that the activity supports scholarship, science and art; for others, the satisfactions are entirely personal, but the results are nevertheless of public benefit (Tanselle 1998). They view themselves as caretakers of art – for when you are a collector, a caretaker is what you become (White and Levy 1990). 'As collectors we take pride in knowing that the works of art in our collection are viewed by visitors to the museums to which we continually loan them' (White 1998: 176). Renfrew (2000: 78) counters this sentiment by asserting that 'museum exhibitions are merely vehicles for those who seek public recognition and esteem on the basis of their collections when these contain recently purchased unprovenienced material', reaffirming his stance that White and Levy's good intentions are overshadowed by the practice of purchasing artefacts with no known archaeological find spot or with a suspect object biography.

Admiration for the 'Keros Hoard'

In the early 1960s, the Cycladic island of Keros attracted the attention of the archaeological community after Colin Renfrew, conducting research for his doctoral dissertation, noted substantial looting on the western tip of the island at the site of Kavos (Renfrew 2007). Recent reports (Sotirakopoulou 2005; 2008; Renfrew *et al.* 2007; Papamichelakis and Renfrew 2009) suggest that illegal excavations on the island began in the 1950s, although Getz-Gentile (2008), after much study of the various artefacts thought to be part of the so-called 'Keros Hoard', asserts

that artefacts from this region may have been appearing on the market as early as the late nineteenth century. The Keros Hoard is an extensive group of fragmented finds from the Early Cycladic phase of the Early Bronze Age, allegedly found in a single area on Keros (Sotirakopoulou 2005). The fragments, which form the hoard, are attributed to the looting of the western portion of Keros, but evidence for their recovery from a single site is sketchy, anecdotal and at best limited. The artefacts include broken pieces of folded-arm figurines, schematic figurines, obsidian blades, clay and marble vessels, most of which were purchased after their initial sale by the late Professor Hans Erlennmeyer, an active collector from the 1940s until the 1960s.

Recent discussions² with the former looters or descendants of the looters confirm many of the rumours and innuendoes surrounding the recovery of the hoard. Papamichelakis (Papamichelakis and Renfrew 2009) determined that a single merchant from Athens looking for saleable artefacts spearheaded the initial looting of the 1950s. He knew what would sell and where to look for the material, and he 'trained' a number of local shepherds and fishermen in the fine art of artefact recovery. It is clear that demand in Athens (national and international) for Cycladic figurines led to their illegal excavation. The desire for the marble figurines continues until today, as evidenced by Aboutaam's recent purchase of the record-breaking figurine mentioned above.

This ongoing demand for Cycladic figurines resulted in decontextualised objects in collections (private and public), a consequence of which is a somewhat skewed interpretation of the Early Bronze Age of the region. A limited number of systematically excavated figurines and those with a verifiable object ownership history led scholars (Broodbank 2007; Whitelaw 2007) to conclude that the site on the northern end of the island of Keros was a rich but looted cemetery. The analyses of recent excavations (2006–2008) by Colin Renfrew and an international team of researchers have produced new considerations about the site – it may in fact be the first major symbolic centre of the early Aegean (Renfrew *et al.* 2007: 108). Every object in the Special Deposit area was deliberately broken in antiquity and not found in a mortuary context, contra to earlier interpretations of the site and its material culture. During the 2007 season, a rare example of a large Cycladic figurine fragment (pelvic area) was found *in situ* and is comparable to examples in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, which have often been considered to be fakes (Gill and Chippindale 1993). Renfrew *et al.* (2007: 122) forcefully state that the fragment 'is a find of importance for the understanding of these exceptionally large figurines. And of course it finally places beyond doubt the

validity of this class of figure'. Documented evidence of a surge in the manufacture of forgeries in the 1960s and 1970s in order to meet the growing demand of the antiquities market (Doumas 1984) led to greater and increased scrutiny of the figurines in collections. With scientific excavations rather than their appearance in the antiquities market, doubts surrounding the authenticity of large Cycladic figurines are laid to rest. Grounded in fact, interpretations of the past are less dubious.

Conclusion

For whatever reason people collect archaeological material, demand for artefacts results in the looting of sites and theft from museums and private collections. Buying illegal artefacts is dependent on the consumer's lack of interest or wilful avoidance of questions surrounding archaeological find spot and object biography. 'From the collection of a Swiss gentleman' or 'from a collection in Hong Kong', long euphemisms for a laundered artefact, should not be considered acceptable forms of object history. If collectors refused to buy these types of antiquities and if the general populace understood the concomitant irretrievable loss of knowledge, the trade in antiquities would surely be diminished. Often the purchaser, high end or low end, is in an inauspicious predicament, lacking enough information to make an informed acquisition. Asking for provenience and assurances of good title should be second nature and should be an essential element of the ethical standards of those who trade in antiquities.

Most commentators agree that once collected – removed from their original use – artefacts are inscribed with new meanings, which reflect the innumerable views and values of auction houses, dealers, collectors, curators and middlemen, apart from their original creator's purposes. Collected artefacts, decontextualised from their original find spots, can often tell us much more about the collectors and the current collecting climate than the period from which they originate. This is, in part, the reason for examining collections and collecting.

Key to making inroads into archaeological site protection and the lessening of theft from museums is a greater understanding of collectors. In their pioneering work on goods and consumption, Douglas and Isherwood (1996 [1979]: 3) highlight the importance of demand when considering consumption: 'It is extraordinary to discover that no one knows why people want goods. Demand theory is at the very centre, even at the origin of economics as a discipline, yet 200 years of thought on the subject has little to show on the question'. Demand is central to many facets of the trade in antiquities, including a role in the ongoing destruction of the archaeological record through

the looting of sites and the theft from museums to supply the market. This chapter, which has examined the consumption of artefacts from the eastern Mediterranean by low-end and high-end collectors, is only the beginning of much-needed analysis.

Notes

- 1 Interviews were conducted after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Ethics Review Boards at the University of Cambridge, the University of Toronto and Brown University. Interviewees agreed to participate on condition of anonymity and were assigned aliases (i.e. archaeologist 12, collector 7 and dealer 19). Any direct quotations used in this chapter are italicised.
- 2 Referred to as hearsay by the authors George Papamichalakis and Colin Renfrew due to the unsystematic approach of data recovery. This differs from an archaeological ethnography, which is methodologically rigorous and vetted by an IRB ethics review board.

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