

Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections

"Artefacts of Excavation": A Transnational Perspective on Ancient Egypt in the Modern World

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> "I think for the sake of future studies it would be well always to say where the antiquities are – that they may be traceable hereafter."[1]

Only seven years after the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) in 1882, its founder Amelia Edwards recognized the problems posed by the organization's liberal dispersal of finds from its fieldwork. More than a century on, attempting to address the legacy of those practices is an even more daunting prospect. Objects from a single tomb might be continents apart, while crucial contextual information may be inaccessible as archaeological archives remain separated from the scattered objects both physically and intellectually. As our Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded "Artefacts of Excavation" project—a joint project between University College London (UCL) and the University of Oxford—enters into its final year of research in 2017, we now have a clearer picture of the enormous scope and widespread impact of partage, by which means a share of the antiquities from excavations were allowed to be exported from Egypt to expedition sponsors worldwide. Between 1883 and the present day, we estimate that some 325 institutions across 24 countries in 5 continents received material from British excavations. There is no other archaeological endeavor in world archaeology that is comparable.

The complexity of object histories means that it has never been our aim to track down individual artifacts, many of which have circulated through multiple hands and numerous institutions via a variety of mechanisms over the years. Rather, one of our primary goals has been to create an online resource that provides researchers and museum practitioners with the tools to facilitate their own investigations into these networks. To this end a website hosted by the University of Oxford's Griffith Institute has been developed to provide an overview of, and interpretive framework for, the distribution activities of British organizations, as well as the known histories of institutions and private individuals who acquired material from them.[2] This online repository lists every site excavated by British teams from the 1880s until the 1980s, with the focus being the work of the Egypt Exploration Fund/Society (EEF/EES), the British School of Archaeology in Egypt (BSAE), the Egypt Research Fund (ERA), and Flinders Petrie's privately funded excavations. Each field-site listed has links to the different seasons of work conducted there, and the known associated distribution destinations are all annotated accordingly. Users can search the numerous webpages by institution or by individual to see which seasons of work may be represented in a particular place, or they can query by excavation season or archaeological site in order to ascertain the possible locations of the material results of specific campaigns. The distribution records in UCL's Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology and the EES have been digitized and are currently being uploaded to the website. A gazetteer of object marks inked by excavation team members onto artifacts is also being compiled in order to facilitate the identification of surviving contextual information. By these means we hope that people might begin to make connections between archaeological sites and collection histories for themselves. We welcome feedback from the academic and museum community as numerous entries will need to be amended in light of local knowledge. This is the focus of our work in 2017.

Previous research on distribution has tended to focus on the artifacts themselves as sources of information about the ancient past. In contrast, the second primary objective of "Artefacts of Excavation" is to examine how the exchange, use, and reception of these objects might reveal more recent, multi-sited histories.[3] The late 19th- and early 20th-century distributions, for example, can provide insights into the development of both archaeology as a discipline and museums as institutions, the relationship between the two often being symbiotic. While the departure point for our research is British fieldwork initiated at the height of imperial expansion and entangled in the politics of empire, it is clear that these histories need to be simultaneously transnational acknowledging the "networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend these politically defined spaces" and foreground "the interconnectedness of human history as a whole."[4] Egyptian artifacts represent far more than just themselves in these distributions.

A case in point is the collections of the University of Kyoto, Japan, acquired early in the 20th century from the EES and the BSAE, primarily through the intermediary of Kōsaku Hamada.[5] Research in Japan in February 2016 demonstrated that the motivation for securing antiquities from the British in this case was less due to an interest in ancient Egypt per se and more a result of Hamada's desire to stimulate Japanese scientific archaeology and to appropriate the model of imperial fieldwork practiced by individuals such as Petrie for Japanese ambitions on the Korean peninsula. We are continuing to investigate such local contexts of interest in distributed finds in places as far apart as South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, and Barbados, and in contexts as diverse as schools, Masonic lodges, bible societies, royal palaces, and suburban garages. Some of these biographies will be shared in blogs and articles on the "Artefacts of Excavation" website, to which we welcome contributions. Together this work is informing the writing of a more in-depth monograph on the social, political, intellectual, and cultural interactions with Egyptian archaeology, together with the numerous object habits that underpin attitudes to its products.

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1 Letter from Amelia Edwards to Flinders Petrie, May 2 1889, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, archive PMA/WMFP1/C/5/EDW/48.

2 Artefacts of Excavation, http://egyptartefacts.griffith.ox.ac.uk/.

3 Alice Stevenson, Emma Libonati, and Alice Williams, "'A Selection of Minor Antiquities': A Multi-sited View on Collections from Excavations in Egypt," *World Archaeology* 48.2 (2016), doi: 10.1080/00438243.2016.1165627.

4 C.A. Bayly, Sven, Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *The American Historical Review* 111.5 (2006): 1446.

5 Takashi Amijima (ed.), *From Petrie to Hamada: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Egyptian Antiquities of Kyoto University* (Kyoto University Museum: Kyoto, 2016).