

DAMNATIO MEMORIAE: ANTIQUITIES WITHOUT CONTEXT

Despoina Markaki

University of Crete, Department of History & Archaeology, Panepistimioupoli Gallou , Rethymno, Greece

dmarkaki@hotmail.com

Abstract. The documentation of ancient artefacts today in cosmopolitan museums and private collections around the world is quite often incomplete, because of the absence of their finding contexts. What do we really know about cultural objects? Is this knowledge accurate indeed? Most of the items in question are looted and smuggled out of their site, region, or even country of origin, and are sold as artworks, themselves too poorly documented, as “orphans without history”. Their treatment reminds us, metaphorically, of the Latin *damnatio memoriae* – a kind of condemnation of memory.

Cycladic figurines provide a typical example of the material and intellectual damage, which is caused by such practices. Besides the loss of their context, it is also the extended circulation of forgeries, due to their high demand in the art market that intensifies the loss. Each figurine with exceptional, unique features becomes, at once, a controversial issue. Are they faked, some or all of them? We cannot prove it, but interestingly enough we cannot deny, neither ignore it anymore.

This paper deals with a particular form of knowledge, that of archaeological provenance, known as provenience in literature. It argues that solid scientific information needs apart from the objects, their secure stratigraphic contexts, making the provenience of knowledge also a desideratum.

Keywords: provenience, illicit antiquities, museums

1. Introduction

This paper deals with a particular form of knowledge, that of archaeological provenance, known as provenience in literature, and the impact of its absence on the understanding and the interpretation of the past. My main argument focuses on the fact that the accurate archaeological documentation is a *sine qua non* condition towards a scientifically documented process of giving a meaning in past material things. With this in mind there is now a need to define the archaeological epistemology in this specific framework of objects study and to outline, in brief, the Greek legal framework and in particular the protective provisions of the archaeological law on scientific knowledge and its ethical provisions, as well as their content, on the state support of Greek territory’s ancient cultures regardless their present context. This two-dimensional approach has been chosen since official archaeology –that is to say archaeology as the state and its institutions practice it - is governed not only by scientific method and archaeological ethics but also by national and international laws. At the same time, I will try to point out the importance of archaeological context for the production of knowledge through representative paradigms of faked objects’ histories, research distraction and public deception.

2. Archaeological epistemology

Science means knowledge, and specifically, perfect knowledge based on empirical data. In light of this definition, if we want to be epistemological accurate we should always keep in mind, within this

process of producing knowledge, whether our concepts are in accordance with the external reality (Manoledakis 1980, 40–41). Archaeological scientific process for building knowledge includes the discovery through excavation and the study of past material remains, provided that archaeology is an empirical science -the “*discipline of things*” (Olsen et al. 2012)- based on empirical observations.

First and foremost the data collection method should be the proper one in order to have the best possible picture of the external reality. For this, a great number of archaeologists across the world spend hundreds of labor hours to extract a strong body of information that is used as knowledge base in the scientific process. It is a hard and time-consuming work that includes documentation in field, collection of contextual data through sieving of sentiments for smaller finds, sampling for organic remains, chemical analysis, washing and recording of finds and many more scientific approaches of material remains (Stockhammer 2015, 274). It should be clear that archaeological finds are not studied per se, but within their context that consists an essential piece of information for a proper scientific study and that in its absence what is missing in reality is the empirical data.

On the contrary, unprovenienced artefacts are inconclusive evidences of the past, despite the fact that they can be still valuable objects, as they can still hold their aesthetic value or even an artistic quality. Antiquities without their context, as vectors of solid scientific information, have no scientific value anymore, since they cannot provide any data about past societies that created and used them. Thus, we can make a distinction between ancient artefacts, as objects of scientific study and art works. Such a point of view is quite helpful as it makes clearer the differences between objects with and without provenience (that is, with and without context). All this considered, it is reasonable to regard this difference as an epistemological one since their function as empirical data is lost –even their authenticity can be questioned- and a potential disregard of the above mentioned method of documentation by scholars permits archaeology to be viewed as an anti-epistemological discipline (Muscarella 2000, 10,18).

This provenience, however, is usually obscured on purpose. Art market is a common source for museums to enrich their collections. Yet, it is not a legal one, as very often looted, recently surfaced antiquities appear on the market. For this reason, the masking of any possible indication of their origin is necessary in art market. In addition, as Elizabeth Marlowe points out in a recent article of her (Marlowe 2018), unprovenienced antiquities are usually featured -on museums and art market photography- against “*a seamless muslin backdrop that can be black or grey or fade from black to grey*”. This is a deliberate choice according her as “*the neutral color, the absence of a horizon line and of any other representational detail situate the piece in an other-worldly realm, one far removed from any specific location*”. This kind of objects’ decontextualization aims to support the rhetoric of universality, adopted by encyclopedic or universal museums, as they are usually called.

According to J. Cuno, an emblematic figure in the debate on the role of encyclopedic museums, “*their core mission is to collect, preserve and present things in the public’s interest*” (Cuno 2011, 34). Meanwhile, Merryman’s object oriented cultural property approach in cultural policy emphasizes on three basic considerations that should control any choice. One of them is truth, meaning the much wanted knowledge, in other words “*the valid information about the human past*” (Merryman 1994, 64). As a result, encyclopedic museums present their collections as “*repositories of things and knowledge*”, where different objects of different cultures are exhibited equally, without discriminations “*based in the polymathic ideal of the Enlightenment*” (Cuno 2008, 123). This perspective is often used as an argument against the national laws for cultural heritage protection in source countries. These laws are denigrated, characterized as nationalistic, thus producing a state-based identity contrary to the truth and the history of culture (Cuno 2008, 15, 2011, 76–77). There are clear evidences, however, as D. Gill notices, that the acquisition and

presentation of cultural objects in these major, encyclopedic museums is usually contrary to the truth and the history of culture (Gill 2012, 87).

Objects, cultures and history are misunderstood, misinterpreted and abdicated of their meaning in encyclopedic museums. They are treated as art works or even as evidences of western superiority. There are several paradigms of such a treatment. In the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, about 3 years ago, there was an informative sign about Greek Mythology where it was referred that the motto of the Olympian Gods was “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*”. Another example is given by N. MacGregor (MacGregor 2009), the former Director of the British Museum. He brags about the British Museum’s contribution in the creation of “*citizens of the world*” and the truth achieved and dispersed through encyclopedic museums. Such an option however overlooks the objective truth. In fact, what is presented in these “*repositories of knowledge*” (Cuno 2009, 28) is different cultures compared in order to find the best among them. This inconclusive, evaluative comparison ends up in the superiority of European civilization. Such a treatment introduces a cultural evolutionist approach that reproduces the stereotypical western narrative through the doctrine of social Darwinism, which places cultures in an evolutionary scale where the European superiority is emphasized. N. MacGregor does not hesitate to recognize even nutritional factors as reasons of this superiority when he declares that “[...] *hand axes made their way out of Africa until they allowed our ancestors to butcher better and get that crucial protein advantage over other peoples*” and he goes on arguing that “*this let us conquer the world and build great cities like London, where visitors of the British Museum first saw, were first able to see, the truth of and connection to the origin of their culture [...]*” (MacGregor 2009, 44). Such evolutionary interpretations and meanings on cultural history inevitably result in an assessment of different cultures. In addition, approaches of this kind justify the inversion of the Enlightenment’s request for the liberation of mankind into an argument of sovereignty over the people (Kotsakis 2008, 35–37).

3. Legal framework

As mentioned above, the protective legislative provisions in source countries are usually denounced as nationalistic. J. Cuno -in his rhetoric in favor of encyclopedic museums- argues that “*antiquities are the cultural property of all humankind, evidence of the world’s ancient past and not that of a particular modern nation*” (Cuno 2008, 146). In such tight discussion context, where each word can be used to serve specific purposes, we need to pay particular attention and seek apart from the letter also for the spirit of laws. Legal texts should have perspicuous wording to avoid inappropriate confusions possibly posed by extreme views. For instance, in the article 167¹ of Lisbon Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, there is an attempt to balance between cultural diversity of the Member States and the common cultural heritage. However, this concept of common European cultural heritage serves the vision of European integration through the construction of a common identity. For this reason, we need to define the legal sense of the term “common”. Its consideration as cultural homogeneity overlooks the diversity, in accordance with the spirit of globalization. Therefore, in order to achieve the vision of European integration, we should bridge the gap between financial strong but poor in cultural goods states of northern Europe and the not so strong financially but rich in cultural goods countries of southern Europe. The relevant discourse, however, should not be limited on the subject of ownership of cultural goods; as such an approach unduly restricts our reflection on it. The deliberate avoidance of the term “European” in the Treaty provides the necessary basis in support of the safeguard and respect of cultural diversity among Member States (Grammatikaki-Alexiou et al. 2001, 46–48; Iliadou 2004). In addition, I would like to draw

¹. Lisbon Treaty, article 167§1: “The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.”

attention to the fact that despite this property-centered legal conception, visible in some international fora and the literature (where it is used almost exclusively the word cultural property), the Greek law translates cultural property as cultural heritage and this sense of ownership is totally absent at least from its letter.

Soon after the establishment of the Greek State in 1830, the protection of cultural heritage received a legal status. As early as 1807, however, during the preparation of the Greek War of Independence, the Greek scholar Ad. Korais noticed the epistemological importance of context documentation (Doris 1985, 27–28). According to the modern Greek law “on the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage In General” its object is the protection of cultural assets as testimonies of the existence and the individual and collective creativity of man (article 2a)². Within this broadened framework, the legislator aims to define its object on the one hand while avoiding the improper use of ideological or aesthetic criteria on the other hand. Consequently, there is no reference to the aesthetic, artistic or even scientific value of the testimony according to the letter of the law, as such a distinction would be irrelevant to the spirit of the law. The only prerequisite for these testimonies – in order to be included in the legal protective framework - is to constitute a source of information in respect of the past human existence and activity. In this sense, the choice of the term “μνημείο” (mnimio) in Greek - that means monument (deriving from the name of the muse Mnēmē of Greek Mythology) - is an intentional choice of a term more evaluative than descriptive. It is used with its primary meaning, that is the remembrance of the historical trace, and it is referred in its function as a guardian of memory (Bantavanou 2012, 10). I would like to highlight that under the previous legal framework wording was not so thoughtfully chosen. Legislator’s intention to protect the knowledge was not fully achieved since the letter of the law reflected aesthetic criteria as a rule.

Moreover, legal protection of cultural heritage in Greece stems from its importance for the society as a whole. More precisely, the law states that this protection aims at the preservation of historical memory in favor of the current and future generations, and the improvement of cultural environment (article 1). This explicit declaration of its scope is of great importance as it consists the basis for understanding the spirit of law that leads to its better interpretation and implementation since it clarifies that it is not just about the protection of property rights over the objects. Instead, this wording emphasizes mainly on our duty as successors of ancient remains to transfer to the future generations a world full of meaning and representations³. Ancient objects, monuments according the Greek law, are not protected for their aesthetic or economic value but as public goods, important for the public interest as scientific information providers. Through research projects they become part of social life since their testimony is getting closer to its recipient that is the public. Such a socio - functional character however requires their proper study, which cannot be achieved without the archaeological context. Otherwise, historical context is lost and objects cease to form monuments legally speaking. They become objects of aesthetic value, that is to say art works. Even their restitution to its rightful owner (such as repatriations of antiquities) cannot undo the harm caused. The transmission of knowledge (and not that of the object) shapes the historical memory thereby realizing their operational objective required by law. I want to clarify at this point that historical memory should not be perceived as national memory. Such an interpretation of the law would be in conflict with the national legislator’s main choice for ideological neutrality.

The Greek archaeological law (article 1) explicitly determines that in the context of the international regulations, the Greek State also procures for the protection of cultural assets originating from the Greek territory, regardless from the time these were taken abroad. The extension of concern under this

² References in this paper to law’s article are to be read as references to the Greek Law 3028/2002 “on the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage In General”.

³ See also the Explanatory Report of the same law 3028/2002 (In Greek).

provision does not imply law enforcement in other countries. It should be read more as a moral obligation whose content depends on the meaning attributed on the term “protection”. As mentioned above what is so greatly sought by encyclopedic museums is not simply preserving their physical substance but protecting their function as information and knowledge mediators, as well as their scientific value, in other words the truth about human past. This legal provision establishes an obligation, mostly an ethical one as long as there is no law enforcement potential, to inform the public and to restore the truth, which is often distorted, especially when the context is absent. Such an example can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a typical example of an encyclopedic museum. According to many scholars (and notably those of Cycladic archaeology) the Cycladic marble seated harp player (accession number: 47.100.1) is not genuine but a modern fraud. It is a well-known Cycladic figurine that has been used to catalogue covers and posters to promote museum’s collection of Greek Art (Muscarella 2000, 22). On the museum’s website it is referred as a work of the Early Cycladic period, and its provenance is generally referred as “*from the Cyclades*”. What is taken for granted for the scholars that is to say its modern manufacturing, it is presented to the public as “*one of the earliest of the small number of known representations of musicians*”⁴. Despite the fact that it is not considered genuine, the Metropolitan Museum of Art disguises the truth. Yet, the Museum’s website mention the reference on the article which proves the forgery (Craxton and Warren 2004). At the same time, no archaeologist or any other scholar, neither the Greek state consider itself obligated to tell the truth for the public interest. Is it a kind of elitism perhaps as it is a published information, ideally available to everyone, or maybe an intentional effort to mislead the public? Whatever the motifs in this case, it is our own responsibility, as experts, to ask ourselves a question already posed in literature by D. Gill “*Yet how many visitors to an encyclopedic museum would seek to ask questions beyond the carefully constructed information labels?*” (Gill 2012, 87).

4. Case studies

The Cycladic figurines’ case as a whole is well known. However, I would like to underline some details, usually overlooked by archaeologists and certainly unknown to the public. During the Early Bronze Age, the inhabitants of Cycladic islands created a unique category of artefacts out of the local marble, vases and the infamous figurines. Those marble figurines became the object of great demand in the art market during the 1960’s. This fact consequently induced the extended plundering of Early Bronze Age graves in the Cyclades. That means an important loss of information about the meaning and function of the figurines themselves, as well as for the prehistoric Cycladic society in general. The plundering also caused the systematic production of fakes in order to cover the demand, which had exceeded the supply. Therefore, a large number of Cycladic figurines of unknown provenience around the world are not authentic.

Because of their extended looting there are aspects of Cycladic culture that unfortunately will remain unknown, as well as a number of faked figurines, exhibited on museums around the world and considered as genuine. Meanwhile, in literature there are some interpretations of Cycladic figurines’ function constructed by scholars, who studied them without taking into account, intentionally or not, the problem of their dubious authenticity. The most popular among them is their usage as grave goods during the Early Bronze Age. But, is this piece of knowledge accurate indeed? There are excavated figurines coming from domestic, or other non-burial contexts (Gill and Chippindale, 1993, 610). In the absence of excavation’s data it is hard, or even impossible to learn which type of figurines is found in each context. Other important archaeological issues will most likely remain obscure. Were there regional variations? Do we have a reliable sequence? Even their dating might be precarious enough. Especially in the matter of their regional variation there is the additional issue of their provenience forgery. That means that we cannot

⁴ <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/47.100.1/> (accessed on 3/9/2018).

rest upon a “said to be from” provenience to come to a reliable conclusion that will be used as an accurate archaeological evidence (Gill and Chippindale 1993, 614-615,629; Muscarella 1977).

The large, almost life-size, figurines have never been found in excavation, that is, they are archaeologically non-existent. All of them have been surfaced in art market, for this, it is quite possible that they have been faked. We cannot prove it, but we cannot either ignore this possibility. An extremely uncomfortable situation for an archaeologist faced with a great dilemma: it is quite dangerous to ascribe such an uncertain object in the archaeological record, when at the same time its uniqueness makes it really important if genuine. These issues are not referred in their official publications and usually dubious objects are ignored in scientific research. According to C. Renfrew, the large figurines might have been used in public cults but as he notices “*this suggestion must remain a pure hypothesis at present*” (Renfrew 1986, 133). Besides the possibility the whole type to be faked (Gill and Chippindale 1993, 620), he adds in their already blurred history the equally problematic religious interpretation. This is where the fun begins. This kind of interpretation reminds me of a very popular archaeological joke: “Can’t explain what is going on? Then it’s ritual!”. This joke might be seen as an epistemological one coming from the inability of the archaeological method to support its conclusions on solid scientific base and undoubtedly to persuade the public regardless the reasons for the last one. In Cycladic scholarship, were the absence of evidences is combined with collectors’ interests about the history of their acquisitions, religious interpretations were and still are desired and dominant. But if this practice was acceptable in the past, today, we should be at least concerned, if not annoyed, about this situation. It seems like an effort to justify previous interpretations, conclusions and representations of Cycladic prehistory, only by using modern approaches, without a relevant intention to review them in the light of the new developments and the knowledge acquired in the meantime. In this way what we achieve is an ostensible modernization with no substance while losing our scientific credibility.

Another aspect of Cycladic figurines’ case comes from the contextualization of their digging. In this way their whole narrative becomes less prestigious but more clear. The Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens has a remarkable, unique collection of Cycladic antiquities; all of them products of extended looting in post WWII Cyclades. Some of the masterpieces of this collection might be fakes, but scholars seem unwilling to talk about it. In 2016 the Museum celebrated its 30th anniversary with an exhibition entitled “Cycladic Society 5,000 years ago”. Our knowledge of this prehistoric society flew from the effort and the hard work of people dedicated to scientific archaeological study; that means archaeologists who excavated on the islands, registered the findings, studied them carefully and published their work, trying at the same time to fund their projects. In the absence of those people, Goulandris’ collection masterpieces (as all antiquities without context) would be just things of beauty without past, artworks of unknown people, and most of all used by people and societies condemned to oblivion. The overall picture, however, is a prominent collection at the most classy quarter of Athens city center, exhibited in such a way as to make people feel partaker in good taste, proud successors of a glorious past. A sign in this museum and an article on the catalogue of this exhibition about the Cycladic society of the Early Bronze Age – a period that has been irreparably damaged by the collecting passion of its founders - inform the public about the devastating consequences of antiquities looting on scientific knowledge. In this indirect way, a conviction for the looters is declared when at the same time the buyers of looted antiquities are presented as heroes. The truth, however, is that in the Cyclades a systematic exploitation of the post-war poverty that the inhabitants had suffered took place since the collectors were buying figurines for a piece of bread. In this framework, the sign seems like an effort to “wash out” the name and the “conscience” of the museum when at the same time poverty is criminalized. But, poverty is not a crime; despite the fact that such a statement seems evident, unfortunately, it is not. The encyclopedic museums often cultivate such a perception through their acquisition policy.

Apart from these recent cases, such practices from encyclopedic museums goes back to their founding. A significant example is the following concerning the Metropolitan Museum's foundation. Luigi di Cesnola, United States consul in Cyprus, soon after his arrival on the island became an amateur archaeologist and a professional antiquities' dealer. In 1871, he managed to sell his collection at the newly established Metropolitan Museum of Arts. In 1873, he returned to the island to find a treasure, more important than that of Schliemann in Troy, in his words. A new antiquities' pillage followed; he collected objects from different sites, either by digging or buying from the locals. This group of alleged objects was sent to the Metropolitan under the name "Kourion Treasure". In this way, thousands of ancient artifacts without context from Cyprus formed one of the very first - and the largest at the time - collection of the Metropolitan Museum. He became the first director of the great museum, while, at the same time, went on a trial accused of fraud for the genuineness of the objects. Today, some scholars consider him as a "rapist" of Cypriot culture, a cultural criminal (Gross 2009, 21–64). However, a similar pattern is being followed up to date, though more or less consciously.

Cesnola was condemned mainly because of the absence of documentation during his excavations, the illegal or extralegal abruption of Cypriot antiquities and for his restoration that considered being incorrect. He lied about the provenience of the findings and he bonded different pieces of sculptures. In 2000, however, the Metropolitan decided to rescue from oblivion the Cesnola's collection aiming to restore its reputation and present once again Cypriot artefacts to the public. This attempt was communicated as an attest of the shift of museums from "*artifice to authenticity*" and also as a "*measure of truth-telling about museum policies*" (Meyer, 2000). But is it real? It is impossible -even under the new perspectives or the modern concepts about archaeological science- to remedy past deficiencies in methodology. Thus, there is a justification of declarations such as "*In art history, indeed, the color of truth is often gray*" (Meyer, 2000). This kind of statements seems as a try to exculpate an ab initio faulty practice in archaeological terms. On one hand we are talking about art history and restorations while on the other hand we are talking about archaeology, history, documentation and knowledge. The difference between science and art is –as John Dewey argues- "*one of statement versus expression*" that is to say, "*statement sets forth the condition under which an experience of an object or situation may be had*", while "*expression doesn't lead to an experience, it constitutes one*" (Olsen et al. 2012, 5).

Another "treasure" in the British Museum this time, provides a consummate paradigm of the supposed knowledge we derive from unprovenienced objects. It is also indicative of the method used to construct their stories. In 1891 a rich collection of distinctive ancient jewelries was sold to the British Museum. According to the Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, A.S. Murray "...*In some respects this treasure, is of higher importance than that found by Dr. Schliemann at Mycenae [...]. Like the antiquities of Mycenae this new treasure belongs to an early age of civilization when the Greeks were being greatly influenced by the older nations of Egypt and Assyria through the medium of the Phoenicians*" (R. A. Higgins 1979, 9–10). This is the very first assessment of the collection in an early period when little was known about Aegean prehistory. In its first publication, the scholar Sir J. A. Evans as he is known today, compared the objects with Mycenaean parallels and realized their essential differences and their strong oriental influences. His interpretation and dating are indicative of the methodology of the era that continues to this day (Evans 1893). Despite their apparent differentiation, he characterizes the assemblage as Mycenaean, he assess that it is of local production, he dates it back to 800 BC, when he considers that despite the gradual decline of Mycenaean traditions in Greek area, in Aegina there were a kind of survival for some of them. He concludes that the island was an enclave of Mycenaean culture, linking even the later commercial welfare of classical times with this past. It is a fantastic, initial way of interpretation not at all bizarre at the time. Nevertheless, he does not seem to have ever been persuaded about the earlier dating of this assemblage, even after his discoveries in Crete and his interpretation of its prehistoric culture. He

insisted on his original position and the early correlation with Halstaat culture of the Early Iron Age of North Italy and Central Europe (Evans 1893; Nilsson 1968, 362,365-368).

In 1957, R. Higgins (R. Higgins 1957), Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum published an article reconsidering Aegina Treasure in the light of new data after half a century of excavations in Crete. In this study, he argued that it is an entirely Minoan assemblage, which comes from the site Chrysolakkos in Malia. Chrysolakkos, meaning in Greek pit of gold, is a great Protopalatial necropolis located close to the “palace” of Malia. In his tempting theory Higgins combined, rather arbitrary, a Minoan treasure of no origin with a promising site -from its name alone- without any finding, however, due to extensive looting. Later, in his book “*The Aegina Treasure. An Archaeological Mystery*” (R. A. Higgins 1979), he revised its origin from Crete, adding, however, that the treasure was constructed in Aegina, where it was found, by Minoan immigrants. Today on the British Museum's website the objects are mentioned as Minoan, dated back to the Old Palace period and Aegina is mentioned as their findspot with the comment that they were made on Crete or on Aegina by immigrant Cretan craftsmen. There are no archaeological evidences however to support these theories concerning Aegina Treasure's provenience; this provenience and history attributed to it are not but a figment of imagination.

5. Conclusions

The above-mentioned examples are only a brief outline of the knowledge that is produced and communicated within encyclopedic museums and private collections. When the market becomes the source of empirical evidences, then, as it comes logically, research results will reflect that market. Archaeological evidences, however, are not only spectacular, attractive objects. Their collection demands a hard methodological process usually in difficult working conditions. Moreover, their study needs hard work and commitment. The scientific knowledge at stake is a universal public good. Unprovenient objects are studied and published following a certain pattern of perception of cultural identity that could be characterized as ‘western’, in the sense of the universality of aesthetics, as a result of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Such an approach, however, transforms cultural goods from historical evidences into works of art. The aestheticization of objects undermines the understanding of their essence and function and hence the culture that produced them. These practices result to the opposite of what is claimed as desirable; instead of accepting diversity, we ended up in the promotion of supremacy feelings against the least sophisticated cultures according Western standards (Brodie 2011, 409–11).

Encyclopedic museums provide a biased view of the past; such a view becomes more and more acceptable recently. Yet, this attitude concerns mainly the colonial possessions' cultures, as long as the dialogue about them getting more powerful. At the same time the dispersal of Greek antiquities didn't occur in a pure colonial context. There is a colonial character, however, or a crypto-colonial one, as Herzfeld has argued, that echoes today (Herzfeld, 2000). The exploitation was not as concrete as in colonies; instead, it was latent and quasi-legal as are its effects at present. Nowadays, however, access to knowledge is far easier and cheaper than in the past, while the quality of knowledge becomes more and more ambiguous. The people are not any more willing to believe our words in a heartbeat. Information and dialogue are always open and existent. For this, while it's not at all easy to believe, it's easy to reject us. We should reconsider and protect ourselves as scholars as well as the public from vague documentation, false information and misleading results introduced in bibliography. As the dominant euro-centric perceptions about the past are reproduced in a stereotypical way there comes a time when as O.W. Muscarella notices “The lie became great” (Muscarella 2000).

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize that my focus on this phenomenon is not one of objects' ownership or countries' responsibility. As far as Greece is concerned it is clear from the above-mentioned examples that misinterpretation, as a result of the unknown provenience, that is to say a serious lack of documentation, is quite possible whether it is about objects at home or abroad. A differentiation can be found in the methods used for the objects' origin concealment, as objects smuggled abroad need extra forged papers to cover their illegal export. In any case, however, the consequences remain the same for science. Yet, the difference in source countries is that the legal framework introduced with international conventions becomes more and more strict as illicit trafficking in cultural goods constitutes an aspect of transnational organized crime. Thus, the over-criminalization of looting leads to the intrinsic paradox -in source countries- to criminalize alternatives archaeologies as long as anything goes over what is official becomes automatically suspicious or even criminal. In this way we can recognize one more uncomfortable situation; the use of the dominant western methods in archaeology are imposed. Therefore, scientists and research framework are committed to serving specific interests. But such a scientific methodology inevitably results in a manipulated science.

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