

How Idrimi Came to London:

Diplomacy and the Division of Archaeological Finds in the 1930s

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Abstract:

From 1936–39 and 1946–49 Sir Charles Leonard Woolley excavated the site of Tell Atchana/ancient Alalakh in southern Turkey on behalf of the British Museum. The statue of King Idrimi, found in 1939, became one of the British Museum's many prized objects and is on display to this day. At the close of the excavation season in June 1939 the statue became the subject of a dispute between Woolley and the government of the Hatay State, solved only after the intervention of the British Consul of Aleppo, the British Ambassador at Ankara and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This paper traces the statue's journey from its discovery to the British Museum and back to the New Hatay Archaeological Museum in the form of a hologram.

Keywords: Idrimi; Leonard Woolley; archaeology; diplomacy, absent objects



Figure 1:
Map of the Hatay showing the position of Tell Atchana and ancient Antioch/modern Hatay © The Society of Antiquaries of London

Introduction

The site of Tell Atchana/ancient Alalakh lies circa 20 km from the city of modern-day Hatay/ancient Antioch in Turkey (Figure 1). Sir Charles Leonard Woolley (1880–1960) led excavations there from 1936–39 and from 1946–49 on behalf of the British Museum. He chose the site in 1936 after an initial survey conducted in 1935 in order to – in his words – find the presumed connection between the eastern Mediterranean, Cypriot and Mycenaean on the one hand, and Anatolian and Mesopotamian cultures on the other.¹ Alalakh indeed proved to have been such a meeting and trading place of empires, yielding a rich royal precinct with palaces and temples, dating from the Early

Bronze Age to the early Iron Age (c. 2000 to 900 B.C).² Woolley's team found the statue of King Idrimi of Alalakh, carved of white magnesite and dating to the sixteenth to fifteenth century B.C., in a secondary context in a temple in 1939.³ The seated king is covered with a cuneiform inscription which recounts certain events of Idrimi's life: After an undetermined event in his father's town of Aleppo, Idrimi was forced to flee to his mother's home town Emar. From there he went to spend seven years among nomads in Canaan where he gathered troops and made a treaty with Barattarna, king of Mittani. After a successful raid on Hittite territory he then re-conquered Alalakh where he reigned for 30 years (Figures 2–3).⁴ At the end of the excavation season in late May 1939 the statue became the object of a dispute between Woolley and the Hatay government, only resolved to Woolley's satisfaction after the intervention of British and Turkish diplomats. Despite attempts to retain the statue for the Hatay Archaeological Museum Woolley was eventually granted permission to export the statue to the British Museum. This paper explores the networks available to Woolley to achieve this goal, and the statue's shifting meanings in archaeological interpretation and museum display.



Figure 2:
The Statue of King Idrimi © The Trustees of the British Museum

Zainab Bahrani has explored the interconnection and interdependence of text and image throughout the history of the ancient Near East. According to her, ‘the text on a statue or relief is an integral part of it, and as such merits our serious consideration, not as a parallel source of information beside the image, but as part of the internal logic of that image’.⁵ The statue of Idrimi is a prime example of this concept. The text covers large parts of the body and clothing, extending onto the right cheek. The statue of King Idrimi remains the only example of such a large-scale sculpture in the round covered with text found at excavations in the Middle East. The ‘autobiographical’ account and how the inscription covers the body leave it without direct parallels.



Figure 3:
The Statue of King Idrimi during excavation © UCL Institute of Archaeology

In later years, the statue's uniqueness made it difficult for some scholars to engage with it. Woolley himself called it an example of 'little artistic value'.⁶ This modern evaluation, as well as the term 'art', have no parallel in the languages of the ancient Near East. Objects such as statues or other images were created 'to resemble something real or imagined... A distinction between beauty and utility was never present; rather, all objects possessed the potential to be qualitatively superior or inferior, important or not'.⁷ In her discussion of Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs Bahrani,⁸ and other scholars such as Irene Winter,⁹ have emphasised that the separation of text and image is an entirely artificial construct of modern scholarship deeply influenced by classical and Judeo-Christian/Western ideals in a discipline still lagging behind in addressing its own history through post-colonial critical methods.¹⁰ Curses on royal statues often invoke – just as the one on Idrimi's face – the sterilization of an aggressor or the destruction of his progeny. According to Bahrani this is based on the *lex talionis*, in that the

destruction of a king's image endangered his very being. Therefore the obliteration of a man's (and reference is generally only made to male aggressors and their seed) progeny equals the damage done to the statue and the immortal representation of the king.¹¹ The ubiquity of curses or maledictions on statues or monuments against their removal or defacement testifies to the real threat of such an act occurring and the power inherent in this.¹² Publicly displayed statues or stelae such as the Code of Hammurabi or the Victory Stele of Naram-Sîn did in fact suffer this fate. They were removed from their original location in the city of Sippar to Susa, the capital of the Elamites, in the twelfth century B.C.¹³ There they were excavated by Jacques de Morgan and are now in the Louvre. Thomas Beran maintains that 'it is certain that the statue (or stele, relief, etc.) possessed a particular existence; that although not living, it had a magically numinous life, a being, a "ME"'.¹⁴ The abduction, defacement or destruction of a statue therefore had a strong symbolic meaning for the people of the Ancient Near East, which continues to echo in museum displays to this day as will be traced by exploring the ways in which Idrimi is displayed.

For the New Hatay Archaeological Museum which opened in 2014 the curators created a hologram of Idrimi, maintaining that 'there is no doubt that using computer-aided imaging methods to emphasize an artifact that does not exist in the museum collection *attracts more attention than those that physically exist there*'.¹⁵ This formulation certainly demonstrates a feeling of loss invoked by the statue's absence and an attempt to return Idrimi closer to his original location. The curators do not quote any sources (such as visitor surveys) that would support their assumption that visitors are more attracted to absent than to present objects. Donald Preziosi's remark that '[t]he significance of any object can be made to appear a uniquely powerful witness to past or present events, and to the character, mentality, or spirit of a person, people, place, or

time'¹⁶ anticipates Murat Akar's intent to 'develop an awareness of Hatay's cultural heritage' through the renewed display of the material culture of Alalakh.¹⁷ The first museum in Antakya was built by the French architect Michel Écochard in 1931, mainly to hold the many mosaics unearthed by excavations in the villas of ancient Antioch.¹⁸ It was completed in 1939 and re-opened on 23 July 1948, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Hatay's integration into the Turkish Republic.¹⁹ Akar further remarks that, while Alalakh holds a crucial place in archaeological research, 'the early history of Hatay had not been presented as it should have been and an awareness of the past was not implemented in society'.²⁰ As will be outlined below, the process of incorporation of the newly minted province of Hatay—the name had been suggested by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself to evoke the (imagined) Hittite ancestors of the Turkish nation and to bind the new entity closer to its northern neighbour—on the eve of World War Two played a crucial role in enabling Woolley to secure the statue for the British Museum.²¹ When Woolley unearthed Idrimi's statue in 1939 the assembly of the State of Hatay had just voted to cede itself from the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon to become the Hatay province of the Republic of Turkey. While the Hittites held an important place in the creation of the past for the citizens of the new Turkish Republic, the political realities in the early twentieth century as outlined below meant that, based on national boundaries, the Hatay could not be not part of the territory defined as Turkish in the 'Turkish Historical Thesis'.²² The two events – the discovery and subsequent export of the statue and the cession of the Hatay to Turkey – are inextricably linked, as will be laid out in this article by examining the close connection between archaeology and diplomacy.

Diplomacy and Archaeology in the Middle East

Diplomacy and archaeology have gone hand in hand in the Middle East and the Mediterranean since at least the days of Claudius James Rich (1787–1821), British Resident of the East India Company in Baghdad from 1808.²³ Rich had developed an interest in the history and geography of the region then commonly known in Europe as Mesopotamia. He published accounts of his visits to the sites of Babylon, Nineveh and Persepolis, which aroused great interest in Europe.²⁴ Perhaps better known today are the exploits of the British explorer Henry Austen Layard and those of Paul-Émile Botta, the French Consul in Mosul. They were the first to dig in the Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Nimrud and Khorsabad in the mid-nineteenth century. Consequent to the highly publicized display of their finds in the Louvre and the British Museum, respectively, the exploration and exploitation of Mesopotamia and the Middle East in general picked up pace significantly to almost rival that of Egypt. The course of this development and the close collaboration between excavators and explorers on the one hand, diplomats and government institutions, including national museums in Europe and the United States, on the other has been the subject of many scholarly and popular publications.²⁵

After World War One, when Britain and France had assumed control over the Middle East, the antiquities legislation in all the French and British Mandate areas was developed at least partly by archaeologists and afterwards sometimes administered by them in their capacities of heads of the relevant government departments until these new nations (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan) became (nominally) independent during the course of the 1930s and '40s and at times even after independence. For instance, David Hogarth, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford from 1909 to 1927 and excavator of the ancient Hittite city of Carchemish, was mentor to Leonard Woolley, T.E. Lawrence (later 'of Arabia') and Gertrude Bell. He was a high-ranking Military Intelligence officer during World War One and later drafted the antiquities

legislation for the Treaty of Sèvres.²⁶ Gertrude Bell herself wrote the first antiquities legislation for Iraq, which was based on the passages in the Treaty of Sèvres.²⁷ John Garstang, who had excavated extensively in Egypt, Sudan and Anatolia and had founded the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Liverpool in 1904, became Director of the Department of Antiquities for the British Mandate of Palestine from 1920 until 1926.²⁸ It is therefore hardly surprising that these archaeologists/administrators usually offered their British colleagues and the museums that funded them favourable terms regarding the division of the objects they unearthed. Holger Hock traces the ‘role of the state and the nation in building the British Museum’s early antique collections’ in the period 1798–1858.²⁹ He details how archaeologists profited from their access to diplomatic channels and, in the case of monumental finds, the help of the Royal Navy, the Foreign Office and other government departments in transporting these to the British Museum. Hock describes how the classical education and often personal interests of ministers, ambassadors and diplomats inclined them either to pursue a side career in excavating antiquities or to support those who did. In what follows I argue that this practice extended well into the mid-twentieth century as demonstrated by the events around the statue of King Idrimi, secured for the British Museum by Leonard Woolley. But in order to make full sense of this, first we need to examine the complex politics around the ownership of the territory in which Woolley was excavating.

The Sanjak of Alexandretta, the State of Hatay, the Hatay Province³⁰

The province of Hatay of the Republic of Turkey, where Tell Atchana is located, was previously known as the *Sanjak* (province) of Alexandretta under the Ottoman Empire. Upon the conferral of the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon to France after World War

One it became part of the State of Aleppo, one of the four constituent entities of the Mandate. The subsequent return or cession of this region to Turkey in 1939 and the motives of each party involved in this will be the focus of this section. The sequence of events and intricate connection to and interdependence of supraregional developments in Europe on the eve of World War Two will, I argue, form the frame to how the statue of Idrimi came to the British Museum and how Leonard Woolley achieved this.

Upon insistence from the newly formed Republic of Turkey during negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 the *Sanjak* was given *entité distincte* within the Mandate, with Turkish as one of its official languages due to the large Turkish share of the population.³¹ Historians agree that the ultimate goal of the Turkish government was to (re)unite the province with the Republic, ostensibly to protect the ethnically Turkish population as laid out by the National Pact of 1920 but also to profit from the strategically and economically important harbour at Alexandretta/Iskenderun.³² It is more difficult to establish (and beyond of the scope of this article) exactly when the French government – and depending on *which* government one speaks of – had accepted that there was no other option than to cede the region to Turkey. In 1936, the year Woolley started his excavations at Tell Atchana, Syrian diplomats were desperately trying – and ultimately failing – to achieve ratification of the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence by France. The short-lived French government of the Popular Front, which came to power in the same year, was focused on domestic issues rather than colonial questions and the treaty had little chance of being accepted in either France or Syria. The Turkish government protested against the incorporation of the *Sanjak* into an independent Syria and requested a treaty granting the region full independence.³³ The French were unwilling to consider this, claiming that Article IV of the League of Nations' mandate prevented them from detaching any territory from Syria.³⁴ The two

countries' positions were clearly incompatible and the matter was referred to the League of Nations under the arbitration of Britain.³⁵ This led to elections for an assembly in 1938 and joint administration by a French delegate and a Turkish Envoy Extraordinaire.³⁶ In its first session in September 1938, the Assembly elected a Turkish-led cabinet, adopted the name *Hatay Devleti* (State of Hatay) and introduced laws based on Turkish legislature.³⁷ By early 1939 the Hatay had effectively become part of Turkey. France and Turkey finalised the transfer of the Hatay to Turkey and signed an agreement to this effect in Ankara on June 23, 1939. During its final session on June 29, the Hatay Assembly approved this transfer and subsequently dissolved itself. The Hatay province of the Republic of Turkey came into being on July 23, 1939.

The transfer of the Hatay from French mandatory rule to Turkish territory would not have been possible without the mediation of Britain and the silent consent of the League of Nations.³⁸ In 1936, when France and Turkey found themselves at an impasse regarding the *Sanjak*, the then Turkish Foreign Minister (and later Ambassador to the United Kingdom) Tevfik Rüştü Aras asked the British government to arbitrate, a suggestion much welcomed by France.³⁹ By the late 1930s French foreign policy had come to rely more and more on Britain. British pressure on France to come to an agreement with Turkey was augmented by the growing danger of war in Europe. By early 1939 the power balance was definitely tipping in Europe: Franco had conquered Madrid, Austria had joined Germany, the Sudetenland had been annexed, and the Italians were about to land in Albania. With Neville Chamberlain and his cabinet determined upon Appeasement, France had no choice but to bend to British pressure and settle with Turkey, who had already made it very clear in October 1938 that nothing less than the return of the Hatay would be accepted.

Over the course of the 1930s British diplomats in Turkey had significantly improved the relationship between the two countries. The British Ambassador Sir Percy Loraine was said to have had a close friendship with Atatürk.⁴⁰ His successor from 1939, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, managed to maintain stable relations with the new president İsmet İnönü and his cabinet despite German and Italian aggression.⁴¹ The ambassador's diaries record almost daily meetings or social engagements with Mehmet Şükrü Saracoğlu, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, and frequent contact with Numan Menemenciğlu, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴² In 1939 Knatchbull-Hugessen was asked to continue mediation in the Hatay question between Turkey and France. These negotiations culminated in the Anglo-Turkish Agreement signed in May 1939. Only after the Hatay question had been settled did Turkey agree to an extension of the Agreement to include France in the now tripartite act, signed by the three parties on October 19, 1939.⁴³

The Dispute over Idrimi

When Leonard Woolley started excavations in 1936, Tell Atchana was thus within the borders of the French Mandate. By the end of Woolley's excavation season in early June 1939 Hatay was a semi-autonomous state, about to be incorporated into Turkey. Previous to his arrival in the Hatay in March 1939 Woolley had taken care to make enquiries with the Foreign Office and the consul at Aleppo about British as well as local opinion of his excavations. C.W. Baxter at the Foreign Office informed him that 'we regard it as desirable that anyone working there should be careful to avoid anything that might offend the susceptibilities of the present administration.' He had, however, 'no sort of objection' to the continuation of Woolley's work.⁴⁴ A.W. Davis, the British consul at Aleppo, replied to a letter of Woolley's that he himself had spoken to the

Prime Minister of the Hatay and had been assured that the French excavation permits and regulations, issued on the basis of the antiquities law, would be honoured.⁴⁵

The antiquities laws of the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon were written by Henri Seyrig, an archaeologist and numismatist who was Director of the Service des Antiquités from 1929 until 1940.⁴⁶ In 1933 the High commission passed revised rules, the *arrêté n° 166/LR du novembre 1933 portant règlement sur les antiquités*. Article 68 of this document stated that all movable (and, according to Article 67 all immovable) antiquities belonged to the state. At the end of each excavation season the excavator was to divide the movable finds into two lots, roughly equal in object category, materials and so forth. The country's Director of the Antiquities Service would choose one lot for the national collections, the other would go to the excavating institution as an indemnity.⁴⁷ According to Guillaume Segret, the state was *obliged* to give the excavator a part of the finds.⁴⁸ The Director of the Antiquities Service, however, reserved the right to retain any exceptional items from the excavator's lot for the country and the division had to be approved by the head of state before an export licence was granted.⁴⁹ The newly established Hatay State government in 1938 adopted this law for existing excavation permits rather than Turkish law, which was much stricter. In 1906 the Ottoman Empire had enacted a decree according to which 'all monuments and immovable and movable antiquities are the property of the Government of the Ottoman Empire'.⁵⁰ This decree replaced the act of 1874 and remained in full effect after the foundation of the Republic in 1923. It stated for the first time that *ipso iure* all antiquities (discovered and undiscovered) belonged to the state and could not be exported.⁵¹ The division of finds which the authors of the relevant passages of the Treaty of Sèvres had hoped to impose on Turkey was thus not carried over to the Treaty of Lausanne, signed with Turkey in 1923.

In a letter, dated 5 July, to the director of the British Museum Woolley asked for the Trustees to fund a second excavation season in 1939, from October to December. He thought his excavation permit was due to expire at the end of 1939, and meanwhile the exchange rate was worsening and prices rising. Furthermore, he could not be certain that the Turkish government would honour agreements made under French law on the division of finds once the Hatay joined Turkey.⁵² A letter from A.W. Davis to Knatchbull-Hugessen reveals the background to this request, centred on the statue of Idrimi at the end of the excavation season, the division of finds and the consequent involvement of British diplomats.⁵³ At the end of his season in June 1939 Woolley divided the finds as usual. The inexperienced Director of the Antiquities Service of the State of Hatay wanted to retain the statue of Idrimi from the British Museum's lot according to the law as outlined above. The fact that the Director of the Antiquities Service had even chosen the other lot, which contained among other things lion statues from the Temple I entrance, probably means that Woolley had made such a tactical division that the Director of the Antiquities Service had had no choice *but* to chose the lot without the Idrimi statue in the first place. This strategy is well illustrated by accounts by other participants in archaeological excavations. Agatha Christie in *Come, Tell Me How You Live* relates her experiences accompanying her husband, Sir Max Mallowan, on his excavations in Syria: 'The agony lies in making the two collections. You are bound to lose certain things you want desperately. Very well, then you must balance them on the other side'.⁵⁴

According to Davis, the Director of the Antiquities Service quoted the law in support of retaining Idrimi for his national collections but Woolley protested that this part of the law was dead letter and he expected to be treated according to practice. The Director of the Antiquities Service was persuaded – or perhaps rather bullied – into

signing the agreement, pending approval by the Council of Ministers. They voted against the proposal on June 5 and wanted to keep the statue. Woolley and the Vice-Consul at Alexandretta went to see the head of Council on June 6, arguing that

if this decision was allowed to stand it would put an end to all archaeological activities in the Hatay since no European or American museum would work there if any first-class antiquity which turned up was to be automatically reserved for the Hatay Government and one half of the second-class objects only would be left to the excavators.⁵⁵

The head of the Council apparently agreed to resubmit the matter for a vote, but again the Council opposed the export of the statue on 7 June. Davis at Aleppo then suggested that Woolley, with the help of the British Ambassador, should involve Cevat Açıkalın, the Turkish Envoy Extraordinaire in the Hatay and head of the negotiations with the French over the Hatay issue. The Turkish Consul-General in the Hatay apparently forthwith received instructions from his government to ‘tell the Hatay authorities that Sir Leonard’s view must be accepted’.⁵⁶ The National Archives have retained no written communication between Knatchbull-Hugessen and Açıkalın. Contact was apparently made via the telephone.⁵⁷ Curiously, Knatchbull-Hugessen neglected to keep a detailed diary between July and November 1939. His entry on Monday, June 26 records meetings with Numan Menemencioğlu, the Secretary-General of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and René Massigli, the French Ambassador, who was ‘off to Paris’ to discuss the Hatay. He made his next entry on 19 November and sums up his activities in the meantime: A holiday in Istanbul, a ball at the Italian Embassy, the

announcement of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and, almost as an aside, the negotiations for the tripartite Anglo-Franco-Turkish treaty, signed on 19 October.⁵⁸ For a very conscientious diary-keeper – in 1938 and early 1939, while waiting for his next appointment, Knatchbull-Hugessen made almost daily entries (perhaps rather out of a lack of other diversions?) – this silence seems odd, especially given the political developments in Europe during that time period. His silence on the Idrimi dispute and his role in it might be explained by the fact that it was, in the greater scheme of things, a rather minor diplomatic event. Going back to those diary entries from 1938, however, reveals further evidence for the close connection between diplomats and archaeologists, which might illuminate the casual access and support these professions accorded each other. On 12 October, 1938 Knatchbull-Hugessen had dinner with Sir N[eill] Malcolm and then attended a lecture on Chinese ceramics at Lancaster House.⁵⁹ Malcolm (1869–1953) was a close friend of Woolley’s and the main driving force behind the Tell Atchana excavation fund. The fund’s subscribers included a host of collectors of Oriental ceramics such as Oscar Raphael, Albert Leopold Reckitt, George Eumorfopoulos and Sir Percival David, any of who might have attended the same lecture.⁶⁰ In light of their similar or shared social set, it may therefore be surmised that Woolley had no qualms in asking a favour from a perhaps casual acquaintance. After his return to Britain Woolley wanted to ensure the episode would not repeat itself. He forwarded the contract or permit that the French High Commission had granted to the British Museum in 1936 to Knatchbull-Hugessen, requesting that he obtain assurances from the Turkish authorities on the interpretation of the law and its application.⁶¹ The permit referenced the French Mandate law as outlined above. Crucially however, the permit stated that ‘[À] la fin de chaque campagne, les objets mobiliers seront partagés selon les lois et *l’usage établi*’.⁶² Although Davis does not refer to this passage in his

description of events it seems that it was this critical difference between the law and the wording in the permit that led Woolley to believe he would be successful in his interpretation. After all, the Hatay was still technically part of the French Mandate in June 1939. Knatchbull-Hugessen duly wrote to Açıkalın on August 24, 1939, reminding him of his assistance in the matter and asking him for an interpretation of the relevant passage in the permit for future years.⁶³ It remains unclear how the British Museum regarded this episode. Neither in its own Central Archive nor in The National Archives are there any letters or other documents revealing whether the Trustees and staff only became aware of the dispute after the fact or if it was deemed more opportune to remain silent. Woolley most likely acted on his own initiative and could count on the tacit approval of the Trustees.

In 1934 Woolley had decided to terminate his activities in Iraq after twelve years at Ur due to impending stricter antiquities laws and the country's independence in 1932. When his export license at what was going to be the end of his last season at Ur was put on hold – due to rising nationalism and a coming change in the antiquities legislation, not to a dispute over a specific object – he spoke very swiftly and ‘with such vigour’ to the British Ambassador Sir Francis Henry Humphrys that the latter approached King Ghazi the following day. The day after that, Woolley received his export permit.⁶⁴ He voiced his disapproval of the new law quite explicitly in a letter to *The Times*, followed by an article in *Antiquity*.⁶⁵ He expressed his opinion, later repeated in Davis' letter, that museums would have been unable to support archaeological excavations, ‘and there would have been no Baghdad Museum,’ if they could not count on receiving a share of the finds. Woolley argued that foreign museums deserved these ‘first-class antiquities’ and, that as a result of this new legislation, eight out of ten excavations – including his own – had suspended their work in Iraq. In then moving to French Mandate territory he

received a much better deal when it came to sharing the finds and was not prepared to compromise on this point.

Writing about the mass exportation of Egyptian artefacts for a European and American (museum) market in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stevenson, Libonati and Williams argue that ‘In order to be released from state control these objects had to first be actively constructed as something ordinary and unexceptional’.⁶⁶ The present article has shown how the construction of an object as ordinary and unexceptional was indeed one of Woolley’s strategies when he engaged Turkish and British diplomats to override French and Turkish antiquities legislation to secure the statue of Idrimi for the British Museum. At the same time he argued that the statue of Idrimi should on the one hand be considered a ‘first-class antiquity’, and on the other, not be exempt from the established practice of dividing finds at the end of an archaeological season. It was therefore simultaneously both uniquely worth having *and* unexceptional – precisely in the sense that an exception should not be made for it. In later years Woolley was to consider the statue ‘not, technically speaking, a good piece of sculpture’ and ‘almost grotesquely ugly’, although he had recognised its significance for the collections of the British Museum immediately upon discovery. In his introduction to Sydney Smith’s philological study of the statue’s inscription, in 1949, Woolley ascribed his own twentieth century standards to the inhabitants of ancient Alalakh:

Purely aesthetic reasons would not account for its survival, but it may have been of peculiar interest in the history of art... It may be that an independent school of North Syrian sculpture began in *Idri-mi*’s reign and was fostered by him, his own statue being the first major work of that school; if that were so, and if the fact were recognised, a high

value might well be set by local patriotism on an outstanding
'primitive' of the local art tradition.⁶⁷

Such contortions of argument were deemed necessary by Woolley to qualify his aesthetic valuation. To justify his 'ugly' find he had to invoke a school of art, nationalist patriotism, royal patronage and an interest in art historical studies in ancient Near Eastern society without being able to quote any sources for the existence of such notions in the past. This interpretation of past societies by introducing ideas and institutions prevalent in and crucial to modern Western society further emphasises the close connection between archaeology and politics.⁶⁸ Woolley, like many of his contemporaries, took for granted the practice of royal patronage for art and the preservation of older monuments by later generations as essential expressions of a community.

Conclusion

This article has shown how, in 1939, the Turkish government took advantage of Britain and France's need for friendly relations and in the course of acquiring a province bargained Idrimi in exchange for British support. Despite Turkey's own, strict antiquities laws, its diplomats felt that the help that British diplomats had provided in achieving the reunification of the Hatay province with Turkey had made it worth ignoring both their own and French law and to sacrifice a rare find as a just reward for Britain.

Despite Woolley's unease about the statue's aesthetics, both the image and the text continue to occupy an important place in the archaeology of the Ancient Near East. This is partly due to the significance of Woolley's discoveries at Tell Atchana in

general but furthermore to the statue's uniqueness as a composite object as outlined above. At the British Museum the statue of Idrimi remains on display to this day. It inhabits a central space in the Levant Galleries surrounded by display cases with other objects from Alalakh. Most recently, the British Museum has undertaken an initiative to make the statue available to more people by commissioning a 3D scan and replica which will be part of a touring exhibition.⁶⁹ Crucially, the statue's own object habit has therefore shifted in precisely the way outlined by the editors of this volume in their introduction. Idrimi is now one of many in the vast collections of the British Museum, while in a Turkish context the circumstances of its appreciation, museum politics, and developments in museum studies in the decades since the integration of the Hatay into the republic have led to a change in its perception and the way it is displayed. In the New Hatay Archaeological Museum Idrimi's hologram is thus shown in a reconstructed temple entrance, framed by lengthy excerpts from the statue's inscription. Uncluttered by other objects, except two lion statues supporting the steps leading up to it, Idrimi confronts the visitor in stark solitude against a black background. The curators emphasise the significance of the Hatay's early antiquity within larger narratives of Turkish history by focusing the new displays on Alalakh and Idrimi specifically.⁷⁰ Thus framed as unique, the hologram simultaneously stages the statue's past and its perhaps desired future; another return to Alalakh.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Abbreviations

TNA: The National Archives, London

BMCE: British Museum Central Archives

Notes

- ¹ C. Leonard Woolley, 'Excavations near Antioch in 1936', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 17 (1937), 1–15 (p.1).
- ² C. Leonard Woolley, *Alalakh: An Account of the Excavations at Tell Atchana in the Hatay, 1937–1949* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); Jesse Casana, 'Alalakh and the Archaeological Landscape of Mukish: The Political Geography and Population of a Late Bronze Age Kingdom,' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 353 (2009), 7–37; Timothy P. Harrison, 'Tayinat in the Early Iron Age,' in *Across the Border: Late Bronze-Iron Age Relations between Syria and Anatolia: Proceedings of a Symposium Held at the Research Center of Anatolian Studies, Koç University, Istanbul, May 31-June 1, 2010*, ed. by Kutlu Aslıhan Yener (Leuven, Walpole, Mass: Peeters, 2013), pp.61–87. The current excavation is led by Prof. Kutlu Aslıhan Yener on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey. Kutlu Aslıhan Yener, Murat Akar and Mara Horowitz, eds. *Alalakh Excavations, Vol 2: The Late Bronze II Levels, 2006–2012* (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, forthcoming); Kutlu Aslıhan Yener, *Tell Atchana, Ancient Alalakh Volume 1: The 2003–2004 Excavations Seasons* (Turkey: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010).
- ³ The exact date of the statue and of the inscription are not agreed upon by scholars and are generally not considered to date even to the same century. Woolley, *Alalakh*; Sidney Smith, *The Statue of Idrimi. With an Introduction by Sir Leonard Woolley* (London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1949); Amir Fink, *Late Bronze Age Tell Atchana (Alalakh): Stratigraphy, Chronology, History* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010); for a discussion of the authorship of the inscription see Jack M. Sasson, 'On Idrimi and Šarruwa, the Scribe,' in *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians 9/1: In Honor of Ernest R. Lacheman*, ed. by Martha A. Morrison and David I. Owen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), pp.309–24.
- ⁴ I would like to thank Dr. Rachael Sparks and Ian Carroll for permission to use the image of Idrimi from the Woolley Papers held at UCL Institute of Archaeology.
- ⁵ Zainab Bahrani, 'Assault and Abduction: The Fate of the Royal Image in the Ancient Near East,' *Art History* 18, 3 (1995), 363–82, (p.372). See also Bahrani's discussion of the Akkadian word *šalmu* and its translations. Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

- ⁶ C. Leonard Woolley, *Mesopotamien und Vorderasien. Die Kunst des Mittleren Ostens*. Translated by Leopold Voelker (Baden-Baden: Holle & Co Verlag, 1961), p.137.
- ⁷ Allison Karmel Thomason, 'The Impact of the 'Portable': Integrating 'Minor Arts' into the Ancient Near Eastern Canon,' in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. by Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston / Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp.133–58, (p.137).
- ⁸ Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, p. 191.
- ⁹ Irene J. Winter, *On the Art in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- ¹⁰ Bahrani, 'Assault and Abduction'; Bahrani, *The Graven Image*.
- ¹¹ Bahrani, 'Assault and Abduction', p.374ff.
- ¹² Marian H. Feldman, 'Knowledge as Cultural Biography: Lives of Mesopotamian Monuments,' *Studies in the History of Art* 74 (2009), 40–55 (p.46); Samuel A. B. Mercer, 'The Malediction in Cuneiform Inscriptions,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 34 (1915), 282–309; Noel Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004).
- ¹³ Feldman, 'Knowledge as Cultural Biography'; Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, p.152ff.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Beran, 'Leben und Tod der Bilder,' in *Ad Bene et Fideliter Seminandum. Festgabe für Karlheinz Deller zum 21. Februar 1987*, ed. by Gerlinde Mauer and Ursula Magen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1988), pp. 55–60 (p.60); As noted in Feldman, 'Knowledge as Cultural Biography', p.55 (note 48) it is 'highly unlikely that a single English translation can accurately convey the many senses of this Sumerian word'; see also Mark A. Brandes, 'Destruction et mutilation des statues en Mésopotamie,' *Akkadica* 16 (1980), 28–41 (39f). It denotes the 'Being, divine properties enabling cosmic activity; office; (cultic) ordinance'. (<http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd1/index.html>) [Accessed 19.10.2016].
- ¹⁵ Murat Akar, 'Bir Başkenti Tanıtmak: Yeni Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Alalah Sergi Salonu (Presenting a Capital City: The Alalakh Gallery in the New Hatay Archaeological Museum),' *ANMED - News of Archaeology from Anatolia's Mediterranean Areas* 12 (2014), 261–66, (p.264, emphasis added). This furthermore calls to mind the empty frames still on display in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston after thirteen of its paintings were stolen in 1990. I am grateful to Lucia Pietroiusti for this reference.
- ¹⁶ Donald Preziosi, 'Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality,' *Museum History Journal* 2, 1 (2009), 37–50 (p.38).
- ¹⁷ Akar, 'Bir Başkenti Tanıtmak', p.264.
- ¹⁸ Jean-Louis Cohen, 'Écochard Michel (Paris, 1905 - Paris, 1985),' in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, ed. by François Pouillon (Paris: IISMM Karthala, 2008), p. 364; Scott Redford, ed. *Antioch on the Orontes: Early Explorations in the City of Mosaics = Asi'deki Antakya: Mozaikler Şehrinde İlk Araştırmalar* (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014).
- ¹⁹ http://www.hatayarkeolojimuze.gov.tr/HatayMuzeWeb/flash/main_EN.html [Accessed 24.03.2017].
- ²⁰ Akar, 'Bir Başkenti Tanıtmak', p.262.
- ²¹ Yücel Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta. A Study in Turkish-French-Syrian Relations* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2001), p.237.
- ²² This maintained that, in an attempt to construct a new cultural identity for the citizens of the new republic, distinct and independent from the Ottoman past, the Hittites were proto-Turks and therefore direct ancestors of the modern Turkish community. The centre of Hittite culture was the capital of Hattusha in central Anatolia. Aslı Gür, 'Stories in Three Dimensions. Narratives of Nation and the Anatolian Civilizations Museum,' in *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, ed. by Esra Özyürek (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp. 40–69, (p.46f); Esra Özyürek, 'Introduction: The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey,' in *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp. 1–15; Çiğdem Atakuman, 'Turkey,' in *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*, ed. by Neil Asher Silberman, 2012. <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199735785.001.0001/acref-9780199735785>> [Accessed 10.04.2017]; Melania Savino, 'Aziz Ogan and the Development of Archaeological Museums in the Turkish Republic' *Museum History Journal* 8,1 (2015), 88–101 (p.89).
- ²³ Lucia Patrizio Gunning, *The British Consular Service in the Aegean and the Collection of Antiquities for the British Museum* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).
- ²⁴ Zainab Bahrani, 'Untold Tales of Mesopotamian Discovery,' in *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753-1914*, ed. by Zainab Bahrani, Zeynep Çelik, and Edhem Eldem, (Istanbul: SALT, 2011), 125–55.

- ²⁵ See for example Brian M. Fagan, *Return to Babylon: Travelers, Archaeologists, and Monuments in Mesopotamia, Revised Edition* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2007); Brian M. Fagan, *The Rape of the Nile: Tomb Robbers, Tourists, and Archaeologists in Egypt* (New York: Simon & Schuster Trade, New York, NY, U.S.A., 1975); Magnus T. Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), p. 117ff; Zainab Bahrani, Zeynep Çelik, and Edhem Eldem, eds. *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914* (Istanbul: SALT, 2011).
- ²⁶ James H. Breasted, ‘Obituary: David George Hogarth,’ *Geographical Review* 18, 1 (1928), 159–61, (p.160); David Gill, ‘Hogarth, David George (1862–1927),’ *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ²⁷ Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past*, p. 117ff.
- ²⁸ Oliver, R. Gurney ‘Garstang, John (1876–1956)’ *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 23, 2004).
- ²⁹ Holger Hoock, ‘The British State and the Anglo-French Wars over Antiquities, 1798–1858,’ *The Historical Journal* 50, 1 (2007), pp. 49–72, (p.50).
- ³⁰ I have tried to reflect the official nomenclature of the political entity at the respective moment in time when using any of these three names. See also Emma Lundgren Jörum, *Beyond the Border: Syrian Policies Towards Territories Lost* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2011), p. 140.
- ³¹ The exact size of this share is debated to this day with some authors insisting that not only the population but even the geography of the region was Turkish, *Publications de “La Société de l’Indépendance de Hatay”* ‘Le calvaire du Hatay: géographiquement, le Hatay est turc’ (1937), 1; 5; Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta*, p.20; See also Gür, ‘Stories in Three Dimensions’, p.48f. for the connection made between Anatolia as a territory to the ‘Anatolian-ness’ of its inhabitants within the Turkish Historical Thesis and the National Pact.
- ³² The National Pact was a statement of six articles adopted by the Turkish Parliament in 1920. It set out the indivisibility of the Turkish nation and the integrity of Turkish territory along ethnic and linguistic boundaries and renounced claims to former colonies with an Arab majority population. Dilek Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p.183.
- ³³ Philip S Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987), p. 485; 499.
- ³⁴ Robert B Satloff, ‘Prelude to Conflict: Communal Interdependence in the Sanjak of Alexandretta 1920–1936,’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, 2 (1986), pp.147–80 (p.177).
- ³⁵ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy*, p. 183; Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2004), p.202f.; Emma Lundgren Jörum *Beyond Syria’s Borders: A History of Territorial Disputes in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p.89.
- ³⁶ Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta*, p.235.
- ³⁷ Lundgren Jörum *Beyond Syria’s Borders*, p.91.
- ³⁸ Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta*, p.292.
- ³⁹ Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta*, p.158.
- ⁴⁰ Güçlü, *The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta*, p.102, 225.
- ⁴¹ Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in War and Peace* (London: John Murray, 1949); Yücel Güçlü ‘Turco-British Relations on the Eve of the Second World War,’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, 4 (2003), pp/ 159–205.
- ⁴² Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; The Papers of Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen; KNAT 1/13, diary 1939-1940.
- ⁴³ From the viewpoint of the Allies these developments proved vital in ensuring Turkey’s neutrality during most of World War Two.
- ⁴⁴ British Museum Central Archives [BMCE], CE32/44/78, C.W. Baxter to L. Woolley, 11.03.1939.
- ⁴⁵ BMCE, CE32/44/75, A.W. Davis to L. Woolley, 23.02.1939.
- ⁴⁶ Rolf Stucky, ‘Henri Seyrig - Engagierter Archäologe und Verwalter des Antikendienstes während der Mandatszeit,’ in *Das Grosse Spiel. Archäologie und Politik*, ed. by Charlotte Trümpler (Köln: DuMont, 2008), pp. 505–11.
- ⁴⁷ ‘Les antiquités mobilières découvertes au cours des fouilles appartiennent également à l’État, cependant une partie en sera abandonnée au fouilleur à titre d’indemnité’ Guillaume Segret, *Une histoire de la législation: Patrimoine en Syrie et au Liban sous le Mandat français* (Paris: Geuthner, 2012), 249. See also Nicole Chevalier, *La recherche archéologique française au Moyen-Orient, 1842–1947* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 2002).
- ⁴⁸ Segret, *Une histoire de la législation*, p.133.

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- ⁴⁹ Segret, *Une histoire de la législation*, p. 249.
- ⁵⁰ Ergun Özsunay, 'Protection of Cultural Heritage in Turkish Private Law,' *International Journal of Cultural Property* 6, 2 (1997), p.278.
- ⁵¹ The decree was only replaced by new legislation in 1973 and this in turn in 1983 by the current Law on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Property. Sibel Özel, 'Under the Turkish Blanket Legislation: The Recovery of Cultural Property Removed from Turkey,' *International Journal of Legal Information* 38, 2 (2010), 177–84, (p.180).
- ⁵² BMCE, CE/32/44/92, L. Woolley to J. Forsdyke, 05.07.1939. It transpires from correspondence between Woolley, the Foreign Office and the Embassy at Ankara that the permit was actually valid until 1941, having been made out for 5 years in 1936. The National Archives [TNA], FO 371/23299, E 5566/530/44, L. Woolley to P. Moore Crosthwaite, 05.08.1939.
- ⁵³ BMCE, CE32/44/98/3/1, A.W. Davis to H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 29.06.1939.
- ⁵⁴ Agatha Christie Mallowan, *Come, Tell Me How You Live* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), p.171f.
- ⁵⁵ BMCE, CE32/44/98/3/1, A.W. Davis to H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 29.06.1939, p. 3.
- ⁵⁶ BMCE, CE32/44/98/3/1, A.W. Davis to H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 29.06.1939. Woolley and Açıkalın were already acquainted. The latter had seemingly 'shown great personal interest in the excavations and had visited them several times'. TNA, FO 861/114, A.W. Davis to H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 22.06.1939.
- ⁵⁷ TNA, FO 371/23299, E 5185/530/44, H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Viscount Halifax, 13.07.1939.
- ⁵⁸ Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; The Papers of Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen; KNAT 1/13, diary 1939-1940, p. 29f.
- ⁵⁹ Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; The Papers of Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen; KNAT 1/13, diary 1938, p. 76.
- ⁶⁰ Woolley, Alalakh, Iff; Hélène Maloigne, 'Sir Leonard Woolley and Tell Atchana, Alalakh (1935-49),' in *Unutulmuş krallık: antik Alalah'ta arkeoloji ve fotoğraf = The Forgotten Kingdom: Archaeology and Photography at Ancient Alalakh*, ed. by Murat Akar and Hélène Maloigne (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014), 34-45.
- ⁶¹ TNA, FO 371/23299, E 5566/530/44, L. Woolley to P. Moore Crosthwaite, 05.08.1939. In July, Knatchbull-Hugessen sent a document to the Foreign Office containing copies of letters and agreements signed between the Turkish and French governments. This dossier included a letter from the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French Ambassador, specifically recognising the validity of contracts given to three archaeological expeditions, including Woolley's. TNA, FO 371/23299, E 5185/530/44, H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Secretary, 13.07.1939.
- ⁶² TNA, FO 371/23299, E 5566/530/4, L. Woolley to H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 04.08.1939, (emphasis added).
- ⁶³ TNA, FO 371/23299, E 6206/530/44, H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to C. Açıkalın, 24.08.1939. An answer was either never given or not retained, and in any case Woolley did not return to Tell Atchana until 1946.
- ⁶⁴ Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past*, p.183.
- ⁶⁵ C. Leonard Woolley, 'Excavations in Iraq,' *The Times*. December 12, 1934; C. Leonard Woolley, 'Antiquities Law, Iraq,' *Antiquity* 9, (1935), 84–8.
- ⁶⁶ 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), 1–14 (p.5).
- ⁶⁷ Woolley, Introduction, p. 8.
- ⁶⁸ Julian Thomas, *Archaeology and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- ⁶⁹ Emily Sharpe, 'British Museum's Ancient Syrian Refugee Who Became King Goes Online' 7 April 2017. <http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/british-museum-s-ancient-syrian-refugee-who-became-king-goes-online/> [Accessed 10.04.2017], and James Fraser 'Idrimi, the 3,500-year-old refugee' British Museum Blog, <http://blog.britishmuseum.org/idrimi-the-3500-year-old-refugee/> [Accessed 24.04.2017], which entirely glosses over the issues regarding the statue's arrival at the British Museum raised in this article.
- ⁷⁰ See Akar, 'Bir Başkenti Tanıtmak', p.264, for a photograph.