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# Egyptian Archaeology and the Museum

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## Abstract and Keywords

The relationship between excavation and museums is often assumed to be linear, with artifacts removed from the field and transferred to a museum. This article, however, envisages a more complex connection between the two based on the premise that archaeological context is a continuous process rather than a static setting. The article's departure point is the legacy and history of collections that were excavated in Egypt and widely distributed to the world's museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These collections comprise not only excavated artifacts, but also the related documents of fieldwork and finds distribution. As a whole, this material allows for continual contextualization as the colonial legacy of archaeology in Egypt, and the hyper-reality of its presentation in museums, is confronted. Concepts such as the contact zone, indigenous archaeologies and radical transparency are just a few of the ways these issues might be addressed. Museum assemblages also permit a critical assessment of both the contemporary and possible future relationships between Egyptian archaeology in the field and museums.

Keywords: Egyptian archaeology, museum, history of collections, context, hyperreality, contact zones, radical transparency, indigenous archaeologies

### Introduction

> The aim, then, in excavating should be to obtain and preserve such specimens in particular as may serve as keys to the collections already existing.
>
> –Petrie 1888: vii
>
> Egyptian collections are not simple didactic illusions. They are assimilated in ourselves and resurrected into an ever-changing present.
>
> –Naguib 1990: 89

These two statements neatly encapsulate some of the fundamental shifts that have occurred over the past 150 years in the relationship between Egyptian field archaeology and museums: from the prominence of founding fathers excavating for museums to the postcolonial recognition of the multiple voices and hidden hands present in the fluid construction of archaeological narratives (Wendrich 2010*a*: 5; Quirke 2010). Both quotes can challenge the common misconception that a sharp line should be drawn between the field and the museum (cf. Swain 2007: 12; Colla 2007: 17).

The first quotation is taken from a man who, in disciplinary histories, is frequently bestowed the epithet "Father of Egyptian Archaeology." Rightly or wrongly, Flinders Petrie's explicit promotion of a rigorous archaeological methodology (Petrie 1904) at first seems to set him apart from many of his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century who undertook widespread trenching of Egyptian sites primarily to enrich Western museum collections, but to the detriment of the archaeological record. As Petrie's statement suggests, however, colonial archaeological

fieldwork in Egypt, as he envisioned it, was from the outset still embedded ideologically within museum practice. Whereas Egyptian antiquities had been a mainstay of European collections since at least the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the latter part of the Victorian era witnessed a change in the pace and nature of their acquisition by museums via new archaeological means and their incorporation into novel forms of exhibit. Crucially, it was also the time when both archaeology as a discipline and museum curatorship as a profession became established, with their relationship up until the 1920s being symbiotic (Stevenson 2014). This resulted in the export and fragmentation of assemblages across hundreds of the world's museums. Since 1983, artifacts have not been allowed to leave Egypt, and the relationship between museums external to Egypt and current archaeological practice may seem more removed than a century ago. Yet, both in Egypt and in the West, museums are beginning to play a more active role in addressing how the past was and is archaeologically constructed among a range of communities and from a variety of perspectives (Ashton 2011; Exell 2013; Tully 2011; MacDonald 2005). Some institutions have instigated dialogue with ongoing excavations and have participated in "community archaeology" projects in Egypt (Moser et al. 2002; Meguid 2010). On the other hand, museum practices may also adversely impact on the preservation of archaeological sites (Hanna 2013). Both perspectives are touched on in this article.

Overall, the literature on ancient Egypt in museums is extensive. A large proportion concerns histories of collection, often focusing on the (usually Western) personalities responsible for amassing prized museum pieces or else taking the form of selective exhibition catalogues. More recently, increasing attention has been paid to displays and exhibitions in the production of archaeological knowledge about Egypt (Colla 2007; Monti and Keene 2013; Moser 2006; Doyon 2008; Tully 2011). Museums, however, are much more than the sum of what is visible in their galleries or represented in inward-looking institutional narratives. At their heart, yet often overlooked, are large and complex assemblages of stored objects, together with associated documentation (maps, field diaries, correspondence, photographs, etc.) that has accumulated around them, entangling collections within multifarious histories and relationships. Although this can also be true for pieces obtained through the art market to some extent, this article's focus is on museum objects whose biographies incorporate explicit archaeological narratives. In other words, it concerns not just any material procured via antiquarian "digging" in the loosest sense of the word, but more specifically where documenting an object's find spot was a key part of its life history (cf. Reid 1997: 312 n. 1). For museum archaeologists today, there are considerable challenges surrounding how to make the diverse material legacy of such fieldwork both accessible and meaningful to a range of publics and stakeholders. One of the most pressing issues in any such undertaking, however, is the foregrounding of links between the modern country and peoples of Egypt on the one hand, against its widely scattered heritage on the other.

## Curating Egypt

### Prehistories of Collecting

Artifacts from Egypt have long held a niche within Western collections. In Renaissance Europe, eclectic ensembles of *naturalia* and *artificialia* were brought together in *Kunstkammer* ("art rooms") or cabinets of curiosity (Moser 2006: 15–32; Riggs 2010: 1132–1133). Few of these "theaters of the world" remain intact today, but the early seventeenth-century Augsburg art cabinet in Uppsala's Museum Gustavianum, Sweden, is an exception that highlights their general character. Among the hundreds of natural and man-made objects secreted away within its panels is a small, blue-green funerary statuette from Egypt known as a *shabti*. In the early seventeenth century, such figurines were a must for any collection of note (Moser 2006: 26, fig. 1.6). These antiquities served to convey the exotic and the rare, and they were often categorized by their material and function rather than by chronological or geographical criteria, which was of minor interest.

Some of these cabinets of curiosity were the precursors of early museums, such as the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Europe's burgeoning new museums continued to profit from the imperialistic and nationalistic rivalries that were being played out in Egypt—principally between the British and French (Hoock 2007), but also involving Italian, Austrian, German, Scandinavian, and Russian interests—and that fueled the export of ancient, often monumental, pieces of Egyptian art and history (Porterfield 1998; Reid 1997: 21–63; Riggs 2010: 1137–1138). Reframed within European institutions, these "wondrous curiosities" (Moser 2006) slowly emerged from the shadow of Classical representations to form an enduring focus for Western reimaginings of Egypt.

These foreign discourses of power left both visible scars on the Egyptian landscape and silent voids in Western accounts of the development of Egyptian archaeology (Colla 2007: 13). "Foreigners," the Khedive Muhammad Ali lamented in 1835, were "destroying ancient edifices, extracting stones and other worked objects and exporting them to foreign countries" (Muhammad Ali cited in Reid 1997: 21). In response, he issued a decree stating that all antiquities that resulted from excavation were to be placed into the care of an Egyptian museum. It was an enterprise that proved to be short lived. Additional decrees in 1869 and 1874 further regulated the export of antiquities without licenses and outlined rules for excavation (Khater 1960; Ikram 2011). Despite these initiatives, the diaspora of Egypt's heritage to foreign states continued unabated throughout the nineteenth century as commercial travel further widened the cleft through which Egyptian objets d'art streamed outward to Western museums in the hands of tourists, frequently with little regard for date or provenance.

## Distributing Egypt: The Egypt Exploration Fund

The first official permits for foreign excavation in Egypt were issued to the UK's Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF, now Society—EES). The EEF was established through the initiative of the travel writer and novelist Amelia Edwards (James 1982) in the same year that the British bombarded Alexandria and established military occupation of country. The Fund's initial approach to excavation in the early 1880s was embedded within wider trends in mid-nineteenth-century colonial cultural practice, including its appeal to biblical and classical narratives (Gange 2006), its use of imperial rhetoric surrounding preservation (Swenson 2013), and in garnering support from individuals whose antiquarian exploits in other countries had caught the public imagination (Challis 2008). The spoils of the adventures of individuals such as A. H. Layard at Nineveh and J. T. Wood at Ephesus, for instance, were not only widely publicized, but were also publicly visible through the acquisition of visually striking sculptures and artifacts bearing texts for the burgeoning national museums of Europe. There had been hopes that excavation in Egypt would similarly provision the British Museum with newly discovered treasures, but the announcement of the new organization in *The Times* on April 1, 1882 conceded that "by the law of Egypt no antiquities can be removed from the country." Nevertheless, the Khedive granted the British Museum two statues from the EEF's first season of excavations at Tell el-Maskhuta. Such monumental pieces had been the primary focus of Tell el-Maskhuta's excavator Edouard Naville, a man who took more interest in inscriptions than in the remains of quotidian life. This stood in stark contrast to the philosophy of the EEF's second excavator, Flinders Petrie. Arguably, it was Petrie's interest in smaller, seemingly more mundane and fragmentary relics of the past that expedited the authorized exportation of much larger volumes of Egyptian antiquities to Western museums from the 1880s onward because such objects frequently fell outside of Egyptian legislation and the interests of the central museum in Boulaq. A system of "partage" was negotiated through Gaston Maspero, head of the Antiquities Service, whereby foreign missions were permitted to ship abroad a share of the finds made during their excavations, subject to the French-run Egyptian Museum having first refusal.

The partage system was of great benefit to the fledgling EEF because it allowed it to attract a network of financial sponsors with the promise of a share of the spoils of excavation. The founding of the EEF coincided with both a peak in the growth of local museums (Van Keuren 1984) and the emergence of professional museum practice in the UK (Flower 1898). Thus, whereas previous digs in foreign countries had primarily enriched the galleries of national museums such as the Louvre and the British Museum, there was now a pool of regional museums keen to expand their collections, and these were more than happy to acquire less monumental pieces of Egyptian culture. A symbiotic dependency between the EEF and museums emerged, with the latter often influencing the choices made by the Fund as to which sites should be explored (e.g., Wainwright and Whitmore 1920). Museums worldwide were also beneficiaries of the EEF's work, resulting in a global fragmentation of the material products of field projects, a pattern that continued until the ban on the export of Egyptian antiquities in 1983. Some 140 institutions today hold material acquired through the Fund, including museums in Japan, Australia, South Africa, and Canada (Stevenson 2014).

The financial imperative of operating foreign missions in Egypt meant that similar models were implemented for Petrie's other initiatives, the Egypt Research Account (ERA) and the British School of Archaeology in Egypt (BSAE), which operated in the first half of the twentieth century. Both organized global distributions of objects from excavations to museums. Other institutions also began to launch their own archaeological projects, with American museums being particularly active (Doyon forthcoming; Thomas and Allen 1996). In other countries, museum staff were similarly active in the field, such as Ernesto Schiaparelli on behalf of Italian museums (Terraroli 2002). This

spread of cultural heritage poses considerable challenges to modern archaeological analyses that seek to re-examine past excavations, with many projects expending substantial time and effort on reconnecting site assemblages (e.g., Bagh 2011; Thomas and Villing 2013). For British excavations, such research is facilitated by surviving records of finds distribution held in institutions including the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, the Griffith Institute at the University of Oxford, and the Egypt Exploration Society based in London. Similar documentary resources contextualizing early unpublished or partially published works are associated with other international missions, the increasing academic interest in which is reflected in the establishment in 2009 of a dedicated journal, *Egyptian and Egyptological Documents Archives Libraries (EDAL)*. Archives such as these offer the opportunity to extend the project of establishing archaeological context to a wide range of museum collections around the world.

## Archaeological Archives

As indicated earlier, it was not just excavated objects that were exported to museums in these distributions. Accompanying and informing these artifacts was an explicit emphasis on their provenance and date because a "specimen may be inferior to others already in a museum, and yet it will be worth more than all of them if it has its history" (Petrie 1888: vii). To distinguish objects in this way meant inscribing excavated material with markings denoting their source (Petrie 1904). This allowed them to be integrated with the swelling volume of documentation that accumulated around archaeological field projects, including maps, museum distribution lists, reports, letters, photographs, field plans, and exhibitions. Whereas antiquities could on their own be "wondrous curiosities," the excavated artifact (often unassuming small finds) required the support of this documentation to be made meaningful. In effect, archaeological context came to be realized not only in the Egyptian landscape, but also performed in the process of tacking back and forth between artifacts and the emerging products of fieldwork (Stevenson 2014). Similar trends enmeshing field documentation and museum collecting practices are evident in this period for anthropology (Gosden and Knowles 2001: xx).

A consequence of these trends for modern museum practice is that collections need to be addressed holistically, ensuring that it is not just objects that are managed with a view to documentation, conservation, pedagogy, and exhibition design, but that all aspects of the archaeological archive are equally promoted as valuable museum resources. This requires attention be paid to the linkages between people and things and an awareness of the need to capture these associations in museum collection management procedures so that they can be made transparent and usable (Stevenson forthcoming). A good example of such an approach is that of Chicago's Oriental Institute Integrated Database Project, which will, in future, allow the user to track related pieces of information about an object: from photographs of an object's excavation, its description in an excavator's notebook, to its bibliographic trail and other objects found in association with it (Branting et al. 2013).

Such a holistic approach to objects and their archives is important because what these historical trends in field documentation and collecting draw into relief is the mutability of objects as they become caught up in "a series of continuous social relations… connecting 'field' and 'museum'" (Gosden and Knowles 2001: 5). This view owes a debt to the concept of the social biography of things (Gosden and Marshall 1999; Appadurai 1986), which has had considerable currency in museum studies generally, in part because the pursuit of richer life histories is one means of challenging colonial pasts (Barringer and Flynn 1998: 6; Hill 2012). It also a means of exploring the broader connotations of the idea of archaeological context beyond the physical environment documented on a context sheet in the field. The provenance of an object remains, of course, a primary key for archaeological inference. Without it, crucial parts of an object's biography are irrevocably obscured and its ethical position in the present potentially destabilized (see below). Archaeologists, however, have long used the term "context" in a plethora of additional ways, including the shifting social, economic, intellectual, and political conditions of archaeological practice (Hodder and Hudson 2003: 170–172). Situating interpretation in this critical manner enriches our perspectives and engagements with artifacts and the stories we construct in their presence. There remains a tendency, however, to see context (including the museum) as merely informing or encoding the meanings of objects and peoples' responses to them. If, on the other hand, context is explicitly recognized to be about connections (e.g., see Hodder and Hudson 2003: 170), then, rather than being merely framed by their contexts, object-people interactions can be considered to contribute to the very formation of those contexts (Thomas 1999: 18–19; Hicks 2010: 84). With a holistic approach to collections—one that seeks to perform connections between people and things—it is possible to consider a range of ways in which excavated objects in museums may

contribute to new contexts that might accommodate a far wider range of voices and histories in museum spaces than has hitherto been the case for Egyptian archaeology.

Such projects are not uncontested, however, and there exist cross-cutting claims concerning who has authority over the possession and interpretation of cultural property. Nowhere is this more evident than in the manner in which archaeological heritage has been implicated within identity construction, such as in black and African identities (e.g., Ashton 2011; Bernal 1987; O'Connor and Reid 2003; Roth 1995; Scham 2003). Such debates have been valuable for politicizing Egyptology, thus encouraging a more critical analysis of Western assumptions (Meskell 2005: 156). At the risk of giving short shrift to immensely complex questions regarding racial representation and museum authority, the remainder of this article will instead consider a less well-developed but emerging theme in the literature on Egyptian archaeology and museums: the visibility and involvement of modern Egyptians.

### Curating Contexts

Many museums, such as the British Museum, the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are still involved in current fieldwork in Egypt. Such institutions are not, however, actively acquiring objects from excavations for their collections. Rather their focus is on recontextualizing collections that already exist, for example by identifying selection biases in the procurement of objects from the field (e.g., Thomas and Villing 2013). Many such projects remain, however, rooted within narrow fields of intellectual enquiry or else restricted to engaging with standard Egyptological themes. It is argued in this section that the processes of context making in both the museum and in the field can be extended to actively engage with broader programs of museological and anthropological discourse. Three concepts that are well-explored in this wider literature are surveyed here: hyperreality, contact zones, and radical transparency.

## Hyperreal Egypt

Museum representations of Egypt have tended to remain conservative, frequently relying on familiar themes such as pharaohs, mummies, and pyramids. Perhaps this is because displays resulting from more than a century and a half of archaeological exploration of Egypt are already hugely popular with museum visitors (Meskell 2004: 198–199), so much so that such models are rendered more real than the reality the displays are supposedly meant to illustrate. In other words, it is a form of hyperreality (Baudrillard 1983; Mclean 1997: 19–23; Meskell 2005; Urry 1990). The Egypt that is encountered in the museum is therefore often conceptual (MacDonald 2003), detached not only from wider archaeological concerns, but also removed in time and space from the modern country in which archaeological fieldwork is still being conducted by international missions (El-Daly 2003; Meskell 2005). In this respect, colonial legacies continue to loom large in Egyptian archaeology and in its presentation by museums. By recognizing, however, that object meanings need not be static, but are instead bound up in continual processes of context formation, it is possible to identify opportunities to reconfigure, resituate, and reanimate objects within alternative narratives.

Egypt's self-contained and homogenized representation in the museum is, in part, a product of disciplinary histories that have privileged Pharaonic Egypt (3000 BC–30 BC) above other pasts (Reid 1997: 7; Meskell 2005: 161; Quirke 2010: 5). Within Egypt, as Doyon (2008: 3) has noted, the historical segregation of postpharaonic material culture was institutionalized "within the urban fabric of Egypt itself" with three individual museums presenting facets of Egyptian history not included inside the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square: the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, the Coptic Museum, and the Museum of Islamic Art. Only later in the twentieth century, with the proliferation of museums in Egypt, did a fuller spectrum of history become commonplace (Doyon 2008: 13). This includes recent capital projects such as the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (el-Moniem 2005).

Outside of Egypt, however, few museums present this richer narrative of the Egyptian past. Yet assemblages from multiple periods of Egyptian history are often encountered by archaeologists because sites are rarely the neat historical units that are presented in museum displays. Rather, archaeological locales are complex palimpsests of interwoven time periods. The field is, however, rarely the template for gallery display, and, instead, recovered fragments are partitioned through the filter of Western typologies and tropes. This process often separates seemingly immiscible layers of more recent Egyptian heritage from "antiquity." Later periods have been the

primary focus of archaeological research in Egypt, but far less frequently than most projects. One example from the British colonial period is the Byzantine Research Fund, which conducted explorations at Coptic sites in the Sinai (Thompson 1914). The material legacy of this work resides in the British Museum, but it is only now being recontextualized (O'Connell forthcoming). The more recent past was also frequently encountered by archaeologists, but, in their zeal to reach classical or pharaonic levels, they would often either ignore or wilfully destroy any more recent cultural "veneers." Nevertheless, whether by accident or design, some excavated specimens have percolated into museum collections. Among the 80,000-strong collection of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London, for instance, are numerous Coptic and Islamic objects. For some of these, the Petrie Museum has created themed trails to allow visitors to explore less well-known eras. In other museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Islamic Egyptian material is presented within discrete galleries devoted to Islamic or Asian culture rather than Egyptian. Embedding this material within wider geographies is certainly understandable, but as Fazzini (1995) has observed such a separation is not similarly recognized for Nubian material which, in spaces such as the British Museum's Sackler gallery of Egypt and Africa, remains a continuation of the ancient cultures that preceded them.

In the majority of museums, however, what is conspicuously absent is the modern country of Egypt, a pernicious oversight given Western assumptions of the East (Fisher 2000) that allow "potentially contradictory images of past glory and present barbarity to coexist" (Motawi and Merriman 2000, cited in MacDonald 2003: 98). Such assumptions are not just misconceptions held by the general public. They are also deeply embedded within disciplinary histories of anthropology, archaeology, and Egyptology. In the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, for instance, it was common for archaeologists to acquire contemporary Egyptian material culture for museums as examples of "survivals" from ancient times (e.g., Wainwright 1919; Blackman 1927; Ghallab 1929). Informed by social evolutionary discourses (e.g., Tylor 1871: 16) these archaeologists procured both ancient and modern objects with the same end in mind: to demonstrate the technological characteristics relevant to the cultural "age" of a society. This took precedence over their temporal location, in effect casting "primitive peoples" as survivals from a previous age into which they could give a direct insight. It relegated modern Egyptians to a subordinate position both within historical cultural narratives and in the hierarchies of contemporary archaeological practice.

Despite threads of continuity, there have also persisted essentialist views that contemporary Egyptians are far removed from past inhabitants on account of the influx of different groups over the centuries (cf. Ingold 2000: 132–151). Consequently, Egyptians are frequently segregated within a hermetically sealed present that militates against autochthonous commentary on the past. Overlooked here, too, however, is a long tradition of "indigenous archaeologies" (Hamilakis 2011) within Egypt itself, evidenced in Arabic-language historiographies that engage with the ancient past and landscape (e.g., Crabbs 1984; El-Daly 2006). There have also repeatedly been attempts to establish Egyptian schools of Egyptology that were thwarted by colonial powers who sought to retain intellectual authority (Reid 1997; Colla 2007; Haikal 2003). The absence of modern Egypt from our museum narratives runs the risk of perpetuating this disenfranchisement of Egyptians from the construction of their own diverse cultural heritage.


*Click to view larger*

*Figure 1* . Image of Hussein Ossman among artefacts in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, that he excavated.

Copyright of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL.

Just as intellectual and political authority emanated from the Empire's metropoles, museums, too, as Riggs (2010: 1138) has pointed out, in acquiring and classifying Egyptian artifacts were metonymically practicing a form of control of Egypt. Thus, the hoards of objects that adorn shelves and plinths of museums, and which are labeled so precisely as being found by archaeologists such as Petrie or by organizations like the EEF, are in fact also the products of Egyptian—local Fellahin and Bedouin—labor (Quirke 2010; Doyon forthcoming). The core of this labor force, for the better part of Petrie's career, consisted of *Quftis*, men from the Upper Egyptian town of Qift who were trained and became skilled excavators and foremen who went on to work for other foreign missions in Egypt, as well as in Palestine. Their expertise was passed down through the generations, and, to this day, *Quftis*—many claiming descent from Petrie's teams—are still employed on field sites throughout Egypt (Rowland 2014). A consequence of the practice of employing communities of local Egyptian workmen was the production of a sharp dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor. What is frequently absent from grand tales of exploration and discovery is the involvement of subaltern groups such as the *Quftis*. Performing context through establishing connections between different museum resources, however, is one way of not only acknowledging indigenous agency in the formation of museum collections (Quirke 2010; Byrne et. al. 2011), but additionally in forming novel types of community heritage situated somewhere between ancient pasts and contemporary presents (e.g., Figure 1).

A case in point is the cipher scrawled on the base of a Predynastic pottery vessel UC5699 accessioned into the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London: "1817." This is a reference to a grave found in the necropolis of Naqada in Upper Egypt (Petrie and Quibell 1896). The same number is noted on a thin strip of card also held by the Petrie Museum, one of 900 such slips that allowed Petrie to create his renowned seriation of prehistoric graves (Petrie 1899), thereby linking this artifact to Western histories of archaeology and Victorian scientific endeavor (see also Challis 2013*a*: 169). This set of digits, however, allows this vessel to act as a key to other discourses because among the excavation notebooks held in the Petrie Museum is one numbered 138, which belonged not to Petrie, but to a man by the name of Hugh Price. Inside, the number 1817 is pencilled beside Price's sketch of the tomb in which UC5699 was found. It is not Petrie's name that is next to this etching, though, nor is it Price's. Rather there appears the name of an Egyptian excavator: Ali Redwan. The tomb number also holds together the group of objects Redwan uncovered, artifacts that further documentation shows were sent to Chicago, Munich, Manchester, and Oxford (Baumgartel 1970). Such distributions brought additional individuals into the escalating documentation surrounding distributed objects, thereby extending the relational nature of such collections, which are today simultaneously material and social assemblages (Gosden and Larson 2007; Byrne et al. 2011; Harrison 2013).

But is simply crediting individuals with a discovery enough? How might we involve other groups more actively within knowledge construction? The model of the contact zone, as developed largely for ethnographic museums and collections, suggests that much more could be done in archaeology to connect the field and the museum.

## The Contact Zone

Originating within the "new museology" of the 1980s, the past three decades have witnessed significant shifts in the conceptualization of the role of museums in contemporary society (Hooper-Greenhill 1995; Macdonald 1998). At the foundation of these developments lay relativistic and postmodern claims about the educational responsibilities of the museum. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a "second wave" to this development has been identified, one that has sought to reconnect research with museum practice (Phillips 2005; Macdonald 2006) in order to establish more collaborative programs of exhibitions, shared curatorship, and inclusionist use of collections (Witcomb 2003; Shelton 2006; Mason 2006; Peers and Brown 2003). Many such projects have taken inspiration from James Clifford's (1997) co-option of Mary Pratt's "contact zone," a framework that identifies the museum as a space of colonial encounter. In his influential essay, Clifford aimed to challenge the traditional notion that museum professionals occupy a central position in the processes of collecting and curation while communities in originating areas remain peripheral subjects of imperialist appropriation. The contact zone, on the other hand, envisaged the museum as a place of encounter where "people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (Clifford 1997: 192).

Although initiatives to achieve this have leaned more toward ethnographic collections from North America and Oceania, there are implications for African and Asian archaeological material that remain to be fully evaluated. The idea of the contact zone, in particular, is one that resonates with the premise running through this article that

archaeological contexts can emerge within museum practice. Peers and Brown (2003: 4), for instance, have argued that artifacts themselves can function as "contact zones" through being "sources of knowledge and as catalysts for new relationships—both within and between the communities." Objects that were procured via excavation and are caught up within complex networks of archaeological archives and distribution relationships have notable potential in this regard. It has already been suggested, for example, that oral histories of *Quftis* communities should be captured as a counterbalance to the numerous recollections and memoirs of Western archaeologists that dominate the literature (Tassie and Hassan 2009: 191). Might museum artifacts and archives act as departure points or mnemonics for such new types of archaeological reflection, ones that do not privilege Western voices? Could, as Glazier and Jones (2010: 32) suggest, Egyptian approaches be implemented to structure the content or message of displays (Tully 2009: 70–71), such as have been explored at the Nubia Museum in Aswan (Meguid 2010)? Art installations that imbricate past excavations' archives with contemporary local communities are also forming new ways of engaging museums and the field (e.g., Shalaby 2013). These dialogues need not just focus on the construction of exhibitions. They should also be embedded within the research and documentation that underpins museum structures of knowledge. In doing so, new forms of archaeological ethnography could be generated, in which the museum might become "a space for multiple conversations, engagements, interventions, and critiques, centred on materiality and temporality" (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009: 67).

Anthropological programs of source community engagement that have explored such avenues have engaged numerous "communities of practice" (e.g., Krmpotich and Peers 2011). Egyptian archaeological collections—objects and archives—might equally create contexts or contact zones for similar such projects that seek more equal participation in the actual production of archaeological knowledge between communities of practice such as academics, Egyptian fieldworkers, and museum professionals. In so doing, the links between field and museum could be reanimated and a wider range of historical trajectories introduced. Nevertheless, situating these encounters within the space of the museum would still privilege the authority of the hosting institution(s), and, by extension, we should be careful not to overemphasize the extent to which asymmetrical relations are fully destabilized by such projects (see Boast 2011). They may still constitute, however, positive steps that might propel archaeological processes in new directions that are sensitive to the multitude of modern Egyptian voices, be they *Quftis*, Copts, Nubians, Bedouin, or other regional or socioeconomic groups.

## Radical Transparency

Exploring and revealing collection histories, as suggested earlier, is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is also an ethical responsibility that demands museums pose more provocative questions that problematize the assumption that Western institutions have the moral authority to curate the world's heritage. For instance, in addition to being explicit about an object's provenance (or lack of it), we might ask whether the objects displayed in an institution are to be considered stolen, looted, rescued, or contested. By offering problems rather than solutions in this manner (Thomas 2010), museums might encourage "radical transparency," a "mode of communication that admits accountability" (Marstine 2011: 14).

The self-reflexive stance encouraged by radical transparency is one that might be particularly crucial at times of political crisis, as has been witnessed in Egypt following the 2011 Arab Spring. Looting has always been a heritage issue in the country, and ancient Egyptian antiquities consistently attract a steep premium on the black market. But coincident with the recent political strife is the emergence of new markets for antiquities in China, the Gulf, and Eastern Europe that have exerted an even greater demand for relics. The inflated prices accepted by museums and private collectors have, in turn, spurred on new generations of looters to destroy archaeological sites in Egypt. Radical transparency might address the role of museums in legitimizing such processes, however unintentionally (e.g., Brodie et al. 2001). Nevertheless, confronting contentious or uncomfortable dimensions of collection histories is always easier to assert blithely within intellectual debate than it is to implement practically within museum spaces (e.g., Challis 2013*b*).

The destruction of archaeological sites in Egypt is not only an economic issue; it is equally a social and historical one. As argued earlier, museums, in perpetuating a narrative of discovery that has largely excluded indigenous groups, might be considered to have contributed to the marginalization of Egyptians from their heritage to the extent that they no longer feel that it is theirs. Hanna (2013), for instance, has contended that years of Western

study has paid scant regard to the needs of Egyptians, with fieldworkers writing in foreign languages and locking knowledge away in academic circles and foreign institutions. Even in Egypt, she argues, heritage "has been imprisoned within museums and in walled-off sites" (Hanna 2013: 24). Radical transparency might offer one way to prise open a dialogue concerning the ethics of heritage display and facilitate the presentation of more diverse object histories that make explicit the relationships between Egyptian archaeology and museums. Aspects of such ethical questions have certainly been touched on before in debates surrounding repatriation requests from Egypt (e.g., Siehr 2006), but such issues are not restricted to high-profile cases, and collection histories ought to be readily apparent for Egyptian displays more generally.

More positively, museums may be better equipped to support the generation of new community-based projects in Egypt itself, which Hanna (2013) has suggested has the potential to address the disconnection between Egyptians and the archaeological landscape within which they live (cf. Tully 2011). The latter has been partly tackled through the increasing emphasis being placed on training programs for local Egyptian inspectors within current foreign archaeological missions (e.g., Jeffreys 2012; Rowland 2012; Wendrich 2010*b*). Despite the good intentions of many, anecdotal evidence from workers in the field suggests that successfully implementing any such initiatives on the ground is problematic. There remains a need for long-term efforts to be made by both Egyptian authorities and foreign missions to address the complex social, cultural, political, economic, and intellectual inequities that cross-cut communities and pose barriers to the involvement of local Egyptian groups in the interpretation and use of the results of fieldwork.

### Conclusion

Museums outside of Egypt cannot procure artifacts from the field for their collections. As a result, most of their holdings represent the archaeological products of particular windows of activity. More often than not, this is the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when excavation was propelled by modernistic, imperialistic, and colonial agendas. A century on, it is time to reflect on the extent to which these continue to frame Egypt's archaeology. Inertia too easily envelops museum collections, either confining them to static, hyperreal epochs branded as "ancient Egyptian" or else cushioning them within nostalgia for a so-called "golden age of discovery." For the twenty-first-century museum, the challenge is to reanimate Egyptian heritage within fresh narratives and in partnership with new communities of practice. In establishing alternative contexts through our museum resources, however, we should not forget to simultaneously cast our gaze toward the present. Modern-day Egypt's archaeological landscape remains a mosaic of international concessions, each with its own traditions of archaeological enquiry. Reconnecting the field and museum will require us to collectively ensure that modern Egyptian archaeology, as it is practised by both non-Egyptians and Egyptians in Egypt today, is not overlooked but can be continually and critically contextualized.

## Further Reading

The establishment of the idea of ancient Egypt in the museum generally is reviewed by several authors (e.g., Moser 2006; Riggs 2010). For museum traditions in Egypt, see Reid (1997) and Doyon (2008). The potential of museum collections for exploring and critiquing disciplinary histories, as well as their role in wider social networks is addressed in Gosden and Larson (2007), whereas anthropological approaches to the colonial legacy of collections is usefully covered in works such as Boast (2011), Byrne et al. (2011), and Harrison et al. (2013).

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