

Artefacts of Excavation

The British collection and distribution of Egyptian finds to museums, 1880--1915

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This paper explores the collection of artefacts from British excavations in Egypt and their dispersal to institutions across the world between 1880 and 1915. The scope, scale and complexity of these distributions is reviewed with a view to not only highlighting the complex, symbiotic relationship between British organisations that mounted such excavations on the one hand and museums on the other, but also as basis from which to argue that both field and museum collecting practices were enmeshed within the same processes of 'artefaction'. These shared processes together created a new form of museum object, here referred to as the 'excavated artefact'. It is further suggested that the collection of artefacts for museums was one of the primary motivating factors in the establishment of a scientific archaeology in Egypt. Case studies of the activities of the Egypt Exploration Fund and Flinders Petrie's work are presented to draw these arguments into relief.

Introduction

AMONGST the jostle of objects on display in the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford is a 5000-year old fragmentary pottery vessel from Abydos, Egypt (PRM 1901.40.1), bearing inside a label typical of the institution within which it is held (Fig. 1). It is one of some 134,000 archaeological objects amassed from across the world, primarily during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of these, around 10,600 come from Egypt. What sets the Egyptian collection apart from other areas of the globe represented in the Pitt Rivers is the number of artefacts that come from well-documented excavations in Egypt -- roughly 62% of the whole. Many bear labels like that of 1901.40.1, or else possess excavators' marks that link the artefact back to where it was found. What is clear from a recent characterization project¹ is that no other area of the world archaeology collection can claim to hold anywhere near the number of pieces that can be contextualized in this way.

The Pitt Rivers Museum is not alone in having this profile. At the very least there are more than 112 collections in the UK that house objects procured during documented excavations in Egypt,² a consequence largely of the activities of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF), the Egyptian Research Account (ERA) and the British School of Archaeology in Egypt (BSAE) during the British colonial era in Egypt.³ Following each season finds would usually be divided between Egyptian institutions and the excavator, and the latter would, in turn, disperse their share the world over. References to such distributions are a common feature of introductions to particular museum collections and in discussions of finds from specific sites.⁴ This paper seeks to take a more holistic overview of the practice -- not only by examining the scope, scale and complexity of such

dispersals -- but also by considering the symbiotic and recursive relationship between the development of museum collections on the one hand, and the advancement of field archaeology in Egypt on the other, from the 1880s to 1915.⁵ It is argued that both arenas of practice contributed to the processes of ‘artefaction’⁶ from which emerged a new type of object: the excavated artefact. More specifically these processes saw Egyptian things transpire from the status of individual curios to polyvalent artefacts whose meaning was socially constructed through shifting links to specific places, objects, people and institutions.⁷ These issues will be explored through case studies of the role of the EEF and its most prominent and prolific excavator, Flinders Petrie (1853--1942), in distributing collections of artefacts from excavations in Egypt to museums throughout Britain and beyond.

Background

By the 1880s ancient Egyptian objects were a common feature of both public and private collections. Some encompassed colossal statues and monuments, others contained smaller scarabs, figurines and amulets. Whether monumental or dainty, beautiful or grotesque, many were considered from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century to be ‘wondrous curiosities’.⁸ The emergence of a more historically informed notion of Egypt in its own terms, outwith the shadow of classical art, has been documented for collections such as the British Museum up until the 1880s.⁹ Thereafter, however, the construction of ancient Egypt in the museum came to occupy a very different dimension and came to include a very different type of antiquity: the ‘excavated artefact’, an object whose value was created through the development of new sets of relationships between sites, institutions and individuals.

This change was first signalled by a column which appeared in *The Times* on 1 April 1882, bearing the headline ‘Egyptian Antiquities’. It proclaimed the formation of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF), established ‘for the purpose of excavating the ancient sites of the Egyptian Delta’. Travel journals and the British press had long regaled popular heroic accounts of British explorations of ancient sites abroad, particularly Assyrian and Classical locations, including reports of the discoveries of Charles Fellows in Lycia and Austen Henry Layard at Nineveh in the 1840s, Charles Newton at Halicarnassus in the 1850s, and John Turtle Wood at the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus in the 1860s.¹⁰ This was not just a British phenomenon, however, with Heinrich Schliemann’s work at Troy, for instance, garnering widespread international publicity. The EEF’s principal founder, the novelist and travel-writer Amelia Edwards, was clearly keen to tap into these wider trends in cultural practice, including appealing explicitly to the opportunities such investigations would provide for making connections to Biblical accounts.¹¹ She was also eager to emulate the public success of these enterprises by ensuring that the new organization had the support of such eminent individuals.¹²

The spoils of the expeditions of such dilettante ‘traveller-archaeologists’¹³ benefitted principally the British Museum, but the early work of the EEF is today materialized in collections across the globe, from New York to Tokyo, and from Aberdeen to Cape Town (online Appendix 1). In part this shift is a correlate of changing ideas about what constituted the ‘excavated artefact’ as explored below. The fledgling EEF, however, faced immediate difficulties in mobilizing backing because despite the

title of the EEF's announcement in *The Times*, it had to close with the firm and unambiguous statement that it 'must be distinctly understood that by the law of Egypt no antiquities can be removed from the country'.

Laws against the export of antiquities had existed in Egypt since at least 1835 and these stated that an official permit was required in order for any objects to be removed from the country. According to the Ordinance of 1835 all antiquities that resulted from excavation were to be placed into the care of the Egyptian museum.¹⁴ Additional decrees in 1869, 1874 and 1880 further regulated the export of antiquities without licences and outlined rules for excavation.¹⁵ Contradictions in doctrine and practice were commonplace however and the effectiveness of these laws was limited. Through competing colonial and interpersonal negotiations, these regulations were easily circumvented or else completely ignored.¹⁶ In this manner, the EEF's first excavator, Edouard Naville, was able to return to England in 1883 with the promise of two Egyptian monuments from his excavations at Tell el-Maskhuta -- a granite falcon and the kneeling figure of a scribe -- which were duly presented to the British Museum.¹⁷ Foreign excavators were subsequently often able to export a portion of their finds, subject to the representatives of the French-run museum at Boulaq selecting a share first -- a system referred to as 'partage'. For instance, Petrie's exploration of Tanis for the EEF in 1884 resulted in lamps, furniture fittings, bowls, vases and many other small objects, being boxed up and shipped from the port at Alexandria to the harbour of Liverpool. These were subsequently divided amongst museums in Bristol, York, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Geneva and Boston.

This shift from Naville's monumental finds to Petrie's more humble offerings, from the unwieldy to the manageable, was a crucial aspect of the processes of instituting the excavated artefact and marked a departure from previous models of archaeological practice. In part this is attributable to Petrie's recognition of the significance of the mundane and fragmentary as important forms of archaeological and historical evidence. There was, however, an element of opportunism in what came to constitute the excavated artefact. By their physical nature, these were objects that frequently fell outwith the purview of much of nineteenth-century antiquities legislation and the interests of the Boulaq Museum in Cairo. Not only were these objects logistically simpler and cheaper to transport, but more importantly (as explored further below) their protean museum status meant that it was far easier for such artefacts to circumnavigate antiquities laws, which more readily identified the colossal and unique as subjects of control. In this, Egyptian antiquities legislation lagged behind the emergence of the new form of museum artefact that Petrie and colleagues helped to institute. Only later would more stringent requirements be introduced for half of everything found to remain in Egypt.¹⁸

A developing symbiosis

With the number of such transportable finds steadily increasing towards the end of the Victorian period (Fig. 2), their distribution became a focus of deliberations in the EEF committee room back in London. Victorian civic pride certainly favoured philanthropic endeavours and at first prominent individual subscribers to the EEF could recommend local institutions be the recipients of a share of the finds, or else the demographic profile of donations would be utilized as one point of reference in decisions to allocate material

to particular museums. Thus only five years after its foundation the EEF committee noted with satisfaction that ‘the public, in subscribing to the Egypt Exploration Fund, appreciated the fact that they were making a good investment for the British Museum and for our provincial collections’ and that the EEF had become a society of donors that ‘unearthed treasures in order to give them away’.¹⁹

This influx of material from Egypt was also coincident with the emergence of the professional museum curator in the closing decades of the Victorian era. The late nineteenth century witnessed a steady growth in the numbers of local museums in Britain,²⁰ particularly in response to municipal reforms that permitted local councils to establish institutions for the public’s social benefit.²¹ It was also in the 1880s that the *Museums Association* was founded. By the end of the nineteenth century the EEF were therefore regularly receiving subscriptions directly from museums keen to expand their collections through requests for a share of the objects excavated. Amelia Edwards, recognised this, arguing at an EEF meeting in 1888 that:

I find wherever there is a local museum, there is an eager desire on the part of the authorities and townsfolk to obtain objects for their museum... I have repeatedly been promised subscriptions and donations, if a contribution of objects is likely to follow.²²

This interest on the part of museums in Egyptian antiquities is reflected in the 1886 reformulation of the original purposes of the EEF, which contrast markedly with the final statement of the 1882 *Times* column. From this point onwards the EEF annual reports made reference to three objects of the Fund: the first was to organise excavations in Egypt, the second to publish the sites explored and the third was to ‘ensure the preservation of such antiquities by presenting them to museums and similar public institutions’.²³ Relative to goals one and two, however, this latter objective began to assume increasing importance.

In order to manage the escalating number of presentations to museums a *pro rata* scheme was adopted in which collections would be divided in accordance with the amount each region, country or institution had contributed to the Fund. Alternatively, if an institution could cover the costs of freight, which were often considerable, assemblages would be readily dispatched.²⁴ Occasionally, when the finds were particularly notable, the EEF committee gifted objects to the principal Egyptological museums on the continent, in addition to those already subscribing to the Fund.²⁵ This process of finds allocation became an annual event, preceded by an exhibition in London, which attracted both media attention and curatorial competitiveness,²⁶ events that were perhaps inspired by the success of Schliemann’s London Troy exhibition in the late 1870s.²⁷

Such formal and published sources do not, however, capture all of the complex biographies of objects as they left Egypt and became caught up in multiple geographies of exchange. Some objects, for instance, found their way into museum collections opportunistically. A letter from Petrie to the University of Oxford’s anthropologist (and then curator of the University Museum) Edward Tylor highlights one such aspect of post-excavation biographies of artefacts: ‘...we gave away many broken and damaged examples and someone has got hold of them that I did not intend’.²⁸ Other artefacts were transferred through individuals that worked directly on EEF sites. David Randall-MacIver’s direction of the work at el-Amrah in Upper Egypt is a case in point.²⁹ It was

through his personal intervention that such a widespread distribution of objects ensued, including the only distribution of EEF material to Italy, where he had toured a year or so earlier and met curators.³⁰ Another notable example is C.T. Currelly who worked with Petrie on several EEF sites and went on to become a major donor to Victoria College, where he taught, the collections for which formed part of the founding collection for the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).³¹ In furnishing the college with a representative selection of antiquities he was not only able to draw on his own activities, but also upon the EEF storehouse: 'Sir John Evans gave me permission to ransack the storehouse, and so I obtained a considerable number of prehistoric objects from earlier excavations that could have been obtained no other way'.³² In this manner collections could be supplemented by material excavated several years before their dispatch to museums.

In the early twentieth century the EEF also had local honorary secretaries and wealthy individual subscribers, many of whom personally interceded to nominate and convey material to their neighbouring institutions. In so doing such individuals altered the biography of the collections as they were dispersed, and they themselves became an intrinsic part of their history. The tangle of objects, places and people is clear from my correspondence with curators the world over, who were quick to relate stories of local personalities that were responsible for facilitating the acquisition of EEF finds. The distribution files now in the EES Lucy Gura Archive also contain several missives from curators of regional museums acknowledging the efforts of resident individuals in securing material for their institutions, such as a letter from the Chief Librarian of St Helen's noting that 'it is mainly though her [Mrs Pilkington's] kind assistance that I have been able to get this important gift'.³³ There are many such examples that could be cited here, but suffice to say that all underscore the relational nature of the excavated object: that things not only gained value through their passage via the EEF, but additionally actively participated in in the construction of social relations between people and institutions in the world beyond.

Regardless of the route of dispersal, one of the primary results of such annual and widespread distributions was the expectation that excavation would automatically result in museum benefaction. Various strategies were enacted by institutions in order to maximise their chances of acquiring specimens, but Edinburgh's Royal Scottish Museum took a particularly direct approach when they turned to the EEF in order 'to secure a sufficient representation of the world's oldest civilisation'.³⁴ It was an initiative that had been instituted by the Museum's director who sought to establish closer ties with the EEF and with Petrie's BSAE not only through financial sponsorship, but by dispatching one of the museum's junior officers to participate in Petrie's excavations. To this end Edwin Ward joined Petrie at Rifeh in 1907 and at Memphis in 1908 where he was allowed to direct 'operations of a regiment of Arab diggers and carriers'.³⁵ The explicit aim was 'to bring to light a number of ancient tombs -- and the tombs, as is well known, are the treasure houses of Egyptian art'.³⁶ Other museum representatives would visit Petrie on site, such as Valdemar Schmidt who regularly travelled to Egypt to observe finds being uncovered *in situ* on behalf of the Glyptotek Museum, Copenhagen.³⁷ Through such approaches archaeological practice in the field was directly affected by museum agendas.

It was not just European institutions and museums in Britain's colonies that were the recipients of the 'share of the spoil which was allowed to come to England'.³⁸ From early on in the EEF's history it received zealous support from Boston-born Rev. William

Copley Winslow who founded the American branch of the EEF in 1883. Through his campaigns of correspondence across the States, Winslow managed to muster up considerable financial backing for the Fund. His success largely hinged upon the incentives he gave for large donations, promising benefactors that American museums would be richly rewarded in return. Writing to the secretary of the EEF in 1900, for instance, he insisted that distributing ‘our antiquities where they will do us financial service, is most vital to our prosperity’³⁹ and he continually pressed the London committee for ‘as many antiquities as may be possible to be sent to American Museums’.⁴⁰ The apportioning of finds between British and American subscribers thus became a source of considerable tension between the branches, culminating ultimately Winslow’s removal from his position in 1902.⁴¹ American subscriptions subsequently declined, although finds continued to be sent to several American institutions for several more decades. Notably, in 1915 the Fund undertook excavations at Balabish and Sawama, a concession which had been granted specifically in order to procure artefacts ‘for a group of small American museums’.⁴² The site was explicitly selected because, despite being frequently plundered, ‘it was thought that they might still yield types of pottery much sought by the museums’.⁴³ Again, museum concerns can be seen to have directed archaeological priorities.

It was not simply Winslow’s dismissal that resulted in a reduction in American donations, however. Like the Royal Scottish Museum, institutions in the States had by the early twentieth century sought to become more directly involved in the discovery of Egyptian antiquities by mounting their own campaigns. For instance, the Phoebe Hearst Expedition was undertaken for the University of California and the Museum of Anthropology (now the Lowie Museum) in 1899--1904, while the Museum of Fine Arts Boston embarked on a joint expedition to Egypt with Harvard University in 1905, and the Metropolitan Museum followed suit in 1906.⁴⁴ Underlying such foreign ambitions for material success in Egypt, ran discourses of imperial power and the assertion of nationalistic goals. Certainly references to the achievements of other countries’ excavations and a concern that Egypt’s riches would be exhausted and absorbed by competing nations, can be found throughout the EEF annual reports. Despite much of the EEF’s rhetoric of objective scientific excavation and ‘liberal’ distribution, these betray deeply embedded attitudes regarding Britain’s position as an imperial power that maintained authority over Egypt, both politically and materially. Although much of this remained implicit in the daily business of marking, packing and shipping objects, it was occasionally more explicitly articulated: ‘... in Egypt, sculptures when uncovered were doomed to certain destruction at the hands of the arab and the traveller, and were never safe until placed within the walls of a museum’.⁴⁵ It was not just museums that therefore articulated imperialism through their collecting practices as is commonly acknowledged.⁴⁶ The EEF can similarly be regarded as an instrumental colonial enterprise that, through the physical acquisition and material authority over artefacts from Egypt, played a role in objectifying London’s metropole position within the Empire.⁴⁷

This was amplified through the EEF’s symbiotic relationships with museums, for while many museums themselves were dependent upon such finds for enriching their collections, the EEF became equally dependent upon museum sponsorship. In the annual reports it was often remarked that the acquisition of material for museums was required in order to continue to encourage subscriptions.⁴⁸ It was a reliance that the museums

themselves were often quick to remind the EEF of and in the event that allocations of artefacts were met with displeasure some museums could make the threat that ‘if the articles sent are of little value contributions will be likely to fall off’.⁴⁹ In other cases museum restitution was eventually essential to the success of a season. For example, in 1905, following the decline in American subscriptions the EEF was facing considerable financial difficulty and took the decision to suspend work at the temple site of Deir el-Bahri near Luxor. The EEF’s excavator, Edouard Naville, was able to complete the season, however, following the donation of £1000 by Mr Laffan of New York who stipulated that the *pro rata* share represented by his donation should go to the Metropolitan Museum.⁵⁰ Collecting in the field and collecting for the museum therefore went hand-in-hand and the development of a ‘scientific’ archaeology in Egypt was a socially and politically embedded process, not a detached area of intellectual or disciplinary advancement.

Reassembling the distribution

Through this symbiotic relationship between organisations like the EEF and museums, assemblages were split and spread far beyond Egypt. Before further qualifying what impact these practices had upon both fieldwork in Egypt and the construction of the ‘excavated artefact’, however, it is first necessary to attempt to quantify the division of finds. Estimating the number of objects and museums involved is complex, not least because of the inconsistencies in the surviving documentation. The nineteenth-century records in the EES are especially vague, as they list only the destination of artefacts (sometimes noting only the state or town) and the year of dispersal, together with the phrase that ‘several minor antiquities’ were sent. Subsequent early twentieth-century records are more detailed, inventorying broad categories of artefact by destination, but often as groups without enumerating the number of objects, such as for sets of beads, groups of flint articles and boxes of pottery. This was especially the case for a type of funerary statuette known as a shabti, which were found in their hundreds -- so many in fact that in 1899 it was decided that every individual subscriber to the Fund could receive one. Occasionally, the excavation reports themselves list the destinations of objects, but this was not a consistent feature of the published memoirs, and where these are present they often simply note the locations of what were considered the most important groups of material. The accounts given in the *Annual Reports* also do not provide a clear picture of museum subscriptions, as although lists of individuals and libraries were published only occasionally is a museum named, but from correspondence it is clear many more forwarded money to the EEF specifically to acquire objects. It should also be noted that the finds distribution of the Graeco-Roman branch of the EEF -- whose primary focus was the excavation of enormous quantities of papyrus -- were often separately administered and were not the focus of this present research. There remains, however, valuable questions to be asked in future studies about the processes of ‘artefaction’ as it pertains to objects containing texts.

In order to get a better sense then of the scale of the distribution, every destination noted in the EES’s distribution files or else referred to in the published excavation reports was contacted in an attempt to verify the current location of EEF collections (online Appendix 1). There remain many complexities and unknowns still, however, given the

fluid nature of collections and the variable quality of museum documentation. From the resulting correspondence it is clear that many museums obtained more specimens than were indicated by the records, while in other cases not everything was received. Given that there was also a similarly widespread dispersal of finds from the work of other organisations that were independent of the EEF, including the ERA and BSAE from 1900 onwards -- both of which involved Petrie⁵¹ and both of which often sent objects to the same institutions as the EEF -- the attribution of organisation behind a donation is often easily confused. Where possible, references to sites and the donor have been cross-checked to minimise this in the data. There is additionally the issue of how divisible an object is for cataloguing purposes, for example whether a pot and lid constitutes one artefact or two, or whether individual fragments of a single object are counted as one or as several items. Ultimately, a numerical figure conveys nothing about the nature of such objects: whether a collection has a small number of large artefacts, or a large quantity of smaller pieces. Given all these issues, the quantities of artefacts listed in online Appendix 1 ought to be regarded in most cases as minimum estimates. While this Appendix cannot therefore be considered completely accurate and is a preliminary listing subject to on-going collections management activities and research, it nevertheless conveys some sense of the relative shape and extent of the distribution.

In total, between 1883 and 1915, the EEF dispatched objects to some 73 UK institutions, from large national museums like the British Museum, to provincial organisations such as Dewsbury Museum in West Yorkshire and Truro Museum in Cornwall. Public libraries and private schools were also beneficiaries, such as the English public schools of Eton and Harrow.

More than 35 institutions in the US accepted distributions of objects, principally museums in the north-eastern states (California and Colorado are the exceptions), which is unsurprising given that the central office for the EEF in America was in Boston and the East Coast was the port of arrival for sea-borne packages of ancient remains. It is likely that many more collections in the US possess EEF material as the distribution lists also make reference to crates of antiquities being sent directly to Boston for further distribution, for which there is no record in the London archives. Globally, at least a further 30 museums in 13 countries received antiquities excavated by the Fund.

From a more detailed examination of the provenance of the objects distributed it is clear that in the course of this distribution new object relationships were constructed. Tomb groups, for instance, were rarely kept intact with several museums sharing the contents of any one grave. To some extent this division occurred at the tomb-edge itself, the very materiality of grave goods imposing a form of self-division with smaller, lighter items separated from larger, heavier objects.⁵² Subsequently, the form in which collections were later dispersed was often constituted by 'type series' of objects, particularly for pottery. This in itself was dependent upon the emergence of the 'pottery type' and the notion of the 'duplicate',⁵³ which were attributes of the construction of the excavated artefact (see below). The dual purposes of the collections to educate and also to provide funds for future seasons therefore overrode contextual integrity, something that Petrie himself bemoaned: 'It has been a bitter sight to me, everything being so split up in England that no really representative collection of my results could be kept together'.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Petrie did see the practical advantages of collection fragmentation, noting in 1903 that the 'risks due to many peaceful causes -- to say

nothing of the greater risks of warfare -- render any one museum at least liable to serious injury'.⁵⁵ The subsequent loss of material during the Second World War bombing of Liverpool Museum and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake that affected Stanford's collections, form just two examples that highlight such issues.

In summary, it is clear that the scale and scope of finds distributions from the EEF alone was considerable, drawing together a wide network of people and institutions. Within such a picture it would be easy to envisage finds distribution as being merely a process of transmission from, or translation of, the excavated assemblage or tomb group in the field to the typological or chronological museum display (however complex the route). I would like, however, to deconstruct the notion these were discrete arenas of collecting practice by collapsing the sharp line between the field and the museum. Instead, I contend that these areas of material discourse did not just impinge upon each other, but were embedded and mutually constituted by the same constructions of knowledge: the idea that both were jointly informed by the same processes of artefaction and both arenas of activity were equally important in the emergence of the excavated artefact. Collection distribution was a more complex, mutually reinforcing entanglement of people and things, rather than simply being diametrically linked. It can be argued that it was in fact the central role of collecting to Victorian constructions of the past that often provided the very motivation for not only excavating and publishing archaeological sites in the first place, but moreover for actively acknowledging context and seeking to situate the resulting material 'facts' in museums. This can be explored through a final case study of the activities of Flinders Petrie.

Excavating for collections: Flinders Petrie

In the late nineteenth century intellectual societies, together with museums, were important sites for the enactment of a 'material anthropology'⁵⁶ in which objects were keenly sought as the material facts of history. Perhaps less well recognised, however, is how this 'epistemology of artefacts'⁵⁷ directly informed the development of field archaeology and how collecting for museums was one of the primary motivating factors in the emergence of 'scientific' excavation in Egypt. This was primarily through the work of Flinders Petrie who had been socialized into the key London intellectual societies that upheld the importance of material testimony to scientific enquiry, long before he first excavated in Egypt.⁵⁸ These frameworks meant that Petrie's work marked a departure from earlier foreign missions in Egypt. These included the Prussian Expedition to Egypt led by Karl Lepsius in the 1840s and Augustus Mariette's large-scale trenching of sites for finds for the Louvre, all to the detriment of much in the way of archaeological documentation. The donations to museums from such investigations in Egypt -- like much of the material acquired by British 'traveller-archaeologists' working in other countries -- generally focussed upon the monumental finds, sculptures, *objets d'art* and artefacts bearing texts. New intellectual currents linked to Victorian ideals of progress, scientific practice and cultural evolution, on the other hand, facilitated the recognition of other types of objects and shaped the concomitant collection of new forms of more specific contextual data.

In his autobiography Petrie reflected upon the skills that had served him well over the course of his long career. Out of five subjects it was 'the fine art of collecting' that he

placed first and foremost, which entailed ‘securing all the requisite information, of realising the importance of everything found... of securing everything of interest not only to myself but to others’.⁵⁹ Those ‘others’ were often his sponsors and museums, who, like the EEF, he was frequently beholden to. For instance, when Petrie parted company with the EEF in the late 1880s his excavations became contingent upon private donations from friends and colleagues. For his work at Kahun, Jesse Haworth and Martyn Kennard became financially responsible for the costs of fieldwork. In return, Petrie noted that ‘we equally divided all that came to England. Thus it was my interest to find as much as I could’.⁶⁰ And he did. Reports of the resulting annual exhibition of finds at Oxford Mansion noted how objects ‘fill and more than fill, two rooms on the ground floor’.⁶¹

When Petrie’s field methodology is further scrutinized it becomes apparent that it was this imperative to provide for collections that was in his mind’s eye when embarking upon his excavations, not the archaeological landscape that might be revealed. Contrary to popular or generic histories of archaeology in which Petrie emerges as a ‘founding father’ of systematic field excavation, Petrie actually devoted little time to the interpretation of archaeological features or reconstructions of the manner in which sites formed.⁶² For instance, he rarely measured or visualized stratigraphic profiles or sections. Rather, Petrie’s digs were fundamentally concerned with the retrieval of objects,⁶³ with the field site merely providing a point of contextual reference:

Here lies, then, the great value of systematic and strict excavation, in the obtaining of a scale of comparison by which to arrange and date the various objects we already possess. 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; and it will be the necessary key, to be preserved with the better examples as a voucher of their historical position... 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.⁶⁴

In this manner the excavated artefact was not a unique object like the ‘wondrous curiosity’ of the previous century. It was instead merely one node in the wider taxonomic schemes that pervaded intellectual thought and practice in the late Victorian era.

Similarly, in his *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* -- arguably the first ever manual on archaeological practice -- the chapter concerning ‘recording in the field’ justified the need for a site record directly with reference to museum collections, with Petrie insisting that it was ‘imperative not only to record, but also to publish, the facts observed; when in future the elements of scientific management may come to be understood, a fit curator may succeed in reuniting the long-severed information’.⁶⁵ The resulting monographs accounting for each season’s fieldwork thus often read simply as an overview of the objects found, not as a site record itself. In these publications Petrie extolled the necessity of corpora of artefact types, the importance of reference manuals, and the utility of typological series. As such, his illustrated plates of finds often took up a greater proportion of his excavation memoirs than written accounts of work undertaken. The telos of many late nineteenth and early twentieth century archaeological endeavours was, therefore, the displayed collection, whether that be on the printed page or in the museum display case.

These very processes of archaeological recording also became additional forms of authentication through which the Egyptian curio was transformed into a new type of

museum object. Whether an object was labelled, inscribed or inked, the record of its provenance became the integral attribute of the excavated artefact, distinguishing it from the miscellaneous mass of relics that had otherwise percolated into museum collections over the course of the previous century. In later years Petrie made this link between excavation and authenticity even more explicit. Writing to the editor of *The Times* on 17 May 1922, for instance, Petrie insisted that there was, in light of forgeries that had flooded the market, ‘more need of regular excavations to supply our museums, without any uncertainty about the authenticity of objects or their origin and date’.

To these ends Petrie developed guidelines for the documentation of artefacts and devoted a portion of his 1904 archaeological manual to the ‘marking of objects’. It included instruction not only in the what to record, but advice on which ink would be best for which material. Examples of such markings include:⁶⁶ roman numerals to denote dates on artefacts from Kahun; a letter to signify the site and a number to indicate each group of objects found in part of that site (Fig. 3); and fractions, the top half recording the year of excavation and the lower the area of the site. In the museum many of these inscriptions not only informed the object, but came to constitute an essential truth about it,⁶⁷ with many objects still incorrectly dated today because of the authority of the written word over the object.

The power of these more recent additions to the materiality of ancient objects is perhaps only fully clear in their absence, however, for without such markings or associated documentation such things, severed from their context, were mute. An abundance of letters in the EES archive, for instance, were penned by bemused curators, who upon opening crates from the EEF were confronted with a muddle of often unlabelled debris. Such ancient pieces of pottery, scraps of baskets and fragments of figurines were not on their own the type of curios that could easily assume a position in museum displays as in the past, since such pieces were only rendered intelligible by their documented association to a period or site. Upon receiving one such box from the EEF in 1907 that had ‘no scrap of information accompanying the articles’, an affronted curator from Glasgow’s Kelvingrove Art Gallery remarked that the crate did ‘not appear to contain elements of much usefulness for any purpose... If those who allocate such things to any Museum do not consider them worthy of being labelled or included in a descriptive list, it is a pity they should be sent out at all’.⁶⁸ Even when objects were marked, the inscriptions often proved to be ‘cryptic’, as curator Henry Balfour of the Pitt Rivers Museum found when attempting to register a box of flints in 1905 that had been collected by Petrie for the EEF in Sinai.⁶⁹

These ciphers also played an important role in the extension of such objects into the wider terrain of emerging archaeological practice through links to other, related material products of excavation, including reports, lists and correspondence, which in turn reified the relevance of such material to understanding and constructing objects. Whereas antiquities were previously able to speak for themselves as ‘wondrous curiosities’, the excavated artefact required the support of this network of documentation and authentication (Fig. 4). Context was thus created not just in the archaeological site within Egypt itself, but further performed in the post-season exhibitions of finds in London, the newspaper reports of these events, the EEF Committee meetings that made decisions on distribution, in addition to the space of the museum and in developing curatorial practice -- all of which coalesced to create the excavated object’s worth and

biography. Through the practice of widespread national and global distribution noted above this emerging form of archaeology, with its emphasis upon provenance and chronology, also came to be disseminated and made manifest by the objects produced in its frame. Petrie's association with objects similarly became part of the congealed value of artefacts with several specimens in museums around the world simply bearing his name as another vector of object authentication.

Not all the cases of Egyptian articles that arrived on museum doorsteps were welcomed at all, however, even when clearly documented. These highlight continuing tensions in the production of ancient Egypt for public consumption and how this new type of museum object -- the excavated specimen -- was often fitted uncomfortably within existing frames of reference. The expressly 'Fine Art' institutions, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are a case in point. In 1899 this New York institution received two small lots from the EEF, but Director was dismayed to discover that these contained 'no object of any artistic significance, no inscription, no ornamentation, most of the objects were rude pottery bowls, repetitions of each other'.⁷⁰ Against the more monumental pieces already on display, these objects at first proved too much of a contrast to existing collections. In a similar vein, the British Museum was equally derisive about Petrie's first offerings, with Petrie receiving the complaint that 'a vast quantity of pottery and small objects... from our point of view are worthless'.⁷¹ These examples underscore the polyvalent nature of the excavated object, shifting its narrative potential as it moved in and out of different spaces.

Conclusion

The excavated artefact was a relational object, contingent upon not just upon its physical features, but also upon its links to archaeological sites and their documentation, prominent fieldworkers and existing museum collections. It was created therefore not just in Egypt or in the museum, but additionally in the intervening spaces: its documentation *in situ*, its material enhancement by being inscribed with context numbers at the tomb-edge or in the dig house, its evaluation in Cairo for either retention or export, its display in annual exhibitions in London, its realignment as part of a collection for allocation to specific institutions, its reframing amongst pre-existing collections on arrival and its links back to associated field and museum documentation. Museums, therefore, did not only directly affect early archaeological fieldwork agendas, but were also an integral part of how the past was constructed and discovered. The processes of artefaction were equally shared by and between field and museum spaces of activity, and both were required for the establishment of 'scientific' archaeology in Egypt.

Such artefacts are also inescapably forms of colonial capital via which crosscutting local, national and international identities were negotiated through museum acquisition -- a rich history which remains to be more fully explored. Today, those same processes of authentication through which the excavated artefact emerged as a new entity -- the context marks and associated vestiges of past excavation record -- still exert control over artefacts, entangling them in very particular histories of exploration. Objects are no longer permitted to leave Egypt and items with documented histories outside Egypt before 1983 command a steep premium at sale. In this manner the excavated artefact continues to be a source of western values, capitalist gains and imperial authority, as the

recent sale of EEF objects once held by Charterhouse School demonstrates.⁷² In such transactions and the continuing dispersal of objects, their associated contexts become easily detached. For those items that remain in museum stores, their potential to be reanimated and situated within the nexus of people, institutions and places, often remains to be realized. Within the jostle of objects however, a few small numbers or letters can still reconnect a sherd of pottery, a blade of flint or a rough figurine to a much wider, richer history.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the many museum curators, too numerous to list individually, that took the time to consult their records and share these with me. Thanks are also due to the staff at the Egypt Exploration Society for their assistance in accessing the archives, particularly Alice Williams and Joanna Kyffin. I additionally owe a debt of gratitude to Stephen Quirke for his detailed reading of an earlier draft of this paper and for his helpful comments and insights. I am similarly very grateful to the anonymous reviewer whose comments have improved this article greatly. I have also benefitted from discussions with Liam McNamara and Chris Naunton. None of this would have been possible were it not for the generosity of an anonymous benefactor whose support of the Pitt Rivers Museum underpinned the research upon which this publication is based.

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Notes and References

¹ D. Hicks and A. Stevenson (eds), *World Archaeology at the Pitt Rivers Museum. A Characterization* (Oxford, 2013).

² M. Serpico, *Past, Present and Future. An Overview of Ancient Egyptian and Sudanese Collections in the UK* (London, 2006).

³ The EEF was founded in 1882, becoming the Egypt Exploration Society in 1919. It was the first foreign institution to receive official permits to excavate in Egypt. For a history of the EEF see T.G.H. James (ed.), *Excavating in Egypt. The Egypt Exploration Society* (London, 1982). Following Petrie's appointment to the newly founded Edwards Chair in Egyptology at UCL in 1892, he founded the ERA to support excavation in Egypt. From 1905 the ERA became the bank account of another of Petrie's initiatives, the BSAE. In addition to these organizations the University of Liverpool's Institute of Archaeology also sponsored expeditions to Egypt, with excavations conducted by Petrie's student John Garstang. Material from this work also found its way into many collections, although with more of an emphasis on private rather than museum sponsorship. <http://www.liv.ac.uk/sace/garstang-museum/museumarchives/egypt-nubia.htm#abydos> [accessed 16/12/2012].

⁴ See, for example, T. Bagh, *Finds from W.M.F. Petrie's Excavations in Egypt in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* (Copenhagen, 2011); J. Picton and I. Pridden (eds), *Unseen Images. Archive Photographs in the Petrie Museum* (London, 2008).

⁵ Curtailing this account to 1915 was due to several issues, not least of which was World War One during which only one excavation was conducted by the EEF (Balabish in 1915). In the War's aftermath the EEF was re-structured and the Fund became a Society in 1919. That same year the Egyptian revolution had far-reaching consequences for British rule in Egypt. These issues were compounded by the subsequent discovery of Tuntankhamun's tomb, leading to restrictions on foreign excavations and tightened legislative access to discoveries. For an overview of this see E. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities. Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham and London, 2007), pp. 199--210. Finds distribution would thereafter be carried out within a different set of power relations. Petrie, dismayed by the possibility of losing access to the major share of finds, left in favour of excavations in Palestine and the frantic pace of British excavation that had characterized the previous three decades eased. It was not just shifts in Egyptian political and social life that affected museum distribution after the War, however, as Britain by this point was also moving out of 'Museum Era' with local museums going into slow decline from the 1920s onwards. See D. K. van Keuren, 'Museums and ideology: Augustus Pitt-Rivers, Anthropology and social change in later Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies* 28 no.1 (1984), p. 59.

⁶ For example, see Colla, op. cit. (note 5) in which objects came to be valued not simply for their inherent qualities, but additionally for the tales of discovery and their relationships with various personalities associated with the objects. In this article I would extend this understanding to encompass the manner in which objects became caught up in Victorian enactments of knowledge construction and the emerging practices of field archaeology in Egypt.

⁷ For example, the idea of the 'relational museum', see C. Gosden and F. Larson, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum 1884--1945* (Oxford, 2007).

⁸ S. Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (London and Chicago, 2006).

⁹ Ibid. See also C. Riggs, 'Ancient Egypt in the museum: concepts and constructions', in A. Lloyd (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 1129--53.

¹⁰ See for example the overview of British work in the Ottoman Empire in D. Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb to the Wonders of Ephesus. British Archaeologists in the Ottoman Empire 1840--1880* (London, 2008).

¹¹ See, for comparison, M. Brusius, 'Misfit objects: Layard's excavations in ancient Mesopotamia and the biblical imagination in mid-nineteenth century', *Journal of Literature and Science* 5 no.1 (2012), 38--52. See also W. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed. Museums, Archaeology and the Visulization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley, 2003), pp. 59--61. As a member of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), which had been founded much earlier in 1865 to explore the Holy Land, Edwards was also adopting for the EEF the PEF model of subscriptions in return for published memoirs of excavations.

¹² B. Moon, *More Usefully Employed. Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveller and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt* (London, 2006), pp.160--71. See also James op. cit. (note 3), p. 13 quoting a letter to the editor of the *Morning Post* in which Edwards refers to Assyrian and Greek archaeologists that 'command in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*'.

¹³ Challis, op. cit. (note 10).

¹⁴ Following the 1835 decree, antiquities were originally to be sent to Rifaa al-Tahtawi, Director of the School of Languages in Ezbekiyeh, but his museum was short lived. A new museum at Boulaq, near the river in Cairo, opened to the public in 1863. Pharaonic collections moved to the purpose built Egyptian Museum in central Cairo in 1902. D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (New York, 2002).

- ¹⁵ For overviews of the legal framework in nineteenth-century Egypt see A. Khater, *Le regime juridique des fouilles et des antiquités en Égypt* (Cairo, 1960); D. N. Osman, 'Occupiers' title to cultural property: nineteenth-century removal of Egyptian artifacts', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 36 (1999), pp. 969--1002; S. Ikram, 'Collecting and repatriating Egypt's past: Toward a new nationalism', in H. Silverman (ed.), *Contested Cultural Heritage. Religion, Nationalism, Erasure, and Exclusion in a Global World* (New York, 2011), pp.141--54.
- ¹⁶ See for example Petrie's different personal relationships with the Directors of the Egyptian Antiquities Service in M. S. Drower, *Flinders Petrie. A Life in Archaeology* (London, 1985).
- ¹⁷ Accession numbers 1883,1107.2 and 1883,1107.1. These objects were first presented by the Khedive to Sir Erasmus Wilson, who had donated £500 to the Fund.
- ¹⁸ Khater, op cit. (note 15). See also H.G. Lyons, 'The law relating to antiquities in Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 1 no.1 (1914), pp. 45--6.
- ¹⁹ *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Fifth Annual General Meeting* (London, 1887), p. 15.
- ²⁰ van Keuren, op cit. (note 5) pp. 171--2.
- ²¹ G. Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (Leicester, 2000), p. 58.
- ²² Cited in James, op. cit. (note 3), p. 33.
- ²³ *Egypt Exploration Fund*, op. cit. (note 15), p. 25.
- ²⁴ The costs were frequently noted in the EEF annual reports. For example, in the year 1887--88, transport from Bubastis to Alexandria was calculated at £935 10 s 6d; from Alexandria to Liverpool £439 10s 9d; and from Liverpool to Australia, America, and Geneva £112 9 s. 6d., op. cit. (note 19), p. 7.
- ²⁵ *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Meeting* (London, 1900), p. 18.
- ²⁶ In the 1880s this was held in the large room of the Royal Archaeological Institute at Oxford Mansion where it became 'a staple feature of the autumnal season'. Reported in *The Times*, September 1 1886, p. 13. Catalogues of these displays were also produced by the EEF.
- ²⁷ Challis, op. cit. (note 10), p. 153.
- ²⁸ Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collections, PRM Tylor Papers/Box 13/P9, Petrie to Tylor, 2 June 1898.
- ²⁹ D. Randall-MacIver and A. Mace, *El-Amrah and Abydos* (London, 1902).
- ³⁰ See Randall-MacIver's correspondence and collections published in M. Cappozzo, 'La collezione egizia del Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini"', *Bullettino di Paleontologia Italiana (Roma)*, 96 (2005--07), pp. 132--202.
- ³¹ M. Trumpour and T. Schultz, 'The "Father of Egyptology" in Canada', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 44 (2008), pp. 159--67. See also J. M. Mackenzie, *Museums and Empire. Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester, 2009), pp. 45--58.
- ³² C.T. Currelly, *I Brought the Ages Home* (Toronto, 1976), p. 65.
- ³³ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, A. Lancaster to EEF secretary, no date.
- ³⁴ Anon., 'Royal Scottish Museum', *Museums Journal* 6 no.4 (1906) pp. 154--5.
- ³⁵ W.M.F. Petrie, *Memphis* (London, 1909), p. 1.
- ³⁶ Anon, op. cit. (note 34).
- ³⁷ Bagh, op. cit. (note 4).
- ³⁸ *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Meeting* (London, 1901), p.18.
- ³⁹ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Winslow to Paterson, 7 June 1900.
- ⁴⁰ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Winslow to Paterson, 20 June 1900.

⁴¹ S. D'Auria, 'The American Branch of the Egypt Exploration Fund', in Z.A. Hawass and J. Richards (eds), *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt: Essays in Honor of David B. O'Connor* (Cairo, 2007), pp.185--198; W.C. Winslow, *The Truth About the Egypt Exploration Fund. The Singular Reorganization of the American Branch* (Boston, 1903).

⁴² G.A. Wainwright and T. Whittmore, *Balabish* (London, 1920), p. v.

⁴³ Ibid. This arrangement may have been a result of the work of Oxford Egyptologist Eric Peet who wrote to the EEF following a series of visits to museums in the UK: 'I think my visit to the museums was a great success. People seemed to be pleased at being brought into closer personal connection with us. I have full notes on all the collections and many curators were glad to ask questions about the labeling and even the arrangement of their finds. I have also reports from all the American museums as to the lines on which they are working and the kinds of objects they most need'. EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Peet to EEF committee, 16 July 1913.

⁴⁴ Thomas, N. and Allen, J. (eds), *The American Discovery of Ancient Egypt* (Los Angeles, 1996). See also C. Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces. The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1970).

⁴⁵ EEF, *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Sixth Annual General Meeting* (London, 1888), pp.22--3

⁴⁶ T. Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the colonial project', in T. Barringer and T. Flynn (eds), *Colonialism and the Object. Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London and New York, 1998), p. 11.; Riggs, op. cit. (note 9), p. 1138.

⁴⁷ The EEF and museums certainly contributed to this in ideological terms, but as Mackenzie, (op. cit. (note 31), p.8) has remarked we must not stretch this point too far as only limited funds were ever provided to museums (and none to the EEF) by the government at this time.

⁴⁸ *Egypt Exploration Fund*, op. cit. (note 5), p.20; EEF, *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Seventeenth Ordinary General Meeting* (London, 1903), p. 22.

⁴⁹ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Metropolitan Museum of Art to the EEF, 27 November 1899.

⁵⁰ EEF, *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Twentieth Ordinary General Meeting* (London, 1906), p.10.

⁵¹ For a list of sites and links to their transcribed distributions see: <http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/petriedigsindex.html> [accessed 16/08/2012].

⁵² As suggested by S. Quirke (pers. com.). See W.M.F. Petrie and J. Quibell, *Naqada and Ballas* (London, 1896) pp. viii--ix and also W.M.F. Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (London, 1904).

⁵³ P. Ucko, 'The Biography of a collection: The Sir Flinders Petrie Palestinian collection and the role of the university museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17 no. 4 (1998), p. 380.

⁵⁴ W.M.F. Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (London, 1931), p. 133.

⁵⁵ EEF, *Egypt Exploration Fund. Report of the Seventeenth Ordinary General Meeting* (London, 1903), p. 22.

⁵⁶ Gosden and Larson, op. cit. (note 7).

⁵⁷ A. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge, 2005), 121--46. See also C. Evans "'Delineating objects": nineteenth-century antiquarian culture and the project of archaeology', in Pearce, S. (ed.), *Visions of antiquity. The Society of Antiquaries of London 1707--2007* (London, 2007), pp. 267--305.

⁵⁸ A. Stevenson, "'We seem to be working in the same line": A.H.L.F. Pitt-Rivers and W.M. F. Petrie', *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 22 no. 1 (2012), pp. 4--13.

⁵⁹ Petrie, op. cit. (note 54), p.106. See also Petrie, op. cit. (note 52), p. 48--9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 79

⁶¹ *The Times*, 16 September 1889.

⁶² G. Lucas, *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork: Contemporary and historical archaeological practice* (London, 2001), p.25; M. Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth* (Oxford, 1954), p. 15

⁶³ This focus upon objects remained an integral part of Petrie's approach to fieldwork for the rest of his career. See for instance his work in Palestine as explored by R. Sparks, 'Flinders Petrie Through Word and Deed: Re-evaluating Petrie's Field Techniques and their Impact on Object Recovery in British Mandate Palestine' (forthcoming).

⁶⁴ W.M.F. Petrie, *Tanis II* (London, 1888), p. vii.

⁶⁵ Petrie, op. cit. (note 52), p. 49.

⁶⁶ For a list of object markings see A. Sivakumar 'Transcription of A.J. Arkell card index to marks on objects in the Petrie Museum' (2009), http://ssndevelopment.org/acces_ssndevelopment/home/acces/public_html/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Arkell_Index.pdf [accessed 16/12/2012]

⁶⁷ J. Coote, 'Objects and words: Writing on, around, and about things -- an introduction' *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 25 (2012), pp. 3--8.

⁶⁸ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, General Superintendent of Kelvingrove Art Gallery to the EEF secretary, 28 August 1907.

⁶⁹ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Balfour to EEF, 16 November 1950: 'A few are marked Wady Magharah or Wady Ahmar, but others have more cryptic inscriptions, e.g. WM/B WM/R, R, A, S.t., TiltA, TiltB, of which I should be glad to have the interpretation in case they are data which I should record in having the specimens labeled'. These objects were subsequently given the accession numbers 1905.47.1--29

⁷⁰ EES Lucy Gura Archive, finds distribution files, Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Kate Bradbury, 27 November 1899.

⁷¹ Petrie 1886, cited in Drower, op cit. (note 16), p. 105.

⁷² Sotheby's, *The Charterhouse Collection: The Property of Charterhouse, Sold by Order of the Governing Body: London, Tuesday 5 November 2002* (London, 2002).