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<CT>Introduction</CT>

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Around the globe, the search for antiquity and antiquities has been a vital part of forging modern national or imperial identities (Díaz-Andreu 2018; Goode 2007; Hamilakis 1996; Kohl and Fawcett 1996; Kohl et al 2007; Meskell 1998; Silberman 1989). Yet nowhere, we argue, has this dynamic been more politically potent than in West Asia and North Africa, the area that Western powers started to term the ‘Middle East’ around 1900. In large part this is because of the way that Western imperial powers from the end of the eighteenth century came to regard this part of the globe, imbuing it with significance as a place of origins: of humankind, civilization, empires, religions and monuments. These ideas in turn shaped Middle Eastern nations and nationalisms as they emerged under varying forms of imperial and colonial control during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The idea that the Middle East is a repository of globally significant heritage continues to shape the politics of heritage preservation in the region, including in ways that often reiterate European colonial discourses about the need for external safeguarding or management.

Perhaps the first moment in the modern history of this process was Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 and subsequent foray into Syria, which raised the Middle Eastern past to a level of national and imperial concern. Bonaparte’s goal was not just to export beyond Europe the ideals of the French Revolution and to threaten Britain’s position in the East. With his army of *savants*, who accompanied the French army to document the flora, fauna, and the ancient remains they encountered, the ambitious French general, who saw himself as a new Alexander, also aimed to conquer and mould the Egyptian-Eastern past. In the words of Edward Said (1978: 85), through conquering Egypt, ‘a modern power would naturally demonstrate its strength and justify history; Egypt’s own destiny was to be annexed, to Europe preferably’.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, France and Britain, and latterly Germany, fought with each other and with the Ottoman Empire for influence and control over this ‘cradle’ of civilization. In this contest, archaeology served as a tool of informal imperialism. Early archaeologists travelling and excavating in the areas that are now part of Iraq and Iran, such as Austen Henry Layard, Claudius Rich, Henry Rawlinson and Paul-Émile Botta acted as ‘men on the spot’, advancing their respective countries’ imperial interests and working hand-in-glove with diplomatic representatives based in Istanbul (Chevalier 2002; Crouzet 2022; Larsen 1996).

In imperial imaginaries, the Middle East was cast not only as the place where history began, but also as a region with a significant role to play in the globalized future, as a crossroads between European colonial powers and colonies farther east and south. For the British, imperial projects structured around steam – the construction of railways and navigation routes – would help to recreate Babylon’s and Nineveh’s past splendours and fashion a region of prosperity centred around ancient Iraq, described at the time with a Greek toponym, ‘Mesopotamia’. The very notion of the ‘Middle East’ as a unique and distinctive region emerged from European imperial projects in this period (Folliard 2017; Porter 2010; Scheffler 2003; Crouzet 2022). In this volume, the areas that scholars consider include the present-day countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (Figure 0.1). This does not constitute the whole of the ‘Middle East’ and would not have been included in every shifting definition of that region (notably, in many framings the term does not include North Africa). Yet these nations were all part of a variegated Middle East defined by its interest to European imperial powers, whether directly colonized or not, and further united by the perception of a unique presence of the ancient past there (Satia 2020; Saliba 2021).

Local powers in the Middle East would work both with and against this temporal-geographical construction. The Ottoman Empire developed its own heritage agendas beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, as part of the wider Tanzimat modernization drive. Ottoman officials and other rulers, from the Khedive of Egypt to the Shah of Iran, understood antiquities, and access to antiquity itself, as a valuable resource, potential bargaining chips in international politics and as a tool to solve their parlous state finances. In the aftermath of the First World War, during the peace conferences of 1919–1921, the two largest victorious European powers, Britain and France, carved up much of the Middle East, sharing the territorial spoils of the Ottoman Empire and drawing borders that still exist there today (Figure 0.2). New nations emerged, with the League of Nations Class A mandates of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine placed under varying degrees of French or British control, framed as ‘tutelage’ (Pedersen 2015; Arsan and Schayegh 2015). In reality, the terms ‘mandates’ and ‘tutelage’ hid a new form of imperialism, and the reinforcement of British and French colonial rule in this region that had acquired a new strategic importance with the discovery of oil in Persia in 1908. This arrangement provoked various strategies across the region for winning independence and self-determination. In this long and violent struggle, the notion of a shared past, whether national or global, became both a rhetorical tool, deployed by nationalist movements and international bodies alike, and a question for political and intellectual negotiation.

This volume will engage with the process whereby the Middle East came to be understood as a place with a particular kind of relationship to and importance for world heritage. Our contributors present case studies spanning more than a century between the early 1800s and the 1930s (with excursions into the modern day), of flashpoints where the implications of the ancient past for the present and future destinies of the Middle East were contested. Key players in this contest included diplomats who excavated in their spare time,

travellers who wrote of their observations, politicians who originated as scholars, or scholars who became nation-shaping politicians and advisers, archaeologists who acted as agents of military intelligence, as well as antiquities dealers who excavated and collected, journalists and commentators, and local workers. This introduction outlines some larger themes that underlie the chapters to come and situates them within an ongoing project of critical reflection on the meaning of the ancient past.

<A>Pasts and presence: Temporalities in the Middle East

As Zainab Bahrani (1998) has observed regarding Iraq, the idea of an area as a ‘cradle of civilization’ fixes it in a stage of arrested development. For European explorers, rogue adventurers, diplomats, and would-be imperial conquerors, the Middle East was simultaneously understood as distant ancestor and eternal child, stuck in the past and undeveloped, belated, stagnant and ripe for development.

As Nora Derbal explains in her contribution to this volume, time and place are ‘mutually constitutive’. Time is the backdrop of historical enquiry, but recent studies have reminded us that it is much more than a featureless setting for events (Lorenz and Bevernage 2013; Edelstein, Geroulanos and Wheatley 2020). This volume demonstrates that an analysis of the history of archaeology in the Middle East and of the discourses about the ancient can complexify our understanding of temporal regimes. In the region stretching from Egypt to Persia and Turkey, archaeologists imposed a European conception of time and history resting on a division into centuries, epochs, cycles and civilization, and which was alien to the Middle East before the late eighteenth century (Hartog 2003; Ogle 2015). However, in the European imagination, the Middle East ‘was not merely further back on the secular time scale of history but on a different scale altogether, outside secular time’. This was at once a ‘biblical region’ but also a ‘mythological landscape’, in some ways ‘outside the space of

history’ and yet also one which would ‘matter deeply to the historical fulfilment of empire’, not least as a space offering ‘the chance to resurrect the cradle of civilization’ (Satia 2020: 156–7, 174). The contemplation of the past, as remains of ancient fallen civilizations were being unearthed, inspired complex feelings amongst Europeans. Archaeology helped invent and justify a future under French and British tutelage, one which would resurrect the grandeur and prosperity of ancient empires like Assyria and Babylon, and place the region on a path towards modernity. But the spectacle of ruins and dust symbolized the possible approaching horizon of the apocalypse and reminded the imperially minded observers of the mortality of empires. Was ruin a fate to which all empires, including those of contemporary Europe, were ultimately doomed? Perhaps this destiny could be averted: planning a future of prosperity for the Middle East, the birthplace of humanity, might ensure for the British or French empires an eternal reign. Yet many Middle Easterners had different visions for the future. In the interwar period, nationalists, revolutionaries and political thinkers invented a new temporal regime where a glorious past would not only justify anti-colonial struggle but also help imagine a new independent future. Rethinking the past became an act of resistance, and history became a locale from which a present resistance could be organized.

<A>Time in the Middle Eastern landscape

Meanwhile, a sense of the Middle Eastern landscape was developed through interpretative technologies that were themselves both the products and the handmaids of Western imperial ambitions: mapping, photographing, surveying, and describing – as in the monumental product of the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt, the *Description de l’Egypte* (Godlewska 1995), but also the numerous accounts by European private travellers or diplomatic officials, like the immensely popular books of Austen Henry Layard, George Rawlinson, Ernest Renan, or Heinrich von Maltzan (see Derbal in this volume). As Mirjam Brusius and Trinidad

Rico (2023: 66–73) have recently argued, early Western photography depicting Middle Eastern ruins in unpeopled landscapes was ‘an instrument of institutionalized memory that was put to the service of and even justified colonial rule’, creating the sense of heritage sites as ‘temporally and geographically segregated from their contemporary world, from the people who live in and alongside them, and their labour’. They point out that such images are still used in heritage preservation today, perpetuating notions of an ‘authoritative original form’ that is unpeopled, in which local people today can be little more than potential dangers, or ‘mere bystanders’ (Kathem and Kareem Ali 2021: 835) at best. Representations of the Middle East sometimes understood as neutral or scientific records of reality, like photographs or maps, are in fact highly ideologically charged works that construct what they purport to merely document (Raj 2007: 60–94; Staum 2003).

In many parts of the Middle East, ancient monuments were visible in the landscape, as with the pyramids in Egypt or at Persepolis in Iran. Across much of the region, the ‘tell’ was the characteristic archaeological subject: ruin mounds, visible as small hills, usually identified in local memory with past cities or cultures. These were tantalizing features that simultaneously revealed and concealed, inviting questions about what exactly lay within. Early excavators tunnelled into these mounds and brought back extraordinary objects and monumental art, most famously, starting in the 1840s, from Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad, ruin mounds located in the proximity of Mosul, Iraq. As archaeological methodology developed and stratigraphy replaced a more haphazard tunnelling, archaeology seemed to have the power not only to make the remains of the past visible, but even to depict the process of time passing. Stratigraphy, and visual strategies for recording the sites it created, illustrated the passage of time in new ways, borrowing from other disciplines that had revealed the deep past, including geology and palaeontology.

Uncovering the past also meant dismantling structures of the present. In some areas, traces of the past were integrated into daily life, as at Bodrum, Turkey, discussed by Debbie Challis in this volume, where remnants of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus were woven into the houses of early nineteenth-century inhabitants, or at Tadmor-Palmyra, Syria, where locals had incorporated stone inscriptions into their houses (Baird et al 2023; Elcheikh 2022). In both these cases, the living spaces of modern peoples were swept away and residents relocated to allow the past to emerge.

Indeed, in contrast to the ‘unpeopled ruins’ that photographers constructed, communities in the Middle East had long lived with and among traces of the past. The growth of the archaeological discipline and European imperial interest in ruins and antiquities also intensified encounters with past remains for various local actors, and modified the ways that communities were able to interact with them (van der Spek 2011). Various chapters in this volume present evidence of how the past was used and lived with by local people, elite and ordinary. These constitute an important corrective to the view that ideas and knowledge about the past emerged only through outside intervention, whether of European travellers or elite Ottoman officials. We will also see that for many people living or travelling in the Middle East, encounters with antiquities were also a quotidian (if often pleasant) aspect of daily life.

<A>Extraction, development, and colonial ‘modernity’

Archaeology, like other sciences of the deep past (including geology, mining, and ultimately oil extraction), involved literally surfacing the relics of the distant past. This was an extraordinary rupture: the past breaking into the present, bringing with it new agendas for the future. These kinds of ruptures can be compared to the earthquake that rocked the city of Nablus in 1927, discussed later in this volume by Sarah Irving, a natural disaster which provided an opportunity for modernization and remaking, while also placing in tension

different ideas about heritage preservation. As ancient remains re-emerged, it was possible to imagine a future in which ever more of the past was exposed, dismantled, controlled and disciplined. This disciplining of antiquity took place in part through a professionalization of archaeology, and in part through the application of increasingly specific and restrictive laws by colonial and national administrations governing the excavation and movement of antiquities.

By the late nineteenth century, discovering antiquity was understood as a necessary part of entering modernity, not only because the methods by which it was excavated were increasingly standardized and professionalized as a prestigious modern science, but also because heritage was understood as, in some sense, one of the natural resources of the Middle East that should be exploited if the region was to leave behind its alleged 'stagnation'. The valuable product of excavations was both 'antiquities' (physical remains) and 'antiquity' (a specific vision of the past). Meanwhile, the gradual professionalization of archaeology notwithstanding, there also remained significant overlap between the scholarly activities of many leading archaeologists and their role as excavators of wider forms of geographical and geological knowledge which were, in turn, often linked to contemporary geopolitics and empire-making. Notably, while excavating ancient remains, European archaeologists would sometimes chance upon oil-bearing strata, and in so doing might forge a future path for resource exploitation in the countries in the Middle East. This was the case of William K. Loftus (1855), known for his work on the Sumerian city of Uruk, and of Jacques de Morgan (1892) the director of the French *mission archéologique de Perse* from 1897. Both highlighted in their accounts the presence of promising oil seepages in south-west Persia which could produce oil in commercial quantities and lead to the development of a national oil industry.

As Billie Melman's chapter in this volume discusses, in the early twentieth century, excavation and archaeology were understood by the two mandatory powers, France and Britain, as part of a programme of modernization and development, reflected in the fact that departments of antiquities were often housed within departments of public works. If we might detect in this administrative grouping a manifestation of the strange confusion and equation between antiquity and modernity that often seemed to arise in the Middle East, we also must acknowledge that in real ways excavation did contribute to developing local economies, providing employment opportunities, and stimulating markets in antiquities and tourism.

Further, knowledge, practises, and expertise gained in managing the past were transferrable skills, also relevant to locating oil, engineering railways, or developing (sometimes deadly) military technologies (Griswold 2019; Meskell 2020; Satia 2008). The extraction of antiquities followed models familiar from other forms of colonial resource exploitation (Grigor 2018). The 'past' and the sites associated with it were seen, just like oil extraction sites and refineries, as locales for implementing policies of modernization that would help prepare Middle Eastern societies and states for a future without the tutelage of the mandatory powers.

While the excavation or preservation of antiquities might serve a wider modernizing agenda, it might equally often clash with other kinds of development. Turning an area into a 'site' meant that it was no longer available for other uses, such as cultivation or housing. In the case of post-earthquake reconstruction in Nablus, there were competing demands within the Mandate administration for hygienic urban spaces and heritage preservation. Exploring the nature of extraction and development, as Robert Vigar and Amany Abd el Hameed do in their chapter, also problematizes the distinction between looting and 'scientific' archaeological excavation, and the associated circulation of extracted antiquities around the world.

<A>Reading into unequal archives

The foundational text for a critical understanding of Western (mostly European) imaginaries of the Middle East is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Drawing on Foucauldian theories about discourse and power, Said argued that Europe established its hegemony over the Middle East by creating an array of images and representations that portrayed this region as primitive, backward and inferior, thus fuelling the assumption of Western superiority and the necessity of intervention and tutelage. It was by first culturally dominating the Middle East that European powers were able to colonize this region. *Orientalism* has generated numerous critiques, expansions, and modifications in the decades since its publication. Some scholars have criticized Said for essentializing the Middle East and for forging static definitions of the East and the West (Lewis 1982; Al-Azm 1981; Lockman 2013). Other critiques have deplored the narrowness of Said's initial theory, which relied exclusively on literary sources produced in Britain and France from the 1740s through the nineteenth century ('Orientalism Twenty Years On' 2000).

Most of the contributors to this volume are historians, or come from historical disciplines, such as Egyptology and archaeology. In the archives that these scholars explore, there is the possibility to discover a more 'multivocal' discourse and to move beyond Said's narrow focus on discursive construction by elite actors. At the same time, many of our contributors find strong examples that substantiate Said's central thesis that knowing the Middle East was a tool of European control, a way of appropriating the Middle Eastern past, and the Middle East itself. For European imperial agents, for Middle Eastern politicians and bureaucrats, and for private individuals who sought to make their lives or their livings with antiquities, the right to access and interpret the past was something they very literally negotiated repeatedly, as they sought concessions to excavate, funding to support

excavations, and permits to export antiquities, not to mention as they displayed or publicized their ideas before various audiences in the Middle East, in Europe, or around the world. Archival sources give us insight into the messy process by which the Middle Eastern past was made.

At the same time that historical archives can offer new and varied perspectives on the past, the archive is not neutral (Baird and McFadyen 2014; Brusius 2015; Lucas 2010; Mbembe 2002; Odomosu 2020; Omar 2014; Riggs 2016, 2017a; Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008). The archives we work in are ‘unequal’, as Debbie Challis reminds us in this volume, and in the case of colonial archives, as Billie Melman explores in her chapter, part of the ‘ruling by letter and paper’ (Stoler 2009: 1–5) by which colonizers maintained their power. These inequalities are also compounded by contemporary inequality in access to archives, by unequal funding and resources for archival management around the world, and also by the continuation of disciplinary norms in many fields relevant to the heritage of the Middle East which privilege a grasp of the languages of international scholarship (English, and to a lesser extent, French and German, also the languages of European empire) over the languages in which many primary sources from and about the Middle East are written (for instance, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, or Hebrew).

In recent decades, scholars working in critical heritage studies and history of archaeology have increasingly sought to address silences and absences in archives. In studies of Middle Eastern archaeology, one of the most fruitful directions has been the study of archaeological labour, revealing the labourers on digs as significant actors in the production of heritage sites (Baird 2011; Challis 2013; Doyon 2014, 2018; Dural 2007; Heffron and Çağlar 2024; Mickel 2021; Mickel and Byrd 2022; Quirke 2010; Riggs 2017b, 2021; Shepherd 2003). Similarly, recent studies on antiquities dealers have offered a fuller sense of

the significant role that these liminal figures played in constructing the past that was offered up by museums and academics (Press 2023a; Said-Ghanem 2022).

These areas elaborate on a common theme: overdue recognition of the significance of local knowledge of the past and its remains. That this has not always been recognized is in part a product of the enduring notion that the people of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Middle East were uninterested in the past. An early manifestation of this myth is explored in this volume by Daniel Foliard, who considers how Austen Henry Layard manufactured and mobilized proof of this alleged lack of interest, with ‘viral’ success. Studies of Egyptian (Colla 2008; Reid 2002, 2013) and Ottoman heritage management and archaeology (Bahrani et al 2011; Çelik 2016, 2021) provide substantive counters to the idea of local disinterest. More material to reconstruct local perspectives and knowledge, including non-elite knowledge, is out there, in archives and photographs, in newspapers and published volumes, and between the lines of European accounts, read ‘against the grain’ (e.g. Baird et al 2023; van der Spek 2011). This can ultimately lead to the creation of what Mirjam Brusius and Trinidad Rico (2023) call ‘counter-archives’ which can be productively read in conjunction with colonial or institutional archives. Many chapters in this volume contribute to this project.

Such studies offer the possibility of moving the discourse beyond a simplistic narrative of Western imperialism giving way to, and conflicting with, emerging Middle Eastern nationalisms. In fact, Middle Eastern and Western actors participated in similar discourses, not always in opposition, and not with the Middle East merely ‘borrowing’ or reappropriating Western ideas (see Shakir, Khayat and Derbal, in this volume). This recognition assigns agency, influence, and creativity to all actors who participated in contesting the meaning of the Middle Eastern past – without ignoring the unequal relationships produced by imperial and colonial power structures.

<A>Colonization and decolonization of heritage

Recent studies have argued that a history of archaeology that acknowledges its colonial and imperial origins has become part of a standard within the discipline without necessarily leading to transformation in contemporary practices that still reflect, uphold, or perpetuate the inequities that emerged under imperialism (Carruthers 2014; Moro-Abadía 2006). This is an example of what Leon Moosavi (2020: 348–50) identifies as ‘tokenistic decolonization’, a danger that he cautions against as more and more academics jump on ‘the decolonial bandwagon’ (see also Behari-Leak 2019; Kassim 2017).

The implications of ‘decolonization’ have shifted and expanded in meaning since the term first gained popularity in the 1960s (in the writings of Frantz Fanon, among other places) to describe the political and intellectual process by which colonized nations in the global south gained independence from European control and won self-determination. In West Asia and North Africa, this process largely began with the advent of the First World War and continued through the 1960s as the degree of French or British imperial control was gradually eroded through revolution, popular protest, and political negotiation.

While an expansive discussion of decoloniality has been productive in many ways, including in highlighting how colonial structures are deeply embedded in knowledge production, we join various other historians in urging that we pay close attention to the historical realities of colonization and decolonization (Behm et al 2020; Carruthers 2019). The use of ‘decolonization as a metaphor’ is a tendency that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) warn against, in their critique of contemporary academic discourse that blurs the distinctions between the inherently unsettling project of decolonization (speaking specifically in the context of settler colonial nations, like the United States) and other political practices. Expansion of the domains encompassed by ‘decoloniality’ can also obscure historical

realities of European colonialism (Abd el Gawad and Stevenson in Carruthers et al 2021). For instance, when repatriation of Middle Eastern objects held by collections in Europe is described as part of the practice of ‘decolonization’, as it often is in media coverage (Francois 2021; Hicks 2020; Judah 2020; Peirson-Hagger 2019), we are not naming the problem – or potential solutions – with enough precision. We might more productively think of the activity that needs to take place as regards museums, and the field of Middle Eastern studies in institutions in the Global North as *deimperialization* (see Chen 2010: 4). In institutions housed in former imperial centres like the London, Paris, or Berlin, a combination of deimperialization and decolonization might be needed, recognizing the role these institutions played in imperial projects but also the fact that they are now staffed and visited by individuals with various backgrounds and relationships to imperial and colonial pasts, or ‘hybrid identities’ of ‘race, culture, nationality’ (Lee 2023).

To insist on sticking with the historical reality of colonialism: it is hardly insignificant that antiquities departments and museums in the Middle East were often the first to be colonized (i.e. European control of antiquities services even when the country itself was not colonized) and holdouts against decolonization, retaining European directors long after other government departments had ceased to have them. This was the case in Egypt, where the Department of Antiquities was headed by French nationals from its founding in 1858 until 1952, in Mandate Iraq where the British explorer and diplomat Gertrude Bell was appointed by King Faisal I as the first Director of Antiquities for the Kingdom of Iraq in 1922 (its first Iraqi director, Sati’ Al-Husri, was appointed in 1932), and in Persia where France was granted a monopoly on all archaeological excavation in the country, and where the French national André Godard headed the Iranian Archaeological Services from its 1928 founding under Reza Shah Pahlavi through 1960.

Departments and institutions that were created to manage Middle Eastern antiquities ran along Western lines and restricted the ingress of ‘locals’ through the professionalization of heritage specialties and restriction of the institutions understood to confer professional standing. Nicole Khayat’s chapter here provides a useful illustration: after the British took mandatory control of Palestine, licenses to excavate were only issued to ‘learned societies or institutions or to individuals of proved scientific competence guaranteed by such bodies’ (Antiquities Ordinance 1920). While we caution against seeing Middle Eastern heritage discourses as simply reactive (see Shakir in this volume), the political project of decolonizing antiquities services in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often did involve adapting, reframing and responding to Western discourses. This response offered various creative opportunities, and Middle Eastern nationalist discourses made various uses of the tools of archaeology and heritage.

Unequal dynamics continue today where the development of heritage expertise in Middle Eastern nations often involves training provided by and run through European institutions, as for instance in the case of British Museum schemes to train Iraqi archaeologists and heritage professionals. These programmes can be part of a reparative project to encourage local heritage engagement and make restitution for past inequities, but they can equally retrench European control over heritage and archaeological knowledge. As Mehiyar Kathem and Dhiaa Kareem Ali (2021: 838) note, such development projects often leave local participants reluctant to criticize anything about external partners because of concerns over losing the benefits that these projects bring. This is hardly a situation in which true restitution can be effected. Benjamin Isakhan and Lynn Meskell (2019: 1200), discussing the ongoing UNESCO project to ‘Revive the Spirit of Mosul’ in Iraq, argue that the project can only be a success if UNESCO avoids ‘privileging the opinions of foreign experts and technocrats over those of the local population’, and ensures that larger humanitarian and

development needs are not subordinated to heritage reconstruction. Other scholars, archaeologists and heritage workers offer models for practises and projects large and small that could begin to redress historic imbalances (Abd el-Gawad and Stevenson 2021; Bonnie et al 2023; Kathem et al 2022; Larkin and Rudolf 2023; Matthews et al 2020; Mickel and Byrd 2022; Porter 2012).

<A>Why does antiquity matter?

Yet we might also pause to consider why the presence or absence of curiosity about the past seems so important to us. Why must we defend nineteenth century Middle Easterners against the charge that they were uninterested in antiquity? In doing so, we credit the notion that the past is significant for identities in the present, and a lack of interest in the past – or perhaps more accurately, of certain forms of interest in the past – suspect.

In 1845, Austen Henry Layard assembled a team of local workers to tunnel into the mound at Nimrud, in what is today northern Iraq, in the process uncovering palaces and temples of one of the great cities of the ninth to seventh century BCE Assyrian Empire. Many of the most magnificent monuments he uncovered there were removed and transported back to London. This was long before the development of ‘scientific archaeology’ and Layard’s methods of discovery also destroyed much of the archaeological context in the areas he excavated. He also caused a great deal of damage to the antiquities he obtained there: many Nimrud reliefs were cut up to create smaller ‘portraits’ from wider scenes, most of which were distributed in Britain as gifts, and numerous Assyrian reliefs were lost in the process of transporting them to Europe. Contemporary archaeologists can condemn Layard’s methods from a place of professional superiority, secure in the knowledge that contemporary archaeological practices are distinct from his methods. Yet many scholars today would nonetheless recognize that it is unhelpful to judge Layard by standards formulated through

the professionalization of what did not then exist as a discipline. Perhaps there would be no ‘scientific’ stratigraphic excavations at Nimrud, or anywhere else, without those first tunnels.

But Layard was not the first nineteenth-century excavator at the mound of Nimrud. Some thirty years before Layard, the hereditary governor of Mosul, Ahmad Pasha Jalili, led an excavation at the same site to quarry stone for repairing the tomb of a local saint. This ‘practical’ aim (Reade 2008: 1) was, in some ways, not entirely different from Layard’s; Layard too quarried and removed stones and incorporated them into monumental public structures (the British Museum), with the difference that Ahmad Pasha allegedly broke apart sculptured stones for use as repair material (Layard 1849: 28–9). As with Layard’s actions at Nimrud, there is little utility in judging this quarrying expedition by the standards of heritage preservation that have been developed in our time. But could we go a step further, beyond refusing to condemn, and perhaps understand, Ahmad Pasha’s excavations as an actively positive engagement with antiquity? Ahmad Pasha at least kept the stones closer to home than Layard did, and incorporated them into structures of local significance, creating the kind of evocative palimpsest we find romantic in many contexts.

If it seems unproductive to litigate these events of the past, let us turn instead to the future. What would it mean to value a different kind of relationship with the remnants in the past, perhaps one in which interaction and change are part of caretaking and stewardship within a wider living, peopled landscape? What would it mean to redefine heritage with an eye towards the notion of ‘home’, as Ammar Azzouz (2022, 2023) suggests (see also al-Sabouni 2016, 2021; Lenzerini 2011; Wollentz 2017)? Or to prioritise preserving sites with meaning and usefulness for locals over those of ‘global’ or ‘world historical’ significance, and to centre the reparative, community-building processes of caring for shared ancient heritage (al-Azm 2017; Bsheer 2017; Elcheikh 2022; Imady 2019; Meskell 2018; Mohammed-Amin et al 2021; Munawar 2017)?

We would suggest that it is worth imagining what it would mean to let go of antiquity entirely as a significant locus of modern identities, national, local, or international. What would it mean to stop seeking answers in the traces of the past? This is an interesting thought experiment, but we suspect it can never be anything more. The belief that antiquity has something important to tell us about ourselves is so deeply ingrained in how we understand the world that, at least for the foreseeable future, we probably must learn to live with the past.

<A>Contents

The chapters that follow relate to the themes discussed above and interrelate in so many ways that, read in almost any order, they will produce fruitful comparisons and connections. We have grouped them, however, around four subjects.

In Part 1, ‘Travellers and Takers’, engages with European antiquarian interests in the Middle East and consider how encounters with antiquity there shaped European identities. Debbie Challis details the shift from antiquarian observation to a proto-archaeological excavation that occurred as British travellers of the early nineteenth century visited the Ottoman port city of Bodrum and moved from drawing and describing Greek reliefs reused in a crusader castle to ‘uncovering’ and extracting remnants of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. This activity was part of a British reconstruction of their own identity along Greek Revival lines, and an act of demarcating as ‘classical’, the history of Western Turkey. Daniel Foliard traces the origins and afterlife of a text that Austen Henry Layard included as the final word in his immensely popular 1849 account of his excavations outside Mosul. Purportedly a ‘Letter of a Turkish Cadi’ discouraging the quest for historical knowledge, the text was widely cited around the Western world in the next 100 years as proof of Islamic antipathy to scientific exploration. While the letter is likely a fabrication, Foliard shows that it contains hints of real tensions in 1840s Mosul that were heightened by Layard’s agenda for antiquity.

Nora Derbal considers the immensely popular German travel accounts of Heinrich von Maltzan whose ethnographic and antiquarian interests overlapped. His investigations of the Phoenician past in North Africa delineated certain periods of the region's antiquity, and certain material remains, as part of the history of European civilization, with his pursuit of that history overlapping with his critiques of contemporary European and Ottoman regimes in the area. Thomas Gertzen discusses an attempt of German Jewish organizations to fund excavations in the Sinai peninsula in the 1920s, in search of an ancient 'Israelite' presence there. These plans, which never came to fruition, were one (mis)step along a difficult path that German Jewish scholars and community leaders charted between identification with the 'Orient' and integration into the German nation. We thus see that European identification with and interest in the East had complex and varied implications for different groups 'back home'. Furthermore, what it meant to be 'Occidental' or 'Oriental' was not clear cut and was redefined and negotiated with every act of excavation.

Part 2, 'Nationalism and Internationalism' begins with Billie Melman's study of internationalism and the paradigm of development in the interwar period, which she identifies as features of the distinctive form of Mandate imperialism that arose in the Middle East in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. She shows that internationalist ideas about development and shared heritage were not merely rhetoric deployed at the level of international conventions, but ideas that filtered down into the speech and practices of administrators and archaeologists working in Mandatory Palestine. Erin O'Halloran offers a comparative study of how nationalist movements engaged with antiquity and archaeology in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine-Israel in the aftermath of the First World War. The comparison indicates that while antiquity was a productive notion in all these emergent nationalisms, the conclusions that followed from seeking identity through antiquity were highly adaptable to different national contexts. In his chapter, Marwan Kilani zeroes in on

Lebanon, asking how the notion of a shared ‘Phoenician’ heritage in the region came to be embraced by various groups in Lebanese society. He discusses the implications of Lebanon’s engagement with the notion of a Phoenician past for contemporary archaeological practice, and the complexities of labelling and identifying ‘cultures’ or ‘peoples’ in the archaeological record. Solmaz Kive discusses the establishment in 1939 of the Iran Bastan Museum, a new museum of the nation which adopted, but also transformed, Western conventions of museum display to support nationalist paradigms. In the exhibitions of this museum, conventional distinctions between objects of art historical or aesthetic significance (primarily Islamic) and those of historical significance (primarily ‘ancient’, pre-Islamic) were discarded in favour of a narrative of national continuity and coherence over time and space within a unified Iran.

Part 3, ‘Valuing Antiquities’, engages with various ways that value was assigned to antiquities: to trade, share, sell, and admire. Sarah Griswold urges us to put money back into the picture, arguing that it is often overlooked precisely because the professionalization of archaeology took place in part through a distancing from the ‘transactional past’ represented by dealers. She traces the fortunes of one family of antiquities dealers in Saïda, Syria and their relationship with Ottoman and French authorities and institutions as they negotiated changing laws and scholarly norms around profiting off the past. Nicole Khayat provides another case study of a liminal trader, her own ancestor Azeez Khayat, who excavated, collected, sold and donated antiquities from Palestine mostly to the United States, where he ran a prestigious gallery. While Khayat would not conventionally be understood as an archaeologist, he identified sites, ran excavations, and was treated by the American press and by museums of the time as a knowledgeable expert with a connoisseur’s eye. He framed his excavation work in terms of community development in his home city Haifa – an aspect of his work that became more difficult as British Mandate policies replaced Ottoman regulations, despite the Mandate rhetoric of development. Finally, Robert Vigar and Amany

Abd el Hameed discuss the problem of nineteenth century ‘site looting’ in upper Egypt. They explore how an extractivist paradigm of British archaeology in Egypt belied the preservationist rhetoric common among British scholars and administrators, and alienated Egyptians from heritage in ways that are still felt today.

Part 4, ‘Living with Antiquities’, explores how individuals have related to the heritage they live in and around, and how administrations and experts have sought to manage that relationship. Laith Shakir examines reporting on Iraqi archaeology in the early twentieth-century Arabic press which, he argues, refutes the notion that interest in antiquity emerged in Iraq only with independence and only as a nationalist political project emulating Western forms. Instead, Shakir finds a sustained and multifaceted interest in exploration of the ancient Iraqi past. While this could be connected to nationalist or pan-Arab political sentiments in varying ways, it also simply reflected pleasure in historical investigation and interest in the continuity of Middle Eastern history. Sarah Irving’s study of the Samaritan community in Nablus in the wake of a 1927 earthquake examines the warring agendas of development and heritage preservation within the Mandate administration, and differences of opinion within the Samaritan community about what heritage they wished to preserve and how. Finally, Heba Abd el Gawad’s proposal for an ‘action-based empathy’ of Middle Eastern and North African archaeology and heritage brings us into the present, to consider open questions about how our understanding of cultural heritage’s entanglements with imperialism and colonialism should inform practices moving forward. She points out that too often efforts at outreach to ‘local’ communities frame knowledge exchange as proceeding only in one direction, from the Global North to the Global South, while proceeding from the assumption that communities of descent need to be educated about their *responsibilities* towards heritage, without recognizing that they might, instead, be understood as holding *rights*. She proposes a different framework for thinking about relational accountability between professionals and the indigenous – a

concept she argues must replace that of the merely ‘local’ – communities into whose spaces and lives heritage work intrudes.

A reader will emerge from these studies with a clearer understanding of how flexible, creative, and adaptable the notion of antiquity was. Our title speaks of ‘finding’ antiquities, but make no mistake: ‘finding’ antiquity was never a case of stumbling across something that chance had placed beneath our feet, but always an act of searching and identifying, and ultimately of creation and interpretation, composing and constituting what it was we felt had been waiting for us all along.