A stratigraphic approach to authentication

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он должен противопоставить свое убеждение в необходимости полного равноправия, полного и окончательного отказа от каких-либо привилегий для какой-либо нации.
Ленин 1914

Some social background

In contemporary public spheres, curatorship and connoisseurship are ambivalent social phenomena. Their mystique and privilege seek an anchor in knowledge, but its institutions cannot protect them against the derisive and corrosive laughter at any emperor's clothes. Object value judgements cannot easily avoid implying "I know more than you", "I know the truth, and you must ask me"; accordingly, object specialists are generally well aware that they are courted, admired, envied, not necessarily liked. The competitive logic of their claims responds to an internal conflict, between classes within one society, or, within one social class, between professional factions in their institutions. In the particular social context of museum worlds, certain collected things are accessioned in museums as Things, that is, as units of information accessible for verification. The Things are not particularly familiar either to most subject specialists, or to most institutional managers and directors, only to staff who encounter them on some habitual basis. For the sculpture in the gallery, the conversant will be the cleaning staff more often than the computer-bound curator, but it is not regular social practice to ask such essential staff about objects they daily encounter, or about anything else. Away from the light of display, the stored item might never emerge into habit-forming practice at all, outside the minority of instances where a catalogue is being prepared, when it must be consulted finally on the terms envisaged by its accessioning. A wider society beyond the precincts of the museum may not know, or be especially concerned, that many professional participants know little about museum contents, or that specialists in different institutions may disagree so strongly over the value of details of object knowledge.

Even where goodwill exists within or between institutions, the practice of professional life overwhelms collegiate intentions: the museums and universities of Berlin, London, New York, Paris, work at rhythms that make short journeys to see and speak impossible. More generally, the habits of practice and thought among the various professionals are sufficiently different to strain relations between nominal 'keeper'/ *custos*, internal budget-holder, and external specialist teacher and writer. Historically writers have sought to broker peace in these civil conflicts: Giambattista Vico might ask the broad sweep of philosophy (at the university) to unite with the details of philology (in the museum) in a new science. Three centuries later, their marriage remains an ideal, set against the mocking of the epic anti-hero and the carnival mask. University and museum remain mutually and competitively aloof. Wider social support for funding both is precarious, and depends on minority private gifts, cementing a culture of privilege and prestige.

With all its structural fault-lines, the theatre of authentication continues in business, reaching wide audiences through television programmes. In mass media with minimal authentication of the expert: the spectacle of *witnessing* expertise in practice seems the primary concern. Alongside, the tradition of deriding the practitioners is also alive and well (Jones 2010). Perhaps, like an annual carnival, derision is the safety valve for the practice, effectively nurturing and protecting its future. The same widespread social scorn may also draw on a deeper sense of loss, of something invaluable beyond the professional envy or private greed in the spectacles of authentication: the wonder at the t(T)hing which sparked the whole historical move to treasure even humble materials out of time (Piotrovsky 1995). In the interest of that prior wonder, I consider below one mechanical way

to practice authentication: identification of successive time-blocks as material strata in the history of museum object acquisition, on the geological "principle of superposition" from Ibn Sina and Niels Stensen (Al-Rawi and Al-Hassani 2002).

Most internal conflicts

Throughout the history of interest in antiquities, the game of authentication depends on the presence of its other sibling – forgery, a practice that has proven as hugely enjoyable for the detached spectator of authentication as it is for the practitioner (examples of Egyptian antiquities fakes, presented with gusto, in Wakeling 1912, Fiechter 2009). In museum life, congratulations at an unexpected treasure often seem less heartfelt than the satisfaction when the treasure is exposed as a fake. As lessons in social distinction, a gallery display might juxtapose media coverage of (a) the remarkable acquisition of an Old Kingdom sarcophagus, at low cost thanks to curatorial discernment and intervention (BM EA71620, Spencer 1999), with (b) the unmasking of a magnificent Amarna artwork as modern, against the estimation of the same national curatorial expertise (Bolton Museum 2004.7, Hardwick 2010). However impossible the task, any device or procedure is under pressure to insure an audience, and its public institutions, against subjectivity.

The same sparring Schadenfreude (also an English-language emotion) may be read in the privately expressed divisions between passionately interested specialists, throughout the history of the discipline. A pair of nineteenth century examples can reassure us that we are in eminent company. One case opposes two of the most influential European Egyptologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Adolf Erman (1854-1937) and Gaston Maspero (1846-1916). In the winter of 1885-1886, in the early years of English military occupation (1882-1952), Erman, then Director of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, visited Egypt to see sites and collect antiquities for the museum. Maspero was at the time Director of the Antiquities Service, under Nubar Nubarian, leading minister for Khedive Tawfiq. Among the objects subsequently accessioned in Berlin is one of the finest extant fragments from a Middle Kingdom object type, the long section of a hippopotamus canine, carved with series of figures (now Berlin 9611). The fragment is sculpted in low relief on both faces with unusually detailed and meticulously proportioned figures, and its high quality may explain why Erman dedicated a passage of his autobiography to the story of its acquisition (Erman 1929:219):

> "Auch in Theben blühte neben dem großen Handel... der kleine mit einzelnen Fellachen und Jungen, besonders auf dem Westufer. Die wußten, in welchem Grabe ich gerade kopierte, und kauerten dann geduldig davor oder lauerten mir auch auf dem Heimwege auf. Eines Abends sprach mich ein unbekannter Araber mit seiner Frau und einem Kinde an; das Kind habe beim Spielen im Sande etwas gefunden; ob ich das kaufen wolle. Es war ein Bruchstück eines sogenannten Zauberstabes mit einer Kröte darauf, die schönste Elfenbeinschnitzerei, die ich je gesehen hatte. Ich kaufte es ... und machte die Leute noch glücklich, als ich der kleinen Finderin einen Piaster dazu schenkte...."

Erman does not question his own ability to separate different strands in the network of finders and sellers, but instead casts a curatorial mantle of absolute knowledge over the landscape. A different orientalist perspective emerges in private comments among the letters from Maspero to his wife Louise, back in France (David 2003)., From initial guarded welcome, this correspondence charts a change in his attitude, always in the long shadow of the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War:

1. Maspero receives Erman at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, then located in Boulaq: "Erman, le directeur du Musée de Berlin, vient d'arriver ... Il est plus aimable que Krall, Stern, Lincke, Piehl et tous les autres illustres pédants que nous avons vus défiler d'année en année. Il vient passer l'hiver en Egypte et acheter des antiquités pour le musée de Berlin. Je l'ai naturellement bien reçu, tout en ayant un oeil ouvert sur lui. J'espère qu'il ne me jouera aucun tour" (David 2003: 66, letter 8 November 1885, Boulaq)

2. Maspero comments on the Erman visit: "J'ai ici depuis un mois et demi Erman. Je lui ai ouvert les portes toutes grandes, et il déjeune tous les matins avec nous: aussi il ne tarit pas d'éloges sur mon compte. Comme il est aujourd'hui le directeur du musée de Berlin, je suis d'autant plus porté à lui être agréable: je ne veux pas qu'on puisse en Allemagne me reprocher de jalouser les savants étrangers par

esprit de vengeance internationale" (David 2003: 91, letter 17 December 1885, Boulaq)

3. Early in his 1885-1886 tour of inspection in Upper Egypt, Maspero acquires antiquities at Qena from the local representative (consul = consular agent) for Germany as a capitulary power: "Au sortir du palais, je vais rendre visite au consul; la petite chienne blanche que nous caressons deux fois par an nous signale de loin en jappant, et au cours de la conversation, on apporte des antikas. Cette fois, la chance nous a bien servis: quatre inscriptions grecques superbes, une de Tibère, une d'Adrien, une très jolie stèle copte de Coptos, le tout pour rien, en cadeau. Le drôle de l'affaire est que le donateur est le consul d'Allemagne, qu'Erman arrive par le prochain bateau, et que nous lui soufflons les monuments qu'il aurait eus sans doute: voilà un commencement de revanche." (David 2003: 131-132, letter 22 January 1886, Luxor).

4. Maspero continues his acquisitions at Luxor, ahead of Erman: "Erman peut venir maintenant." (David 2003: 135, letter 25 January 1886, Luxor).

5. "L'approche d'Erman a jeté l'émoi dans le pays: partout on lui prépare les plus jolis objets faux qu'on peut trouver. Sa réputation comme acheteur est faite du Caire: il passe pour payer très cher et pour ne pas savoir reconnaître le faux du vrai. Le fait est qu'il a enrichi le musée de Berlin de diverses antiquités fort modernes: je lui ai d'abord communiqué mes observations, puis comme il ne m'écoutait pas, je l'ai laissé se tirer d'affaire comme il l'entendrait: peu m'importe, après tout, la manière dont le musée de Berlin dépense son argent" (David 2003: 140-141, letter 29 January 1886, Luxor).

The fifth of these excerpts implies that the two men lost sympathy for one another already in Cairo, over the ever-delicate issue of authentication: there is no easy way to reveal to a colleague an error of this kind. I cannot cite any known modern item among the 1885-1886 acquisitions, and such research most often requires local curatorial access to museum inventories and familiarity with the collection. From the museum inventory in Berlin, material analysis of specific items from the Erman visit might be enlisted to identify examples of "les plus jolis objets faux".

In the second example of intercollegiate irony, from earlier in the nineteenth century, the talent of a knowledgeable artist triumphs, at least temporarily, over the historian-philologists. In 1825-1826, the outstanding Scottish epigrapher Robert Hay (1799-1863) spent part of the winter recording monuments at Thebes, in company with at least four key figures in early Egyptological collecting: Joseph Bonomi, James Burton, John Gardner Wilkinson, and the indispensable Demetrios Papandriopoulos (Visconti 1828, for this key figure, better known by the name Γιάννης Αθανασίου in the Italian form Giovanni D'Athanasi, see giving his own account of his work in the English version D'Athanasi 1835). Selwyn Tillett relates the following occasion from the diary entry for New Year 1825 (Tillett 1984:23):

> "As a kind of New Year prank Hay forged a small sculpture "to try to take in the party with it as an antique. After it had been handed round and laid down I could not refrain from telling them they had been taken in, wh. of course as antiquaries made them very angry at being deceived by a work of a very young artist!". A similar attempt a week later did not achieve its desired effect."

Perhaps the small sculpture still lies dormant somewhere in the collections of Robert Hay, dispersed between the British Museum and, when not deaccessioned, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. As documented deception his light-hearted artefact would be a rare treasure.

Documented excavation as core, acquisition as strata

The prank by the great Hay, and the derisive comments on the great Erman by the great Maspero, need not be read too seriously, though the playwright warned us that we are laughing at ourselves. The more engaging task remains to encounter ancient Egypt in its own products, rather than in nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first century *hommages*. In an historical science, documentation is still the essential frame for this task. As in forensic science, reputation alone is not a criterion for authentication, as the case of Erman might warn (if Maspero was right). Neither date nor place provide any automatic alibi. The year of acquisition is only useful in the context of a history of skills: competence of fakers depends on opportunities to train, and on individual ability, and may decrease as well as increase over time. For place of acquisition, not even a site during excavation can guarantee that every find is authen-

tic: *sotto voce* the excavation can harbour a fake as readily as the market-place (Vernus 2009). However hard to achieve, verifiable evidence of the finding would be needed to avoid the risk that an object has been planted by the digger in the ground being dug; in Egyptian archaeology, foreigners mention this risk in relation to Egyptians (Petrie), but not so often other foreigners, least of all of the same nationality.

Artefact authentication comprises acts of comparison with most similar available examples, and therefore depends upon a prior and more exhaustive programme of research, to establish a corpus of the object type. For authentication, the efficacy of the corpus depends not only on formal criteria internal to the type, but also on its own history of production; that is, the corpus must provide explicit chronological data both for excavation and for all other means of acquisition. With all due caution over the risks of intrusion, the documented find-context offers the most stable core to any typological corpus. Most useful are find-contexts where associated features or objects have been documented, as these may corroborate the integrity of the find in its context, beside providing the archaeological clues to dating the material. As archaeologists continually emphasise, the important point is not the source from an excavation, but the documentation of the finding (Petrie 1904, 1). Conceptually, then, each inspection of an object begins with comparison against an established corpus of its type. In Egypt, as elsewhere, the more often an object type requires authentication, the smaller the proportion of excavated examples with documentation. However much undocumented items may seem dominant by sheer quantity, the principle of documentation requires that the corpus be considered two essentially or ontologically separate components: primary documented core, set against a secondary comparative block. For the secondary block, the database fields "acquisition date" and "acquisition history" acquire defining importance. Most subject specialists may find a museal minority rather obsessed with the intricacies modern object biographies. Yet archaeology needs these modern archival lines that have long been second nature to the European art historical practice (for the archaeology of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, the principle is demonstrated classically by Haskell and Penny 1981).

One means of ordering the undocumented mass is periodization, for which certain criteria can be suggested as part of the mechanisms of authentication. Different means of periodization could readily be offered, notably by political and social history, as that would directly affect access to sites and markets. Major historical points of change could be considered such as: principal legislative changes e.g. in land-ownership; main infrastructure projects affecting mobility and income; military historical events. In current research into the figured hippopotamus tusk sections, I have adopted one framework of explicit criteria, and present this here as an experiment among the many possible approaches. This framework is possible only on the basis of the corpus established by Hartwig Altenmüller for this object type, recently considered further by Peter Hubai (Altenmüller 1965, 1983; Hubai 2008). A first criterion is documented relation to site, as a bridge between documented excavated core and undocumented mass. The fragment acquired by Erman is a useful test-case: if we follow the tale recounted in his autobiography, it might be considered relatively more likely to be from, if not the Theban area directly, then perhaps not too far; the Maspero letters raise the possibility that the item was planted from farther afield, depending on the frequency of contact between Cairo and Luxor sellers at this date. By identifying acquisition place and date as a joint question, the Erman acquisition helps to show the need for new research into the history of selling networks across the Nile Valley. The history of the antiquities trade may be expected to follow the history of transport and communication, in tandem with that of archaeology. In the early 1880s, Maspero authorised clearance of cemeteries around Akhmim, and the town became for a while the preponderant source for papyri, and above all textiles of late Greek and Roman antiquity, from the first millennium AD (Kuhlmann, 1983); foreigners sailing to or from Luxor could readily stop at the town, ensuring a certain proportion of acquisition at source, rather than only at the national centre of trade in Cairo (cf Smith 1994).

That same winter, the travelling reverend Greville Chester also stopped at Akhmim, cited as source for another figured tusk section (now British Museum EA17078, Altenmüller 1965: II, no.55). Akhmim is not known as a source for excavated examples of the object type; the nearest major such site would

be Abydos, and therefore, in combination with the documented role of Akhmim as a sales-point for antiquities that same year, the tusk might plausibly be assigned with a question-mark to the Abydos area – always pending the necessary research into the history of the vendor networks. The other objects acquired from Chester that year might help map the geographical horizon of sources for his Akhmim purchases; if the vendor(s) could be identified, their scope of activity could also be charted. In such cases, it is important that documentary evidence confirms that an item was acquired at a particular place; without the information that Greville Chester stopped at Akhmim that winter, the provenance might merely be a device to raise the value of the piece. In sum, corroborated "acquisition place" in historical context may offer significant information, sufficient to justify treating specific acquisitions as a special corpus category between the documented excavated core and the remainder of the undocumented material.

Dividing lines

For many object types, acquisitions with no verifiable link to place constitute a considerable quantity of material, if not the majority. I would treat any extensive corpus as a spectrum of acquisition history on purely formal terms; suspending connoisseurship, I would first insist on documentary evidence for the first known reference to an artefact in publication or in archive, including collection inventories. In assessing likelihood of authenticity, one major dividing-line is the earliest attestation of a modern version. Within the corpus of figured tusk sections, Altenmüller notes the existence of two painted wood copies of one of the finest, and atypical examples, British Museum EA18175, accessioned in 1887 as acquired at Thebes by senior curator Wallis Budge. The two copies are Ashmolean 1892.1159, accessioned in 1892, and Chicago Oriental Institute Museum E 11208, purchased in Cairo in 1920 (Altenmüller 1965: II, 51). As Altenmüller notes, one wood copy was reported already by Rylands in 1888, offered along with the first to the British Museum. Even if the wood example was not recognised as modern, the 1888 report can be taken as the point by which copies are known to be in circulation, for this one object category. For another object category, the earliest fake may be later or earlier. The Borchardt excavations at Amarna seem to have stimulated talented sculptors inside Egypt, who might not have been tempted earlier (Fiechter 2009 for the imitations). Similarly, it seems unlikely that predynastic material was being copied before scientific recognition of that phase of material culture, whereupon production flourished in the early twentieth century (Arkell 1955 on the modern motifs added to probably ancient siltstone palettes Berlin 14411 and UC15821). In other words, recognition of the object category itself is a prerequisite to collecting, and in turn to new production. The object category need not be the same as its modern name: the category "idol" generated a stone version of a Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figure from a mid-seventeenth century Italian publication as a small-scale shabti, now in the Ashmolean Museum (Whitehouse 1989).

The case of the Ashmolean shabti introduces the second criterion for sub-dividing the disorderly mass of the undocumented: print publication as circulation of the object type in pictorial form, as a stimulus enabling new production. For the figured tusk sections, the first print dissemination of a group came in 1896, when James Quibell published line-drawings of four found among late Middle Kingdom objects in a tomb-shaft, covered by the later Ramesseum storerooms (Quibell 1898: pl.3). A more concerted focus on the object type is first found in the catalogue of "magical" objects in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, including nine examples, whole tusks or fragments (Daressy 1903). It must be emphasised, that I do not have specific examples of modern versions based on either the Quibell or the Daressy publication. After British Museum EA18175, I know of only one example of a figured tusk section which can be identified conclusively as based on another, and this seems not to be from publication: Fitzwilliam Museum E. 394a.1932, from the bequest of the collector Edward Towry Whyte (1847-1932) (Altenmüller 1965: no.28), probably an ancient fragment with inverted and imperfect modern copy of the design on anciently sculpted fragment UC35309, from the collection of Henry Wellcome (1853-1936). As UC35309 seems not to have been published before 1932, when Whyte died, the carver of the Fitzwilliam piece presumably saw it at some point between its unearthing and its time in the Wellcome collection, whether on display

or in private. Nevertheless, a first publication date provides a more formal criterion, than can yet be established from archival records for the impact of original examples seen by excavators and vendors in circulation in the market. For a more stable, strictly formal division, the date of printing therefore takes precedence in the framework for guiding authentication.

Subsequent divisions in the spectrum of authentication may apply across a majority of object types. A third dividing-line is the explosion of modern production of ancient Egyptian antiquities during the 1910s and 1920s. Unprecedented publicity surrounded the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, and that year might offer a neat chronological marker. However, Elliott Colla notes how the scale of reception reflects the mood of the moment, and that the Tutankhamun find may be less a catalyst than an echo of its time (Colla 2007: 172-226). In the case of figured tusk sections, at least four examples were acquired in 1919 and 1920 (including the wooden copy cited above): UC16786; Chicago OIM 10788, 11288; New York MMA 19.2.18). The next period dividing-line is from political history, but with direct impact on the history of collecting. Either 1939 or 1945 might be considered the principal turning-point; even before the Cold War set in, with political de-colonisation, Western museum management, staff and public may have moved from global to local interest. However, in the Egyptian context, the 1952 Revolution seems the point of greatest change: foreign antiquities officials were finally replaced with Egyptian nationals, the exodus of foreigners probably profoundly transformed antiquities sales networks at all levels, and the political overhaul brought an end to large-scale foreign excavations and divisions of finds, already largely impeded by the Second World War. A final dividing-line for both historical and ethical reasons is the introduction of international agreements on antiquities export. The spectrum of acquisition history emerges as the following framework:

Core Corpus = excavated examples with extant documentation
Comparative Group A = with local provenance/place of purchase information from seller/donor (excluding references to Cairo and Luxor, as larger centres of antiquities selling)
Comparative Group B = without local provenance information
(i) = date of first known reference to a modern imitation (*for figured tusks = known before 1888*)
(ii) = documented/acquired between date of first known modern imitation and date of first publication of series of examples (*for figured tusks = first known between 1888 and 1903*)
(iii) = documented/acquired between first known publication and major increase in antiquities purchases (*for figured tusks = first known 1904-1918*)
(iv) = documented between major increase and major decrease in antiquities exports (*for figured tusks = first known 1919-1952*)
(v) = documented between decrease in antiquities exports and introduction of legal restriction on antiquities sales (*for figured tusks = first known 1952-1973*)
(vi) = not documented before introduction of restriction on antiquities sales (*for figured tusks = first known before 1973*)

For the figured tusk sections, the framework does not offer a mechanical authentication, but instead it helps to foreground clusters and so histories of skills, ancient and modern, in the relatively little explored world of bone and wood carving. Earlier corpora have organised lists around present location (as Altenmüller 1965), for an alphabetical or geographical list of collections provides the most convenient frame for reading. In place of that convenience, the framework above prioritises acquisition time and place, setting at core the best documented material, and admitting other material secondarily, for comparison. The chronological acquisition-list promises at minimum a warning over the presence of accomplished cutting in earlier generations of archaeology in the Nile Valley. Further research would need to include investigation of the specific crafting and cutting skills available from the known tool-kits and professions of particular places, metropolitan to rural, generation by generation: sculpting, drawing, jewel- and (in more recent times) clock-making or –repairing.

Chaining authentication

A stratigraphic approach to authentication may encourage a focus on the documentary evidence for first modern appearance of an object. The division into time-blocks of acquisition also encourages new comparisons between objects of one type. As a by-product, a current researcher into the history of the discipline can more clearly recognise for each modern decade the visual resources of study of antiquities (including study for forgery). Despite such potential, a single device cannot be expected to guarantee the security demanded by a scientific or wider public. Therefore the researcher who adopts the "principle of superposition" could reinforce the results by applying to her/himself the idea of the operational chain, by which Leroi-Gourhan proposed to find the human act in the flint tool (Schlanger 2004). Admittedly the duller graphic form of the chaîne opératoire lacks the theatrical appeal of repeated curatorial enactments of authority. Yet, if the purpose of the chain is precisely to pinpoint the gesture, the tool is perfect against the uncontrolled flourishes of the connoisseur. As a self-critical turn, the device of the prehistorian could force us towards more explicit statement of the criteria we use, and the precise parallels we have found, when we deliver our judgements on authenticity. The result might be a more transparent world of scholarship, and need not be a less enjoyable spectacle. As the objects themselves take to the stage in their own order, the sight of ancient and modern imitation is not lost, and nor are its always fascinating makers.

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