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The Ancient Object and its Modern Negotiation. A History of Latin American Archeological Heritage in International Museum Networks of Collaboration and Competition (1894-1914)

Ir a la versión en español

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a historical analysis of international collaboration and competition between museums. Archival materials and publications from the late 19th to the early 20th century show Latin American museums as institutional spaces in constant tension between defending and protecting national heritage and seeking to establish international scientific networks. The case study of the American archeological collections contextualizes and reconstructs custodians of heritage in museums in Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico in the face of the international collecting of museums in the United States of America, Germany, France, and England. In this sense, this article contributes to understanding the conditions of the appropriation and negotiation of archeological objects that reveal modes of constructing national, cosmopolitan, and imperial identities. The trajectories of these archeological objects help to reflect on the social relationships that their ownership, transfer, and negotiation have historically involved.

KEYWORDS

Modern history; history of museums; collecting; archeology; cultural heritage; Americanists; Latin America

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To the health and cleaning staff
of this health crisis

ANCIENT OBJECTS AND MODERN MUSEUMS

Contrary to what one might think, at the moment of most remarkable optimism for the modern, archeology became fashionable. In Egypt and Latin America, expeditions and excavations were undertaken to find archeological objects that would be part of museums (Lombardo, 1994, p. 55). The greater the interest in them, the greater the demand, a situation that generated an acceleration process in their commercialization in internal and external markets, creating pressure to regulate the acquisition, care, study, and transfer of archeological collections for museums in the Americas and Europe.

At the center of this flow is the ancient object, which, as a reference to the past, rarely has a practical function and, generally, has the function of signifying time or the origin of collective identities. According to Jean Baudrillard, these ancient objects belong to a category that contradicts functional calculation demands. Nevertheless, they are an essential part of modernity construction, acquiring their double meaning (Baudrillard, 2019, p. 83). Social relationships of reciprocity, inequality and commercialization have been woven around these objects. In their link with ancient objects, societies reveal a set of aesthetic, historical, and political judgments that define the attitudes toward the object and the values of a time (Kopytoff, 2011, p. 67).

Interest in these objects has produced trajectories and negotiations that also reveal geopolitical agendas. In recent decades, the ownership of archeological heritage has been called into question, and one of the most fruitful perspectives in this sense is that of provenance. Works like those of Bénédict Savoy explain from a historical analysis the colonial contexts in which African collections began to form part of the exhibitions or warehouses of French museums at the time in question (Savoy, 2018). Although it is crucial, there are only a few studies on the reaction of Latin American counterparts to international collecting practices.

Although significant steps have been taken (Gänger, 2006; Bégin, 2013; Kohl, Podgorny, & Gänger, 2014), it is important to understand the flows and communications in museum contexts. The lack of such studies may be due to the custom of thinking about the history of museums exclusively within the framework of nation-states, which prevents seeing their communication—which is not necessarily friendly— as a potential to understand intercon-

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nections and how the protection of monuments now called heritage was previously understood.

Based on the study of Americanist networks, and the social history of archeological objects from Latin America, this article contributes toward that area of study by exposing the appropriation and negotiation conditions of these objects, particularly during the peak of their exploration and collection in the subcontinent. Beyond the individual-centered perspectives as a "foreign collector," which have dominated most of the historiography on the subject, this article explores the agency of the heritage custodians in museums—also collectors—who observed and participated in this international competition from Mexico, Bolivia, and Argentina.

This article, based on archival material and internal publications, presents an overview of the conception of heritage in those three countries' museums. Despite the potential revealed by this study of networks, the links between museums participating in Americanist studies, as well as their relationships of cooperation, competition, trafficking, or exchange, have rarely been analyzed. This article recovers from conversations and documented cases the approaches taken by the custodians in Latin American museums regarding archeological objects. Their similarities and differences help understand an era in terms of identity and science.

Museums functioned as the priority spaces in uniting the search and conservation of archeological objects (Figure 1). Their negotiations generated social relationships not only in the exhibitions and narratives within those institutions but also from the very moment of their acquisition; they explain a part of the history of archeological collections in European and American museums. In Latin America, the beginning of legislation on archeological monuments marked a critical point for the ownership of this heritage. It was in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century when the protection of archeological heritage began to be seen as a State function.

In this sense, Latin American museums participated in a notion of archeological conservation that marked limits and exceptions for international collecting: it was considered that there should be control in the preservation, ownership, and exportation of archeological objects, which became a regulated aspect. However, this raises the question of what type of social relationships mediated the agreements and disagreements about the ownership of these mobilized objects. Studying the notions of *conservation*, *study*, *condemnation,* and *cooperation* from Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico can provide a closer view of the geopolitics of the Latin American archeological heritage at the beginning of the 20th century.

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FIGURE 1: Men and women working in an office of the Museo Nacional, Mexico City, *ca.* 1910 (Culhuacán Collection) (Courtesy: Fototeca Nacional [SINAFO], Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [INAH]).

THE LONGED-FOR ARGENTINIAN COSMOPOLITANISM

The trajectory and dispersion of the fragments of an old bronze disk of the Calchaquí culture occupied the notes of the founder of the Museo Etnográfico[1] of Buenos Aires, Juan B. Ambrosetti. He noted as an interesting fact that half of the disk, found in Tolombón, in the Salta valley, was "in his possession", donated by his friend, the Argentine archeologist Adán Quiroga, while a quarter of the disk was located under registration VC1279 in the Museum für Völkerkunde[2] (MV) in Berlin, brought to that institution by the German scholar Max Uhle. His words to describe the situation were: the "fragments have been scattered most singularly" (Ambrosetti, 2011, pp. 134-135).

[1] It is normal for institutions to change over the years and museums are no exception. Like the purposes and approaches, a good part of the museums discussed in this article have been transformed, sometimes splitting their collections and giving rise to new museums and spaces, even changing their name. The first museum referred to here is the Museo Etnográfico of the Universidad Nacional in Buenos Aires, which was founded in 1904 to undertake a systematic study of Argentine archeology. In its first decades it occupied the basements of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras at 430 Viamonte street in the Argentine capital. Currently, the museum bears the name of its founder and is known as the Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti. Since 1927 it occupies its own building and continues to be linked to the University.

[2] Founded in 1873 by the ethnologist Adolf Bastian, the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, or Royal Ethnological Museum was conceived as a scientific institution to serve as an archive of humanity. With this aim in mind, an *ad hoc* building was constructed and inaugurated in 1886 on Königgrätzer Street to house archeological and ethnological collections from all over the world. In that space, very diverse collections on America were gathered and this situation led to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century it was considered by various Americanists as the museum with the greatest diversity on the cultures of the American continent. During the bombings of the Second World War the building was severely damaged and was finally demolished. The successor to that museum is currently in Dahlem under the name Ethnologisches Museum and a part of its collections have recently been transferred to the Humboldt Forum.

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Nowadays we could read in his description a neutral perspective, and to understand it, it is necessary to consider the context of the emergence of said museum in the capital and its relationship with the archeological heritage of the country. In Argentina, the interest in the study of pre-Hispanic cultures emerged comparatively later than in other Latin American countries. The case of Ambrosetti and the museum he founded represented an institutional effort to generate national and international interest in the cultures formerly settled in Argentinian territory and the study of other cultures in the world.

Ambrosetti conceived this institution to support the Argentinian identity by creating a national past and space for archeological and ethnographic research within the Universidad de Buenos Aires. In the beginning, the scant state support for the increase of the collections was compensated for with donors' contributions, thanks to Ambrosetti's personal relationships. The collections did not limit themselves to the national territory, and flows of archeological and ethnographic objects crossed the borders in both directions: the museum acquired collections of ancient archeological objects from its surroundings and from ancient and contemporary cultures from different parts of the world. Thus, objects from various places such as the Congo, Japan, Egypt, Bolivia, and the United States were collected (Pegoraro, 2009).

One of the primary forms of acquisition of these objects came, as noted above, from donations. However, another took place through exchanges, so that between these, donations, and explorations, by 1912, the Museo Etnográfico had a network of 75 donors and a collection of 12,156 objects, of which 2,000 entered on average annually (Caggiano & Sempe, 1994, pp. 3-4). In the institutional effort to generate international interest, archeological objects found in Argentinian territory and considered "repeated" were sent to museums in Europe and the United States in exchange for other objects.

Through this practice, museums consolidated inter-institutional exchange networks and diversified their collections. According to Ambrosetti, this practice provided good results since it "provided an outlet for the large stock of duplicated material extracted in our explorations" and, at the same time, allowed them to diversify their collections by including objects from other regions of the world (Ambrosetti, 1912, p. 5).

Besides their use as objects of exchange, it was intended that these collections would arouse interest and study abroad. Thus, during the first decade of the 20th century, archeological objects

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left Argentina accompanying researchers in their presentations in scientific congresses. The Museo Etnográfico obtained in exchange, for example, copies of busts of the indigenous peoples of North America, as well as molds and originals of archeological objects from the United States, ethnographic collections from Brazil, the Congo, Poland, Uruguay, the Philippines, Dutch Guiana, the Island of Java, and some costumes from Siberia (Ambrosetti, 1912, p. 5).

The museums with which exchanges were made were the MV, the American Museum of Natural History[3] (AMNH) in New York, the United States National Museum[4] (USNM) in Washington D.C., Музей антропологии и этнографии имени Петра Великого[5] in San Petersburg y el Museo Nazionale d'Antropologia in Florence. From the American side, for example, these exchanges were also seen in a positive light, and the National Museum in Washington reported the importance of the objects received from Argentina, such as mortars, grinding stones, stone discs, seashells, and ornaments. This collection was of great interest as material suitable for comparison with similar remains found in North America (Smithsonian Institution, 1911, p. 18).

There were two tendencies inside that Argentinian museum at that time: on the one hand, a cosmopolitanism in its intention to gather collections from cultures all over the world, and, on the other hand, a nationalism encouraged by the national and foreign interest in the study of pre-Hispanic cultures in Argentina. Although most of the objects found by the archeologists of the Museo Etnográfico in Buenos Aires in their excavations contributed to increasing its collections, those considered "repeated" were used to consolidate exchange networks between institutions.

As in other museums, the concept of *duplicated material* was applied in this exchange, which can be seen as a crucial means to expand and diversify the collections. This concept makes it possible to observe the consolidation of a hierarchy among objects. Their custodians included notions of "exceptionality" in which the "non-exceptional" were used in a barter process. In most of the

[3] The American Museum of Natural History, located across from Central Park, was founded in 1869 as a result of the proposal of naturalist Albert Smith Bickmore. The anthropologist Franz Boas stands out as curator of the ethnology department from the period treated in this article.

[4] At the beginning of the 20th century, the Smithsonian Institution consisted of six spaces, of which one was the USNM, which had a focus primarily on natural science collections and, secondly, on ethnographic and archaeological collections. The growth of these collections was such that in 1910 a building was inaugurated to house them, which is currently the National Museum of Natural History.

[5] Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera)

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exchanges, as mentioned in the case of the USNM in 1910, it was "originals" for "originals." However, it was not uncommon in this exchange of objects between museums for "originals" to be exchanged for materials for educational purposes, as was the case of the busts obtained by the AMNH in New York.

Another important museum in Argentina—the Museo de La Plata[6]—also shared this archeological heritage view (Figure 2). The relationships cultivated there by the influential Argentinian paleontologist Florentino Ameghino with the director of the Museu de São Paulo—a paleontologist and personal friend—Hermann von Ihering, who in private correspondence and academic circles emphasized the importance of exchanges of publications and *scientific material* to carry out worthwhile research and comparisons, were particularly fruitful (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1911, pp. 98-99).

FIGURE 2: The new archeological room of the Museo de La Plata in 1911 (Courtesy: Departamento de Documentos Fotográficos, Archivo General de la Nación [AGN], Argentina).

[6] Founded by the geographer Francisco P. Moreno, and inaugurated in 1887, the Museo de La Plata was considered from its origins as an institution for science, a headquarters for the study of nature and cultures of the American continent, and a space for general instruction (Podgorny, 2009, pp. 191-197). The Museum is part of the Universidad de La Plata and is perhaps the one that has been preserved with the least amount of changes from the time discussed here to the present. To this day, when visiting this museum, it is possible the see what exhibition strategies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were like.

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In addition to acquiring them through exchanges, museums purchased some plaster reproductions of pre-Hispanic monoliths located in Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru. The Museo de La Plata, conceived as an educational institution, had the task of presenting a complete history of the Americas for teaching and research. Therefore, to demonstrate its cosmopolitanism, it acquired plaster replicas of exceptional works of the Mesoamerican and Andean cultures, as other museums commonly did. This fact reveals the use of copies in research and teaching.

Thus, this museum brought copies created by the reproduction workshop of the MV which, in the opinion of the scientists of the Argentinian museum, served for their study and dissemination. They noted that copies allowed them to admire the monuments "without the imperfections of time," corresponding to the educational purpose of the museum. In some cases, ethnographic objects were exchanged for reproductions of archeological pieces, as was the case of a group of objects from Tierra del Fuego in exchange for reducing the price of reproductions of the Mesoamerican and Andean monoliths (Ballestero, 2013, pp. 268-269).

Observing international archeological collecting, the Argentinian historian Ernesto Quesada emphasized at the International Congress of Americanists in 1910 in Argentina that "Europe doesn't lag behind" on these issues. And, although referring to Argentinian collections in the MV he regretted that the "treasures of the Río de La Plata" had left the country, he also said that "in few other places could they be better than among the marvelous riches of that superb museum" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1912, pp. 85-86).

At that time, museums such as the MV were not frowned upon in Argentina; on the contrary, they were recognized as models and institutions for cooperation. In the richness of their American collections, the Argentinian custodians of heritage, like those of Mexico, saw them as references for the study of the Americas. The migratory flows registered at the time, particularly in the capital and the province of La Plata, impacted the social perception of the circulation of archeological objects. An ethnic and cultural identification with the agents of other museums could have brought scientists closer and, consequently, made international collecting be perceived not as aggression but as stimulating competition.

Moreover, in Argentina, heritage custodians were determined to position their museums on the international stage as science institutions and not as institutions dispossessed by other museums. Florentino Ameghino would defend the importance of the two Argentinian museums, stating that, as valuable as the geological,

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paleontological, and anthropological collections of the European capitals were, theirs equaled and even surpassed them in many points (Ameghino, 1910, p. 4).

Ernesto Quesada also considered that however rich the archives, libraries, and museums of Europe were, their treasures did not replace the experience *in situ* of archeologists and anthropologists in the Americas (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1910, p. 86). Ameghino and Quesada directly claimed that Argentina exported raw materials and science, helping, through its museums, to revolutionize areas such as paleontology and even give them new directions (Ameghino, 1910, p. 4). Therefore, the cosmopolitanism cultivated by the Museo Etnográfico de Buenos Aires and the Museo de La Plata was by no means exempt from nationalist impulses, and a central part of the construction of national identity was at stake in their constitution.

After the cases referred to here, Argentina legislated for the limits and exceptions of international collecting. In 1913, the Poder Legislativo Nacional declared with Law 9080 that the State was the authority on ruins and archeological and paleontological sites, and thus was —with the advice of museums such as the Museo Etnorgáfico— responsible for granting permits. It was considered that permission for explorations could be granted to both national and foreign institutions that demonstrated a scientific purpose, without commercial speculation, and the export of "duplicated" objects would also be allowed, as long as the advisory museums agreed to it (Podgorny, 2000, pp. 13-14).

With this law, the archeological zones became regulated by the State, although its museums continued to regulate the flow of archeological objects. Thus, returning to the words of Ambrosetti at the beginning of this section, it is possible to see the cosmopolitanism achieved by Argentinian museums and how archeological objects, such as the Calchaquí bronze disk, were sent to both national and foreign museums, which explains the neutral reaction of the Buenos Aires museum director when he mentioned that those fragments had been "scattered most singularly."

REPORTS OF TRAFFICKING IN BOLIVIA

If international collecting was seen positively in Argentina, one need only analyze the case of the neighboring country for an example of the contrary. In Bolivia, the flow of archeological objects to European museums provoked a defensive reaction, and consequently, in 1906, a law was enacted to prevent their export. In that country,

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the archeological collecting of an agent of the MV was denounced as "trafficking in antiquities" by the Austrian, nationalized Bolivian, engineer Arthur Posnansky, who years later would have a leading role in the creation of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología (Munarq) in La Paz, also known as "Palacio de Tiwanaku" (Ponce, 1999).

Tiwanaku is an ancient archaeological site that is currently considered Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Even from pre-Hispanic times, the Incas were interested in the imposing monuments at 4,000 meters above sea level. During the colonial era, it was studied by chroniclers and the attraction for its history continued in the 19th and 20th centuries. The site and its archeological objects caught the attention of national and international Americanists (Otero, 1939). One of the most prominent was Max Uhle, who made fundamental contributions to the study of the Andean cultures, including those of Tiwanaku, which he considered "the most interesting ruins of South America" (Stübel & Uhle, 1894, pp. 205-208) (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Rear view of the Sun Gate in Tiwanaku, Bolivia (Courtesy: Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia [ABNB]).

Simultaneously with his theoretical work, he participated in numerous national and international collecting expeditions representing museums from Prussia, the United States, Peru, Chile,

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and Ecuador, making his career more complex. At first, he was commissioned by the MV's director to increase its collections on the Americas. While in Tiwanaku, in addition to studying the area and taking photographs, he sent a set of archeological objects to Prussia, which later sparked controversy (Kaulicke, 2010, pp. 13-14) when Posnansky accused him of being an "antique trafficker" for the MV (Posnansky, 1913, p. 19).

Precisely on that trip to Bolivia, in 1894, the relationship between Uhle and Adolf Bastian, director of the museum that had commissioned him for the trip to the Americas, ended up deteriorating. The latter felt dissatisfied with the results of the trip and withdrew his support. The German scholar found himself financially defeated. When the American archeologist Adolph Bandelier arrived in La Paz with a similar mission for the AMNH in New York, that defeat was evident: in the competition to acquire an archeological collection from the Isla del Sol, Uhle begged Bastian for funds to buy it for the museum, but Bandelier made a better offer (Fischer, 2010, pp. 54-55).

This particular case illustrates the synchrony of several international museum agents in spaces of archeological interest in Latin America, which, in turn, reveals greater competition between these agents and their institutions to secure for themselves the collections that were in the hands of local collectors. The increase in the demand for archeological objects to send to institutions commercialized their flows. Museums and their agents tried to secure these objects and transformed them into merchandise whose price they adapted to the demand. Interestingly, even today, museums often blame each other for commercializing the goods they consume (Kopytoff, 2011, p. 63).

In addition to the purchase of archeological objects, some museums acquired them in excavations. The first ones carried out in Tiwanaku had a third international participant: the French Créqui-Montfort and Sénéchal de la Grange mission, in 1903, which left a significant photographic record, but also took a large amount of archeological material to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro[7] (MET) in Paris. With the help of 16 local peons, the French geologist Georges Courty excavated the archeological site and tried to send the whole collection obtained in Tiwanaku clan-

[7] The Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro was founded in 1878. In 1937 it was transformed into the Musée de l'Homme. A part of the American collections that this museum originally housed are in the Musée du Quai Branly, inaugurated in 2006. This museum is currently the headquarters of the Society of Americanists, which has a history that dates back to 1895.

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destinely to France by sea from the port of Antofagasta. The Bolivian government seized the material until an agreement was reached by which Courty would return half of it to Bolivia (Ponce, 1999, pp. 27-28).

This experience probably generated the urgency to legislate on archeological monuments, thus preventing the export of ancient objects. When an attempt was made to take those materials to France, the Bolivian government applied the first curb to international collecting and agreed with the expeditionary groups that they could take half of the objects found in exchange for the excavation work done; however, the other half had to remain in Bolivia, which started a small museum in the town of Tiwanaku.

Thus, in 1906, the Ley de Tres de Octubre was issued, given the risk that archeological material would be transported to museums all over the world. This precept established that the ruins of Tiwanaku, as well as those of Lake Titicaca, were the property of the nation, and explicitly prohibited the export of "objets d'art" from both sites, which would be confiscated, and even established the application of penalties to "smugglers". At the same time, it entrusted the Sociedad Geográfica de La Paz and its members with their conservation and restoration. In excavations that were permitted to individuals, they would be compensated for the objets d'art they found (Rada, 1907, pp. 282-283).

The Museo Nacional, located in La Paz and directed by the historian Manuel Ballivián, had a collection of archeological and ethnographic objects, as well as mineralogical and natural resource samples of the country (Villanueva, 2019, p. 203). This museum had a comparatively smaller margin of action than that of others at the time since, besides not being directly responsible for applying or benefiting from the Ley del Tres de Octubre, it was isolated from the extensive communication that other Latin American museums had by then.

At the time, the Law was a fundamental regulatory response to prevent the dispersal of archeological objects; however, it never completely put a stop to collecting outside national borders. Even custodians of Bolivian heritage such as Ballivián and Posnansky expressed interest in generating scientific cooperation in research alliances, particularly with Argentina—there, archeological objects fulfilled a diplomatic function.

The aim was to establish supranational cooperation to study pre-Hispanic cultures in South America, some of which cross current political borders. However, these attempts faced severe difficulties, particularly in funding (Ponce, 1999, pp. 38-39). Thus, with

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or without the authorization of the law, in 1910, the Argentinian anthropologist Salvador Debenedetti collected 173 archeological objects from the Tiwanaku site for the Museo Etnográfico of Buenos Aires, and Posnansky himself made personal donations to that institution (Pegoraro, 2009). Such attempts at collaboration called into question the full application of the law.

However, amidst a theoretical discrepancy about the chronology of the archeological complex, the first retroactive accusation was made of "trafficking in antiquities" against Max Uhle and the MV. After seeing Uhle's criticism of his work, Posnansky accused him and the museum for a set of archaeological pieces taken to Prussia in 1894, arguing that the criticism was inspired by Uhle's "hatred and envy" of him. Thus, when the two principal researchers of the Tiwanaku monuments disagreed on their chronologies, the discussion escalated to the point of evidencing the tension that international collecting also caused (Uhle, 1912; Posnansky, 1913).

The conflict between Posnansky and Uhle is fascinating for many reasons since both can be considered European custodians of Latin American heritage in different versions. The two German-speaking researchers expressed a clear interest in Andean archeology and world views. Both managed to insert themselves so well in the Latin American institutions that represented the highest national hierarchy of archeology in Bolivia and Peru, respectively, that they obtained the support of geographical and archeological societies and national museums in those Andean countries (Ponce, 1999, pp. 110-114; Browman, 2007, pp. 29-32).

It is incongruous that both protectors of the pre-Hispanic monuments of Tiwanaku coincided in the notion of preserving and establishing research centers *in situ* and that, at the same time, contributed, as they did, to the centralization of archeological objects in different cities of the world. Although in meetings of Americanists the researchers publicly expressed their protests against the destruction of the archeological ruins, they generally blamed the inhabitants of the region or the explorers who sought economic benefits. Uhle took objects to the MV and the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia at their request, while Posnansky made donations and loans to museums in Buenos Aires, Gothenburg, Munich, and Paris (Ponce, 1999, pp. 96-97; Erickson, 1998, p. 95).

Despite the great potential for cooperation between the two countries in archeological matters, perhaps the scientific-personal relationships of their two main German-speaking custodians undermined that potential in the joint archeological studies between

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Bolivia and Peru, and produced divided visions of the pre-Hispanic past marked by the borders of the new nation-states and their areas of influence. When continuing his studies, Max Uhle did not return to Tiwanaku to avoid Arthur Posnansky. In contrast, the latter dedicated himself to trying to prove the superiority of the culture of that site over later ones.

Although it seems that other history scholars and heritage custodians in Bolivia, such as Ballivián, remained on the sidelines of this denunciation, Posnansky's criticism implied, in the context of academic disagreement, an explicit claim of national dispossession and theft. This situation demonstrated how the custodians of the archeological heritage treated the departure of archeological objects from the region differently, depending on the people and the institutions responsible for it, prioritizing on this occasion the Latin American and some European ones. Nevertheless, Posnansky's denunciation is the first accusation of "trafficking" found in the Bolivian context.

Unlike in Argentina, where priority was given to exchanges, in Bolivia, the presence of museums such as the MV in Berlin or the MET in Paris was viewed with suspicion, since, despite recognizing the contribution of their researchers and the fact that they financed costly excavations, the lack of reciprocity, such as exchanges, evidenced an unequal relationship. As will be seen in the following case, the archeological heritage scenarios could be further complicated.

MEXICAN "HOMELAND ARCHEOLOGY"

Mexico was the main focus of attraction for explorers, researchers, and those interested in Latin American archeology. Its Museo Nacional de Arquelogía, Historia y Etnografía[8] (MNAHE) was considered the main institution for researching, safeguarding, and exhibiting the archeological heritage of the Americas. With its Gallery of Monoliths (Figure 4), it aspired to become "the archeological cap-

[8] The Museo Nacional de México was founded in 1825 by an agreement of Guadalupe Victoria with the advice of Lucas Alamán. Later, in 1865 Maximilian of Habsburg designated the old mint (Casa de Moneda) as its building, located on the street with the same name. Linked to the Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, in 1910 the museum was reorganized and the collections were split. Those that corresponded to the natural sciences were transferred to El Chopo and with those that remained, the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía was formed. Finally, with the inauguration of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in 1964, the collections of that old museum, especially those that made up the famous Gallery of Monoliths, were transferred to Chapultepec. Currently, in the old Mint sits the Museo Nacional de las Culturas, which protects objects from cultures from around the world, many of which are reproductions.

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ital of the Americas," as Justo Sierra expressed in the Americanist congresses (Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnología, 1912, pp. 17-24).

The Museo Nacional, located in Mexico City, had increased its collections exponentially during the last decade of the rule of Porfirio Díaz. Unlike the Brazilian or Argentinian national museums, and similarly to the Bolivian context, collections in Mexico were strictly limited to its territorial boundaries. The country maintained close communication with other American and European museums and scientific institutions, but practically none with those in Latin America.

FIGURE 4: Gallery of Monoliths of the Museo Nacional, Mexico City, *ca.* 1910 (Culhuacán Collection) (Courtesy: Fototeca Nacional [SINAFO], Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [INAH]).

A nationalist view of archeological heritage, coupled with many foreign explorers, made it necessary from early on to regulate international collecting and set limits on it. With this purpose, in 1897, the Ley General de Monumentos Arqueológicos was enacted. It was the first statute for the protection of archeological heritage in Latin America, and, like the Bolivian one, it sought to keep archeological objects within its borders or, at least, regulate their export (Baranda, 1897, f. 4).

This law declared archeological sites to be the nation's property and even stipulated as powers of the federal government to arrest and punish those who destroyed archeological monuments, in addition to judging illegal the export of antiquities without au-

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thorization. According to this legislation, the archeological objects found in the country had to be taken to the Museo Nacional, which, despite its extensive collection, received a large number of objects annually. Isabel Ramírez Castañeda, a Mexican archeologist, reported that in 1910 alone, the museum acquired almost 9,000 archeological objects, 138 by donation and the rest by purchase (Ramírez, 1910).

The person in charge of enforcing the law was the Inspector General of Monuments, Leopoldo Batres, who represented the nationalist vision of heritage previously referred. The archeological excavations carried out in Mexican territory were supervised by this government agent, which was contrary to many international explorers and archeologists' interests, although not necessarily all of them. However, Batres is known for his "homeland archeology" (*arqueología patria*) that is, for linking archeological studies with the Mexican State (Bueno, 2004).

Within the law, concessions for archeological excavations were obtainable, although not necessarily straightforward. Its provisions allowed for photographs and molds of the monoliths, which gave other museums the possibility of making, and on occasion commercializing, their replicas.[9] Moreover, the legislation considered that some exceptions could be granted to scientists through permits to take "original" archeological objects. Again, as in Argentina's case, those "duplicated" or "repeated" objects, that is, similar to those existing in the collections of the Museo Nacional and not having a value in precious metals or stones, could be transferred by archeologists to museums abroad.

The aim was to promote the dissemination, study, and scientific exchange of these objects with other institutions. However, in the Mexican case, the process was not of barter, as in Argentina, but rather that of concessions in particular cases.

With the analysis of three facts, ranging from permits for services or the reporting of crimes to an exceptional case of restitution, a complex situation and differentiated treatment in the relationship between custodians and their museums can be observed.

The first case involved the British Museum (BM) and was a direct confrontation between Alfred Maudslay and Leopoldo Batres, which involved severe mutual accusations. Thus, when in 1907 the English diplomat and archeologist tried to export Zapotec archeological artifacts to said museum, Batres immediately opposed

[9] As illustrated above, this explains why there are reproductions of Mayan, Toltec, and Mexica steles and monoliths in places as far away as La Plata or Berlin.

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it, pointing out Maudslay as the "hand executing the crime," and drawing a parallel between the institution and its agent, qualifying both as having a "vandalistic" character alien to the historical archeological interests of Mexico. Batres, faced with the impossibility of "bringing the criminal institution and its accomplice in carrying out the crime to justice," advocated that Mexico close its doors to them and "view with suspicion" the museum and the archeologist (Batres, 1908).

In the taking of archeological objects, Batres gave an account of the relationship between people and institutions and the international geopolitics of heritage. This relationship, more than a mere illegal action in the appropriation of the objects themselves —which contained exceptions—, was what the Mexican custodian denounced. He became the first to denounce what would later be known as *consular archeology*, that is, the expropriation of cultural property by agents who carry out political, commercial, and scientific actions in regions outside the metropolis, collecting indigenous material culture (Hinsley, 2008, p. 125).

The museums did not act themselves, but through their agents; thus, they created social relationships despite geographical distance and language barriers. Unlike the Posnansky-Uhle case, the Batres-Maudslay case illustrates a deepening of the reasons for the accusation, since the criticism was not particularly of the fact the artifacts were taken—something not necessarily problematic at the time—but the type of social relationships established in their present through that transfer.

The management of heritage was not limited to letting or not letting the archeological objects exit the national borders; it extended to the exercise of national sovereignty and international respect. Batres expressed it this way:

> not even the gratitude of the fortunate, since the foreign element always views us with the concern that we are inferior countries, and that as such are obliged to be always ductile and give in to their desires. [...] Therefore, I believe that in the present case it would be unjustified to accede to the claim of the English Minister because although Dr. Seler was indeed granted this concession, it is also true that for many years this savant has been helping the history of Mexico with his writings, personal explorations, and services rendered recently to the Museo Nacional [Batres, 1908, f. 4].[10]

[10] Editorial translation from Spanish.

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In just one letter, Batres manages to denounce consular archeology—that of the BM—and at the same time indicate an exception, that of the MV. Within the Museo Nacional, both foreign researchers, Eduard Seler and Alfred Maudslay, were recognized as honorary professors of the institution and, therefore, were part of the hierarchy of the museum itself. Batres did not specify which pieces were granted to the German Mexicanist, but, from his perspective, the services rendered to the Museo Nacional were what differentiated museum agents, so that, based on his personal and professional view, he would permit Seler's authorization, but not Maudslay's.

Thus, Batres justified the distinction granted to the director of the Americas Section of the museum in Berlin, Eduard Seler, because, in addition to his studies, he spent some time at the Mexican museum preparing the catalog of the archeological collections (Olmedo & Achim, 2018, pp. 11-12). However, such favoritism would also be denounced by other researchers, such as the American archeologist Zelia Nuttall, who accused Seler of not publicly condemning the reclassifications of Batres in the Museo Nacional, and Batres of defending the "destructive actions" of Seler in Palenque (Valiant, 2017, pp. 215-216).

Thus, it is possible to see strong tensions in the academic field over the export permits for archeological objects found in Mexico granted to the British Empire, Prussia, or the United States. Despite the refusal of the Inspector General to grant an export permit to Maudslay and the denunciation of the geopolitics of archeological heritage, Batres lost the battle due to the weight of diplomacy. Maudslay, in his capacity as a diplomat, communicated with Batres' direct boss, Justo Sierra, who ended up authorizing the export of four boxes of Zapotec objects to the BM through Veracruz, on board a steamer bound for England. Despite the great power that Batres concentrated in his post, he was prevented from restricting all the export permits (Batres, 1908, f. 9).

This example illustrates how necessary it is, almost as much as the biography of archeological objects, to analyze the social relationships established behind them, which have a historical value as crucial as their provenance. The Batres-Maudslay case becomes even more interesting because these were reciprocal accusations since the latter expressed a negative opinion about the work of the former and criticized him for centralizing objects from the State of Oaxaca to the benefit of the Museo Nacional in Mexico City.

Maudslay's accusation of centralization was not entirely incorrect, as there were communities that opposed the transfer of monoliths and other archeological objects from Yucatan, the State

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of Mexico, and Morelos to Mexico City (Bueno, 2004, pp. 133-144). The organization of these people should also be considered as actions of other groups of custodians of archeological heritage that were in direct conflict with Batres' vision of "homeland archeology." However, it was slightly contradictory that the criticism came from an agent of the BM.

One of the aspects of international collecting by museums allows an analysis of the second case. Despite the good relationships and the institutional gratitude to Eduard Seler for his Mexican studies and the cataloging of the inventory, the pacts should not disguise the competition which existed between the Prussian and the Mexican museums in regard to purchasing from private collections, where the complication of the social relationships faced with the commercialization processes of archeological objects in the tension between their supply and demand was evident. The MV and its agent, Eduard Seler, reappeared in the context of the purchase of private collections.

One of those cases is that of Honorato J. Carrasco, who, in 1904, put on sale his collection of antiquities of almost 3,700 objects from Puebla and Veracruz, formed over 14 years. The collector asked for 15,000 pesos for the complete collection, while the agents of the Mexican museum offered him only two-thirds of the stipulated price. Carrasco showed the agents of the Museo Nacional a letter from Seler in which he qualified his collection as "very important" and expressed his interest in acquiring it for the Prussian government. Although there is no information on the price offered by the MV, and it is not known if it was willing to pay more to the collector, the agents of the Mexican museum warned that Seler could arrive in Mexico unexpectedly and, therefore, let the institution know that it would not only be "truly sensitive, but unpatriotic for these objects to leave the Republic to enrich a foreign museum" (Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnología, 1904, f. 136).

The availability of resources to make purchases from private collectors represented for some national museums an effective means of pressure against museums such as the German one, which was used by private collectors to accelerate the sale of archeological objects or to increase their price. In the negotiations that some Mexican collectors expressed, invoking patriotic sentiments, it is often found a clear preference for the sale of the collections to the Museo Nacional. There were even cases in which the collectors sold them at a lower price than they had hoped, intending to keep them in the country, like Francisco Belmar with his Zapotec collection in 1901 (Sellen, 2010, p. 143), although, in other cases,

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economic interest prevailed over the patriotic rhetoric and the collections ended up being exported. Although good relations were decisive in this example, it demonstrates the competition between museums to acquire collections.

Finally, the third case involves an unprecedented act of restitution between the American and the Mexican national museums at the beginning of the 20th century. It was the return through diplomatic channels of one of three panels that comprise the bas-relief carving of the Templo de la Cruz at Palenque, which in 1908 was still at the Smithsonian Institution (SI) in Washington, D.C. The stele has an exciting history, and its parts were scattered before that time: one of them was in its original place, in Palenque, State of Chiapas; another in Mexico City, in the Museo Nacional; and the third in the SI in the American capital. In a restitution process of international collecting, the third part returned to Mexico on the initiative of the Secretary of State of the United States, Eliah Root, and the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs of Mexico (Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnología, 1912, pp. 17-24; Filloy & Ramírez, 2012, pp. 71-74).

However, upon its return, it did not arrive at its original site in Chiapas but was sent directly to Mexico City, specifically to the MNAHE. The following year, the first panel, still in Palenque, was removed from the temple and sent to the museum. In 1909, the three panels were reunited, although far from the Mayan zone. After much toing and froing, they were then put in the famous Monolith Gallery of the MNAHE, one of them after decades in the United States. This case, interesting for its exceptional nature, brings to a close this story about archeological collecting and museums, where, as has been seen, the directions are many and where politics, international scientific cooperation, and inequalities meet.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on records in archives and publications of the time, this article discussed the collaboration and competition for archeological heritage in three Latin American nations, given the collecting practices of other museums. Taking as a starting point the negotiations for objects and archeological collections, the individual, institutional, and national stances that permeated the negotiations between heritage custodians can be reconstructed and contextualized in relation to international collections.

The movements of the archeological objects reviewed made it possible to reflect on the social relationships that their ownership,

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transfer, and negotiation have historically entailed and to account for relations of reciprocity, asymmetry, and cultural translation. In turn, this social life of the objects reveals modes of construction of cosmopolitan, national, and imperial identities. Based on the documented cases, two general conclusions about the social relationships regarding archeological heritage in Latin America, and some particular conclusions, can be drawn.

The first is that of relative synchronicity in the Latin American States' legislation regarding archeological monuments in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century. The States considered the need to protect the monuments and enacted the first laws to prevent the export of antiquities, where museums and their agents were directly or indirectly responsible for the negotiations that began to mark a greater control by the State over the flow of ancient objects. However, these laws also established scientific purposes as an exception. Therefore, the State and the museums, along with their agents, tried to regulate this traffic outside their national borders with the expectation of consolidating international academic or diplomatic collaborations.

Secondly, as a consequence of this situation, there was tension within the Latin American museums over the combination of nationalist and cosmopolitan interests. Consequently, a group of artifacts cataloged as "duplicates" or "repeated" was assigned a role in the exchange systems and concessions, which became especially important in the configuration of scientific networks. In the most extreme cases, replicas were even produced for scientific purposes, fulfilling a teaching function, which would seem to go against the fetishism of the original ancient object.

The interest in promoting the study of their "own" cultures abroad contributed to the prestige of the countries of origin of the collections and to bring attention to the scientific research on archeological subjects in their museums (Figure 5). The recognition of these cultures also encouraged nationalism and thus fulfilled a critical diplomatic function. In this tension between conservation and dissemination interests, the positions of museum agents provoked differentiated responses and treatments between agreements and disagreements regarding exports.

As has been seen, sometimes the Latin American museums themselves were interested in promoting exchanges, and at other times the first accusations of dispossession or what later would be called *consular archeology* were made—where European museums, particularly English and German ones, were criticized and accused of creating unequal relationships in specific cases. The author finds

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that in that context, academic disagreements and the attitudes of the museum agents were mixed with such claims and that it was not necessarily the export of antiquities that was criticized, but the framework of social relationships in which it occurred.

Regional differences were also crucial in the negotiation of this cultural heritage. Among the Argentinian museums, the exchange of archeological and ethnographic objects was predominant as part of a policy of alliances and networks, where it was essential that, in international forums, the advances in the research carried out by their institutions were discussed. On the other hand, although it was also inclined to forge alliances, Bolivia had a stricter policy concerning the export of archeological objects, going so far as to make accusations of trafficking in antiquities. Finally, Mexico had a differentiated process regarding museums and agents, where concessions, complaints, and an exceptional case of restitution all coexisted.

Overall, this research has shown the tip of the iceberg of vast flows of archeological objects that had mobility and recontextualization processes more than a century ago. The agency of heritage custodians is traceable through institutions such as museums. Beyond focusing on the objects themselves, the research demonstrated the social relationships that mediated such currents, which were present in networks of Americanist scientists. In many cases, contrary to common belief, their capacity to respond and negotiate is surprising. This answers the challenge of identifying the circumstances of acquisition and the ownership history to contribute to a social history of the archeological objects in modern negotiations.

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FIGURE 5: Florentino Ameghino researching in his archeological deposit. Year 1902 (Courtesy: Departamento de Documentos Fotográficos, Archivo General de la Nación [AGN], Argentina).

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