

The Invention of ‘National Antiquities’ in the Late Ottoman Empire. Archaeological Interrelations between Discourses of Appropriation, Preservation and Heritage Construction¹

Abstract

In the late 19th century, the German Empire intensified its economic, military, and cultural activities on Ottoman territory. Within the field of archaeology, the Royal Museums in Berlin endeavoured to demonstrate their hegemony. Thus, they focused particularly on the acquisition of ancient objects from the Ottoman territory. The Ottoman authorities’ responses differed between political and cultural actors: While Sultan Abdülhamid II used Hellenistic and Byzantine antiquities as diplomatic gifts to improve his foreign relations to Berlin, the *Müze-i Hümayun* (Imperial Museum) appeared as an antagonist to foreign claims in the Ottoman Empire. Its directors, Osman Hamdi and Halil Edhem, aimed to rectify the discrepancy between political concerns and the will to preserve antiquities within the Ottoman realm. However, German archaeologists, museum representatives and diplomats strived to benefit from this discrepancy to obtain cultural objects for Berlin. The article argues that Prussia’s strategies of appropriating ancient objects for the Royal Museums correlated and entangled with the valorisation of antiquities in Istanbul.

Keywords: Antiquities (*asar-ı atika*); Museum; Preservation; Cultural Heritage; German-Ottoman Relations; Archaeology

1. Introduction

European interest in the ancient world grew steadily from the 16th century onwards. A widespread desire for the acquisition and appropriation of antique objects led to the genesis of an international trade in antiquities.² With the objective of investigating the cradle of European civilization and the search for evidence of biblical places and narratives, the establishment of archaeology as a scholarly discipline in the 19th century prompted a large number of research expeditions as well as numerous and extensive excavations.³ The territory of the Ottoman Empire incorporated traces of various antique civilizations testifying to a continuity of settlements for more than 4000 years. Consequently, the Ottoman

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2 Koçak 2011, 15.

3 Winter 2014, 34.

realm became a hub for the exploitation of antique objects.⁴ In synergy with geopolitical interests, an international competition for excavation sites and cultural assets – a “*scramble for objects*”⁵ – evolved.⁶ The exodus of artefacts from ancient sites in Asia Minor and the Middle East was not only determined by illegal excavations or destruction to extract building materials, but also by the academic, commercial and nationalist interests of museums to acquire prestigious relics of ancient civilizations. Many archaeological enterprises shared a common ambition to aim primarily at an appropriation of antiquities to expand museum collections and to exhibit such objects as symbols of identity,⁷ national triumph and supremacy.⁸

Although the Church of Hagia Eirene was rearranged in 1846 to form a museum,⁹ the Ottoman Empire initially ignored the exodus of cultural assets into foreign museums and only later responded and entered the scramble for objects by establishing the *Müze-i Hümayun* (Imperial Museum) in 1869.¹⁰ Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), since 1881 first Ottoman museum director, intended to put the museum in a powerful position with view to the legal protection and collection of ancient objects. In consequence, he wanted to centralize authority over Ottoman antiquities under his aegis. Eventually, the excavation of the Sidon necropolis in 1887 in connection with the immediate extraction and translocation of the most valuable and prestigious sarcophagi to Istanbul gave Osman Hamdi not only the opportunity to expand the museum but also to gain an international reputation. The display of the Sidon finds finally raised the museum to the same level as its European counterparts in Paris, London, St. Petersburg, and Berlin.¹¹

Despite these measures, which aimed at strengthening the Ottoman sovereignty over antiquities, Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842–1918) continued to use ancient remains as a bargaining chip in the field of foreign policy, and attributed significance to iconic Islamic objects in the context of pan-Islamic ideology and state-supported Islamic symbolism.¹² The tensions between his politics and the *Müze-i Hümayun*'s effort to retain antiquities within the empire reached a climax when the Sultan handed over parts of the façade *Mshatta* (*Qaşr al-Mshatta*) to the German Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941) in

4 Özel and Karadayi 1998, 20–21.

5 In accordance with the model developed by Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, the term *scramble for objects* refers to the exploitation of African Art between 1900 and 1915 and its translocation to European museums. Here, it refers to the exploitation of relics on Ottoman territory and their export to Europe or America. Cp. Schildkrout and Keim 1998, 23.

6 Eldem 2011, 281; Shaw 2003, 35–36; Treue 1957, 286.

7 Uslu 2013, 51; Uslu 2017, 19–20 and 22.

8 Bahrani 2011, 150; Çelik 2011, 446–47; Díaz-Andreu 2007, 142; Malley 2011, 99–123; Shaw 2017, 167–68; Winter 2014, 34 and Willert 2021c, 268.

9 The collection stored at the Church was divided into a collection of antiques (*mecma-ı asar-ı atika*) and a collection of ancient arms (*mecma-ı esliba-ı atika*). Eldem characterised the museum as “*in fact a glorified warehouse*” (Eldem 2016, 123–24).

10 Eldem 2015, 67–80.

11 Cezar 1995, 228 and 253–262; Willert 2021b, 49.

12 Deringil 2011, 16–43; Deringil 1993, 5, 6–12; Shaw 2003, 172–73 and 183–84.

the belief that its components were mere ‘broken stones’ from non-Islamic and hence less valuable architecture. Previously, the Sultan had already assured the Royal Museums in Berlin in 1899 that half of the objects from their excavation campaigns would pass into their possession through an agreement on the division of finds.

Due to the ongoing exodus of objects and general ignorance regarding the conservation of antiquities, Osman Hamdi compiled the Antiquities Law of 1906 together with his brother and successor, Halil Edhem Eldem (1861-1938). For the first time, protective principles applied to Islamic art, which was introduced into the legal corpus.¹³ Although one of the six sections of the *Müze-i Hümayun* was dedicated to ‘Ancient Islamic Arts’ (*Sanayi-i atika-i İslamiye*) in 1889, it was not until 1894 that funds were released and the department implemented.¹⁴ After the death of Osman Hamdi in 1910, Halil Edhem proclaimed Islamic art – with a focus on relics in Anatolia – as ‘national antiquities’. Subsequently, enacting a law for the protection of monuments in 1912 and establishing the *Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi* (Museum of Pious Foundation) in 1914 contributed to the construction of national heritage.¹⁵ For the Royal Museums in Berlin, the ultimate source for the appropriation of antiquities dried up after the Young Turk Revolution. Other ways were sought to acquire prestigious finds.¹⁶ A favourable opportunity for the Royal Museums arose in the context of the Tripolitanian War, the Balkan Wars and internal turmoil in Istanbul. The Sublime Porte’s precarious financial situation during the armed conflicts of 1911-1913 forced the Ottoman government to source financial capital. Following a remark by a German embassy employee, the Grand Vizier and Islamist thinker Said Halim (1864-1921) as well as the radical politician and Minister of the Interior, Talat Pasha (1874-1921), initiated negotiations for a sale of the *Müze-i Hümayun*’s collection. Although it never materialised, the initiative of Said Halim and Talat illustrates the ongoing disconnect between cultural and political actors in the Ottoman Empire regarding the valorisation of antiquities and Islamic art.

Against this background, the present paper examines the interrelation of discourses on appropriation and protection, cultural property’s neglect and valorisation and the struggle for the emergence of Ottoman heritage against German appropriation policy. It seeks to answer the research questions, if and to what extent cultural assets had been subordinated to political and ideological priorities and which implications were made for the preservation of antiquities in the Late Ottoman Empire? Did the Berlin Museums’ desire for objects lead to a sensitisation to the valorisation of antiquities on the Ottoman side? To what extent did the tensions between political and cultural actors affected the conservation of ancient monuments and objects? How did German actors take advantage of the perception of antiquities by Ottoman actors?

After the 1899 agreement on the division of finds and the translocation of *Mshatta*, the 1906 Antiquities Law represents a milestone within the genesis of a comprehensive protection of antiquities while demonstrating opposition to their degradation as com-

13 Makdisi 2011, 272; Shaw 2003, 31.

14 Eldem 2016, 133-34.

15 Eldem 2015, 67.

16 Willert [forthcoming].

modities. Eventually, Halil Edhem's contributions in *Şebbal* dissect the transition to define Islamic art as national heritage. Finally, the negotiations on the sale of the *Müze-i Hümayun's* collection are an example of adapting appropriation mechanisms by German museum representatives and shed light on the perception of antiquities by the ruling members of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP) in Istanbul.

2. Fear and Ignorance of the Sultan and Those Who Benefitted

In his position as Foreign Director of the Berlin Royal Museums Carl Humann (1839-1896) frequently relied on personal negotiations with Osman Hamdi for the acquisition of antiquities for Berlin in the Ottoman Empire. After Humann's death in 1896, his successor Theodor Wiegand (1864-1936) found himself undergoing a probationary period since the Berlin Museums suspected that he would not be able to rely on similar relations with the Ottoman director. Hence, Wiegand sought to consolidate his position primarily through material and negotiation successes. During his first years, he tried to implement three objectives: A division of finds from the excavation campaign in Priene, a successful application for an excavation licence for Miletus and an associated agreement that would guarantee that half of the finds from excavations would pass to the Berlin Museums.

The state visit of Wilhelm II to the Ottoman Empire in 1898 provided German archaeologists and museum representatives with a singular opportunity. Wiegand tried to take advantage of the Kaiser's visit to Istanbul in October 1898 to enforce the desired agreement at the highest diplomatic level. But he was not the only Berlin Museum representative who used the emperor's journey for an enforcement of claims.

Wilhelm Bode (1845-1929), future Director General of the Royal Museums and at that date Director of the Picture Gallery, sent his emissary Wilhelm Vöge (1868-1952) to Istanbul.¹⁷ Vöge was to acquire Byzantine sculptures and tried to convince the German ambassador, Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein (1842-1912), "*that the Emperor was determined to have Christian antiquities from Turkey offered to him by the Sultan in memory of his journey to the Orient.*"¹⁸ His attempt to obtain the export of objects via Abdülhamid II with the help of the embassy failed. Wiegand, still acting director, had already staked his claims: Although he regarded Vöge's presence and agenda as an "*invasion into my [Wiegand's, SW] official domain with great discomfort*", he nevertheless arranged with Osman Hamdi "*that the latter concede us a memorial gift of Christian Antiquities for the Emperor according to a list to be drawn up later.*"¹⁹ In return, Wiegand convinced Bode to purchase

17 Pabstmann 2019, 154-200.

18 "[...] dass der Kaiser bestimmt werde zur Erinnerung an seine Orientreise christliche Alterthümer aus der Türkei sich vom Sultan zum Geschenk machen zu lassen"; DE DAI-Z-AdZ NL-WieT-00862-007, Wiegand 'Vorgeschichte der Erwerbung von Meschatta'.

19 "Ich hatte seine Invasion in mein amtliches Bereich [sic!] mit grossem Missbehagen gesehen, fand mich aber doch sofort bereit, für die christlichen Alterthümer thätig zu sein und erreicht es bei Hamdy Bey,

a painting from the Ottoman museum director for 6,000 francs. According to Wiegand's biographer, Carl Watzinger (1877-1948), the *Müze-i Hümayun* did not collect "Christian monuments"²⁰ and therefore Osman Hamdi willingly helped to acquire the objects.²¹ Documents preserved in the Ottoman Archives illustrate that the wish list included nine objects²²: Seven column capitals from Istanbul, a stone from Thessaloniki, which Edhem Eldem identified as the Great Ambo of Salonika,²³ and a stone from Alaçam, evidently the Petrus Relief.²⁴ The antiquities were commissioned by Bode to be acquired for the Early Christian and Byzantine Department of the Royal Museums in Berlin, which was under development at the time.²⁵ As Edhem Eldem observed, Osman Hamdi followed the German example and began to devote more attention to Byzantine antiquities. When Wiegand wanted to acquire the Ambo of Salonika for the Berlin Museums, he intervened and incorporated the object into the *Müze-Hümayun's* collection.²⁶

In addition to the wish list of ancient Christian and Byzantine antiquities, Wiegand tried to enforce the agreement on the division of finds. Although he had the opportunity to personally discuss his wishes during a conversation with Wilhelm II in Tarabya, he failed in obtaining an intercession by the monarch.²⁷ In addition, the necessary negotiations were at risk of interfering with the appropriation process of archaeological finds from the Priene excavation campaign. Only after the objects acquired for Berlin had been transported out of the Ottoman Empire on August 1, 1899²⁸ did the German diplomats in Istanbul turn their attention to the enforcement of the desired agreement.

To legitimise the claim, German Embassy's First Secretary, Karl von Schlözer (1854-1916) argued that Abdülhamid II had already granted such an agreement to the Russian

dass dieser uns eine Erinnerungsgabe christl. Alterthümer für den Kaiser nach einer noch näher aufzustellenden Liste concedierte [...]"; Ibid.

20 Watzinger 1944, 87.

21 Ibid.: 87-88.

22 MF. MKT. 479/41, 4 Receb 1317 (8 November 1899); İ. MF. 5/91, 15 Şaban 1317 (19 December 1899); BEO 1431/107262, 20 Şaban 1317 (24 December 1899); Y. PRK. ASK. 163/11, 22 Rebiülahir 1318 (4 August 1900). Edhem Eldem also referred to these documents: Eldem 2020, 118, n. 31.

23 Eldem 2020, 118

24 Strzygowski 1901, 29; Strzygowski 1903, 196 and Effenberger 1989, 129. The relief is listed under inventory number 3234 and the name 'Peter in a Miracle Scene' in the collection: Museum of Byzantine Art of the State Museums in Berlin. See online database: Anonymous. n.d. Petrus in einer Wunderszene. Schrankenplatte.

25 Pabstmann 2019, 169-72.

26 DE DAI-Z-AdZ NL-WieT-00862-007, Report Wiegand; DE DAI-Z-AdZ NL-WieT-00146-1900-05-16, Wiegand to Osman Hamdi, Arnavutköy, 16 May 1900. Eldem 2020: 118.

27 DE DAI-Z-AdZ NL-WieT, box 22, n. p., Diary 1896-1899, Wiegand to Kekulé von Stradonitz, Istanbul, 24 October 1898.

28 PA-AA, RZ 503/64603, n.p., Telegram Schlözer to Foreign Office, Tarabya, 1 August 1899; Ibid., n.p., Kuntzen to von Bülow, Berlin, 3 August 1899; Ibid., n. p., Telegram Schlözer to Foreign Office, Tarabya, 15 August 1899; Watzinger 1944, 89. For the excavation result's publication: Wiegand/Schrader 1904: 5.

Empire and that he had allowed the Austrian archaeologists in Ephesus to export all antiquities unearthed at the ancient site to Vienna.²⁹ In preparation for the negotiations, Schlözer identified the Ottoman Sultan to be the decisive factor that would lead to a successful conclusion for Berlin. In his statement, the First Secretary assessed the Sultan's perception of antiquities, referring to Abdülhamid II:

On the other hand, the views of His Majesty the Sultan himself, who shows little interest in the remains of Greek art, be they Hellenic or Byzantine, already with regard to his Muhammadan subjects, make it easier for us to achieve our goals. The fact that not only the Byzantine, but also the classical representations of Hellenic art have contributed significantly, and still contribute, to reminding the Greek subjects of Turkey of their great past and to keeping the pan-Hellenistic ideas alive, could also be successfully asserted at the highest level.³⁰

According to Schlözer's statement, two years after the last armed conflict between Istanbul and Athens,³¹ the path was open to enforce the demand for the division of archaeological finds. Thus, Abdülhamid II feared a valorisation of Greek antiquities in the Ottoman Empire. In consequence, the ancient sites of the Hellenistic and Byzantine eras incorporated a potential threat for the empire's integrity. Following Schlözer's argument, the Greek-speaking population could increasingly identify with the antique monuments and relics. The major concern was that an exposed display of Greek and Byzantine antiquities might generate not only an imaginary space for identity projection and a sense of belonging and nationality but also territorial claims. The preservation and valorisation of antiquities associated with Hellenistic and Byzantine epochs were perceived as having the potential to awaken a national consciousness among Ottoman subjects who, depending on their religious affiliation, belonged to Rum-millet (*millet-i Rum*).³² The reference to Greek antiquity and Byzantine Empire emerged as a leitmotif of Greek nationalism, and attempted to create a unifying bond via "*its political interpretation through the identification of the moderns as descendants of the ancient Greeks.*"³³ In the late 19th century, not only did a variety of concepts around the *Megali Idea* (Great

29 PA-AA, RZ 503/64603, n. p., Schlözer to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Tarabya, 24 August 1899. On the agreement on the division of finds between the Russian Empire and the Sublime Porte: Üre 2020, 3 and 88. For the translocation of the Ephesus-objects to Vienna see: Koçak 2011, 153-55.

30 "Erleichternd andererseits für die Erreichung unserer Zwecke sind die Anschauungen Seiner Majestät des Sultans Selbst, Höchstwelcher, schon mit Rücksicht auf Seine muhamedanischen Untertanen, für die Ueberreste der griechischen Kunst, seien sie nun hellenisch oder byzantinisch, wenig Interesse zeigt. Auch wäre an höchster Stelle mit Erfolg der Umstand geltend zu machen, dass nicht nur die byzantinischen, sondern gerade die klassischen Darstellungen der hellenischen Kunst wesentlich beigetragen haben, und noch jetzt beitragen, die griechischen Untertanen der Türkei an ihre grosse Vergangenheit zu erinnern und die pan-hellenistischen Ideen wach zu halten"; PA-AA, RZ 503/64603, n. p., Schlözer to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Tarabya, 24 August 1899.

31 Şenişik 2011.

32 Zelepos 2002, 43-44.

33 Ibid., 56.

Idea)³⁴ flourish in the Ottoman realm, but also other proto-nationalist ideas, of which the Albanian *Rilindja* and the Arabic *Nabda* – both meaning national *Renaissance* – were the most advanced.³⁵ In context of the Megali Idea, Greek and Byzantine antiquities became an identification factor and Abdülhamid II supported their migration to the German Empire. The German Embassy interpreted the Sultan's perception of antiquities and tried to exploit it for the benefit of the Royal Museums. The diplomats were aware of the threat that independence movements posed to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and used the relation between the development of national consciousness and the valorisation of cultural assets to acquire desirable antiquities. To demonstrate Berlin's imperial interest in the excavations at Miletus, Marschall von Bieberstein planned to attend the ceremonial opening of the campaign. The ambassador used the opportunity to announce the journey to Abdülhamid II in the context of a *Selamlık* to obtain a verbal concession for an agreement on the division of finds. The Ambassador reported:

At my audience today, in which I informed him [Abdülhamid II] of my forthcoming journey to Miletus, the Sultan gave me the confirmation that half of all the objects found in excavations organised by the Berlin Museum in the Turkish Empire would be allocated to the Museum. The Sultan remarked that he was particularly pleased to make this promise after hearing that His Majesty the Emperor was interested in these excavations. He would immediately issue the necessary orders and asked me to consider the matter settled.³⁶

A month later, on October 30, 1899, following the instructions of the Sultan's General-Secretary (*Mabeyn başkatip*) Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pasha (1827-1901) sent the Sultan's order to *Hariciye Nezareti* (Foreign Ministry). According to the document, in response to the request of the Berlin Museum, half of the antiquities from the excavations undertaken by the Royal Museums would be conceded to Berlin, while the other half would be given to the Ottoman government.³⁷ Two weeks later, on November 15, *Hariciye Nezareti* sent a verbal note signed by Foreign Minister Ahmet Tevfik Pasha (1845-1936) to the German Embassy in Istanbul. The text read:

34 Ibid., 52-55.

35 Hanioglu 2008, 142; Hourani 2013, 56, 67-102.

36 "Zu meiner heutigen Audienz, in welcher ich von meiner bevorstehenden Reise nach Milet Mitteilung machte, hat mir der Sultan die Zusage gegeben, daß von allen Fund-Objecten aus Ausgrabungen welche das Berliner Museum im türkischen Reiche veranstaltet, die Hälfte dem Museum zugewiesen werden solle. Der Sultan bemerkte dabei, daß er diese Zusage mit besonderer Freude ertheile, nachdem er vernommen, daß Seine Majestät der Kaiser Interesse an diesen Ausgrabungen nehme. Er werde sofort die nöthigen Befehle ertheilen und bitte mich, die Angelegenheit als erledigt zu betrachten"; PA-AA, RZ 503/64603, n. p., Marschall von Bieberstein to Foreign Office, Tarabya, 29 September 1899.

37 „Berlin Müzesi için âsâr-ı atika taharrisi hakkında ale'l-ıuşûl vâkî' olacak istid'â üzerine tabarriyâta nizâmı dâ'iresinde ruhsat verildikde zubûr edecek âsâr-ı atikanın nısfının hükümet-i seniyyeye ve nısf-ı diğêrinin mezkûr Berlin Müzesi'ne itâsî arz [...]“; HR.İD. 1446/33/3, 24 Cemaziyelahir 1317 (30 October 1899).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the honour to inform the Embassy of His Majesty the Emperor of Germany that an Iradé of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan authorises the Berlin Museum to keep for itself half of the antiquities it would discover through authorised research and to leave the other half to the Imperial Government. The necessary communications on this subject have been made to the Ministry of Public Education.³⁸

While the document thus authorised the Royal Museums to appropriate half of those finds of their excavation campaigns previously approved by the Ottoman authorities, corresponding instructions had been issued to the *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti* (Ministry of Education), which was responsible for excavation matters. Six days later Marschall von Bieberstein confirmed receipt of the document.³⁹ The exchange of notes laid the foundation for a bilateral treaty and was celebrated in Berlin.

3. The Translocation of *Mshattu*

The German archaeologists and museum representatives were not satisfied with potential appropriations of antiquities from excavation campaigns. Recalling the wish list developed in the aftermath of Wilhelm II’s visit to Istanbul, the Royal Museums sought to further exploit the Sultan’s lack of interest in Byzantine-era remains. Again, the personal bond between the sovereigns was used to appropriate remains of important architectural structures and other finds for Berlin. With the help of photographs of a desert palace taken by Rudolf Ernst Brünnow (1858-1917), the Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941) convinced Bode in spring 1902 to campaign for the acquisition of the façade of *Mshatta*.⁴⁰ According to Wiegand, Wilhelm II had already been assured during his trip to the Ottoman Empire in 1898 that the Royal Museums would be allowed to incorporate an ancient Christian church portal from the Hawran in their collections.⁴¹

At the beginning of the appropriation process, museum representatives in Berlin were at odds about the provenance and construction date of *Mshatta*. While Jens Kröger stated in 2004, that “*experts*” assumed “*at the latest since 1910, an early Islamic date*”⁴² for its construction, when the translocation process was completed, Strzygowski in his art historical analysis estimated *Mshatta* to be erected by Ghassanids between the fourth

38 “*Le Ministère des Aff. Etr. a l’honneur d’informer l’Ambde de S.M. l’Empereur d’Allemagne qu’un Un Iradé de S.M. Ile le Sultan autorise le Musée de Berlin à garder pour lui la moitié des antiquités qu’il serait découvrirait au moyen des recherches autorisées, en en laissant l’autre moitié au Govt Il. Les communications nécessaires à ce sujet ont été faites au Ministère Il de l’Instruction Publique*”; HR.ID. 1446/33/1, Hariciye Nezareti to German Embassy, Istanbul, 15 November 1899.

39 HR.ID. 1446/33/4, German Embassy to Hariciye Nezareti, Pera, 21 November 1899.

40 Enderlein 2008, 415-16; Koçak 2011, 147 and Willert 2021a, 228.

41 DE DAI-Z-AdZ NL-WieT-00862-007, n. p., Report Wiegand.

42 Kröger 2004, 39.

to sixth centuries.⁴³ Responding directly to this hypothesis, Carl Heinrich Becker (1876-1933) expressed doubt and claimed that the palace ruins were the work of the Umayyads.⁴⁴ As early as August 1902 – more than a year before the demolition project began – the German archaeologist Otto Puchstein (1856-1911) suspected after a one-day exploratory survey that *Mshatta* would have architectural components from the Islamic period:

It is a rectangular fort (or a fortified Khan?) with walls & towers & with a gate on the S[outhern] side. Inside, about the middle third is separated from the N[orth] to the S[outh] by two dividing walls and in between there are several smaller rooms to the west in the S[outh], next to the large gate hall, while to the east, among the less numerous rooms, there is a large hall stretching from the N[orth] to the S[outh], which has a small niche in the S[outh], facing Mecca – so it should be a mosque with its mihrab.⁴⁵

The German archaeologists were aware that Abdülhamid II pursued a different art policy regarding monuments and objects with references to Islamic origins, as opposed to ancient remains of the Greek and Byzantine eras. Puchstein knew that a reference to an Islamic history connection of the building could prevent its appropriation and therefore warned in his letter to General-Director of the Royal Museums in Berlin, Richard Schöne (1840-1922): “*The existence of a mosque in Mshatta must never be mentioned to the Turkish government.*”⁴⁶

Regardless of the architectural provenance, Wilhelm II immediately supported the acquisition of the portal via Abdülhamid II in order to “*possess the ornamental panels of Mshatta for the newly opened Kaiser Friedrich Museum.*”⁴⁷ Despite the unknown origin, German museum representatives and diplomats followed Puchstein’s recommendation. For the Ottoman authorities, the German Embassy in Istanbul referred to architectural remains of a castle near Al-Salt which was constructed during the reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian I (approx. 482-565). Subject to the condition of a possible subsequent excavation, the Embassy applied for a research permit under the supervi-

43 Strzygowski 1904, 367; Becker 1905/06, 425 and Troelenberg 2016, 110. Grabar emphasised that in addition to *Mshatta*, other Islamic buildings were often thought to be Roman or Byzantine, while academic and non-academic discourses on its dating centred, among others, around the antipodes Orient/Rome: Grabar 1978, 177 and Grabar 1987, 243.

44 Becker 1905/06, 425-26.

45 “*Es ist ein rechteckiges Castell (oder ein befestigter Chan?) mit Mauern & Thürmen & mit einem Thor an der S-Seite. Innen ist etwa das mittlere Drittel von N nach S durch 2 Scheidemauern abge-sondert und dazwischen liegen im S neben der großen Thorhalle westlich mehrere kleinere Räume, wäh-rend östlich unter den weniger zahlreichen Räumen ein großer von N nach S gestreckter Saal auffällt, der im S, nach Mekka zu, eine kleine Nische hat – also eine Moschee mit ihrem Mihrab sein müsste*”; SMB-ZA, I/IM 006, fol. 49, Puchstein to Schöne, Baalbek, 5 August 1902.

46 “*Von dem ev. Vorhandensein einer Moschee in Mschatta darf gegenüber der türk. Regierung niemals die Rede sein*”; Ibid., fol. 51, Puchstein to Schöne, Baalbek, 5 August 1902.

47 “*die Ornamentplatten von Meschatta für das neu zu eröffnende Kaiser Friedrich Museum zu besitzen [...]*”; Ibid., fol. 62, Wiegand to German Embassy, Istanbul, 17 August 1902.

sion of Gottlieb Schumacher (1857-1925) for a team of archaeologists. The permission to investigate the ancient monument was issued to the architect, but the Sublime Porte authorised the survey of the monument’s surface only, while excavations and especially the removal of antiquities and objects were expressly forbidden. Schumacher was allowed to conduct academic investigations, take photographs, and make drawings of the ruins. At the same time, he was obliged, in case he found inscriptions, to take photographs and to hand over copies to the *Miize-i Hümayun*.⁴⁸

German archaeologists, museum representatives and diplomats were aware that Osman Hamdi would perceive a possible translocation of the *Msbatta* façade “as a personal offence.”⁴⁹ If he knew about the plans to appropriate part of the architecture, he was certain to counteract and launch an intervention. A primary goal was therefore to keep the plan to transfer the façade to Berlin secret, circumventing the Ottoman antiquities administration. As Wiegand put it, to secure the façade for the Berlin Museums, the German Embassy had “to be on guard that Hamdy Bey won’t balk that intention.”⁵⁰ However, the diplomats in Istanbul considered the façade’s appropriation via Abdülhamid II as the ultimate rationale, whereas the Foreign Office in Berlin preferred to come to an agreement with Osman Hamdi on the matter.⁵¹ The Embassy followed the directive given from Berlin and changed strategy only after Osman Hamdi demanded that photographs taken of *Msbatta* be sent as required by the permit. As he now had the opportunity to realize the extent of the appropriation, the Ottoman Museum director tried to prevent the initiative. Immediately, the German Embassy embarked on the alternative approach via Abdülhamid.⁵²

On May 29, 1903, the German Embassy’s Chargé d’Affaires Hans von Wangenheim (1859-1915) met Abdülhamid II. His audience was adjourned to another date, but the diplomat was able to hand over a memorandum.⁵³ According to Wangenheim, Abdülhamid II presented the memorandum to the Council of Ministers for consideration, which initially rejected it, whereupon the Sultan demanded that a “*mazbata drafted in a favourable spirit be presented*.”⁵⁴ On June 11, 1903, Wangenheim received notification that the Sultan would present the façade to Wilhelm II as a personal gift, and would in return receive horses from the Trakehnen stud farm in East Prussia.⁵⁵

48 HR.TH. 273/41, 2 Cemaziyelahir 1320 (6 September 1902); MFMKT. 661/24-1-24-2, 19 Cemaziyelahir 1320 (23 September 1902) and SMB-ZA, I/IM 006, fol. 79-fol. 79v., Translation of Decree to Vali of Syria, n.p., 10. Cemaziyelahir 1320 (14. September 1902).

49 “[...] als eine persönliche Kränkung [...]”; SMB-ZA, I/IM 006, fol. 62, Wiegand to German Embassy, Istanbul, 17 August 1902.

50 “[...] und dabei nur auf der Hut sein müssen, dass Hamdy Bey diese Absicht nicht vereitelt”; Ibid.

51 BArch, R 901/37702, fol. 23, handwritten Note, Berlin, 20 April 1903.

52 Ibid., fols. 75-76, Wangenheim to Foreign Office, Pera, 20 May 1903; Ibid., fols. 77-78, Wangenheim to Foreign Office, Pera, 20 May 1903.

53 SMB-ZA, I/IM 006, fols. 163-163v., Wiegand to Schöne, Istanbul, 30 May 1903.

54 “[...] in günstigem Sinne abgefaßtes Mazbata vorzulegen.” BArch, R 901/37702, fols. 93-93v., Telegram Wangenheim to Foreign Office, Tarabya, 4 June 1903

55 BArch, R 901/37703, fol. 17, Wangenheim to Foreign Office, Tarabya, 11 June 1903; DH.MKT. 725/67, 22 Rebiülevvel 1321 (18 June 1903). Troelenberg 2016, 61.

The dismantling under the direction of the German engineer Schumacher was followed by the transport of 459 stone blocks, packed in 422 crates, towards Beirut. The crates were loaded onto the steamer “Leros” of the German Levant Line and ultimately reached Berlin via Hamburg on December 23, 1903. Eventually, the architectural fragments of the *Mshatta* façade were incorporated into the newly built Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, where the architecture was to become one of the main attractions and later one of the most important objects of the museum’s Islamic Department.⁵⁶

In the end, Watzinger stated that it had been Abdülhamid II, who commented on the translocation of the architectural fragments of *Mshatta* with the words: “*Here are these foreign fools, I console them with broken stones.*”⁵⁷ If this is true, the statement revealed the Sultan’s view of a relic that he considered to be of Byzantine origin and whose conservation he considered a threat to the continuity of his empire.

4. The Antiquity Law of 1906

After Abdülhamid II rejected Osman Hamdi’s request to resign in the aftermath of *Mshatta*’s translocation, *Müze-i Hümayun*’s General Directorate convinced the Sultan to enforce a revision of the Antiquities Law of 1884. In 1906 an extended legislation comprising 35 articles passed with the Sultan’s support. It required the immediate reporting of antiquities to the *Müze-i Hümayun* and established a closer cooperation between district administrations and the museum’s general directorate. The revision was a reaction to the experiences of the translocation of *Mshatta*, the ongoing export of antiquities from Ephesus to Vienna under the protection of Abdülhamid II and the illicit antiquities trade operated by antique dealers, diplomats as well as foreign archaeologists.⁵⁸ With the law’s promulgation, Osman Hamdi aimed at centralizing sovereignty over antiquities in the *Müze-i Hümayun*, declaring in Art. 1:

The general directorate of the Imperial Museums oversees all matters concerning antiquities in the Turkish Empire. For this purpose, a permanent commission has been formed, consisting of the general director as chairman, his assistant and at least two other members appointed by the general directorate from among the museum’s custodians in Constantinople.⁵⁹

Osman Hamdi expressed his perception of the general directorate as the superior institution regarding all archaeological questions in the Ottoman Empire establishing a

56 Kröger 2004, 39 and Willert 2021b, 228-30.

57 “*Voilà ces imbéciles étrangers, je les console de pierres cassées.*”; Watzinger 1944, 170.

58 Marchand 1996, 206; Koçak 2011, 132-33 and 156-57.

59 “*Die Generaldirektion der Kaiserlichen Museen ist mit der Erledigung sämtlicher die Altertümer im Türkischen Reich betreffenden Angelegenheiten beauftragt. Zu diesem Zwecke ist eine ständige Kommission gebildet worden, welche aus dem Generaldirektor als Vorsitzendem, dessen Adjunkt und mindestens zwei weiteren Mitgliedern besteht, welche von der Generaldirektion aus den Aufsehern des Museums in Konstantinopel gewählt werden*”; PA-AA, RZ 503/64440, annex to report, 16 May 1906. See also: Reinach 1908, 405.

central commission for antiquities.⁶⁰ Increased administrative cooperation was intended to ensure that the law was complied with, aiming at supervising the activities of foreign archaeologists. The law also stipulated that the general directorate would have a monopoly on the investigation, research, exploration, and excavation of antiquities. As a new feature, all articles would also apply to Islamic art.⁶¹

The law's publication provoked interventions by various European powers. The German counsellor of the embassy in Istanbul, Hans Bodman (1862-1923), formally protested on August 10, 1906.⁶² In his note to Ahmet Tevfik Pasha, Bodman argued that the Ottoman Antiquity Law "*includes several provisions which, from the point of view of their application to German archaeological enterprises, give rise to objections*" and that he believed it was his "*duty to formulate certain reservations with regard to them, while regretting that the Imp. Ottoman Govt. has refrained from initiating a prior agreement between him and the foreign missions on this subject.*"⁶³ Of particular importance was his criticism of the paragraph which stated that all previously concluded contracts would be cancelled, as German archaeologists and diplomats perceived a threat to the agreement on the division of finds. Ultimately, Bodman demanded to revise the law with immediate effect. Moreover, the documents of the German Foreign Office contain various strategies proposed by German archaeologists, museum officials and diplomats to prevent the law, ranging from Osman Hamdi's dismissal to the formation of an international alliance of European powers.⁶⁴ In his response, Osman Hamdi strengthened that it was "*the main concern of the General Directorate of the Imperial Museums [...] to prevent the destruction of artistic monuments and their dispersion abroad*"⁶⁵ highlighting that

[t]he Ottoman Government, in legislating on archaeological excavations, has decided on an internal matter; the monuments of the past, whether they belong to Greek, Roman or Islamic art, are part of the public domain, such as the natural

60 Koçak 2011, 160.

61 Reinach 1908, 405-12. Concerning Islamic Art especially Art. IV stating that this article also includes 'Islamic art and industry.'; Ibid.: 406.

62 HR.İD. 1446/52/1, Bodman to Tevfik Pasha, *Thérapie*, 10 August 1906.

63 "*Le nouveau règlement sur les antiquités du 29 Safer/10 Avril 1324/1322 contenant plusieurs dispositions qui, au point de vue de leur application aux entreprises archéologiques Allemandes, donnent matière à objection, je crois de mon devoir de formuler certaines réserves à leur égard, tout en regrettant que le Gouvernement Impérial Ottoman se soit dispensé de provoquer une entente préalable entre lui et les missions étrangères à ce sujet*"; HR.İD. 1446/52/1, Bodman to Tevfik Pasha, *Thérapie*, 10 August 1906.

64 The protests of the foreign missions of the German Empire, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia indicate an agreement on the nature and form of the protest between the European actors. See: HR.İD. 1446/52/1 [Imperial German Embassy; 10. August 1906]; HR.İD. 1446/52/61 [British Embassy, 1 October 1906]; HR.İD. 1446/52/9 [Italian Embassy; 26 October 1906]; HR.İD. 1446/52/10-1 [Russian Embassy; 17/30 November 1906].

65 "*la [sic!] Direction Générale des Musées Impériaux a pour principale préoccupation d'empêcher la destruction des monuments artistique et leur dispersion à l'étranger*"; HR.İD. 1446/52/18-1, Note Osman Hamdi, n. d.

resources of the soil, and everything related to their research can only be regulated by it.⁶⁶

Osman Hamdi identified the cause for the exodus of cultural assets to be the activities of foreign archaeologists and diplomats. In this context, he addressed destruction, pointing to the General Directorate's right to save antiquities "from barbaric destruction or mutilation [...]."⁶⁷ But he also tried to define the antiquities of the Ottoman Empire as a public good and postulated to integrate Greek, Roman, and Islamic art not only into the canon of law but also into the perception of Ottoman heritage and its relics as a compilation of diverging civilizations. He challenged Abdülhamid II's pan-Islamic orientation, who ascribed a singular significance to Islamic assets as a symbol of his self-perception as Sultan-Caliph. The Antiquities Law protected ancient remains of all epochs, fixing in written form an equivalence of valorisation regardless of provenance.

Concerning Bodman's insistence on the validity of the 1899 agreement, Osman Hamdi initially stated that the *Müze-i Hümayun*'s General Directorate had no information about such a treaty and therefore, could not refer to it.⁶⁸ After the *Hariciye Nezareti* highlighted that the German protest note aimed at preserving the agreement, Osman Hamdi was presumably made aware of the exchange of verbal notes. He then wrote a "Note complémentaire" and took a stand:

This text consists of an Imperial Iradé concerning the excavations carried out in Miletus by the Berlin Museum and authorising the dispatch to this Museum of half of the ancient objects that would be discovered as a result of excavations duly authorised on request presented in due form in the name of this same Museum. An examination of this document suffices to show that the terms by which it is referred to in the Note of the Imperial German Embassy do not suit it. Indeed, we do not find in it any of the ordinary characteristics of a diplomatic convention between the German and Ottoman Governments, either as to its substance or as to its form. Simply unilateral, [it] constitutes an act of liberality granted by H.I.M. the Sultan, and it does not contain any stipulations, given the impossibility of reconciling it with a measure of pure favour.⁶⁹

66 "Le Gouvernement Ottoman, en légiférant sur les fouilles archéologiques, a statué sur une question d'ordre intérieur ; les monuments [sic !] du passé, qu'ils appartiennent à l'art grec, romain ou Islamique, font partie du domaine public, comme les richesses naturelles du sol, et tout ce qui a trait à leurs recherches ne peut être réglé que par lui"; HR.İD 1446/52/18-3, Note Osman Hamdi Bey, n. d.

67 "[...] de la destruction ou de mutilations barbares"; HR.İD. 1446/52/18-7, Note Osman Hamdi Bey, n. d.

68 HR.İD. 1446/52/18-4, Note Osman Hamdi, n.d.

69 "Ce texte consiste en un Iradé Impérial concernant les fouilles effectuées à Milet par le Musée de Berlin, et autorisant l'envoi à ce Musée de la moitié des objets antiques qui seraient découverts à la suite de fouilles dûment autorisées sur requête présenté en due forme au nom de ce même Musée. L'examen de ce document suffit à démontrer que les termes par lesquels il est désigné dans la Note de l'Ambassade Impériale d'Allemagne ne lui conviennent pas. On n'y rencontre en effet aucun des caractères ordinaires

In his additional response, Osman Hamdi clarified that the concession of appropriation only related to the excavation of Miletus and was contingent on the Sultan's generosity. For this reason, it could not constitute a bilateral treaty and would not impose any obligations on the *Müze-i Hümayun*. Through his addendum, he underlined his opposition to the Sultan's art policy not only by referring to the principle clarified in the Antiquities Law, but also by attempting to limit the effect of the agreement granted by Abdülhamid II.

Osman Hamdi succeeded in institutionalizing and professionalizing the protection of antiquities in the Ottoman Empire until his death in 1910. His interest in research and collecting laid mainly in the relics of Greek and Roman antiquity, however, he attempted to cover antiquities of all epochs with a protective status and therefore completed and refined the Antiquities Law.

5. Towards a National Heritage

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Young Turk Revolution and its aftermath increased the radicalization and ethnicization of Turkish nationalism. It "*obscured the transitions, linkages, confluences, and intertwining between the imperial, confessional, and ethnic manifestations and features of Turkish nationalism.*"⁷⁰ In the course of Sultan Abdülhamid's deposition, it opened a new liberal, public, and political field with influence on intellectual cultural transformation. Indeed, a shift in the perception of Islamic art had already been brought to the museum earlier by Halil Edhem,⁷¹ but the valorisation of cultural heritage in the post-revolutionary years and the implications of proto-nationalistic ideas with strong relations to the concept of ethnic superiority now became increasingly political.

The Ottoman Empire was threatened by further territorial losses in Ottoman Tripolitania, the Cyrenaica, and the Balkan region. Liberal parliamentary ideas were abandoned as the Young Turks encountered the Empire's decline with the idea that only radical nationalism could save the Ottoman inheritance from disintegration. Doğan Gürpınar explains:

New intellectual milieus immersed with new historical visions emerged around nationalist journals such as *Türk Yurdu* and *Halka Doğru*, in which numerous stimulating articles appeared on Turkish history, archaeology, literature, and sociology from the early 1910s onward.⁷²

d'une convention diplomatique, entre les Gouvernements Allemand et Ottoman, ni quant au fond, ni quand [sic !] à la forme. Simplement un[i]latéral, [il] constitue un acte de libéralité consentie par S.M.I. le Sultan, et il ne porte pas de stipulations, vu l'impossibilité de concilier celle-ci avec une mesure de pure faveur"; HR.İD. 1446/52/18-2, Note complémentaire, n.D.

70 Gürpınar 2013, 18.

71 Eldem 2015, 80.

72 Gürpınar 2013, 18.

Within the framework of Ziya Gökalp's (1876-1924) goal to increasingly modernise, muslimise and ultimately Turkify the Ottoman realm,⁷³ Halil Edhem's work was intended to contribute to the construction of an identity based on Turkish nationalism. Since his appointment as director of the *Müze-i Hümayun* in 1910, he devoted himself to promoting the necessity of conserving cultural assets and was influenced by radical nationalism. Halil Edhem reacted euphorically to the coup and wrote to his friend, the archaeologist Hermann Volrath Hilprecht (1859-1925), on July 27, 1908:

Since 24 July, we have been freed from the horrible bondage. [...] Everything breathes a sigh of relief. The country will revive, the sciences will develop, scholars will be able to travel freely in the country!⁷⁴

In the revolution's aftermath he tried to consolidate his perception of the protection of cultural assets. In a series of publications entitled "*Asar-ı Atika*" (Antiquities) in *Şebabal*, Halil Edhem documented the destruction of architecture, monuments, and objects. He published photographs of monuments and artefacts threatened by destruction or translocation abroad. Proto-nationalistic ideas shone through the subtitle of his first contribution: "*Asar-ı Atika-i Milliyemiz Nasıl Mabv Oluyor?*"⁷⁵ ("How are our national antiquities being destroyed?"). In contrast to the articles in various journals that had appeared regularly since the 1880s, the *Müze-i Hümayun*'s General Director declared various monuments to be 'national antiquities'. Halil Edhem began his first article describing the ruins from Gebze. He referred to the *Çoban Mustafa Paşa Külliyesi* (Çoban Mustafa Pasha Complex), which is situated on a hill to the northwest of the town.⁷⁶ The mosque complex had been commissioned by Çoban Mustafa Pasha (?-1529), who participated in the conquest of Egypt under Selim I (1470-1520) and eventually became Vali of Egypt, Grand Vizier and son-in-law of the sultan. Although it is quite a small mosque in size, it is especially known for its rich ornamentation. Halil Edhem particularly emphasised that Çoban Mustafa donated, among other valuable objects, four bronze lanterns to the mosque inscribed with the name of the Mamluk Sultan Al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghuri (c.1441-1516). Three of the lanterns were stolen two years prior to the article's publication. Although the museum director sent photographs of the lanterns to the customs authorities to prevent their export, the search was unsuccessful. Resignedly, Halil Edhem suspected that the objects had been taken to antiquities shops or museums outside the Ottoman Empire. Based on this example, he pointed to significant objects in religious complexes in other parts of the empire, and in particular works of decorative art from Egypt, Damascus and Iraq. Halil Edhem then discussed the state of *Türbe* in Anatolia, referring first to *Şabne Kümbeti* dating from 629,⁷⁷ which

73 Kieser 2018, 98-106; Parla 1985.

74 "Seit 24 Juli sind wir von der entsetzlichen Knechtschaft befreit. [...] Alles athmet auf. Das Land wird aufleben, die Wissenschaften werden sich entwickeln, Gelehrte werden frei im Lande reisen können!"; FSUJ, HSN 00031, Halil Edhem to Hermann V. Hilprecht, 27 July 1908.

75 Halil Edhem 1911, 226. Also cited in: Çelik 2016, 123-24.

76 Halil Edhem 1911, 226.

77 Üçer 2017, 127.

is situated in the outskirts of Sivas. In addition, he mentioned monuments⁷⁸ from Konya, Kayseri, Niğde and Karaman and emphasized their ruinous state and the ongoing theft of valuable artefacts from the complexes. Finally, Halil Edhem ended on the recommendation of enacting a law for the conservation of the old national antiquities. The General Director was sure of the deputies' support for the monument protection, but he doubted whether the law's provisions would be respected. He emphasized his objective to counteract the process of disappearance of material memories of the past which symbolised national greatness, finding effective means to prevent the decay of material traces of ancient glory.⁷⁹ Significantly, Halil Edhem only referred to relics of the Islamic past and especially from Anatolia, which gained importance within the process of ethnic radicalisation within the CUP. With a focus on architecture and assets from the Anatolian Islamic past, Halil Edhem argued for comprehensive protection of these relics in other articles underlining the need to preserve the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. His contribution "*Asar-ı Atika: Yine Konya*" (Antiquities. Again Konya) concluded:

[A]mong the laws our government passes should be one on the 'conservation of national heritage.' There is no time left: the most beautiful and the noblest sacred buildings are being ruined day by day.⁸⁰

The museum director pointed out the historical and artistic significance of the monuments and objects of Islamic art from Anatolia, which, originated from Byzantine, especially in the case of Konya, but above all Seljuk and Ottoman times and were sometimes intertwined. Halil Edhem ended his article with the more general note that valuable antiquities were to be found in villages of all corners of the empire, from Edirne to Iraq, from Syria to Palestine,⁸¹ but he did not name any specific places or monuments outside Anatolia.

The Regulation for the protection of monuments (*Mubâfaza-i Âbidat Nizamnâmesi*), publicly demanded by Halil Edhem through his articles, was enacted on July 28, 1912, and specified that monuments would be subsumed under Article 5 of the Antiquities Law of 1906 and thus be considered antiquities. Yet, the law provided a special regulation according to which a building could be demolished immediately if it was in such a precarious condition that it posed a danger to the surrounding area. But the decorated and inscribed parts of the building to be demolished were to be preserved.⁸²

78 Halil Edhem mentioned the following sites: Karamanoğlu İbrahim Bey İmareti (Karaman); Beyhekim Mosque (Konya); Alaeddin Köşkü (Alaeddin's Kiosk, Konya); Sahabiye Medrese (Kayseri); Taşmedrese and Seyyid Mahmut Türbesi (Akşehir); Karaca Mosque (Mihalıç); Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha Mosque (İzmit); Aydınoğlu Mosque (Ayasoluk). Halil Edhem 1911, 226-28.

79 Halil Edhem 1911, 228.

80 Halil Edhem 1912, 212-13. Quoted from: Çelik 2016, 122-23.

81 Halil Edhem 1911, 227-28. See also: Çelik 2016, 124.

82 DH.İD., 129/12, 16 Safer 1330 (5 February 1912). Altınyıldız 2007, 286; Papatheodorou 2020, 115.

When Halil became director of the *Müze-i Hümayun* in 1910, there was a generational change including a shift in political views and motivations to preserve Ottoman heritage. This led to the enforced protection of Islamic antiquities of the Seljuk and Ottoman periods as well as attempts to instrumentalize the heritage defined as ‘national antiquities’ to serve the construction of an Ottoman identity based on Sunni-Turkish roots. With the aim of redefining the Ottoman heritage according to national patterns, focusing on the Islamic period, the *Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi* (Museum of Pious Foundation) opened in April 1914, leaving the *Müze-i Hümayun* as a “*showcase of civilization*.”⁸³

6. Secret Negotiations

On the eve of the First World War, the Antiquities Law of 1906 had made any legal appropriation of cultural assets from the Ottoman Empire almost impossible. Additionally, the Berlin Museums lost their agent in Istanbul due to the revolution of 1908 and the dethronement of Abdülhamid II. Once again, the perception of non-Islamic antiquities within Istanbul’s ruling elite was to be exploited for the benefit of Berlin’s museums. In consequence, the collection of the *Müze-i Hümayun* was on the verge of translocation to Berlin. Towards the end of the Second Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire found itself in a political, financial, and military state of emergency. Adrianople had been occupied by Bulgarian troops and Istanbul needed financial liquidity to maintain the possibility of recapturing the former Ottoman capital. During the war, Ottoman Minister of Finance Abdurrahman Vefik Sayın (1856-1956) turned to 1st Dragoman of the German Embassy in Istanbul, Theodor Weber (1872-?), who, according to the records of the German archaeologist Martin Schede (1883-1947), casually said: “*If you need money, why not sell the museum?*”⁸⁴ Although the minister initially refused to do so, he sent his agent shortly afterwards to verify the seriousness of the Dragoman’s offer. On July 6, 1913, the German ambassador in Istanbul, Hans von Wangenheim, telegraphed to Berlin and asked whether there was interest in a loan transaction on the *Müze-i Hümayun*’s collection. Five days later he sent another telegram reporting “*Talat, Minister of the Interior, came unsolicited to speak on the museum matter and emphasized willingness to conclude with German finance*.”⁸⁵ The news from Istanbul were followed by a meeting at *Deutsche Bank* in July 1913. In the presence of the bank’s board member Arthur von Gwinner (1856-1931), it was decided that the bank was willing to provide 10 million *Reichsmark* to purchase the main parts of the Ottoman Museum – especially the finds of the Sidonian necropolis and twelve of the best statues.⁸⁶ A German delegation was established to negotiate in Istanbul. The delegation travelled via Odessa to Istanbul and reached the Ottoman capital on July 20, 1913, where the first meeting at the Ger-

83 Eldem 2015, 80.

84 “*Wenn Sie Geld brauchen, warum verkaufen Sie nicht das Museum?*”; SMB-ZA, I/ANT 050, fol. 2, Schede’s Records, 1920.

85 “*Talat Bey, der Minister des Innern, kam unaufgefordert auf die Museumsangelegenheit zu sprechen und betonte die Bereitwilligkeit mit deutscher Finanz abzuschließen*”; Ibid., fols. 2-3.

86 Ibid., fol. 3.

man embassy took place on July 21.⁸⁷ From the Ottoman side, Arif Bey, President of the Bar Association, and the Armenian businessman Leon Bey were sent as mediators.⁸⁸ On July 26, Schede reported to Berlin that the following was to be acquired for the 10 million Marks provided by the *Deutsche Bank*:

1. all objects of the Sidonian royal necropolis including the so-called Alexander's sarcophagus.
2. the entire collection of Christian art from Byzantium, Asia Minor, etc.
3. a selection of the very best and most distinguished other works of art from the Constantinople Museum in marble, bronze, precious metals, ceramics.⁸⁹

Hope for the acquisition of important antiquities was based on the assumption that the leading political functionaries of the Ottoman Empire would not attach any value to the collection of the *Müze-i Hümayun*. As Wiegand expressed in a letter to Schede "*Helfferrich* [Karl Helfferrich (1872-1924), director of the *Deutsche Bank*, SW] is firmly convinced that the matter is for purchase, he knows his Turks & neither Talaat nor Said Halim attach importance to the sarcophagi etc."⁹⁰

During negotiations in Istanbul, the Ottoman negotiators refused to sell the museum or parts of its collection and presented the idea of pledging the objects on condition that they remain in Istanbul.⁹¹ The German delegation rejected this option and aimed at the translocation of some outstanding objects to Berlin. The negotiators were under time pressure as the Ottoman side expected a decision by August 4, 1913 – the beginning of *Ramazan* – in order to be able to pay salaries to state officials and officers. The transaction was threatened by two possible alternatives: A credit of the *Dette publique* or a loan granted by a third country. After the *Dette publique* as well as the Régie Company (*Société de la régie co-intéressée des tabacs de l'empire Ottoman*) announced the possibility of large payments, Schede concluded that "*the big moment was missed*."⁹² Nevertheless, Karl Helfferrich referred to the ongoing need for money in Istanbul and thereby underpinned the Royal Museum's hope for concluding a pledge transaction including the display of prestigious archaeological finds in Berlin. However, negotiations were complicated by the involvement of Wilhelm Bode, now director general of the Royal Museums, other departments and especially the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*

87 Ibid., fol. 4.

88 Ibid., fol. 32.

89 "1. sämtliche Gegenstände der sidonischen Königsnekropole mit Einschluß des sogenannten Alexandersarkophages. 2. die ganze Sammlung christlicher Kunst aus Byzanz, Kleinasien usw. 3. eine Auswahl der allerbesten und vornehmsten übrigen Kunstwerke des Konstantinopler Museums an Marmor, Bronze, Edelmetall, Keramik"; Ibid., fol. 46, Wiegand to Minister of Education, Berlin, 26 July 1913.

90 "Helfferrich ist der festen Ueberzeugung das die Sache zu kaufen geht, er kenne seine Türken & weder Talaat noch Said Halim legen Wert auf die Sarkophage etc."; Ibid., fol. 62, Wiegand to Schede, Berlin, 1 August 1913.

91 Ibid., fol. 47, Wiegand to Minister of Education, Berlin, 26 July 1913.

92 "[...] war der große Moment verpaßt"; Ibid., fols. 9–10, Schede's Records.

(German Orient Society). The latter insisted on demands for securing the right to the export of excavation finds.⁹³

On August 8, 1913, Berlin sent a telegram to its negotiators in Istanbul authorizing the purchase. The offer was brought to the Ottoman bargaining partners in the evening on the same day. However, negotiations were interrupted four days later only to be resumed on August 16. The Ottoman shortage of money had increased, and Said Halim asked for greater haste. As a consequence, the Ottomans repeatedly demanded the list of objects desired by Berlin in order to finalise the negotiations.⁹⁴ Immediately after receiving the list, the Ottoman side expressed concerns about its scope and mentioned that Halil Edhem would put up significant resistance, a concern which, according to Schede, had not played a role earlier.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, on August 23 the draft list was handed over to Said Halim, followed by months of waiting for a reply.⁹⁶

In September 1913 the Ottomans once again received a sum from the *Dette publique*. As of this point, Ottoman reluctance to seriously adhere to the deal became obvious. It was clear that Istanbul would accept smaller payments rather than take the risk of losing prestige and give the most important pieces of their antiquities collection to Berlin.⁹⁷ Through Ambassador Wangenheim, the German negotiators tried once again to exert pressure on Said Halim, but growing opposition to the project in the Ottoman capital now centred around the diplomat Osman Nizami Pasha (1856–1939). Eventually, Halil Edhem, as Schede explained, “developed a feverish desire to save his museum.”⁹⁸ After the matter was presented to the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Viikela*) on September 14, the opposition to the deal had become too powerful. Said Halim was forced to take the matter off the agenda, as he hoped to be able to convince his colleagues in person afterwards.⁹⁹ Although a counterproposal was made on September 24, however, Arif Bey withheld it from the German delegation as he perceived its content as unfavourable. The sale of the museum seemed to have failed and eventually, German negotiators were now trying to obtain compensation for their expenses and focused on the safeguarding of access to excavation sites in the Ottoman Empire and especially on the permission to export archaeological finds.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, influence was to be exerted on Cavid Bey (1875–1926), who was negotiating with *Deutsche Bank* in Berlin, but who, according to Wiegand, referred to public opinion as an obstacle for the deal.¹⁰¹ While Enver Pasha (1881–1922) increased his influence in Istanbul on the eve of the First World War, the German negotiators also tried to manipulate him. But he turned

93 Ibid., fols. 10–11.

94 Ibid., fols. 14–15.

95 Ibid., fols. 14–15.

96 Ibid., fol. 15.

97 Ibid., fols. 15–16.

98 Ibid., fol. 17.

99 Ibid., fol. 17.

100 Ibid., fols. 18–19.

101 Ibid., fol. 19.

out to be “*a fanatical opponent of the project.*”¹⁰² Subsequently, the German delegation suspected that Halil Edhem was Enver’s main influencer leading to the rejection of the project.¹⁰³ On March 2, 1914, Said Halim finally informed the German Ambassador that “*the museum business [...] can no longer be done.*”¹⁰⁴

7. Conclusion

The international *scramble for objects* in the late 19th and early 20th century culminated in increasing importance of possessing and appropriating antique objects and their prominent exhibition in museums. This development included negotiations about the fate of antiquities at the highest political levels. Appropriated assets were considered to play a significant role to the formation of a nation: their ownership was associated with prestige and intended to illustrate a superior level of civilization and culture by displaying prestigious relics of the past. The paper analysed the intertwined valorisation and politicisation of antiquities in the Ottoman Empire, where interdependence between objects and predominant political discourse crystallised in the context of an identity-building process and had impact on the appropriation strategies of foreign powers such as the German Empire.

In the late 19th century, the emerging national-separatist movements within the Ottoman Empire posed a potential threat to the integrity of the Ottoman realm. Abdülhamid II attempted to counter this development by focusing on the pan-Islamic idea. The Sultan considered sovereignty over the *haremeyn* (Mecca and Medina) a fundamental and integral part of his legitimacy. Nevertheless, he feared possible independency’s claims of non-Muslim minorities to be raised and fuelled through excessive protection of antiquities attributed to the Hellenistic or Byzantine eras, as well as their prominent valorisation as important cultural sites and exposed displays in the museum. German museum representatives were aware of the Sultan’s concerns and took benefits of his perception. Thus, they succeeded in acquiring Byzantine antiquities, granting an agreement on the division of finds in the context of the Miletus excavation and translocating the *Mshatta* façade to Berlin.

The *Müze-i Hümayun* aimed to preserve and exhibit the ancient objects in the Ottoman Empire, with the ambition to signal Istanbul’s equality with the European capitals, both on an academic and cultural level. Osman Hamdi began in the late 19th century to protect and collect antiquities on Ottoman territory, by attempting to minimize the European influence on the export of antiquities. He used the museum, and the tool of legal regulations, to assert his interests in the conservation of what he considered Ottoman cultural heritage. Already as vice-director, Halil Edhem played an important in protecting antiquities within the Ottoman Empire, as he actively pursued the inclusion of Islamic antiquities in the 1906 Antiquity Law. After becoming the *Müze-i Hümayun*’s

102 “[...] ein fanatischer Gegner des Projekts”; Ibid., fol. 20.

103 Ibid., fol. 20.

104 “[...] die Museumssache sei nicht mehr zu machen”; Ibid., fol. 20.

director, he strived towards a strategy to define primarily Islamic art and antiquities as Ottoman heritage. In the aftermath of the 1908 revolution and the subsequent radicalization of Turkish nationalism in the course of the Balkan Wars, he demonstrated to the government that he dedicated himself to promote emerging Turkish nationalism. He highlighted the outstanding importance of Islamic objects and architecture for the Ottoman Empire, not only in legal canons, but also in various publications, to support the perception of Islamic assets as national antiquities. Halil Edhem demonstrated that he was in line with the ideological-political idea of the CUP and promoted the superior role of Islamic art with a focus on Anatolian relics as symbols of Turkish-Sunni dominance.

Driven by the interest of European powers in obtaining prestigious antiquities and the ongoing *scramble for objects*, the political actors, however, primarily saw the potential economic value of the antiquities, which had to be exploited in terms of certain political objectives. This approach was also advocated by Said Halim and Talat, who tried to exploit the monetary value of the *Müze-i Hümayun*'s collection in negotiations with the German Empire to guarantee the Sublime Porte's capacity to act on the military landscape. Political and military manoeuvrability seemed more important than a possible loss of reputation through the sale of cultural assets. In the end, however, national pride, the fear of public opinion and the resistance of the actors around Halil Edhem prevented a sale of the antiquities collection.

The political and cultural actors' views on the valorisation of antiquities differed. While for Abdülhamid II value lay in diplomatic relations with the German Empire, for Said Halim as well as Talat Pasha economic efficiency would define value. The cultural actors of the Ottoman Museum tried to use the objects as precious resources for the Ottoman Empire in the sense of identity and nation-building, while German museum representatives and diplomats adjusted their appropriation strategies and tried to align them with the political circumstances in Istanbul.

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