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## Introduction

“In truth, the only limit to the valuation of such things is the desire which any one has for them, for it is difficult to set bounds to the price unless you first set bounds to the wish. I see then that (...) you, under the presence of purchase which you put forward, in reality seized and took away these things by force, through fear, by your power and authority, from that man...”<sup>1</sup>

Force, fear, power, authority on the one hand – valuation, price and desire on the other: the art market has been associated with the issue of territorial displacement of cultural assets since Cicero’s impassioned series of speeches during the corruption and extortion trial of the former governor of Sicily in 70 BC. In the current issue, we explore the connection of the art market to the wider subject of historical enquiries into object displacement. We have given the term “translocations” to our subject, since in this particular discourse, words are inevitably weighted with implications and associations, and a neutral terminology clears the path for a scholarly approach to historical constellations.

Terms such as “pillage”, “spoliation”, “confiscation” or “artistic seizure” carry within them implications of ideology, politics or representation, which in themselves already constitute a particular reading of events. An attempt at translation immediately reveals this: In French, the words pillées (pillaged) and spoliées (spoliated) have direct connotations to the Nazi period. When the French refer to the massive European confiscations carried out by France during the Revolution and Empire, they use expressions like conquêtes artistiques (artistic conquests) or confiscations révolutionnaires (revolution-

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1 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, literally translated by C. D. Yonge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903), The Fourth Book of the Second Pleading in the Prosecution of Verres, 2.4.14 (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Cic.%20Ver.%202.4&lang=original>; accessed on 3 May 2018).

ary confiscations). The wording carries the view and legitimising rhetoric of those who appropriated these objects: they are rooted in the language of the victors, of the predators. Words are always points of view. In contrast, “translocation” is a term from genetic chemistry that refers to an “exchange between chromosomes provoked by breakage and repair”, an exchange that implies mutations. While genetic heritage and cultural heritage are not comparable, the metaphor works: applied to the issue of spoliations, “translocation” has the immediate advantage of putting the concept of place at the centre of the discussion. Last, not least, the term leaves ample room for the issue of *mutations*, of the multiple transformations that affect displaced objects and the societies that receive (or lose) them as a result of displacement. The articulation of these three elements: place, wounds and transformation – is crucial in terms of understanding the logic of patrimonial appropriations and their effects.

Not a day goes by without a public appeal urging “equitable and fair” decisions in disputes about cultural restitution. Lawyers, museum curators, politicians, ethnologists and archaeologists, art dealers, political activists and journalists, artists and writers all over the world are concerned with the subject. Its topicality is reflected in headlines, blogs and TV documentations, in the founding of state institutions as well as in feature films from Hong Kong to Hollywood, which dramatize various cases and situations with considerable emotion for the wider public. There is no doubt that the consequences of past translocations of cultural assets form one of the great challenges of the twenty-first century. Today, it is not only those displacements resulting from physical force in the past that are seen as problematic. Increasingly, criticism is also directed towards forms of translocations resulting from academic or aesthetic demands that were facilitated by an asymmetric balance of power (be it of an economic, political or epistemic nature).

However, the field of translocations *as such* – that is, not the history of the transferred object, but the actual phenomenon of the transfer itself, with all its traumas, discourses, actors, gestures, techniques and representations -, has hardly been recognised, and certainly not fully researched.

## Looking towards the future

The project cluster *translocations* at Technische Universität Berlin compiles scholarly findings about the social, political and cultural implications of past displacements of cultural assets since antiquity, that will deliver orientation and direction for the future. This historical research deliberately aims to shape a societal dialogue and to develop potential courses of action. It includes aspects related to art theft and spoliation organised by the state in times of war and occupation, seizure of cultural goods during colonialism, displacements as a result of a partition of excavation discoveries and research expeditions, confiscations justified through ideology, nationalisations, or *en masse* disposals of private property – but also a material diaspora of, in some cases, entire civilisations expedited by the art trade. This issue will cast some highlights on the last subject.

The utilisation of translocations and restitutions in the service of political and economic goals can be traced and illustrated by numerous examples throughout history. At the same time, object migration has a demonstrable effect in history as a source of creativity, innovation and knowledge. Even in antiquity, translocations were noticeably an important element of empire-building. Around 1800, the Musée Napoléon in Paris became the depository for the “conquered” paintings and antiquities from Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, the Netherlands and Spain, instrumentalised for national affirmation of the empire and the establishment of a universalist paradigm of power *à la française*. Half a century later, the dislocation of thousands of art objects forcibly taken from the summer palace in Beijing and brought to Europe was denounced by Victor Hugo as a barbaric crime against civilization, and he declared their restitution a republican imperative. In the present issue, the resulting effects and the fate of this particular trove of objects on the art market in Paris is explored by **Léa Saint-Raymond** and **Christine Howald** through meticulous data analysis of art auctions from the 1860s.

Not only did Chinese objects change hands and began to circulate throughout the Western world, translocations abounded during the so-called Age of Discovery, which turns into “Discovery as Appropriation”. In 1912, the bust of Nefertiti was excavated in Egypt and the bones of the biggest dinosaur skeleton in the world in present-day Tanzania, both destined for Berlin museums. In the same year, the “Yale Peruvian Expedition” uncovered Machu Picchu and had tens of thousands of artefacts shipped to the Peabody Museum at Yale University. After a long-running legal dispute, they were spectacularly restituted to Peru in 2011 as a form of “academic diplomacy”. Today, provincial museums from Irkutsk to Nizhny Novgorod house Old Masters from German collections, seized by the Red Army in 1945 as compensation for its country’s war losses, which provide entire school classes with the immediate opportunity of a sensual experience of Western art.

Several decades earlier, in the wake of the October Revolution, a displacement of assets took place in Russia which led to significant sales on the art market. In her present article, **Waltraut Bayer** follows Stalin’s museum sales, which led to a mass transfer of major – and minor – cultural goods to the Western art market, sometimes official, sometimes not. Today, the memory of those sales has become entangled in the narrative about Russian identity, demonstrating once again the topicality of the issue.

In recent years, the example of the National Socialists’ art theft has demonstrated first and foremost that an appropriate and contemporary approach to dealing with the consequences of such translocations of cultural goods demands not only political will but also meticulous historical knowledge of the respective cases. By way of example, Germany invests millions of euros every year into researching the provenance of its art museums. In this issue of our journal, **Gitta Ho** looks at the so-called *M-Aktion* in Paris, where the contents of tens of thousands of French homes were seized by the German occupiers in the 1940s. The spoils were ultimately intended for the art market - even though the planned large scale sell-off never came to pass. For the Nazis, the Paris art market seemed to be the perfect platform to dispose of unwanted pictures, furniture and household items,

creating a potential pipeline to turn these into financial assets for the regime. Both Bayer and Ho thus offer specific studies of the systematic expropriation and translocation of cultural goods in the context of one of the great wars of the twentieth century.

## Museums, and a polyphonic approach

At the moment when a cultural asset in transfer is integrated into public museums and libraries, the incorporation of the foreign into a native narrative leads to multiple effects of cross-fertilization across generations. These are of a profoundly cultural, intellectual and aesthetic nature. Concurrently, when feelings of injustice, expropriation and loss become manifest in societies or interest groups, questions of ownership, identity and pride become linked with the displacement of material objects and their insertion into new contexts.

Archaeological, scientific, and ethnological collections have now begun the process of investigating the historical origin of their objects and making it transparent. The article by **Julia Friedel** and **Vanessa von Gliszczyński** explores objects in the ethnological museum in Frankfurt and their complex histories, which touch both on the colonial and the National Socialist background. The authors look specifically at purchases made for the museum in Paris under the German occupation and give an outline of the challenges and the potential for provenance research in this area. With regard to the art market, transactions for ethnological objects are frequently less well documented and preserved and can be harder to find in archives than those of traditional high value Western art objects.

Even today's art market still presents its own challenges to museums, as the article by **Robert Arlt** and **Lucie Folan** makes clear. In 2016, the National Gallery of Australia restituted an Indian stone relief after research led to the discovery that it had been looted and sold illegally by the notorious dealer Subash Kapoor. As the authors describe the process of research and restitution, the article is also an appeal for the international exchange of information and the establishments of global standards of due diligence, since more objects with similar histories surely still form part of the world's museum collections.

While provenance research must be the basis for any political decision on restitution, academic research in the *translocations* project cluster approaches the phenomenon independently of the legality or illegality of the respective events: there may have been cases where the translocation of cultural assets was legal, but it may take societies or interest groups decades or centuries to articulate their sense of loss or their wish for restitution. At the same time, societies and individuals deliberately choose to accept a provenance based on violence when it is tied to the visibility, research and material preservation of cultures, especially in a museum context. Scholarly research must investigate complex temporality, uncomfortable resentment and diverging processes of recollection. The key question concerns the perspective of those who perceive themselves as "dispossessed" across eras and regions, based on any possible construction of identity. This perspective may not always be defined by demand or by grief. The first and most important

task is the identification and gathering of sources and their discourse analysis. Conceptual history must be included. Who determines the terminology, when, and why? What do and what don't terms such as looted art, Beutekunst, spoliations, furti or перемещенное искусство actually convey?

## Translocations and the Economic Context

Three articles in the present issue focus on translocations channelled through the art trade and facilitated by economic imbalances. **Cecilia Riva's** research into the activities of Austen Henry Layard provide a fascinating insight into the history of nineteenth century collecting as a "public duty" in Britain. As a collector, National Gallery trustee and unofficial adviser and agent for other collectors, Layard was a lynchpin for the circulation of art works. Using his network of contacts created during a diplomatic and political career, the deep pockets of his patrons, and without undue concern for what might be considered conflicts of interest today, he helped to propel important Old Masters from Italy and Spain as well as a range of other objects to London museums and British collections.

**Céline Brugeat** looks at the history of the trans-Atlantic movement of medieval architectural fragments from France in the early twentieth century. Today, institutions like the Cloisters in New York are inextricably linked to the American museum landscape, but they are in fact the result of a translocation process facilitated by enterprising French art dealers, their establishment of a network of American clients fascinated by these manifestations of medieval heritage, and a frequent lack of interest in conservation at the local level in the country of origin. Arguably, even though the pieces from France sometimes ended up in ahistorical garden *pasticcios* from the Riviera to the Bahamas – becoming entirely detached from their original religious context – they also took on a new life in fostering American appreciation of medieval art.

Sometimes, trade can be accelerated by purely economic factors, as **David Challis** describes in his article about the sale of Rodin bronzes to Japan in the 1920s. The combination of the newly opened Musée Rodin's financial difficulties and the concurrent collapse of the French franc led to a situation where sales of Rodin sculptures to Japanese collectors were conceivably expedited due to the significant currency imbalance vis-à-vis the Japanese yen. While the history of appreciation by Japanese collectors for Rodin has been recorded, their purchases during this period were buffered by the strength of their currency, until the yen fell by 75% in a year from December 1931. The main conduit for the trade, the dealer Herman d'Oelsnitz, immediately went bankrupt, and sales fell.

Concluding the current issue, three short articles add further perspectives to the subject. **Gidena Mesfin Kebede** and **Susanne Meyer-Abich** reconstruct the genealogy of a story about an object which is frequently referred to as an icon of Ethiopian culture and which still reverberates on activist internet pages today. Looking at the sources, their dependability and the varying historiographical approaches and multiple forms of perception that an art object can undergo in its history of translocation, this story is an excellent

example of the various interpretations and instrumentalisations that can occur in the course of the translocation of cultural assets.

**Eleonora Vratskidou** writes about the recent documenta 14 as an example for a contemporary take on the subject of translocations by the curators and artists of our time. With a focus on looted art, combined with the dual venue in Kassel and Athens and its political implications, the themes of translocations and economical imbalance formed an integral part of the exhibition concept. Noticeable differences in curatorial approach between Nazi spoliation and the translocation of cultural assets from Africa perhaps also reflect the state of the current discourse on this complex subject.

**Sebastian Willert** reviews Fredrik Hagen and Kim Ryholt's publication on the antiquities trade in Egypt from 1880 to 1930. The H.O. Lange Papers form an excellent archival basis for the understanding of the trade which has led to so many Egyptian objects in Western museums today. While Egyptian cultural goods are deeply rooted in European reflections on the Non-European, we feel that the material presence of Egypt outside Egypt has not received sufficient academic attention.

With the current issue we also hope to encourage further research into the art trade's role in the historical displacement of cultural assets, particularly with regard to the diasporas of objects from Italy, Greece, Egypt, sub-Saharan Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and the Americas. The chronology and the forms of displacement – punitive expeditions, excavations, trade and other types of violent or non-violent transfers – will inevitably often involve or lead to art trade activities. In turn, their traces form a valuable and, to date, little explored basis for research in a wider context.