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**Zeus in Exile:  
Archaeological Restitution as Politics of Memory**

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## The Zeus Altar of Pergamon in Berlin

Overshadowed by the debates on the Holocaust Memorial or the fate of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of archaeological collections in Berlin nevertheless poses an international problem. The question is, in a way, analogous to the current sensibilities about the future of memory, as it was called by a recent conference at Princeton University. How will the past will be framed and commemorated in a reunified Germany; what constitutes the cultural heritage of the new *Berlin Republic*? As Berlin assumes the role of the capital, both official and popular approaches to memory of the recent past gain a vital importance. Curiously, an internationally recognized effort on the part of the federal government to commemorate the victims of the Nazi regime goes hand in hand with a systematic repression of the more recent East German past. As the American-style malls and corporate headquarters of the Postdamer Platz, once the busiest center of Europe, celebrate the victors of the Cold War, the institutions of the East German Republic are being erased from the city. New Berlin will be a city of memory, as evident in its memorials and museums. Yet it will also remain a site of amnesia and forgetting. This paper will discuss Berlin's contested Zeus Altar and its role as a collectively negotiated construct of memory. By reconsidering the Altar as an embodiment of memory, and not merely a cultural good, this paper seeks to bring a new perspective to the definitions of cultural property, national patrimony and historical heritage.<sup>1</sup>

The German Unification Treaty signed on August 31, 1990 gave the administration of the art and archaeology collections, which once belonged to the Prussian state and which subsequently were divided between the West and the East, to the *Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Foundation of Prussian Cultural Property).<sup>2</sup> The Foundation took measures to exhibit all the archaeological collections in a historic complex of museums in the heart of Berlin. The complex, also known as the Museum Island, consists of a number buildings, among which are Altes, Neues, Bode and Pergamon museums, constructed in neoclassical style in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and which came to symbolize the Prussian state.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank M. Christine Boyer, Steven Tepper, Paul diMaggio and Stanley Katz for their comments on this essay.

<sup>2</sup> The Unification Treaty, Article 35, paragraph 5. See Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, *Museumsinsel Berlin: Wettbewerb zum Neuen Museum*. Publication information is included in the bibliography.

These archaeology collections were brought to Berlin from the oriental expeditions of the Prussian Empire in the late 19th century, under the reign of Wilhelm II. Encouraged by the emerging power of the German *Reich*, and the private funds of the Kaiser, German archaeologists carried out large-scale excavations in a number of sites in the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia regions. The most celebrated of all these archaeological achievements was the discovery of the Zeus Altar (2nd. century BC) in the Hellenistic city of Pergamon.

The Zeus Altar, now reconstructed in Berlin, is believed to have rested on a high platform in the acropolis of Pergamon. A large frieze which surrounded the altar on three sides and which depicted the mythological scene of the battle of the gods of Olympus with giants, is considered the masterpiece of late Greek art. The Pergamon frieze is the largest sculptural composition after the famous Parthenon marbles of Athens--now in the British Museum, though it was carved with much larger figures (7.5 feet). By depicting the victory of the Greek gods over the giants, the altar symbolically celebrated the triumph of the city of Pergamon in the newly conquered lands of Anatolia, hence proclaimed the city as the legitimate continuation of the Greek civilization, a second Athens located far from the mainland Greece. This indeed suggests that Pergamon, a city governed by a Greek speaking elite, yet consisting mostly of Lydian natives, referred to classical Athens (5th century BC) as the origin of its own high culture. Perhaps, as an irony of history, the altar lent its glory centuries later to another kingdom which equally idealized ancient Greece. When reconstructed in Berlin in what was then believed to be its original form, the Zeus Altar became one of the symbols of the German Empire. Both as an artistic style and an ideological paradigm, neoclassicism provided forms that came to symbolize the Prussian state in the 19th century, when Prussian architects adopted neo-Greek forms. Hence the Zeus Altar was received with unequalled enthusiasm in Germany. Its reconstruction in Berlin provided the German neoclassical project and German Philhellenism with a sense of authenticity. Historical analogies between ancient Pergamon and modern Germany were also close at hand: just as the kingdom of Pergamon unified the city states of Anatolia under its rule after the conquests of Alexander the Great, so the Prussian Empire, the victor of the 1871 war, was the ruler of the small German states, and a new power in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kunze, p.16.

In 1930, the present Pergamon Museum opened to the public. The museum was constructed according to a 1907 plan by the German architect, Alfred Messel, although modified several times during the three decades of its construction. In contrast to other national archaeology galleries, the Pergamon Museum was designed with a clear hierarchy: the visitor is admitted to the museum from an axially organized, neoclassical court and proceeds directly to a very large hall, designed as the largest museum hall in the world, where the main facade of the Zeus Altar is located. After a monumental encounter with the Zeus Altar the visitors are guided towards the other sections of the museum: the Greek, Babylonian and Islamic collections. In the original design, the visitor can experience the different sections of the museum only in relation to the imposing effect of the Pergamon Altar, as one has to return to the principal hall in order to reach the other wings of the museum. The artistic achievements of other civilizations are staged in such a way that they can be judged only with the yardstick of the Hellenic perfection. Furthermore, the architect of the museum after Messel, Ludwig Hoffmann imagined a processional way that would start from the Pergamon Altar and extend towards south until the Humboldt University on Unter den Linden, reshaping the center of the city around a monumental axis. Although this urban project never materialized, the Pergamon Museum nevertheless became an important landmark of the Center of Berlin.

In 1948, the frieze of the Zeus Altar, spared from the allied bombardment, was confiscated by the Soviet Army and taken to Leningrad in lieu of the German war debt. It was only returned to the museum in East Berlin in late 1958, as a Soviet gift to the people of the German Democratic Republic. East Germany, although deprived of financial means to do more than meager restoration work, was eager to open the Pergamon Museum to public, while the Egyptian antiquities stored in West Berlin during the war were exhibited in the West, in Charlottenburg. The competition between the East and the West for the representation of German history and ownership of archaeological treasures came to an end with the annexation of GDR in 1990 and the unification of the collections.

After the *Preußischer Kulturbesitz* took control of the collections, an architectural competition to rehabilitate the Neues Museum and reform the museum complex, was carried out in 1994. The winning project by Italian architect, Giorgio Grassi transforms the program of the entire Museum Island by rearranging the entrance to the Neues and Pergamon Museums with a single new structure. Grassi wants to replace the monumental entrance of the Pergamon Museum, which directly leads the visitors to the Zeus Altar, with a secondary side entrance. That the original

*mise-en-scene* of the Pergamon museum will change, and the Zeus Altar will lose its Wilhelmine experience, did not prevent the jury from choosing Grassi's project. The new German authorities primarily seem concerned about how to transform the political image of the Museum Island from a Prussian Acropolis to a contemporary tourist center, and do so with the least intervention to the historic buildings themselves.<sup>4</sup> Having survived the allied bombing, an extensive Soviet looting and a limited East German restoration, the Museum Island promises to become once more the sanctuary of official culture in Berlin, one that not only inherited but also has actively reframed the Prussian heritage. The changing presentation of the Zeus Altar is symptomatic of a less authoritarian, pluralist German State; one that no longer uses the classical façade as the symbol of its own political power and rootedness in Western high culture. The Zeus Altar becomes one among many German cultural treasures.

Given the recent project for the transformation of the Pergamon Museum, the question arises whether the Zeus Altar can be considered the heritage of the modern German State --- or of any other political entity claiming the monument as its own. Can the ruins of a distant past be considered the property of any given country? The museum no doubt makes the altar available for the study of international scholars, besides displaying it to thousands of curious tourists each year. From a strictly legal perspective, however, the altar is treated as movable cultural property. Just like a piece of sculpture or a painting, the archaeological monument is the possession of its exhibitors --- both in terms of its material property, presentation and copyright. If we included a picture of the Zeus Altar in the following pages, we would have to pay tribute to the *Preußischer Kulturbesitz* in concrete financial terms. Similarly the museum controls and benefits from the dissemination of images of the altar in the tourist-industry.

## II

### **Bergama: the Memory of Conspicuous Absence**

In a short and touching book the Social Democrat mayor of a small town in western Turkey, Bergama, attacks a respectable German institution, the State Museum of Berlin, based on a one

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<sup>4</sup> See the competition announcement, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. "Inspiration and Aims of the Competition."

hundred-year old cultural conflict. Sefa Taşkın's book, *The Zeus in Exile* voices claims of the town's inhabitants, small farmers and shop keepers, against the museum of a distant European city which they have never actually seen. As the title of the book suggests, the people of Bergama feel that they had been robbed of their cultural heritage, or more specifically, the major cultural monument of their town is in exile:

The greatest wish of the people of Bergama, who are conscious that their culture is the accumulation of all previous cultures which flourished in Bergama in the past, is the return of the Zeus Altar where it is supposed to be, so that it could stand once more on its foundations which remained in Bergama today.<sup>5</sup>

The town of Bergama, as the mayor carefully points out, was once the capital of the ancient Anatolia, the modern-day Turkey. Most of the monuments of the antique Pergamon (modern Bergama), including the Zeus Altar, were erected during the reign of the Hellenistic kingdom of the Attalids around the 2nd century BC. In a political testament that was probably an intrigue of the Roman Senate Attalos III, the newly emerging power in the Mediterranean and last king of the Attalid dynasty, left his kingdom to Rome in 133 B.C. Henceforth Pergamon, a city of 200,000 inhabitants, became the capital of the Roman province of *Asia*. Although much reduced in size in the Byzantine middle ages, the city emerged again in historical documents as a center of the Muslim and Turkish speaking Karasi emirate in the 14th century. It eventually became a provincial commercial center in the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), a vassal to the throne in Istanbul. Today's Bergama is a small provincial town of the Republic of Turkey (1923), and a major tourist attraction due to the remaining monuments of its Acropolis, a large amphitheater, an Askleipion (antique medical complex), a Roman Serapion temple which later housed one of the seven churches of early Christianity, and a 14th-century mosque, the Ulu Cami, particularly important for the development of the Ottoman art. Besides its historic monuments, Bergama is also famous for the conspicuous absence of a monument, which once was erected in the Pergamon yet is now exhibited in Berlin.

The campaign for the restitution of the Zeus Altar was perhaps not a surprise for those who are familiar with Turkey's efforts to repatriate its antiquities. Within the last decade, the Republic of Turkey orchestrated a systematic repatriation policy, which is at times called "aggressive" by America's art magazines. The policy consisted of pursuing archaeological artifacts originally

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<sup>5</sup> Sefa Taşkın, *Sürgündeki Zeus: Bergama dan Berlin, Berlin den Bergamaya*, p.44 (translation mine).

from Turkey in the collections of museums and dealers in various countries. The aim of the policy is primarily to discourage the international art market from acquiring archaeological objects from Turkey, thereby lifting economic pressure from archaeological sites which have been subjected to illegal excavations. A \$50 million state-financed endowment was created to promote cultural activities and retrieve stolen archaeological items.<sup>6</sup> Using the endowment, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and its lawyers abroad brought high-profile lawsuits against the museums, which in most of the American cases resulted in restitution of the artifacts. Most remarkably, the Metropolitan Museum in New York agreed to return the Lydian Hoard in 1995 after a long battle in court. In an other high-profile case, Boston businessman William Koch agreed to return 1,661 antique coins, also known as the Elmalı treasure, on March 4, 1999<sup>7</sup> -- only to be decorated by the Turkish state for his efforts in the conservation of antiquities. The situation, however, is different in countries which protect the collections of their state archaeology museums with national patrimony laws, or in countries which did not ratify the UNESCO Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property, as adopted by the General Conference, 14 November 1970, Paris. Western European countries with large archaeological collections in their national museums have been reluctant to endorse the UNESCO Convention. Only four members of the European Community ratified the treaty: Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Not surprisingly these countries are themselves rich in antiquities and suffer from illegal export. Greece, in particular, has since 1974 pursued a better known campaign to repatriate the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum.

The 1991 campaign for the repatriation of the Zeus Altar, however, is unique among Turkish repatriation cases. Initially it was conceived, not by the central government in Ankara, rather by the local authority of a small town and its inhabitants. It quickly gained, however, a popular support in national scale, hardly enjoyed by other cases: 15 million signatures were collected to ask the return of the Zeus Altar back from Germany. In 1991 alone, more than 100 articles appeared in the Turkish daily press--ranging in tone from mourning for the stolen altar to accusing Mayor Taşkın of being crazy in thinking that Germans might give the altar back at all.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Turkey Pursues Ancient Art." *Art in America* v.83 January 1995, p.128.

<sup>7</sup> Rose, Mark. "Hoard Returned," p.28.

<sup>8</sup> See Hacer and Yavuz Özmakas *Bergama Bibliography*.

The controversy is focused on the uprooting or discovery of the Zeus Altar by German archaeologists in 1870's to use the terminology of Turkish and German sources respectively. Carl Humann, a German engineer employed by the Ottoman government for the construction of the Bergama Dikili road in 1864, noticed the sculptural reliefs built in an 8th century Byzantine wall in the historic citadel of Bergama. Impressed with the ruins, Humann carried out unofficial excavations in the citadel (acropolis) of Bergama from 1864 and 1871 and sent his finds to Berlin, hoping to attract, at first unsuccessfully, the attention of the museum director. The situation, however, was to change radically in 1871 due to developments in 19th century geopolitics. As it is explained to the visitors of the Pergamon Museum in the guide written by Max Kunze:

Thanks to Prussia's military success, the German Empire had been proclaimed in 1871. Understandably the new imperial capital of Berlin called upon its research institutions and museums to help establish a worthy cultural legitimacy...

[Culture and Education] Ministries felt that in order to bring the Berlin Museums up to par with the collections in The Louvre and the British Museum, excavations should be undertaken in Turkey where the chances to expand the collections seemed better. Numerous uprisings against the Turks as well as the war between Turkey and Russia had worked in favor of the young German Empire by increasing its influence with the Ottoman Empire. Permission to excavate at Pergamon was obtained easily. The division of finds originally agreed upon between Turkey and Berlin was renegotiated with Bismarck's support in 1878-1879. The new agreement stated that in exchange for 20,000 Marks, the Turkish government would permit all finds relating to the Pergamon Altar to go to Berlin...<sup>9</sup>

In his *Zeus in Exile*, Mayor Taşkın contradicts Kunze's description on several accounts. Having emphasized the finds that Humann secretly sent to Berlin, Mayor Taşkın disputes the Berlin Museum's claim that most of the altar was displaced from Bergama with an official permission. He calls the transfer of 20,000 marks "ambiguous dealings" and underlines that the arbiter who oversaw the division of finds between the Berlin Museum and the Ottoman Museum in Istanbul was a German banker in Izmir.

The way the German Empire adopted the symbolism of the altar does not appear understandable to Mayor Taşkın, to say the least, in contrast to the writer of the museum guide. Mayor Taşkın

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<sup>9</sup> Kunze, pp.10-11.

insists that those who displaced the Altar of Zeus for the sake of preserving it, were indeed in the search of cultural roots for their emerging 19th century empire: “Today they try to conceal the inhuman dimensions of the [19th century project of] sharing the world.”<sup>10</sup> In raising this point the aim of Mayor Taşkın is to call into question the current ethical dimensions of the issue:

Opposition to the uprooting of human creations from their historic and societal contexts, is a basic human responsibility. In this context, the Zeus Altar, which we consider the common heritage of all humanity, should return to the site where it was constructed and where it stood for thousands of years. Just as two Berlins were reunified [in 1991], the Zeus Altar should reunify with Bergama.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in his political campaign to reconstitute the cultural heritage of Bergama, Mayor Taşkın uses an internationalist idiom, perhaps as required by his Social Democrat stand. Quite remarkable for a *re-patriation* case, the word nation is missing altogether from Mayor Taşkın’s book. Instead the word culture is used in abundance, to such an extent that one wonders what such an all-inclusive term may mean for the mayor.

Mayor Taşkın’s book presents the altar as an inseparable component of Bergama’s local heritage. This, in essence, is in accordance with a culture thesis mostly embraced by the Turkish left since 1930’s. Despite the strong Turkish nationalism which, since the 19th century, has been instrumental in the Young Turk Revolution (1908) and finally in founding a nation state from the remaining territories of the multiethnic Ottoman Empire (1923), the present Turkey is far from being culturally and ethnically homogenous. In an attempt to de-emphasize Turkey’s own imperial, Ottoman past, the culture thesis seeks to establish Anatolia (that is, the modern geography of Turkey) as “the cradle of civilization.” As can be seen in the 1940’s writing of the art historian Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and essayist Cevat Kabağaçlı, who signed his books with the pseudonym, “the Fisherman of Halicarnasus,” the possession of material culture from past civilizations of different linguistic-ethnic groups is essential to sustain the cultural identity of modern Turkey as unity in diversity. In contrast to the better known Greek thesis of repatriation which often rests on the transcendental subjectivity of the Greek nation and seeks to define archaeological finds as inalienable objects belonging to that Nation, the Turkish case of repatriation depends on a melting pot argument. The thesis known in Turkish as “toprağın kültürü,” literally the “culture of earth” argues for the continuity of memory not in the

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<sup>10</sup> Taşkın, p.51.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.45.

subjectivity of an ethnically and linguistically defined group, but in the “genius of place.”

The Anatolian culture thesis also constitutes one important branch of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish historiography and competes with a more nationalist historiography which nostalgically celebrates the conquests of the Turkish speaking empires of the past. The 1978 history of Iskender Ohri, for example, is called *The Story of Anatolia* (and not the story of the Turks). Ohri wrote a 5,000 year history of the country which starts with the Hittite civilization, and extends from the Greek colonization to the Turkish conquests.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically both the Anatolian and Turkish history theses enjoyed official support from education and culture ministries during different governments. Neoliberal and conservative coalitions, which have governed Turkey since 1983, are less supportive of the Anatolian culture thesis. The large popular support that the restitution campaign of Mayor Taşkın enjoyed, in that sense, may be considered one important success of the Turkish left, at the very moment it had to face several defeats in national elections. The municipality of Bergama, in that sense, has something more important at stake than possessing the altar as a material treasure. Despite the Berlin Museum’s unwillingness to take his campaign seriously, and although gaining the Altar for the city of Bergama seems unrealistic, Mayor Taşkın certainly succeeded on other ideological grounds internal to Turkey.

### III

#### **Repatriation: Battle Between Identity and Alterity**

Perhaps the only outcome of Mayor Taşkın’s restitution campaign in Berlin is a newfound interest in the history of archaeological excavations. A number of books published by the Berlin Museum in the 1990s celebrate the archaeologists of the Wilhelmine age as the pioneers of modern science. “Looking behind the historical scenes,” these publications often assert in between the lines that all the original elements of the altar which are on display today have a secure legal status. Explaining to the visitors why all the artifacts were taken from the territories of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but not from newly independent Greece (another county rich in antiquities), Olaf Matthes writes the following in the Pergamon Museum’s guide:

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<sup>12</sup> Ohri, *Anadolunun Öyküsü*.

... In the 1870s, the museums of Berlin initiated intensive and successful excavating activities in Greece and the Ottoman Empire, which were to continue up until the beginning of World War I. The German Reich funded excavations at Olympia which produced research results indeed remarkable at that time, but brought little gains to the Berlin museums --- the Greek antiquities law prohibited exporting any finds dating from *its* ancient past. The Berlin Museums were allocated only a few small art objects and duplicates, but a large number of plaster casts.

The situation was different in the neighboring Ottoman Empire. Its antiquities law --- generous when compared to the Greek law --- allocated the excavators more than a third of their finds. As a rule, however, up until the turn of the century they were permitted to export a much larger part. This was possible because at that time, neither the Turkish authorities nor its people had a historical consciousness of *their* Greek and Roman past.

...Turkish authorities and the tourists above all may regret that only the grid foundations are left at Pergamon itself. What, however, would have been the fate of the great altar and the friezes if the excavators had not rescued them from the hands of the lime burners? It may indeed be doubted that the Gigantomachia [the Battle of the Olympian Gods with the Giants] would still exist as it does today if Humann, in his time, has not so energetically opposed the current practice of destroying antique marbles in Turkey.<sup>13</sup>

If we rephrase the message of the author: (1) Turkish authorities and tourists have indeed a Greek and Roman past (emphasized by the use of the possessive pronoun *their* past). (2) But they were not conscious about it when the Germans took the altar away. (3) Now they regret it but it is too late. They should instead be thankful to the Prussian Empire and the Berlin Museums for preserving artifacts that they were about to destroy. (4) Carl Humann was not only a road engineer employed by the Ottoman government for construction of roads, but also a philanthropist who tried to enlighten the Turks by opposing to their traditional practice of burning antique master pieces. Uncertain about the faith of the temple, he finally, rescued it to the capital of the Prussian Empire, whose authorities, unlike the Turks, were aware of the value of the Turks's antiquity.

It suffices to read the museum guide distributed by the Berlin Museum to see that archaeology indeed depends on an ideological frame, and that the museum itself is well aware of this. The similarity of Matthes's argument with the position defended by David Wilson, the director of the British Museum in 1985, is striking. Defending the British Museum against the repatriation case

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<sup>13</sup> Matthes, pp.11, 15-16. The italics on the possessive pronouns *its* and *their* are my additions.

of Greece for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, Wilson writes argues the following. It is interesting to note that in Wilson's eyes, Greece, a fellow country of Britain in the European Community, is a "Third World country." Whatever he means by the term, he seems to use it in a rather negative sense:

Who then own what? As a result of European wars and pillage, the European heritage has been distributed more than once. There is little that one would wish to see returned to their original owners (who are they in any case?) Or redistributed among the European treasuries and museums. But this self-satisfied attitude causes pain when one turns to the real feeling of ex-colonial people who feel a need to establish their national identity. Much of the material from the Third World countries was not collected as a result of war or pillage. Much came as a result of gifts and barter, and of a genuine spirit of scientific enquiry by Europeans eager to know more about the people with whom they came into contact... According to the lights of the collectors of the period the material now housed in museums all over the world was acquired legally and with the full--even eager--permission of their owners. This is as true of the Elgin Marbles as of spears from Fiji. It is difficult to adjust modern terms to the morality of the past.

The Third World and other countries bent on return and restitution should, however, realize that they are themselves in danger of being considered vandals if they persist in their course with regard to the great international collections. The universal museums have looked after their collections for many years--they are great monuments to man's achievement... only in them we grasp some ideas of the totality of man's mind, its possibilities, its weaknesses, its similar or different reactions.<sup>14</sup>

To differentiate between the European heritage and the ex-colonial peoples lack of heritage, serves Wilson's political agenda of acknowledging the rootedness of the European culture, on one hand, while underlying the *constructedness* of the *other's* identity on the other. According to Wilson the legal status of both the spears from Fiji and the Elgin Marbles of the Acropolis is the same since they were given away to curious Europeans by unknowing primitives. The important difference, is, however, that once appropriated by Britain, the Elgin Marbles came to be one of the most important artifacts of European culture. Despite Wilson's comparison of Greece with Britain's colonies, Greece was neither a colonial country, nor a European colonizer--it was part of the Ottoman Empire when Lord Elgin displaced the marbles from the Acropolis.

Wilson's comparison of Greece's repatriation case with the ex-colonial people's need to establish national identity suggests that the encounter of Europe with its non-European other is at

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<sup>14</sup> Wilson, pp.105-106.

the very center of today's cultural conflict. For a 19th century Europe that constructed a national patrimony for itself --- mostly through the Romantic appreciation of Gothic architecture in Britain, France and Germany --- the classical ruins of the Eastern Mediterranean symbolized, in contrast, the origin of the universal Western civilization. This origin could not be attributed to the ethnic ancestors of the Western European nations themselves.

For the 19th century archaeologist, in search of universal knowledge, the natives of the region were analogous to unconscious children who are unworthy of their own ethnic ancestors (modern Greeks)<sup>15</sup> or who are altogether foreign to the origins of the West proper, that is the invaders in their own lands (like the European conception of the Turk in the 19th century). Far from being a search for disinterested knowledge, the 19th century archaeology was steeped in Western ideology, excavating the origins of the self in the fields of the other.

When Humann arrived at Bergama in 1864, there was no free-standing Altar of Zeus at the site. Just like the famous German adventurer, Heinrich Schliemann before him, who participated in the search of Troy, Humann came to the site with an *a priori* memory-image, one that was embedded in the Philhellenic German consciousness: he was in the search of a Greek temple. In the fragments of an apparently earlier Hellenic building built in the 8th century Byzantine wall, Humann saw his own ideological fantasy. In search of a pure Greek ideal he undertook the systematic destruction of the Byzantine wall. The stones and sculptural reliefs were then freed from later historical layers to constitute the fragments of a neoclassical jigsaw puzzle. The Zeus Altar of Pergamon exhibited in Berlin, no doubt is a powerful image, but it is at best a hypothetical reconstruction. The Byzantine and medieval Islamic layers that Humann destroyed in the citadel, on the other hand, are lost to history.

Today's crisis of restitution is a confrontation with the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century history, in which a self-reflective subjectivity was restored to the East at the very moment the archaeologist landed at the site. Thus European reason is constituted only at the expense of the natives, the

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<sup>15</sup> See M. Christine Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*: "Thus an imaginary gap seemed to separate the people of Europe from those of Greece and although the latter might be the living ancestors of Europe upholding the role of Ur-Europa, they were simultaneously blamed for being immature and backward children held down by their ancient past. This placed nineteenth-century Greece in an impossible position: it was to be the standard of civilization in the abstract sense, but judged in reality to be a humiliated Oriental vassal clearly inferior to--an in the end dependent on--the more modern Europe. This bind, moreover, served Eurocentric purposes and legitimated the plundering of Greece's past," p.158.

unconscious inheritors of antiquity or intruders in the dream world of the European origin.<sup>16</sup> The archaeologist, then, undertook the project of rescuing the origin from “most certain destruction” and preserved it in the institution of universal memory: the archaeology museum. How else can we explain the account of the Berlin Museum’s guide that narrates how the Pergamon altar was rediscovered (who discovered it in the first place?). Archaeology has been represented as the return of Western subjectivity to the landscape where it had originated in the first place, yet where it was frozen to death, when these lands fell into the hands of the Orientals. Just like another product of the European Enlightenment, the “Nation,” the “West” has pushed to oblivion “the historical time of its non-existence” and imagined itself as the descendant of a distant and imaginary antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

In this historical enterprise German archaeology constructed in Bergama an ancestry, which is symbolically present, yet irretrievable for the locals. To whom this ancestry belongs is a political question, particularly in Greece and Turkey, which, in the last two hundred years, adopted the European Enlightenment as their own universal project. In both contexts archaeology was instrumentalized in the political construction of both the nation state and modern identity following the Western European and especially the German model. Hence the modern crisis of repatriation is the outcome of a long-standing battle between identity and alterity. In their self-presentation as the libraries of universal knowledge, great archaeology museums --- number one tourist attraction in Paris, London, Berlin --- continue the legacy of 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialism. The museums’ authority to hold the universal knowledge about antiquity has rarely been contested, despite several campaigns for restitution of various objects.

## IV

### **Patrimony versus Repatriation: Sharing the Iconic Image?**

The controversy about the possession of archaeological artifacts call into question the definition of cultural patrimony in different legal contexts. We may define *patrimoine*, in its original

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<sup>16</sup> See Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

French sense of the word, as the totality of physical sites, objects and cultural practices which, through their presence, constitutes, fulfills and testifies to the existence of the *memory* attributed to collective entity called a Nation. The group imagines itself to be a homogenous subjectivity by encapsulating its own character in a set of inalienable objects. Hence in European legal systems cultural patrimony is given priority over private property and protected from export and alteration. The paradox intrinsic to such a construction is apparent in the fact that cultural patrimony stands both for the particular and the universal. It is particular because patrimony testifies to the specific experience of the Nation. (The German Nation may be expected to possess a Gothic cathedral but not African masks. The signification of patrimony is not arbitrary --- or so we came to believe). It is universal because the protection of national patrimony is not only internationally legitimate but the responsibility of every “enlightened nation.”

French architectural historian, Françoise Choay, who studied the semantic shift of the term *patrimoine* from its strictly nationalist origins after the French Revolution to the late 20th century, underlines the importance of the iconic image associated with the cultural objects. Particularly in the case of famous architectural monuments, what matters is not so much the material possession of the object, as a photographic image of the monument which is retained in memory. The monuments, whether associated with the Nation or merely submitted to the mercy of international tourist industry, are remembered not with the specificity of the viewer’s experience, but rather as fixed iconic images. (Just think of the Eiffel Tower.)

Choay’s analysis is indeed very helpful in understanding what makes the Zeus Altar such a powerful object which dominates not only the Museum Island in Berlin with its presence, but also Bergama with its conspicuous absence. The reconstruction of the Altar is a powerful memory-image for at least 15 million people who petitioned for its return to Turkey. The same is true for many others who associate the temple with German culture or with Greek antiquity.

When we acknowledge that the 19th and early 20th century archaeology actively constructed and altered the image of the monument, and that the altar that we experience today is mostly a modern iconic image, the very concept of archaeological patrimony requires a more nuanced definition. What is inherited from the past is not only the product of the far distant past, but a creative contribution of the excavators and restorers, as well as, that of people who subsequently associated their identity with the ancient monument.

Unfortunately, in today's historiography we are very far from acknowledging this point. The museum sees the history of modern archaeology as a history of acquisition, that is a tool to assert the legality of the exhibited pieces. In doing so it paradoxically overlooks the creative contribution of the archaeologists who have constructed the museum itself. The defenders of restitution, on the other hand, present this history simply as an account of pillage and vandalism.

The history of modern archaeology, however, is the common property of all the countries involved. The teaching of this common history should be negotiated among the Western European countries and the countries of the Mediterranean basin. As a first step towards such an understanding the Pergamon Museum has to develop a new strategy for the presentation of the archaeological monument, one that underlines the modern construction of the monument in collective memory in lieu of uncritically celebrating it as the original Greek altar.

Developing such an alternative museology is particularly important given the contemporary search to define a common European cultural heritage, one that transcends national patrimony. Hence Europe has to face the repatriation debate from a different perspective. Alongside the Western European states, Greece is a member, and Turkey is an official candidate for the European Community. At this critical juncture, the discourse of restitution may gain a new dimension if we cease to consider archaeological artifacts as mere cultural goods, but acknowledge their role in the modern politics of memory. Central to the question of repatriation is not only the legitimacy of the acquisition, but the right to associate one's collective identity with a powerful memory-image.

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