

# “Small Archaeological Artifacts as Witnesses of History: Collecting Activities in the Life of Athanasios S. Rousopoulos (1823–1898)”

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This project researches....

...archaeological artifacts from Greece as sources for the microhistory of collecting practices, which are discussed in their broader sociocultural and historical contexts.

fig. 1



fig. 2

Can we reconstruct the impact archaeological artifacts had on a person's life?

Can we invoke them as cultural artifacts of modern societies?

The abundance of reception studies for Greece suggests a resounding “yes” to these questions.

Herein, the symbolic use of Greek monuments, especially in nation building, has attracted the most attention so far. Next to that, archaeology's pluralization into archaeologies in post-colonial approaches focuses on archaeological scholarship and practice as phenomena of nationalist, colonial, and imperial agendas. These find their essential counterweight in the category of indigenous archaeologies. However, this structural binarism of colonizing and being colonized in the name of antiquities misses particularized research approaches.

Studies on the emergence of archaeological museums and antiquities displays have long identified the central role private collectors had in the cultural reception of antiquities. All the same, individual discussions are still rare.

With the theoretical background of object biographies, this dissertation works out aspects of the microhistory of antiquities collecting. It proposes to dig into the topic microhistorically in order to complement the debate of private ownership of objects with their sociocultural function for the individual.

### ANTIQUITIES POLICIES AND ACADEMIC SPECIALIZATION IN GREECE DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the early years of the Greek state (founded in 1830), several institutions were assigned with the task of managing archaeological material. In 1834, the first antiquities law was passed by the Othonian Regency. It defined the provisions for archaeological excavations, for the collecting of ancient artifacts and for their commerce. Regulatory authorities – the Ephorates and the Archaeological Committee – controlled these matters. The law was in effect until a revised and augmented antiquities law was issued in 1899, regulating the circulation of archaeological material with increased strictness.

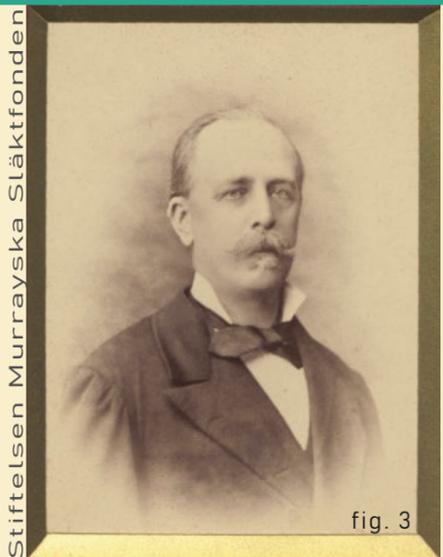


fig. 3

“A gentleman used to say ‘Rousopoulos’ house is where children and antiquities stand in every corner’.”

source:  
Louisa Rousopoulou, biographical notes on Athanasios Rousopoulos, 1894.  
Murrayska Släktarkivet i Riksarkivet, 131-6

In 1837, the University of Athens was founded, where archaeology was taught at the Faculty of Philosophy. In the same year, the Archaeological Society at Athens was established. This society, though organized privately, had much authority in the public discourse of archaeological topics. The personnel of all these institutions overlapped in many cases, representing the country's academic elite specializing in archaeological practices and studies.

### ANTIQUITIES FROM THE LIFE OF ATHANASIOS ROUSOPOULOS

It is at this junction between questions of antiquities policies in nineteenth century Greece and individual collecting practices that the project proposes to research these phenomena on a smaller scale. It focuses on the case of the Athenian archaeologist Athanasios S. Rousopoulos (1823–1898, fig. 3) and looks into his different strategies as an antiquities collector.

Working from bottom to top, results are embedded in the wider social and historical context of Rousopoulos' collecting activities. His case offers a substantive example to conduct a microhistorical study, as Rousopoulos unites various categories of archaeological practices typical of the nineteenth century in one person. He was Archaeology Professor at the University of Athens and owned a renowned collection of Greek antiquities that attracted visitors from the academic world as well as travelers to Greece. He sold archaeological artifacts to international clients for many years. Because of this, we find his antiquities in different museums (fig. 2, highlighted).

The role Greek antiquities played in Athanasios Rousopoulos' life can be reconstructed from a variety of references in published texts and unpublished biographical material. As the analysis tracks his different living environments (Vogatsiko, Constantinople, Göttingen, Patras, Athens, as well as travels to many European countries), it reconstructs Rousopoulos' relationship with antiquities in these settings.

### METHOD & SOURCES

The thesis is conceptualized with object biographies: these employ the idea that things embody cultural practices and are, therefore, material witnesses of sociohistorical processes. This idea serves as the base on which to elaborate a study focusing in detail on the life of Rousopoulos. The biographies of small archaeological artifacts serve to comprehend their wider significance in the collector's biography as a specialized academic as well as an individual with personal ties to affluent people in Greece and abroad.

Research for this project was begun in archives in Athens that specialize in the administration history of archaeological material in Greece since the early nineteenth century, such as the Historical Archives of the Archaeological Service (fig. 1, a list numbering the antiquities with Rousopoulos' heirs in 1902) and the Historical Archives of the University at Athens (OeAW at OeAI Athens fellowship, 2019). Pieces from Rousopoulos' collection that remained in Greece were discovered in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens (fig. 4, highlighted).

The sources obtained through archival visits and bibliographical work allow for a discussion of archaeological artifacts as a biographical attribute not only for Rousopoulos, but also for his family and household (see the quote next to fig. 3).

13,355 νουμ. Γα. Εφορ. Συγγραμ. του μνημ. 1835

3	25	=	75
5	20	=	100
8	120	=	960
12	12	=	144
74	12	=	888
87	10	=	870
90	100	=	9000
102	10	=	1020
124	10	=	1240
157	5	=	785
225	40	=	9000

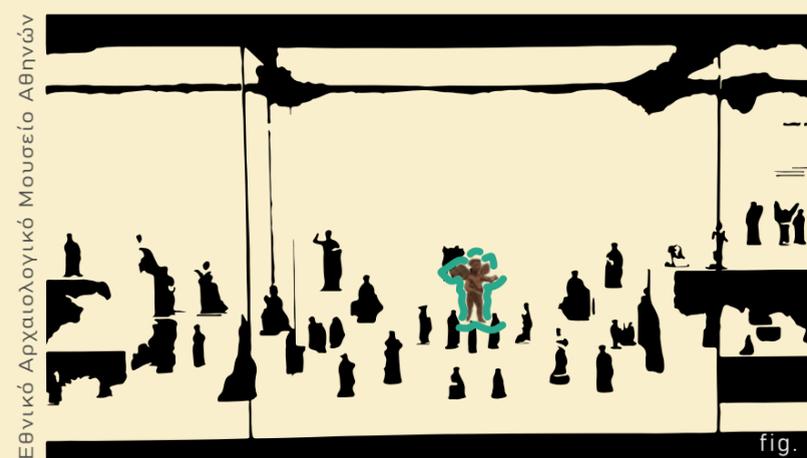


fig. 4

ΥΠΠΟΑ/ Διεύθυνση Διαχείρισης Εθνικού Αρχείου Μνημείων/Τμήμα Διαχείρισης του Ιστορικού Αρχείου Αρχαιοτήτων και Αναστηλώσεων