

Article

Archaeologists, Treasure Hunters and Collectors: Heritage in the Spotlight

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Abstract: This paper inquires into different aspects involved in gathering archaeological materials practices in the contemporary world. Archaeological objects comprise an intricate network of interests such as social, academic, scientific, touristic, historical, territorial, and economic, among others. It is based on those interests that the objects are appropriated and re-signified depending on specific contexts. We introduce two Argentinean cases in order to look into the relations between people and collected objects, and how those relations intertwine with social and political issues. Founded on these cases, we assess the need to create a broad-encompassing framework to study the collecting practices and the great diversity of actors involved.

Keywords: appropriation; archaeological heritage; temporality; cultural studies

1. Introduction

Collectionism, huaqueo, treasure hunters, archaeological bandits, tombaroli, pillage, piterismo, looting, and plundering: These are some of the categories used by professional archaeologists to address the different practices related to gathering and use of archaeological materials. Such activities encompass phenomena associated with processes of appropriation, and heritage and local memory activation, as well as controversies referred to as commodification processes, including the illegal trade of antiques. Commonly, these activities are defined as a global problem affecting the integrity and conservation of archaeological sites and materials [1–9]. This perspective lies on the idea of a universal value of archaeological evidence related to the knowledge about the past that can be obtained by studying it. According to this conception, “there is a universal imperative to preserve archaeological context” [10] (p. 297). This notion is also supported by national and international laws, which, during the 20th century, have legitimated the management of archaeological evidence as universal heritage. Several authors [10–15] point out that such legislation contributes to a perception of heritage that focuses on objects to the detriment of historical processes. As a consequence, heritage is represented as a commodity, devoid of subject sense. This implies a (de)politicized view of the archaeological heritage constitution and origin, and it also legitimates a supremacy of the actors and institutions that are involved in its research and conservation [16,17]. In that vein, actors other than the

legitimated ones, gathering and using archaeological materials, reveal social conflicts. Their practices make evident a tense relationship between the Estate and civil society that emerges because of the question about the ownership of the materials and the authorized management of cultural goods.

In this paper, we assert the importance of studying social practices related to gathering and use of archaeological objects as actions that are originated outside of the academic historiography sphere, but still have an impact on the cultural and historical field. While we assert the importance of preserving the archaeological evidence for the development of science, we also consider that understanding it, as a universal heritage, is an apolitical and simplified representation of the past that shows a history without conflicts.

Therefore, in this paper, we introduce two different cases from Argentina in order to discuss developing a research perspective that considers the complexity of the practices involved in gathering and use of archaeological materials. First, we outline the theoretical basis to carry on such research. This theoretical basis comes from the public archaeology, supported by theoretical and methodological backgrounds developed inside the field of anthropology, the history of science, and sociology. It is a heterogeneous basis that results from the constant search for appropriated research strategies that does not simplify the complexity of the studied realities. According to this, we introduce theoretical backgrounds with the focus on two main points: (a) The collectionism as a wide spectrum of practices and actors related to the gathering and use of archaeological materials; and (b) the role of ancient objects in the contemporary Western world. Then, we examine two examples from Argentina in order to contextualize a global issue and introduce tangible descriptions to the discussion of the wide range of collecting practices. Thus, the cases are our starting point for discussing how objects are appropriated and re-signified, being part of exchange and reciprocity networks that go beyond the archaeological knowledge.

Finally, we reflect on the processes of claiming archaeological materials. We consider that this reflection is paramount to the development of an archaeological practice involved with the conflict over the ownership and management of culture as a social issue.

2. Traces of an Intricate Practice

The search for ancient objects and their gathering and preservation has gained momentum in the contemporary Western world. Today, in unstable contexts, coexist in an “explosion of the memory” with a planned obsolescence, a high esteem in which the ephemeral is held, and the transient nature of the facts of life [18]. The obsession for recording and storing memories puts on one side of the balance the material and long-standing quality of the objects, and on the other side, a fluid temporality characterized by the overlapping of times and spaces represented in communicational devices [19]. We argue that it is worth asking about the role of antiquities in such processes and how these processes are connected to the validity of gathering archaeological material practices. To that end, we adopt an archaeological approach by which objects are in no way neutral: They cannot be thought of fixed entities with essential attributes since they are culturally and historically defined according to a multiplicity and a variety of relationships. Thus, human life would be unthinkable without the objects, given that experiences and social relations are deeply rooted in, and mediated by, material contexts [20].

People usually relate their own stories with symbols, and they revisit the past by stockpiling different objects one after the other. In doing this, material culture makes up temporal and spatial inscriptions of the memory and it grants some extent of subjectivity to certain contents. Thus, objects enable the fixation of memories bringing the past to the present, so the past can be redefined as part of the memory [18,21,22]. The past has a founding and legitimating effect, making it a subject of symbolic disputes. Therefore, how the past is organized through the objects accounts for a specific set of representations and interests in the present and not others [21].

In connection with the above-mentioned ideas, we consider Benjamin’s [23] perspective when addressing collectionism as a way of understanding the past. The collector not only accumulates

objects, but he or she also gives them an ever-changing historical meaning. The collector sorts the objects, classifies, and reorganizes them. Additionally, in doing so, the collector develops different representations of what is real. Such representations gain continuity within a specific narrative. From this point of view, the study of collecting practices may be a path to recognize and understand how people treat objects when projecting themselves onto a specific present.

Collecting practices were studied as activities related to the three pillars of human existence such as curiosity, thirst for power, and communication needs [19]. A wide and extended material about collecting had been written during the 20th, including different approaches (psychological, anthropological, social, and historical), and introducing a great diversity of problems. Such studies go from the obsessive passion, usually present in the character of collectors [24–26] to questions about the role of collecting practices based on social, economic, historical, and institutional aspects [23,27–33]. It is not our intention to summarize the multiple discussions and contributions published on this subject. Instead, we highlight that the studies address a great diversity of contexts and subjects pointing to the idea that collecting is a widespread phenomenon in time and space that changes its characteristics depending on dominant knowledge models, political positions, and consumption economy practices in modern Western society [34–36].

Many papers about collecting practices have been published in the cultural studies field giving rise to a new research issue among the studies of material culture: The collecting studies. The analysis of collecting practices as a social and cultural matter, related to the construction of meanings about the world and the experience in time and space represents the starting point for these studies [23,27,29,32,33,37]. Such a perspective involved three broad thematic areas: The nature of collections and the reasons why some people collect; the history of collections and of collecting practices; and the complex issue of collection policies.

Walter Benjamin's work on the history of the art collector Eduard Fuchs is a benchmark on the first thematic area mentioned above [23]. His analysis made it noticeable that the individual collecting practice gains a sense of significance according to the specific social context where it occurs. Benjamin proposed that Fuchs' collecting activity was related to a 19th-century bourgeois' obsession. As a consequence, it created a new arrangement of objects, bare of their original functions. Thereby, the inheritance from the past becomes private goods, that is, the collection.

Many studies deal with collector's character traits because collecting is an activity that is in some intimate fashion a way of controlling the world. Thus, collectors are described as curious persons, self-taught, with possessive feelings, patients, and persistent; they also show a tension between the need of a private relationship with their objects and the avidity of exhibiting the objects in public [19]. Since every collector represents a self-taught erudite person, in order to interpret the process of acquisition and conservation of objects, it is necessary to decode their practices. The nature and history of a collection, in addition to the above-mentioned characteristics of the collector, should be considered in order to understand the assumptions about knowledge and value that the collection embodies [37]. These kinds of studies, focusing on the origin and development of particular collections, are crucial to comprehending that, although collecting is a practice performed in the interest of the collector, its result exceeds the merely personal sphere [27,32].

The history of collections and of the collecting practices is the second perspective mentioned above. Throughout the history of the Western world, this kind of studies remark different criteria for the arrangement of collections related to the thirst of knowledge and possession, such as the right of conquest, collecting relics, collecting everything rare or intriguing, and the organization of cabinets of curiosities, among others. In such a way, James Clifford [29] observed that the concept of possession, inherent in collecting practices, is central in Western culture's worldview. Clifford also highlighted the historicity of the activity of collecting shows that, in time, the processes progressively changed the subject to political and economic scenarios. In this manner, some studies focused on collecting as a consumption activity. Jean Baudrillard [27] led the way when he pointed out the relationship between collecting practices and the middle 20th century's consumption society. This author proposed

to consider the collected objects as things devoid of their utilitarian function. Subjective senses related to nostalgia, memories, and reminiscences are given to objects in the abstraction of the collector mind. According to Baudrillard, in the consumption society, the collection is a new arrangement of objects that turn into goods of exchange, conservation, illegal trade, social ritual, exhibition, and even saleable goods. When considering collecting practices in such a perspective, the activity can be understood as a part of the cultural.

Finally, many studies analyze institutional collection policies and the role of collecting practices at the beginning of modern science. This kind of analysis “include decisions about what any particular museum should and should not collect, why and how the material may be disposed of, and the relationship between documentation systems and the kinds of research which we can be generated” [32] (p. 193). We are particularly interested in this perspective because it analyzes the participation of collectors, amateurs, and aficionados in the strengthening of scientific activities—mainly in such disciplines that gather material culture during fieldwork, like archaeology. These approaches highlight the importance of collector characters in the collections assembling and socialization—which, in several cases, influenced the popular perception of nature and the past. It is also observed the displacement of these amateurs practices with the development of professional archaeology [13,32,38–45]. This kind of researches assess the importance of collective and cooperative work in science and evaluate how the knowledge spaces are structured in the practice with a geographical differentiation: The outside field and the lab or the museum. In this spatial structure, a network of individuals guarantees the supply of objects for the study [43].

In Latin America, for example, such studies have analyzed the importance of collectors in the rise of archaeological knowledge through the founding of scientific societies [46,47]. In some cases, collectors became key actors in the public administration when their collections became public heritage in the context of the organization of modern museums during the 19th and 20th centuries [43,47–49].

Another example of collecting practices related to archaeology comes from Griffiths’ [39] study; it deals with amateur antiquarians and the way they contribute to shaping Australian historical narratives from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The author shows how collectors build a sense of identity in a colonial context because of an intellectual appropriation of Aboriginal places and their cultural remains. Additionally, he points out that these activities changed their meanings in the late twentieth century, including “black histories” into the political and environmental debates about museums, “conservation”, and “wilderness”. Therefore, part of collectors’ activities first contributes to creating traditions in the dispossession process, and so, they sustain the indigenous position in a cultural battleground.

According to the aim of this paper, we point out that this historical perspective left us a great lesson about the existence of ambiguous boundaries between the archaeologist and non-archaeologist; between cultural heritage and archaeological objects; and between private and public heritage. Those boundaries were social and historically created in relation to the heritagization of archaeological objects during the conflictive processes of defining their possession; to the way in which cultural goods are managed, and the tensions between the State and the civil society [13,40,48,50]. Heritagization entails a change in the status of the objects because of the application of new criteria, the intervention of experts, and a debate about their public accessibility. It is an intricate topic since it is about the historical nature of the existing boundaries between professional archaeologists and collectors of archaeological objects. Such a distinction, with only a few exceptions, lies in specific legislation that gives, to the State, the role of guardian of the archaeological heritage. Thus, many regulations punish the private appropriation of archaeological heritage in order to promote scientific studies. As a result, collaborative practices that involved professionals and amateurs during the twentieth century are invisibilized [51], and also, a vast span of worldviews and practices connected to archaeological objects—before, during, and after they became archaeological objects—are overlooked or, to say the least, underestimated. Taken as a whole, those collaborative practices reveal the existence of other types of aspects that involve objects appropriation in terms of memory, identity, and commodification.

Those aspects must be at the cornerstone of any debate about who is authorized to study and to manage the archaeological materials.

Nevertheless, Latin American studies addressing today's collecting practices of archaeological objects mainly focus on how those practices affect the integrity and conservation of archaeological sites and materials [1,3,6,7,9]. As a matter of fact, in poor rural areas in many of Latin American countries, people excavate and sell ancient objects as an economic activity that is very important for domestic subsistence [6,52–54]. In this context, a wide debate is taking place in order to assess the positioning of archaeologists that consider social, economic, and historical standpoints involved [6,55]. In Latin America, besides the cases that reveal an extreme social inequality, few studies take into account the multiple dimensions involved in today's private practice of collecting archaeological objects [14,48–50,56–60]. Those studies situate collecting practices in a set of dynamic relations with archaeologist, museums, private collectors, local inhabitants, among others.

Over the next section, we introduce two contemporary examples in order to reflect on the potential of studying the practices connected to archaeological objects.

3. Today's Ancient Objects

Far for a comparative analysis between the two cases, we introduce the examples looking for attention on the diversity of situations involved in today's appropriation of ancient objects. Firstly, we present the case of an inhabitant of a rural area in Antofagasta de la Sierra (in the Northwestern region of Argentina). He collected archaeological materials from his lands throughout his life. Secondly, we describe the case of a collector of historical objects related to the Vuelta de Obligado's battle (in Buenos Aires province, central-Eastern Argentina). He created his collection using a metal detector. Many differences can be pointed out between both cases, such as the spatial and the socioeconomic contexts of the collectors, and the temporality of the collected objects. However, both examples share two important aspects. In the first place, each collection comprises ancient objects that were collected in the same archaeological site. Secondly, the history of both cases shows key moments when the collectors met the archaeologists that were interested in those archaeological sites and materials.

The methodology for the compilation of these two examples includes interviews and observation activities, published interviews by other researchers and the analysis of newspapers. In the Antofagasta de la Sierra's case, one of the authors conducted observations and interviews at the Museo del Hombre, she registered informal conversations with local inhabitants, and she also searched in the published references of the collection [60,61]. In the Vuelta de Obligado's case, the interviews and observations took place during commemorative events related to the site, when the private collection was exhibited. Additionally, because the case of this collector was reported on the news, we included the analysis of press articles.

3.1. Case I: the "Collage" of the Museo del Hombre of Antofagasta de la Sierra

Anacleto Cháves was an inhabitant of Antofagasta de la Sierra (a town in the Puna region, Province of Catamarca, Argentina). He was a shepherd whose house was located on an archaeological site. For a long time, he facilitated archaeological excavations in his territory. In the meantime, he made a collage over a flagstone with a drawing of a landscape using archaeological pottery and lithics from the surrounding area (Figure 1). Cháves kept the collage in his house until the time of its donation to his hometown's archaeological museum, the Museo del Hombre of Antofagasta de la Sierra.

Antofagasta de la Sierra is a small town in the North of Catamarca province, located about 590 km northwestwards the provincial capital. It is a small rural town with 730 inhabitants according to the Argentine National Census of 2010, and thus, its population density is about 0.03 persons per square kilometer. Based on archaeological and anthropological researches this area of the Puna has been steadily settled, at least, since 10,000 years B.P. [62–67]. Thus, the Puna social landscape has been built through a long population process of thousands of years. A variety of material culture repertoire was

involved in such a social construction. Currently, this repertoire is re-signified because of touristic activities that gained impulse during the last years [67].



Figure 1. Cháves' collage exhibited at the *Museo del Hombre de Antofagasta de la Sierra*. We are grateful to the authorities of the Museum for allowing us to take pictures of the Collage.

According to Haber et al. [68], over time, three main actors had an impact on the created representations around the archaeological materials and the local history: The local inhabitants, the local museum (Museo del Hombre), and the different groups of archaeologists that work in the area. The authors pointed out that the knowledge of local inhabitants and their participation in the archaeological researches are invisibilized because of the representations crystallized in the museum, and because of the positioning marked in the discourse of the archaeologists. Thus, according to the perspective of the local community, the Cháves' collage "is the only piece made of "little things" from here, by people from here, and shown through a decision made by people from here" [68] (p. 89).

The history of this collage was reconstructed because of the research of a Catamarca University Volunteering Programme developed in the museum. Anacleto Cháves was interviewed by volunteers of the programme that recorded how and why he made the aforementioned artwork. Cháves said that the tejitas (archaeological pottery) and flechitas (lithic material) used in his work were gathered from different locations while he was walking when looking after the sheep, that is, in the course of his routine. He said that he "had begun by gathering these things, putting them in a box and, at a certain point, started to perform the work" [61] (p. 21, our translation of the original quote in Spanish).

In the interview, Cháves told them that he did not think about his work's significance until he brought it to the museum. He explained that the landscape drawn was very important for him because it was a representation of his land, with a lot of "things" that were always part of his life. He remembered that he had not learned about local "things" at school so he had begun to prepare the collage to increase his knowledge and show it to others.

For a long time, Cháves kept the objects in a box. He explained that since he was a young man he was interested in "those things different to our life, nowadays, in these years [. . .] things that have come since many centuries ago" [60] (p. 11). That is the reason why he collected and store ancient objects.

Then, he decided to create the collage and hang it up on the door, inside his house. Twenty years later, upon request of the person in charge of the museum, Cháves donated the collage to this institution in 2004. The interviewers realized that Cháves made his artwork in the middle years of the 1980s, at the same time that a group of archaeologist begun continuous and systematic visits to his house in order to

study the archaeological site located there [60]. Due to this coincidence, Roda infers that Cháves made the collage so as to show the archaeologist that the objects they were looking for could be found in that place. Beside the motivations that made Cháves manufacturing the collage, we consider the presence of the local group of archaeologists as a milestone in the relationship that the collector created with the collected objects. Since then, for more than twenty years, Cháves joined the archaeological fieldwork in Antofagasta [60]; and he did not block the development of the researches in spite of his collecting activity. Noteworthy is that his name is recalled in an important archaeological site: “Casa Cháves Montinculos” [69].

This case underscores practices that take place in every-day relationships with the archaeological objects and the archaeologists. For example, the Cháves collage synthesizes how the past is a part of his present, and it discloses knowledge about a deep past that is not included in the official history. These kinds of relationships with objects get specific meanings when the protagonists are local residents, even if these people-things associations are involved in the antiquity trade [5,50,70]. In other cases, it has been mentioned that there is an array of relations established with the objects in which people re-signify their space and project themselves in time [48,50,53,54,71]. In spite of the variety of situations, we find a common ground: Relations with objects are a part of a long-term temporality. Therefore, objects are used to establish a connection with the past and with the community through knowledge. Moreover, in many occasions, alternative meanings to those inherent to heritage or different to those addressed by professional archaeology are created. In this example, Cháves’ collected objects are appreciated because they make it possible that Cháves connects himself with a distant past of his own territory. At the same time, as we mentioned above, the collage is especially appreciated in the local community because it is one of the few exhibited objects in the museum that was manufactured and arranged by local people.

The relationship with these objects is part of a long-term temporality that usually pre-exists to the archaeological activity and the subsequent classification of the objects in terms of heritage. Whenever archaeologists disassociate the objects from social relationships, they limit and censor the wide spectrum of meanings about landscape and local history that those relationships condense. As an example of the established hierarchy of knowledge, the Cháves collage is displayed in the museum next to archaeological materials; but while the collage is described as a local art craft, the archaeological materials are presented as scientific evidence interpreted by archaeological researchers. The collage is shown as a local representation that is disassociated from the historical prose that presents the scientific scenario of the museum exhibition.

3.2. Case II: *Touching Our History. From Patriot to Experienced Looter of Historical Relics*

In November 2009, the National Sovereignty Day at the Argentine House of Government with the inauguration of an exhibition on the Battle of Vuelta de Obligado (dating back to the mid-19th century) was celebrated. For the said exhibition, archaeological objects were temporarily loaned by the Museum of Luján, by the Argentine Armed Forces, and by private collectors. Ángel Pérez, a collector from Baradero¹, gained public visibility in his town because of his participation at this event. The local media portrayed him as a contributor to “altruism” by increasing the knowledge of local history as he had invested money of his own to obtain and preserve the objects of the battle of Obligado. Indeed, Ángel Pérez had spent several years gathering objects from the battlefield—a public park today—with the help of a metal detector. Additionally, he was a member, alongside local professors and historians, of the Permanent National Commission of Celebration of Vuelta de Obligado. Pérez’ collecting activity in Vuelta de Obligado was interrupted at the end of 2008 when a group of archaeologist from the National University of Lujan asked him to stop excavating the site. Then, several meetings happened and Pérez gave the archaeologist access to his collection in

¹ Baradero is a district (administrative division) located in the far northeastern corner of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina.

order to analyze the objects [72]. The archaeological site, Vuelta de Obligado, was systematically studied by archaeologist since 2000. Due to multiple factors, such as the visibility and the accessibility of the site, it was repeatedly altered through private collecting practices of objects related to the battlefield. These practices involved local inhabitants and collectors from other localities. During the last decade, public politics promoting the value of the site heritage regulated those collecting activities. Among these public politics, the creation of a site museum in 2008 was important because many members of the local community participated in its creation and donated part of their collections for the exhibition. Additionally, in the exhibition, there were the most significant objects from the archaeological excavations and materials that Pérez donated [73].

Two years after the exhibition in the National Government House, the Federal Police broke into Pérez' house and confiscated his collection. He was accused of "experienced looter of historical relics" and charged with the infringement of the law on protection of cultural heritage enacted in the year 2003. This law dictates that anyone possessing archaeological objects obtained prior to the enactment of the law must have such objects registered in the Official Records. He was also accused of buying and selling antiques. Thus, Pérez was arrested for three days in Buenos Aires city. The police seized his collection of historical objects and it was analyzed and preserved by working for the National University of Lujan because of a special request of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (National Institute of Anthropology and Latin American Thought); the National Center of the Archaeological and Paleontological Record works at this institute. Due to the police raid, a great public debate began in the media; and many voices considered that Pérez received an unfair treatment. People also claimed that Pérez was "a real patriot (. . .) that personally rescued a lot of our historical heritage on the Vuelta de Obligado battle even at the expense of long days along the Paraná River coast"². Six months later, the law-suit was dismissed because Pérez did not keep "undeclared cultural goods", and there was no evidence about the "buying and selling of antiques"³.

Even though this case is complex, we focus on some relevant aspects in order to compare with Case I. First, Pérez created his collection of objects of the Vuelta de Obligado battle through a planned activities routine. He searched for the objects spending time and his own money. The objects gathered were those that were identified because of their scientific or historical value. The collection became communicable through different practices: When he loaned it for the exhibition of 2009, when he participated with his materials in the reenactment and performance of the celebration of the battle each 20 November, and when he became part of the Permanent National Commission of Celebration of Vuelta de Obligado, among others. A variety of information's sources converge in these practices making the collection a communicable whole about the battle. We still have an unanswered question about how important those practices are for creating collective memories and/or challenging the established ideas about the past.

Another interesting issue is that such communication practices are due to the strategic social position of the collectors involved. By this, we mean the resources to sustain the collecting activity as well as the social, political and economic networks contributing to generating prestige around such activity. In this regard, there are advocates for considering this activity as a way of leisure and entertainment of middle and upper classes [5,49,74]. This seems to be the case of the networks

² On-line news between 2009 and 2011 can be found at the following links: <http://www.baraderohoy.com/2009/11/20/un-baraderense-en-la-rosada-para-recordar-la-batalla-de-vuelta-de-obligado/>; <http://www.baraderoteinforma.com.ar/en-silencio-inauguraron-pulperia-en-baradero/>; <http://www.baraderoteinforma.com.ar/mega-operativo-para-detener-a-un-coleccionista-local/>; <http://canalwebsanpedro.com.ar/fue-detenido-en-baradero-un-colleccionista-acusado-de-tener-piezas-historicas-de-la-batalla-de-obligado-roadas/>; <http://www.baraderoteinforma.com.ar/similitudes-y-diferencias-entre-amantes-de-la-historia-nacional/> Last consulted: 20 November 2015.

³ On-line news: <https://www.laopinionsemanario.com.ar/noticia/angel-p-rez-sobrese-do-en-causa-por-delitos-contr-el-patrimonio-hist-rico-202051352934681>; <http://canalwebsanpedro.com.ar/angel-perez-fue-sobreseido-en-la-causa-que-lo-imputaba-como-saqueador-de-reliquias-historicas/> Last consulted: 20 November 2015.

of users of metal detectors—including Ángel Pérez—whose actions directly impact the integrity of certain types of archaeological sites across the globe [45]. The impact (positive and/or negative) and the legal status of the actions conducted by such networks of amateurs are widely debated among archaeologists. During the last decades, a greater access to more powerful technologies, such as metal detectors, reveals a quantitative increase of this type of collecting activities [2]. Many countries consider the recovery of archaeological objects with metal detectors as a type of heritage crime related to a “number of hotspots of criminal activity at heritage assets” [75] (p. 3). There are many different positions considering the role of collectors. Such positions range from assertions of the need to ban the activities of the amateurs altogether, to proposals aimed at strengthening their collaboration with professionals [9,74,76,77]. It is curious that this activity does not decline, not even in those countries where it is banned by law (like Argentina). Depending on the viewpoint, the activity of metal-detector users may be understood in a wide variety of ways—hobbyist, looter, treasure hunter, or volunteer [78]. We consider, as Penny English [79] does, that archaeology addresses this debate as part of a problem of heritage management with the prevalence of legal aspects. However, “the debate always leads us back to the intangible and seemingly insoluble question of who should have the right to control access to the past” [79] (p. n.d., para. 1). Much has been said about this topic. We do not wish to dig in this point; instead, we would like to indicate that the example in Case II contrasts with those cases where the protagonists are local inhabitants.

Both cases refer to people that appropriated archaeological materials and re-signified them as key elements of their personal history. Additionally, the objects are valued as part of the production of knowledge in a different way: For the collector, the object has intrinsic qualities that make it valuable, whereas, for archaeologists, the real value of each object lies in the context of its finding [33]. For such reasons, the interpretations that emerged from the collections open up spaces for understanding the past, as it becomes a set of communicable objects, and even a new form of cultural heritage. In both examples mentioned above, collectors were influenced by connecting their self with the archaeological research process. It is possible that, because of these connections, they decided to open their collections to the public. Being part of archaeological fieldwork or experiencing the interpretation process around the objects must influence in some way their decisions. However, both cases are very different. It is evident in the different ways the collections turned public and in the tensions that participated in each process. Such differences are related to the place of residence of each collector and their social position: Cháves is a shepherd in the Puna, and Perez lives in the city where he is supported by an important social and political net of relationships. In addition, each of them understands archaeological objects according to a different otherness. On the one hand, Cháves’s artwork is indigenous history, a history that falls outside the official narratives in the national history [80]. As a result, a large part of the Pune population does not recognize itself as indigenous. On the other hand, Pérez’s collection is related to the one-off moment in the nineteenth century, which relevance in the origins of the national estate was widely debated among the twentieth-century Argentine historiographers [81]. Additionally, the temporality that stands out in each case is important. In the Cháves example, the collection represents a way of understanding the past that is related to the memory activation of the territory; it is a part of everyday life that cannot be reduced in terms of universal heritage. In contrast, the case of Pérez’s collection describes situations where the representations of the objects are built on the basis of archaeological science. We will argue that in there were, in these cases, different kinds of temporality and appropriation processes.

We consider that the Cháves’ case emphasizes the need to pay particular attention to the relations between people and objects that exist prior to archaeological work. In this regard, studying the long-term temporality is paramount to understanding the tensions due to the archaeological intervention. We ask the following: What is the relation between these forms of appropriation and the meaning given during the archaeological practice? Can these relations with archaeological objects be understood as practices that drive processes of remembrance and oblivion? Is it possible that these different forms of knowledge and relation with objects exist side by side? How these connections to

ancient objects are intertwined with processes of commodification and economic appraisal? For its part, Pérez' case makes us question about how archaeological and historical researches have important effects on how people value ancient objects. Furthermore, this example reminds us of the ethical dilemmas related to the development of collaborative practices with such actors. On the one hand, collaboration with collectors makes it possible to guide collecting activities in order to avoid the destruction of the archaeological context. However, on the other hand, collaboration also empowers collectors who gain new tools for their activities. Since, in many cases, these actors are motivated by a real interest in the past, we understand that it is important to develop a perspective that not only focuses on the point of view of the professional archaeologist.

In sum, the differences can be considered in terms of the social position of the actors involved, in terms of the public and political use of memory triggered by such practices, and in terms of the temporality generated. All of this has an impact on the social meanings created around the objects because of the actions of both collectors. While the Cháves' collage is considered as a local handcraft, the collection of Pérez was exhibited as an assemblage of symbols of the Argentine nation. While the urban collector case is completely different from the case of the rural inhabitants who collect ancient materials around their place of origin, it is the social and contemporary value of the objects that connects both and puts them side by side. As part of the present, objects comprise an intricate set of interests, such as social, academic, scientific, touristic, historical, territorial and economic. It is upon those interests that objects are appropriated and re-signified under such varied activities. Consequently, different forms of connecting with 'archaeological material', with 'ancient objects' may coexist under certain conditions that can even be opposing. Thus, a process of heritage activation that underscores the scientific value of a specific object does not preclude that the same materials may be part of other types of relations and forms of valuations in tension with the former. The consideration of such processes of appropriation of archaeological objects cannot be overlooked when reflecting on the complexity of the social implications of archaeological work in a specific context.

4. Conclusions

This work seeks to reflect on a variety of aspects related to the practices of gathering archaeological materials by private actors at the present time. Such activities speak of different ties established with the objects that generate different temporalities. In the first case, the relation with processes of memory activation in connection with the territory and the every-day life becomes quite obvious. In this regard, the temporal relations established with the objects that come before the academic/archaeological knowledge. Ancient objects are not understood in terms of archaeological heritage or scientific knowledge; instead, they seem to condense subjective senses that come from the local history weave.

On the contrary, the second case features temporal relations built in dialogue with historical and archaeological knowledge. Pérez defined himself as a collector, and he can be considered as a social actor who is concerned with historical studies but creates his own narratives about the past. The ancient in this case is defined in relation to the knowledge built around the objects, and simultaneously, it comprises the basis for reifying temporal relations in terms of origin, beauty, and knowledge [29]. At this point, a key unanswered question persists among archaeologists: Is it possible that a collector of archaeological objects becomes an important social actor included in the study and preservation of objects, rather than a factor that affects the integrity of the sites?

Finally, these two cases point out the need to open up debates addressing different questions within archaeology. The first case refers to the tensions resulting from the processes of heritagization generated in the archaeological practice and faces us with the question of co-existence of different forms of knowledge around objects. The second case makes us reflect on the effects of symbolic values generated by historical knowledge. In such a process, objects are disputed by different interests. It is paramount to look for ways to establish collaborative relations between the field of archaeology and such actors whose actions can impact the integrity of the sites. Thus, we argue that a broad-encompassing framework to study this process needs a relational approach that takes into

account temporalities and knowledge generated through the interaction between people and objects, and how such relations intertwine with social, political, and economic considerations.

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