

Fig. 1. Archaeological Museum of Carmo and headquarters of the Royal Association of Portuguese Architects and Archaeologists, *Boletim de História e Arqueologia*, 2.^a s, t. III, nº 10, 1879, sp.

II

Backstage strategies: how a private collection becomes a (non) museum collection. The example of Possidónio da Silva (1806-1896)

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*« The archaeological reproductions of the ruins
of these [Egyptian] gigantic temples,
which still amaze the imagination¹ »*

I. POSSIDÓNIO DA SILVA, AN ERUDITE SOCIETY, AND A MUSEUM

In 1863, a group of Portuguese led by Possidónio da Silva (1806-1896) joined forces in Lisbon to defend the interests of their profession: architecture. They founded the French-inspired² *Associação dos Arquitectos Civis Portugueses* (“Association of Portuguese Civil Architects”, AACP)³, established in the old church of the Carmo convent ruined by the 1755 earthquake (fig. 1). It provided meeting rooms and a specialized library here, while it began to publish the *Boletim de Arte e Architectura* (“Bulletin of Art and Architecture”, BAA)⁴. It strove, however, to rescue architectural and artistic components on the verge of being destroyed by works of adaptation of old buildings to new occupational typologies. Therefore, the following year a museum known as *Museu Arqueológico do Carmo* (“Carmo Archaeological Museum”, MAC) opened.

The name of the museum may, however, have deceived those who expected to find artefacts resulting from archaeological activity, namely prehistoric. They would certainly find objects from different geographical, cultural, and typological origin. But those objects

1. A inveja que tenho aos que visitam a Exposição Universal de Paris, *O Panorama*, XVII, Lisbon, 1867, p. 177. Our translation.

2. We assume that the AACP is inspired by the *Société centrale des architectes français* (SCAF) founded in Paris (1840) at the initiative of a group of architects committed to defending their profession.

3. See Martins 2003.

4. Martins 2003.

covered a chronology only from Roman times to contemporary times. Therefore, the museum was closer to a “wonder cabinet” (although centered on the artificial world) or to an eclectic collection, than to a 19th century museum⁵. Nothing, however, that undermined the importance of the AACP and the MAC in a country where heritage safeguard was still ignored or undeserved by most politicians. Quite the contrary.

II. POSSIDÓNIO DA SILVA, HERITAGE SOCIETIES, AND THE TASTE FOR ANTIQUITIES

The AACP had a helmsman: Possidónio da Silva (fig. 2). Still a baby, he went to live in Rio de Janeiro in 1807, with the Portuguese Court that moved the capital of the Empire there following the French invasions. Possidónio soon revealed interest in the fine arts. Returning to Lisbon, he continued his training with Portuguese artists who showed him the way to Paris to graduate in architecture. He travelled as a government scholarship holder to the French capital in 1824, returning from there in 1833 with the ultimate launch of Liberalism in Portugal. In the meantime, he travelled through France and

stayed two years in Italy. These experiences showed him the significance and urgency of heritage safeguarding⁶.

Named “architect of the Royal House”, he sought to combine this work with the cult of the past, touring part of the national territory and photographically recording old buildings, which was new in the country. Nonetheless, he associated his voice with that of those who wanted to institutionalize the preservation of materials with historical, artistic, and archaeological significance. The dispensability, though, of the built heritage to justify Portuguese political boundaries seemed to determine the general ignorance on the subject.

It is thus understandable that the first years of the AACP was of assertion and extension of the initial project based on a neo-rationalist thought present in the Freemason ideals embraced by Possidónio, mentor and president of this erudite society.



Fig. 2. Possidónio da Silva, c. 1870. Col.: Ana Cristina Martins.

5. Martins 2005.

6. Martins 2003.

III. POSSIDÓNIO DA SILVA AND THE UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION OF 1867: THE ARRIVAL OF A COLLECTOR

Represented and medaled in the 1860's in national competitions⁷, MAC was invited to be part of the official Portuguese representation at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867 (April 1-October 31). Exhibition that was visited by Possidónio who went there in July to attend the *Conférence internationale de la Société impériale et centrale des architectes français*, one of the twenty-four congresses held during the exhibition⁸. At the age of 59, Possidónio da Silva could witness the ratification of Paris as the epicenter of modernity molded by the new Napoleonic imperial agenda and translated into numerous public spaces such as museums, galleries, and exhibitions. An example of this is the former palace of *Saint-Germain-en-Laye* transformed into *musée d'Antiquités celtiques et gallo-romaines dépendant du musée des Antiques* (1862) and which was visited by members of the 2nd session of the *Congrès international d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie préhistoriques* (17-30 August) after observing the prehistoric artifacts exhibited at the *Galerie de l'histoire du travail* of the Universal Exhibition⁹.

But other novelties could be found at the Exhibition. Along with the latest technological innovations, scientific discoveries, including archaeological ones, were displayed as evidence of the political and economic hegemony of countries like France, England, and Germany¹⁰. It is not surprising, therefore, that Possidónio returned enthusiastically to Lisbon and sought to enlarge the geographical, epistemological, and scientific boundaries of the AACP that assumed a new name: *Real Associação dos Arquitetos Cívicos e Arqueólogos Portugueses* ("Royal Association of Portuguese Civil Architects and Archaeologists", RAACAP) (1872). This way he intended to guarantee its protection, prestige, and perpetuity, associating simultaneously the archaeological activity with direct effects on the MAC and the Bulletin, now of "History and Archaeology".

This opened a new page in the existence of RAACAP and MAC, two expressions of the same reality that continued to be built with the will, knowledge, and resources of Possidónio da Silva, starting with his collections of art and archaeology, diversified following the 1867 Exhibition. Collections that result from the prospecting and excavations that he performed on the national territory, along with the purchases and exchanges obtained through the network of contacts that he was intensifying. As if, in the background, Possidónio, Association and Museum were three vertices of a triangle placed at the service of a strategy of institutional and/or personal statement.

7. Martins 2005.

8. Rasmussen 1989, p. 24.

9. Quiblier 2014, p. 68; Rasmussen 1989, p. 29.

10. Quiblier 2014, p. 68 and 72.

IV. THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AT THE MAC: SOME MENTIONS

Possidónio's return to the RAACAP presidency, with new contact networks, defined the enhancement of the MAC¹¹, as observed by the Italian prehistorian Luigi Pigorini (1842-1925): "Très heureux de faire avec vous pour votre Musée l'échange d'objets préhistoriques de l'Italie avec des objets préhistoriques du Portugal¹²."

Corroborating the practice of exchanging collectible pieces, this letter suggests the geographical extension and academic quality of Possidónio's network. It is then not surprising that the MAC sought to include, for instance, Phoenician objects and reproductions of low and high reliefs of monuments of Ancient Egypt. But what are these pieces? To answer this question requires resorting to crypto-history¹³ of the MAC because, apparently, none of these artefacts have reached the present day. We can, however, retrieve some information thanks to the massive epistolary of Possidónio da Silva, the RAACAP manuscripts, the two catalogues of MAC published in the 1880's, and the data included in the BAA.

Ancient Phoenicians at the MAC: a crypto-history exercise (1)

The MAC catalogues published in the 1880's (1876 and 1891)¹⁴ does not mention the artefacts sent from Sidon in 1875 by the Swedish archaeologist Carl Landberg (1848-1924) (fig. 3). It is strange, since they appear in the letters exchanged with Possidónio in this regard. Moreover, it is these letters that disclose to us the contents of the boxes to be shipped to Lisbon (fig. 4).

First, some lachrymatories, twelve clay and twenty-five glass, some of which rare, such as doubles; lucerne representing the goddess Astarte supported by lions and sixteen others in terracotta of eventual Jewish inspiration¹⁵; bronze statues, arrowheads; glass bracelets, small necklace or bracelet with blue pearls; jewelry set with four pairs of earrings, a ball with pearl and a gold shell; bowls and plates, a fragment of convex bottle and a small bottle neck; dozens of pieces in glass paste; Phoenician and Roman coins; a Phoenician head in terracotta; anthropomorphic Greek-Phoenician wooden sarcophagus of the 1st century A.D., associated with rings, bearing feline heads on one side and a lion on the other.

11. Subject addressed by us in 2003 in the oral paper "The Universal Exhibition of 1867 and the beginnings of collecting oriental artefacts in Portugal" submitted to the 3rd *International Congress of the Archaeology of the near East*, Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art.

12. Arquivo Histórico/Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses (A.H./A.A.P.), *Livro de Declarações da Real Associação dos Architectos Cívicos e Archeologos Portuguezes*, 21/10/1871.

13. See Serrão 2001. The crypto-history is dedicated to the study of materialities conceived but not materialized or, then, transformed, disappeared or destroyed.

14. See *Museu da Real Associação dos Architectos Cívicos e Archeologos Portuguezes*, Lisbon, 1876 and *Catálogo do Museu da Real Associação dos Architectos Cívicos e Archeologos Portuguezes*, Lisbon, 1891.

15. Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (I.A.N./T.T.), *Correspondência artística e científica, nacional e estrangeira*, com J. Possidónio da Silva, t. IX, em 8.^a, doc. 1083, 10/01/1875 (unpublished).

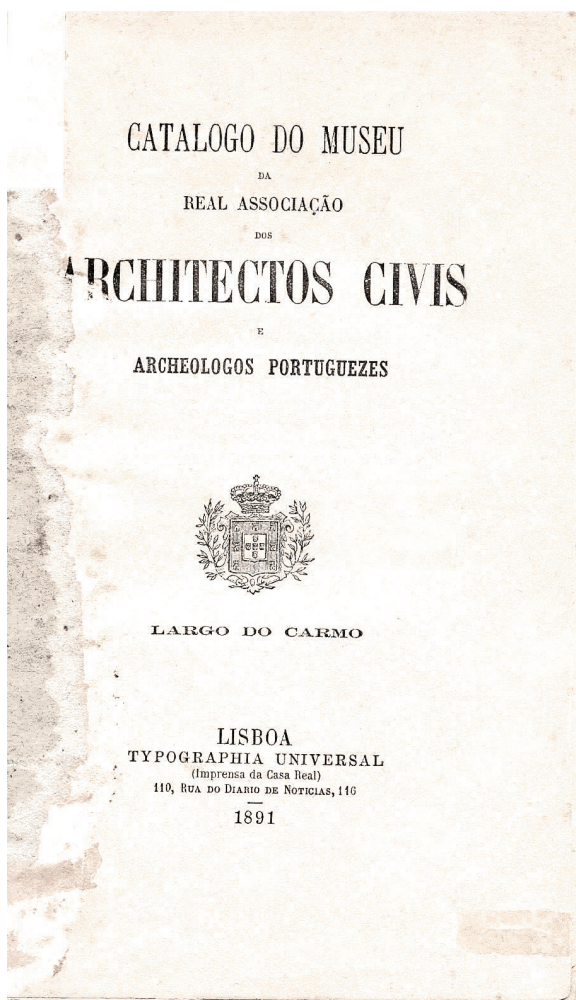


Fig. 3. Carmo Archaeological Museum Catalogue, 1891.

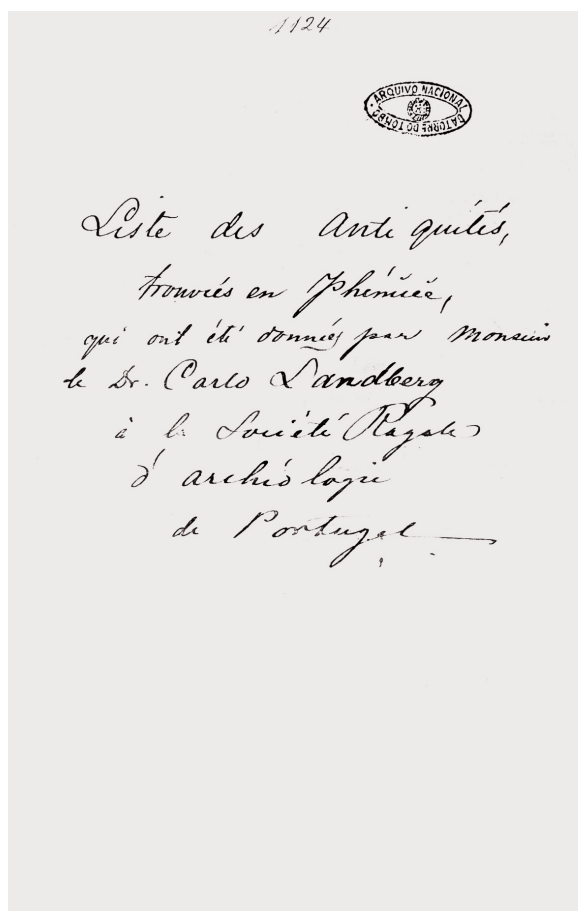


Fig. 4. Excerpt from a letter addressed to Possidónio da Silva by Carl Landberg, c. 1875. Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, Correspondência artística e científica, nacional e estrangeira, com J. Possidónio da Silva. Col.: Ana Cristina Martins.



Bas-Reliefs du Temple de Abydos

- N^o 1. — Bas-Relief, représentant au Dieu Horus, fils de Osiris et d'Isis, et la Déesse Isis ou Isis, (Déesse des ténèbres). —
- N^o 2. — Prêtre, faisant des offrandes au Dieu Osiris le second Hermès. —
- N^o 3. — Prêtre Isis, marchant en procession devant le Nôis, au large livonne de Osiris-Prêtre de l'Ammonthi (Infer Egyptien). —
- N^o 4. — Deux Bas-Reliefs, représentant des esclaves faisant des offrandes au Dieu Amon. —
- N^o 5. — Prêtre de la XVI. Dynastie offrant au Dieu Horus-Ancien. —
- N^o 6. — Esclave-femme, offrant au Dieu Amon.
- N^o 7. — Buste humain à tête d'épervier, c'est le Dieu Raoh-Hieracéphale, soit le Dieu Lunus. —
- N^o 8. — Bas-Relief représentant un Sphinx qui offre au Dieu Amon-Pré. —
- N^o 9. — Prêtre de la XVI. Dynastie, brûlant de l'encens dans une cassolette, au Dieu Horus. —

Fig. 5. Excerpt from a letter addressed to Possidônio da Silva by Abargues de Sostén, c. 1875. Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, Correspondência artística e científica, nacional e estrangeira, com J. Possidônio da Silva. Col.: Ana Cristina Martins.

Add forty pieces of *antiquités cypriotes*, including a vase about one-meter high which “fera bonne figure dans votre musée¹⁶”, and wall paintings from the catacombs of Sidon that Carl Landberg claims to have sent.

There are still only a few certainties about the journey of these artifacts. The first one concerns their multiple destinations: Possidónio and MAC. The second refers to the retaining in Turkey of the first container from Syria due to the rigorous Ottoman law on the export of antiquities. This explains why Carl Landberg wanted to distribute the objects (except for the sarcophagus) in three parts that he intended to send out through Marseille and Bordeaux. The size of the cargo, however, urged him to dispatch them in a warship to the Portuguese capital¹⁷.

The project was, nevertheless, postponed or not entirely fulfilled. What we do know is that the MAC did not receive “ces antiquités de façon à pouvoir servir d’étude de la culture phénicienne¹⁸”, in a claim of the importance of objects in the construction of scientific knowledge and narratives, in this case museological. However, there is a subsequent aim to Carl Landberg’s offer of artefacts to Possidónio da Silva, whom he considers and values: “Si je vous envoie des choses si rares c’est uniquement à cause de vous que j’estime et dont l’amitié m’est précieuse. Je compte fouiller dans une localité très ancienne phénicienne prochainement et je ne manquerai pas de mettre quelque chose de côté pour vous¹⁹.”

Ancient Egypt at the MAC: a crypto-history exercise (2)

The 1891 catalogue presents a novelty. In addition to the models and panels representing ancient Egyptian buildings placed by Possidónio, the MAC displayed bas-relief *moulages* of the Abid and Dendera Temples²⁰. Organized and offered by the young Spanish diplomat, architect and archaeologist, Juan V. Abargues de Sostén (1845-1920), these objects reflect a common practice in 1880’s Europe, and they confirm the relevance of personal networks in the structure of collections:

Je Vous écris de la Haute-Égypte [...] mon intention est de faire une collection des Bas-Reliefs, copiés sur les anciens temples et monuments égyptiens [...] que je désirais offrir au Royal Muséum d’Archéologie Portugais [...]. La collection qui est à Vous est pareil à celle que j’ai donnée à la Royale Académie de Saint Fernando [...] Je crois pouvoir dans quelques jours aller au Portugal et Vous apporter la collection [...]. On dit que les amis de nos-amis sont nos amis, dans ce cas je dois être le vôtre, parce que Vous êtes l’ami de Don Rodrigo Amador-de-los-Rios, qui est pour moi un frère²¹.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. A.H./A.A.P., *Livro de Actas da Assembleia Geral*, Acta n. 82. 27/11/1874 (unpublished).

19. *Ibid.* Underlined in the text.

20. *Catálogo do Museu da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes*, Lisbon, 1891, p. 44-45.

21. A.H./A.A.P., *Livro de Declarações da Real Associação dos Architectos Civis e Archeologos Portuguezes*, 11/03/1879 (unpublished). Underlined in the text.

The reference to the MAC as “Royal Muséum d’Archéologie Portugais” reveals how it was perceived abroad, an idea possibly aroused by the verballity and prestige of its president, Possidónio da Silva, to whom the museum owed these artefacts. Artefacts that were now displayed in a single room at the MAC. Respecting the original scale of the bas-reliefs and sculptures, the replicas provided an accurate view of the magnificent Egyptian art, corroborated by the illustrations placed in the same room for a better understanding of their original contexts.

Yet, it is necessary to question if Possidónio really transferred to the MAC all the copies received. Moreover, we face something unexpected when comparing the list sent by Abargues de Sostén with the objects detailed in the catalogue of 1891: the presence of reproductions missing from the original inventory (fig. 5). So, we wonder if there was another list with artefacts offered only to Possidónio da Silva. Judging by the words of Abargues de Sostén, the answer should be positive:

J’espère un jour Vous envoyer, non des Bustes, et des Bas-Reliefs incomplets, mais bien une chambre entière de six mètres carrés, du Dieu Osiris, chambre qui est une merveille et a 80 Figures de 2 mètres de haut, tout écrite en hiéroglyphes, je Vous enverrais cette chambre en pièces d’un mètre carré que l’on peut facilement monter en plâtre, ayant le plan – Vous envoie si joint une courte description des Bas-Reliefs – numérotés comme le sont les papiers²².

If this intention had been achieved, the MAC would have occupied an unique place amongst other museums, especially national, by exhibiting a special attraction in a Europe fascinated by Egyptian history and aesthetics: the view of the interior of an Egyptian tomb, mainly when “l’Angleterre et France n’en auront des pareilles²³”.

V. BRIEF FINAL REMARKS

The path until we fully understand the collecting activity of Possidónio da Silva is still a long one. There are certainly other sources to be located, and the study must intertwine with broader subjects such as the circulation of antiques, heritage legislation, art and archaeology markets, and the way all this replies to some needs, either individual or collective, public, or private. More than that, it is imperative to better understand and map the path of the artefacts mentioned here, identifying actors, places, and projects.

For now, we are aware of the central role of Possidónio da Silva’s presence in Paris in 1867 in the shaping of his collection and of the becoming of RAACAP and MAC. We also know that a fraction of his collection was obtained free of charge thanks to the empathy he generated amongst European peers enthusiastic about the way he managed the destinies of RAACAP and MAC. It is possible, however, that this esteem also results from the fact that he was an architect of the Royal House, which meant being close to

22. I.A.N./T.T., *ibid.*, t. II, em 4.^a, doc. 2764, s/d.

23. *Ibid.*, t. II, em 4.^a, doc. 2761, 04/05/1879.

some of its members. Moreover, we cannot underestimate his condition as a freemason. A situation that surely allowed him to penetrate certain circles, mainly cultural and scientific, inside and outside the country.

It will be interesting if the mapping of these entwined realities allows us, as we hope, to find common denominators among several European researchers, collectors, and museums of this period. Only then will we draw deductions concerning the backstage of what is presented to us, for example, in art and antiques markets, collections, exhibitions, galleries, museums, catalogues, magazines, newspapers and lectures. Only in this way will we be able to better understand the interdependent equation “Possidónio-RAACAP-MAC-Possidónio” and inscribe it in the national and international dynamics of production of knowledge and archaeological heritage poured into collections, exhibitions, manuscripts, and catalogues.

More than this, we will continue to rebuild Possidónio’s collection, to follow its fortune, and to try to identify the moment, the way, and the reason why the objects he placed in the MAC were removed after its death in 1896. Ultimately, these attempts are meant to (re)create a certain *musée imaginaire* that we hope can be transformed into trans-memorial and trans-contextual approach activities of the MAC’s educational service, resulting in a model to be adopted and adapted by other museums and cultural institutions²⁴.

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24. See Serrão 2008.

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