

rencontres

N°1

du MAN

Catherine Louboutin
Anne Lehoërf

Archéologie en musée et identités nationales en Europe (1848 — 1914)

Un héritage en quête de nouveaux défis au
21^e siècle

MUSÉE
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE
NATIONALE





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au 21^e siècle

Sous la direction scientifique de
Catherine Louboutin
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Elisabete J. Santos Pereira

The Management of Archaeological Remains in Portugal, 1893–1932: Private Collectors and the Development of the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia

Keywords: history of collections, history of museums, José Leite Vasconcelos, Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (Lisboa, Portugal), private collecting, scientific networks.

Mots-clés: collectionneurs privés, histoire des collections, histoire des musées, José Leite Vasconcelos, Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (Lisboa, Portugal), réseaux scientifiques.

Abstract: The National Archaeological Museum in Portugal was established in 1893 and initially housed in the Lisbon Academy of Science building. State policy envisaged the definition and representation in museological terms of the history and identity of the nation, while the personal interests and ambitions of José Leite de Vasconcelos (1858-1941), the first director, are evident in the result. The strategy for growing collections was so successful that the museum had to be moved to the Jerónimos monastery in 1900, where collections could be expanded, a location which was better suited to the public and patriotic ideals pursued.

When it was first created in Lisbon, the national museum sought to document a pre-Roman national identity. The director of the museum was supported in this aim by the high level of interest in collecting among private individuals throughout the country. This movement flourished in the absence of regulation within the field of archaeology, while individual collectors used their academic and professional knowledge in other fields to record and conserve objects which otherwise would have been lost or destroyed.

The multitude of private collectors all over the country contributed to the success of the museum: some sent information, documentation and numerous objects which helped to develop the archaeological collections of the institution, while others competed with it at the local level for the possession of objects and the investigation of archaeological sites that were relevant for the construction of the memory of the nation.

These practices continued on an informal basis until 1932, when new laws, created to regulate the field of archaeology as a whole, began to limit the activity of private individuals interested in preserving and studying remains and identity at the regional and national level as part of romantic interest in the study of “the country” and “the Portuguese”.

Résumé: *La gestion des collections archéologiques au Portugal entre 1893 et 1932, les relations entre les collectionneurs privés et le Museu Nacional de Arqueologia.*

Le Musée national d'archéologie du Portugal fut créé en 1893 et initialement installé dans le bâtiment de l'Académie des sciences de Lisbonne. La politique nationale avait pour ambition la définition et la représentation muséographique de l'histoire et de l'identité de la nation; par ailleurs, le résultat dut beaucoup aux intérêts personnels et aux ambitions de José Leite

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Vasconcelos (1858-1941), le premier directeur. La stratégie d'accroissement des collections eut tant de succès que le musée dut déménager en 1900 dans le monastère des Hiéronymites, un lieu où les collections pouvaient s'étendre et qui correspondait mieux au public et aux idéaux patriotiques recherchés.

Quand il fut créé à Lisbonne, le musée national cherchait à documenter une identité nationale préromaine. Le directeur du musée fut aidé dans sa tâche par un immense intérêt des collectionneurs particuliers dans tout le pays. Ce mouvement fleurit en l'absence de réglementation dans le domaine de l'archéologie et les collectionneurs utilisaient tout leur savoir académique et professionnel afin de recenser et conserver des objets qui autrement auraient été perdus ou détruits.

La multitude de collectionneurs privés à travers tout le pays contribua au succès du musée: certains envoyèrent des informations, de la documentation et de nombreux objets qui aidèrent au développement des collections archéologiques de l'institution, alors que d'autres rivalisèrent avec lui sur le plan local pour l'acquisition d'objets et l'exploration de sites archéologiques pertinents pour la construction de la mémoire de la nation.

Ces pratiques continuèrent sur des bases non formalisées jusque 1932, lorsque de nouvelles lois, créées pour réglementer l'archéologie dans son ensemble, commencèrent à limiter l'activité des particuliers intéressés par l'étude et la préservation des vestiges et d'une identité régionale ou nationale, dans une vision romantique de l'étude du « pays » et des « Portugais ».

The first steps towards the creation of the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (National Archaeological Museum), previously known as the Museu Etnológico Português (Portuguese Ethnological Museum¹), were taken by José Leite de Vasconcelos Cardoso Pereira de Melo (1858–1941) in the 1880s. Known as José Leite de Vasconcelos, the first head of the institution built up an excellent reputation in Portugal (**fig. 1**). The importance and range of his cultural and scientific legacy are mentioned in a number of books that honoured his work both during his life and posthumously². Trained as a doctor in Oporto in 1886, he briefly practised medicine before becoming a numismatics teacher at the Biblioteca de Lisboa (Lisbon Library). While at the library, he built up a private ethnographic and archaeological collection and developed an interest in the primitive religions of Portugal, while also amassing a collection of epigraphs and *ex-voto* from the sanctuary of the pre-Roman deity Endovelicus, located in Alandroal, southern Portugal³. In 1890 he retrieved dozens of objects from this archaeological site, altars, pillars and tablets bearing inscriptions, and also sculptures, architectural remains, etc.⁴ This formed the founding collection of the National Archaeological Museum, created by the Decree of December 20, 1893 (**fig. 2**). The private collection of Leite de Vasconcelos was added to this set of pre-Roman objects, together with an important set of objects that derived from the ex-Museu Archeologico do Algarve (Algarve Archaeological Museum), which was inaugurated in Lisbon in September 1880⁵ as part of the social and scientific programme of the 9th International Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology Congress.

1 The present-day National Archaeological Museum was founded in 1893 as the Portuguese Ethnographic Museum. In 1897, its name was changed to the Portuguese Ethnological Museum, and in 1929 the name was again changed to the Dr. Leite de Vasconcelos Ethnological Museum, in honour of its first director. In 1989, the name changed again to the Dr. Leite de Vasconcelos National Archaeological Museum, and it is currently designated by the name of National Archaeological Museum.

2 *Miscelânea científica e literária dedicada ao Doutor J. Leite de Vasconcelos*, 1934; UL/FL 1960; RIBEIRO 1969; RAPOSO 2006; CARDOSO 2008.

3 FABIÃO 2008, p. 100.

4 SCHATTFNER, FABIÃO and GUERRA 2013, p. 70.

5 The Algarve Archaeological Museum was disassembled 11 months after it was inaugurated.

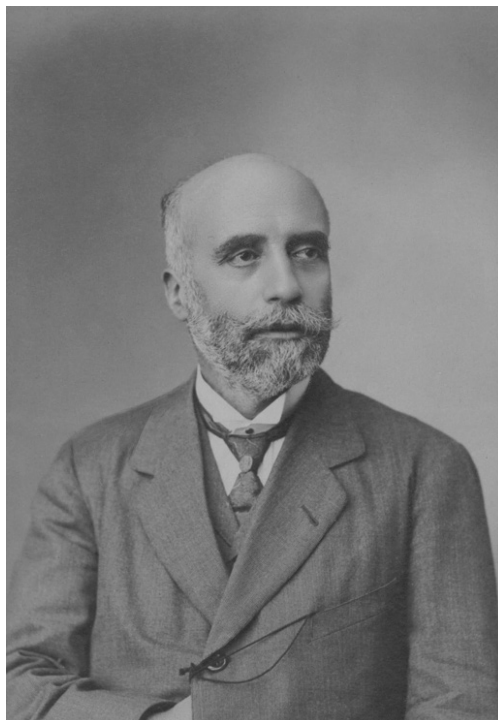


Fig. 1 José Leite de Vasconcelos (1858–1941), founder of the National Archaeological Museum and first director, from 1893 to 1929 (© Photographia Guedes).



Fig. 2 National Archaeological Museum, Jerónimos Monastery, Lisbon, Portugal (© Elisabete Pereira).

From the beginning, José Leite de Vasconcelos sought to bring together at the museum all the archaeological collections held by public institutions and take advantage from the dynamic movement for private collecting across the country. With the aim of harnessing this movement of private collectors, Vasconcelos successfully established a network for the communication of knowledge covering the entire



Fig. 3 Cover of the journal *O Archeologo Português*; this specimen was given to a collector in southern Portugal and bears a message from the director of the museum (© Fundação Arquivo Paes Teles).

country⁶. An essential catalyst for the creation of this network and the development of the growing collections of the institution was the journal launched by the museum in 1895 entitled *O Archeologo Português*: an affordable illustrated monthly publication created by Vasconcelos to facilitate, as he says, “the dissemination of information about the archaeological sciences in this country⁷”.

In order to achieve the aims of his museological project, to study and exhibit Portuguese history and identity, Vasconcelos needed to publicise his aims and also amass a great deal of empirical evidence. He realised the importance of encouraging “literary interchange between the various individuals who, either out of scientific interest or mere curiosity, concern themselves with our ancient relics”, making available to them a special journal in which the objects they possess may become

6 PEREIRA 2018; PEREIRA, LOPES and NUNES 2020.

7 VASCONCELOS 1895, p. 1.

known to the public through pictures and descriptions, and which provides information about the archaeological sites and monuments of which they are knowledgeable. In this magazine, rather than seeking to publish “long dissertations”, the director of the Portuguese museum aimed to “gather news about antiquities in Portugal... so that after a few years it will provide an excellent repository of elements for the knowledge of our history⁸”. He would use this repository to further his own scientific advancement (**fig. 3**).

In the journal a request was made to all those who were disposed to send him notes about archaeological objects accompanied, wherever possible, by drawings or photographs, with an indication of the dimensions. He addressed private collectors in particular:

In this country, collectors of coins and antiquities abound—some collect because they love it or for recreation, others out of necessity, as scientists—they all have a meritorious purpose, because it is always good to entertain the spirit with things that may illustrate and ennoble it: *The Archaeologist* [*O Archeologo Português*, the museum journal] would welcome a summary description of every collection, which at the same time would enable things still unknown to become part of the public domain, and thus the groundwork would be laid for the full history of the numismatics and the archaeology of this country to be written one day⁹.

By finding out about the collections of these “scholars”, as he also termed private collectors, he sought to acquire some of the objects they possessed, or even procure their collections (**fig. 4, 5, 6 et 7**). At the same time, he publicised their generosity in the museum journal and sought to enable those interested in archaeology to identify more remains and objects. For this purpose, he published instructional texts on archaeology, provided bibliographical references that would “serve as instruction to scholars” and inserted two sections in the review, entitled “Miscellaneous News” and “Questions”. In the first section of the journal *O Archeologo Portugues*, entitled “Miscellaneous News”, featuring transcribed from Portuguese newspapers on archaeological finds are common, as well as appeals for conservation of heritage and information on current activities carried out by museums, societies and institutes at home and abroad. In the “Questions” section, information was requested on specific features or details relating to ruins and monuments, and clarification provided on questions raised by subscribers. It was necessary to provide instruction on the subject to readers so that:

[...] After having competently gathered together these varied and fragmented details of the activity of our ancestors, over the centuries bequeathed to the generations to come, we may know about and fully appreciate Portuguese history and civilization: and the more profound this knowledge, the more solidly the sense of nationality will be rooted in the hearts of our people¹⁰.

In the context of the safeguarding of patriotic values¹¹, Vasconcelos linked the message conveyed by the museum’s periodical to numerous archaeological excursions at weekends, on weekends and holiday periods. During these meetings ties were strengthened with local collectors and other interested parties who provided him with the authorisation to excavate, or gave him archaeological objects which they possessed, or whose location they knew about. He also went on visits to view the numerous private

8 VASCONCELOS 1895, p. 2.

9 VASCONCELOS 1897, p. 67.

10 VASCONCELOS 1895, p. 2.

11 FABIÃO 1996.



Fig. 4 Roman object belonging to collector Teixeira de Aragão (1823-1903), donated to the Algarve Archaeological Museum and transferred to the National Archaeological Museum in 1893. MNA 994.43.1 (© MNA, DGPC-ADF/José Pessoa).

collections scattered across the country. These excursions were reported in *O Archeologo Portugues*, an excellent repository of information on the local actors who acquired legitimacy and support for developing their collections as a result of the high profile they gained all over the country by having their names published in national newspapers and scientific journals such as the one produced by the museum directed by Vasconcelos.

This strategy was very successful. Initially installed in the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa (Lisbon Academy of Sciences) building, sharing two rooms with the Comissão Geológica (Geological Commission), the museum quickly expanded to the cloisters of the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa building¹². As the objects that made up the national

12 VASCONCELOS 1915, pp. 2-3.

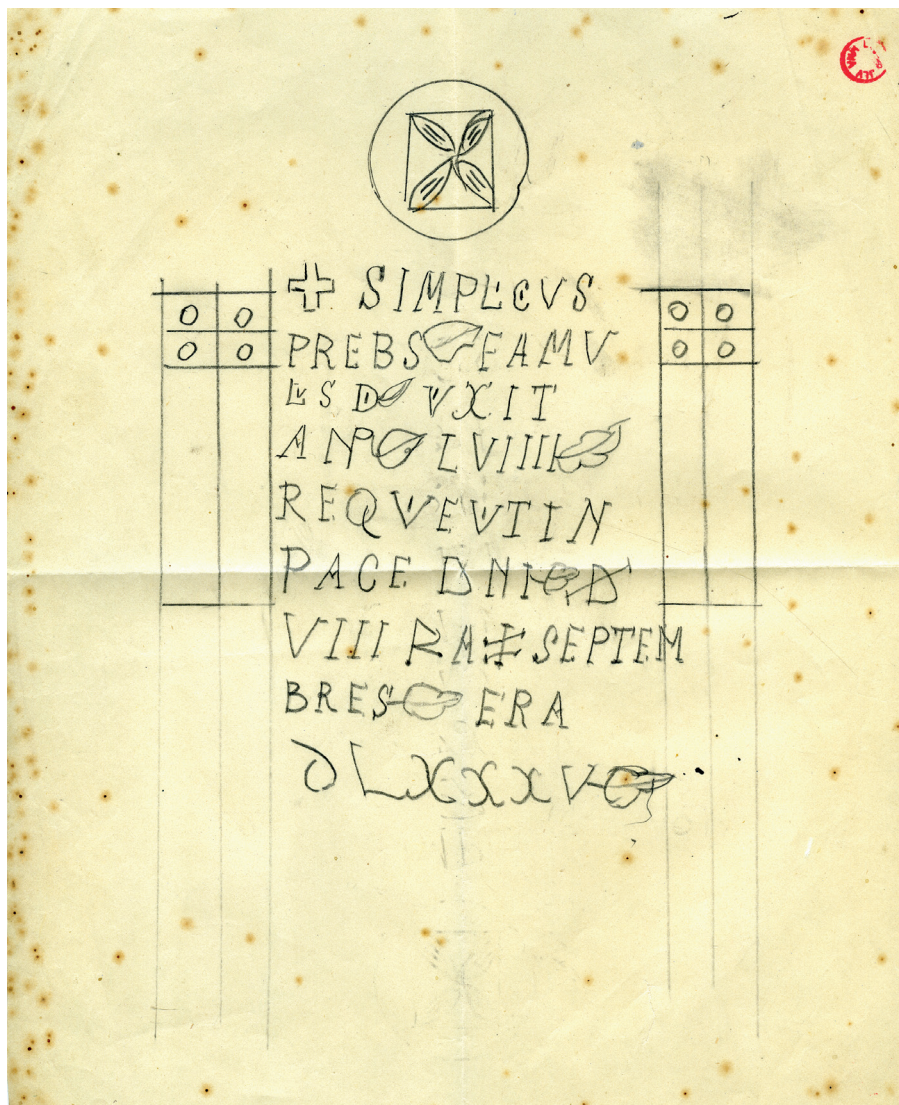


Fig. 5 Drawing of a medieval tombstone found in 1886 and sent to José Leite de Vasconcelos in May 1894 (MNA 927-6003B) by private collector João Manuel da Costa (1836–1918?), resident in Mértola, southern Portugal (© MNA, DGPC).

collection continued to multiply, the museum was transferred to the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Jerónimos Monastery) in 1900, where there were better facilities for ensuring the continuation of the expansion of collections, while the premises provided an appropriate expression of the public and patriotic ideal of the institution. The monastery was one of the greatest symbols of the nation—a fine example of Gothic architecture, with specific characteristics associated with the Portuguese Maritime Discoveries of the 16th century, portraying ropes and shells, for example. Like the Portuguese architecture of the Jerónimos Monastery, the museum’s archaeological and ethnographic collections and exhibitions played a specific patriotic role. Vasconcelos held that the museum was instrumental in demonstrating the national identity to an urban population dissociated from its cultural roots and educating artists about genuine Portuguese values. He expressed satisfaction that he could “conveniently extend gradually into enormous halls the collection of all the historical and ethnographic riches that has been keenly gathered over the course of a decade, many of which has still not been unpacked¹³”.

13 VASCONCELOS 1915, p. 4.

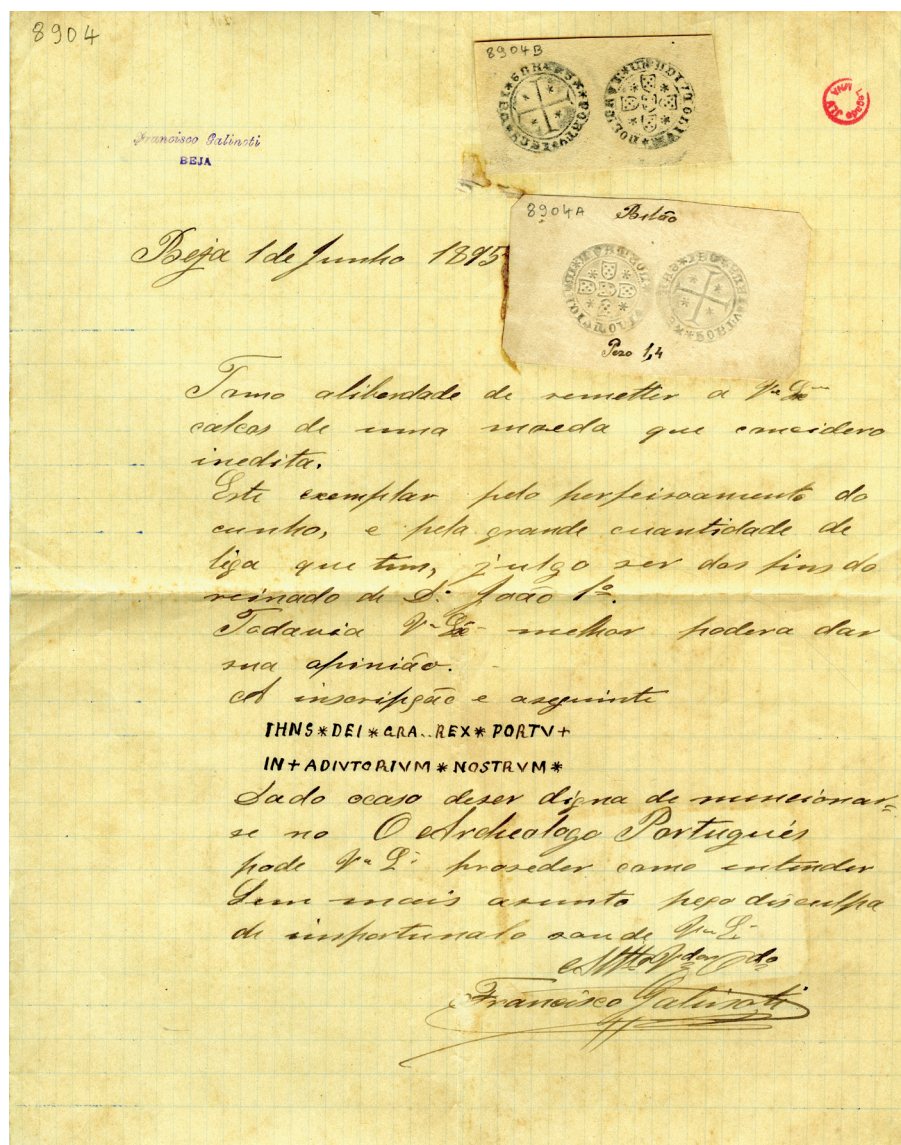


Fig. 6 Roman stone urn with lid donated between 1894 and 1905 to the National Archaeological Museum by Joaquim Correia Baptista, secretary of Alcácer do Sal Municipality. MNA 999.140.1 (© MNA, DGPC-ADF/José Pessoa).



Fig. 7 Roman object given to José Leite de Vasconcelos in 1889 by collector José de la Feria y Ramos and donated to the National Archaeological Museum in 1893 by Leite de Vasconcelos. MNA 18709 (© MNA, DGPC-ADF/José Pessoa).

Fig. 8 Decals belonging to private collector Francisco Galinoti, resident in Beja, southern Portugal, and letter sent by him on June 1st, 1895. MNA 1383/8904 AB (© MNA, DGPC).



The monastery building also guaranteed better conditions for museum operations: the museum staff was increased, it acquired a library of its own, as well as a photography and technical drawing office, a restoration workshop, and it was provided with its own separate budget. In 1906 it officially opened to the public, on the occasion of the International Congress of Medicine that took place in Lisbon. A leaflet was produced explaining that the museum sought to exhibit “methodically material elements so that one can study and gain knowledge of the life of the Portuguese people¹⁴”.

The institution encompassed national collections of archaeology, anthropology and ethnography. As the Portuguese historian Henrique Coutinho Gouveia stated, it sought to combine a range of disciplines that were considered to form “a systematic whole, with the objective of researching and museologically processing the documentation relating to the current life of the nation¹⁵”. In 1906, this was expressed in a collection of objects representing Portuguese history (comprising

¹⁴ VASCONCELOS 1907, p. 125.

¹⁵ GOUVEIA 1992, p. 199.

“prehistoric times”, “protohistoric times” and “historic times”), ethnography, anthropology, and objects from the colonies. There was also a comparative section for the display of objects from other countries¹⁶. In 1915, these representative sections of the life and history of the Portuguese people—“National Antiquities”, “Portuguese Ethnography”, “Comparative Section” (encompassing colonial and foreign objects)—were still growing. Another section was created for “General items” and an expanding “Museum library”, which included what were termed “books for use”, and special sections for “old monographs and municipal documents”, “incunabula”, “Portuguese books, 16th to 18th centuries”, “manuscripts” and “miscellaneous items (maps, etc.)¹⁷”. These sections contributed towards the construction of an identity whose roots were sought in the heroic examples of the Lusitanians¹⁸ and a history that extended to the present day encompassing beliefs, habits and objects.

The collections of the museum thus achieved Vasconcelos’ objectives, seeking to confer, as Carlos Fabião states, “a unitary sense of a globalising exposition of the Portuguese world”, while highlighting the existence of “a continuity between the remotest inhabitants of the extreme western peninsula and the Portuguese¹⁹”. The director of the museum was firmly supported in his aim to document a pre-Roman identity through the collection and exposition of archaeological objects by a large number of individuals interested in archaeology, scattered across the various Portuguese regions (fig. 8).

Vasconcelos had a very good knowledge, as already mentioned, of the private collecting movement; he too had been a private collector of archaeological and ethnographic objects.

In spite of their lack of historical visibility, these collectors played an essential role in the growth of the museum and the construction of a national history and identity. They were located in the remotest and most isolated places—many lived in towns or villages, or farms, scattered throughout the country and difficult to reach. Nevertheless, their knowledge and archaeological practices were often comparable with those of the director of the Lisbon museum. They possessed private specialist archaeology libraries in which scientific journals such as *L’Anthropologie*, *L’Homme préhistorique* and *La Revue archéologique* were read and studied²⁰. Besides theoretical knowledge, they had a stock of extremely important practical expertise: they had an excellent fund of experience of the field, something that José Leite de Vasconcelos lacked.

In order to benefit from this local knowledge²¹, the Lisbon museum director improved contacts with collectors and informants as well as private landowners who could obtain for him unique objects, valuable information on the location of objects or ruins and grant authorisation for carrying out archaeological excavations on their property. The existence of networks for the circulation and dissemination of knowledge is evident in the museum’s journal, *O Archeologo Portugues*, and also in the correspondence between local actors and the director. The letters he received from more than 3,000 individuals (3,757 to be exact) are preserved in the archives of the National Archaeological Museum together with photographs, maps, drawings and decals²². A large number of these documents were sent from places all over Portugal by private collectors, informers and landowners interested in archaeology. The museum’s growth was favoured, according to the Portuguese historian José d’Encarnação, by “a climate in which patriotic values were upheld²³” and also by

16 VASCONCELOS 1907, p. 125.

17 VASCONCELOS 1915.

18 ENCARNAÇÃO 1993–1994.

19 FABIÃO 2002, p. 344.

20 PEREIRA 2017, 2018.

21 ROBERTS 2009.

22 COITO 2011.

23 ENCARNAÇÃO 1993–4.

the growing interest in archaeology that produced an extensive network of contacts with these interested parties²⁴.

As in other countries, this was a period in Portugal during which collecting was a spontaneous activity carried out by educated individuals—engineers, linguists, doctors and lawyers—whose practices and discourses derived from their professional background and the absence of regulatory control²⁵. In natural history textbooks, works by classic authors, and periodicals, collectors found the right words to describe objects, the conventions of organising collections, and practices for gathering artefacts for study²⁶. As in the circumstances described in the publication *Nature and Antiquities: the Making of Archaeology in the Americas*²⁷, in Portugal it was also the case that the government was seemingly incapable of developing rules for archaeological practices and indeed was not called on to provide funding for excavation work, for example. From 1893 to 1932, most archaeological activity in Portugal was conducted informally by individuals with sufficient free time and the financial means to do so. The private resources of individuals provided the funds for studies, excavations, and collecting; and they exhibited objects in their own homes. Government action was only one aspect of a broader historical scenario, which encompassed, as the authors of *Nature and Antiquities* mention, the personal and professional experience of the actors who employed these practices, and the intellectual fashions and social conventions of the time²⁸.

In Portugal, this informal approach held sway until 1932. That year legislation was enacted to classify and draw up an inventory of the mobile heritage and regulate the execution of archaeological works. At the time, the National Archaeological Museum was headed by Manuel Domingues Heleno Júnior (1894–1970) who, within a context of political and administrative centralisation, saw his powers extended by the promulgation of Decree n° 21,117 of April 18, 1932. The new law gave the new museum director the authority to authorise, supervise and suspend the execution of archaeological excavations across the country, and also empowered him to establish scientific policy in the field²⁹.

Following the introduction of the new legislation, private collectors and others interested in archaeology who sponsored and funded archaeological excavations, many closely collaborating with José Leite de Vasconcelos, began to fear the consequences of their actions. Here is the example of António Paes da Silva Marques (1876–1950), a rural landowner who in 1933 wrote to Vasconcelos, the former director, now retired, on the question: “I humbly beg your advice on what I should do in order to be able to carry out several excavations in this municipality without the fear of seeing my efforts hampered³⁰”.

In 1932, Decree n° 20,985 of March 7, 1932 was also promulgated to regulate the classification and inventory of “movable objects (jewels, coins, inscriptions, etc.) of archaeological or historical importance³¹”. Collectors naturally feared that the state might list objects that formed part of their collections with the justification that they were regarded as antique items of national interest.

The publication of this new legislation may have led to the regulation of the management of the numerous private collections across Portugal and the practices of a multiplicity of actors who collaborated in the development of knowledge about the past—an issue that future research will clarify. In the period under review,

24 PEREIRA 2017, 2018, 2020.

25 LOPES and HEIZER 2011.

26 KOHL, PODGORNY and GÄNGER 2014, p. 6.

27 KOHL, PODGORNY and GÄNGER 2014.

28 KOHL, PODGORNY and GÄNGER 2014, p. 9.

29 FABIÃO 1999, p. 122.

30 Letter from António Paes, March 15, 1933, MNA 2538/17249.

31 PINHO 2011.

the identity of these mostly invisible actors is obscured by that of museological institutions dedicated to archaeology³². Along with the founders and directors of these bodies, these individuals contributed to the institutionalisation of archaeology in Portugal. A series of interlinked actions with common objectives was carried out that enabled the production of knowledge gained from objects and collections that were scattered across the country. These included the implementation of scientific policy, projects for the creation of collections and museological institutions dedicated to archaeology, the contracting of people to organise collections, preserve heritage and produce knowledge, and the establishment of networks for communication and scientific cooperation which were characterised by the informal practices and knowledge of the individuals who comprised them and their ability to transform common or unusual objects into scientific objects.

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32 PEREIRA 2017, 2018, 2020.

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