

PROTECTING ONE OF THE BEST ROMAN MOSAIC COLLECTIONS
IN THE WORLD:

Ownership and Protection in the Case of the Roman Mosaics from Zeugma, Turkey

Eisuke Tanaka

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the idea of “protection” and the idea of “ownership” in the case of historical objects marked as “cultural property,” by focusing on the controversy over plans for an exhibition of Roman mosaics discovered at Zeugma, the site of an ancient city on the Euphrates near Gaziantep, southeast Turkey. Focusing on a discrepancy found in the claims for protection and control of the mosaics, this paper attempts to elicit the relationship between the notions of protection, ownership and place in debates over objects considered “cultural.” In discussions of the issues concerning cultural property, the notion of protection and the idea of ownership are generally considered to overlap and reinforce each other. However, the ways in which the locals in Gaziantep, the Turkish state and an international organization that supported conservation works for the Zeugma mosaics used the notion of protection to claim control of the mosaics, suggest that these ownership claims are not only opposed but also are differentiated by mobilizing the notion of protection.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the relationship between the idea of “protection” and the idea of “ownership” in the case of historical objects marked as “cultural property,” looking at a case of Roman mosaics found at Zeugma near Gaziantep, southeast Turkey. Recent anthropological discussions concerning “cultural property” point out that the notion of property is deployed in the discourse of protection of tangible and intangible manifestations of an individual culture, which works to reify the culture as if it was a thing to be owned (see e.g. Brown 2004; Handler 1988). Reciprocally, this also designates a group, usually a nation or an ethnic group, as the owner of such cultural objects. In this context, it is often claimed that such cultural objects should be protected in the place where they were originally found.

In Turkey, controversies over state development projects and the protection of archaeological sites affected by such projects have increasingly drawn public attention since the late 1990s. In 2000, international as well as Turkish media attention focused on the rescue excavations conducted at Zeugma, an ancient city on the Euphrates, where archaeologists found a number of extremely well-preserved Roman mosaics. Zeugma and its mosaics were recognized as important to the cultural heritage of the country by both the Turkish state and the local inhabitants of Gaziantep. However, there were tensions between the two. This was particularly evident when these locals opposed the Turkish state’s plan to exhibit the mosaics in Istanbul in 2004, arguing that they should not be transferred outside Gaziantep (see Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı, 11 March, 2004).

Based on the media coverage on this controversy over the exhibition plan of the Zeugma mosaics in Istanbul, this paper examines what it means for different groups involved in this case, specifically Turkish state agencies and local people, to protect things considered “cultural property.” It explores how the language of ownership is related to the idea of protection of cultural objects. It also considers the role of the idea of place in relation to the discourses concerning the protection of cultural property in showing how and why the locals in Gaziantep opposed the exhibition plan in Istanbul. It suggests that the notion of place of origin helps to construct an essential link between cultural property and those who make claims for its protection using the language of ownership.

CLAIMS OF CULTURAL PROPERTY AND THE IDEA OF PROTECTION

Terms like “cultural property” and “heritage” are now commonly used to refer to all cultural expressions both tangible and intangible, such as artifacts and sites of historical importance, and practices considered “traditional.” Several scholars have studied the

role of the concept of cultural property in constructing representations of the past and history, highlighting that the notion of property is used to denote phenomena related to the appropriation of culture and history in the name of “identity,” such as in the case of “cultural revival” movements (Brown 2003 and 2004; Foster 1991; Handler 1988; Lowenthal 1985 and 1997; Walsh 1992). These studies have suggested that the notion of property works to reify a “culture” in a materialized form, as it “encompass[es] all manifestations of an individual culture, both material and intangible” (Brown 2004: 53). Moreover, a culture reified through the concept of property works reciprocally to designate a community as the rightful owner of cultural objects, usually identified with a nation or an ethnic group, both by international organizations like UNESCO and by nation-states. Through such reification, the relationship between cultural property and the owners of that property is often described by anthropologists as “inalienable” (Welsh 1997; Weiner 1985; 1992).¹

This relationship between cultural property and their owners involves the notions of time and place. Objects considered “cultural property” often acquire a particular symbolic value for a nation or an ethnic group as their owner. In such a context, cultural objects are considered to be inseparable from the group of people who claim their possession as their “heritage.” This “inalienable” nature of cultural objects is indicated for example in the claims for repatriation of cultural property. Those who ask the return of cultural objects (i.e. some nation-states and indigenous peoples) often claim that they have inherited such objects from their ancestors. This then entails that these people have to verify their link with the originators of the objects in question. For example, in the case of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles debates between Greece and the United Kingdom, the Greek state has stressed the continuity between ancient Greeks and the modern Greek nation (see Greenfield 1996; cf. Herzfeld 1987; Yalouri 2001).

In addition to invoking the idea of the past through terms like “inheritance” and “heritage,” disputes over cultural property suggest that ownership of such objects is also strongly connected with the idea of place. What is often problematised in repatriation disputes is the fact that the objects in question are outside their place of origin. Words

¹ Annette Weiner (1985 and 1992) discusses a special value attached to particular objects, which is generated through resistance against mechanisms of exchange, emphasising the role of the idea of the past and the way in which these objects have the power “to define who one is in an historical sense” (Weiner 1985, 210). Objects that are “inalienable possessions” act to bring the past into the present. The histories or titles of previous owners or past events, including mythological ones, become part of the identity of their current owner. Peter H. Welsh (1997) argues that the debates surrounding cultural property should be seen as conflicts over Weiner’s idea of “inalienable possessions”.

such as “return,” “restitution” and “repatriation” themselves imply the move of objects from one place to another, and in practice, claims of repatriation of cultural property are often based on the assumption that an object’s place of origin is self-evident.² The idea of place of origin already reifies “place” as an essential reality assuming that things marked as cultural property have a well-defined singular place of origin as such. In this context, the place of origin emerges as a distinctly bounded space in which cultural property should most legitimately belong. Thus, through involving the notions of place and the past, an “inalienable” value of cultural property is generated. This is also in accordance with the idea that the nation or ethnic group, the supposed owner of cultural property, is thought to be bounded spatially as well as temporally (cf. Anderson 1991).

It is important to note here that the significance of cultural manifestations, both tangible and intangible, is articulated by evoking the necessity of their protection through the conservation and restoration of historic sites, monuments and artifacts, the preservation of cultural landscapes, and the safeguarding of “traditional” practices (like rituals and music) and “indigenous” knowledge. Protection, that is the bid to save cultural property from destruction, is in fact one of the focal points in the discussions of heritage management and other cultural property related phenomena such as the illicit trade of antiquities (Carman 2001; Daifuku 1968; Renfrew 2000; Tubb 1995). The protection of cultural property is also the key objective of the laws and regulations for such objects, which are formulated by international organizations like UNESCO as well as nation-states (Magness-Gardiner 2004).

However, the idea of protection does not simply mean safeguarding objects considered cultural property from destruction. The notion of protection is also used to denote protecting the owner’s right to control cultural property. What is often at stake in cultural property debates (e.g. disputes over repatriation) is where and by whom such objects should be protected, and who can decide where such objects are protected and displayed. This provokes rivalry between different claimants for the ownership of cultural property at international, national and local levels. The “allocation” of cultural property is contested among these groups (Lowenthal 1997: 269). Given that objects considered cultural often play a key role as symbols of identity, control over cultural products works to authorize a particular group’s objectification of “culture” in the sense of self-identification and self-determination (see Neller 2002).³ Claims to protect a

² Conversely, this also means that nations claiming repatriation have to show the proof regarding the object’s origin.

³ Angela Neller (2002, 129) points out that traditional Hawaiian objects have acquired a symbolic meaning for the recovery of cultural practices in the context of the revitalisation of “Hawaiian Culture”

culture through its products are seen as claims to protect the identity of the group in this respect (Bray 1996; see also Strathern 2004: 93). Thus, ownership claims for objects designated cultural property are entwined with the idea of protection, and these two notions reinforce one another. However, the following case-study of the controversy over the Gaziantep Roman mosaics suggests a more complicated relationship between the idea of “ownership” and the idea of “protection.”

DISCOVERY OF ONE OF THE BEST ROMAN MOSAICS COLLECTIONS

Since the 1960s a number of archaeological and historical sites in Turkey have been submerged because of dam constructions and many more will soon be underwater. Most affected are the country’s southeastern regions, where a number of dams have been constructed on the basins of the Tigris and the Euphrates as part of the state’s regional development project.⁴ Archaeological projects to record the archaeological remains which would be inundated by the dam water have also been conducted (e.g. the “Keban Project”).⁵ From the end of the 1990s especially, dam constructions and the protection and conservation of archaeological and historic sites attracted much public attention (Siiler 2000: 3). In 2000, international as well as the Turkish mass media highlighted several issues involving Zeugma.

Zeugma was a Hellenistic and Roman city whose remains are today found in the village of Belkis on the Euphrates, 60 km east of Gaziantep, southeast Turkey.⁶

since the 1960s. The passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 has provided for Native Hawaiians the right to repatriate objects of their cultural patrimony, as well as human remains of their ancestors (cf. Neller, 132).

⁴ The project is named “Southeastern Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*)” (Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration 31 March, 2006). The GAP started in the late 1970s, aiming for regional development of the southeastern part of Turkey through a large-scale irrigation scheme as well as hydro electronic power production through constructing a number of dams in the basins of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

⁵ In his article on Archaeology in Turkey in the *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (Encyclopaedia of Turkey during the Republican Period), Güven Arsebük wrote that the Keban Project was a rescue excavation project for archaeological sites found in the regions which were to be submerged through the construction of the Keban Dam on the Euphrates basin in eastern Turkey. The project was carried out at more than 20 sites by Turkish and foreign archaeologists from the mid-1960s, and continued for a decade.

⁶ In the 3rd century BCE, Seleucus I Nicator, one of the commanders of Alexander the Great and the founder of the Seleucid Empire, founded twin towns on the Euphrates: Seleucia on its west bank named after himself, and the other on the east bank, which was named Apamea after his queen. Since these towns were connected by a bridge over the Euphrates, Seleucia came to be known as “Zeugma” meaning “span” or “bridge.” As a junction linking Syria and Mesopotamia, Zeugma consequently gained military as

Archaeological excavations at the site started in the late 1980s, although it was already known in the early twentieth century to locals and to some Europeans who visited the region as the site where Roman mosaics and inscriptions were discovered. Some of the excavated mosaics are said to have found their way to museums in Turkey as well as Europe and the United States, and also to private collections (Kennedy 1998: 11-13). By the 1960s, some locals discovered the monetary value of the mosaics, and are said to have been involved in clandestine excavations for the international art market (Ergeç 2000: 20). Archaeologists who began excavation at Zeugma have reported that many of the mosaics found in Zeugma had been damaged by such “illegal” excavations (Campbell and Ergeç 1998; Ergeç 2000: 21). When I interviewed Turkish journalist Özgen Acar about issues of illegal digging in Turkey, he told me about his suspicion that many of the Roman mosaics in various museum catalogues, whose place of origin is described as “East Mediterranean,” or “said to be from East Turkey,” or “near Syria,” are probably excavated from Zeugma.⁷

One notable example is the mosaic of Dionysus and Ariadne. In 1992, a local guard for Zeugma noticed a tunnel, which led to the remains of a Roman villa. Archaeologists based at the Gaziantep Museum excavated the site and uncovered a mosaic depicting the wedding of Dionysus and Ariadne (Başgelen and Ergeç 2000: 18). They decided to preserve it in situ. However, a large part of this mosaic was cut out by looters on 15 June 1998 (Acar 2000b: 7), and has been missing since then.⁸ Archaeologist Rifat Ergeç, who was the director of the Gaziantep Museum between 1989 and 1999, notes that the name of Zeugma became known for the first time to the locals in Gaziantep through the news coverage of the discovery of this mosaic piece (Ergeç 2005: 52). He also mentions that the villagers living near Zeugma started to visit the site showing an interest in the Dionysus and Ariadne mosaic, and also began to appropriate the motifs of the mosaic for the designs of their handicrafts (e.g. carpets) (Ergeç 2000: 52).

From the late 1990s when the construction of the Birecik Dam on the Euphrates commenced, a rescue excavation at Zeugma was also started by the

well as economic importance especially under Roman domination in the 1st century. For two centuries it became an important military post on the eastern border of the empire, and was also a cultural centre. However, its prosperity came to an end by the 3rd century AD. Zeugma was abandoned and disappeared from the historical record in the Middle Ages. By the 18th century when European travellers came to explore the region, its exact location had been forgotten by local people (Kennedy 1998b, 11-13).

⁷ The interview with Acar was conducted in July 2004. He made this point in one of his articles about the plundering of Roman mosaics from Zeugma (Acar 2000a).

⁸ The remaining part of the mosaic is currently exhibited in the Gaziantep Museum.

Gaziantep Museum and a team of foreign archaeologists. At first, the excavation did not seem to attract much public attention (Acar 2000: 7; Başgelen 2000: 13-14; Ergeç 2000: 22-3.). However, as the construction of the Birecik Dam neared completion in 2000, the Turkish press started to bring up the issue of Zeugma after a huge number of extremely well-preserved Roman mosaics and frescoes were discovered through the rescue excavations (see Figure 1) (Gaziantep Sanay Odası 21 June, 2000). Eventually, these finds came to be regarded as “one of the greatest collections of ancient mosaics anywhere in the world” (see Gorvet 31 May, 2004).⁹ After the Birecik dam went into operation in April 2000, a large number of articles on the development of the rescue excavations began to appear in the international media (e.g. New York Times, The Economist) as well as in the Turkish national and local press.¹⁰

The fact that these articles appeared in the foreign press had the effect of further attracting the attention of the Turkish media: that of the mosaics was a story which “shook the world first, and only then the Turkish media, intellectuals, the Ministry of Culture, and politicians like a big earthquake” (Acar 2000b: 8). The media coverage also attracted financial support for the excavation project from the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) in the United States (Başgelen and Ergeç 2000: 46). The PHI gave \$5,000,000 for a three-month archaeological rescue operation from July to the beginning of October 2000.¹¹ It also agreed to support post-excavation works, such as the construction of a laboratory for the conservation of the finds.

Through this national and international attention, the Roman mosaics excavated from Zeugma have come to be recognized as one of the finest in the world both in size and in quality. Declaring that the South Anatolia Project (SAP) “assigns special importance to the protection, conservation, tourism industry, related promotion of the cultural heritage of the region” (Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration 6 November, 1999), SAP now presents the management

⁹ Jonathan Gorvett (31 May 2004) published an article for *Aljazeera*, which focuses on the controversy over the exhibition plan of the Zeugma mosaics. In the article he also discusses the rescue excavation conducted at Zeugma in 2000. The controversy over the exhibition plan will be analysed on in the following sections.

¹⁰ On 29 April, The Economist published an article about the rescue excavation at Zeugma entitled “Watery Grave,” while Stephen Kinzer’s article ‘Dam in Turkey May Soon Flood a “2nd Pompeii”’ with a photograph of the mosaic depicting Perseus and Andromeda appeared in the first page of the New York Times on 7 May (see The Economist 2000; Kinzer 2000).

¹¹ The project was an international archaeological project that focused on excavation and on site conservation, involving specialists from Turkey, Britain, France, and Italy. It was directed by the Ministry of Culture in coordination with the state administration office of SAP (see Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration, 16 March 2006).

of Zeugma's heritage as essential to its policy on "cultural sustainability,"¹² by which it means "the transfer of cultural heritage to future generations" (Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration 28 December, 2006). Highlighting the significance of the site as national heritage, the local government in Gaziantep also uses images of the excavated objects as one of the symbols of the city.¹³ Images of the mosaics have proliferated in the city, and can even be found in the central reserve of the main street in the city centre (see Figure 2). Turkish archaeologist Rıfat Ergeç notes in his article written for a local business magazine that "Zeugma" is sometimes used as a synonym for the Roman mosaics discovered at the site (Ergeç 2005: 53.). Given such a situation, questions such as who controls the mosaics, where they are protected, and by whom, have become focal points of discussion. Roman mosaics of Zeugma were thus featured again by the Turkish (and some international) mass media in 2004.

"MOVABLE" OR "IMMOVABLE" CULTURAL PROPERTY?

In the spring of 2004, authorities of the Turkish government, Gaziantep Museum and the PHI planned a temporary exhibition of the Zeugma mosaics at the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul during the NATO summit was to be held in Istanbul in June.¹⁴ According to Turkish media coverage, the mosaic panels were to be displayed first in Gaziantep in April, and then to be transferred for the exhibition in Istanbul. The aim was to exhibit them to a wider public, especially to the foreigners attending the NATO summit.

However, this plan faced strong oppositions from local people in Gaziantep. The Gaziantep Zeugma Platform (GZP), a group of local organizations and individuals applied to the local court to stop the exhibition plans at the Topkapı Palace.¹⁵ At the press conference, the GZP claimed that it aimed to protect objects considered "cultural

¹² In 1999, the SAP administration office adopted the idea of sustainable development (Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration, 6 November, 1999). Its master plan referred to restoration, conservation, salvation, and the documentation of cultural property as part of its framework of sustainable development. "Cultural sustainability" seems to be articulated in this context.

¹³ A similar situation is reported in the case of Çatalhöyük near Konya, central Turkey (Bartu 2000: 105; Hodder 1998, 129). As Ayfer Bartu (2000, 105) notes, the image of a naked female figurine found from Çatalhöyük was used in the front page of the nearest local town's promotion brochures.

¹⁴ At the beginning of February 2004, Turkish media reported for the first time that the authorities of Gaziantep Museum, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and PHI were planning a temporary exhibition of mosaics from Zeugma in the Topkapı Palace from June when the NATO summit was held in Istanbul (Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı, 2 February, 2004; and 4 February, 2004).

¹⁵ GZP originally consisted of 23 local organisations such as Gaziantep Artisans Associations Union, Gaziantep Lawyers Association, Friends of Gaziantep Museum, Gaziantep Tourism Association, Architects Society Gaziantep Office, but the number of participating organisations increased later (see Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı, 11 March, 2004; and 12 March, 2004).

properties (*kültür eserleri*)” found in the Gaziantep province, notably the mosaics from Zeugma; to support further excavations at Zeugma; and to construct a new building for Gaziantep Museum to house the Zeugma mosaics. Litigation continued until May 2004 when the judge concluded that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism had the authority to transfer and exhibit cultural property in Turkey. However, as the court’s decision came out just one week before the NATO summit, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism cancelled the exhibition (Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı, 25 May, 2004).

The focus of dispute over the exhibition plan in Istanbul was whether the mosaic pieces would be damaged in their transfer between Gaziantep and Istanbul. Those who joined the GZP emphasized that the objective of the GZP was to prevent damage to the mosaics (NTV, 17 March, 2004). In this context, they brought up their suspicions about the conservation work. In particular, the team led by Roberto Nardi, a conservation expert who was hired by the PHI, was accused by the GZP of causing the mosaics harm (Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı, 23 March, 2004).

This claim against the exhibition in Istanbul was made by questioning who should protect the mosaics and where they should be kept. Notably, the GZP created a slogan saying that “We will claim ownership of culture (*Kültüre sahip çıkacağız*),” by which they meant that the mosaics retrieved from Zeugma should be kept and protected in Gaziantep.¹⁶ Many locals expressed their fear that the mosaics would never return once they were taken outside Gaziantep. For instance, the Architect’s Society Gaziantep Office (Mimarlar Odası Gaziantep Şubesi), which also joined the GZP, claimed that PHI’s ultimate intention was to take the Zeugma mosaics outside Turkey as well as Gaziantep (Mimarlar Odası Gaziantep Şubesi, 14 May, 2004). Thus, the locals in Gaziantep, who took a stand against the state’s exhibition plan, were not simply concerned about physical damage that the mosaics might suffer, but even more importantly perhaps, they were concerned about the mosaics’ removal from Gaziantep. Gaziantep emerged as a distinct place where the mosaics should be protected, as the site where the mosaics were discovered had already been submerged.

The local claim to protect the Zeugma mosaics relied on current Turkish cultural property legislation, which declares state ownership of cultural property found in Turkey.¹⁷ In particular, it referred to Article 6 of Law No.2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Property (Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kanunu No.

¹⁶ In Turkish, the phrase “*sahip çıkmak*” means “to claim the ownership of something” or “to get something under control,” and is often used in a context where one claims the ownership of something that he/she has no right to claim (Redhouse 1997, 637-8).

¹⁷ In fact, the theme of state ownership of cultural objects discovered within the state territory has been the leitmotif of legislation from Ottoman times to the present (see Blake 1994; Özsunay 1997).

2863, the 2863 law), which defines mosaics as immovable cultural property (*taşınmaz kültür varlıkları*). The law states that objects defined as immovable cultural property should be protected in the place where they are found unless there is a need to protect such objects in a museum close to their place of discovery. Transfer of such objects without necessary justification is a violation of the law (Article 20). Based on these articles, the GZP criticized the Turkish state and the way in which it sought to control the mosaics (NTV 17 March, 2004). They even brought a lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture and Tourism arguing that the exhibition was against the 2863 Law. They thus acknowledged the state's superordinate ownership of the mosaics by invoking its status as "immovable cultural property." From this point of view, transferring the mosaics was a violation of the state law by the state itself. This criticism of the state's mishandling of the mosaics seems to imply that the locals knew better how to deal with the mosaics, such knowledge being the basis of their claim to the right to safeguard them.

By contrast, those involved in planning the exhibition in Istanbul emphasized that the mosaics from Zeugma are recognized as one of the best-preserved Roman mosaic collections in the world. When the GZP brought a lawsuit to the local court in Gaziantep, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism made a written statement to justify its plan for the exhibition in Istanbul and its treatment of the mosaics (Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı 16 March, 2004). In this statement, the ministry claimed that the exhibition was going to provide an important opportunity to show Turkey to the political leaders who were to gather for the NATO summit. It also stressed that the expert conservators would take special care of the mosaics and they would not be damaged during their transfer and the exhibition in Istanbul. In addition, it mentioned that they would be returned to and displayed at Gaziantep after the exhibition and underlined that the exhibition in Istanbul would not permanently remove the mosaics from Gaziantep.

Criticizing the GZP's lawsuit as a mistake, Erkan Mumcu, Minister of Culture and Tourism at that time, said "Zeugma is a heritage of humanity (bir insanlık mirasıdır)," and "must not be made to belong to one province (*taşralılaştırılmamalıdır*)" (Radikal, 10 April, 2004). As mentioned previously, according to the 2863 law (Article 5), the Turkish state is the sole owner of cultural objects found in the country. In fact, the court decision that the state could transfer the mosaics for the exhibition in Istanbul was made based on this legislation. However, the press coverage of this controversy, notably of Mumcu's comment, suggests that the Turkish state claimed its right to the mosaics through emphasizing that they were a "world heritage" of sorts, belonging to the much wider public, even that beyond the nation-state.

On the other hand, in responding to the GZP accusation, the PHI issued “an Open Letter to the People of Gaziantep” in national Turkish newspapers on 9th April 2004 “to correct certain inaccurate public statements made by the GZP.”¹⁸ In the first place, the letter emphasised that it had no intention of taking the Zeugma mosaics away from Gaziantep, saying that “if PHI had believed that there was any chance that the Zeugma mosaics would not return to Zeugma, PHI would never have offered to sponsor this Istanbul exhibit” (Packard, 9 April, 2004). However, the letter made a point that “the question of a permanent home for the Zeugma mosaics, however, has nothing to do with the merits of a temporary exhibit in Istanbul” (Packard: *ibid*). Quoting some examples of international loans of mosaics for exhibitions, he made a point that “shipping mosaics is neither uncommon nor irresponsible, if it is done with professional care” (Packard: *ibid*). The PHI saw the exhibition in Istanbul as an opportunity to make the mosaics of Zeugma known to the wider public, saying that “showing mosaics to NATO leaders has never been a motivation for PHI,” but “a NATO visit could generate international news coverage, which could stimulate future tourism to Zeugma” (Packard: *ibid*). Based on this, the PHI highlighted that the exhibition was for the benefit of the Turkish nation.

Arguably, this letter was written because the GZP doubted the return of the mosaics after the exhibition outside Gaziantep. The PHI emphasised a point that the mosaics should be exhibited where they were found, and that the exhibition was planned mainly by the Turkish state authorities.¹⁹ Through this, it distanced its standpoint from the Turkish state. In so doing, it did not claim the right to control the Zeugma mosaics. Conversely, such an attitude suggests that what was at stake in the controversy over the exhibition plan in Istanbul was claiming the right to dispose of the mosaics.

OWNERSHIP, PROTECTION, AND PLACE

As this paper has described, different groups appeared in the media coverage of this controversy (i.e. local people in Gaziantep, the Turkish state, and the PHI). These groups deployed two different interpretations of the mosaics as cultural property in order to articulate their views on where and by whom the mosaics should be protected: the mosaics as the heritage of the community of Gaziantep; and the mosaics as the

¹⁸ The letter was written in the name of David Packard, the director of the PHI, and its English version is available online (Packard, 9 April, 2004).

¹⁹ Asked to comment on this controversy by Aljazeera, Richard Hodges, an archaeologist who worked as a coordinator of the excavations at Zeugma from PHI, answered that Packard “reluctantly” agreed with the exhibition plan at Istanbul (Gorvett, 31 May, 2004).

“common heritage” of humanity. Marilyn Strathern (2004), examining the discourse of scientific knowledge, points out that debates over cultural property tend to echo Euro-American conceptions of property and the commons. “Knowledge belongs to (can be claimed by) communities near and far”: both scientists who produced it (the near) and “mankind” (Strathern 2004: 91-92). Similarly, cultural manifestations both tangible and intangible are also often considered to belong to two collective or communal entities “near” and “far,” i.e. “heritage” of a particular community and “world heritage”. While as “world heritage” cultural manifestations are accessible to the much wider community (the community far) as a “non-exclusive, distributable resource,” the community near restricts the use or, more precisely, the commodification of cultural property as “their” own resource (Strathern: 92). Objects labeled “cultural property” are implicated in general in the constitution of a nation or an ethnicity. In the case of the Zeugma mosaics, the Turkish nation-state appears to stand as a particular community to which cultural property belongs, as opposed to the wider community i.e. “mankind” to which “world heritage” belongs. This is in fact legally recognized (the 2863 law). However, the materials presented above suggest that this framework does not work in a straightforward manner.

The locals in Gaziantep, who opposed to the exhibition plan, used the idea of the community near, through which they made their claim to keep the mosaics in Gaziantep. The GZP opposed the exhibition by emphasizing a link between the mosaics and the community of Gaziantep as their place of origin. Moreover, their claim was based on the state’s legal framework on cultural property that categorizes the mosaics as “immovable.” Being “immovable cultural property,” the mosaics are “legally” linked with Gaziantep as their place of origin, through which they are claimed to belong to the community of Gaziantep. However, what is intriguing is that this state legislation also defines the state, not the community of Gaziantep, as the legitimate holder of rights to protect cultural property. Relying on state law, these locals paradoxically claimed control of the mosaics based on a legally authorized link between the object and their place of origin.

On the other hand, the state and the PHI who planned the exhibition stressed that the Zeugma mosaics belong to the community far in the sense that they were recognized as one of the best-preserved Roman mosaic collections found in the world. In responding to the locals’ claim to protect the mosaics, they argued for the importance of making the mosaics accessible to the wider public through the exhibition in Istanbul. In order to justify the exhibition plan, the Turkish state and the PHI repeatedly claimed that transferring the mosaics between Gaziantep and Istanbul was safe. Thus, they considered the mosaics to be “movable” in opposition to the people in

Gaziantep. Since the locals stressed that the mosaics were “immovable,” this suggests that such emphasis meant to detach the objects from Gaziantep as their place of origin. The movable aspect of the mosaics was deployed as part of a counter argument against the local claim. In so doing, the state tried to destabilize the naturalized link between the mosaics and the nearby community of Gaziantep, which the locals attempted to establish.

However, the state and the PHI did not seem to share the same interests regarding the exhibition in Istanbul. As PHI attempted to distance itself from the issue of ownership claim, it emphasized that the Zeugma mosaics were “heritage of humanity,” implying that as a non-exclusive and distributable resource, they belong to “mankind” (see Strathern 2004). For the Turkish state, by contrast, given that it is the legally authorized owner of cultural property in Turkey, an exhibition of the mosaics in Istanbul highlighting the significance of the mosaics as “world heritage” was meant to exercise its right to control the mosaics against the counter-claim of Gaziantep locals.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the contest between claims concerning the protection of Roman mosaics found in Zeugma, this paper has attempted to elicit the relationship between the notions of protection, ownership and place in debates involving objects considered “cultural.” In the discussion of the issues concerning cultural property, the notion of protection and the idea of ownership are generally considered to overlap and reinforce each other. However, the ways in which the locals in Gaziantep and the Turkish state used the notion of protection to claim their ownership of cultural property, suggest that the language of protection works to produce different ownership claims.

In the controversy over the exhibition of the Zeugma mosaics in Istanbul, the Turkish state stressed that it was safe to transfer the mosaics and it would protect them. Its right to dispose of the mosaics included transporting them from one place to another. On the other hand, the locals in Gaziantep insisted that protection meant keeping the objects fixed in a certain place. They emphasized a sort of relation between the mosaics and place relying on a category of the state legislative framework, i.e. the mosaics as “immovable cultural property.” In other words, they constructed their claim of ownership of the mosaics around and through the legally authorized notion of “place,” drawing on the notion of protection to constitute a close association with the mosaics in a particular place (Gaziantep). This was deployed to override the state’s superior right to dispose of the mosaics.

Thus, these ownership claims are not only opposed but also can be differentiated by mobilizing the notion of protection and the idea of place, which

reflects a political relationship between local/regional community and the state in dealing with the items of cultural property. In this particular case, it is important to note that the objects in question were present in their place of origin (Gaziantep) from the time when their significance as “heritage” came to be recognized internationally as well as nationally. For the local community of Gaziantep, the state’s ownership claim for the mosaics (the exhibition in Istanbul) did not simply mean their removal from Gaziantep, but also affected negatively its recently constructed relationship with the mosaics as the symbol of the city. This helps to explain why place was called into play as a signifier of local interests in order to redefine the notion of protection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was supported by the William Wyse Fieldwork Fund, the Richards Fund, and Hughes Hall, Cambridge. I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the “Cultures of Contact” conference. I would also like to thank my peer reviewer for the comments and suggestions. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor Paola Filippucci for her support during the research as well as in the preparation of this paper. Finally, I am grateful to Gwyn Williams, who carefully read the draft.

REFERENCES

- Acar, Özgen. “Mosaics and Heads of Statues Plundered from Zeugma.” *Culture without Context* 7 (2000a): 5-8.
- Acar, Özgen. “Yıllardır Devam Eden Zeugma Trajedisi.” *Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 98 (2000b): 6-9.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991.
- Bartu, Ayfer. “Where is Çatalhöyük?: Multiple Sites in the Construction of an Archaeological Sites.” In *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: the Example at Çatalhöyük*, edited by Ian Hodder, 101-10. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2000.
- Başgelen, Nezh. “Fırat Üzerindeki Seleukeia’dan Zeugma/Belkıs’a.” *Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 98 (2000): 11-19.
- Başgelen, Nezh and Ergeç, Rıfat. *Belkıs/Zeugma, Halfeti, Rumkale: A Last Look at History*. Istanbul: Archaeology and Art Publications, 2000.
- Blake, Janet. “The Protection of Turkey's Underwater Archaeological Heritage: Legislative and Other Approaches.” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 2 (1994): 273-293.

- Bray, Tamara L. "Repatriation, Power Relations, and the Politics of the Past." *Antiquity* 70 (1996): 440-444.
- Brown, Michael. "Heritage as Property." In *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*, edited by Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphrey, 49-68. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004.
- Campbell, Sheila and Ergeç Rifat. *New Mosaics. In The Twin Town of Zeugma on the Euphrates: Rescue Work and Historical Studies*, edited by David Kennedy, 109-29. Portsmouth: JRA Supplement 27, 1998
- Carman, John. *Archaeology and Heritage: An Introduction*. London and New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Daifuku, Hiroshi. *The Significance of Cultural Property. In The Conservation of Cultural Property: With Special Reference to Tropical Conditions*, edited by UNESCO, 19-26. Paris: UNESCO, 1968.
- Ergeç, Rifat. "Bekis/Zeugma 1992-1999/2000": Çalışmalar, Araştırmalar ve Kazılar. *Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 98 (2000): 20-29.
- Ergeç, Rifat. "Zeugma Gerçeği ve Gaziantep'te Çağdaş Müzecilik." *Genç Çizgi* 16 (2005): 52-54.
- Greenfield, Jeanette. *The Return of Cultural Treasures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Handler, Richard. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.
- Herle, Anita, ed. *Pacific Art: Persistence, Change, and Meaning*. London: Crawford House Publishers, 2002.
- Herzfeld, Michael. *Anthropology through the looking-glass: Critical ethnography in the margin of Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Hirsch, Eric and Strahern, Marilyn. eds. *Transactions and Creations: Property Debates and the Stimulus of Melanesia*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2004.
- Hodder, Ian. "The Past as Passion and Play: Çatalhöyük as a Site of Conflict in the Construction of Multiple Pasts." In *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, politics and heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, edited by Lynn Meskell, 124-39. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Hodder, Ian. ed. *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: the Example at Çatalhöyük*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2000.
- Kennedy, David. ed. *The Twin Town of Zeugma on the Euphrates: Rescue Work and Historical Studies*. Portsmouth: JRA Supplement 27, 1998a.
- Kennedy, David. "Zeugma, the South-East Anatolia Development Project, and Fieldwork on the Turkish Lower Euphrates." In *The Twin Town of Zeugma on the*

- Euphrates: Rescue Work and Historical Studies*, edited by David Kennedy.
Portsmouth: JRA Supplement 27 (1998b): 11-18.
- Kinzer, Stephen. "Dam in Turkey May Soon Flood A '2nd Pompeii.'" *New York Times* 7 May (2000): 1.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Magness-Gardiner, Bonnie. "International Conventions and Cultural Heritage Protection." In *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and Consumption of the Past*, edited by Yorke Rowan and Uzi Baram, 27-40. Walnut Creek: Artamira, 2004.
- Meskeel, Lynn. ed. *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, politics, and heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Neller, Angella, J. "From Utilitarian to Sacred: the Transformation of a Traditional Hawaiian Object." In *Pacific Art: Persistence, Change and Meaning*, edited by Anita Herle, 126-38. London: Crawford House Publishers, 2002.
- Özsunay, Ergün. "Protection of Cultural Heritage in Turkish Private Law." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 6 (1997): 278-290.
- Redhouse. *REDHOUSE Büyük Elsözlüğü*. İstanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1997.
- Renfrew, Colin. *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership: the Ethical Crisis in Archaeology*. London: Duckworth, 2000.
- Rowan, Yorke and Baram, Uzi, eds. *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and Consumption of the Past*. Walnut Creek: Artamira, 2004.
- Siiler, Orhan. Giriş In *Zeugma Yalnız Değil: Türkiye'de Barajlar ve Kültürel Miras*. Edited by Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 3-4. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2000.
- Strathern, Marilyn. "Transactions: an Analytical Foray." In *Transactions and Creations: Property Debates and the Stimulus of Melanesia*, edited by Eric Hirsch and Marilyn Strathern, 85-109. Oxford: Berghahn, 2004.
- The Economist. "Watery Graves." 355 no. 8168 (19 April, 2000): 109-110.
- Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı. *Zeugma Yalnız Değil: Türkiye'de Barajlar ve Kültürel Miras*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2000.
- UNESCO. ed. *The Conservation of Cultural Property: With Special Reference to Tropical Conditions*. Paris: UNESCO, 1968.
- Verdery, Katherine and Humphrey, Caroline, eds. *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004.
- Walsh, Kevin. *The Representation of the Past: Museum and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Weiner, Annette. "Inalienable Wealth." *American Ethnologist* 12(2) (1985): 210-227.

- Weiner, Annette. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping While Giving*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Welsh, Peter H. "The Power of Possessions: The Case against Property." *Museum Anthropology* 21 (1997): 12-18.
- Yalouri, Eleana. *The Acropolis: Global Fame, Local Claim*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001.

Law:

- No. 2863 Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kanunu (the Law No.2863 on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Property) 21 July, 1983.

Online Sources:

- Gaziantep Anadolu Ajansı. Zeugma Mozaikleri Topkapı Yolcusu. NTVMSNBC.com, 2 February, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/255480.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- . Zeugma Mozaikleri İstanbul Yolcusu. NTVMSNBC.com, 4 February, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/255629.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007)
- . Zeugma Platformu: Kültüre Sahip Çıkacağız. NTVMSNBC.com, 11 March, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/261474.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- . Bakanlık'tan "Zeugma" Seferberliği. NTVMSNBC.com, 16 March 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/261814.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- . Zeugma Mozaicileri için Dava açıldı. NTVMSNBC.com. 23 March, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/262855.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- . Zeugma Mozaikleri Yerinde Kalıyor. NTVMSNBC.com. 25 May, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/271442.asp> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- Gaziantep Sanay Odası. Zeugma 10 Yıldır Basının Gündeminde. Zeugma Web Sitei. 21 June, 2000. http://www.zeugmaweb.com/zeugma/bzeugmah_9.htm (accessed 12 March 2007).
- Gorvett, Jonathan. Clashes over Treasures of Zeugma. Aljazeera. 31 May, 2004. <http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=3996> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- Mimarlar Odası Gaziantep Şubesi. ZEUGMA Nereye ...? Mimarlar Odası Genel Merkezi. 14 May, 2004. <http://www.mimarlarodasi.org.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=Belge&Sub=detail&ReclD=90> (accessed 12 March 2007)
- NTV. Zeugma Platformu'ndan Açıklama! NTVMSNBC.com. 17 March, 2004. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/262013.asp> (12 March 2007)

- Packard, David W. An Open Letter to the People of Gaziantep. Possible Protest Campaign. 9 April, 2004. <http://www.packhum.org/phi/letter.html> (accessed 12 March, 2007)
- Radikal. Belkıs Kavgası. Radikal-çevrimçi. 10 April, 2004. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=112814&tarih=10/04/2004> (12 March, 2007).
- Southeast Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration. GAP Regional Development Administration in Its Tenth Year. Press Release. 6 November, 1999. <http://www.gap.gov.tr/English/Basinbil/Bbil1999/bb153.html> (accessed 12 March, 2007).
- . History of Southeastern Anatolia Project. T.C. Başbakanlık GAP Bölge Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı. 31 March, 2006. <http://www.gap.gov.tr/English/Ggbilgi/gtarihce.html> (accessed 12 March 2007).
- . Belkıs-Zeugma: The Importance of Cultural Heritage in Southeastern Anatolia Project, Activities of the GAP Administration and the Antic City of Zeugma. T.C. Başbakanlık GAP Bölge Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı. 28 December, 2006. http://www.gap.gov.tr/gap_eng.php?sayfa=English/zeugma.html (accessed 12 March 2007).

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. “Gypsy Girl,” one of the mosaics discovered through the rescue excavation at Zeugma (Photo by E. Tanaka).



Figure 2. Images of the Zeugma mosaics found in the central reserve of the main street in Gaziantep (Photo by E. Tanaka).

