

**The Nation Under Display.
Museums and Exhibitions in Nineteenth-Century Chile**

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Abstract

The Nation Under Display. Museums and Exhibitions in Nineteenth-Century Chile

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This dissertation exams the origins and agency of museums and exhibitions, along with their collecting policies and displaying practices, in the configuration of early notions of national heritage in Chile. In so doing, it establishes the active participation of such institutions, policies and practices in the Chilean national identity-building process during the nineteenth century.

To corroborate this idea, it takes two postulates as its overarching pillars. The first, historiographical in nature, recognises Latin American national identities as a consequence, rather than a cause, of the struggles for independence in the early nineteenth century. The second, this time anthropological, assumes that the symbolic value of museum collections is not intrinsic to them, but rather imbued in them via political and intellectual operations. In applying these rationales to the case of Chile, this work concludes that the notion of the “museum” that circulated among the local ruling classes of the time was a plastic and malleable one, open to specific interests that ranged from the personal sphere to the national one, in negotiation with matters of class, family values, race and identity.

Throughout the five chapters that function as critical essays, this dissertation is an interdisciplinary exercise which seeks to trace the origins of practices that are still deeply ingrained in contemporary collecting and exhibiting “ways of doing.” In this manner, it provides evidence to both support its theoretical tenets and call into question the legacy and persistence of nineteenth-century practices in the museums of present-day Chile.

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Dedication

To my grandmothers, Elba y Lucrecia, and to my grandfather, Hugo;
the founders of my greater little Chilean family.

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List of Acronyms

AHNE	Archivo Histórico Nacional de España (National History Archives of Spain)
AMNCNE	Archivo del Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales de España (National Museum of Natural Sciences of Spain Archives)
ANAP	Archivo Nacional de la Administración Pública (National Archives for Public Administration)
ANCh	Archivo Nacional de Chile (National Archives of Chile)
AUCh	Anales de la Universidad de Chile (Annals of the University of Chile)
Cat.	Catálogo de la Exposición del Coloniaje (Coloniaje Exhibition Catalogue)
MHN	Museo Histórico Nacional (National History Museum)
MNBA	Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum for Fine Arts)
MNHN	Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (National Museum for Natural History)
SCLRCh	Sesiones de los Cuerpos Legislativos de la República de Chile (Sessions of the Legislative Bodies of the Republic of Chile)
SURDOC	Sistema Unificado de Registro y Documentación (Unified Registration and Documentation System)

Introduction

I.

The first time I ever visited a museum, I was nine years old. Along with my primary school group, we went to the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago. I do not remember which exhibition we saw or, more generally, what exactly we did. What I do remember is my experience and my feeling of awe as I entered a place the like of which I had never seen before, and one I would not return to until I was well into my teenage years. This experience marked the beginning of a journey that, just like history itself, is neither linear nor progressive. Rather, my “museum autobiography” is actually unstable, perhaps even ambiguous. It is full of gaps, in terms of both time and space, full of moments of hope and others of despair. For the time being, the endpoint of the story—one which is open and tentative—is the work that you, the reader, currently hold in your hands (or have up on your screen).

As fate would have it, at the age of seventeen, I visited the National History Museum of Chile in Santiago (Fig. 1). My visit was not planned, nor was the conversation I had with a member of staff there. Her name was Teresa, and she worked in the library. I do not quite know why (most likely because I was the only person who was not part of a group of students or tourists), but Teresa came up to say hello to me and to ask me what had brought me to the museum. Lost for words, I told her that I had an exam coming up on the History of Chile, and a trip to the museum would surely be useful for me. Teresa nodded with hint of pride, confirming that I had made the right decision. After exchanging a few words, she offered to accompany me on a walk through the rooms in the museum, so that she could show me “our history”. I took her up on that offer.

I only have vague memories of that guided tour. What I do have a particularly clear memory of is the comment she made when we reached the *Libertad* room (“Freedom”), which to this day contains paintings of the “Fathers of the Nation” and objects that belonged to them (Fig. 2). On display there, following the semantic logic that gives the room its name, were the relics of those men who, at the beginning of the 19th century, freed Chile from the yoke of the Spanish Empire. The central piece is the flag with which Bernardo O’Higgins¹ proclaimed the

¹ For a short biography of this and other actors central to my research, see Appendix 4: “Biographies.”



Figure 1: Façade of the National History Museum of Chile at Plaza de Armas in Santiago.
Photography, ca. 2018. National History Museum of Chile's website.



Figure 2: "Libertad" [Freedom] Room (Detail).
Photography, ca. 2018. National History Museum of Chile's website.

country's independence in 1818. In a clear example of *horror vacui*, it is surrounded by dozens of objects, images and documents from the pantheon of the heroes of Independence. Standing there, Teresa asked me if understood the importance of the space we were in. "Here lies the origin of our nation," she proclaimed.

Ten years later in 2014, I would return to that very same museum, not as a visitor, but as a historian. Teresa no longer worked there, but the exhibition rooms remained exactly the same, as if time had stood still. But time had indeed continued marching on, and the way the museum was curated—completed in 1982 during the seventeen-years dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and only partially modified in 1993 along with a return to democracy—seemed obsolete, not to mention problematic, to me. For those reasons, it was not particularly difficult for me to draw up a "critical diagnosis" of its narrative, which was my first task as a member of staff. My conclusion: The invitation to learn about "our history" that Teresa had put forth ten years earlier, now felt misleading. The museum mistakenly claimed to present the history of all Chileans when, in fact, it only told the story of the country's ruling classes.

The curatorial narrative, with strong military, patriarchal and triumphalist leanings, operated as a mirror to the *historias patrias* (national histories) that had contributed towards shaping out the nation-state building process throughout the 19th and into the 20th century. According to both these historical accounts and the museum, the Chilean nation is a homogeneous and indivisible community, white and Catholic and, above all else, directly descended from Western culture. Of course, the way the museum was curated left no space for the inclusion of communities that were historically side-lined from the official narrative. No women, no indigenous people, no Afro-descendant people, no children, no lower classes or sexual dissidents. If, by chance, some object or other seemed to point towards the existence of these group, it did so in order to explicitly indicate their place on the margins.

That appraisal, the museum, its history and its collections would go on to become a cornerstone of my life story and a central part of my research. At that point, two fronts were opening up in my work at the museum. The first one, a challenge: taking the proverbial bull by the horns and constructing a new way of curating the museum based on a diversity of voices and subjects that interwove to form the "History of Chile", (a particularly difficult task given the political implication of the proposal, and the practical hurdles involved in making visible historically marginalised communities when the museum collections contained no objects that

represented them). The other one, a presumption: assuming that the curation of the museum was not the spontaneous result of an assemblage of multiple factors, but rather the outcome of intellectual operations deeply rooted in the history of Chilean cultural thought. Identifying those operations and their links to the origins of collecting and exhibiting practices that shaped the early notions of the museum and of national heritage in Chile is, specifically, the main objective of this PhD thesis.

Although my visit to the National History Museum of Chile was what set this story in motion and triggered my interest in museums, readers will not find in this text a “history” of that institution. In fact, my work is not a “history-of”, and I struggle to classify it according to the standards of historiography, (I shall leave that task to the reader). That being said, I must admit that this was in fact my original idea. The winding roads of historical research do, however, seem destined to challenge the researcher’s preconceived notions; they invite researchers to rethink their motives and the contribution their work makes. Early into my PhD programme at Concordia, this same invitation was extended to me (I am particularly grateful for the conversations I have had with Nora Jaffary, my advisor, and with Erica Lehrer, a member of my thesis defence committee). If my intentions were to track down the origins of a problematic curatorial narrative, I should question the established historical representations and move beyond the image of the state as the sole agent in the construction of national identities. I found it was unworkable to start this work by taking the founding of the National History Museum at the beginning of the 20th century as a milestone without exploring the collecting and exhibiting practices—and the subjects and ideas behind them—that laid the groundwork for such a museum.

As a result of that reflection, this dissertation is an analysis of the first experiments with museums in Chile before the founding of the History Museum in 1911. This challenges a linear version of history in order to detect continuities and ruptures that specifically show the non-linear nature of the object of my study. Although to speak of museums in Chile would mean only doing so starting from the beginning of the struggles for independence in 1810, (museums as such did not exist in the “Kingdom of Chile”² during the colonial period), my research works

² The Chilean territory under the control of the Spanish Crown was not, strictly speaking, a “kingdom”. In legal and administrative terms, from 1541 to 1817, its original title was the “Captaincy-General of Chile.” Nevertheless, the very institutions of empire and the inhabitants of what is now Chile unofficially called the territory a “Kingdom”. However, this is a merely semantic matter that is void of any political implications.

across this rupture in time to explore the legacy that the Spanish Empire's collecting practices passed down to the Chilean Republic's projects. Along these same lines, the end goal of examining nineteenth-century "ways of doing" involves detecting continuities with the contemporary institutional structures of museums. Therefore, even though my work roughly spans the 19th century, the intention behind it is to contribute towards the current debate that problematises the role that museums play, specifically "history" museums, in matters of decolonisation, integration of historically marginalised communities, and democratisation of historical knowledge, among other things.

Throughout the five chapters that work as critical essays, my dissertation seeks to make a contribution towards the question of how we got here: How and why did a small selection of material culture become "Chilean national heritage" and, almost by default, representative of national identity? This question stretches out to cover museums and their place as the custodians of such heritage, a synonym for "us." As I argue, the notion of the "museum" that circulated among the Chilean ruling classes of the 19th century was plastic and malleable, open to specific agendas and goals. Just like the collections the museum contains, my research assumes that it is not a fixed institution, but rather one in constant motion.

II.

What is a museum? This question was posed by some of the most renowned academics and professionals working in the field at the General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), held in Tokyo in 2019. However, there was little consensus as to how to answer the question, and the Assembly finished without a set definition.³ This very same question must have arisen two hundred years ago on the other side of the world among the Chilean *criollos*⁴ who formed the government Junta that, in 1810, broke ties with the Spanish Empire and declared Chile to be an independent republic. As one of the first measures of the fledgling country, its governors ruled in July 1813 to create two institutions that they felt were fundamental for any modern nation. The first was a National Institute "which no part of America

³The proposed (and then rejected) museum definition stated, "Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. [...]" In 2022, the board agreed on a new definition: "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. [...]"

⁴ In Spanish America, "*criollo*" was a noun and adjective for a person who was not born in Spain but was of pure Spanish descent.

has even seen”;⁵ and the second was a National Museum, “which amounts to a scientific workshop for human wit.”⁶

What is a museum? More specifically, what is the function of a museum? These questions, much like in 21st-century Tokyo, found no agreed-upon answer in early-19th-century Santiago. If there was any notion circulating among the *criollos*, this must have been somewhat close to the only “official” source at the time. The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, in its Fourth Edition published in 1734, defines a “museum” as “the building or place used for the studies of the sciences, humanities and liberal arts,”⁷ a definition that it repeats in its Fifth Edition of 1817.⁸ In both definitions, the main attribute of the museum is the physical space that houses it. However, as the evidence that supports my research shows, the spatial component was, at best, a secondary aspect of the first museum in Chile. In fact, the projects to create museums in the first years following independence did so without even considering the physical aspect of the institution. The whys and wherefores behind the country's need for a museum at the time, even without a physical form, are questions that structure my work, and for which I seek to provide transversal answers that echo throughout the five chapters.

While the semantic matter of the museum is rich and interesting, my dissertation advances an approach to the political and cultural use of museums that transcends its mere definition. Going beyond the museum as a physical space, I am interested in exploring what it houses: its collections. Museums are structured based on their collections and, in turn, these collections are made up of “things” (tools, clothing, relics, rocks, animals, plants, images or, quite literally, anything). The power of museums stems directly from their capacity to turn “things” into “heritage.” This transformation derives from the application of a system of values that changes the properties of the “things” to such an extent that it turns them into “something else”: museum pieces.

⁵ “Acta de los acuerdos de la Junta de Gobierno, el Senado i el Cabildo de Santiago, en 27 de julio de 1813.” *Sesiones de los Cuerpos Lejislativos de la República de Chile* (from now on SCLRCh). Annex A: “Espediente sobre la fundación del Instituto Nacional i del Museo de Ciencias en el año de 1813. Oficio de la Comisión de Educación a la Junta de Gobierno.” Volume I, 291. From now on, all translations from Spanish are my own.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Museo.” *Diccionario Histórico de la Lengua Española – Diccionario de Autoridades*. Volume 4, 1734. Online: <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>

⁸ “Museo.” *Diccionario de la lengua castellana de la Real Academia Española*, Fifth Edition (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1817): 592.

Therefore, the starting point of my research is my conviction that the symbolic value of the objects and images that make up the collections of a museum, (specifically “history” museums), that we now deem to be “the historic heritage of the nation,” is not intrinsic to them, but rather one that we grant them, the result of specific political and intellectual operations. The museification of things is, therefore, not a matter of fate or mere chance, but premeditated. For this reason, apart from the collections, my work also examines the agency of the figures that created the museum, in the case of Chile: the *criollo* élites. My analysis of the relationship between material culture and the ruling class leads me to argue that the groups that selected the elements that made up the first “Chilean” collections sought not only to contribute towards the process of configuring a national identity, but also to obtain advantages for themselves, their families and their class. Taking this claim as my context, my dissertation aims to provide evidence of the active role that museum and exhibitions played in the formation of an array of “things” that, once part of a collection, became symbols of “Chilean national identity” (and, by default, its others).

The “constructed” nature of national identity means that my work also enters into recent academic debates about the agents who gave rise to it, and the ways in which they did so. In terms of Latin America, academic research from the last thirty years has shown that, at the beginning of the 19th century, against the backdrop of independence struggles, regional identities were in a quasi-embryonic state that, as they came into being, only circulated within an extremely small social circle.⁹ In the case of Chile, the evidence suggests that if there was a “national conscience” around 1810, it was the exclusive property of the *criollo* oligarchy.¹⁰ However, the historiography from the 19th century (and a large swathe of the 20th century) deemed independence to be the natural political consequence of an already deep-seated national

⁹ See for example: David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Classical Republicanism and Creole Patriotism: Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) and the Spanish American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Rebecca Earle, “Creole Patriotism and the Myth of the 'Loyal Indian',” *Past & Present* 172 (August 2001): 125-145; and Anthony McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America* (New York, Routledge, 2014).

¹⁰ During the 18th century, the Chilean *criollo* elites were, in economic terms, a class of landowners and merchants; in social terms, they were representative of a conservative and religious ethic. The late 18th and early-19th centuries, on the other hand, witnessed the emergence of a bourgeois elite, composed of *criollo* and foreign merchants, miners, professionals and intellectuals. The main goal of the so-called “bourgeois ethic” was accumulation of wealth and capital under the tenets of liberal thought. In Chile, the early merger of these two classes via kinship ties gave rise to a *criollo* oligarchy that would govern the country throughout the 19th century. In 1928, the Chilean intellectual Alberto Edwards accurately described this group as “a mixed aristocracy, bourgeois in its formation due to the triumph of money [...], but through whose veins also ran the blood of the old feudal families.” Alberto Edwards, *La fronda aristocrática en Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1928): 308.

identity held at the time. In Chile, this translated into a narrative that artificially contrasted the Chileans and the Spanish, not just as two distinct “nations”, but also as a mutually exclusive duality: good and bad, light and dark, past and future.

As the reader may have guessed, my work refutes this thesis. Instead, I base my analysis on approaches that accept that Chilean national identity was a consequence rather than a cause of the wars of independence. As historians Gabriel Cid and Alejandro San Francisco argue, “around 1810, the [Chilean] nation is not a settled matter; on the contrary, it is yet to be constructed through a complex political, institutional, social, symbolic, cultural and even semantic process.”¹¹ Many contemporary studies have identified the ways in which the state (and the élites that ran it) managed to consolidate a Chilean national identity over the course of the 19th century. However, specifically those from the field of cultural history have shown that this process was neither monolithic nor unilateral. Unlike positions that, for decades, assumed a passive reception of the élites’ nationalising discourses, recent studies have brought to light the resistance and negotiation through which the lower classes participated in the process.¹² As historian Paul Gillingham argues, “[n]ationalism may well be a bourgeois project, but it is not just a bourgeois project.”¹³

It is worth highlighting here the works that prove this dynamism through an analysis of dimensions that transcend the state apparatus, even though it was that self-same apparatus that incentivised them. Among them was the creation of a repertoire of national symbols,¹⁴ a “national landscape,”¹⁵ a system of national education,¹⁶ a calendar of national holidays and military victories¹⁷ and a “a philosophy of being Chilean.”¹⁸ However, there has not yet been sufficient exploration of museums, the objects that make up their collections and the practices associated with this field. Another aim of this dissertation is to bridge that gap.

¹¹ Gabriel Cid and Alejandro San Francisco, *Nación y Nacionalismo en Chile*. Vol. 1: Siglo XIX (Santiago, Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2009), XV.

¹² Julio Pinto and Verónica Valdivia, *¿Chilenos todos? La construcción social de la nación (1810-1840)* (Santiago: LOM, 2009)

¹³ Paul Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 6.

¹⁴ Bárbara Silva, *Identidad Y Nación Entre Dos Siglos: Patria Vieja, Centenario Y Bicentenario* (Santiago: Lom, 2000)

¹⁵ Catalina Valdés and Peliowski Amari, eds., *Una Geografía Imaginada: Diez Ensayos Sobre Arte y Naturaleza* (Santiago: Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2014)

¹⁶ Sol Serrano, ed., *Historia de la educación en Chile (1810-2010)* (Santiago: Taurus, 2018)

¹⁷ Paulina Peralta, *¡Chile tiene Fiesta! El origen del 18 de septiembre (1810-1837)* (Santiago: Lom, 2007)

¹⁸ Bernardo Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas y la cultura en Chile* (Santiago: Universitaria, 2011)

In Chile, the 20th century produced some “museum histories” that, at very best, were institutional accounts that commemorated foundational milestones and figures, strictly bound up with the process of state formation.¹⁹ Of course, contemporary studies have managed to buck this trend, but they have not necessary been able to work past a vision of the museum as the logical consequence of an readily formed national identity at the time of independence.²⁰ For example, in the foreword to one of the most recent studies on this matter,²¹ historian Paz Nuñez-Regueiro—curator of the American Collection at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris—argues that “in 1838, the recently inaugurated National Museum was already offering a vision of the country’s riches, the idea of the Nation and what it mean to be Chilean through its fledgling natural history and archaeology collections.”²²

By contrast, my work shows how museums and exhibitions were active agents in the process of constructing Chilean national identity, rather than merely institutions that “exhibited” an identity that already existed.

III.

In terms of methodology, my thesis works within the premises of cultural history. As the result of applying post-structuralist thought to the fields historiographical knowledge-production,²³ this approach rejects essentialist notions of human nature and contemplates the possibility of “historicising” all aspects of society.²⁴ In this way, by detecting the origins of problematic practices, we can remake and remodel them. To do this, towards the end of the 20th century, cultural history pushed for the analysis of images, texts and narratives that, when brought together, structured everyday meanings, even complex ones, of identity and social belonging. As such, much like my own work, cultural history is intrinsically interdisciplinary. In

¹⁹ See for example: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, *La Historia de Chile en la pintura* (Santiago: DIBAM, 1981), and Hernán Rodríguez, ed., *Museo Histórico Nacional* (Santiago: DIBAM, 1982)

²⁰ Patiente Schell, “Capturing Chile: Santiago's Museo Nacional during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001): 45-65.

²¹ Luis Alegría Licuime, *Historia, Museos y Patrimonio. Discursos, representaciones y prácticas de un campo en construcción* (Santiago: Servicio Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural, 2019)

²² Paz Nuñez-Regueiro, “Presentación” in Alegría Licuime, *Historia*, 15.

²³ The most influential authors for “The New Cultural History” are, quite clearly, Michel Foucault, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu.

²⁴ Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)

this field, the realm of the historian also draws on a dialogue with anthropology, literary criticism, history of art and sociology.

The swift incursion of cultural history allowed for the emergence of topics that historiography had traditionally relegated to a secondary position. English historian Peter Burke notes that “[o]n one occasion Foucault criticized historians for what he called their ‘impoverished idea of the real’, which left no space for what is imagined.”²⁵ Cultural history has taken on this challenge by extending the limits of the real beyond the tangible world, drawing into its field of study certain subjects that, until relatively recently, had little historical agency. The analysis of matters such as the feelings, emotions, the body, food, reading or clothing are relatively new topics for the discipline. Also new is the methodological use of a set of concepts that feed into the study of these matters, such as the concepts of “construction”, “otherness”, “performativity”, “translation”, “consumption”, “appropriation” and “invention”.

That being said, there are two concepts that are crucial to both cultural history and my work: *practices* and *representation*. Regarding practices, the use of this concept reveals the historical dimensions of the social interactions that make an action possible. Attentiveness to these interrelationships can help us to detect the ways in which people who participate in them configure and negotiate usage, values and meanings. In Michel de Certeau’s terms, everyday life is structured around social practices.²⁶ In turn, these are the result of dynamic interactions between strategies for producing power and tactics of active reception that can even reshape them. For example, the reader will notice that my work covers “collecting and exhibiting practices” rather than a “history of collecting and exhibiting.” This is because institutional collecting strategies did not necessarily align with the tactics of executing, receiving and consuming them. As my work shows, in 19th-century Chile, many agents with different agendas drew on the notion of the museum. The subjects that used this notion changed their opinions, they adapted their ideas and took positions, (sometimes contradictory ones), based on interests that range from the personal sphere to the national one, in negotiation with matters of class, race and identity.

The second concept, representation, is relevant since it addresses the domain of the ideas contained within museums and exhibitions. French historian Roger Chartier, thought to be one of

²⁵ Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 64.

²⁶ Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (California: University of California Press, 1988)

the figures behind the “cultural turn,” takes the following approach to representation based on the malleability of its meaning: “toute représentation *représente* quelque chose (...) toute représentation *se présente* représentant quelque chose.”²⁷ In other words, to represent means to make an absence present and, at the same time, to exhibit a presence. The application of this duality in my work has helped me to work past the formal aspects of the historical document to focus on what these practices represent. Collecting and exhibiting are universal practices, but the ways in which both actions take on meaning locally hinges on specific factors. Likewise, the museum presents materialities that represent abstract ideas: nation, national identity and belonging. Mapping out the trajectory of the practices through which the museum represented ideas of Chilean national identity is another objective of my work.

IV.

To visit a museum is to move through its rooms. Observing, pausing, continuing along a path which is also a narrative written by the curator. However, when we visit a museum, we only access a tiny part of its collections. If a collection is a selection of pieces that aspire to represent a whole, an exhibition is an even more specific selection. Like a microcosm, what we see in a museum attempts to represent what we do not see: its storerooms and its repositories.

As a member of staff at the National History Museum of Chile, I had access to the repository that houses around ten thousand pieces in its collection that, incidentally, amount to around 98% of it, (the remaining 2% forms part of the permanent exhibition). A small door, like that of a catacomb, restricts access to what, once inside, is the largest repository of material culture in the country. Since I was more accustomed to seeing documents lined up on the shelves of an archive, my first impressions were bound up in the similarities between both types of space. The repository of a museum is, to a certain extent, also an archive. They both store, organise, classify and safeguard “historical” pieces; both of them stop time, conserving elements that are waiting patiently to be selected, to potentially see the light of day again.

What is contained in the National History Museum repository, when I saw what the public does not normally see, confirmed my suspicions: the Museum’s alleged representation of

²⁷ Roger Chartier, “Defense et illustration de la notion de représentation” *Working Papers des Sonderforschungsbereiches* 640, no. 2 (2011). Italics in the original. From the same author, see: “Le Monde Comme Représentation,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 44, no. 6 (1989): 1505– 1520.

the history of all Chileans was not only an illusion of its permanent exhibition, but also of its entire collection. At the same time, a stroll through the aisles of the storerooms leads me to reflect on the limits and differences between the figures of the historian, the curator and the archivist. Of course, they exist, and I do not mean to suggest that they are all one and the same. In fact, when historians need the archive, they seem to also feel the need to differentiate their work from that of the archivist. Even though the cornerstone of both professions is the past, only one of them seems to have the authority to analyse it. Canadian archivist Terry Cook uses the metaphor of the past as a “foreign country,” (previously used by David Lowenthal who, in turn, borrowed it from LP Hartley), to call this apparently irreconcilable difference into question: The archive is a country “that they [historians] visit frequently, but perhaps mainly as tourists passing through, [...] not talking to the local inhabitants about what they do, thus failing to understand the country’s real character and animating soul.”²⁸

My approach to the museum’s repository as an archive aims specifically not to visit that country as a tourist, but to inhabit it as a resident. The sources that make up the corpus of my PhD research are, in and of themselves, an archive that fosters dialogue between figures that are also those of my own professional journey: historian, curator and archivist. Furthermore, it is also an archive that erases the boundary of the exclusively written record to include other elements that transcend this differentiation. Therefore, the archive of documents that underpins this work is made up of a range of materials (my fonds, so to speak) that range from hand-written documents (letters, official notes, reports), printed ones (catalogues, press articles, bulletins), natural specimens (animals, plants, minerals), material culture (objects, relics, things), visual culture (paintings, sculptures, etchings), and my own experience as a visitor, employee and researcher of museums.

Despite the challenges and limitations, (travelling to Chile and conducting my fieldwork at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was a particularly difficult task), this archive is the framework that underpins all of the ideas in my work. These ideas take concrete shape through the five thematic chapters that, much like an exhibition, are the result of selecting specific topics. Without wanting to tread on anybody’s toes, I feel this work is also a piece of curatorship. If we trace it back to its Latin roots, the verb “to curate” comes from “*curare*”, which means “to care.”

²⁸ Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 605.

It is precisely because I do *care* about the place of museums in our society that I have selected topics that will help readers to understand the contexts in which the first museum practices emerged in Chile and, in so doing, to contribute towards questioning and reworking the contemporary museum.

In the first chapter, “From the Cabinet to the Museum”, I examine the notion of the museum that circulated among different agents of Chilean society during the first half of the 19th century. Unlike other works that operate on an understanding of the universality of the museum as a “temple of the muses”, this chapter shows that both the late-colonial administration and the early republic deemed the museum to primarily be a bureaucratic unit with glaring political and economic interests. Unlike the discourse of the ruling class at the time, which depicted the museum as a “new and unique” institution, the fact of the matter is that, as that chapter establishes, the Chilean museum is a continuation of Spanish imperial policy, this time on a local scale. In the élite’s opinion, the practice of collecting “Chilean nature” allowed them to create an image of the country and, in so doing, to frame it within the trajectory of Western progress.

Putting that nature on display, however, was not at the forefront of the ruling class’s minds at the time. I cover this matter in depth in the second chapter, “Forms of Classifying, Exhibiting and Observing”, focussing on the administration of the German scientist Rudolph Philippi, Director of the National Museum of Chile from 1853 to 1897. During that period, as I explain in that chapter, a lack of interest from the government clashed with Philippi’s desire to create a modern museum, following the codes of the nascent institutional structures of museums in Europe. As such, the Museum would then arrange its work around three key notions: collecting, organising and, above all else, exhibiting “Chilean nature.” Through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on museum studies and visual culture, Chapter Two argues that, during this period, the Museum became an optical institution; in other words, it participated in the configuration of “ways of seeing” and moving through space, and it was also able to make visible an abstract concept: Chilean national identity.

The museum’s participation in the process of constructing a national identity is not, however, merely affirmative. Museums and exhibitions contributed both to the national discourse of “who we are”, and to that of “who we are not”, and “what we do not want to be”, thus participating in the production of otherness. Chapter three, “Chilean Antiquities” covers this topic. In this Chapter, I examine the role that the practices associated with the museum played in

the symbolic annihilation of indigenous communities in the country over the course of the 19th century. Specifically, I do this by analysing the collecting and exhibiting policies that classified indigenous material culture as “antiquities.” Within the framework of the intellectual debates of the period, that chapter shows how museums and exhibitions actively participated in the configuration of a chronology that placed indigenous people as the sole representatives of the past, thus circumventing their agency in the present of the republic.

Chapter Four, “From Family Heirlooms to National Heritage,” examines the impact of one specific event: the Coloniaje Exhibition. Held in 1873, its goal was to “resuscitate” the colonial age based on displaying material and visual culture from that era. In an analysis that goes beyond the limits of that event to explore it from a much broader perspective, the chapter challenges the assumptions of the very few works that have studied the exhibition. As we shall see, they approached it with an uncritical vision that hails it as the first exhibition of “historical objects” in the country. My approach, on the other hand, questions these arguments to give new meaning to its position as a milestone event: rather than a history exhibition, I posit that the Coloniaje Exhibition was the event that set in motion a process through which the élite’s family heirlooms became national heritage.

The fifth and final chapter, “National Relics”, encapsulates the overarching ideas in this thesis (and my own interests as a historian). In that chapter, I examine the ways in which ordinary materialities become “historical objects”, arguing for an understanding of this shift in meaning based on what I call the “logic of the relic”. As we shall see, physical contact (the relationship between body and object) functions as the fundamental principle behind this transformation. On the basis of certain principles of religious anthropology, I uncover both the importance of secular relics in the construction of national identities and, more importantly, the significance of the museum as a temple for worshipping them.

Lastly, a few caveats: Although my research is constantly in dialogue with studies on the nation state-building processes in Chile and Latin America, I would not classify it within such field of studies. Rather, the museum-focused nature of my work aims to corroborate the agency of these institutions as subjects of history. Through an analysis of the case of Chile, I seek to demonstrate that museums—their collecting policies and displaying dynamics—are the outcome of complex interactions between local elites, policy makers, members of staff, donors and merchants, academics and intellectuals, audiences and, mostly, their own collections. In light of

this, rather than a study of the process of construction of a national identity, my dissertation establishes the active participation of the museum within such process.

The reader will also notice that my work is not a chronology of any events or institutions, but rather a proposal for understanding the origin, legacy and persistence of nineteenth-century practices in the museum of present-day Chile. That being said, this work does not cover each and every museum and exhibition in Chile in the 19th century (See Appendix 1: Museums and Exhibitions in Chile during the 19th century). My focus on the historical agency of objects and material culture only gives me scope to provide a superficial approach to cases such as the Museum of Fine Arts, the International Exhibition of 1875, or the Centenary Exhibition of 1910.

In this way, I hope to contribute towards an understanding of museums as complex institutions that hold historical agency. Museums, as my work shows, have played an active role in the configuration of a specific way of “being Chilean,” a monopolised identity that some sectors are now beginning to question and problematise.

Chapter One: From the Colonial Cabinet to the National Museum

Introduction

At the beginning of nineteenth century, the Spanish Empire faced its most important political crisis, one that would end with its collapse and the transformation of its American colonies into a set of independent states. As a result, and although the phenomenon is the outcome of a large and complex process, the period between 1808 and 1825 witnessed a series of revolts and local uprisings led by those seeking to create a group of new administrative apparatuses based on the modern idea of the national state.

Chile, in colonial times a small and conflictive *capitanía general* (captaincy general) under the administration of the Viceroyalty of Peru (Figs. 3 and 4), was not an exception within the regional emancipation process. On the contrary, in September 1810 a government Junta was held, giving way to the emergence of a pro-independence discourse which would result in the Chilean Declaration of Independence in February 1818. In this context, on July 27, 1813, a joint session of the members of the recently formed national senate and the government *Junta* agreed to create a network of cultural institutions dedicated to foster the production of “national knowledge” at the service and development of the new republic. These included, among others, the establishment of a national institute, a national botanical garden, a national library, and a national museum.

For the then nascent Chilean ruling class, the museum proclaimed by the Junta, would be “by nature, so brilliant and new among us that, most likely, many would doubt and even ridicule its existence.”¹ It would grant “honour and wealth”² to the State and it would become “the nation's most sacred pursuit.”³ However, that specific museum never came to be. In 1814, a lack of experience among the *criollo* élites made it possible for the Spanish Empire to reconquer its most far-flung colony in the Americas and, in the process, it overturned the independent

¹ “Acta de los acuerdos de la Junta de Gobierno, el Senado i el Cabildo de Santiago, en 27 de julio de 1813.” SCLRCh, Appendix A: “Espediente sobre la fundación del Instituto Nacional i del Museo de Ciencias en el año de 1813. Oficio de la Comisión de Educación a la Junta de Gobierno.” Vol. I (1813), 291.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

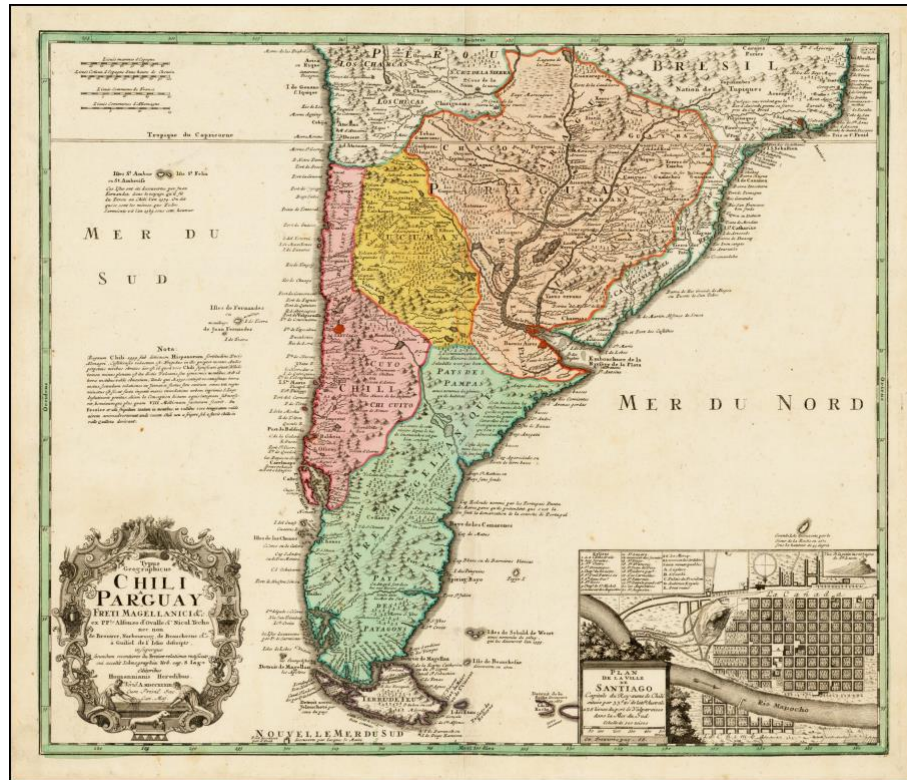


Figure 3: “Typus Geographicus Chili, Paraguay Freti Magellanici...[with large plan of Santiago].”
Map, Hand Colored. Nuremberg, 1733.
The Barry Lawrence Ruderman Map Collection.

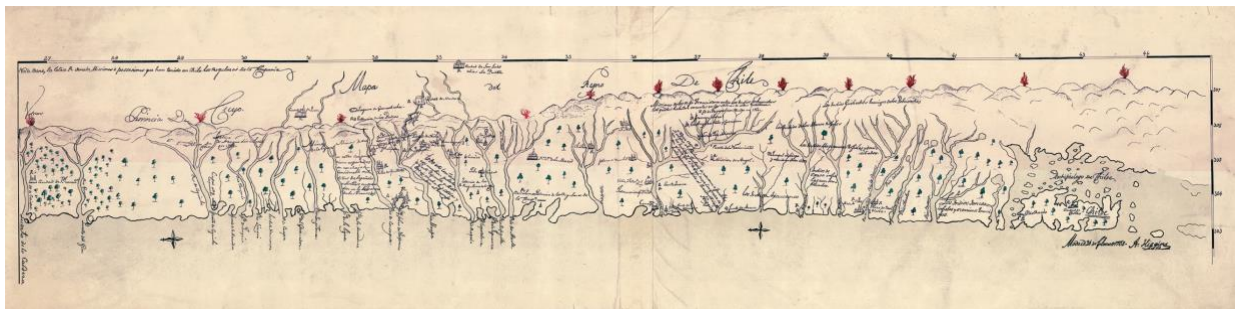


Figure 4: [Attributed to Ambrosio O'Higgins, viceroy of Peru] “Mapa de Chile, desde Copiapó hasta Chiloé.”
(Map of Chile, from Copiapó to Chiloé)
Map, Ink on Paper, 1768. Maps Collection, National Archives of Chile.

government's plans, museum and all.⁴ Despite this failure, the mere existence of such a project leads me to conclude that the authorities of the time—the ones that planned out a post-colonial administrative regime—deemed the museum to be a key piece in the incipient state foundation-scheme. The enquiry into the motives and interests that made this structure possible is the framework that will structure my analysis of the first museum in Chile, the subject of this chapter.

Beyond the romantic symbolism of the 1813 project to create a museum, the Decree does not specify either the role or the purpose of the museum, let alone a clear definition of what the government deemed a museum to be or what, in practical terms, it expected from it. Instead, on this matter, the document poses more questions than it answers. For example, while the authorities use the word “museum” as a central semantic element of their project, it appears indistinctly as “the museum”, “national museum”, “natural history museum” and “science museum”, thus assuming some degree of synonymy between these concepts. Along these same lines, as we shall see throughout this chapter, the notion of the “Cabinet” enters this field as an element that calls into question the role that spaces of this kind played in political, economic, cultural and even aesthetic matters.

Faced with this ambiguous situation, the question regarding the role of the museum in the construction of a post-colonial Latin American State such as Chile is highly relevant. Approaching the matter of the museum, (and the élites' insistence on having one in the country), are the two lines of enquiry that give shape to this chapter. Having analysed a corpus of evidence made up of, but not limited to, bureaucratic documents from the period known as the “formation of the State” (1810-1840), I propose the general hypothesis that, during the first half of the 19th century, (including the last years of the Spanish colonial regime), the concept of the museum that circulated among the Chilean ruling class was an ambiguous and malleable idea that its members could shape to fit specific interests.

As we shall see, a Chilean museum would be an institution of great symbolic value for the élites of the time. Its mere existence would cement the inclusion of the fledgling country within the tradition of Western thought, emphasising the civilised nature of those who lived

⁴ Labelled by Chilean historiography as *La Reconquista Española* [Spanish Reconquest], this refers to the period between 1814 and 1817, when Spanish troops defeated the Chilean attempt at emancipation, control over the colony to the Monarchy. Early in 1817, however, the so-called Ejército Libertador [Liberation Army] defeated the Spanish forces once and for all. Chile's official declaration of Independence is dated 12 February 1818.

there. At the same time, the museum, (which did not exist as such under Spanish rule), would attest to the end of the colonial period and underscore the attributes of the “new” society. However, due to the malleable and open nature of the notion analysed in this chapter, the museum would also function as part of an economic project designed to draw Chile into a global network of trade.

Based on these hypotheses, this chapter (and, in general, my entire dissertation), seeks to move beyond the centre/periphery binary, to focus on the asymmetrical nature of the movement and circulation of natural and material samples, as well as the role of the museum as the facilitator of such movement. For this reason, my approach to this phenomenon is non-linear. To address the issues outlined in this chapter and my hypotheses regarding them, I propose a chronologically asymmetrical route, structured according to the effects that different policies had on the concept of the museum in Chile between 1790 and 1840. In doing so, I intend to examine the notions, ideas, aspirations and even utopias in circulation regarding the idea of the museum, not just as an institution, but also among the people who advocated for, implemented and, ultimately, ran a museum that shifted, adapted and even questioned its own role as an agent of the State all under the flag of the same institution during the entire period.

An Invisible Museum

After the definitive victory of the *criollo* army over the Spanish troops, General Bernardo O’Higgins’ government started implementing a plan to stabilise the now independent country, but still ravished by the consequences of war. Against this backdrop, the identification of the natural attributes of the national territory became a state affair: identifying the component parts of “Chilean nature” would allow the State to exploit these and help the country enter the international networks of modern capitalism.

Furthermore, the once-thwarted national education project had not vanished from the government’s roadmap. In 1819, the Senate passed a decree to reopen of the National Institute⁵; the museum, however, did not meet the same fate. While the idea of having a museum for the country remained active among local authorities, the evidence suggests that there was a shift in the perception of its role in the project of state formation. At this point, the idea of the museum

⁵ “Proclama del senado conservador sobre el restablecimiento del Instituto, en 1819.” in Juan Espejo, *Centenario del Instituto Nacional: 1813-1913: breve reseña histórica* (Santiago: Barcelona, 1913), 153.

shifted from the field of education to the field of economics and, specifically, the field of utilitarianism. As we shall see throughout this chapter, the ways in which the museum could contribute towards the development of the economy and the country's progress turned out to be central arguments in the many discussions that led up to its definitive materialisation in the 1830s.

We can see this explicitly in 1822, when O'Higgins' government hired the French veteran and botanist Jean-Joseph Dauxion-Lavaysse and offered him the role of director of the National Museum and the Botanical Garden of Santiago. More of a soldier than a scientist, according to historian Diego Barros Arana, "Dauxion-Lavaysse was a Frenchman whom the accidents of an adventurous life had led to Chile."⁶ The "accidental" nature of his time in the country is a common theme in the sparse documentation that mentions his work. Dauxion-Lavaysse had almost no background as a scientist, and yet he was tasked with the job of starting a Chilean museum. This matter was wound up in the expectations of the Chilean ruling class whose representatives, (heavily influenced by an anti-Spanish sentiment), saw France as a cultural and civilisational model to follow. O'Higgins actually made specific mention of the importance of having French professionals in Chile, since their mere presence would grant the country "that extension of faculties in which they are outstanding."⁷

Dauxion-Lavaysse had decided to try his luck as scientist in Argentina. However, his limited professional background and reputation as a swindler shut down any possibilities for him in that country. O'Higgins' offer reached his ears in 1821 and, by the end of that year, he had already installed himself in Santiago. Once he had settled in the capital, Dauxion-Lavaysse asserted his claims regarding his agreement with the Supreme Director, to whom he wrote the following in 1822: "With the deepest respect, I request that you deign to issue the corresponding orders so that I may be granted the title of director of the National Museum, as discussed when I was ordered to come to this state from Tucumán."⁸ O'Higgins kept his promise, and on 1 June 1822, he officially appointed Dauxion-Lavaysse as the director of the National Museum of Chile. By putting him in this role, the Chilean government hoped that his work in the country would

⁶ Diego Barros Arana, *Don Claudio Gay: su vida y sus obras. Estudio biográfico y crítico escrito por encargo del Consejo de la Universidad de Chile* (Santiago: Cervantes, 1911), 250.

⁷ "Oficio de Bernardo O'Higgins al Senado" [no date, Ca. 1821], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol. 315, fs. 403-404v.

⁸ "Carta de JJ Dauxion Lavaysse a Bernardo O'Higgins" Santiago, May 20th, 1822, ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol. 315, f.402.

allow them to go about “discovering the utility of the huge treasures hidden away in the plant and mineral kingdoms, adorning the respective Museum and Cabinet with their precious materials.”⁹ But what museum was Dauxion-Lavaysse meant to adorn if the country still did not have one?

Dauxion-Lavaysse was appointed as the director of a museum that, strictly speaking, did not exist. Without collections, a budget, or even a building, the National Museum of Chile only existed in a few bureaucratic notes, amongst which was the appointment of the director who otherwise had no civil servants or staff to direct. The museum he ran was a ghost museum or, using the concept put forth by the Argentinian anthropologist Irina Podgorny, an “invisible” museum. These “invisible museums”, according to the author, “are not for the delight of the eyes, but rather for those who know how to read data or calculate the profitability of the products of different regions.”¹⁰ In other words, far from being a “temple of the muses”, the concept of the invisible museum functions to give name to other projects that, while under the banner of the museum, involved work that was barely related with exhibitory practices. Instead, this involved exploratory work that did indeed collect and classify specimens, both with the end goal of determining the utility, (primarily in economic terms), of that which they had collected.

The invisible nature of the museum under Dauxion-Lavaysse’s control becomes evident when we examine the details of his contract. In the agreement, the government expressly states that his mission was to go on a scientific voyage across Chile’s territories,

for the purpose of examining the geology of the country, its minerals and anything else within the realm of natural history; all data that may contribute to form an exact statistics of Chile, stipulating the points that are navigable, the rivers and locations for the purpose of establishing factories, ports, canals and roads that could be easily opened to facilitate communication and trade, indicating measures to promote agriculture and lands for the purpose of growing raw materials for industry and, lastly, proposing measures that can be best adapted to achieve these aims.¹¹

⁹ “Otro,” *Gazeta Ministerial de Chile* (Santiago: June 1st, 1822): 86.

¹⁰ Irina Podgorny, “Naturaleza, colecciones y museos en Iberoamérica (1770-1850),” In *El Museo en escena. Política y cultura en América Latina*, edited by Américo Castilla (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2010), 61.

¹¹ “Senado Conservador. Sesión 51” August 6, 1823. SCLRCh. Vol. VII, Appendix 538, 312.

The roadmap that the government gave Dauxion-Lavaysse made no reference to anything that would fall within the remit of the modern museum. Actions such as collecting materials to organise, categorise and, most importantly, exhibit, are absent from the stipulations of his duties. Also absent is the idea of the museum as a repository for a collection intended for a community to view and experience. This, specifically, is what makes the museum “invisible”. The work assigned to him, similar in nature to that of a geologist, was practical and utilitarian, with one specific aim: to identify the country's natural resources so that the State could exploit them, a practice that was otherwise common among the natural scientists of the 18th and 19th centuries.¹²

Returning to the overarching hypothesis of this chapter, the fact that Dauxion-Lavaysse was hired as the director of an invisible museum would suggest that the Chilean authorities understood the museum not as cultural project, but rather as part of an economic endeavour. Even though it was an abstract institution, that did not mean that it was any less pragmatic and utilitarian. Around 1820, the government envisaged the museum as a facilitator for the formative process of national industrialisation. Within its administrative purview fell a series of practices more akin to those of natural science, namely exploring, observing and describing specimens taken from nature, in this case, Chilean nature. As the Senate concluded in 1820, the museum would contribute towards identifying elements of the natural world contained within the republic's territories and, therefore, “the precious materials of this realm will be made known, and new riches shall free us from hardship; then, our State shall become truly independent.”¹³

Against this backdrop, it is relevant to pose the question of the forms and mechanisms through which the “precious materials” of Chile would be “made known”. Even though the mission that the government envisioned for the museum was to identify specimens of Chilean nature, the fact of the matter is that there are no references to how the samples collected would circulate beyond the spheres of the government itself. In fact, in 1825, Dauxion-Lavaysse sent a report to Joaquín Campino, the Interior Minister, mentioning that the sparse natural specimens collected up until then would remain in a room in Santiago's public library, given that there was no physical space for the museum. “This gentleman,” the would-be scientist wrote in reference to Francisco García-Huidobro, director of the library, “is eminently qualified to oversee and

¹² Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire. Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

¹³ “Oficio de Bernardo O'Higgins al Senda”, [no dated, Ca. 1821], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol. 315, fs. 403-404v.

promote everything related to the natural sciences, and he has been so kind as to offer me one of the rooms in the library to house the collection of fossils and minerals,”¹⁴ thus confirming the lack of a physical space for the museum under his care.

Furthermore, if we focus in on this matter through the lens of the modern museum, (which I shall do at length in the following chapter), the question to address is specifically how the specimens collected were organised and exhibited, and how the museum in this early stage contributed to the production of knowledge—in line with the tenets of the Enlightenment—and who made up its audience. The documentation analysed suggests that these questions were, at best, irrelevant for the government, thus corroborating the “invisible” nature of the first museum in Chile.

The only evidence that alludes to a somewhat different understanding of the museum is the project that Mariano Egaña, the Interior Minister, presented to Congress in 1823. As part of a public education plan, Egaña proposed creating a department “intended for scientific practice under the name of a Science Museum.”¹⁵ Although we see the museum characterised as a space confined to the field of science for the first time, the fact of the matter is that the scant references to this space, (a few lines in the written project), suggest that Egaña and his colleagues understood it as an administrative unit for experimenting with scientific theories. The Minister sustained that the museum was “intended for practising the science studied in books,”¹⁶ or in other words, it would be a complementary laboratory for the science classes at the National Institute.

On the other hand, some documentation suggests that the museum envisioned by the first Chilean government did have a certain exhibitory component to it. However, this was just as abstract as the institution itself. The authorities thought of the museum as a project whose main purpose was to justify the country’s exploration, followed by the overseas promotion of the findings. Through this “global” circulation of natural specimens taken from Chile, the government sought to make visible a country that had only recently come into being and, in so doing, to contribute to its inclusion in Western economic markets. As such, the government did not wish to hide the specimens of “Chilean nature” away in a display case; their aspirations were,

¹⁴ “Carta de Juan José Dauxion al Ministro del Interior.” Santiago, December 21st, 1825. ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol. 51, fs. 16-16v.

¹⁵ “Congreso Constituyente. Sesión 26, 22 de Setiembre de 1823.” SCLRCh, vol. VIII, Appendix 386, 222.

¹⁶ Ibid.

rather, the exact opposite: for those specimens to travel through international displays cases, specifically ones lodged in Europe. In this way, the museum project would contribute towards raising awareness of the entire collection of specimens as a whole, as an image of Chile that would help towards the international recognition of (and investment in) the fledgling country.

To achieve this goal, the government oversaw scientific expeditions articulated via a museum that did not function as a gallery of everything collected, but rather as a department of the nascent state bureaucracy. This is proof of the capacity that *criollos* had for identifying the attributes of the market that they sought to join. In such a market, the interaction and exchange of not only goods but also knowledge and productive images played a fundamental role. Decades later in 1875, historian Diego Barros Arana came to the same conclusion, namely that these initiatives, including the museum, were part of a framework of “administrative tasks” that “would reveal the richness of our land abroad and attract to it the emigration [*sic*] that national industry needed so much.”¹⁷ This corroborates the strictly instrumental nature of the project.

At any rate, it does not appear that the work of Dauxion-Lavaysse met the expectations of the government that hired him even slightly. The documentation of his work is scarce, given that his written output was equally lacking. In fact, the few references to him and his work dismiss him as a “charlatan.”¹⁸ For example, Diego Barros Arana wrote that Andrés Bello, the first rector of the University of Chile and a key figure in 19th-century Latin American thought, defined him as a character who was “very ill-versed in the natural sciences,”¹⁹ and, the historian concludes, “in carrying out his role [as the director of the museum], he did nothing of what would have been expected of him.”²⁰

In 1830, Dauxion-Lavaysse died in obscurity in Santiago. The amount of attention I pay here to his figure has little to do with his biography, but rather with the interests of the Chilean government that justified hiring him. As a part of their drive to raise greater awareness of a country that was still invisible to Europe’s eyes, *criollo* authorities concluded that the museum would be one of the best strategies to achieve this goal. As such, the main force behind the museum they envisioned during the first years of the republic was the desire for Western

¹⁷ Diego Barros Arana, “Don Claudio Gay y su obra. Estudio biográfico i crítico escrito por encargo de la Universidad de Chile por don Diego Barros Arana, decano de la Facultad de Filosofía i Humanidades,” AUCH XCVIII, no.1 (1876): 7.

¹⁸ Daniela Serra, “De la Naturaleza a la Vitrina. Claudio Gay, la práctica naturalista en Chile y la formación del Gabinete de Historia Natural de Santiago” (PhD Diss., Universidad Católica de Chile, 2019)

¹⁹ Barros Arana, “Don Claudio Gay,” 261.

²⁰ Ibid., 258.

acknowledgement. However, as we shall see further on, the decision to label the unit tasked with overseeing such a project as a “museum” is no coincidence. There are records that allow me to identify the practice of collecting and exhibiting “Chilean” specimens during the late colonial period; however, they have been ignored and overlooked in the official story of museums in Chile. As we shall see, the “museum” run by Dauxion-Lavaysse was not the first “Chilean” venture into this field. The intention of the following sections will be to take a deeper look into the reasons behind this matter.

The Royal Cabinet of Natural History of Madrid

Disciplines such as museology and cultural history have come to a consensus on understanding the museum as part of a Western network intended for the production of knowledge according to the standards of modern thought. Professionals in these fields understand this knowledge to be the outcome of interactions between subjects, objects, meanings and signifiers that circulate in an irregular fashion, in multiple directions and with different reaches. As art historian Daniela Bleichmar points out, “[s]cholars have shown that early collections were not created as mere assemblages of oddities but rather as places for active use through study, research and learning: sites where owning led to knowing.”²¹ In bringing this idea to the late-colonial Latin American context, we will notice that the connection between collecting and knowledge-production practices between Spain and its colonies was anything but straightforward. Understanding this irregularity allows me to bridge two organisations that were distant in both time and space, but that, as I argue here, are part of the same cultural trajectory: the National Museum of Chile and the Royal Cabinet of Natural History of Madrid, founded in Spain by King Charles III in 1771.

Even though a cursory view of these spaces would suggest little connection between the two institutions, a keen eye can see a degree of continuity between them. This continuity, however, has been wiped from the few histories of collecting practices in Chile until now. As I will show in this section, the description provided by the ruling élites in the first post-independence years made the museum out to be a new and never-before-seen space, which erased the existence of late-colonial collecting and exhibiting practices. Consequently, I suggest

²¹ Daniela Bleichmar, “The Cabinet and the World. Non-European Objects in Early-Modern European Collections,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 33, no.3 (2021): 435-436.

that the National Museum of Chile was not merely an economic project but also a symbolic one. Through this endeavour, élites hoped to create the image of a country free from the chains of its colonial legacy. In practice, however, it upheld the same social, legal and economic epistemology that it had inherited from the Spanish Empire.

To corroborate this idea, I propose calling into question the thesis laid down by 19th-century, and partly 20th-century, historiography that claims that the identification, organisation and circulation of specimens of “Chilean nature” came about as a result of the revolutionary agenda and the *criollo* state-formation project. For example, in a posthumous publication from 1908, Rudolph Philippi, (on whom the following chapter will focus), stated that “one must admire the fact that those eminent men who governed the fate of the Republic were already, just two years in [1813], thinking about establishing a Museum.”²² Likewise, both this historiography and the institutional versions of history purported by the national museums insist that the first attempts to create a museum for the Republic laid the groundwork for the history of collecting practices in both Chile and in Latin America in general. For instance, historian Patience Schell argues that “[i]mplicit in the [1813] museum’s project was the idea that the nation of Chile could be represented through the material culture and natural artefacts that composed the collection.”²³ Along these same lines, in a recent academic publication from Mexico, Miruna Achim claims that the National Museum of Mexico, (founded in 1825), was part of a “generational tide” of museums in the region. In the context of the post-independence Latin American States, the author suggests that “a museum is a constitutional institution”, in other words, “it bears the burden of constituting a nation’s cultural framework.”²⁴

My research challenges this approach on two fronts. The first, which applies to each chapter, is connected with the impossibility of asserting that Latin American national identities were already defined at the moment of their respective independence struggles and, *ergo*, that the museum would be able to “represent them.” The second—specific to this chapter and with the potential for extrapolation to the rest of the region—suggests that there was a degree of continuity between late-colonial natural history collecting practices and the “museum” project

²² Rudolph Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile,” *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Chile* 1 (Santiago: Imprenta Barcelona, 1908), 4.

²³ Patience A. Schell, “Capturing Chile: Santiago’s Museo Nacional during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 10, n. 1 (2001): 45.

²⁴ Miruna Achim, *From Idols to Antiquity: Forging the National Museum of Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), I.

pursued by the Chilean ruling class in the early republic. Rather than just a repository of pieces that would give an account of the cultural attributes of the nation, the first attempts at creating a museum were, above all else, economic projects aimed at shaping such attributes.

The trajectory of this continuity dates back to the founding of the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid (or the Royal Cabinet of Natural History of Madrid) in 1771, a space created by King Charles III with the aim of it “cultivating the study of nature, and for its precious materials and marvels to be admired,”²⁵ which belies its inclusion within the standards of Enlightenment thought, specifically in terms of the museum. Along with the Real Jardín Botánico (or, the Royal Botanical Gardens), founded in 1770, the Royal Cabinet was part of the reforms ushered in by the Bourbon dynasty in order to modernise the Spanish empire, thus contributing towards both the field of collecting natural specimens and the visibilization of imperial power. In fact, historian Helen Cowie comes to the conclusion that “more ornamental projects like the Real Gabinete were pursued as a means of showcasing Spain’s imperial potency.”²⁶

Installed in the city centre, the Royal Cabinet had “magnificent halls” aimed at “delighting the satisfaction and curiosity of the patricians.”²⁷ Its collections fell mainly within the field of natural history and, in curatorial terms, they sought to systematically represent the Spanish empire and the “territories and people included therein.”²⁸ There, its “patrician” visitors could discover the marvels of the Empire without ever having to cross the ocean that separated the metropole from the colonies. However, while the Royal Cabinet was rich in Spanish collections, it was lacking in items from the Spanish Empire in the Americas. For this reason, with the goal of expanding its repertoire by incorporating natural specimens from the “Indies”, Pedro Franco Dávila, director of the Royal Cabinet, wrote to the king in 1776 in order to request approval from the crown for

the Viceroy, Governors, Magistrates, Mayors and Provincial Intendants in all of Your Majesty’s dominions to have collected, prepared and sent to Madrid all of the productions

²⁵ ‘Real Gabinete de Historia Natural’ *Memorial literario instructivo y curioso de la Corte de Madrid, correspondiente al mes de febrero 1784* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1784), 17.

²⁶ Helen Cowie, *Conquering Nature in Spain and its Empire, 1750-1850* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 16.

²⁷ ‘Real Gabinete de Historia Natural,’ *Memorial*, 17.

²⁸ Ibid.

of Nature found in the lands and towns of their districts to be housed in the Royal Museum that Your Majesty has established in this Court for the benefit and education of the public of the Nation.²⁹

Also known as the *Instrucción de Dávila* (or, the Dávila Order), the document is a cross between a royal order and a treatise on natural history. Its main aim is to “request, in all of Your Majesty's dominions, items that may be useful to the Royal Museum,”³⁰ which confirms its status as a colonial instrument. Within the context of collecting practices in Europe, Bleichmar argues that the “Indies” were not so much a specific geographical space as an “out there”, one that, in Christine Göttler’s terms, was far more moral than geographical.³¹ The category of the “Indies”, Bleichmar asserts, “served to group a vast range of objects into a single category that ultimately served to convey, above all, their foreignness.”³² Therefore, apart from its economic use and its potential for education, the Royal Cabinet of Madrid also contributed to the creation of the worldview in which Spanish power collapsed all of the “specimens from the Indies” into a singular “otherness”.

Furthermore, in the *Instrucción de Dávila*, the notion of the “museum” and the “cabinet” overlap and refer to the same space. The specimens brought over from the “Indies” contributed towards enriching a department which the documentation describes indistinctly as a “museum” and a “cabinet”. Paying such close attention to this matter is crucial to the goals of my analysis since, in imperial Spain at the end of the 18th century, the idea of the “museum” and the “cabinet” overlapped as synonyms just as they did in the republic of Chile in the 19th century. Much like what happened in Spain, the museum planned for Chile also included a botanical garden. Further, Dauxion-Lavaysse was appointed as the director for both “invisible” institutions. Although my approach goes far beyond mere semantics, a quick overview of the

²⁹ “Nómina hecha de orden del Rey Nuestro Señor, por Dn. Pedro Franco Dávila, director del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural para que los Srs. Virreyes, Gobernadores (...)” AMNCNE, Sección Documentos del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural (1752-1786), expediente 276, 2 de febrero de 1776, f. 1. Also published in: Miguel Villena et al., *El gabinete perdido. Pedro Franco Dávila y la historia natural del Siglo de las Luces* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009), 847.

³⁰ “Carta de Dávila a Grimaldi, fechada en 2 de febrero de 1776.” AHNE, Sección Estado, Libro 1030, s.f. Also published in Villena, *El gabinete perdido*, 664.

³¹ Christine Göttler, ‘Extraordinary things: “Idols from India” and the visual discernment of space and time, circa 1600’ in *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, ed. C. Göttler and M. Mochizuki (Leiden: University of Leiden, 2018), 41.

³² Bleichmar, “The Cabinet and the World,” 437.

social use of both concepts (the cabinet and the museum) will help us to pinpoint the extent of this overlapping.

In order to sketch out a genealogy of the idea of the “cabinet”, we must first accept that it is a malleable concept. I can, however, frame it through two notions: collecting and exhibiting. In 16th- and 17th-century Europe, as museologist Stephanie Bowry points out, “[i]t might refer to the physical cabinet or apparatus which housed a given collection, to the room or series of rooms in which the collection was housed and displayed, or to the collection itself.”³³ Apart from this, we should also consider the concept that encompassed everything displayed in the cabinets: curiosities. The collection and exhibition of curiosities, wonders and rarities were the articulating force behind a range of spaces that, during that period, functioned as galleries where the extraordinary was on display for local aristocrats. In this light, it was a socially selective space. As Tony Bennett asserts, “they all constituted socially enclosed spaces to which access was remarkably restricted.”³⁴

Cabinet of curiosities, *gabinete de curiosidades*, *Wunderkammer*, *cabinet des curieux*, *gabinetto delle curiosità*: all of these are nouns that, in translation, invoke the same idea: private repositories that store and exhibit the unconventional to the point that they form microcosms that surpass the limits of the known world to display and express the possession of its opposite: the unknown. By collecting objects foreign to the European aristocrat’s eye, the cabinets of curiosities contributed towards shaping images both of the self and the other, favouring differentiation and exoticism inherent to European colonialism. As Bleichmar argues, “cabinets were more than repositories for world-gathering: they were crucial sites of ‘worldmaking’.”³⁵

Conversely, the Greek term *Μουσείον* (*mouseion*), reappears as a result of the epistemological paradigm shift that took place in the context of the Enlightenment in the 18th century. As historian Paula Findlen argues, the re-emergence of the term “marked the transformation of the museum from a poetic construct into a conceptual system through which collectors interpreted and explored their world.”³⁶ In the following chapter, I will explore the modern uses of the signifier “museum”. For the time being, I want to draw attention to the

³³ Stephanie Bowry, “Re-thinking the Curiosity Cabinet: A Study of Visual Representation in Early and Post Modernity” (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2015), 45.

³⁴ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 92.

³⁵ Bleichmar, “The Cabinet and the World,” 435.

³⁶ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49.

turning point that the appearance of the term meant in 18th-century Europe at the height of colonial expansion. A determining factor here is the concession made by collections of curiosities that would be instrumental for specific programmes, particularly imperial and civilising missions. Furthermore, a shift in the nature of the institutions, (from the private sphere to the public sphere), also made its mark on this transformation. This does not mean, as some theorists have suggested,³⁷ that the cabinet was necessarily the “natural” historical precursor to the museum. Accepting this idea would also mean accepting a linear and progressive version of history that leaves out the conditions that allow for the emergence of diverse practices and dynamics of collecting and exhibiting. Moreover, this does not mean that the museum did not operate as a colonising institution or generated hierarchical “othernesses”; rather, the evidence shows that it played an active role in these processes even to this day.

What I want to make clear here is that the emergence of the “museum” in the 18th century responded to an epistemological paradigm shift upheld in the new systems of classifying and organising the known world and, most importantly, the world yet-to-be-known (and colonised). As a response to this shift, the politics of the cabinets veered away from collecting and exhibiting “curiosities” towards modern systems of classification, among them, natural history. As such, going beyond the general differentiations that set the museum and the cabinet in contrast as representatives of the order and disorder of their collections, I propose a differentiation based on the epistemological conditions that gave way to the emergence of the different ways of organising and exhibiting their materials.

The outline of this conceptual distinction allows me to take up the discussion about the Royal Cabinet of Madrid to suggest that, if King Charles III, (its main proponent), Pedro Franco Dávila, (its director), and the Imperial Spanish Authorities used “museum” and “cabinet” indistinctly in reference to the same space, this is because both concepts effectively served as synonyms in the epistemological shift described here. Within these concepts, old forms of divulging the curious and the strange existed alongside modern strategies of ordering and classifying the known world, which we can see in the layout and organisation of the sections in

³⁷ See, for example, Alejandro Pous, *Del Gabinete al Museo. Tres siglos de Historia* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1993). In general, Spanish institutional culture creates an image of the cabinet as the predecessor to the museum. For example, the Gabinete de Ciencias Naturales (1785) is presented as a precursor to the Museo Nacional del Prado (1819) and the Museo de América (1941) “La institución,” Museo Nacional del Prado (website), accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.museodelprado.es/museo>

the Royal Cabinet. Out of its eight rooms, six of them specifically displayed natural specimens organised in accordance with modern taxonomical criteria. Following the basic principles of Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus, the first six rooms exhibited the “the richness of the three Kingdoms”³⁸, in other words, the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.³⁹ However, the other two rooms displayed everything that fell beyond the bounds of these systems of classification. While one room exhibited “exquisite antiquities from Spain and beyond,”⁴⁰ the other displayed “many beautiful vases, cameos, many pieces of rock crystal, oriental agates and other precious items.”⁴¹

Furthermore, the order for the colonies to collect, organise and send specimens from “the Indies” to Madrid also contains other elements that corroborate its pedagogical nature. In this respect, we can read the *Instrucción de Dávila* as bearing both accepted definitions of the Spanish verb ‘*instruir*’ (the root of the noun ‘*instrucción*’: to command and to educate). Certain of the “intelligence of the Americans”, the *Instrucción* speaks in a didactic language that seeks to instruct its reader on the basic principles of natural history collecting practices. Trusting that his *Instrucción* would meet with a good reception, the director of the cabinet told the King that the colonies “will be glad to have documents that will help them to send their Lord and King the products that nature has abundantly bestowed upon them.”⁴²

The *Instrucción* also specified methods of compilation, classification systems and techniques for conserving, taxidermizing and transporting specimens. As the Spanish researcher Juan Pimentel argues, a policy of this nature fell “within the hybrid interstices that open up between mercantile culture in the Indies and a worldly passion for science and nature in the Age of Enlightenment.”⁴³ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Dávila pointed to the potential that this type of knowledge could have for *criollos*: putting into practice the knowledge sent to them, “they [the colonists] will form Cabinets that could be highly useful to the Republic of Letters.”⁴⁴

³⁸ ‘Real Gabinete de Historia Natural’ *Memorial Literario, Instructivo y Curioso de la Corte de Madrid, en Febrero de 1784* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1784), 17.

³⁹ In 1735, Carl Linnaeus published his *Systema Naturae*, which contained his taxonomy for organizing the natural world. Linnaeus proposed the organization of all the elements of the world into three kingdoms, which were divided into classes. From classes, the groups were further divided into orders, families, genera (singular: genus), and species.

⁴⁰ ‘Real Gabinete de Historia Natural,’ *Memorial*, 18.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Carta de Dávila a Grimaldi,” Op. Cit.

⁴³ Juan Pimentel, *Testigos del mundo: ciencia, literatura y viajes en la Ilustración* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2003), 163.

⁴⁴ “Carta de Dávila a Grimaldi,” Op. Cit.

The latter issue is of the utmost importance for my analysis. The possibility of this knowledge resulting in the creation of local cabinets is a decisive factor since it is, as we have seen specifically, the drive to which the ruling class of an independent Chile would aspire some decades later. The question to address here is whether this idea of the cabinet that Dávila envisioned for the colonies is the same one that the authorities of the Republic of Chile aspired to create years later.

A Cabinet for Chile

All the evidence seems to point towards a slow uptake of Dávila's instructions. In 1779, the director of the Royal Cabinet of Madrid mentioned to José Moñino y Redondo, Count of Floridablanca, that “three years have passed since that order was sent out and that which has reached us is both scarce and absolutely useless.”⁴⁵ The dispatches became more generous starting in the 1780s. For example, in 1789, the Secretary of State for the Indies, Antonio Porlier, sent “the skeletons of a male and female anteater”, the Governor of Santa Marta (present-day Colombia) provided “a bat of extraordinary size”, while “a box of petrified stones” was the contribution of Francisco Alos, Governor of Paraguay.⁴⁶ Much later than expected, around 1790, the *Instrucción* took effect in Chile. That year, Governor Ambrosio O’Higgins ordered his team to “verify the collection and shipment to Spain of mineral samples from this Kingdom [of Chile], as stipulated in a previous order.”⁴⁷ This “previous order” mentioned by O’Higgins is no other than the *Instrucción de Dávila*. We also know that this operation was effectively successful since, by virtue of this order, Chile sent various shipments with small collections of “Chilean nature” to the Cabinet of Madrid from of the Port of Valparaíso.

For example, in 1791, the Count of Floridablanca asked the vice-director of the Cabinet of Madrid to come to collect “a crate of stones and gold mineral powders”⁴⁸ from Copiapó, in Northern Chile. In 1798, the Cabinet of Madrid issued a report stating that, in that year, “the only collections recently received were from Chile, almost all of which was copper.”⁴⁹ The scientific

⁴⁵ Quoted in Villanueva, *El gabinete perdido*, 776.

⁴⁶ These three examples are cited in Cowie, *Conquering Nature*, 50.

⁴⁷ “Carta de Ambrosio O’Higgins. Santiago, 3 de Septiembre de 1790” ANCh, Fondo Antiguo, vol.18, f.8.

⁴⁸ “Catálogo crítico de los documentos del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural.” AMNCNE Archivo 149, 6 de junio de 1791. Also published in: María de los Ángeles Calatayud, *Catálogo crítico de los documentos del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural (1787-1815)* (Madrid: CSIC, 2000), 64.

⁴⁹ “Catálogo.” AMNCNE, Archivo 330, 10 de septiembre de 1798, s.f. Also in Calatayud, *Catálogo*, 117.

expeditions funded by the Spanish crown also contributed towards this matter. In 1782, an endeavour led by Hipólito Ruiz and José Pavón—which would result in a taxonomic treatise entitled *Flora Peruviana et Chilensis*, published that very same year—sent “six specimens of *Araucaria* pine from Concepción.”⁵⁰ In 1793, the Royal Cabinet asked the Spanish Crown to finance an expedition to Chile and Peru in order to collect mineral samples to expand their collections. The “Mineralogy Expedition to Chile and Peru”, under the command of brothers Christian and Conrad Heuland, which ran from 1795 to 1800 was a huge success for the Cabinet. This included the receipt of “26 crates from the Kingdom of Chile”⁵¹ in 1797, while a further 34 were held up in Buenos Aires.⁵²

It is no coincidence that Ambrosio O’Higgins’ regional government had sent mainly minerals to Madrid. It was a response to a direct request in the 1776 *Instrucción*, which stated: “we request the most curious pieces found in the mines which are currently in operation in all of His Majesty’s domains.”⁵³ This matter came about as a result of the push from the Spanish crown, within the context of the Bourbon reforms⁵⁴, to develop its mining industry, singling Chile out as one of the main regions for exploration and mining work. The direct dispatches of mineral samples from Chile to Madrid contributed towards the expansion of the mineralogy collection in the Royal Cabinet and led to its director telling the King, in 1798, that “it is undeniable that Your Majesty’s Cabinet will be outstanding in terms of mineralogy.”⁵⁵ Cowie makes reference to an episode in which Charles III visited the Royal Cabinet in 1786 and was so impressed by the marvels on display that he penned his perceptions in a poem. His favourite room was the “Mineral Room”, “where the sight of so many rare sands, stones, salts, petrifications and metals... suspended both the eyes and the spirit.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Franco Pupulin, “The Orchidaceae of Ruiz & Pavón’s ‘Flora Peruviana et Chilensis’. A Taxonomic Study,” *Anales del Jardín Botánico de Madrid* 69, no.2 (July-December 2012): 143.

⁵¹ “Catálogo” AMNCNE, Archivo 316, 1797, s.f. Also in Calatayud, *Catálogo*, 114.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ ‘Nómina’ in Villena, *El gabinete perdido*, 849.

⁵⁴ The “Bourbon Reforms” are a historiographic concept that groups together a set of policy changes to reform and renovate the Spanish Empire’s bureaucratic system under Bourbon rule (Philip V [1700–1746], Ferdinand VI [1746–1759], Charles III [1759–1788] and Charles IV [1788–1807]). Such policies aimed to curb smuggling, regain control over transatlantic trade, curtail the Church’s power, modernise state finances to fill the depleted royal coffers and establish tighter political and administrative control within the empire. For a deeper analysis on the subject, see: Francisco A Eissa-Barroso and Ainara Vázquez Varela. *Early Bourbon Spanish America: Politics and Society in a Forgotten Era (1700-1759)*. (Leiden: Brill, 2013)

⁵⁵ Pedro Franco Dávila, “Medios de hacer útil para la prosperidad de la Nación Española el Real Gabinete de Historia Natural,” in Villanueva, *El gabinete perdido*, 940.

⁵⁶ Cowie, *Conquering Nature*, 36.

This evidence leads me to the conclusion that the request for collections from the Chilean colony to be sent to the Royal Cabinet was part of an economic project whereby natural resources from the Americas could serve to resuscitate Spain's withering economy. In this respect, collecting practices are marked by their economic context, much like the first plans for a museum in Chile. However, what sets this apart from the Chilean museum is that the Cabinet of Madrid also emphasised the importance of the exhibition of the specimens collected for it, a crucial element in the modern notion of the museum. As we shall see at length in the next chapter, it was with this logic that the Cabinet organised its collections for visitors to visually consume them. Therefore, this was not an invisible museum, but one that was intended to be seen. In fact, Juan Mieg, head of the zoology section at the Cabinet of Madrid, argued in 1818 that "it is necessary for these collections to speak to the soul while also speaking to the eyes."⁵⁷

However, this visual consumption never materialised in Chile at end of the 18th century; first, because the colony sent its specimens to Madrid rather than displaying them locally and second, because the colony did not have a specific exhibition space. Since it was part of an economic and colonial project, early collecting practices in Chile helped to fill the coffers of the Spanish metropole to the detriment of the colony itself, thus contributing towards feelings of injustice that would legitimate the *criollo* uprising of 1810. That said, it is also the case that the collecting practices promoted by the crown not only fostered the addition of "Chilean elements" to its cabinet's collections, but also taught *criollos* about the benefits that the techniques and criteria inherent to natural history had to offer for the economic and intellectual development of the Chilean settlers. As Bleichmar argues, "whereas Madrid considered the expeditions a way of reaching back to a glorious past of conquest, power, and profit [...] Creoles and American-based Spaniards found in natural history the promise of reconfiguring and moving away from that tradition."⁵⁸ As such, it is little surprise that the Captaincy of Chile, the most far-flung of the Spanish colonies in the Americas, harboured aspirations to form its own cabinet with the aim of generating, for itself, knowledge about the natural treasures within its realms.

It was Manuel de Salas who defined the aspirations for a cabinet in Chile. He was a *criollo* who, despite having pro-independence leanings, acted as the director of the mining

⁵⁷ Juan Mieg, *Paseo por el Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid ó descripción sucinta de los principales objetos de zoología que ofrecen las salas de esta interesante colección* (Madrid: Imprenta de D.M. de Burgos, 1818), VI.

⁵⁸ Bleichmar, *Visible Empire*, 148.

department of the Captaincy from 1798 onwards. From his position there, de Salas was somewhat irritated by the fact that the profits from the exploration of Chilean territory failed to enter the local treasury, and that this prevented *criollo* access to the study of the collected specimens. In 1798, he stated that “the natural scientist who currently examines [Chile] in order to gather materials for the Royal Cabinet [of Madrid], has found precious materials that astound him.”⁵⁹ However, he continued, “to no avail, we [Chileans] walk over the precious products of the mineral kingdom. [...] The absolute lack of knowledge of countless fossils that would be useful for the arts, pharmacy and factories deprives us of objects that would be sufficient to support the welfare of entire nations.”⁶⁰

Given that Chile was far behind in creating scientific and intellectual institutions, in 1797, de Salas managed to get authorisation from Spain to found the Real Academia de San Luis in Santiago. With a notable focus on local knowledge, the Academy, where de Salas was appointed as its director, was devised as an institute for studying “useful sciences” that set out to “expound the knowledge provided by cultivating our own production.”⁶¹ After it opened in 1801, its director claimed that “with the savings on salaries, we have started to put together a small library [...] and we shall pave the way for a cabinet.”⁶² This is a landmark event for a territory that, while still a Spanish colony, was undertaking the creation of its own local cabinet.

The project for a cabinet in Chile is fundamental for this study in multiple ways. First, it was a materialisation of the prediction that Pedro Franco Dávila had made twenty years previous as the director of the Royal Cabinet of Madrid who, as mentioned above, imagined that, with proper instructions, the politics of imperial collections could lead to the creation of local cabinets. Furthermore, it is also proof of multi-directional movement in the circulation of knowledge. Even though a lack of documentation makes its nearly impossible for us to address the details of its functions at length, the mere formation of the cabinet in Chile is indicative of the fact that the *criollos* were not passive receptors of scientific knowledge sent out from the metropole; rather, they were able to adapt it to their needs and uses.

⁵⁹ “Carta de Manuel de Salas al Rey Carlos IV. Santiago, 12 de marzo de 1798,” in Miguel Luis Amunátegui, *Don Manuel de Salas*. Vol. I. (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1895), 154.

⁶⁰ Manuel De Salas, “Informe sobre la Academia, presentado al presidente interino don José de Santiago Concha” [1801], Universidad de Chile, *Escritos de Don Manuel de Salas y documentos relativos a él y su familia*. Vol. I. (Santiago: Cervantes, 1916), 571-572.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 570.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 582.

Although the documents are scarce in nature, we know that the crown, via the mining tribunal,⁶³ commissioned Juan Egaña, who, as mentioned above, advocated for the creation of the republican “science museum”, to draw up a study “of the minerals, mines and *trapiches* [grinding mills] contained in [the Kingdom of Chile]”⁶⁴ in 1803. As part of this work, Egaña himself stated: “I have intervened in and overseen the business between the Academy and the Tribunal, assisting with the scientific development of its cabinet of mineral history.”⁶⁵ This confirms the idea that the project was part of an economic framework given that mineral mining has been the basis of the Chilean economy ever since, even to this day. We also know that at this point the Cabinet of Santiago had a physical venue, “a house located on Calle de San Antonio.”⁶⁶ The record books of the Royal Academy of San Luis confirm an investment made to paint the exhibition halls, to repair its windows, construct wooden units with glass doors, which shows that they paid at least some attention to the visual and exhibitory aspects of the Cabinet.⁶⁷ Lastly, the evidence also denotes that the Cabinet of Santiago also had a handwritten catalogue of its small collection. It contains a list of 98 samples, all of which were minerals, categorised according to their chemical components and each identified with a record number within the collection.⁶⁸

However, we know little of what happened to this cabinet. After Chile achieved independence, the government of the Republic published a plan originally conceived in 1813 to combine all of the colonial educational institutions, including the Royal Academy of San Luis, into one single body: the National Institute. All the evidence indicates that the cabinet was part of this project. That same year, Manuel de Salas, commissioned at the time to draw up the State education programme, pointed out that by transferring the Academy to the National Institute, the

⁶³ The Real Tribunal de Minería [Royal Mining Tribunal] was an institution created by the Spanish Empire in the context of the Bourbon reforms. It had three branches in the Americas: New Spain (1783), Peru (1785) and Chile (1786). Historian Gastón Fernández Montero states that the Tribunal “was the basic guild organisation of mine owners, merchants and metal smelters, and was intended to promote the growth and productivity of the existing mining activity in the various regions of the Spanish Empire.”, Gastón Montero, ed., *Minería y metalurgia colonial en el Reyno de Chile* (Santiago: AGD, 2000), 7.

⁶⁴ “Informe de don Juan Egaña al Tribunal de Minería en 1803,” in Montero, *Minería*, 1.

⁶⁵ Raúl Silva Castro, *Juan Egaña. Escritos inéditos y dispersos* (Santiago: Universitaria, 1949), 205.

⁶⁶ Serra, “*De la naturaleza*,” 144.

⁶⁷ “Cuenta de gastos hechos en la Real Academia de San Luis en todo el año 1803” ANCh, Fondo Antiguo, vol. 20, fs. 171 *et seq.*

⁶⁸ Francisco Rodríguez Brochero, “Catálogo de las muestras minerales y fósiles de este Reino de Chile. Santiago, 22 de septiembre de 1803” ANCh, Fondo Antiguo, Vol.18, ff. 99-101. The discovery of this document and the foregoing one are the result of the historian Daniela Serra’s work, who was kind enough to share her findings with me to provide an account of this matter.

former could contribute “its small library and cabinet of natural history so as to start a library and collection of the productions of the three kingdoms, which are both prolific and overlooked in our own.”⁶⁹ However, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Spanish crown temporarily took back control of its Chilean colony from 1814 to 1817, scrapping all of the projects put forth by the previous government known as the “*Patria Vieja*”.

The idea to include the cabinet from the Academy of San Luis in the National Institute is the last mention made of the establishment, or at least the last mention that is of any interest to my research. From 1818 onwards, as previously noted, the government of the republic, started pushing for the creation of a museum. However, in officials’ argumentation there are no references whatsoever to *criollos*’ earlier experience of collecting “Chilean” specimens and sending them to the Royal Cabinet of Madrid and what this meant to them. Nor do they recount what the Cabinet of Santiago meant to the *criollos* who had previously founded it, and now wanted to found a museum. In terms of the discursive framework, the idea of the colonial cabinet is obscured by the republican museum. This is not a merely semantic shift, but rather a political manoeuvre packed with symbolic value: republican state makers wrote off the Cabinet of Natural History at the Royal Academy of San Luis as a colonial residue, thereby scrubbing out the founding narrative of these state institutions. In fact, they were founding not an invisible museum, but rather forcing a cabinet into invisibility.

A National Museum for the Republic

After a number of failed attempts, the government hired the French natural scientist Claude Gay in 1830 to bring the dream of a museum for Chile into being. Gay, who was also a botanist, was in the country from 1828 onwards as a correspondent for the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle de Paris and, as we shall see later on, this association later had a stark influence on the future of the Chilean museum. In October 1830, one month after Gay had signed the contract, the official newspaper, *El Araucano*, surprised its readers with news of the week:

Our capital [Santiago] is to be graced with a cabinet of natural history, which shall inspire in our young an interest for a science that can be of use to the human species and that

⁶⁹ “Carta oficial del director de la Academia de San Luis a la Junta de Gobierno[1813]” SCLRCh vol.1 (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1887), 318.

produces sublime ideas. Foreign visitors will have something to visit, the wise, something to learn, and manufacturers somewhere to find samples of the materials for their establishments, classified and laid out with technical nomenclature and the corresponding common names.⁷⁰

There are multiple issues that make this document important to our discussion. The first is that the project mentioned is a cabinet and not a museum. However, much like the other cases we have looked into, the evidence shows that both signifiers had interchangeable meanings and often appeared as synonyms. That being said, the article does suggest some elements that were absent from previous projects including the incorporation of “modern” elements in its meaning. Among these is the stipulation of taxonomical criteria for organising and exhibiting the collections, as well as a drive for change framed within the civilising discourse of the 19th century.

Even though much like the previous cases, the project led by Gay was part of a wider economic project, the article also confirmed its symbolic function. It continued, declaring that the results of the republican cabinet “will show our past oppressors the country that they lost, and the impossibility of winning it back,”⁷¹ as well as the “vast amount of resources that we have to be a rich and unassailable nation.”⁷² This confirms the thesis that runs throughout this chapter, namely that, for the Chilean ruling class of the first half of the 19th century, having a museum in the capital would contribute towards both expanding its economic potential and developing the image of a civilised country freed from any colonial burdens. The symbolic dimension of the Chilean museum coincides with the analysis made by the English theorist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill when exploring the role played by European museums in discourses treating the break from the old monarchical order. With a distinct focus on France, she argues that “the ‘museum’ was created as one of the instruments that exposed both the decadence and tyranny of the old forms of control, the *ancien regime*, and the democracy and the public utility of the new, the Republic.”⁷³

⁷⁰ *El Araucano* 3. Santiago, October 2, 1830.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 168.

The inclusion of this specific cabinet within the discursive framework that pitted the darkness of the colonial past against the hopeful light of the republican present—a matter we shall return to in Chapter Four—is also indicative of the obliteration of late colonial collecting and exhibiting practices described in this chapter. The omission of the colonial Cabinet of Santiago made it possible for its republican counterpart to appear as a new project, the result of the new freedoms secured by the ruling class. In fact, it is unclear whether it was out of a lack of knowledge or merely convenience that Gay stated in 1830 that Chile was “a country completely unknown to natural scientists,”⁷⁴ adding in 1831 that “we do not know what twist of fate led Chile to be without a Cabinet of Natural History, or even a simple collection of productions from its territory.”⁷⁵

As we have seen in this chapter, Chile was not a country “completely unknown” to the field of natural history. Nor was it a country that was unfamiliar to collecting practices, as I have shown here. Both the collections sent to the Royal Cabinet of Madrid and the *criollos’* experience with the Cabinet of Natural History of Santiago towards the end of the 18th century were foundational events in the history of collecting practices and natural history in Chile. These experiences made it clear that it was necessary to discover the country’s wealth of natural resources and gave the *criollos* the idea of the museum as an institution that was qualified to do this work. Therefore, it is of little surprise that the concept of the museum that the ruling class of Chile held was particularly close to that of the Spanish crown: an administrative unit of the state whose ultimate goal was to identify the economic potential of the territory under its control. As such, the government’s aspirations were that the specimens that Gay identified and collected would allow them to “make known the natural resources within the territory of the Republic to promote industry among its inhabitants and attract foreign industry.”⁷⁶

Descriptions of Chile as an “unknown” country are particularly frequent in documents connected with Gay’s tour of the nation. The constant use of this rhetorical element leads me to the conclusion that, rather than the attributes of its territory, what remained “unknown” was an image of Chile, both as a republic and as a “new” society, freed from Spanish colonialism. At a time when most of the former Spanish colonies were now independent republics, the

⁷⁴ “Carta de Claude Gay a Diego Portales” [before July 31, 1830], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol.51, f. 35.

⁷⁵ Claude Gay, ‘Sobre la utilidad de un curso especial de Química aplicado a la industria y a la agricultura,’ *El Araucano*. July 30 and August 6, 1831.

⁷⁶ *El Araucano* 3. Santiago, October 2, 1830.

construction of an international image for Chile that set it apart from the rest of Latin America became a crucial matter for the state. As such, the ruling class saw the identification of “Chilean nature” as a necessary stage for its subsequent dissemination abroad. In fact, Gay’s contract with the government explicitly states this intention when it stipulates that one of his obligations was to conduct a “scientific voyage” lasting three and-a-half years throughout the entire country, “in order to investigate Chile’s natural history, geography, geology, statistics and as to contribute to *make known* the country’s natural productions, its industry, commerce and administration.”⁷⁷

As we can see here, Gay's obligations are fairly similar to the ones that Dauxion-Lavaysse undertook seven years before. The results that the government expected from his work were also similar. In both contracts, the main goal was to travel the country in order to identify, collect and name the specimens taken from nature that would be of use to the national economy. In both cases, the projects were also under the auspices of administrative units that the first called a museum and the second called a cabinet. Despite these similarities and most likely in order to avoid a second failure, the 1830 contract is much more explicit with regard to the cabinet: Article 6 stipulates:

He [Gay] undertakes to form a cabinet of natural history that contains the main mineral and plant productions of the territory, and a catalogue that lists them by their common and scientific names, which states the uses and utilities of such objects and the places where they are found.”⁷⁸

Although the article refers to taxonomy as the main principle of a future catalogue, the visual component of the museum is completely absent from the contract. There is no documentation that would suggest that the government was interested in displaying its collections in an exhibition space. Furthermore, what also stands out is the exclusion of the animal kingdom in the provisions stipulated. This omission is proof of the economic and commercial emphasis of the project and also gives us an insight into the potential sectors for industrial development in the country: agriculture and mining. As we have seen, both fields—

⁷⁷ Ibid., My emphasis.

⁷⁸ ‘Viaje Científico,’ Ministerio del Interior, Otro S/N. September 14, 1830. Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (website) <https://bcn.cl/2x76r>

particularly mining—were stipulated by the Spanish Crown as ones that were abundant and ripe for development. As such, it would be plausible to view this as a gesture of continuity between late colonial policy and the republican strategy to claim them for themselves, including the museum/cabinet.

Even though the commission was limited to the identification and study of plants and minerals, Gay collected specimens that were beyond the government's interests. In 1835, he wrote to the committee tasked with overseeing his work that “the Natural History of a country should cover all of its products.”⁷⁹ Moreover, he added that “it is my duty to dedicate myself to all objects, with no distinction of class, form or size: taking everything, examining everything, not scorning anything.”⁸⁰ In that drive to “take everything”, Gay included the study of the animal kingdom and some “Chilean customs” in his work, as well as the anthropological and material study of the “Indians of Chile”, (a matter to which I will return in depth in Chapter 3).

The evidence suggests that Gay's interest in “taking everything” was much more closely related to his personal motivations, than to contractual directives from the Chilean government. His main interest lay rather in making a name for himself within French scientific circles, (circles that otherwise did not exist in Chile). The natural scientist never lost contact with his colleagues at the Musée de Histoire Naturelle de Paris, with whom he maintained an active correspondence. For example, in 1835, he wrote to the director of the Parisian museum telling him that: “Since I arrived in Chile, I have been engaged in creating a collection of objects of natural history to send them to you on the first ship to set sail from Valparaíso very soon.”⁸¹ Years later, in another letter, he highlighted the importance of his work in Chile and the “glad results” that it would provide for the field of science in France, stating that his time in the country would mean that he could “enrich our [French] museums with a huge amount of objects of natural history and mainly most of the instruments, weapons, clothing of the Puelche and Huilliche Indians and other tribes that are completely unheard of in Europe.”⁸²

The previous quote speaks volumes: Gay's interests lay in the French museum, rather than the Chilean one. As a matter of fact, this issue did not bother the *criollo* government since,

⁷⁹ Claude Gay, “Viaje Científico. Carta del Sr. Gay,” *El Araucano* 267, October 16, 1835, 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Barros Arana, *Don Claudio Gay*, 308.

⁸² Claude Gay, “Proyecto de solicitud al señor Ministro de Francia de Instrucción Pública,” in Carlos Stuardo Ortiz, *Vida de Claudio Gay*, vol. I (Santiago: Fondo Histórico y Bibliográfico José Toribio Medina, 1973), 609.

after all, the circulation of “Chilean nature” in Europe was the reason they had hired the natural scientist. Because of this, the benefits for both parties did not clash; rather, they even overlapped and bolstered each other. Years later, Diego Barros Arana, Gay’s biographer, attested to this, writing in 1875:

In order to be favourably received by those learned men [at the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle de Paris], Gay had a fail-safe measure: displaying the objects of natural history that he had collected and publicising his works. That was what he did. He stated out by gifting the [Parisian] museum a considerable number of minerals and fossils, a valuable collection of stuffed animals, a live condor taken from a nest in the mountains, and around one thousand species of plants collected in Chile, half of which were new to scientists in Europe.⁸³

With these “donations” Gay managed to make a name for himself within the prestigious scientific circle of natural history in France and, at the same time, he made the specimens of Chilean nature visible in Europe, the desired goal of the local government. As I have suggested, the “cabinet-museum” operated from its very beginning not as an institution, but as a concept for administering exploration projects in a country, which would help its image to circulate abroad. Towards the end of the 1830s, this objective was almost coming into fruition: Gay had identified, named and organised “Chilean nature”, while the specimens he had collected were circulating within the Western world thanks to a range of projects incentivised by the State. Among these were the exhibition of Chilean species in Europe and the monumental treatise written by Gay, entitled *Historia Física y Política de Chile* [A Physical and Political History of Chile], edited in France and published in Paris between 1842 and 1871.

Gay also produced the first “official map” of the Republic of Chile in 1854 (Fig. 5). Unlike the maps of colonial Chile made by Spain, which showed a horizontal stretch of land on an east-west axis (Fig. 4, page 17), its republican counterpart depicts a vertical country on a north-south axis. This visual arrangement—since then and even to this day the only “official” way of representing the country on a map—is symptomatic of an apparent irreconcilable break between colonial and republican ways of understanding the territory; furthermore, as historian

⁸³ Barros Arana, *Don Claudio Gay*, 316-17.

Rafael Sagredo suggests, this map is "a geographical manifestation of the sovereignty of the unitary and centralised State over the territory and, therefore, also of the consolidation of the nation."⁸⁴ As such, both the map and the *Historia* were fundamental texts in the construction of images of Chilean national identity. These reasons explain why, returning to my analysis of the National Museum, for both parties—Gay and the Chilean government—the fact that the samples collected had left Chile and gone on display in France allowed them to successfully conclude their work.

This agreement allows me to include the first results of the Chilean museum within the framework of what Mary Louise Pratt conceptualises as the “reinvention of America”; in other words, a dialogic and dynamic process of cultural exchanges between Europe and the *criollo* élites, which would lead to the ideological reinvention of South America. As the author suggests and as my research confirms, this exchange did not work in the same way for both agents. While for the European élites, “the reinvention is bound up with prospects of vast expansionist possibilities for European capital, technology, commodities, and systems of knowledge,”⁸⁵ the Hispano-American élites “faced the necessity for self-invention in relation both to Europe and the non-European masses they sought to govern.”⁸⁶

Gay’s insistence of categorising Chile as an unknown country falls within a colonial rhetorical tradition that we can even trace back to Columbus and Vespucci. What characterises this discourse is the description of America as timeless, wild and unclaimed nature, which justifies its colonisation. Furthermore, during the first half of the 19th century, negotiations between the European and Hispano-American élites ended up modifying the image of the continent, this time as “unexploited nature”, virgin if you will, but now not in a prelapsarian state but rather one that was unexplored and lagging behind in its productive dimension. Therefore, this is what led to the role that the élites gave to the museum as an agent for promoting development. As such, the Chilean museum created by the ruling class was one of many strategies through which they hoped to break any ties with Spanish colonial rule. Such rupture was based on the formulation of a national image grounded in a politically independent society

⁸⁴ Rafael Sagredo, “Chile, del orden natural al autoritarismo republicano,” *Revista de Geografía Norte Grande* 36 (2006): 5-30.

⁸⁵ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 112.

⁸⁶ Ibid.



Figure 5: Gay, Claude. “Mapa para la inteligencia de la Historia Física y Política de Chile.”
 (Map for the Intelligence of the Physical and Political History of Chile)
 Gay, Claude. *Atlas de la Historia Física y Política de Chile*. Vol. 1 (Paris: E. Thunot, 1854), 1.

but, paradoxically, one with European values based around upholding their own privilege, in which the same colonial social structures remained in place.

The evidence confirms that the museum played an active role in shaping an image of Chile in Europe. In July 1836, Gay wrote to the government that “if we establish the museum, we can include in the objects it contains a multitude of animals from these provinces that European natural scientists do not even know exist.”⁸⁷ Once again, his text confirms the trope of Chile as a country unknown to European natural scientists. It also shows that, at that point, the Chilean museum was still an “invisible” one, without a physical venue to house its collections. However, while the government applauded Gay's work, some local voices complained of the absence of its results in the country. Among them was Vicente Bustillos, chairman of the committee entrusted with overseeing the natural scientist's work, writing to the government in 1836:

As great as the results expected of [Gay's] work are, they will never have all of the promised utility unless we organise the cabinet of natural history in which all of the objects are to be located. Without this, it will be in vain to continue collecting materials from which, due to the lack of a specific venue for installing them, we shall not see any other profit from them other than their destruction and the exhaustion of resources that the government spends on collecting them.⁸⁸

This claim appears to be Bustillos' response to Gay's report. In that same year, the natural scientist had informed him that he had collected “a huge variety of animals,”⁸⁹ adding: “I have taken to the Museum 5 skins of quadrupeds, 5 skulls of id. [quadrupeds], 73 skins of birds, 25 reptiles in alcohol, 300 insects [and] 95 molluscs in alcohol.”⁹⁰ As we can see, Gay used the term “museum” to refer to the physical space where the collections were stored since, at that time, the museum was, in fact, merely a repository, a storeroom where many of the specimens collected awaited shipment to Europe. It was only two years later, in 1838, that the government

⁸⁷ Claude Gay “Carta,” July 4, 1836. in Diego Barros Arana, *Obras completas de Diego Barros Arana*. vol. XI: Estudios Histórico-Bibliográficos (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1911), 331.

⁸⁸ SCLRCh, vol. XXIX [1841], Appendix 633 (July 15, 1836), 414.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

granted Gay “a spacious room in the palace that is currently used by the Courts of Justice,”⁹¹ in the centre of Santiago to establish the Cabinet and exhibit the collections of the country’s natural history for the first time in the nation.

Given that Gay’s professional interests were focussed more on France than in Chile, around 1840, he started to make known his intentions to finish his work and return to his home country. In 1841, he wrote to the Minister of Public Instruction, Manuel Montt, to inform him that he “had [finished] the work that I had to complete in order to fulfil the obligations of my contract.”⁹² Among these tasks, the Frenchman stated that he had created “a worthy cabinet for this Republic that could not be scorned by any of the secondary cities of Europe and that is far superior than any other created before in South America.”⁹³ However, we do not know what attributes made this cabinet “superior” to its counterparts in other South American countries. As well as the sparse documentation, I should also add that Gay breached an article of his contract because it had required him to produce a logically structured catalogue of the Cabinet, a task that also fell within his remit as the director. There is no evidence that he produced such a catalogue, and there is no sign that the Chilean government tried to enforce this obligation. However, the government did state that it was satisfied with the natural scientist’s work, even though he had not fulfilled one of the clauses, which shows just how little interest either party had in this particular task.

The most explicit reference to the features of this cabinet comes from Gay himself in the public statement he made before the National Congress in 1841, months before he left for France. Using organisational criteria characteristic of modern scientific discourse, the natural scientist stated:

This cabinet houses objects from all three kingdoms, almost all of which are perfectly labelled with a sufficient number of species for the study of the different branches of Natural History. And so, the zoological section has 46 quadrupeds, 855 birds, 87 fish, only some reptiles and over one thousand shells, over 7,000 insects and butterflies, 37 zoophytes, etc. The botanical section has over 7,000 plants, and the mineralogy section

⁹¹ Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional,” 5.

⁹² “Sesión de la Cámara de Diputados, en 19 de noviembre de 1841,” SCLRCh, vol. XXX (1841), 21.

⁹³ Ibid.

has a collection of stones and minerals, and another almost complete collection of the rocks specific to the country. All of these objects are classified by families, genera and species and are in glass cases, displayed in such a way that students and curious minds can fulfil their goals and find their distractions.⁹⁴

To date, this quote is the first and only reference that points towards the possibility of the collections being put on display. Furthermore, this is fundamental reference because, as we shall see in the following chapter, this inventory did not match the impression of Rudolph Phillippi, a German scientist who took control of the Museum in 1853. We also do not know what impact this space had on the people living in the capital. The natural scientist left Chile to return to France in 1842 and, up until then, the Museum was still closed to the public. Shortly after, in 1843, when Gay had already left the country, Francisco García Huidobro, director of the National Library and the interim director of the Museum, wrote to Montt to inform him that: “I have now made all of the necessary repairs to the National Museum, getting it into perfect conditions to open it to the public when Your Excellence sees fit.”⁹⁵

Moreover, much like in the cases we have already covered in this chapter, the museum under Gay’s direction was a space in which modern organisational techniques existed alongside other ones that do not easily fall within the taxonomic criteria of Enlightenment scientism. In the same address that Gay gave to the National Congress where he explained how he had organised and scientifically classified Chilean nature, the botanist also noted that, apart from natural samples, “the cabinet now possesses a large number of curiosities that I have managed to collect or that have been donated by good patriots.”⁹⁶ Among such curiosities were coins, medals, some furniture and -as we shall see in Chapter Three- indigenous material culture along with “some natural monstrosities.”⁹⁷

In this way, even though there was no logical catalogue of its displays, it is possible to conclude that the foundational collection of the National Museum of Chile was one that covered a wide range of materials that exceed the inherent categories of natural history and scientific

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Carta de Francisco García Huidobro a Manuel Montt” [Santiago, January 2, 1843], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 59, no.37, sf.

⁹⁶ “Sesión de la Cámara de Diputados, en 19 de noviembre de 1841,” Op. Cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

taxonomy. The fact that these displays of Chilean nature existed alongside a diverse range of other elements classified as “curiosities” would support the thesis put forth in this chapter, namely that the ambiguous and open notion of the museum still circulated among the political and intellectual élites in Chile throughout the first half of the 19th century.

In Conclusion: The Museum between Natural History and National History

In July 1841, as part of the annual report of the department he ran, Minister Montt addressed Congress to inform its representatives “that the distinguished natural scientist [Gay], who the government tasked with a scientific journey across the Republic eleven years ago, has brilliantly concluded in his interesting tasks by creating a National Museum.”⁹⁸ Thirty years after its first formulation, the country now officially had its own museum that, according to the minister, would be “an ornament that graces the country and that will promote a passion for the natural sciences, from which we should expect considerable benefits.”⁹⁹

As we can see, the institution that the government presented to the Chamber was a “National Museum”. This differs, at least in name, from the “Cabinet of Natural History” for which they had hired Gay. However, this time around, unlike in the previous examples, this was not merely a meaningless semantic change. Quite the opposite: the shift from the Cabinet of Natural History to the National Museum was one that altered the very nature of the institution in various ways. As we will see in the coming chapters, the second half of the 19th century bore witness to a certain tension in which “natural” and “historical” elements competed to enter a space that sought to represent the attributes of a Chilean national identity. As a result, from 1840 onwards, the question of the name disappears and the title of “National Museum” was the only one given to the institution for the rest of the century.

What is specifically interesting for my research is that the trajectory of the institution reveals the wide range of meanings that its usage held among the Chilean ruling class in the post-independence years. From 1810 to 1840 in Chile, the signifier “museum” acted as an umbrella term that covered multiple uses, which served to describe various economic, cultural and symbolic projects. In this respect, my conclusion enters into dialogue with the arguments put forth by the English theorist Rhiannon Mason, for whom “the term ‘museum’ is understood as a

⁹⁸ “Sesión 21, Ordinaria, de la Cámara de Diputados, en 28 de julio de 1841,” SCLRCh, vol. XXVII (1840-1841), 334.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

much more flexible and expansive way of describing a whole range of relations and activities which surround the valuation, collection, and display of cultures and histories.”¹⁰⁰

The instrumental versatility that characterises the lifespan of the first museum in Chile can be read as an embodiment of the broadly accepted thesis of the American anthropologist James Clifford who, following Mary Louis Pratt’s line of argumentation, proposes that we understand the museum as a “contact zone”; in other words, a space of cultural encounters, clashes and negotiations, the result of the interaction of subjects in highly uneven contexts of power. “When museums are seen as contact zones”, Clifford argues, “their organizing structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship; a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull.”¹⁰¹

The evidence that I have analysed here leads me to the conclusion that, in the first instance, Clifford’s argument does indeed apply to the case of the National Museum of Chile. For the three decades that led up to its final consolidation, the museum was a bureaucratic apparatus whose objective was precisely to foster contact between Chile and Europe. However, there is one thing that the “museum as a contact zone” leaves out, which is the deep-seated essence of the museum as an institution descended from Western thought, and the colonialism underpinning it. As the English theorist Robin B. Boast states, “the role of the museum, or archive, is obscured as it does not make clear how these objects of the contact zone are being used.”¹⁰²

The “museum as a contact zone” tends to omit the relationships of power implicit in the history of their existence. Among them, for example, is the connection between collecting practices and economic activity that I have outlined in this chapter. In the moralising epic of scientific and national stories, the museum as a commercial instrument has been erased from the historiographical narratives. The scarce institutional histories of museums in Chile present the museum formulated by Bernardo O’Higgins’ government in 1813—the same one examined at the beginning of this chapter—as the foundational event of a narrative in which the museum appears as “real” from such point, and also remains unalterable over time.

¹⁰⁰ Mason Rhiannon, “Culture Theory and Museum Studies,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Shannon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 25.

¹⁰¹ James Clifford, ‘Museums as Contact Zones,’ *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 438.

¹⁰² Robin B. Boast, ‘Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as a Contact Zone Revisited,’ *Museum Anthropology* 34 (2011), 61.

Taking all of this into consideration, the evidence does not only show that the Spanish colonial legacy was implicit in the plans for a museum in Chile in the first half of the 19th century, but also articulated the multidimensional and asymmetric nature of the relations that shaped it. Along these lines, even though the shipment of specimens from Chile to the Royal Cabinet of Madrid towards the end of the 18th century is an explicit example of the operations of the Spanish colonial apparatus, the Chilean *criollos* did not play a passive role in the system. On the contrary, as we have seen in this chapter, they knew how to read the potential of the natural sciences, and they applied it to their own interests once the territory was under their control. The erasure of this tradition and the presentation of the museum as a “new” institution is one of the many symbolic strategies through which the élites sought to unravel themselves from any connections to Spain. The inclusion of collecting practices and the museum as a part of this narrative has not been examined up until now.

However, even when the *criollos* presented the museum as “by nature so brilliant and so new for us,”¹⁰³ in practice, it actually operated as a continuation of the Spanish Empire’s policies and, to a certain extent, of internal colonialism under the administration of the ruling class of the republic throughout the 19th century. In this respect, the period from 1810 to 1840 examined in this chapter is one that lay the groundwork for a politics that spanned the entire century, and one whose legacy is still upheld even to this day; namely, the idea of the museum as a reflection of national identity and the Chilean character. These are the topics that I shall discuss in the coming chapters.

¹⁰³ “Acta de los acuerdos de la Junta de Gobierno, el Senado i el Cabildo de Santiago, en 27 de julio de 1813.” SCLRCh, Appendix A: “Espediente sobre la fundación del Instituto Nacional i del Museo de Ciencias en el año de 1813. Oficio de la Comisión de Educación a la Junta de Gobierno,” vol. I, 1813, 291.

Chapter Two: Forms of Classifying, Exhibiting and Observing

Introduction

In 1853, a decade after Claude Gay returned to Paris, the Rector of the University of Chile, Andrés Bello, warned the University Board that “what we possess under the name of the National Museum is in a lamentable state of disrepair.”¹ At that point, the Museum was no longer housed in the venue that the government had granted Gay, but rather in a small and rather unsuitable room in the University. “In that establishment,” Barros Arana notes, “it occupied a modest room, some thirty or forty metres in length, that only opened one day per week to allow in a few curious minds that came to visit it.”² It would appear that it was not only some of the best pieces that had left the museum along with its director, but also the government’s interest in the institution.

This was also the opinion of Rudolph Philippi (1808-1904)³, a German natural scientist and the principal figure of this chapter. Philippi, also a botanist, took charge of the National Museum of Chile in 1853 and, as this Chapter will demonstrate, his tenure as director redefined the very nature of the institution under his control. Two years before, in 1851, Philippi had come to Chile in response to the offers made by the local government to promote European immigration into the country. One thing that piqued the botanist’s interest was the existence of a natural history museum heralded by Gay as “far superior to anything heretofore seen in South America.”⁴ However, what Philippi found did not live up to his expectations. Shortly after arriving in the country, he visited the National Museum with the Polish intellectual Ignacy Domeyko, who would go on to become the rector of the University of Chile years later.⁵ As he recounted, in contrast to his expectations, the experience was disconcerting for him:

On my first visit to the Museum, I went with Ignacio Domeyko in December 1851, and I was surprised by its impoverished situation.

¹ *El Araucano* 1455. October 17, 1853, 3.

² Diego Barros Arana, *Obras completas de don Diego Barros Arana*. vol. XIII: Estudios biográficos (Santiago: Barcelona, 1914), 92.

³ See Appendix 4: Biographies.

⁴ “Sesión de la Cámara de Diputados, en 19 de noviembre de 1841” SCLRCh, vol. XXX (1841), 21.

⁵ A mineralogist by profession, Ignacy Domeyko was the rector of the University of Chile from 1867 to 1889.

[...] This impoverished situation astounded me, even more so later on when I read the excellent work cited above by Diego Barros Arana, which includes excerpts from Gay's reports about the results of his journeys through the Republic, which state that he had collected, with unspeakable zeal, countless minerals, plants and animals, which appear to have left for France.⁶

Far from what he had been led to expect, Philippi found an institution that did not fit what he deemed a museum. When looking back on the time when took up the position as director in 1853, he came to the conclusion that “the Museum was a disarray of a thousand different things heaped together in a cramped room,” and “the few items that remained were about to be lost.”⁷ His impressions confirm, first, the ambiguity with which the notion of museum functioned in Chile during the first half of the 19th century and, second, they spell out the problems that such ambiguity meant for the institution itself. What Philippi took charge of was, in his professional opinion, anything but what he understood to be a museum. Even if it had ever managed to amass a collection, Gay had sent the most important specimens to Europe and, with the government’s approval, he “had taken everything he found to France and only forgotten to take a few specimens.”⁸

The scenario is the context that sets the stage for this chapter. Around the 1850s, the National Museum of Chile was still, in essence, a repository for a few samples from its foundational collection that were not sent to Europe. Those samples were on display, all together in one single room that, according to Philippi’s first impressions, did not fit the standards of the “modern” museum. However, the second half of the 19th century bore witness to shift towards the professionalisation of the Museum in line with European standards. At the same time, the government stopped showing the same interest that, decades before, had made the Museum a crucial institution for its ambitions.

Set against this backdrop, this chapter will examine the challenges Philippi faced in working the Chilean Museum into the framework of modern Enlightenment thinking. Unlike the

⁶ Rudolph Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile,” *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Chile* 1 (Santiago: Imprenta Barcelona, 1908), 5.

⁷ Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía del Museo Nacional de Chile, en Setiembre de 1878, destinado a los visitantes* (Santiago: Imprenta de los Avisos, 1878), 4.

⁸ Rudolph Philippi, *Los fósiles terciarios y cuaternarios de Chile* (Santiago: Gobierno de Chile, 1887), 1.

cases we examined in the previous chapter, the German scientist did not only redefine the museum in theory, but he also shaped and materialised the forms in which it might be experienced. In this respect, the form of laying out the objects and the ways in which the visitor's body experienced them were intrinsic aspects of his work and are central to the objectives of this chapter. As the new director re-defined the museum under his management, he articulated his institutional policies around the practices of collecting, organising and exhibiting materials. Broadly speaking, the central objective of this chapter shall be to examine the scope of repercussions that such policies had.

Putting these notions into practice allowed for the emergence of a discourse in which the Museum became an institution that could display and demonstrate the command of state over the natural world found within the territory it governed. Around the mid-19th century, the Chilean National Museum was a space in which the natural and the national converged as if they were one singular concept. However, as I will show in this chapter, this vision worked much more as a personal project for Philippi than as a state one. As the evidence shows, the government's interest in the National Museum in the second half of the 19th century was, in the kindest of terms, minimal. Analysing the motives that led to this situation is another objective of this chapter.

In any case, the “modern” condition of the National Museum of Chile under Philippi's management serves as an example of a way of understanding the museum as a “civilising” institution, since it played an active role in the construction of a type of modern and civilised citizen. However, going beyond this generalisation, this chapter also examines the Museum as an institution that, much like many other “modern” ones, was meant to be experienced through the sense of sight. Accordingly, this chapter approaches the museum as an institution that, first, participated in shaping out “ways of seeing” and moving through space and, second, one that made a particular abstract notion visible and, therefore, tangible, namely Chilean national identity.

In terms of its methodology, this chapter analyses a documentary corpus made up of, but not restricted to, bureaucratic material from the National Museum under Philippi's management during the second half of the 19th century. To confirm and support the hypotheses I have laid down, I propose a study of such material framed within the relevant historiography while also

drawing on contemporary theory from the fields of cultural studies, visual culture and museum studies.

A Modern Museum

After taking on his role as director of the National Museum, Philippi began to draw up annual reports for the Ministry of Public Instruction to provide the government with an account of the progress he was making. In these documents, we can identify a narrative pattern that reveals the slow progress of his work, justified by the state of the museum as it was handed to him. These documents also provide an explicit critique of what was passed on to him under the name of the museum. Apart from a lack of staff, Philippi also noted:

When, in the aforementioned period [1853] the museum was handed over to me, it only had one single room in which, of course, all of the objects, even the most heterogeneous of them, were collected together [...].

Many objects were in a poor state; almost all of the quadrupeds and birds that the museum had worked on were very ugly and not in a very natural shape [...] and many of them were moth-eaten; some of them were headless, others had no body, no limbs, no wings; it was necessary to throw almost all of them out and start putting together an entirely new collection. [...]

When it was handed over to me, very few objects were classified, practically only those from Europe; no Chilean plant, no Chilean animal of the few that existed had a scientific name, and all of the objects were laid out without a systematic order and made for *a real chaos*.⁹

Under the title of "museum," the body that Philippi took charge of did not fit the standards that he held for such an institution. He came from a European tradition in which the tenets of both philosophy and Enlightenment scientism came together to solve the conundrum of how to define the museum. Although there was no explicit definition of the concept, the bureaucratic notes that Philippi wrote to report on his work for the government document his

⁹ "Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones según informes de su Director Dr. R. A. Philippi" Santiago, May 20, 1861. AUCH. vol. XIX (1861): 424. My emphasis.

vision of the modern codes of Western museological institutional structures of the 19th century. Within these codes, the importance of classifying and organising the materials aimed at preventing cases like the one faced by Philippi who, upon arriving to the Chilean museum, found the exact opposite of what he expected: “a real chaos”. Along these lines, it is essential to lay down a framework to understand Philippi’s thought. As we will see throughout this section, this was the expression of a museological epistemology that he shared with his European counterparts; one that was directly descended from Enlightenment scientism.

In 18th-century Europe, the terms ‘*Musaeum*’ and ‘*Museographia*’ circulated in the first treatises aimed at examining, and in some way setting down the rules for, the practice of collecting and exhibiting rarities and curiosities. As Susan Pierce notes, the use of these terms stems from the understanding of collecting practices “as a microcosm of the Universe that is a copy or representation of the whole within a small compass.”¹⁰ However, one text was crucial for the professionalisation of the museum: the treaty *Systyema Naturae*. Published in 1735 by the Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus, it laid out a system for organising the natural world based around taxonomical units that presents multiple relationships “just like territories in a geographical map.”¹¹ Although the approach Linnaeus proposed was not necessarily aimed at museums, the application of his nomenclature caused an upheaval within epistemological frameworks surrounding the institution. As Linnaean taxonomy became the primary method for naming and classifying all elements contained in nature, this led to a decline in interest in the curious or unclassifiable since, under the proposed system, all elements of the natural world possessed classifiable aspects. After that point, particularly in the 19th century, this also led to museums giving priority to the exhibition of named and classified elements, rather than curiosities and rarities. In fact, around a century after the publication of the treatise, in 1876, the entomologist of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, Hermann August Hagen, claimed that “even today we find the principles and rules of Linnaeus are more or less unconsciously followed in many museums.”¹²

This paradigm shift, which clearly falls within the tenets of Enlightenment discourse, also meant that the organisation and classification of the materials collected became inherent

¹⁰ Susan M. Pierce, *Museums and their development: the European tradition, 1700-1900* (London: Routledge, 1999), VIII.

¹¹ Carl Linnaeus, *Philosophia botanica* (Translated by Stephen Freers) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1751] 2003), 40.

¹² Hermann August Hagen, “The History of the Origin and Development of Museums,” *The American Naturalist* 10 (1876): 80.

properties in the notion of the museum. In 1883, the German intellectual and collector Johann Theodor Grässe claimed that “[i]t is sufficient to note that [museums] gradually developed from the cabinet of curiosities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries into the systematically organized institutions of our time.”¹³ Furthermore, these properties went beyond the limits of natural science to classify different types of museums and, at the same time, their collections. Within the field of the fine arts, to name but one example, the director of the Musée Napoléon (now the Louvre) in Paris, declared in 1803 that “the first time you walk through this gallery you will find that it brings a character of order, instruction, and classification.”¹⁴ Indeed, apart from ordering and classifying, Western museums also added “education” to their functions. There was a type of moralising pedagogy that understood their galleries according to an encyclopaedic logic, or “a magnificent library and school of object-teaching,”¹⁵ as Luigi Palma di Cesnola, the first director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, described it in 1887. Along these same lines, Georges Brown Goode, a researcher at the Smithsonian Museum, claimed that museums should make their collections “visually accessible” “for the increase of knowledge and for the culture and enlightenment of the people.”¹⁶

Taking up the tradition that I have outlined above, the English intellectual David Murray published the 1904 treatise, *Museums: Their History and their Use*, now thought to be a foundational text for the field of museum studies. Although Murray’s work was published when Philippi was no longer the director of the National Museum of Chile—Philippi died in 1904—its importance to this discussion lies in the fact that it provides a compendium of tenets that redefined the notion of the museum over the course of the 19th century for it to be a “modern” institution. Since Murray’s work provides an overview of the discourse of the previous century, placing it in dialogue with Philippi’s will allow me to show how steeped the latter was in the epistemological tradition outlined in this section.

¹³ Johann Theodor Grässe, “Die Musologie als Fachwissenschaft” *I Zeitschrift für Museologie und Antiquitätenkunde sowie verwandte Wissenschaften*, vol. 15 (1883): 1.

¹⁴ Quoted in Karsten Schubert, *The Curator’s Egg. The evolution of the museum concept from the French Revolution to the present day* (London: Ridinghouse, 2002), 20-21.

¹⁵ Luigi Palma di Cesnola, “An Address on the Practical Value of the American Museum” [1887] in *Museum Origins. Readings in Early Museum History and Philosophy*, ed. Hugh H. Genoways and Mary Anne Andrei (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008), 52.

¹⁶ George Brown Goode, “The Relationships and Responsibilities of Museums” [August 23, 1895], *New Series*, vol. 2, no.34 (1998):198.

Placing the work implemented by Philippi during the half-century that he was in charge of the National Museum of Chile in dialogue with Murray's compilatory work proves that the German scientist was fully aware of the tenets of the modern Western museum. For example, regarding the pivotal role of classification, Philippi wrote in 1861 that "the numbering and preparation of the object is not the main merit of a museum; more important is their systematic classification and exhibition."¹⁷ Almost four decades later, Murray came to the conclusion that "the distinguished features of [the modern museum] are specialization and classification."¹⁸ What is more, the specialisation of the institution through clearly delineated topics was an important tenet of his work. The English intellectual claims that "Instead of one museum embracing every subject, or at least many subjects, we have museums which are limited to one or two a few special subjects, as, for instance, museums of Natural History."¹⁹ This was a key issue for Philippi since, as he himself argued, "When I took charge of the Museum and thoroughly examined it, I first noticed that there were many objects that bore no relation to Natural History."²⁰

In this respect, Philippi was critical of objects that did not fall within the scope of natural history remaining part of the museum under his control—specifically indigenous materialities and other "curiosities", which will be the focus of the next chapter. This matter was not directly connected with a rejection or devaluation of these objects as "museum pieces" so much so as the impossibility of including them within the taxonomic structures of natural history. To resolve this conflict, with a mind to the importance of these collections and the limited budget of the Chilean State, in 1861, he created a section that he named the "Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities." In order to distinguish between that which fell within the realm of natural history and that which did not, the director gave the name "museum" to one room in the National Museum. In creating a museum inside a museum, Philippi intended to solve the classificatory problem for those objects "that did not belong to natural history."²¹

I will cover the "Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities" in depth in the following chapter. At this point, however, it is necessary to broach this matter to note just how important

¹⁷ "Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones," 424.

¹⁸ David Murray, *Museums: Their History and their Use* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904), 231.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Philippi, "Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile," 8.

²¹ "Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones," 425.

disciplinary specialisation was for the director in how he managed the museum. The fact that Philippi divided up the National Museum by subject matter did not imply that he believed these “other” collections to be of lesser value. On the contrary, the purpose of this differentiation was to place value on objects that did not fall within the taxonomy of natural history, while also maintaining a strict distinction between the two fields. Regarding indigenous materialities, to name but one example, Philippi intended for these collections to one day form part of an “archaeological Museum fit for Chile” that could provide an account of “the importance that these objects have for the ancient history of South America.”²²

The foregoing does not only show that Philippi was aware of the European codes of museology, but also that he sought to materialise them in the Chilean museum. For him, no collection was any less important than any other, but they needed to be organized in such a way that they would belong to specific fields delimited by discipline: Museums of Natural History, of Fine Arts, of Archaeology, etc. However, what stands out here is the establishment of a semantic relationship between the classificatory use of the adjectives “national” and “natural,” since Philippi conjoined the two concepts as part of the same idea. The starting point for “the national” is, both in his view and that of the government, the natural world within its territory. With this in mind, it makes sense that this matter would appear in his definitions of the museum under his control. In 1858, he declared that the main purpose of the National Museum was to “present a collection, as complete as possible, of nature in Chile,”²³ an idea that he consistently upheld, given that, in 1874, he noted that he hoped to exhibit “a complete collection of the natural productions of our nation, well prepared and classified.”²⁴

As presented by Philippi, the definition of the Museum’s objectives places a clear emphasis on the territorial delimitation of its collection. As such, the limits of the State are the same as those framing the natural specimens in the museum. Hence, the director endeavoured to find an alternative space for the collections that did not fall within the taxonomy of “Chilean nature”. This matter draws an important line between the working methodology put in place years before by Gay who, as we have seen, claimed to want to collect “all objects, with no

²² “Oficio del Director del Museo Nacional don Rodolfo Amando Philippi. Sesiones del Consejo Universitario. Octubre 15 de 1875” AUCH. vol. XLVII (1875): 288-289.

²³ “Proyecto de Reglamento del Museo Nacional” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 84, October 9, 1858, s/f.

²⁴ Rudolph Philippi, “Zoología. Noticias relativas a la fauna chilena” AUCH, vol. XIV (1874): 479.

distinction of class.”²⁵ In contrast, for Philippi it was precisely this distinction by classification that was fundamental for his understanding of the modern museum. In this scheme, the samples had to pass through a first phase of classification: those that belonged to the nation’s territories and those that did not. In fact, in 1878, he argued that “knowledge of the national nature [is] the primordial objective of the National Museum.”²⁶

The compilatory treatise that Murray published decades later coincides with the delimitation put in place by Philippi. The British historian noted that “A most useful feature of modern museums is the separation of objects into national and foreign, the latter being reserved as objects with which to compare, and by which to illustrate the former.”²⁷ The matter of classification is, therefore, fundamental in so far as it has the scope to organise the collections not only from a strictly scientific and taxonomic perspective but also from the ruling class endeavour to build a referential catalogue about what it is Chilean and what it is not. Under these parameters, it follows that the indigenous objects were deemed to belong to another classifying scope since they were not representative of the project to construct a national identity.

Philippi was well aware that the republic of Chile was, around 1860, a project of modern statecraft that was still under construction. For him, the museum would play an essential role within the state and a national identity-building process. He shared this view with the ruling élites who, nevertheless, seemed to lose interest in associating Chilean identity with an “untouched” nature in the second half of the 19th century. As we will see in the coming chapters, the museum became a disputed space with regard to who had control over “national heritage” and the pieces that should be included in this category. At the same time, the value of nature now did not lie in its unexploited condition, but rather in its industrial potential (industrialised nature).

For Philippi, on the contrary, the museum could exhibit the national identity by displaying the country's natural samples. Classifying and organising displays of “*lo chileno*” was, according to Philippi in 1861, “in my opinion, the most important work of my responsibility, as is that of informing the world of the new plants and animals in our nation.”²⁸ Hence his constant use of the demonym ‘Chilean’ to classify and differentiate the collections belonging to the “national soil” and those from beyond its confines. When he visited the museum

²⁵ Claude Gay, “Viaje Científico. Carta del Sr. Gay,” *El Araucano* 267, October 16, 1835, 3.

²⁶ Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía*, 5.

²⁷ Murray, *Museums*, 234.

²⁸ “Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones,” 423.

for the first time in 1851, he noted that, at that point, “there was no Chilean reptile or fish,”²⁹ that “the Chilean herbarium was particularly modest,”³⁰ and that there were drawers in which “one could see Chilean insects, almost all of which were moth-eaten.”³¹ In his view, the collection that he found when he became director in 1853 did not manage to “represent even half of the Chilean species.”³² Years later in 1860, he claimed that, when he took charge of the museum, it was “very lacking in Chilean animals, and they did not have their scientific names.”³³ For these reasons, one of his principle objectives became filling in the lack of “Chilean” specimens.

Reflecting on the role that museums played in the construction of national identities in Latin America, Jenns Anderman argues that “[t]he museum offered a way of experiencing the foundational experience of nationality: the emergence, in the “wilderness” on the borders of national territory, of a new, modern form of subjectivity associated with knowledge.”³⁴ Following along those lines, it is possible to understand the project of the National Museum with Philippi at the helm as an active agent in the construction of an idea of the Chilean nation. The museum articulates the “experience of nationality” through a series of natural displays circumscribed within a specific territory, as if the boundaries of the country were also those of nature itself. This is also one of the central matters of *Plantarum novarum Chilensium*,³⁵ a treatise published by Philippi in 1856 which orders and classifies the “Chilean flora” held at the museum. Among the systematised species, one of the most interesting is the Chilean bellflower or *copihue* [*Lapageria rosea*] (Fig. 6), named as the “flower symbolising Chilean nationality” in the 20th century.³⁶

It is possible, therefore, to conclude that the collection, classification and exhibition of that nature, once wild and untamed, now dominated by the state, were exercises intrinsic to the construction of an image of Chilean national identity. Of specific interest to the case at hand is the fact that it was Philippi, rather than the Chilean state, who fostered the relationship between

²⁹ Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile,” 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía*, 4.

³³ “Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones,” 424.

³⁴ Jens Andermann, *The Optic of the State. Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 51.

³⁵ Rudolph Philippi, *Plantarum novarum Chilensium: centuriae inclusis quibusdam Mendocinis et Patagonicis* (Berlin: P. Parey, 1856)

³⁶ Ministry of the Interior. Decree 62 of 1977: “Declara al copihue flor nacional.”



Figure 6: Sample of *Lapageria rosea*, the Chilean national flower. [given name]
Dried floral species, ca. 1788. “Herbario Nacional de Chile” (National Herbarium of Chile)
National Museum of Natural History, SGO 148127.

the museum, nature and national identity. After Gay's departure, the Chilean state went on to operate as an agent that, during the second half of the 19th century would act passively, merely overseeing the German scientist's management of the museum. As we can see here, the Chilean government had minimal involvement in developing this relationship. However, Philippi insisted on giving the museum he ran the scope to expound the logic of Enlightenment thought. Within the pedagogical and moralising principles of the modern museum, the collections should be on display for its visitors to consume visually. As such, Philippi resumed the exhibitory component of the museum, previously overlooked by Gay and the Chilean government, with the intention of transforming the disarray he had inherited into a modern museum. An early note from 1858 addressed to the Ministry of Public Instruction confirms the importance of what I have named as the three fundamental principles of the modern museum, namely, collecting, classifying and exhibiting:

The objects stored at the Museum had to be laid out in systematic and scientific manner, in such a way that the exhibition could satisfy both the curiosity of the general public and that of people who wanted to view and study one of the branches of the Museum.³⁷

As Foucault argues, the discipline of natural history—and, by extension, the museum—is one in which language, gaze and representation converge. Natural history, the French theorist concludes, “is nothing more than the nomination of the visible.”³⁸ The experience of the known world through the sense of the visual is one of the main features of the modern subject, and it was this dimension to which Philippi would appeal, as we shall see.

A Museum to Be Seen

As I argued in the previous chapter, the attempts made by the *criollo* government in the first half of the 19th century to have a museum for Chile did not take into account the exhibition of its collections. However, as we have seen, modern Western museums were not only oriented toward the collection and organization of their materials, but also on their systematic exhibition

³⁷ “Proyecto de Reglamento del Museo Nacional,” s/f.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, [1966] 2006), 144.

according to specific criteria. As theorist Mieke Bal argues, the idea of the museum that emerged and forcefully established itself in the 19th century in the West was one that developed its exhibitory function: “The discourse around which museums evolve, and which defines its primary function, is *exposition*.”³⁹

Following this logic, the nineteenth-century museum operated—as art historian Svetlana Alpers argues—as “a way of seeing,”⁴⁰ in other words, as an institution made to be experienced through the gaze. The modern museum, she contends, participated in the construction of a type of subjectivity through what the visual experience of the visit produces in the viewer. Alpers provides the term “museum effect” to describe the impacts that an exhibition has on the person that views it: “everything in a museum is put under the pressure of a way of seeing,”⁴¹ she argues. Consequently, I understand the modern museum to be an optical institution and, as such, one that can transform the visitor into an active observer in a narrative whose signifiers are that which is on display.

The relevance of this theoretical approach is directly linked to the thesis outlined in the previous section: Rudolph Philippi was not only aware of the codes of the modern museum, but he also sought to put them into practice in the museum he ran in Chile. The exhibitory aspect of the museum, which according to Alpers affects the experience of observation in the visitor, was a crucial element for the German scientist. The layout of the elements in museum rooms, Alpers argues, “affect[s] how we look and what we see;”⁴² an aspect that we can identify in Philippi’s administration. For example, in 1858, the museum director justified the need to hire a taxidermist to “get the animals (and fish) into suitable conditions to be put on display in view in the Museum.”⁴³ Years later in 1870, he would place greater emphasis on this idea, asserting that “a great swathe of a Museum’s merit is that the objects should necessarily be displayed in such a way that they are visible and systematically ordered.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁴⁰ Svetlana Alpers, “The Museum as a Way of Seeing” in *Exhibiting Cultures. The poetics and politics of museum display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 25-41.

⁴¹ Alpers, *The Museum*, 29.

⁴² Alpers, *The Museum*, 31.

⁴³ “Oficio del director del Museo Nacional al ministro de Instrucción Pública. 9 de octubre de 1858,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 84, 1v.

⁴⁴ “Museo Nacional. Agosto 3 de 1870,” AUCH. vol. XXXVII (1870): 133.

The emphasis on the museum's collections being viewed is the starting point for my analysis in this section. Here, I argue that the attention paid to the exhibitory component of the museum is intrinsic to the construction of an image of Chilean national identity structured around the features of its natural world. My analysis is in dialogue with the approach of US art historian David Preziosi, who asserts that "in a very real sense, the modern museum was the most extraordinary optical instrument of all; the veritable summa of opticality, of visuality; an instrument of the scale of the state; a vehicle that at the same time contained the state."⁴⁵ Following along these lines, I argue that Philippi's aspirations were for the exhibition halls in the museum to provide a curatorial narrative in which the Chilean state demonstrates its dominion over the natural world circumscribed within the territory it controlled.

The evidence confirms that, for the German natural scientist, putting the collections on display would contribute towards forging a connection between the natural and the national. For example, in 1857, he claimed that the objective of the museum he ran was to "present a complete collection of the natural productions of our country, correctly prepared and classified, for the study and the observance of the natural scientist, of the student and of the general public."⁴⁶ Some years later, in 1861, he reasserted his position, arguing that "the objective of the National Museum should be primarily to present for viewing the productions of the natural world in the Republic, as completely as possible."⁴⁷ In this way, the museum functioned as an institution with the scope to make the state visible and tangible through the observation of its natural species.

For these reasons, practices of collecting, classifying and exhibiting formed an indivisible unit under Philippi's administration. This matter is also reflected in cultural theorist Jonathan Crary's argument that modernity, its practices and forms of knowledge made it possible for the emergence of the modern observing subject during the 19th century. This new subject, who is also a citizen, is able to decipher a new set of signs and objects that appear as the result of modern Western scientific discourse. In this way, Crary argues, "modernity is inseparable from on one hand a remaking of the observer, and on the other a proliferation of circulating signs and objects whose effects coincide with their visuality."⁴⁸ On this point, I propose reading the

⁴⁵ Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the earth's body: art, museums, and the phantasms of modernity*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 88.

⁴⁶ "Zoología. Noticias zoológicas relativas a la fauna chilena," AUCH, vol. XIV (1857): 479.

⁴⁷ "Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones," Op. Cit., 425.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: MIT Press, 1990), 11.

National Museum of Chile under the management of Philippi as one of many projects that, during the 19th century, participated in both the construction of the modern and civilised subject, and a type of observer that was able to make visible an abstract notion—the concept of “the national” or “*lo chileno*”—within the museum.

However, the visibility of the collections did not reside solely in their exposure to the human eye. Rather, this takes place through its participation in a curatorial structure—the exhibition—that makes a specific narrative visible. “Something is made public in an exposition, and that event involves bringing out into the public the deepest held views and belief of a subject,”⁴⁹ Bal contends, concluding: “Exposition is always an argument.”⁵⁰ Based on this approach, it is relevant to pose the following question: what was the argument that Philippi sought to expound through the systematic exhibition of the museum’s collections?

The evidence can provide an answer to this question along two lines. On the one hand, Philippi’s adherence to the tenets of Enlightenment scientific thought is clear: displaying and demonstrating humanity’s dominion over nature is the argument that structures the natural-historical narratives of the 19th century, and his work fit neatly into this discourse. On the other hand, Philippi’s most interesting and specific intent for his exhibitions was that they should become part of the process of forming the Chilean nation, even though, as we shall see later on, the state itself paid very little heed to the institution.

We should bear in mind that when Philippi took charge of the museum in 1853, he was given a single room that he himself claimed was in absolute disarray. After a decade under his care, the situation had changed. Around 1864, the Museum had three rooms and had just opened a fourth but, even then, neither the space nor the resources proved sufficient for him to run the institution in line with his own expectations. That same year, he mentioned to the Ministry of Public Instruction:

In the new room that I have been able to open this year, I have placed the head of a whale, the skeleton of a large species of dolphin, cases of insects, the Chilean herbarium, the exotic herbarium, samples of woods and a small collection of nuts, shells, roots and other drugs from the country and abroad that, beforehand, were piled together and almost

⁴⁹ Bal, *Double Exposures*, 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

inaccessible for viewing due to a lack of space. This new room is already full, and in some years I will be forced to request another room from the supreme government.⁵¹

This documentation leads me to the conclusion that Philippi put into practice the categories that were useful for this exhibitory discourse. Everything on display in the room belonged to the field of natural history, and there were no elements that were beyond this category. Furthermore, he classified Chilean displays and differentiated them from the foreign ones, (the contrast between the Chilean and the exotic is of particular interest here), and, lastly, he made it quite clear that the collections should be visually accessible for visitors. The latter part can be understood as an allusion to the translation of the state into a collection.

The Negligence of the State

Despite everything that we have recounted up until now, the physical spaces granted to the Museum did not always allow Philippi to implement his exhibitory strategies. Rather, the lack of space provided for the exhibition prevented the director from organising an exhibition with the scope to showcase the systems of classification deployed to organise the collections. The exhibition spaces in the National Museum of Chile were lacking, and Philippi would make this known in each of the annual reports that he drew up for the government. The 1867 report is telling:

The lack of space on the premises make it impossible to put up the units required; therefore, the new objects that enrich the collections cannot be placed in a suitable manner, and it is necessary to place them where there is space left; they are too cluttered, the systematic order is broken, and conserving them is becoming increasingly difficult, because it is impossible to have the objects on view.⁵²

The evidence suggests that the government paid no heed to the director's behests since he reiterates his complaints in the following years. In 1870, Philippi wrote that the specimens “are

⁵¹ “Informe del director del Museo Nacional sobre este Establecimiento, abril 18 de 1864,” AUCH, vol. XXIV (1864): 495.

⁵² “Informe anual del Museo Nacional de Santiago. Santiago, 13 de mayo de 1872,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 138, 1862–1883, f.2.

too cluttered, and it is now impossible to place them in a suitable and systematic manner.”⁵³ The following year in 1871, he was even more emphatically disgruntled, writing: “The lack of space on the premises is growing increasingly noticeable year by year, but I do not think it is futile to repeat what I had to say about this matter in my reports from previous years.”⁵⁴ One year later in 1872, he concludes that: “the lack of space on the premises [is a] hindrance that each year leads to greater losses; there is no space to place objects where they should be, thus breaking the systematic order; objects are too cluttered, with some behind other ones; as such, they cannot be viewed or checked for deteriorations; lastly, there is often a lack of space for new objects.”⁵⁵

It is very probable that Philippi’s irritation was linked to the considerable amounts that the state was investing in the Chilean International Exhibition of 1875. The aim of the event was to “present to the eyes of the Republic an inventory of its industrial advances, alongside those that foreign civilisations have made and imparted to us.”⁵⁶ The event had all the characteristics of a World’s Fair, and the Chilean government invested considerable amounts of money into it, which helps to identify the type of exhibition and the “Chilean” attributes that the state sought to make visible: its industry rather than its nature. At this event, the Chilean ruling class materialised the shift in the understanding of the natural specimens from the country, which had taken place over the previous decades. At the time, this was no longer linked to the raw value of the natural world, but rather to its potential as raw materials for global industry. As such, this was the reason behind the government’s lack of interest in a space that no longer represented its economic interests.⁵⁷

As the documentary evidence shows, Philippi’s intentions to run a museum that met the standards of its Western counterparts were limited by the government’s flagging interest in the institution he operated. Regardless, the director endeavoured to uphold such standards. Despite the lack of economic resources, staff and space, he managed to create an exhibition that, in its curation, laid out the taxonomic criteria used to organise its materials. Thus, in 1869, the

⁵³ *El Araucano* 3653, November 14, 1870, 2

⁵⁴ *El Araucano* 3773, September 27, 1871, 1

⁵⁵ *El Araucano* 3963, September 10, 1872, 3

⁵⁶ “Discurso del Excelentísimo Señor Presidente de la República Don Federico Errázuriz,” in *Discursos pronunciados en la apertura de la Exposición Internacional de Chile. 16 de Setiembre de 1875* (Santiago: Imprenta de F. Schuebler, 1875), 6.

⁵⁷ For a detailed review of the Chilean International Exposition of 1875, see: Juan David Murillo, “De lo natural y lo nacional. Representaciones de la naturaleza explotable en la Exposición Internacional de Chile de 1875,” *HISTORIA* 8, vol. I (January-July 2015): 245-276.

National Museum was organised into three large collections—zoology, botany and mineralogy—which in turn were subdivided into Chilean specimens and foreign specimens, in the categories of “National Natural History” and “Foreign Natural History”. Moreover, the Museum still held the “Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities”, a space where Philippi deposited all of the objects that fell beyond the scope of the taxonomy of natural science.

Tony Bennett argues that “the items displayed in the [modern] museum, then, were to be arranged so as to make visible the structure that governed the order of things.”⁵⁸ As I have shown in this chapter, Philippi made countless endeavours to have a museum that, in line with Bennet’s arguments, would make visible both a local and a universal order of things in its rooms. However, the Chilean government barely took all of these efforts into consideration, despite the museum director constantly trying to draw their attention to this matter. For example, in 1872, he complained that “due to a lack of units, the plants that have been recently collected and the duplicates have to be placed on the floor or on top of the cabinets,”⁵⁹ which proves that there was not only a lack of space, but also a lack of furniture and apparatuses to correctly display the specimens. In fact, in 1889, the director requested resources from the government to refurbish the equipment since “many people have commented to me that they found the shelves and display tables to be a shambles.”⁶⁰

The situation was already critical in 1876, when the director complained that the museum space, at that time, was so small that he had been forced to take books home with him in order to free up shelf space to make room for the collections. That same year, he wrote to the Minister:

As you know from my previous reports, the lack of space on the premises has forced me to place the objects far too close together, sometimes in three rows on the same panel, and often to break the systematic order. Therefore, because of this, in the same cabinet, there are currently quadrupeds, birds and fish.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Tony Bennett, *Museums, Power, Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 163.

⁵⁹ *El Araucano* 3963, September 10, 1872, 4.

⁶⁰ “Memorándum de Philippi al Ministro de Instrucción Pública, julio de 1889,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 792, s.f.

⁶¹ *El Araucano* 4625, January 26, 1876, 2.

Of the three qualities that we have identified as being essential to the modern museum—collecting, classifying and exhibiting—it was the latter that was most affected by the Chilean government’s neglect of the institution. The documents I have analysed in this section prove Philippi’s endeavours to organise the few exhibition rooms in the museum according to the taxonomic criteria he used to classify its collections. This lack of resources hampered the systems of classification since, as the director himself argued, the lack of space “broke any systematic order.”

The period from 1853 to 1878 was one in which Philippi’s attempts to run the museum in conformity with Western standards were frustrated by the Chilean government’s lack of support for the institution. This matter was symptomatic of the way in which the élite was redefining the nature of the country. In this shift, the museum was no longer the economic agent it had been during the first half of the century; rather, it became an institution almost devoid of agency. As we have seen, this shows through in the meagre resources given to the museum. The lack of space in the building, making it unsuitable for the collections, was such that the museum’s guide itself described the space as “awkward and improper.”⁶² The director’s wishes were met with frustrations, which also clashed with certain Western discourses that he could not apply to the reality of a country that yearned for recognition as a modern and civilised nation, but one that did not see this museum as a means of achieving such recognition anymore.

Ways of Exhibiting

The Museum’s spatial problems were largely solved by the government granting the National Museum a building that, in 1875, had housed the aforementioned “Chilean International Exhibition” (Fig. 7). Along with some specimens added to its collections from the Exhibition, the Museum also inherited “the space and comfort for which it had longed for so many years.”⁶³ However, even though the new building relatively effectively solved the spatial problems, Philippi insisted on making it known that the government continued to give very little support to the institution he ran. “As it is currently installed, it would appear that the Museum lacks for nothing,” he argued after it was reopened, in 1878, in its “new” building; however, he continued: “but that is not the case, the meagre subvention of 500 pesos per year, its only income, is not

⁶² Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

enough even for its upkeep.”⁶⁴ The director’s disgruntlement makes sense when we compare the 500 pesos per year with the 150,000 pesos invested in organising the International Exhibition.⁶⁵ In other words, Chile invested 300 times the National Museum’s annual budget in a temporary exhibition that was only open to the public for three weeks.

This situation leads me to the conclusion that the Chilean government was both interested in and had the funds for participating the boom of exhibitions that arose in the West during the second half of the 19th century. This interest was not just related to the country’s natural history, but also to its industry and the possibility of attracting international capital. Much like the cases we have already examined, the Chilean International Exhibition functioned as an exhibitory strategy that formed part of a strictly economic programme. The government’s aspirations to create an “image” of the country shifted away from the circulation of its natural resources towards its industrial potential. Clashing with Philippi’s museological model, the state saw these kinds of exhibitions as a means to an end, as opposed to an end in and of itself.

In any case, the National Museum did benefit from the Exhibition as it inherited its building (Fig. 7). In a clearly Neoclassical style, the new space allowed the director to intertwine the classification criteria with the exhibition criteria for the first time. This meant that the Museum would no longer operate as a repository space, but rather now as an exhibition space. As such, Philippi enacted the new arrangement of the rooms based on the “systematic ordering” of the collections, an essential principle for the director who, as we have seen, was limited by the precarious nature of the previous space.

The vastness of the new premises made it possible to set up 14 exhibition rooms, each of which was structured around specific classificatory tenets (Figs. 8a and 8b). This way, the building’s ground floor was organised into rooms for “Chilean and Foreign Mammals”, “Foreign Birds”, “Chilean Birds” and “Botany”. The second floor housed the rooms for “Minerals and Fossilised Shells”, “Insects”, “Fish”, “Crustaceans, Shells and Madreporae” and “Reptiles and Fish”. Moreover, the “Museum of Ethnology and Antiquities” section went from being crowded into one room, to spread out across five: “Antiquities of Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador”, “Mummies”, “Miscellaneous” and two rooms for displaying the “Ethnography” collection.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ *Boletín de la Exposición Internacional de Chile en 1875* (Santiago: Imprenta de la Librería del Mercurio, 1873), 162-163.

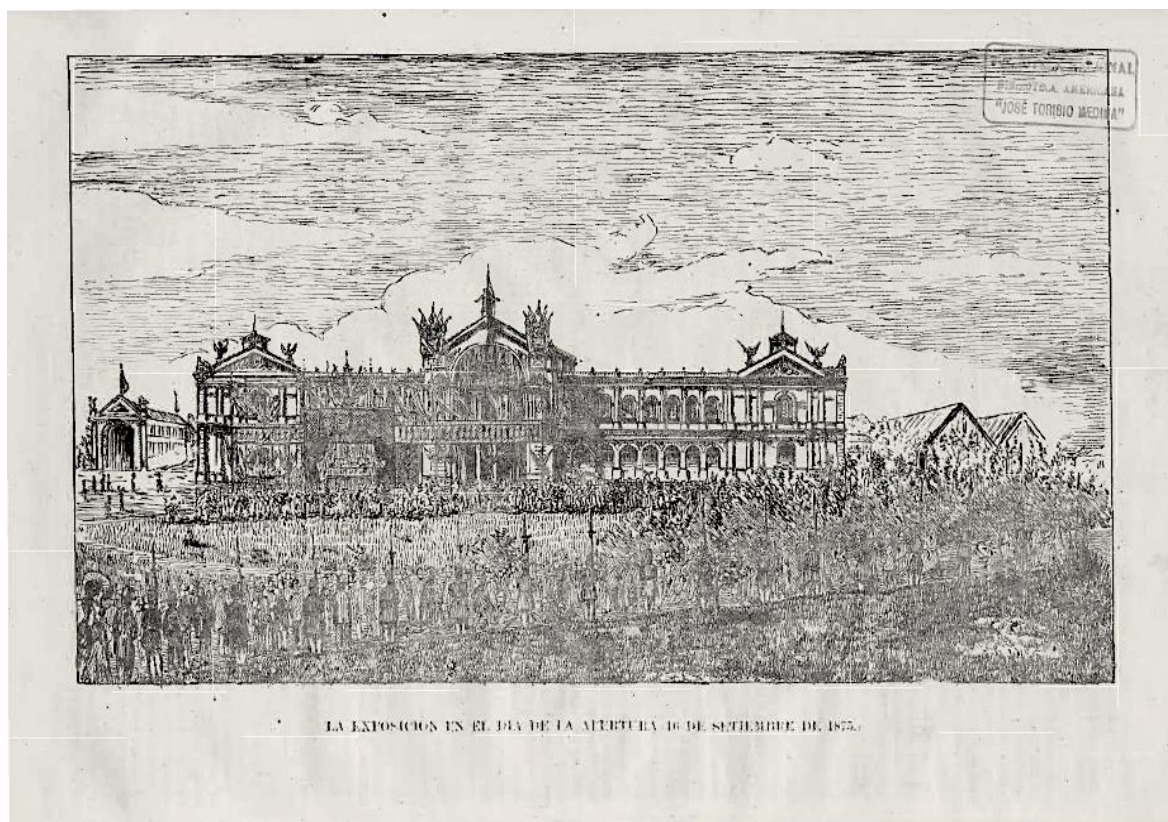
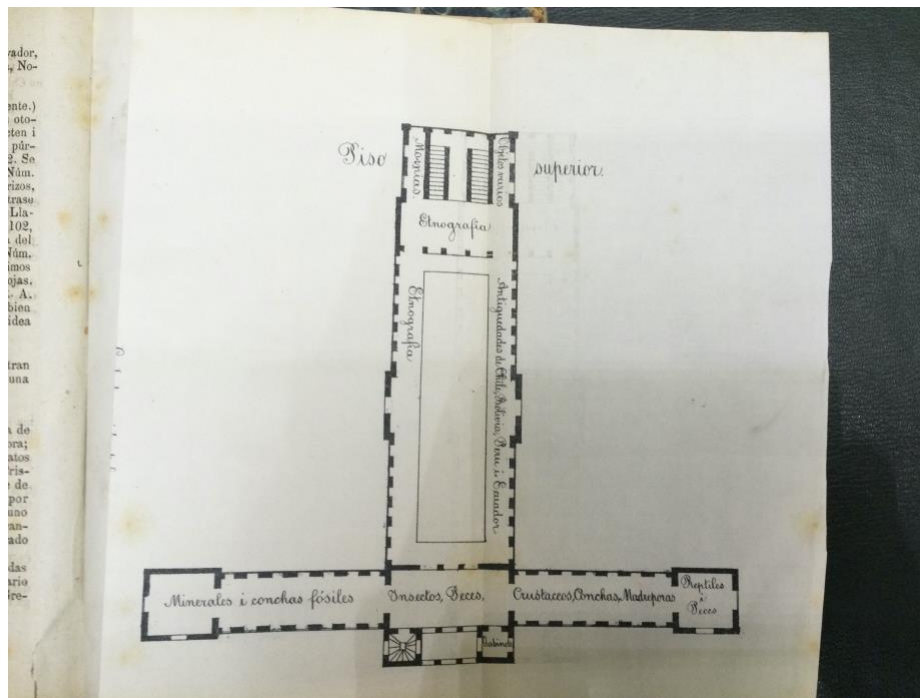
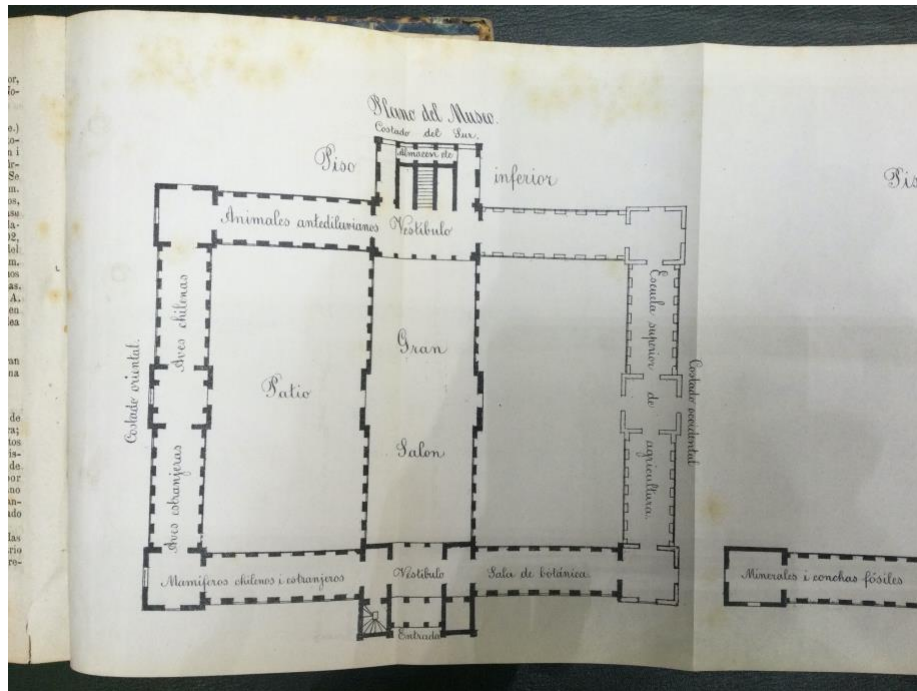


Figure 7: “La Exposición en el día de la apertura. 16 de setiembre de 1875.”
(The Exhibition on its opening day. September 16, 1875.)
Correo de la Exposición 1, n.2, (October 1st, 1875), 20.



Figures 8a and 8b: “Museum Floor Map.” [Given name]

Fig. 8a: “Ground Floor” and Fig. 8b: “Upper Floor.” Photography by the author.
 Museo Nacional de Chile. *Guía del Museo Nacional de Chile, en Setiembre de 1878, destinado a los visitantes*. (Santiago: Imprenta de los Avisos, 1878), Appendix.

In total, the collections were on display in 123 wooden units and a large yet unspecified number of cases that served as herbaria and insectaria. All of these units were sealed off with a pane of glass, meaning that, in museographical terms, we can describe them as display cases. This is no insignificant matter since it is one of the few shreds of evidence from which we can ascertain how and by what means these collections were displayed. While the shelving unit acts as a mount, the glass serves two functions: first, its transparency effectively allows visitors to see the exhibits, prioritising sight and excluding all other senses from the experience. Second, the glass operates as a barrier that separates the observer from the object observed. As Bal argues:

Exposing an agent or subject, put “things” on display, which creates a subject/object dichotomy. This dichotomy enables the subject to make a statement about the object. The object is there to substantiate the statement. It is put there within a frame that enables the statement to come across. There is an addressee for the statement: the visitor, viewer, or reader. The discourse surrounding the exposition, or, more precisely, the discourse that *is* the exposition is “constative”: informative and affirmative.⁶⁶

Following Bal’s line of argumentation, it is relevant to ask of what exactly the display cases of the National Museum were “constative”. To answer this, I base my approach on what Roland Barthes called the “reality effect”. In this mode of interpretation, what is represented is unquestionably assumed to be plausible and, therefore, real.⁶⁷ The display cases in the Museum therefore acted as signifiers in a narrative in which the displays represented an irrefutable truth: the identity of the national territory, the “national nature”; that which is Chile and, by default, that which is not. The showcases produced a reality effect in which the displays make a kind of sovereignty visible: that of the Chilean state over the natural world contained within the territories it controlled.

This “reality effect” is not just determined by the specimen on display in the cases, but also by other exhibitory techniques, one of which is the diorama. Derived from the Greek terms *dia* (through) and *horama* (that which is seen, sight), dioramas are a mode of producing reality through sight. Unlike the other visual production techniques such as the *camara obscura* or even

⁶⁶ Bal, *Double Exposures*, 3

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)

photography, the way in which the diorama is visually consumed involves a bodily displacement of the observer. As Crary argues, dioramas acted as “machines of wheels in motion, and of which the observer was an inflexible component.”⁶⁸ British archaeologist Ross J. Wilson echoes this line of argumentation, asserting that, in the 19th century, dioramas “came to prominence as a means of placing visitors physically within the setting of the natural world.”⁶⁹ Following this logic, dioramas are a “*mise-en-scène*” of a timeless moment not centred around the people who form the scene but rather the people who observe it.

The documentation analysed in this chapter leads me to the conclusion that both display cases (Fig. 9) and dioramas (Fig. 10)⁷⁰ were exhibitory strategies deployed by the National Museum under Philippi’s management. Both strategies are the result of the curatorial intentions of its director who, it should be noted, insisted that his professional objective was to “put on view” the samples of Chilean nature. If, on the other hand, we assume that the modern experience of the museum provides a difference in the relationship between the observed object and the observing subject, then the question of who visited the museum is particularly relevant here: which subjects had access to this *mis-en-scène* of a reality narrated through the species on display?

Ever since it officially opened its doors in 1843, the National Museum of Chile was open free-of-charge to all citizens of the Republic. The documents show that the Museum saw a considerable increase in visitors when Philippi stepped in to manage it in 1853. In 1862, the director noted that “turnout from the general public of the capital coming to see the museum is not decreasing, it rarely falls below three-hundred or four-hundred people [per week].”⁷¹ In 1883, now in the new building, the visitor count had at least doubled. “Turnout from the general public to visit this establishment is really remarkable,” Philippi stated, adding: “the number of visitors on a public holiday reached 2000, and 900 of those who came to its opening on the last day of the month of May.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Crary, *Techniques*, 113.

⁶⁹ Ross J. Wilson, *Natural History: Heritage, Place and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018)

⁷⁰ These photographs were published some years after Philippi left his post as director of the Museum. However, there are no records that would suggest any substantive changes in either its curation or its furnishings, which makes possible to assume that these images are representative of the topics discussed here.

⁷¹ “Estado del Museo Nacional según informe de su Director. Santiago, mayo 13 de 1862,” AUCH, vol. XX (1862); 431.

⁷² “Instrucción pública: su estado en Chile en el año último, según la memoria del ministro del ramo al Congreso nacional, i según los documentos a ella anexos.” AUCH, vol. LXIII, 1 (1883); 321-22.

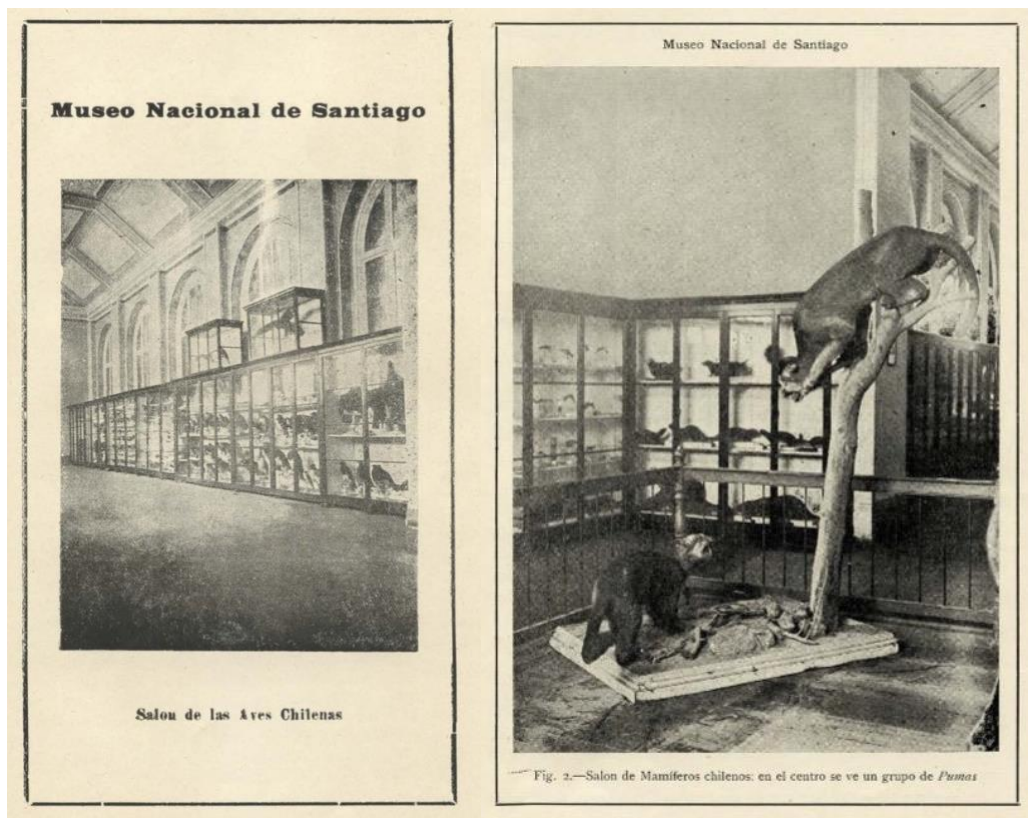


Figure 9 (left): “Salón de las Aves Chilenas.” (Chilean Birds Hall)
 “Catálogo ilustrado i descriptivo de la colección de las aves chilenas conservadas en el Museo Nacional”. *Boletín del Museo Nacional* Vol. I, n.8 (Santiago: El Globo, 1910), 270.

Figure 10 (right): “Salón de Mamíferos chilenos: en el centro se ve un grupo de *Pumas*.”
 (Hall of Chilean Mammals: in its center is a group of *Pumas*.)
 “La sección Vertebrados del Museo Nacional de Chile.”
Boletín del Museo Nacional de Historia Natural. Vol.7, n.1 (1914), 69.

Since its reopening at its new building, the Museum was open to the public on Thursdays, Saturdays, and holydays. As part of its inclusion in the circuit of national public education, only students could visit it on the other days. In this respect, Philippi noted in 1870 that “the number of young people who frequent the museum on days other than this [Thursday] for serious study is on the rise, and the educational establishments, the National Institute, [...], etc. now visit it frequently.”⁷³ Years later in 1876, he remarked that “the students at the National Institute, the Seminary and various colleges visit it regularly, led by their respective teachers [...] studying book-in-hand in the Museum’s rooms.”⁷⁴

Although there is no documentation that stipulates the specificities of the visitor base, it is possible to surmise some points. First, we can be sure of the urban nature of the audience. From its opening, the museum was located in the city centre, and in 1876 it was definitively moved to the Quinta Normal de Agricultura, within the metropolitan radius of the city. Second, taking into consideration that a large swathe of its visitors were students, it is quite likely that they would have been mostly men, since the institutions listed above were male-only establishments. Lastly, visitors were likely not members of the lower class. Although the museum was free to enter, a certain level of decorum was required to visit. The Museum regulations of 1858 stipulated that “entry is prohibited to people who are not decently dressed and children who are not accompanied by their parents.”⁷⁵ They also add that “foreigners and, in general, decent people may visit the Museum on any other day.”⁷⁶ Moreover, the Museum produced a guide that acted as recommended itinerary through the different rooms. This guide cost 20 centavos, and while this was not a hugely extravagant amount, it did act as an immediate barrier to access.

Ways of Navigating and Observing

The National Museum published a visitor guide for the first time after it reopened in 1878. Printed in September of that year, the *Guía del Museo Nacional destinada a sus visitantes* [Guide to the National Museum Intended for its Visitors] was a short document that functioned in at least three ways: as a narrative, it recounts a brief history of the institution; as a catalogue, it

⁷³ “Museo Nacional. Agosto 3 de 1870,” 133.

⁷⁴ *El Araucano* 4625, January 26, 1876, 3.

⁷⁵ “Proyecto de Reglamento del Museo Nacional,” 479.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

lists the species on display; and lastly, as a guide, it proposes a physical and spatial itinerary for its visitors. The latter point is of the utmost interest to our analysis. Since it provided a specific route, the *Guía* sought to direct the corporeal and visual itinerary of those who visited the museum.

While the visual aspect is predominant in the itinerary, it also set down the introduction of the visitor's body, the pace of their movement and the direction of their gaze. In other words, it was concerned not just about the viewing of the displays, but also *how* they were seen. Therefore, the *Guía* operated as a set of instructions: it indicated which rooms to visit first and, once there, the correct order for the gaze when observing the specimens. In this sense, I propose reading the *Guía* as a textual instrument in dialogue with Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's concept of "hierarchical observation," meaning, "the connection between visibility and the establishment of deep-seated relations of advantage/disadvantage."⁷⁷ Applied to the museum, hierarchical observation "introduces the idea of an apparatus designed for observation, which induces the effects of these relationships deployed through the visibility of those subject to it."⁷⁸

Based on this idea, alongside the importance that Philippi places on the observation of the displays, it is plausible to understand the National Museum as an institution whose collections were designed not only to be observed but also for visitors to hierarchise what they observed. That said, observation within the museum necessarily implied the intrusion of the visitor's body as a motor that made it possible move the gaze around. In her reading of the visitor's body in the modern museum, Mary Bouquet argues that "[a]s the visitor walked through the galleries of the museum, looking was an active process: following narratives of progress (evolutionary or historical), the visitor absorbed the underlying message through their own locomotion as they moved from simpler to more complex forms."⁷⁹

As such, the body movement and the gaze are essential components of the experience of visiting such exhibits. Taking into consideration the hierarchisation of the gaze proposed here, it becomes clear that the *Guía del Museo Nacional* recommended an itinerary with a considerable evolutionist leaning or, as Bouquet argues, a movement from the simple to the complex. The recommended itinerary started once the visitor entered the museum building. Before coming into

⁷⁷ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 169.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Mary Bouquet, *Museums: A Visual Anthropology* (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 45.

the rooms, the guide invited them to observe the foyer through the direction of their gaze: “Upon entry, one can see in the foyer: to the right, a piece of oak from the Magallanes territory⁸⁰ [...] and to the left, a piece that appears to be a soapbark tool.”⁸¹ The itinerary continued through the “Botany” room, to the right of the foyer: “Entering the Room and starting your visit on the right,” the guide notes, “we find a case that contains various classes of paper made from the stem of *Jucca Draconis*.”⁸²

The itinerary recommended in the *Guía* provided other elements that confirm the hypotheses of this chapter. One of these is the importance Philippi placed on exhibiting samples from the nation’s territories—“The space between the columns on the right-hand side of the Room are filled with a collection of 60 species of wood that provide an idea of the richness of our Southern provinces,”⁸³—and differentiating them from those that were not national: “Then, there is a unit with remedies and medicines from other countries,”⁸⁴ and later, “a unit with 160 samples of remedies and medicines from Chile.”⁸⁵

After finalising the itinerary through the “Botany” room, the guide instructed visitors to continue their itinerary through the “Mammals” room. If we look at the map of the Museum (Figures 8a and 8b), this movement involved turning back, passing through the foyer again and then entering the room. The specimen on display in the “Mammals” room were organised into two smaller chambers, one for foreign mammals and one for Chilean mammals. In the latter, the visitor would find “five units [...] that contain various skeletons and mammals from Chile.”⁸⁶ The itinerary started at Unit 8, “the one on the right”,⁸⁷ which contains the heads of monkeys and quadrupeds; moving on to Unit 48, “the one on the left”,⁸⁸ which, for some strange reason, contains birds, and continues up until Unit 44, where the *Guía* encouraged the visitor to rest their eyes “on the lower panel in the unit”⁸⁹ to see examples of the Southern vizcacha.

⁸⁰ Magallanes is the name given to the territories around the Estrecho de Magallanes [Strait of Magellan]. In 1843, the Chilean government took possession of these territories, thus initiating the process of colonisation of this region. Magallanes is today the southernmost and largest region of Chile and also includes the Antarctic territory claimed by Chile.

⁸¹ Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 7.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

It is no coincidence that the itinerary through the “Chilean Mammals” room ended with the exhibition of the Southern vizcacha, (*Lagidium viscacia*), and this is of particular interest for my analysis. This rodent is currently found in an area that spans Northwestern Argentina, Southern Peru, Western Bolivia and what is now Northern Chile. By 1878, however, the possession, control and administration of these territories had generated a fraught political friction between these countries, particularly between Bolivia, Chile and Peru, which finally triggered the War of the Pacific the following year (see Chapter Five). Strictly speaking, none of the territories inhabited by the Southern vizcacha were not yet under the control of the Chilean state as of 1878. Thus, the attention paid to this species in the *Guía* can be interpreted as one of the symbolic gestures through which the Museum contributed to the “Chileanisation” of certain animal species.

After leaving the “Mammals” section, the itinerary continued on to the “Chilean Birds” room. This confirms the non-linear nature of the visit since, if we turn to the Museum map (Figs. 8a and 8b), we can see that one would have to walk straight past the “Foreign Birds” room only to return to it after having finished the Chilean room. In this way, the *Guía* did not just organise the visit, it also hierarchised it: first, the Chilean specimen, then the foreign ones. Furthermore, the “Chilean Birds” room stands out due to the patriotic discourse it espoused. Here, the *Guía* started out by encouraging the visitor to observe Unit 9, which housed “four beautiful specimen of condors, the emblem of our freedom.”⁹⁰ It should be pointed out that, alongside the South Andean deer (*huemul*), the condor was named by the government as the “national animal” early on in the Republic, in 1834, and both species appear in the national iconography and coats of arms.⁹¹ In fact, in one of the few references that document the period between Gay’s departure and Philippi’s arrival at the Museum, the English explorer Fred Walpole visited its small room in 1844, and in his notes, he mentioned that “at the top of the room are the arms of Chili; the supporters a condor and a whymul, real animals or rather their skin stuffed.”⁹² This “*mis-en-scène*” is proof of the early interest in putting the “national animals” on display and their permanence throughout the 19th century.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁹¹ “Ley de 24 de junio de 1834 que crea el Escudo de Armas de la República de Chile.” The law stipulates: “The coat of arms of the Republic of Chile shall present (...) a *huemul* on the right and a condor on the left, each of these animals crowned with a golden naval crown.” *Boletín de las leyes y de las órdenes y decretos del gobierno* (Valparaíso: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1846)

⁹² Fred Walpole, *Four Years in the Pacific in Her Majesty’s ship “Collingwood” from 1844 to 1848*. vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 163–164.

The suggestion for directing the gaze in the “Chilean Birds” room continued through the other 14 units in the room. Among them, the guide highlighted Unit 12, which displayed “the beautiful many-coloured rush tyrant (*Regulus omnicolor*), the finest bird we have in Chile”;⁹³ and Unit 13, which housed “the most beautiful *trile* [yellow-winged black bird], which, according to some, is the origin of our nation’s name.”⁹⁴ At the end of the section, in the “Chilean Birds” room, the guide recommended continuing through the “Foreign Birds” room, thus confirming the national-based hierarchy of the itinerary.

It is relevant that this same non-linear itinerary gave an account of a clear evolutionist, or even creationist, discourse. In the “Foreign Birds” room there were four units “containing little birds, of which we can admire the first of the most beautiful birds of paradise.”⁹⁵ In other words, the museological discourse established a starting point for the natural history of the world: Creation. This matter becomes more evident in the following room: “Antediluvian Animals”, in which the exhibition focussed on animals “that do not live in current times”⁹⁶ and of which “we only know of fossils or traces, which are almost always tattered.”⁹⁷

As such, the curatorial narrative offered at least two key moments in the chronological ordering of the species: Creation and the World Flood (or Flood Myth). It was these two events that framed the possibility for including the specimen on display in that room. Even though most of these are “foreign” specimens, the Museum emphasised that its collections contained at least one “Chilean” example from this period, as well as “some mastodon bones discovered in the province of Talca in 1835.”⁹⁸ As well as this, there also appears to have been a huge attraction discovered by the museum’s own exploration team: “an almost complete leg, all but two of the molars, some vertebrae and fragments of the skull [of a mastodon] found in the city of Chillán in the winter of 1877.”⁹⁹

This is no small matter, as it allowed them to include Chile within their creationist discourse. The idea of Chile as part of the divine plan of Creation was present in various aspects of discourse in the process of shaping out the nation-state. The most important of these was—and

⁹³ Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26

still is—the national anthem that describes Chile as a “joyous copy of Eden”, and the Andes mountain range as the “Lord’s bulwark”.¹⁰⁰ The inclusion of the mastodon in the range of species that inhabited the world between Genesis and the Flood contributes towards a discourse that often associates an idea of Chile as part of a divine plan.

The itinerary continued through the rooms of Ethnography and Archaeology, which we shall analyse in the next chapter. What is important to note here is that, following the recommended circuit in the *Guía*, these two rooms are the start of the route through the upper floor of the building. Not only does this establish a break in the narrative—from the natural to the cultural to then return to the natural—it also chronologically places the species on display in those rooms within Postdiluvian times, which thus justifies describing them as the “first inhabitants” of Chile.

Once the itinerary had finished in these two rooms, the *Guía* specifically instructed visitors on how they should continue on their way: “Returning to the northern part of the upper floor, we will visit its five rooms, starting with the central room in the following order[.]”¹⁰¹ The idea of order becomes insistently explicit with regard both to the collections and the order of the visit. The disorder that Philippi so often complained about to the government seems to have found a remedy in the new building, which is consistent with what Bennett defines as a “rhetoric of power”, in other words, the modern museum’s “ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order.”¹⁰² In this sense, it is not enough to subject the collections to a specific form of organisation, but also to control how the visitor comprehends them through the gaze and bodily experience.

Following the order set forth, the itinerary continued through the “Reptiles, Fish and Insects” section. The *Guía* encouraged visitors to stop in the centre of the rooms and, from such point, to observe the “collection of foreign fish, almost all European.”¹⁰³ Then, the itinerary continued westwards. There, the visitor enters the “Crustaceans, Molluscs, Zoophytes and Protozoa” section, starting at Unit 1, which contains specimen of “*Centella* from the seas of

¹⁰⁰ The first version of the National Anthem of Chile was composed by the Argentine poet Bernardo Vera in 1819. The current version was written by the Chilean poet Eusebio Lillo in 1847 and set to music by Ramón Carnicer. In both versions, the exaltation of the country’s natural beauty is a central element of the composition.

¹⁰¹ Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 36.

¹⁰² Bennett, *Museums*, 31.

¹⁰³ Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 36.

Chile”¹⁰⁴ up until the last unit, which contains the “vast and magnificent collection of shells of Dr. R.A. Philippi.”¹⁰⁵ The itinerary continued into the “Reptiles and Fish” room, and the guide draws attention to Unit 120, which contains “a real conger ell from Chile.”¹⁰⁶

Lastly, the *Guide* encouraged visitors to head to the last room: “Minerals and Fossils”. Following the parameters for classification and organisation that characterised the rest of the exhibitions, this rooms distinguished between Chilean minerals and foreign ones. Along these lines, Units 2, 3, 14, 15, 50, 51, 59 and 60 displayed “Chilean minerals and rocks”, while the remaining displayed foreign minerals. After listing the contents of each unit, the itinerary came to a close by focussing in on one last object:

Next comes the fossil collection of Dr. R.A. Philippi. This, while slightly less extensive than the collection of shells, is very comprehensive and no less valuable. The only way to take scope of it is by viewing it. It takes up 16 units. ¹⁰⁷

There are two points to which I wish to draw attention regarding the last stop on the route. First, the fact that it ends with part of Philippi’s personal collections, which I understand to be his desire to acknowledge his own work. Second, the explicit confirmation of the visual aspect for understanding the meaning of the exhibition: “The only way to take scope of it is by viewing it,” the Guide noted. This leads me to the conclusion that the National Museum of Chile managed to transform nature into an object for observation and, in the process, established a new relationship between that nature— “Chilean nature” —and the subjects that observed it.

In Conclusion: “Our” Nature Under Display

As a result of decades of work during the second half of the 19th century under the command of Rudolph Philippi, the National Museum of Chile managed to confer a tangible presence to the nation-state that ordered, classified and exhibited its nature based on the tenets of modern thought. During the first stage, as we have seen, Philippi was barely able to apply these principles due to a lack of economic resources and staff. This matter was partially resolved by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 37

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 39

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 40

moving the museum in 1878 to the building it still occupies to this day as the Natural History Museum of Chile. Experienced as real through a visual itinerary, from that point forth, the Museum provided an *in situ* catalogue of all of the natural riches of the country and, in doing so, it made visible the gifts that the natural world of the “national territory” bestowed upon its citizens.

This leads me to the conclusion that it was only towards the final decades of the 19th century that the Museum took on a status that would only allow us to fully read within the tenets of the modern museum. The “modern” nature of the National Museum of Chile, however, was not the result of policies enforced by the state, but rather ones of a personal nature implemented by its director. As I have shown, in his work, Philippi intended not only to apply the taxonomic criteria stipulated in the natural sciences, but also to a large extent, to have the results form part of the construction of the state and a Chilean national identity.

With this, I wish to demystify certain ideas put forth in the few studies that cover the relationship between the museums and the Chilean state. In general, they establish the state as an active agent in the process, without questioning its role and taking the relationship between museums and national identity as a given.¹⁰⁸ We can return here to the words of Paz Nuñez-Regueiro, quoted in the introduction: “[i]n 1838, the recently inaugurated National Museum was already offering a vision of the country’s riches, the idea of the Nation and what it meant to be Chilean through its fledgling natural history and archaeology collections.”¹⁰⁹

The historian’s conclusion is one of many that assume that the institution under Claude Gay’s management effectively operated as a museum from the outset. In fact, Gay himself stated in 1842 that the National Museum he created “would not be shunned in many great European cities, and no other of its kind can be found in any of the Spanish[-speaking] Republics.”¹¹⁰ As I have shown in this chapter, none of this coincides with Philippi’s impressions when he took charge of the institution. However, up until now, his figure and his work seem to have been omitted from the foundational narratives.

¹⁰⁸ Luis Alegría Licuime, *Historia, Museos y Patrimonio. Discursos, representaciones y prácticas de un campo en construcción*. (Santiago: Servicio Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural, 2019)

¹⁰⁹ Paz Nuñez-Regueiro, “Presentación,” in Alegría, *Historia*, 15.

¹¹⁰ “Carta de Claudio Gay a Manuel Montt. Valparaíso, 16 de junio de 1842.” In Grete Mostny, “El Museo Nacional de Historia Natural 1830-1980,” *Boletín del Museo de Historia Natural de Chile* 37 (1980): 6.

From the point it reopened in 1878, the Museum offered an experience to its visitors that was structured around the visual consumption of its collections. As an optical institution, the Museum made it possible for a type of discourse (the exhibition) to emerge, the signifiers of which (its collections) were decipherable through the gaze. Through this transformation, the observer who makes their way through the rooms in the Museum participated in an exercise in which nature is shown to be a foundational element of national identity. This presentation of nature according to a specific order appeal to the visitor to understand it as a unifying element for an “us”: “our” nature, one that is identifiable and distinguishable from the “others” that are not ours.

That being said, nature is not the only element that took part in the construction of the relationship between museums and national identity. While, in curatorial terms, the natural history collection operated as a demonstration of “what we are”, a collection of other elements functioned in a similar way but in the opposite direction: “what we are not”. Objects and practices of the indigenous world, monsters, strange curiosities, and everything that could not be subsumed within a tidy definition of “the Chilean” will be the central focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Chilean Antiquities

Introduction

In 1876, the Chilean historian Diego Barros Arana, thought to be Chile's most important writer in the genre of *historia patria* ("national history," a term further discussed below), published his biographical study of Claude Gay, who had died three years previous in Paris. Barros Arana, a known admirer of Gay's work, recounted various episodes of the natural scientist's life with a particular emphasis on the time he spent in Chile and his legacy in the country. Although there are very few references to his position as the director of the National Museum, one particular passage in the work serves to open up the topic that this chapter seeks to scrutinise. Recounting the end of the scientist's exploratory voyages in 1838, the historian notes:

[The only room in the Museum] was fitted with a modest yet more or less convenient shelving unit, and Gay spread out across it many samples of animals, plants and minerals that he had collected on his expeditions. There, he also found a place for objects of indigenous production that he had managed to acquire in the hopes of also forming a section of Chilean antiquities.¹

The description of how the room was organised is crucial for the approach that will give shape to this chapter. Barros Arana makes an association between "objects of indigenous production" and "Chilean antiquities" as units that belong to the same universe, that gives them the same meaning, even making them work as synonyms. This association, as we will see, is the result of ideological operations that established the world of the "Indians"—their history, their objects and the myths constructed about them—as an immutable past that preceded the present of the republic. In this chronological structure, the indigenous peoples were presented as a prelude to national history, as representatives of the nation's "prehistory". They were, however, denied a part as active subjects of the republican present. This leads to an understanding of indigenous

¹ Diego Barros Arana, "Don Claudio Gay, su vida i sus obras. Estudio biográfico i crítico escrito por encargo del Consejo de la Universidad de Chile [1876]" in *Obras completas de Diego Barros Arana*. Tomo XI: Estudios Histórico-Bibliográficos. (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1911), 347.

peoples as subjects that belong to a bygone time that, incongruously, is both “ancient” and “Chilean”.

The role that nineteenth-century historiography played in constructing this chronological configuration is a matter that its present-day counterpart has broadly and critically studied.² However, until now, there has been little exploration of the role that collecting and exhibiting practices, as well as museum and exhibitions, played as agents in the process. This is where my approach comes in: this chapter will provide evidence of how certain practices associated with the museum contributed towards the symbolic annihilation of indigenous communities in the nation-state building process in Chile over the course of the 19th century. To do this, the central hypothesis that I propose is that both the National Museum and other exhibitions contributed towards this process through the collection, classification and exhibition of indigenous material culture, under the category of “Chilean antiquities”.

The theoretical reference that I wish to take as a starting point is the broadly accepted thesis of the Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai who, in his proposal for examining the value and social life of things, argues that value “is never an inherent property of objects, but is a judgement made about them by subjects.”³ With this idea in mind, I argue that the indigenous objects collected or produced to be put on display in museums and exhibitions in Chile in the 19th century are not “ancient” *per se*, but rather they fit with an ordering of time constructed from one specific standpoint: the formation of the nation-state and the interests of the ruling class. Assuming that museums and exhibitions had agency in this process, we shall observe that the narratives surrounding the origin of the nation took their shape and meaning not just from the elements of the collections and exhibitions, but also from the way in which these practices were implemented and the criteria and interests involved.

Therefore, the methodological approach of this chapter will go beyond the institutional limits of museums and exhibitions to read their practices within a broader set of cultural, political

² Key on this issue are the works of Germán Colmenares and José Carlos Chiaramonte. See: Germán Colmenares, *Las convenciones contra la cultura: Ensayos sobre la historiografía hispanoamericana del siglo XIX* (Santiago: Centro de Investigaciones Barros Arana, 2006), and José Carlos Chiaramonte, *Fundamentos intelectuales y políticos de las independencias. Notas para una nueva historia intelectual de Iberoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2010). It is also important to note that this issue was not exclusive to Chile. Quite the opposite, it is a mirror of a Pan-American phenomenon rooted on evolutionary thinking and colonial legacies regarding race. The Chilean case, however, presents certain specificities that will be discussed throughout this chapter.

³ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

and symbolic actions. As part of an endeavour to structure time, these strategies would end up justifying the use of indigenous material culture as museum pieces due to the alleged extinction of their producers. As part of the process that over the course of the century shaped out the canonical narrative of national history, the practices of collecting and exhibiting indigenous materialities and subjects managed to make visible a discontinuous temporality based on setting the old in contrast to the new. Identifying discourses associated with this structuring of time, as well as the shifts in the history of the life of objects and subjects on display are the axes that will give shape to my analysis, which I have based upon a rich textual corpus made up of bureaucratic notes, catalogues, deeds of donation and purchase, letters, newspapers and other printed and handwritten materials.

Between the Old and the New

As many studies from the field of Latin American cultural history have argued, the narrative genre of *historias patrias* was particularly central to the configuration of national identities in the region. The emergence of this genre, following the widely accepted argument of historian David Brading, is intertwined with a process in which an ideology takes on a specific form through written narratives. The core idea in these stories is that for pro-independence *criollos*, the “nation was already in existence prior to the advent of the Spaniards and now about to recover its freedom, thus reversing the injustice of the conquest.”⁴ Throughout the 19th century, these *historias* contributed towards constructing accounts that gave meaning and coherence to the republican project for the then ex-colonies. In these constructions, independence operated as a foundational, almost epiphanic, event that marks a watershed moment between “what we were” and “what we are”. This was an exercise in ordering time in a linear and structured way through a strict binary between the old and the new. In this structuring of time, the local intelligentsia placed the indigenous populations at the start of their chronology, setting them up as the representatives of a remote and distant past, which stood in contrast to the “newness” of the independent *criollos*. In this way, the indigenous communities came to represent antiquities.

⁴ David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

As was also the case in the rest of the Spanish-speaking nations in the Americas, the Chilean *criollos* invoked the indigenous world to construct images in which both the *criollos* and indigenous populations belonged to a tradition of struggle and resistance against a shared enemy: Spain. While we can identify this manner of ordering time across different regional “*historias patrias*”, the Chilean case contains elements that fed into the configuration of a very specific “antiquity”. During the early decades of the 19th century, the local ruling class sketched out a genealogy that established a continuous lineage between the “old” Chileans, (the Mapuche world) and the new Chileans (the revolutionary *criollos*). This was so deeply ingrained that, in 1819, Bernardo O’Higgins, by then Supreme Director of the country, even declared that the Mapuches and the *criollos* were “descendants of the same father.”⁵ In this account, the “ancient brothers” of the Chileans only existed as abstract references to a distant past without agency or real participation in the national project. The metaphor of the “greater Chilean family” that, as we will see in the next chapters, structured 19th-century identarian narratives, construed the living indigenous populations as the unwanted relative, quite literally banished from the core.

One key element of this strategy was the *criollos*’ appropriation of the epic poem *La Araucana*.⁶ This text, written between 1557 and 1559 by the Spanish soldier Alonso de Ercilla, narrates the tale of Mapuche characters, (or “Araucanians” as the Spanish conquistadors called them),⁷ and originally sought to legitimate the annexation of Chile into the Spanish empire. However, the epic underwent a process of symbolic manipulation in the first half of the 19th century. In this process, the élites reclaimed the attributes that Ercilla used to describe the indigenous resistance against the first waves of colonisation in the 16th century—strong, brave, gallant and respected men—to work themselves into a tradition of struggle against the Spanish

⁵ Bernardo O’Higgins, “El supremo director del Estado a nuestros hermanos los habitantes de la frontera del sur” [Letter, signed on March 13, 1819], in *El Mostrador*, August 20, 2014 (online) <http://surl.li/heipj>

⁶ *La Araucana* is a poem in the epic genre, made up of thirty-seven cantos, divided into three sections. It was written by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, a Spanish soldier and a courtier in the court of Charles V and, subsequently, Philip II. Between 1557 and 1559, Ercilla took part in the military campaign to overthrow the Mapuche people and bring their territory under the control of the Spanish empire. Against this backdrop, he wrote *La Araucana*, which was published and printed in Madrid in 1569, 1578 and 1589. In formal terms, the intention behind the poem was to inform King Philip II about the state of the wars of conquest at the southern reaches of his Empire. For this reason, the text is of an official nature and, as such, it functions as a representation of the theretofore unknown territory of the Kingdom of Chile.

⁷ It was the custom of the Spanish conquerors to name indigenous groups after the territories they inhabited. Thus, the inhabitants of the area of Arauco—namely, Mapuches, Picunches, Moluches, Puelches, Huilliches and Chiquilanes—came to be called “Araucanos.”

foe that legitimised their own emancipation.⁸ This process also led to a shift in the interpretation of the poem. Both nineteenth-century historiography and the state's educational projects took the text to be something more than a literary artefact: a historical apparatus and, understanding it as such, documentary evidence of an unquestionable past. We can see proof of the extent of this belief in Barros Arana, the same historian referenced at the beginning of this chapter, who made an appeal in 1884 to overlook any aesthetic analysis of the poem to “only remember its value as a historical document.”⁹

This context helps us to understand how to the *criollos* viewed themselves as the legitimate heirs to the Mapuche protagonists of *La Araucana*. Through various motions of appropriation, the indigenous people of the text were brought to life to craft a national origin myth that also served as evidence of the “character” of the modern Chileans: “of sturdy nerves, agile, self-assured and bold” in the defence of the country they had come to govern. This led to a boom of references to this origin myth in the post-independence years: from the first national coat of arms that depicts an Araucanian man and woman holding up their weapons (Fig. 11, currently on display in the *Libertad* room at the National History Museum) to the names of countless newspapers: *El Monitor Araucano* [The Araucanian Observer] (1813-1814), *La Ilustración Araucana* [The Araucanian Enlightenment] (1813), *El Despertador Araucano* [The Araucanian Awakener] (1823), *La Década Araucana* [The Araucanian Decade] (1825-1826), *El Insurgente Araucano* [The Araucanian Insurgent] (1827) and, among others, *El Araucano* [The Araucanian] (1830-1877), the official state newspaper.

The Chilean intellectual movement of the first half of the 19th century contributed towards the consolidation of this image through references that glorified the feisty nature and the sharp wits of the “Chileans of yore”. For example, in 1844, the essayist José Victorino Lastarria claimed that “in Chile, there were no degraded and faint-hearted indigenous men who only needed to be tricked in order to conquer, command and enslave them, but rather a proud and brave people.”¹⁰ In addition, in 1862, the historian Miguel Luis Amunátegui argued that Lautaro, one of the figures in the poem, had “the toughest and strongest heart ever contained in a human

⁸ “Canto” 1: They [Mapuches] are of rugged gestures, beardless, Their bodies well-formed and grown, Great backs, haughty chests, Stocky limbs, of sturdy nerves, Agile, brash, bold.

⁹ Diego Barros Arana, *Historia general de Chile*. vol. 1 (Santiago: Rafael Jover Editor, 1884), 275.

¹⁰ José Victorino Lastarria, *Investigaciones sobre la influencia social de la conquista y del sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta del Siglo, 1844), 22-23.



Figure 11: “Escudo usado por el Estado de Chile durante la Patria Vieja.” [1812]
(Coat of arms used by the state of Chile during the *Patria Vieja*).
Paintings Collection, National History Museum of Chile.
Photography by Marcela Covarrubias, 2023.

chest.”¹¹ All of these actions contributed towards the consolidation of the origin myth of Chilean national identity based on the attributes of the Mapuche people that Ercilla depicted, to such an extent that Andrés Bello went so far as to described the poem as “our Aeneid.”¹²

However, the Mapuche people who lived alongside the *criollos* in the newly formed country were completely side-lined in the national project. Paradoxically, the only indigenous people that held a place within the narrative of national identity were those who no longer existed. The public policy of the Chilean state deemed the indigenous population to be a hindrance to the development of the fledgling country. For the ruling class, the Mapuche people who lived within the same national territory as they were not only different from the “brave men” described by Ercilla, but their complete opposite. Amunátegui described his Mapuche contemporaries as the true representation of barbarism, incapable of governing themselves “because they are ignorant and indolent.”¹³ The same writer that celebrated the heroism of the characters in the poem went on to argue that it would be impossible to compare the “Chilean character” with the living indigenous populations. In a talk that he gave to the students at the University of Chile in 1878, the then Minister of Public Instruction described the Mapuche people as the “mastodons of civilisation” and asked his audience,

Would any of you men wish to be like an Araucanian man? None of you would. Would any of you women wish to be like an Araucanian woman? None of you would. This instinctive disgust is legitimate, fair and more than fair. It should not come as a surprise to any of us, and we most certainly should not decry it.”¹⁴

Justifying itself in the struggle against the “Indians” barbarism, the state started out on a process of internal colonisation in the name of the “Pacification of Araucanía”,¹⁵ which was of a

¹¹ Miguel Luis Amunátegui, *Descubrimiento y conquista de Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta Chilena, 1862), 407.

¹² Andrés Bello, “La Araucana por don Alonso de Ercila y Zuñiga,” AUCH, vol. XXI, no. 1 (1862): 2-11.

¹³ Amunátegui, *Descubrimiento*, 22.

¹⁴ “Discurso del Ministro de Instrucción Pública en la distribución de premios a los alumnos de las escuelas de Santiago, celebrada en la alameda el 1 de enero de 1878.” AUCH, vol. 54, no.2 (January-September 1878): 17-18.

¹⁵ The misnamed “Pacificación de la Araucanía” [Pacification of Araucania] was a project designed by the Chilean state to occupy the ancestral territories of the Mapuche people by force. Although the phenomenon was coetaneous with the formation of the republic, the period between 1860 and 1890 was the most “successful” for the state as it managed to bring those territories into its administration through forced usurpations. This is, without a doubt, a clear example of internal colonisation that has been erased from official histories.

different nature to the Spanish colonisation of the past. While the latter had inherently altered the Mapuche people's lives, the Araucanian communities were active agents in the Chilean colonial apparatus. Either through their own resistance or their strategies for trade and exchange of goods, the indigenous populations displaced southwards of the Biobío River acted as participant subjects in the system imposed by the Spanish Crown. By the early 19th century, Mapuche society has reached great political, social and economic complexity, which allowed them to operate with a certain autonomy from the colonial regime.¹⁶ Later in the century, however, this autonomy started to become a problem for the project to consolidate the Chilean state and national identity. This led the ruling class to develop a range of strategies to bring the Mapuche people into the project of "Chile" by force. Among these strategies was the conceptualisation of the indigenous world as "ancient" and representative of an obsolete past.

To justify the "bygone" nature of the indigenous world in contrast to the republican present, the élites who tasked themselves with writing the history of Chile embraced the idea that the autochthonous populations had died out. Initially, as an inevitable act of fate, as Andrés Bello argued in 1844, stating that "judgement has been passed to destroy the native man. The indigenous races disappear and will be ultimately lost in the colonies of the transatlantic peoples."¹⁷ This matter is intertwined with the influence that the civilisation-barbarism dichotomy supported by the Argentinian politician and intellectual Domingo Faustino Sarmiento held in both Chile and a large swathe of Latin America. In fact, Sarmiento had a critical view of the "mythologising" of the Mapuche people, who he thought to be savage and lice-infested "vile Indians"¹⁸ for whom he claimed to feel "an insurmountable disgust."¹⁹ Along these same lines, the liberal politician and intellectual Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna—who, as we will see later on,

¹⁶ In this regard, historian Rolf Foerster states: "During the 18th century, Mapuche society underwent important transformations in the economic and political spheres. Livestock, destined for trade with the Spanish-*criollo* society, became the main economic activity, driving the expansion of Mapuche territory towards the "Argentinian" pampas. (...) At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, Mapuche society (...) experienced a period of economic boom and full political autonomy under the leadership of great *lonkos* [chiefs] linked by relations of cooperation or conflict." Rolf Foerster, "Sociedad mapuche y sociedad chilena: la deuda histórica," *Polis. Revista Latinoamericana* 2 (2002) [online] <http://journals.openedition.org/polis/7829>

¹⁷ Andrés Bello, *Repertorio Americano, textos escogidos* (Santiago: Penguin Random House, 2019), 282.

¹⁸ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, "El Progreso," *El Nacional*, November 25, 1876, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

organised various “historical” exhibitions—defended the Chilean state’s invasion of Mapuche territories in 1868,²⁰ arguing:

The Indian (not the one of Ercilla, but the one who has come to slit the throats of our [gold] panners in the Malleco [river] and to mutilate our noble soldiers with horrible infamy is nothing more than an untameable brute, the enemy of civilisation because he only adores the vices in which he is constantly embroiled, idleness, drunkenness, lies, treachery and all that array of abominations that make up the life of the savage.²¹

Since they were of little use to the national project, Bello's prophecy seems to have come true, and the extinction of the indigenous population was taken to be given from the middle of the century onwards. Lastarria’s own words illustrate this: in 1844, when celebrating the Mapuche past, he claimed that, at that point, the indigenous populations “have disappeared forever”²² not “even leaving any trace of their existence.”²³ Along these same lines, Vicuña Mackenna argued in 1869 that “it can be truthfully said that the aborigines have completely disappeared from among us.”²⁴ While in 1875, Barros Arana came to the conclusion that Chile was different from all other Latin American countries since “the indigenous race has disappeared; the language of the aborigines that populated Chile is completely unknown.”²⁵ In 1861, Rudolph Philippi, director of the National Museum, informed his German colleagues of the need to collect materialities from the Mapuche world due to an imminent “extinction of the Araucanians.”²⁶

²⁰ This invasion—part of the “Pacification” project—was one of many carried out by the state during the latter third of the 19th century. As a result, the state incorporated a surface area of 510,386 hectares into its territory, thus instigating the forced migration (mainly to urban areas) of thousands of newly impoverished Mapuche people.

²¹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *La conquista de Arauco. Discurso pronunciado en la cámara de diputados en su sesión del 10 de agosto de 1868* (Santiago: El Ferrocarril, 1868), 11.

²² Lastarria, *Investigaciones*, 88.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, “Nota a las obras de Lastarria,” in *Colonización, resistencia y mestizaje en las Américas*, ed. Guillaume Boccara (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2002), 29.

²⁵ Diego Barros Arana, “Jeografía Etnográfica. Apuntes sobre la etnografía de Chile,” *AUCh*, vol. 47, no. 1 (January-December, 1875): 11.

²⁶ Rudolph Philippi, “Das Aussterben der Araucanier in Chile,” *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*. Justus Perthes. Gotha. vol. VII, 1861.

With all of this, the alleged disappearance of the indigenous communities opened up an opportunity in the nascent field of museums in Chile. Since they were deemed to be extinct communities, the remnants of their material productions were registered as vestiges of a bygone era. As a result, there was a growing concern for recovering and conserving material (and bodily) traces as museum pieces. By understanding the “Chilean antiquities” as reflections of the country’s prehistory, the Chilean intellectual élite were able to frame them, not through the lens of history, but rather through that of archaeology and “curiosities”. In this way, as the evidence analysed below shows, museums and exhibitions were active agents in the symbolic annihilation of indigenous communities in Chile. Their rooms materialised the discourses that deemed those people to be from a ancient age, almost extinct, representing a distant and unknowable time.

Antique Curiosities

The construction of a national temporality structured around the old/new binary goes beyond the intellectual discourses analysed in the previous section. The displacement and relegation of indigenous communities to the prehistory of Chile is a matter that we can identify in particular actions. This includes specific lines of argumentation that justified the collection and exhibition of indigenous materialities, which serve as proof of the agency that museums and exhibitions had in the process. At this point, I wish to return to the work (and contribution to the production of this temporality) of Claude Gay and the Cabinet of Natural History that he oversaw.

As we saw in the first chapter, the Chilean government hired Gay in 1830 to produce an inventory of the natural world in the country as part of a scientific voyage and to found a cabinet of natural history in the capital. As part of his work, the French scientist paid particular attention to the study of the Mapuche people, justifying the necessity of collecting “Araucanian artefacts” in the “natural” condition of their makers. Arguing in favour of the importance of this research, he wrote that their “pride and daring give a huge amount of interest to the study of the Araucanian nation, which was the subject of Ercilla’s glorious epic.”²⁷ However, Gay’s notes show that there was a dialogue between his vision and the discourses that, as we saw in the previous section, construed the Mapuche people as representatives of a bygone age out of joint with the republican present.

²⁷ *El Araucano* 544, January 29, 1841, 2.

Just like the *criollos*' historiography and intellectual output, Gay wrote that the Spanish invasion of the 16th century "was the heroic era of the Araucanians."²⁸ In this "golden age", the Mapuche people "deployed all of their force of audaciousness and courage,"²⁹ displaying "the truly fierce and independent nature of this brave people."³⁰ Moreover, Gay noted that the material traces that bore witness to their struggle against the Spanish empire showed "the hallmark of an originality undiscovered, until then, in the ancient world,"³¹ thus contributing toward the mythologising of the characters in the poem and the construction of a national temporality that, just like the West, had a "classical antiquity". However, when it came to the work he conducted in the 1830s, Gay observed and reported on a completely different scenario that was disconnected from that glorious age:

[now,] the most severe loss for them is the rigour of the soul, which, in years gone by, they put into all of their actions, and which now only appears in the diminutive. The Araucanians are, in fact, no longer those valiant and audacious men who resisted the Spanish armies and their well-studied tactics with such bravery."³²

Based on these records, we could posit that Gay's conclusions are not only in dialogue with 19th-century racial discourses, but rather they also contribute towards the transformation of both indigenous communities and their material productions into "antiquities". The observations of the director of the Cabinet of Santiago form part of a repertoire of discourse that sets up a chronology that draws a line between the heroic mythologising of the Mapuche past and the alleged loss of this heroism in the present of the republic. Through this perspective, it appears logical that Mapuche material culture would take on the status of museum pieces as the traces left by a community that, while once glorious in the past, did not count as subjects with active agency in the process of forming the Chilean nation-state.

Despite Gay's express interest in studying the Mapuche people, we do not know of any examples of collections of indigenous materialities in the Museum before 1840. It was that year

²⁸ Claude Gay, *Usos y Costumbres de los Araucanos* [Translation and edition by Diego Milós] (Santiago: Taurus, 2018), 348.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *El Araucano* 544, January 29, 1841, 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

when the director informed the government that he was working on collecting “objects belonging to the industry of the ancient Indians.”³³ The following year in 1841, he made a suggestion to the Minister of Public Instruction, Manuel Montt, writing that “it would be fitting for Your Honour to directly instruct the Intendants and Governors to obtain all of the ancient curiosities that are spread out across the Republic.”³⁴ In Gay's opinion, the exclusive collection of material samples from the Mapuche world—pieces described as ancient and curious—would allow him to turn them into “a particular cabinet, a true national museum that would give an idea of the civilisation of those Indians.”³⁵

This suggestion, I would argue, is directly related to the destabilisation that such objects caused in the system of organisation that Gay used for the materials he collected. In his museological vision, the pieces of indigenous material culture amounted to a classificatory unit structured around their temporality: they were antiquities that eluded the taxonomies of natural history employed in the cabinet that he ran. Apart from the “antique” nature of these pieces, they are also described as “curiosities”; in other words, elements that, while interesting, do not fall within the standards of classification of Enlightenment scientism. There is evidence of this in 1841, when Gay addressed Montt and the National Congress to describe the state of the cabinet under his management. In his address, the director listed a series of “curiosities” that did not fit within the categories that configure the unit of the “Chilean natural world”:

Apart from these objects, the cabinet now possesses a large number of curiosities that I have managed to collect or that have been donated by good patriots. For that reason, we now see 183 national or foreign coins or medals that could serve as a basis for a more complete coin and medal collection, various weapons from the South-Sea savages, some natural monstrosities and, most of all, some ten antiquities that belonged to the Indians of Chile before conquest. When we have collected a good number of the latter object, we will be able to form some notion about those peoples that are now lost to history.³⁶

³³ “Carta de Claudio Gay a Mariano Egaña, Santiago, 12 de diciembre 1840,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, vol. 51, fs. 70-70v.

³⁴ *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Historia Natural*. vol. XXII: “Homenaje a Claudio Gay” (Santiago: S/I, 1944), 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Gabinete de Historia Natural. Cámara de Diputados. Sesión 7 Extraordinaria en 15 de noviembre de 1841.” SCLRCh, vol. 30 (1841), 21.

There are various elements of this excerpt that are important to my analysis. First, the description of the donors as “good patriots” confirms the role of the museum as a nation-building project. Second, the taxonomical collapsing of pieces of indigenous material culture and other “curiosities” that, along with other “monstrosities”, did not fall within the classificatory limits of natural history. Last, it is telling that the appreciation of these objects lay in their archaeological potential as antiquities, pieces from a supposedly extinct community. In claiming that the collecting and exhibiting of these kinds of objects would allow Chileans to learn about “those peoples that are now lost to history,” Gay included the Museum and its practices in the repertoire of discourse that, as we have seen, worked on the assumption that living indigenous communities had become extinct in order solely to recover their mythical and “prehistoric” past.

This matter allows us to differentiate the case of Chile from other Latin American contexts. For the ruling class, the only salvageable attribute of the Mapuche people was the bravery of their ancestors in the struggle against the Spanish Empire, which *criollos* and their descendants also deemed to be their common enemy. In the eyes of the élites, the population groups that inhabited pre-Hispanic Chile did not create what Western standards deemed to be “monumental architecture” or “complex art”. In fact, Gay himself noted that “there was nothing similar—neither monuments or traditions—in Chile when the Spanish arrived.”³⁷ In contrast with other countries in the region where, according to historian Rebecca Earle, “[p]re-Columbian ruins were a sign of the greatness of preconquest civilizations, and therefore were important to the State,”³⁸ in Chile the greatness of its “prehistoric peoples” lay in a more symbolic than material value, one that changes between past and present. Unlike the cases of Mexico and Peru, where the construction of national narratives made appeals to their continuity with the Aztec and Inca Empires respectively, in Chile, the indigenous past was deemed to be extinct and lost. As Earle argues in her discussion of this case, “[n]ineteenth-century elites thus stressed not the continuities linking the preconquest past with the contemporary indigenous population but rather the discontinuities separating one from the other.”³⁹

In this way, we can see that early collecting practices in Chile participated in the rhetorical celebration of the Mapuche past and, simultaneously, in the chronological division set up to

³⁷ Gay, *Costumbres*, 344.

³⁸ Rebecca Earle, *The return of the native. Indians and myth-making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 138.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

differentiate the time of the Araucanians and that of the Chileans. The National Museum consolidated these practices through its policies of collecting and exhibiting. The creation of the Ethnography and Archaeology Section in 1861 paved the way for the materialisation of a discourse that collapsed indigenous pieces and curiosities into the same taxonomical universe. In 1858, Philippi, the director of the Museum at the time, claimed in a brochure that this section “shall house all objects of mere curiosity,”⁴⁰ adding that “curious objects from antiquity should be stored [there] and, specifically, those that belonged to the indigenous people of Chile, should be brought together.”⁴¹

Between Monsters and Curiosities

As we have mentioned before, Gay addressed the National Congress in 1841 to inform it that, apart from the inventory of the “Chilean natural world”, the Museum he handed back to the government also contained “a large number of curiosities” and “antiquities that belongs to the Indians of Chile.”⁴² However, in his address, he did not go into detail about which objects he had classified as curiosities or antiquities. We have also noted that even though he was tasked with drawing up a catalogue of the collection, the French natural scientist left the country without ever having fulfilled that clause. That said, my investigation had led me to accessing this information in an inventory created in 1843 by Francisco García-Huidobro, then the temporary director of the Museum.

García-Huidobro, who was also the director of the National Library, drew up an inventory “of the instruments and other tools in the Museum,”⁴³ upon the request of his superior, the Minister of Public Instruction. The inventory lists jars, display cases and working instruments, as well as a table in the annex that provides quantitative information on the number and classification of the specimen stored on each of the twenty-seven shelves in the museum. Listed in the margins of this table, in a gesture that makes their marginality explicit, the

⁴⁰ “Proyecto de Reglamento del Museo Nacional,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 84, October 9, 1858, s.f.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Gabinete de Historia Natural. Cámara de Diputados. Sesión 7 Extraordinaria en 15 de noviembre de 1841,” SCLRCh, vol. 30 (1841), 21.

⁴³ “Inventario de los artículos que contiene el Museo Nacional entregado por orden superior a Don Andrés Gorbea, en la forma en que lo entregó al que suscribe, Don Claudio Gay.” [attributed January 2, 1843], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 59.

Table 1

Location	Description
No information	- Two conjoined lambs and a human monstrosity - 1 skull of a monstrous calf - 4 monstrous and petrified lambs. - 2 bones of Indians - 1 human mummy
Unit 1	- One flute of the Indians, 1 small, petrified basket. - An idol, a clay vessel of the Indians - A kind of stone inkwell and a kind of bludgeon from the Indians.
Unit 9	- Six tools of the Indians, for fishing and Industry. - Two cords made by the same people from fish guts - Three clay vases from the same people. - A marble handle from the country [from the “Indians”?] - A musical instrument of the black people.
Unit 22	- A pair of gloves made by the Indians - Five stone tools of the Indians, in various shapes and for various uses, including a necklace. - A monstrous pearl. - A small axe and something like a copper hook of the Indians - Eleven monstrous eggs. - A small stone mortar and other things of little importance

Table 1: Curious Objects, Objects of the Indians and Monstrosities.

Table prepared by the author. Source:

“Inventario de los artículos que contiene el Museo Nacional entregado por orden superior a Don Andrés Gorbea, en la forma en que lo entregó al que suscribe, Don Claudio Gay.” [attributed January 2, 1843], ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 59.

inventory lists a series of pieces that do not fit into any of the categories used to classify the rest of the collection following the standards of the natural sciences (see Table 1).

As we can see, the list places pieces of indigenous material culture alongside “other” monstrosities, as if they should fall within the same universe of classification. The inventory groups “instruments of the Indians” with “a human monstrosity”, the “skull of a monstrous calf”, and “eleven monstrous eggs”, among other things. Irina Podgorny argues that the collapsing of pieces of natural history, monstrosities and indigenous antiquities into the same category was fairly commonplace in early museum experiences in the new nation-states of Latin America over the first half of the 19th century. The anthropologist concludes that these “are similar to the European cabinets from the late 18th century, in which monstrosities, giant bones, products of natural history, works of art and minerals were stored alongside coins and archaeological objects.”⁴⁴ What underlies the grouping together of these articles is clearly the predominance of the “curious” as a central pillar of early collecting practices in the region. Even as a taxonomical category, the concept of the curiosity allows for the grouping together of objects that are foreign to the standards of the known world from a positive perspective distinguished by the “desire, liking, hunger to see, know and understand things,” according to the *Diccionario de Autoridades* of 1729—the first ever Spanish dictionary published by the Royal Academy.⁴⁵ The inclusion of monsters in the museum is indicative of the continued existence of certain colonial discourses in which the monstrous belongs to the semantic world of the curious, a concept that, otherwise, shifts nebulously between wonder and mystery. According to Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, in the Romance language tradition, these concepts were “a well-defined but also an extraordinary rich and complex emotion, with associations that crystallized into separate terms over the course of time.”⁴⁶ Bringing this matter back to Latin America, Nora Jaffary posits that “both contemporary sources and modern scholars have reported that monsters and monstrous births in colonial Latin America evoked loathing or freak show curiosity.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Irina Podgorny, “Naturaleza, colecciones y museos en Iberoamérica (1770-1850)” in *El museo en escena. Política y cultura en América Latina*, ed. Américo Castilla (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2010), 68.

⁴⁵ “Curiosidad.” *Diccionario de Autoridades*, vol. II (1729) [online] <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>

⁴⁶ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 16.

⁴⁷ Nora E. Jaffary, *Reproduction and Its Discontents in Mexico: Childbirth and Contraception from 1750 to 1905* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 142.

“Monsters,” argues theorist Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “frustrate our epistemological strategies for making sense of the world.”⁴⁸ We can see the workings of this logic when analysing Philippi's frustrations when he took charge of the National Museum in 1853. The German scientist was not only astounded by the scarcity of the collection there, but also by number of monstrosities on display in its one chaotic room. Among these, he found “a sheep with two heads, a pig with five legs, hens with three feet, etc.”⁴⁹ and “even human phenomena.”⁵⁰ In fact, the Museum had considerably expanded its collection of monstrosities in the decade before Philippi's arrival. For example, in 1844, *El Araucano* wrote of the “enrichment of the Museum collection”⁵¹ with a “double foetus with two separate head with their own necks”⁵² that “is on display to the public in the Museum.”⁵³ Later, in 1850, the English travel writer Fred Walpole wrote of his impressions after visiting the museum. Apart from pointing to the display of “a number of Indian curiosities,” he concluded that “[a]ll the horrors and monstrosities seem to be collected here, -animals with supernumerary heads, bodies, and legs; babies of every shape.”⁵⁴

The critical aspect of this matter for my research is the fact that, within the Museum, indigenous objects and monstrosities belonged to the same unit of classification: curiosities. The ordering and exhibiting of “tools of the Indians” alongside monstrous phenomena is testament to a classificatory operation that placed them on the same level in terms of strangeness and marginality. The association between the indigenous and the monstrous, however, is nothing new since the characterisation of indigenous subjects as monstrous had significant implications for the Spanish colonial project. This is, in fact, an issue that we can identify even in the earliest colonial chronicles of the 16th century. In these narratives, the meaning of the monstrous is collapsed and assimilated into accounts of savagery and barbarism. One implication of this was that the dehumanisation of native population enriched the arguments used to justify subjugating

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory” *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 19.

⁴⁹ Rudolph Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile,” *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Chile*. no.1 (Santiago: Imprenta Barcelona, 1908), 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Museo Nacional. Descripción de un feto doble,” *El Araucano* 730, August 16, 1844, 5.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Fred Walpole, *Four Years in the Pacific in Her Majesty's ship “Collingwood” from 1844 to 1848*. vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 163.

and evangelising them. As Weinstock argues, “‘monsterizing’ an existing group can also promote imperialist political agendas.”⁵⁵

Thus, placing monsters in the same category as indigenous pieces in the museum stems from a legacy of colonial thought, bolstered by the impossibility of classifying them in line with the parameters of Enlightenment scientism. Because of this, Philippi was swift to reject the inclusion of monstrous pieces in the museum. Even when these seem to be a huge attraction to the general public—“they were mainly of interest to the women who visited the museum,”⁵⁶ the director notes—the fact of the matter is that they did not fit into the system of classification for the “Chilean nature”. In his opinion, the monsters and other phenomena were more of a hindrance than an allure, since they “take up a large part of the room, considerably reducing the space for storing objects that actually belong to Natural History.”⁵⁷

The previous quote from Philippi is a turning point that excludes monstrous pieces from the catalogue of the National Museum. Because of this, one of his first measures was to remove the monsters from the exhibition room in the hope of sending them to an institute of teratology. However, there was no such institution in the country, since the public authorities had deemed that the museum was the space most suited to housing these phenomena and abnormalities. After years of back-and-forth, in 1878, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Chile, Wenceslao Díaz, accepted “to move the human monstrosities held in the natural history museum to this department [of medicine].”⁵⁸ This move shows that there was a paradigm shift in the system of classification, one in which the monstrous lost its value as a curiosity and became an object of scientific investigation. In fact, Díaz confirmed the importance of moving the monstrous objects once housed in the museum since they are “pieces that should be placed there [the Department of Medicine] rather than here [the Museum].”⁵⁹

By removing these items, Philippi enacted a powerful gesture in his drive to transform the National Museum of Chile into a modern institution that, as such, would be subject to the taxonomic systems of Western scientism. However, the distinction made between monsters and indigenous pieces was not a criticism of the “monsterisation” of the native population. It was

⁵⁵ Weinstock, “Introduction,” 14.

⁵⁶ Philippi, “Historia del Museo Nacional de Chile,” 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Instrucción Pública. Su estado en el año último según la memoria ministerial pasada al Congreso Nacional por el ministro del ramo en 1878,” AUCH, vol. 54, no. 2 (January - September 1878): 490.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

more the resolution of a conflict of classification that by no means tackled the racial problem underlying the matter. By contrast, as we shall see further on, the discursive association between monsters and native communities took shape in practices such as the exhibition of live indigenous people in the latter half of the 19th century, thus expanding their otherness, characterised by the exoticism and barbarism of their representatives, to even more radical levels.

However, unlike the fate of the monstrous pieces, the objects manufactured by the indigenous populations were not “thrown out” of the National Museum. Rather, they were subject to a review that situated them in an ambiguous place between natural history and national history. This confirms that these pieces caused a destabilisation of the canon: while the monsters destabilised the canon of the natural sciences, indigenous objects ruptured the canonical chronology. Just as the monsters did not belong to “Chilean nature”, the objects created by indigenous peoples did not belong to the “time of the Chileans”. Thus, their classification as “antiquities,” archaeological materials that represented a distant past and communities that had supposedly gone extinct. This also generated an institutional need to create a department that could certify this chronological distinction: the Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities.

The Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities

In 1858, Philippi wrote a draft document that organised the museum’s collections into three main categories: zoology, botany and mineralogy.⁶⁰ This document also acknowledged the existence of “antiquities” and “indigenous curiosities” that eluded this taxonomic framework. To remedy this problem, he asked the government for authorisation and resources to create a specific room in which to place those objects that, while interesting, “were extraneous to natural history.”⁶¹ As such, the Director managed to get a small room, next to the Museum's installations, which he called the “Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities”, which was intended for the collection and storage of “Chilean and American antiquities.”⁶²

By creating this room, Philippi separated the objects made by indigenous people from the rest of the museum’s collections, thus acknowledging their value while also distinguishing them

⁶⁰ ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, vol. 84, October 9, 1858.

⁶¹ “Museo Nacional. Mayo 13 de 1872,” AUCH. vol. XLII (1872): 265.

⁶² ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, vol. 84, October 9, 1858.

from the rest of the “natural world of the nation.” This was no little matter insofar as the German scientist did not dismiss the importance of collecting indigenous material culture, as long as those pieces did not disturb the systematic order of the categories of natural science. Unlike his perception of the eventual fate of the monstrous specimens, the director acknowledged the value of the indigenous tools as museum pieces, just not as pieces for a natural history museum. In fact, when he was made director in 1853, he remarked that the collection was lacking in both natural and indigenous pieces. In his memoirs, he notes that, at such point, “there were no other antiquities from the aborigines of Chile [other] than the objects listed on plates 1 and 2 of the Atlas of the Physical and Political History of Chile.”⁶³

Such plates (Figure 12) appear in the first volume of the *Atlas of the Physical and Political History of Chile* by Claude Gay, printed in Paris in 1854. Spread out across two pages, the edition includes drawings of eleven pieces by the French natural scientist with no description other than a title that binds them all within the same category: “Chilean Antiquities”. If we take into consideration Philippi’s words quoted above, it would be plausible to suggest that these antiquities were the sum of the “six tools of the Indians” and the “five stone tools of the Indians” listed in the 1843 inventory. However, apart from the pieces themselves, it is also of interest here to pick apart the role of the museum in classifying them as antiquities. Even though they were pieces in active circulation and produced by living communities, the evidence shows that, even in the early attempts to classify them, the Museum circumscribed the indigenous pieces within an ambiguous taxonomy: they were neither natural nor national, but rather archaeological.

Once open, the room of the “Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities” significantly expanded its collections of indigenous material culture. The evidence suggests that the inclusion of this collection in a network of exchanges made it possible for the Museum to increase the number of pieces through donations and purchases using the term “Antiquities” to justify their presence there. In so doing, the indigenous pieces took on a value that was, above all else, temporal: evidence of a different, remote, far-off past.

⁶³ Philippi, “Historia,” 9.

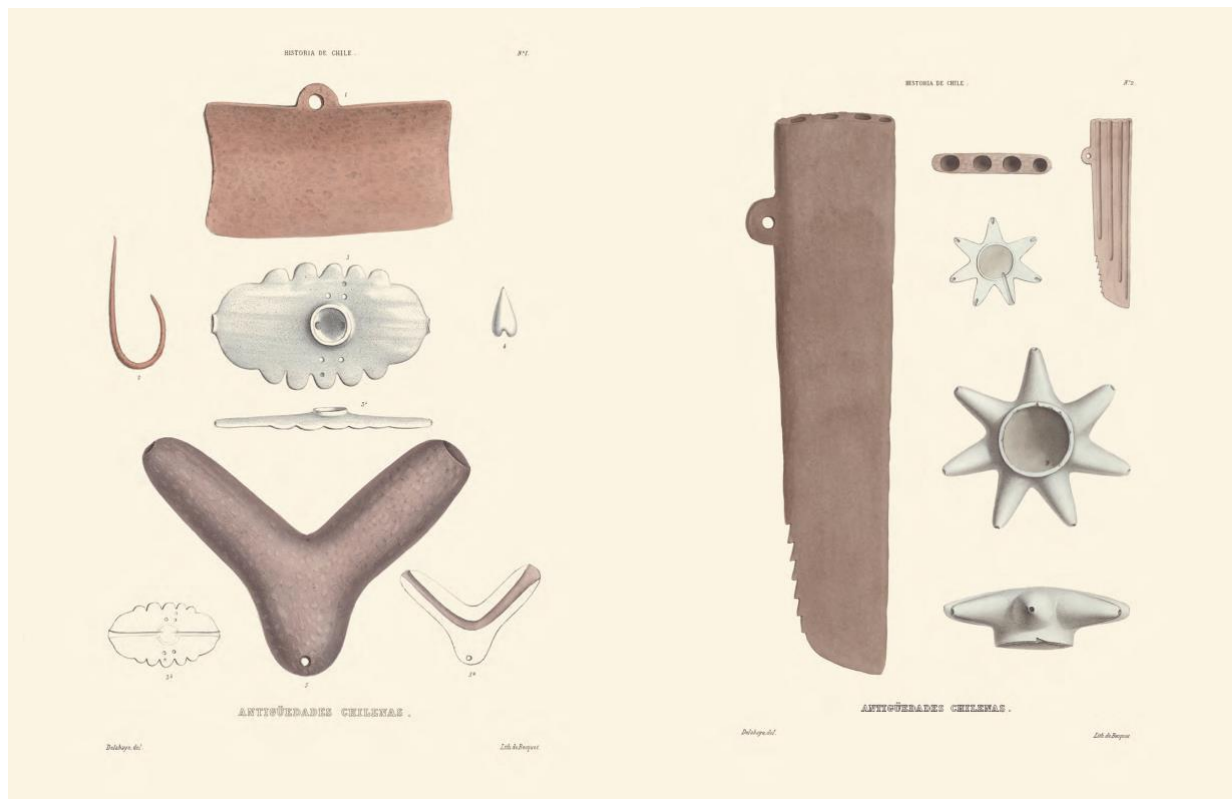


Figure 12: Gay, Claude “Antigüedades Chilenas.” (Chilean Antiquities)
in Gay, Claude. *Atlas de la Historia Física y Política de Chile*. (Paris: E. Thunot, 1854), 18-19.

There is documentary evidence of the explicit use of chronological frameworks that legitimated the classification of indigenous material culture as pieces “from another time”. By associating the indigenous communities with the past, both the Museum and other collecting practices contributed towards a two-pronged process that marginalised and excluded the members of such communities, while also appropriating that same past in order to make it national and Chilean. The chronological binary that separates prehistory from the history of the Chileans became explicit in the Museum's lines of argumentation. For example, in May 1861, Philippi praised the increase in “objects that refer to the industry of the indigenous of America and the ancient inhabitants of this part of the world.”⁶⁴ The collection of tools from the “ancient inhabitants” of the country had expanded thanks to the donation of “some stone tools that the ancient indigenous that inhabited the regions of Puerto Montt used to use in another time,”⁶⁵ and “a stone axe from those times.”⁶⁶ Later, in 1876, he addressed the Minister of Public Instruction, Miguel Luis Amunátegui, explicitly stating with regards to the Museum of Ethnography and Antiquities that “we should first limit ourselves to collecting and conserving the remains of the ancient Chileans.”⁶⁷ The Minister responded by saying that, indeed, the purpose of the room was to display “what the men were that used to live in this country before the Spanish conquest,”⁶⁸ as if those peoples no longer lived there.

In that same report, the minister thanked the historian José Toribio Medina for his contribution to the creation of this collection of antiquities. Medina, as Amunátegui recounts, “purchased, with the most intelligent zeal on behalf of the Museum, a large number of objects suited for making known what the industry and arts of the former population of the country were.”⁶⁹ Later, in 1885, Philippi informed the Minister that the Museum “despite being very modest in comparison [to European museums], now contains a number of rare and interesting objects, and it has now been notably enriched by the collection of Chilean antiquities that the supreme government has purchased from Don José Toribio Medina.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ “Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones, según informes de su Director. Mayo 17 i 20 de 1861,” AUCH, vol. XIX (1861): 427.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 424.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ [No title. November 26, 1876] ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, vol.138, fsn.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ “Museo Nacional,” AUCH, vol. LXVIII, no. 2 (1885): 1011.

The description of the Chilean antiquities as “rare and interesting” is clear evidence that these objects were valued as curiosities. Moreover, their classification as a “collection of Chilean antiquities” confirms the persistence and transversal nature of the establishment of the “indigenous world” in an immutable place in time that precedes the dawn of national history. However, while these objects were fixed in their assigned chronology, the category was open to new incorporations as the Chilean state expanded outwards in the last decades of the 19th century. This is shown in the list that Philippi drew up to report on the expansion of the collection in 1885:

Since these collections were created, I have acquired the following objects: two stone axes, a llaqui ball and two stones, the use for which I do not know, which I obtained in the Province of Valdivia; two perforated stones, that Don Gustavo Gabler donated to the Museum, which are from the Province of Ñuble; various pots from the Huacas of Antofagasta de la Sierra, from Atacama and from Iquique and some silver broaches made from teaspoons, which are in fashion in Atacama, all of these objects were brought in by the Tarapacá exploration committee.⁷¹

The incorporation of indigenous materialities from the provinces of Atacama and Tarapacá—territories that previously belonged to Bolivia and Peru respectively—shows the effects that the War of the Pacific (1879-1884)⁷² had on both the Museum’s collecting practices and also the shifts and extensions in how they collected “the traces of the ancient Chileans” as the state brought new territories under its jurisdiction. With the annexation of both of these territories and those in the Juan Fernández Islands (1834), Patagonia (1881) and Easter Island (1888), the Chilean state increased its territory to the point that it almost tripled in area from its original size when it declared independence in 1818. What is of the utmost importance for my analysis is the fact that, as a result of such expansion, other indigenous communities living in the newly annexed territories—such as the Diaguita people in the north, the Fuegian and Selk’nam people in the south, and the Rapa Nui people on Easter Island—stretched the limits of the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² This event is discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

“Chilean Antiquities” category, bringing in other materialities beyond those of the Mapuche people.

Curious Bodies: Mummies, Bones and Live Indigenous People

The malleable and dynamic nature of the “Chilean antiquities” category does not only show through in the changes caused by the state’s territorial expansion, but also the properties of the elements included in it. While, at first, the collection was exclusively material, as it grew, it started to incorporate organic traces that went beyond this materiality. From the 1840s onwards, the National Museum expanded its collection of antiquities with the incorporation of the mummies, skulls and bones of indigenous bodies. In the 1870s, a decade that was particularly rich in local exhibitions, they took these practices to the extreme with the exhibition of live indigenous people. As we shall see, the practice of collecting and exhibiting “Chilean antiquities” served as a colonising exercise that surpassed its territorial dimension to shift towards what some academics have theorised as the “colonisation of the body.”⁷³ As a result, the practices analysed in this chapter contributed towards the objectification, fetishisation and nationalisation of indigenous bodies.

The first records of this practice date back to 1839. That year, the Peruvian General Fernando Baquedano wrote to Francisco García-Huidobro, the director of the National Library, to pay homage to the “loyalty and patriotism” of the Chilean people with the donation of “an indigenous mummy that I have the honour to send to you [...] for it to be placed in the Museum under your care.”⁷⁴ The following year, García-Huidobro wrote to the Minister of Public Instruction to tell him that he had received a herbarium and a “mummy sent from Peru by General Baquedano.”⁷⁵ Deeming that these donations were not suitable for the Library, the director argued that “the natural place for both objects is clearly the Cabinet of Natural History,

⁷³ See, among others: Alejandra Araya Espinoza and Constanza Martínez Gajardo, “Nombrar el cuerpo en los vocabularios coloniales para el mapudungun de Chile (ss. XVII-XVIII),” *Atenea* 516 (2017): 13–32; y Ana Lucía Sá, “Polaridades Expoliadoras: La Escritura Sobre La Colonización Del Cuerpo,” *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* 67, no. 1 (2012): 297–318.

⁷⁴ “Fernando Baquedano a D. Francisco García Huidobro, Director de la Biblioteca y Conservador del Museo Nacional. Lima, 12 de junio de 1839” in: Stuardo Ortiz, *Vida de Claudio Gay*, 424–425.

⁷⁵ “Carta de Mariano Egaña a Francisco García Huidobro, Santiago, 25 de agosto 1840,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 29, n. 63.

which is currently being arranged by Mr Claudio Gay, and I think it would be most appropriate to send them to him so that he may put them in their rightful place.”⁷⁶

The understanding of the museum as the “natural” and “rightful” setting for the mummy hearkens back to the imported European perspective on the elements that could be included in a collection of curiosities. Early on in the Spanish invasion, the conquering armies identified various mummies and sent them back to Spain to be placed in the local cabinets owned by the Crown. For example, in 1536, the secretary of Francisco Pizarro, the conquistador who led the conquest of Peru, sent a shipment of curiosities to Madrid that included “two Indians in the manner of *embalsamados*.”⁷⁷ Some three-hundred years later in 1823, José de San Martín, an Argentinian General often referred to as the “Liberator of America” for his role in the struggle for independence, sent a mummy to King George IV of the United Kingdom as a donation for the British Museum. San Martín wrote to the monarch telling him that the mummy was “a proof of Peru’s ancient glory and renewed sovereignty.”⁷⁸

These examples prove that the value that the mummies had as museum pieces was, above all else, political. Even though the contexts may appear different, both cases understood the mummy to be an objectified indigenous body, the principal value of which is not in the body itself but rather in who possesses and controls it: the Spanish conquistador of the 16th century or the *criollo* revolutionary of the 19th century. This evidence leads me to the conclusion that this same logic applied to the case of Chile. As part of the process of territorial expansion of the state, I understand the practice of collecting mummies and bodily remains to be one of the many ways in which the ruling class implemented its internal colonisation plans that included the appropriation of indigenous bodies, transforming them into museum pieces and classifying them as “Chilean antiquities.”

The inventory of the National Museum drawn up by García-Huidobro in 1843 lists the existence of a “mummified human” in the collection (probably the one that Baquedano donated). In terms of organisation, the mummy was stored in a unit along with “two ribs, two vertebrae, 1 whale baleen, the head of a deer and an alligator,”⁷⁹ which attests to its animal-like condition and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Anonymous, ‘La conquista del Perú, llamada la Nueva Castilla. [Sevilla, 1534]’ in A.M. Salas, M.A. Guérin and J.L. Moure, eds., *Crónicas iniciales de la conquista del Perú*. (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1987), 110.

⁷⁸ Quoted in: Christopher Heaney, “Inca Mummy,” in *New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities*, eds. Mark Thruner and Juan Pimentel (London: University of London, 2021), 127.

⁷⁹ “Inventario,” in Stuardo Ortiz, *Vida de Claudio Gay*, 540.

classification as a foreign piece since the mummy is from Peru, and none of the specimen (except the whale) can be found within the Chilean territory. However, as the state expanded southwards and annexed the indigenous populations to its territory by force, the Museum started to include “Chilean mummies” in its collections of antiquities.

For example, in 1849, Ramón Lira, the Intendant of the Island of Chiloé (annexed as a province of Chile in 1843), informed the Minister of Public Instruction of the shipment to Santiago of “a mummy from the Guaitecas Islands [...] to add to the curiosities held in the Museum.”⁸⁰ Both this mummy and the one donated by Baquedano were included in the Museum's collection of antiquities and put on display under this classification. The *Guía del Museo Nacional* of 1878 lists the display of “a mummy found in Huano [Bolivia], donated by Don Fernando Baquedano”⁸¹ and an “Indian found on the Guaitecas Islands, a donation from Don Ramón Lira.”⁸² Both “curiosities”, the guide states, “seem in their attitude to still feel the cold that put an end to their days.”⁸³

Apart from these pieces, the Museum also added to its collection of mummies in the second half of the 19th century. In 1861, Philippi informed the Minister that they had “mummies from the Province of Tarapacá and the objects found alongside them in the tombs,”⁸⁴ and, in 1875, “two mummies found in Calama.”⁸⁵ These records are interesting since they show the Museum incorporating elements from territories that, at that point, were under the jurisdiction of Peru and Bolivia respectively. Later on, as a result of Chile’s triumph in the War of the Pacific and the annexation of the new provinces that were particularly rich in archaeological remains, the Museum made considerable expansions to its collection of mummies. For example, in 1885, Philippi wrote that the exploratory committee sent out to occupy the newly conquered territories had sent him “two intact mummies from Atacama and one of a little child in its crib from Pica.”⁸⁶ Years later, the mummies from these territories would no longer be classed as foreign, but rather Chilean.

⁸⁰ *El Araucano* 1000, September 5, 1849, 1.

⁸¹ *Guía del Museo Nacional*, 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones, según informes de su director. Mayo 17 i 20 de 1861,” AUCH, vol. XIX (1861): 427.

⁸⁵ Museo Nacional, *Guía*, 28.

⁸⁶ “Museo Nacional,” AUCH, vol. LXVIII, no.2 (1885): 1011-1012.

These records show that there was a close relationship between archaeological practice, the museum and the creation of national identities. The “Chileanisation” of elements that were once Peruvian or Bolivian—or rather of the Diaguita or Atacama people—and their incorporation into the category of “Chilean antiquities” speaks to the political and ideological dimension through which the National Museum and private collectors participated in the incorporation of these elements into the national imagination. As Stefanie Gänger argues, “[for Chileans] the collecting of indigenous artefacts in the previously Peruvian territories represented a proof of conquest, proprietorship, and ultimately incorporation.”⁸⁷

One of the key pillars in the collection and exhibition of the mummies is in the indivisible nature of their very structure. Mummies are entire human bodies whose principal value lies in them remaining as such. However, the practices analysed in this chapter also included incomplete bodies. Bones, skulls and skeletons that were once part of the bodies of indigenous subjects were not just part of the collecting and exhibiting strategies of the time, but also a way of dehumanising the native communities.

The expansion into and appropriation of Western Patagonia by the Chilean state provides a clear example of this matter. In the last decades of the century, the government oversaw various scientific expeditions to identify the resources available there and invited Philippi to act as an advisor to instruct the explorers on matters of natural history and how to collect specimens. As part of his instructions in 1871, the director of the Museum stated that “if ancient tombs are found, no skeletons, or at least skulls, should be left uncollected, nor should tools made of metal, stone, wood, etc., buried with them or that are found in the earth, such as stone axes, ancient pots, etc.”⁸⁸ Before, in 1869, Philippi reported that he himself had “opened some ancient tombs near to Osorno [and] was able to extract some skulls from them.”⁸⁹ Years later in 1876, he told the minister how important it was for the Patagonian expeditions to collect specimens “from the people that we call savages.”⁹⁰ Specifically, he expressed a desire to “primarily obtain skulls

⁸⁷ Stefanie Gänger, “Conquering the Past: Post-War Archaeology and Nationalism in the Borderlands of Chile and Peru, c. 1880-1920,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 4 (Oct. 2009): 696.

⁸⁸ “Exploracion científica practicada por orden del Supremo Gobierno i según las instrucciones del doctor don R. A. Philippi, por don Carlos Juliet, ayudante de la Comision Exploratoria del Mar i Costas de Chiloé i Llanquihue, a bordo del ‘Covadonga. Instrucciones relativas al viaje del Buque Covadonga. Diciembre 19 de 1869,” *AUCH*, vol. XXXIX (1871): 81.

⁸⁹ *El Araucano* 3429, October 8, 1869, 3.

⁹⁰ Rudolph Philippi, “Muestras i objetos de Magallanes para nuestro Museo Nacional,” *AUCH*, vol. L, n.2 (1876): 478.

from the Araucanians, Patagonians and Fuegians, and, where possible, entire skeletons from them.”⁹¹

All of this would suggest that these expeditions successfully contributed to the growing number of bones and full skeletons in the National Museum. Towards the end of the century, in 1897, Federico Albert, its Head of Collections, published a new guide to show visitors the way through the Museum. Among the units that contained “Chilean cats” and “Chilean otters” was Unit 23, which had no title but is described as housing “the skeleton of an *Araucanian*, which is unfortunately incomplete; followed by the skeletons of a *Woman* with wider hips than that of the *Man*.”⁹² On display among the taxidermized animals, the presentation of these “Araucanian skeletons” confirms the persistent dehumanisation of indigenous bodies and the Museum’s role in this practice over the course of the 19th century.

This matter laid the groundwork for critical reflection regarding the relationship between collecting practices, the body and colonisation. By means of an example, studies on the history of the body in Latin America consider the importance that the dominance over indigenous bodies—their gestures, clothing and, in general, their performativity—had as a colonial strategy during the centuries of Spanish rule on the continent.⁹³ If we deem the practice of collecting “Chilean antiquities” to be part of the forced appropriation of indigenous territories implemented by the Chilean state, we can clearly see a continuation of this dominance over the body as a strategy of internal colonisation; an action that, as we have seen, spread out into the realm of lifeless bodies. Stripped of the context of their original funeral rites to be exhibited in a museum’s display cabinets, mummified indigenous bodies and skeletal remains that were once part of a body become colonised once again in order to give meaning to the chronological construction of the Chilean national narrative.

The exhibition of human remains is not the only place we can identify the dehumanisation of indigenous bodies. A very graphic case of the persistence of such colonial practices is the failed attempt to put a Fuegian man, José Neira—a Hispanic name probably

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Federico Albert, *Guía del Museo Nacional. Bajos. Sala de Mamíferos* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1897) Emphasis in the original.

⁹³ See, among others: Alejandra Araya and Jaime Valenzuela, eds. *América Colonial. Denominaciones, clasificaciones e identidades* (Santiago: Ril Editores, 2010), and Alejandra Vega and Natalie Guerra, “Fajar/ceñir/envolver. Chumpi y fajas. Objetos y prácticas del vestir de indias y guaguas en Potosí y La Plata, siglos XVI y XVII,” *Fronteras De La Historia* 20, n.1 (2015): 200–229.

given to him after capture—on display as part of the Coloniaje Exhibition organised by the then Mayor of Santiago, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, in September 1873. This event, which is the central theme of the next chapter, sought to draw a stark line between the republican present of Chile and its colonial past through the exhibition of a wide range of material and visual displays. To achieve this goal, Vicuña Mackenna appointed an organisational committee that put together a collection of 600 pieces, including objects and paintings. However, the most important part for the argument at hand is that the event involved the first attempt—albeit a failed one—to exhibit living indigenous people as part of the curatorial approach.

The Coloniaje Exhibition hoped to include the presentation of “José the Fuegian cannibal”,⁹⁴ an indigenous Tehuelche (Patagonian) man taken captive in July 1873 by the Governor of the Magallanes Colony at the southernmost point of the country, the “Tierra de Fuego”. The publicity surrounding this part of the exhibition included a narrative to ratify his “savage nature” since, as the press at the time reported, after being captured, José had been taken prisoner “aboard a schooner, the captain, boatswain and three sailors of which had become the food for this man and two of his companions.”⁹⁵ Using this narrative for publicity, the Exhibition announced that they would be showing the “Fuegian anthropophagus” on Wednesday, 24 September 1873; however, José Neira fell ill in Santiago and, at first, his presentation was postponed until his health improved. The local press reported that the presentation of the “Indian hungry for human flesh”⁹⁶ had been suspended and that he, while still ill, put up a “tenacious resistance to the resources of medicine.”⁹⁷ “José the Fuegian,” *El Ferrocarril* announced, who “should have been on display yesterday at the Coloniaje Exhibition, is still ill. We hope that today or tomorrow, at the latest, he can be presented in public.”⁹⁸

The idea that José Neira should be “presented in public” in the capital shows just how dehumanising his exhibition would have been. Just like most of the “Chilean antiquities”, Neira was a curiosity for his contemporaries. However, this time it was a “living curiosity”, a being from “another time” who embodied barbarism and, by default, served as a foil to the values of the civilised Chilean. Presenting him as a cannibal takes this idea to the extreme. In fact, when

⁹⁴ *El Ferrocarril* 5553, September 23, 1873, 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *El Mercurio*, September 23, 1873, 2.

⁹⁷ *El Mercurio*, September 27, 1873, 2.

⁹⁸ *El Ferrocarril* 5553, September 23, 1873, 3.

Neira fell ill and could not be put on display on the advertised date, the press put this down to the fact that he was “lacking his favourite food”: human flesh.⁹⁹ Furthermore the newspaper *El Mercurio* wrote that “it was proposed to give him a remedy from the apothecary; but he rejected it, adding: *What would make me feel better is a little kid, raw or roasted, which would be better.*”¹⁰⁰

José Neira died without being put on display at the exhibition. Before dying, he received “the baptismal waters with great fervour”¹⁰¹ although, according to the press, “the poor thing was unable to say whether he regretted once having eaten a ship's captain and three sailors.”¹⁰² The association between the Fuegian peoples and cannibalism is indicative of a firmly held idea in the discourses of the time. Some years after the failed exhibition of Neira, the newspaper *La Lectura* wrote that cannibalism among the indigenous Tehuelche people even had certain gendered aspects: “The women devour the arms and chest, the men feed on the legs, while the torso is thrown into the sea.”¹⁰³

However, despite the failure of the Neira exhibition, there are records that, while scant, prove that in late September 1873, there was an open-air display in which a certain “cacique Caile” came to an agreement with Mayor Vicuña Mackenna regarding the presentation of a group of Tehuelche people at the top of the newly opened promenade on Cerro Santa Lucía, in the centre of Santiago. “The inhabitants of the disputed region of Patagonia and their veritably war-like yet not very appealing or beautiful appearance,” argues the newspaper *La República*, “are still drawing in the curious residents of Santiago.”¹⁰⁴ As a spectacle, the presentation of these indigenous people was most likely an itinerant exhibition that took them around a range of places in the capital in the last week of the month, with the goal of sating the curiosity of the *criollos* in the capital who were disappointed that they did not have the chance to see the Fuegian cannibal.

“It's quite unbelievable, but you just have to believe it,” exclaimed a journalist in *El Independiente*, “the Patagonians with their vile garb and repulsive figures are like lions for the curious men and women. They are put on display, they are walked through the streets, they are

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *El Mercurio*, September 23, 1873, 2. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰¹ *El Ferrocarril* 5557, September 27, 1873, 3.

¹⁰² *El Ferrocarril* 5559, September 30, 3.

¹⁰³ *La Lectura*, vol. 1 (Santiago: Rafael Jover, 1883), 3.

¹⁰⁴ *La República* 2339, September 24, 1873, 2.

even taken into some respectable homes.”¹⁰⁵ The travelling Tehuelche exhibition wound up in a final visit to the Coloniaje Exhibition, as *El Ferrocarril* reported, noting that “the audience left completely satisfied at the end of the day, having spent over 400 pesos at the ticket office.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the following year, Vicuña Mackenna named one of the paths on Cerro Santa Lucía, in the centre of Santiago, the “Trail of the Indians”, “because that was where the Patagonians and Araucanians rode up on horseback when they came to Santiago in September 1873.”¹⁰⁷

Despite the success of the presentation in terms of audience numbers and ticket revenue, the Tehuelche exhibition confirms one of the key points discussed in this chapter, namely the impact that the mythologising of the *La Araucana* narrative had on the discourses of accepting and incorporating one exclusive type of indigenous people into the Chilean national story. For example, *La República* claimed that:

The exercise of the Patagonians was not, however, an interesting spectacle, since as they are very poor horsemen, their evolution lacks the swiftness and dexterity of our old brothers and friends, the descendants of Caupolicán and Lautaro.¹⁰⁸

The reception of the “spectacle” in which the Tehuelche people were put on display for the *criollos* of the capital and the ill-fated attempt to put José Neira on display both confirm the persistence of a certain nostalgia for a mythologised indigenous past that was distant from republican Chile. The exhibition of living indigenous people makes it clear that the urban élites understood that there was a fundamental difference between the heroic natives of the past and the uncivilised barbarians of their present. In this respect, the presentation was a direct appeal to one of the key pillars of the modern museum, namely the empirical confirmation of an idea, in this case, the level of civilisation of “the Chileans” and the huge distance between them and “the Indians”. As such, the exhibition served to confirm that the Republic was also a “new era,”

¹⁰⁵ *El Independiente*, September 17, 1873. Quoted in Constanza Acuña, *Perspectivas sobre el Coloniaje* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2013), 10.

¹⁰⁶ *El Ferrocarril* 5559, September 30, 1873, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Álbum del Santa Lucía: colección de las principales vistas monumentos, jardines, estatuas i obras de arte de este paseo: dedicado a la Municipalidad de Santiago por su actual presidente B. Vicuña Mackenna* (Valparaíso y Santiago: E. Garreaud y Ca., 1874), XV.

¹⁰⁸ *La República* 2339, September 24, 1873, 2. Caupolicán and Lautaro are the main male characters of *La Araucana*.

vastly separate from the “ancient” world in which these subjects, allegedly approaching extinction, lived. In the *criollo* worldview of the second half of the 19th century, the native populations were a symbol of both the traces of a glorious past and the woeful decadence of their fate, thus confirming the racial superiority of “the Chileans”.

In Conclusion: A Not-So-Antique Practice

In this chapter, I have critically analysed the ways in which collecting and exhibiting practices—as developed within museums and exhibitions in Chile over the course of the 19th century—contributed towards the construction of a framework of chronology and identity articulated around the category of “Chilean antiquities”. The analysis of the production, collection and exhibition of the objects (and people) lumped into this category confirms the hypothesis that I put forth at the beginning of this chapter: the “ancient” nature of these materials is not an inherent condition but rather the result of a political and intellectual manoeuvre that was part of the process of constructing the Chilean nation-state.

In their attempts to piece together a narrative that would legitimise both their separation from Spain and their “right” to govern the country, *criollo* élites worked on the supposition that the indigenous communities that lived alongside them had gone extinct. This process made visible the construction of a chronology in which there was only space for the indigenous world as a precursor to the “age of the Chileans”. The consignment of the native communities to an immutable place in time—the prehistory of Chile—allowed the National Museum and other exhibitions to present indigenous material culture as curious antiquities that represented a distant past. This vision developed in parallel with a process of mythologising that positioned those self-same élites as the heirs to a heroic anti-colonial past, represented by the characters in *La Araucana*, a tradition suspended in time, as if there had been a long interruption caused by three centuries of Spanish occupation. Paradoxically, at the same time, the Chilean state was implementing its own internal colonisation plans articulated along many lines. Among these, as I have shown, the collecting and exhibiting practices of 19th-century Chile led to the symbolic erasure of its native communities, spurred on by the drive to collect pieces of their material culture and to classify them as antiquities.

However, the most interesting (and decisive) aspect of this matter is that the association between indigenous materialities and “antiquities” is not just confined to 19th-century

museological practices. Even today, in the 21st century, the National History Museum of Chile—a public institution that defines itself as the “depository and guardian of the material evidence of Chile's history”¹⁰⁹—still presents its permanent exhibition along a linear and evolutionary itinerary that reproduces the chronological structures analysed in this chapter. The room named “The First Inhabitants of Chile” (Fig. 13), which is the starting point of the itinerary, is a strange amalgamation that anachronistically lumps together pieces of material culture from the different indigenous communities in the country as if they were one and the same. This room mixes Mapuche materials with Diaguita, Selk’nam, Ona, Tehuelche and Rapa-Nui ones, to provide an account of all of the “ancient” people of Chile. The itinerary then moves on to the “Discovery and Conquest” room, (the names themselves are quite problematic), and, thereafter, progressively forward in time on a journey that would appear to “narrate” the history of the Chilean state.



Figure 13: “Room *Los primeros habitantes de Chile*.” (The First Inhabitants of Chile” Room), Photograph, 2021. National History Museum of Chile’s website.

¹⁰⁹ Museo Histórico Nacional, “Preguntas frecuentes” (online) <https://www.mhn.gob.cl/faq>

Much like the cases that I have analysed in this chapter, indigenous pieces are still only on display in the first room. In this story, there is no room to include them in any of the other 18 rooms with which the Museum structures its curatorial narrative, consigning the indigenous world to the field of archaeology, foreclosing its inclusion in the historical narrative. The exhibition of indigenous material culture described as “the first inhabitants” is nothing more than another way of reaffirming their “ancient” or even “curious” condition insofar as they are merely the prelude to the narrative that follows: the History of Chile.

This example proves that contemporary Chilean museums are yet to shake off the epistemological framework that shaped out collecting and exhibiting practices regarding the indigenous world. It also evidence of the often over-looked power that such practices held (and continue to hold) in the construction of national identities and discourses of belonging. There is also the possibility for investigating much broader questions, ones that are undoubtedly connected to the operations discussed thought this chapter. Matters such as internal colonialism, racism, the pillaging of the indigenous world, the marginalisation of Afro-descendant communities and, in general, the construction of multiple forms of otherness are the linchpins of the configuration of a canon of “Chileanness.” Scrutiny of the rationale through which museums and exhibitions organise their “indigenous” collections reveals both the agency that these kinds of institutions had in the process of constructing the nation-state, and the contribution they made in clearly neo-colonial practices. If, as their manifestos would suggest, the museums of the 21st century are to begin a process of decolonisation, it is crucial to understand the origin of these spaces and their involvement in colonial projects. It is to this process that the ideas laid down in this chapter hope to contribute.

Chapter Four:

From Family Heirlooms to National Heritage: The 1873 Coloniaje Exhibition

Introduction

Apart from a Mapuche man and woman bearing arms to defend the fledgling country, the first national coat of arms of the Chilean state, created in 1812 (Fig. 11, page 90), included a Latin motto that sought to capture the almost epiphanic intellectual spirit of the age: *Post tenebras lux*, or “after the shadows, light.” As if depicting the shift from night to day, Chilean republican discourse construed the declaration of independence as a watershed moment that gave rise to a new age, perhaps even one wiped clean of all of its colonial baggage. However, even though *criollos* had overthrown the imperial regime through armed conflict, they had in fact carried over many aspects of the Spanish empire that made its legacy quite evident. Among these, the continued existence of the colonial order—articulated through structures of race and class—troubled matters of identity for the new ruling class: the newly independent *criollos* were direct descendants of the agents of empire. The same Spanish blood that they wanted to wipe clean still flowed through their veins.

Therefore, the drive to fully distance themselves from the colonial age was not just a question of military and administrative matters. The legitimization of the independence process and of the class that had brought it about also hinged on ideological and symbolic concerns. Among them, the question of what to do with the era of Spanish colonialism—that difficult and cumbersome past—became a fundamental trope in discussions that sought to construct a national historical narrative. As I will discuss in this chapter, the question of how to approach, break away from or reconcile the colonial period of Chilean history was a central issue in the articulation of historical discourse in 19th-century Chile. Out of the many strategies that élites used to resolve this conflict, there is one of particular interest with regard to the relationship between exhibitions and national identity. On 17 September 1873, in the context of the “*Fiestas Patrias*” (the celebrations in commemoration of the country’s political independence), the president of the Republic, Federico Errázuriz (1871-1876), opened an exhibition created with the intention of “remembering” the days when Chile was a colony rather than a country in its own right: the Coloniaje Exhibition.

In the words of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1831-1886)¹, the then Mayor of Santiago (1871-1875), the organiser of the event and the central figure of this chapter, the purpose of the exhibition was to:

[B]ring together those scarcely known treasures, to classify those humble but meaningful tools, to reorganise public life of the colonial age in one word, with its own garments and, through research and method, to give it a fleeting life, to put it on display for an intelligent but overly forgetful people.²

Vicuña Mackenna's statement is central to the analysis of the Coloniaje Exhibition in this chapter: he not only makes explicit the essential elements of modern collecting and exhibiting practices—grouping, classifying, organising and exhibiting—but also weaves these practices into the process of sculpting out a “national memory.” If, as the quote claims, the Chilean people had forgotten certain aspects of their history, the Coloniaje Exhibition would seek to jog their memory. But what did Vicuña Mackenna consider to be the gaps in the memory of the intelligent yet forgetful Chilean people?

The answer to this question is the central argument of this chapter: the Coloniaje Exhibition was the result of an attempt to salvage—or to “resuscitate”, in the words of its main promoter—precise aspects of the colonial age in Chile to specific political ends. Through this process of recovery, during the second half of the 19th century, Chile's ruling élites found a way to present themselves as the rightful heirs to a power that gave them the right to govern the fate of the country, this time without the baggage of colonialism. Accordingly, my hypothesis is that the Coloniaje Exhibition reconciled different approaches to the contentious colonial past, offering a vision of a middle ground and a version of the past that all local élites could share.

To validate this claim, I propose a critical analysis that challenges the conclusions drawn from the few studies that have explored this exhibition until now. The one thing that these studies share is an insular (or even decontextualised) approach that led them to the conclusion that it was the first strictly “historical” exhibition in Chile. While there are very few works that

¹ See Appendix 4: Biographies.

² Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, “Carta familiar a Monseñor Ignacio Victor Eyzaguirre sobre la esposicion de objetos pertenecientes a la era colonial que tendrá lugar en Santiago en setiembre de 1873. Por Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, Intendente de Santiago,” *Revista de Santiago* 2 (1872-1873): 343.

have addressed it as their main object of study, we can identify certain patterns that they share regarding their celebratory approach to the exhibition: one that was a unique and isolated event in the history of collecting practices in Chile. One example of this is historian Patience Schell's claim that the Coloniaje Exhibition was "the first and only historical exhibition in Chile [in the 19th century]."³ Along these same lines, anthropologist Paulina Faba presents the exhibition as "the first complete retrospective organised in Chile in the 19th century,"⁴ while historian Macarena Ponce de León, the current Director of the National History Museum of Chile, describes it as "the first exhibitory experience implemented in our country."⁵ Two recently published works also reassert this definition: Luis Alegría claims that "the Coloniaje Exhibition was one of the first museum displays implemented in Chile in which historical objects were exhibited,"⁶ while Danilo Duarte argues that the Exhibition "presented a retrospective vision of history, the aim of which was to place value on the objects from the colonial period."⁷

Both this chapter and the entirety of my dissertation contest these interpretations. These approaches justify their assessment of the Coloniaje Exhibition based on the "historical" nature of the objects on display. According to them, this condition is determined by the fact that the objects belonged to a distant past that had supposedly been surpassed by the present. This entails a linear and progressive view of history while also overlooking the historical agency of the collecting and exhibiting practices that we have scrutinised in the previous chapters. If we follow the logic put forth by these scholars, the scope for "historical" agency in these practices stems from their inclusion in the canonical account of the nation's history and, specifically, in the stark binary distinction between the time before independence and the one after it. As such, in this perspective, the "history" of Chile is synonymous with the history of the state and the families that created it.

³ Patience A. Schell, "Desenterrando el futuro con el pasado en la mente. Exhibiciones y Museos en Chile a finales del siglo XIX," *Relics and Selves* (online) <http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/ibamuseum/texts/Schell03sp.htm>

⁴ Paulina Faba, "El carácter de lo sensible. La exhibición del pasado en el Chile del siglo XIX," *Revista de Teoría del Arte* 25 (2014): 39.

⁵ Macarena Ponce de León, "Presentación," Museo Histórico Nacional. *Arqueología de una exhibición. La Exposición del Coloniaje (1873)* (Santiago: Servicio Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural, 2021), 4.

⁶ Luis Alegría, "Estudio e historia de las prácticas patrimoniales en la Exposición del Coloniaje," in Museo Histórico Nacional, *Arqueología*, 18.

⁷ Danilo Duarte, "El espacio de experiencia museográfica de Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, 1852-1872," *Historia* 396, vol. 11, n. 2. (July-December 2021): 192.

By contrast, this chapter lays down an analytical methodology that looks beyond the limits of the Exhibition in order to approach it from a far broader perspective, problematising the triumphal attitude that other studies have taken towards it. In analysing a rich body of evidence made up of bureaucratic documents, catalogues, letters, speeches and newspaper articles, among other things, I hypothesise that the Coloniaje Exhibition was far more than a historical exhibition: it was the event that ushered in a process whereby the *élites*' family heirlooms became national heritage.

This chapter is split into five sections that seek to support this claim. The first descriptive section offers the reader an overview of the Exhibition. The following ones provide an analysis to contextualise the exhibition alongside other facets from which we cannot disentangle it. These facets include, first, the Exhibition as a “product” of liberal thought and its main promoter, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna's obsession with death. Second, the place that the colonial period holds in national memory and the conflict between remembering and forgetting of which it forms part. Third, its counterpart in the Exhibition of Arts and Industry held in Santiago in 1872. And last, the fourth facet of my analysis which locates the Coloniaje Exhibition as an example of the historiographical theory that claims that the specificity of the construction of the Chilean nation-state lies in the unity of the *criollo* elite under the metaphor of the “greater Chilean family.”⁸

The Coloniaje Exhibition

Based on the idea “that countless characteristic objects from the various eras and transitions through which the Chilean people have passed are scattered or lost to memory,”⁹ the Mayor of Santiago, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, decreed in March 1873 that, in September of the same year, there would be “an exhibition of all of the objects that the country retains from the time of conquest up until the first year of General Bulnes' rule (1541-1841).”¹⁰ Baptised the “Esposicion del Coloniaje”, its aim was to collect and exhibit objects and images from the period of Spanish colonial rule in Chile that would lead audiences to “note, through the inherent contrasts, the admirable level of well-being and production, of leisure and wealth that the republic [of Chile] has

⁸ See: Sarah C. Chambers, *Families in War and Peace: Chile from Colony to Nation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015)

⁹ “Decreto” *El Ferrocarril* 5388, March 7, 1873, 2

¹⁰ Ibid.

reached in just under half a century of freedom and a life of its own.”¹¹ In other words, it was an exercise in curatorship based around contrast and hierarchical differentiation between the material culture of the colonial era and its republican counterpart in order to underscore the superiority of the latter.

To these ends, the mayor appointed an organisational committee made up of “dignified gentlemen” from the *criollo* élite.¹² Under the leadership of Monsignor Víctor Ignacio Eyzaguirre,¹³ the members of the committee went about collecting, through loans and donations, “the manufactures of the Europeans who founded the colony that was called the ‘Kingdom of Chile’.”¹⁴ Working over the course of five months, the committee managed to put together a repository of 600 pieces that they classified and organised into 12 collections (see Table 2). These taxonomical criteria were the same as those used in the exhibition; in other words, the pieces were displayed under the same categories. Despite their heterogeneous nature, there are two properties that apply transversally to the vast majority of the pieces collected. First, they belonged to a place in time that had apparently been surpassed: the colonial period. Second, they were the property of a small group of people, almost a family: the *criollos*. Thus, the curatorial representation of the “Kingdom of Chile” would be that of the white *criollos*, the forebears of the organisational committee. It goes without saying that the event erased the active presence of indigenous, mestizo and Afro-descendant communities.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Apart from Vicuña Mackenna’s omnipresent guidance, the Exhibition also had an organisation committee chaired by Monsignor J. Ignacio V. Eyzaguirre, with José Manuel Guzmán as his second-in-command. Additionally, the group included: “Don Juan Vicente de Mira; Don Marcos Maturana; Don Juan Nepomuceno Iñiguez; Don Maximiano Errázuriz; Don Francisco de Paula Figueroa; Don Blas Cañas (presbyter); Don Enrique De-Putron; Don Horacio Pinto Agüero; Don Carlos Brown (from Valparaíso); Don Ramón Subercaseaux.” (Acuña, *Perspectivas*, 2013, 36)

¹³ Hailing from a line of well-to-do patriotic *criollos*, José Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre Portales (1817-1875) was a Chilean lawyer and church pastor who was heavily involved in the social spheres of mid-19th-century Chile. He is thought to be an important private collector of his time. See: Marcela Drien and Fernando Guzmán, “Monseñor José Ignacio Eyzaguirre: Mecenas, Promotor Cultural y Coleccionista,” *Intus-Legere Historia* 13, no. 1 (2019): 26-47.

¹⁴ Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre, “Discurso de inauguración en la Exposición del Coloniaje,” *Discursos de Monseñor Ignacio Víctor Eyzaguirre i de Don Horacio Pinto Agüero en la inauguración de la Esposicion del Coloniaje en Setiembre 17 de 1873* (Santiago: Sudamericana, 1873), 5.

Table 2

Group	Name
I	Historical portraits and family paintings
II	Furniture and carriages
III	Costumes and upholstery
IV	Objects of worship
V	Objects of civil ornamentation
VI	Household objects
VII	Jewellery, plaques, and personal decorations
VIII	Numismatic collections
IX	Objects and utensils of indigenous industry, before the conquest
X	Objects and artifacts of the Chilean-colonial industry
XI	Arms and Weapons
XII	Manuscripts and autographs from the colonial era up to 1820; family trees and samples of palaeography.

Table 2: Classification Groups of the Coloniaje Exhibition.

Transcription. “Decree of Creation,” Article 3.

Vicuña Mackenna, Benjamín. *Catálogo razonado de la Exposición del Coloniaje*. (Santiago: Imprenta del Sud-America, de Claro i Salinas, 1873), VIII.

The Exhibition was held in a building that, in the 18th century, had served as the residence of the colonial governors in Santiago. Abandoned after independence, the building was, in Vicuña Mackenna's words, "at this time, rejuvenated and decked out with exquisite finery (like a resuscitated corpse)."¹⁵ As we shall see further on, the mayor constantly turned to death-related rhetorical figures to refer to the colonial period, which he deemed to be a period that was already entombed in the cemetery of the past with no links to the living Chile of his day. Because of this, the "resurrection" of the building entailed aesthetic choices that would conjure the effect of travelling back to the "time of the Spaniards." This meant that the large entrance door was "painted in Spanish colours, red and yellow, tones that shall take precedence in all of the ornamentation in the Exhibition."¹⁶ Furthermore, the foyer was "adorned with huge red and yellow curtains",¹⁷ and the coat of arms of the Spanish Crown was hung from the ceiling.¹⁸

Although these decisions may appear to harken back to a romanticisation of Spanish aesthetics, the truth is that they actually invoked its exact opposite. The palace, once a symbol of imperial power, was now under the control of Chilean *criollos*. For that reason, the building's "return to life" was a highly symbolic exercise. Through this reoccupation, élites not only demonstrated their political control, but also their power to resuscitate the time of the Spaniards, like a ghost from the past, and manipulate it to fit their own interests. However, even though these manoeuvres were intended to illustrate the tyranny of the imperial regime, the fact of the matter is that they actually embodied the continued legacy of colonial practices. One example of this is the theatrics of the event's ticket office. The organiser noted:

We had forgotten to mention that, beyond the pavement and the door, we see the ticket office on two wheels. It is an old barouche that has been adapted for this purpose. To serve the public, it has its own coachman, a real *Negro* from Lima.¹⁹

¹⁵ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo razonado de la Exposición del Coloniaje celebrada en Santiago de Chile en setiembre de 1873 por uno de los miembros de su comisión directiva* (Santiago: Imprenta del Sud-América, de Claro i Salinas, 1873), IV.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., IV-V.

The barouche carriage is listed as Object Number 132 in the inventory and labelled as “the last barouche of the colonial period.”²⁰ With a pedagogical tone, the catalogue explains that before “going out of fashion” around 1845, these carriages were driven “by a *Negro* from Lima or an Indian from Arauco.”²¹ Taking great pride in the staging, the organiser wrote that “we have copied this type of peculiarism as naturally as possible,”²² and, as such, they asked that the exhibition-goers exercise leniency towards “Object” 133: “a *negrito* from Lima, dressed in the finery that his forefathers once wore.”²³ Much like the failed attempt to exhibit the “Fuegian cannibal” (see Chapter 3), the objectified presentation of the “*negrito* from Lima” in the Exhibition is proof of the power it has in shaping out a national narrative based around racial exclusion.

On one side of the barouche carriage, adjacent to the large red and yellow door, Vicuña Mackenna and Monsignor Eyzaguirre stood in wait of President Errázuriz for the grand opening of the Exhibition on the 17th of September. At the ceremony, two hundred children from the National Conservatory sang out the national anthem and then ‘*El último día del coloniaje*’ [The Last Day of Colonial Rule], a march composed in honour of the occasion.²⁴ After that, members of the organisational committee gave two speeches before officially opening the Exhibition.

That afternoon, the Exhibition was open free of charge—thereafter, it would cost fifty centavos—and, according to the local press, it was a resounding success as “the venue became too small to contain the huge crowds that filled the large courtyard of what we now call the ‘Palace of the Coloniaje Exhibition’.”²⁵ The crowds continued to pour in even after the day of the inauguration. Ten days after it opened its doors, the press reported that “turnout is not waning; quite the contrary, it is heading towards become an avalanche.”²⁶ For the four weeks that the Exhibition ran,²⁷ the local newspapers regularly reported on the event. For example, *La República* wrote the following about “this intriguing Exhibition”:

²⁰ Ibid., 61.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 62.

²³ Ibid., 61.

²⁴ *El Ferrocarril* 5549, September 14, 1873, 2.

²⁵ *El Independiente* 2940, September 18, 1873.

²⁶ *El Independiente* 2945, September 27, 1873.

²⁷ The exhibition was planned to remain open for three weeks. However, due to its success, it was extended for a week, closing on the 23rd of October 1873.

Once the Exhibition opened, the huge turnout gave way to the examination of the objects that filled the beautiful, improvised hall and the two rooms at the front of the palace. In general, the objects are very intriguing, since almost all of the antiquities that the country possesses are gathered there with a level of good taste and patience that does credit to the committee, which was able to most successfully bring to life the glad idea of Mr. Vicuña Mackenna.²⁸

Much like the “Chilean antiquities” discussed in the previous chapter, the intriguing nature that the press attributed to the object in the exhibition speaks to the fact that they understood them to belong to a different time, distant from that of the republic. As we shall see further on, the Exhibition formed part of the historical debates around the remembering and forgetting the past. Even though the omission of the colonial period was the intellectual hallmark of the time, the truth is that the exhibition of these pieces was an attempt to “save from obscurity” those elements that, though part of colonial tyranny, represented the level of civilisation, progress and inclusion of the country within the Western material tradition. Symptomatic of this disposition, in 1848, Miguel Luis Amunátegui, a politician and intellectual, claimed that “not all of the luxury objects that decorated the salons of the colonial period deserve to be turned into firewood or left to rot in some filthy hovel.”²⁹

These arguments laid the groundwork for an organisational plasticity, giving the Exhibition scope to include pieces whose main hallmark was chronological: objects from the past. Thus, the collection was made up of, “the *Libro Becerro* of the City of Santiago,”³⁰ a document that recounts the founding of the capital (Cat. n.545)³¹; “a silver sugar bowl that belonged to the Royal Ensign, Don Fermín Vidaurre,” the former official flag-bearer for the Spanish Crown (Cat. n.326); “the parasol used by the Viceroy of Peru,” requested on loan from the collection of antiquities at the National Museum (Cat. n.257) (Fig. 14); “a vermilion velvet

²⁸ *La República* 2338, September 23, 1873, 2.

²⁹ Miguel Luis Amunátegui, “Apuntes sobre lo que han sido las bellas artes en Chile,” *Revista de Santiago*, vol. III (Santiago: Chilena, 1849), 37.

³⁰ The “libros becerros” are a type of book used by medieval churches and monasteries to copy the acts that gave an account of their privileges. Its name is given by the calfskin-lined cartridge cases where the documents were kept. In the process of the Hispanic conquest of America, the “libros becerros” recorded the minutes of the cabildos with respect to administrative and commercial records. The “Libro becerro del Cabildo de Santiago (1541-1557)”, gathers the first minutes from the founding of the city until 1557.

³¹ From now on, the acronymous “Cat.” refers to the object’s number in the Exhibition catalogue.

pouch embroidered with the Spanish coat of arms in gold, as used by knights in the 16th and 17th centuries” (Cat. n.192); and “a royal chest or coffer of the treasury of the Kingdom in the time of the Spanish” (Cat. n.171).

Apart from elements of material culture, there were also various paintings in the collection. The most notable of these were the series of paintings entitled ‘The Governors of the Kingdom’ that chronologically presented the portraits of the representatives of Spanish colonial power in Chile, from the country’s “discoverer”, Diego de Almagro (cat. n.1) up until the last governor, Casimiro Marco del Pont, whom the catalogue describes as “cowardly, cruel and wretched.” The display also included the last governor’s wash basin (Cat. n.285) and travelling case (Cat. n.284). Also notable were a portrait of Charles IV of Spain, described as the “idiot king” (Cat. n.150), and another portrait of Ferdinand VII of Spain, “The last King of colonial Chile” (Cat. n.107) (Fig. 15). The description of these works in the catalogue is quite telling of the *criollo*’s discourse about the representatives of the Spanish Crown. The latter painting is introduced as “a magnificent portrait of a lousy prince,”³² and goes on to say,

The resemblance to the lubricious and gluttonous Spanish monarch is proof of its authenticity, no less so than its indisputable artistic merit. Note how his mouth is so similar to that of his impudent mother, and the volume of the Bourbon nose [like] in his entire family.³³

Much like the building, the pieces on display, intended to represent the former imperial apparatus, confirming the triumph of the republican project and the authority of the new ruling class. In this respect, it was an exercise in symbolic power that underscored the political distinction between the vanquishers and the vanquished. Furthermore, if we accept the chronological division that the Exhibition sets up, not all of the objects on display were, strictly speaking, “colonial”. Many of them were material remains of the struggle for independence and the first years of state formation. With this, the Exhibition draws a stark line between two diametrically opposed times, confirming the comparative nature of the curatorial exercise. Moreover, this contrast also managed to place value on the heirlooms of the families that had.

³² Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, 53.

³³ *Ibid.*



Figure 14: “Quitasol del último virrey del Perú” (Parasol of the last Viceroy of Peru)
Unknown producer; various materials, [Lima] 18th century.
Decorative Arts Collection, National History Museum of Chile. 3-38494.



Figure 15: “Retrato de Fernando VII, Rey de España.” (Portrait of Ferdinand VII, King of Spain)
Unknown Author. Oil Painting, [Madrid] Ca. first decade of 19th century.
Painting Collection, National History Museum of Chile. 3-259

specifically put an end to colonial rule. Among the objects that helped to draw a line between the two periods, there were, “the original document of the Declaration of Independence”,³⁴ Bernardo O’Higgins’ sword (Cat. n.522); a copy of the 1828 Constitution (Cat. n.504), and portraits of the national heroes of independence.

In methodological terms, the material and utilitarian heterogeneity of the collections allowed the organisers to classify the items by production techniques and usage, “such as garments, household utensils, historical portraits and paintings, tapestries, art objects, autographs, genealogy records, etc.”³⁵ However, we see no such diversity when it comes to classifying them socially by their networks of circulation: either by purchase or inheritance, all of these objects belonged to the families of the *criollo* élites. In fact, at least around twenty of the objects on display were personal possessions of Vicuña Mackenna himself, while others belonged to his family circle.³⁶ It is important to note here that, unlike in the cases discussed in the previous chapters, this exhibition was not part of a state-run enterprise, but rather a personal one. The underlying reasons behind this project were the mayor's own interests as part of his plan for modernising Santiago (in European fashion). As we shall see further on, for Vicuña Mackenna, exhibitions belonged to the world of Enlightenment thought and, as such, were a reflection of the civilised nature of a given society.

The Exhibition also had other events that ran in parallel with it. These included the exhibition of “the magnificent jewels of [the figure of] Our Lady of Andacollo,”³⁷ on loan from the Bishop of La Serena; concerts and formal balls—“the concerts and the soirées are admirable in the exhibition,” *El Ferrocarril* reported³⁸—; the failed exhibition of José Neira, the Fuegian anthropophagus, and the processions of indigenous Tehuelche people (see Chapter 3); a painting competition,³⁹ and an ornament bazaar run by *Las Señoras de la Beneficencia*.

³⁴ The Declaration is not included in the catalogue. However, Vicuña Mackenna specifically refers to it in its introduction, which would suggest that the omission is either a mistake or that the document was a “last minute” inclusion.

³⁵ *El Ferrocarril* 5388, March 7, 1873, 2.

³⁶ Among these, I have been able to trace the origins of objects that belonged to his wife, Victoria Subercaseaux, his mother, Carmen Mackenna de Vicuña and his sister-in-law, Manuela Subercaseaux. The catalogue also included objects that belonged to Francisco Subercaseaux and Pedro Vicuña, with whom he most likely had family ties.

³⁷ *El Independiente* 2942, September 24, 1873, 2.

³⁸ *El Ferrocarril* 5553, September 23, 1873, 3.

³⁹ In this respect, *El Independiente* reported: “To ensure that this gallery was as complete as possible, given that some portraits were missing, a painting contest was opened for national artists who wanted to fill in the gaps, providing them with historical indications, as detailed and thorough as possible, so that they could be of use to those who wanted to compete for the final victory.” (*El Independiente* 2957, October 11, 1873)

The bazaar was the only space in which women were permitted some degree of participation in the event. Since it was run by women, Vicuña Mackenna claimed that it was a “display of beauty, of grace and of charity.”⁴⁰ The Mayor posited that that room contained “all the objects that are agreeable to women and, therefore, there are things that are agreeable to men.”⁴¹ On the matter of the bazaar, the press noted that “while one can go to examine the history of the colonial period in the exhibition, one can also admire the lovely works, embroidery, textiles and thousands of other objects created by the ladies’ beautiful and charitable hands, who have donated them to this charming institution.”⁴² While this serves as proof of the distinct gender bias of the event, (women’s output was left out of the historical narrative), it also belies the pedagogic intentions underpinning it. Beyond the presentation of historical “curiosities”, the Exhibition also sought to have its visitors study, (and evaluate “through the inherent contrasts”), the differences and discontinuities between the Spanish colony and the Chilean republic.

The foregoing information lays the groundwork for exploring the first hypothesis I set out in this chapter: the Coloniaje Exhibition was an exercise in curatorship circumscribed within the struggle over the historical narrative that took place in 19th-century Chile. Interestingly, the people that oversaw the event saw it as a way of participating in the debate through a practice that, at the time, was fairly uncommon and was in friction with the written word's monopoly over history. Hence its main value. That being said, the pressing question that I wish to address here is that of the political and intellectual intentions that underpinned the event. To do this, we must first take a moment to examine the life, thought and curatorial perspectives of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, the man who oversaw the Exhibition.

Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna

Born to an upper-class family of pro-independence military figures, the diversity of his political career makes Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1831-1886) one of the most multifaceted figures of 19th-century Chile. He was a member of parliament, a senator, a presidential candidate, mayor of Santiago and the leader of the Liberal party of Chile for some ten years. This diversity

⁴⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, V.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VI.

⁴² *El Ferrocarril* 5540, September 4, 1873, 3.

in his career also spilled over into his writing, which ranged from genres such as journalism, literature and historiography, (genres that, incidentally, did not have hard and fast limits at the time). His work hovers around what historian Manuel Vicuña conceptualises as a “zona de frontera” [borderland]. In this zone, “history is interwoven with literature; imagination for interpreting the past gives way to pure fiction, and his writing shines through his aesthetic revelations more than his cognitive powers regarding the past.”⁴³

As a historian, Vicuña Mackenna subscribed to the “way of studying history”⁴⁴ put forth by Andrés Bello in 1848. Well within the discourse of Enlightenment scientism, this proposal understood history as a narration of the past based on the empirical verification of the object of study. According to Bello, the examination of the past had no scope for multiple interpretations. Rather, it was a detailed study of the archives could only lead to irrefutable truths: “writing history means setting the facts straight,” was the maxim of his treatise. In this process, the historian becomes the judge of the past, and the archives become the evidence that backs up their ruling.

A faithful disciple of this approach, Vicuña Mackenna upheld that “history, real history, can only be written in light of a universal inspection of the archives.”⁴⁵ In his vision, the archive was much more than just a department of institutional bureaucracy. It was the home of the documents that provided for “the banquet of History,”⁴⁶ his writing and his critical judgement. Here, it is interesting to note that, when it came to describing the archive, Vicuña Mackenna also drew upon the association between the past and death, and the task of the historian as resuscitator and judge. In 1870, he visited the General Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, and wrote the following about his experience:

⁴³ Manuel Vicuña, *Un juez en los infiernos. Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna* (Santiago: Universidad Diego Portales, 2009), 16.

⁴⁴ Andrés Bello’s method for writing history could be boiled down to one single concept: *ad narrandum*, or rather “in order to narrate.” In his first press article, which appeared in *El Araucano* on 28 January, 1848, entitled ‘The Way to Write History’, Bello laid down his ideas regarding the historical method. His approach involved the excessive use of original texts and documents to narrate the events of the past so as to “give a sort of historical life to those throngs of men and individual characters and, in this way, in the political destiny of nations, we should find something of that human interest that unwittingly inspired the ingenuous details of the vicissitudes of fate and the adventures of one single man.” His method was the one that, along with its counterpoint, *ad probandum* (in order to prove), played a central role one of the historiographical polemics of the time when, in the press media, he locked heads with the main exponent of this approach in Chile, the intellectual José Victorino Lastarria.

⁴⁵ *El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, May 20, 1882. Quoted in Carlos Sanhueza, “Historiografía y funciones públicas en Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (Chile, segunda mitad del siglo XIX),” *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia* 67, no. 110 (2000-2001): 341.

⁴⁶ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, “La Historia de Chile en el Archivo de Indias,” *Miscelanea. Colección de artículos, discursos, biografías, impresiones de viaje, ensayos, estudios sociales, económicos, etc.* (Santiago: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1872), 326.

Looking upon those volumes, lined up like the tombstones in our cemetery, I came to the conclusion that our colonial Chile is buried alive there, in body and soul, with its noble deeds, its chimeras, its wars, its civilisation hastily patched together, even its parlour gossip and boudoir memoirs, all still intact, like a perfectly embalmed cadaver. [...] One could say that the nation of our forefathers is there, housed with all its worldly goods, lost in an eternal slumber, waiting for the final judgement of the *buscones* [swindlers].⁴⁷

There are two key matters here for our analysis. The first is the depiction of the archive as a court and the historian as judge. Years before in 1844, Andrés Bello had already anointed the historian as the “lawyer for the rights of humanity,”⁴⁸ and adjudicated them the duty of “passing judgement on corruption-prone institutions.”⁴⁹ Even though Vicuña Mackenna sought to distance himself from this role—writing in 1856, “I am not a judge, I am a narrator of facts. Furthermore, my ideas are not a judgement”⁵⁰—the fact of the matter is that his historiographical works pointed towards specific critical judgement of the past. The second matter is the relationship between the past and death, a recurring necro-analogy in both his intellectual and personal writings. He himself claimed to be obsessed with death and the fleeting nature of life.⁵¹ In this dynamic, the archive becomes a cemetery lying in wait for the historian to come and resuscitate its contents and, in so doing, provide evidence that would support a verdict.

This is where this matter overlaps with the Coloniaje Exhibition. As we have seen, the Exhibition used the metaphor of resurrecting a dead and buried past as one of its central ideas. In the “borderlands” through which Vicuña Mackenna's thought roamed, this rhetoric is in dialogue with both the historian's task and that of the archaeologist. In methodological terms, the Exhibition would resuscitate the colonial period “under a merely archaeological perspective,”⁵² he argued in March 1873 in a letter encouraging Monsignor Eyzaguirre to chair the organisational committee. In this same missive, the mayor noted:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Andrés Bello, *Opúsculos literarios i críticos* (Santiago: Imprenta Chilena, 1850), 119.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, “La Historia,” 326.

⁵¹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, “En Francia,” *Revista de Artes y Letras* XI (1887): 351-352.

⁵² Vicuña Mackenna, “Carta Familiar,” 346.

Much like a natural scientist with mutilated remains that have turned to dust and fragments of beings that belong to other epochs manages, by virtue of shrewdness and patience, to piece together a perfect skeleton and deduce from this jumble of bones an organised life, the profusions and even the peaceful or violent habits of the beast to which they belonged; that is how [in organizing the Exhibition] we can resuscitate our colonial period.⁵³

Challenging the monopoly of the written word, Vicuña Mackenna understood the practice of collecting, classifying and exhibiting objects as a form of expanding the limits of the archive. Where the archive housed the written past, the history museum did the same thing for the material past. Both the archive and the museum are complementary institutions insofar as they both make it possible to "resurrect" the past and thereby to critically assess it: "The learned governments and advanced peoples of Europe," the mayor noted, "often benefit from making these exhumations of their past that, by contrast with their former inertia, reveal their present-day vigorous vitality."⁵⁴

This perception most likely drew upon his own experience visiting the museums of Europe. Between 1853 and 1855 he visited, among others, El Prado in Madrid, the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London. He described the latter as a "true compendium of history,"⁵⁵ "the most authentic and succinct book of universal history that we have read."⁵⁶ He also paid a visit to the Vatican Museum. There, he saw all of the epochs of Christianity brought together, "the origin and progression of civilisation in the West,"⁵⁷ "where their history is written with the most select fragments of their past."⁵⁸ He came to the conclusion that such museum was "a fertile book in broad and easy studies."⁵⁹ Apart from this, he also greatly appreciated the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 344.

⁵⁵ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Páginas de mi diario durante tres años de viaje, 1853-1854-1855* (Santiago: Imprenta del Ferrocarril, 1856). Also in César Leyton Robinson and Rafael Huertas, "Reforma urbana e higiene social en Santiago de Chile: La tecno-utopía liberal de Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1872-1875)," *Dynamis*, 32, no. 1, (2012): 21-44.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Rebecca Earle, *The return of the native. Indians and myth-making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 20.

⁵⁷ Vicuña Mackenna, *Páginas*, 238.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Musée de Cluny in Paris, which he described as a “true wardrobe and pantry, if one could say that, of the history of French civilisation.”⁶⁰

In Vicuña Mackenna’s thought, the comparison between the history book and the museum sets them up as equals with regard to their encyclopaedic properties. Both of them are sources of information that allow the reader/visitor to pass judgement on the past: “rummaging through, classifying and astutely and rationally commenting on the material traces left from one epoch to another is one of the accurate and enlightening guides that can accompany the philosopher and historian in their undertakings,”⁶¹ the mayor wrote in 1873. However, unlike Europe, Chile at the time did not have any space dedicated to the “resurrection of the ancient world.”⁶² “Among us,” he wrote to Monsignor Eyzaguirre, “there has been not even the most timid of public attempts of this genre of collecting.”⁶³

All of the foregoing is evidence that, contrary to the works that have examined this event before now, the logic underlying the Coloniaje Exhibition was not the romantic remembrance of the past but rather its critical assessment. In the symbolic struggle over memory in the 19th century, the “resurrection” of the colonial period that the Exhibition attempted was an exercise that sought to legitimate the “historical” nature of the *criollo* past. By presenting the colonial age as “resuscitated”, the Coloniaje Exhibition worked on the assumption that it was part of the past. This approach also presumes that the Chile of the 1870s was completely decoupled from the colonial regime, with no legacy or continuity, as if the Declaration of Independence had acted as a guillotine that cut the underpinnings of the Spanish colonial system off at the root. The assessment of this difference was, in terms of curatorship, the end goal of the Exhibition. Such difference is also the result of a struggle over the historical account that arose after independence in which the friction between forgetting and remembering played a fundamental role. As we shall see in the next section, the consequences of such struggle provided the logical framework for the emergence of the Coloniaje Exhibition.

⁶⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, “Carta Familiar,” 344.

⁶¹ Ibid., 346.

⁶² Ibid., 345.

⁶³ Ibid.

Oblivion and Remembrance

As I mentioned in the previous section, my analysis of the Coloniaje Exhibition understands the event as part of the struggles over memory and the national historical narrative that ran throughout the 19th century. On this point, the ideas of memory and oblivion are, as I shall show in this section, fundamental aspects for a critical analysis of these struggles. Thus, the notion of oblivion played a crucial role in the process of constructing a postcolonial Chilean national memory. The constant presence of forgetting served to balance out those aspects of history that should be included within the national memory from that which should be erased from it. As the French historian Ernst Renan argued at the time, “the essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things.”⁶⁴ Along these lines, in the process of shaping out a Chilean national memory, the “forgettable” aspects found a home in a time that the Republic sought to distance itself from: the colonial period.

“Unlike amnesia,” David Lowenthal argues, “oblivion is purposeful and regulated.”⁶⁵ Because of this, there is one crucial question for my analysis: if, as we shall see, the intellectual discourse of the time called for the colonial period to be forgotten, what sense did it make for there to be an exhibition to commemorate it? To approach this question, I shall examine at length the role that the oblivion/remembrance dichotomy played in the configuration of a Chilean national memory. To do so, I take German anthropologist Aleida Assman's notion of “collective memory” as my starting point. Challenging Susan Sontag’s exclusively individual understanding of memory—“All memory is individual, unreproducible. It dies with each person,”⁶⁶—Assmann identifies the properties through which it becomes social and collective:

Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a business firm do not “have” a memory, they “make” one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as monuments, museums, commemoration rites, and ceremonies. Together with such memory, these groups and institutions “construct” an identity. A memory that is

⁶⁴ Ernst Renan, “What is a Nation?” [March 11, 1882] in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992) [translated by Ethan Rundell] (online) http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf

⁶⁵ David Lowenthal, “Memory and Oblivion,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 12 (1993): 171.

⁶⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 85.

intentionally and symbolically constructed is based on acts of selection and exclusion, neatly separated from not useful, relevant from irrelevant memories.⁶⁷

The "constructed" nature of both collective memory and identity are key elements of my analysis. The milestone events that made up "Chilean memory" are the result of a series of political decisions that, historically, have resolved the conflict between forgetting and remembering. It is here, I would argue, that the 19th century in Chile—the period that historiography has traditionally labelled as the construction and consolidation of the state—was also the construction and consolidation of a collective memory that became narratives of identity and symbolic belonging.

In the process of selecting and organising involved in any exercise of remembrance, there was a majority voice calling for the colonial past to be forgotten. Liberal *criollo* thought saw this as justified since it blamed the Spanish empire for having kept the country at the margins of civilised Western life. This argument is connected with the very basis of liberal thought in Latin America and its conception of history. This thinking conceives history as a line of continuous development, bounded up with the concept of progress (both material and spiritual). History, in this perspective, is not a cultural construction but rather an inherent phenomenon of human nature. Thus, it understands Spanish colonialism as an anti-natural undertaking, an episode that halted and hindered the forward march of progress and the development of Chile for three centuries.

If we consider the fervent drive of the Chilean élite to include the country in the Western tradition, the forgetting of the colonial period, even its complete erasure, is, at the very least, a contradictory matter. Thus, the operations that shape out national memory are, first and foremost, selective. *Criollos'* defence of Catholicism and the Spanish language are proof that it was convenient for them to generalise about the colonial period as a whole in a way that also overlooked its legacy. When we consider, for example, the persistence and expansion of the racial hierarchies that the colonial system imposed, we can see how the post-independence

⁶⁷ Alleida Assmann, "Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past." in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, eds. Karin Tilmans (et al) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 42-43.

criollos paradoxically seem to have forgotten that they once belonged to that time that they themselves wished to forget.

José Victorino Lastarria, a politician and intellectual from Santiago, represents one such example of such thinking. In 1844 he summarised the “fateful consequences” of the colonial past in the republic’s march towards progress. Lastarria described the three-hundred years of colonial rule in Chile as a time of “darkness and shadows,” “profoundly degraded, consigned to a complete stupor and without even a single social value.”⁶⁸ The colonial regime had reduced the *criollos*’ intellectual spirit to “a perfect slavery”⁶⁹ For that reason, Lastarria called on them to “completely destroy the persistence of the old Spanish system that haunts [Chilean] society.”⁷⁰

In 1853, Francisco Bilbao, another member of the Liberal party, invoked the “new [Chilean] man” to “plunge him into the oblivion of the past, raise him to the greatest heights and awaken him, unchained, in the middle of an Enlightened greatness.”⁷¹ That past they wished to forget was the colonial period, a time where, according to Liberal writer Hermógenes Irisarri, Chile “was vegetating rather than living” in a “state of idleness that did not allow one to predict better days for the ailing body of the nation.”⁷² In 1873, the year of the Coloniaje Exhibition, the humanist Juan Domingo Arteaga Alemparten defined the history of colonial Chile as a stagnant age in which “a day, a month, a year are all the same as all other days, months and years; in which time slips through a crowd of inert and silent men.”⁷³ Deprived of their freedom, the Chilean people had spent three-hundred years “in a sort of human vegetation.”⁷⁴

That same year, 1873, the Puerto-Rican intellectual Eugenio María de Hostos—who, years later, would go on to found the Pedagogical Institute at the University of Chile—presented a comparison table in which he set the colonial age up in contrast with “a society like the Chilean one, which was born out of protest against its previous life.”⁷⁵ To contextualise the

⁶⁸ José Victorino Lastarria, *Investigaciones sobre la influencia social de la conquista i del sistema colonial de los españoles* (Santiago: Imprenta del Siglo, 1844), 71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷¹ Francisco Bilbao, *Revolución en Chile y Los mensajes del concripto* (Lima: Imprenta del Comercio, 1853), 18.

⁷² Hermógenes Irisarri, “Introducción,” *Galería nacional, o, colección de biografías i retratos de hombres celebres de Chile*. vol.1 (Santiago: Imprenta Chilena, 1854), V.

⁷³ Juan Domingo Arteaga Alemparte, “El Coloniaje I el Progreso,” *Revista de Santiago* II, (1872-1873): 826.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Eugenio María Hostos, *Chile en su Exposicion de Setiembre* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República: 1873), 11.

intellectual thought that surrounded the Coloniaje Exhibition, I think it is important to present Hostos' comparison table here (see Table 3).

Hostos' table does not only provide a neat summary of the arguments that served to justify the call to consign the colonial period to oblivion. It also reflects a logic in which time is structured into separate and opposing segments. Here, the signifiers "colonial past" and "republican present" are irreconcilable antonyms, omitting any degree of continuity between the two. The past takes on a specific form with a certain duration: "The past lasts eight-hundred and eighty years," Hostos argued. In the process that, at that time, was shaping out a national memory, the obliteration of the colonial past allowed them to construe the present day as the triumphant culmination of the struggles for independence. In rhetorical terms, the remembrance of the colonial past only made it possible to consign it to oblivion, paving the way for the celebration of a present age that had supposedly shaken off all forms of despotism.

This is the same intellectual context as that of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. Much like his contemporaries, the mayor was not only critical of the colonial past, but he also succumbed to a certain wilful ignorance of how it had seeped over into the present. In fact, regarding this matter, his writings provide a clear example of the dichotomy between the "colonial darkness" set against the "light of the Republic" that pervaded the discourses of the time. As a historian, he depicted the colonial period as a gloomy time, ruled over by an "eternal idleness" and incompetence. In 1869, he defined it as "*una inmensa siesta a calzón quitado*"⁷⁶ [an immense and unstimulating slumber], a stagnant time in which "one cannot tell night from day, only that the latter had light and sun."⁷⁷ It was 17th-century Chile that saw the worst of it, which he described as "an absolute horror story."⁷⁸ The entire colonial period, he concluded, "was nothing but a three-century night."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Historia crítica y social de la ciudad de Santiago: desde su fundación hasta nuestros días (1541-1868)*. vol. II (Valparaíso: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1869), 440.

⁷⁷ Ídem, 313.

⁷⁸ Ídem, 130.

⁷⁹ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, "Historia de Santiago" in *Obras Completas*. vol. II (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1938), 313.

Table 3

The Past Life of Chile, the Colony.	- Physical, moral and intellectual malady of society. - Disconnectedness, isolation, poverty. - Desert, depopulation, social and individual apathy. - Territorial feudalism, slavery of property and the settler. - Impossibility of power, slavery of the citizen.
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The past lasts two-hundred and eighty years.
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The Present Life of Chile, National Independence.	- Physical, moral and intellectual health of society. - Connectedness, civilisation, wealth. - Conquest of nature and the desert, population, activity. - Division of property, growing liberation of the settler. - Responsibility of power, freedom of the citizen.
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This is the work of seventy-two years. To make it clearer, we set the progress of the nation in contrast with the lackadaisy of the colony:

Progress of life	- From colonial to civilised
Progress in work	- From feudal to free - From agricultural to industrial - From simple to combined
Progress in customs	- From semi-barbaric to civilised - From superstitions to reasoned beliefs - From revolutions to pacific customs

Table 3: Hostos, Eugenio María. “Vida pasada de Chile. La Colonia.”

(Past life of Chile. The Colonial Period)

Transcription. Hostos, Eugenio María. *Chile en su Exposicion de Setiembre* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República, 1873), 11.

If, in Vicuña Mackenna's opinion and that of the intellectual élite of his time, the colonial period was nothing more than a drowsy cycle defined by “its idleness, its disturbances in discipline and its scandal in customs,”⁸⁰ why then would they want to create an exhibition that, running against the prevailing discourse, brought the colonial period back into memory? This question becomes even more relevant if we consider the mayor's intentions when he published a brief catalogue of the Exhibition to produce a “a useful and reasoned memorandum that can be used for studying the colonial period as deep as possible into its entrails, in the densest of its shadows, if such a thing is possible.”⁸¹ It is precisely in this dichotomy between forgetting and remembering the colonial past that the Coloniaje Exhibition installed itself. Its emergence offered a narrative that, while challenging the monopoly of the written word over history, still subscribed to the chronological structures of *criollo* liberal thought. Based on collecting and displaying objects described as “colonial,” the Exhibition participated in the staging of a national temporality by salvaging of certain elements of that past that deserved to form part of national history. Those elements, as we shall see further on, have one property that equated them as the heirs to a shared tradition: they were objects that belonged to the forebears of the organisers. In this operation, they put the colonial past on display before the eyes of the Republican present, invoking a future of national unity.

The 1872 Exhibition of Arts and Industry

As I have laid out here, the documents associated with the Coloniaje Exhibition show that it is impossible to address the event in isolation. The Exhibition participated in an intellectual debate that spanned the entire century and, furthermore, was directly inspired by the philosophy of its main organiser, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. In addition, as we shall see in this section, it also emerged as the counterpart to another exhibition: the 1872 “Exhibición de Artes e Industria,” or the Exhibition of Arts and Industry, also organised by Vicuña Mackenna. In fact, there is such a clear relationship between the two events that the decree that set the Coloniaje Exhibition in motion specifically mentions that “the Exhibition of Arts and Industry of September 1872 was such a success insofar as it represented the degree of progress and

⁸⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, *Historia Crítica*, 217.

⁸¹ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, VII.

civilisation that the country has achieved in recent years.”⁸² Thus, as I will demonstrate in this section, both exhibitions worked on opposing side of the binary of civilising discourse; one as a manifestation of republican progress, and the other as a showcase of colonial stagnation.

The Exhibition of Arts and Industry opened on 15 September 1872 and remained open to the public for three weeks. Much like the Coloniaje Exhibition, it was the commencement of the *Fiestas Patrias* that year. To construct the building that would house it, the mayor hired the Argentinian architect Fermín Vivaceta, a key figure in the urban development of Santiago during the second half of the 19th century. Both the Exhibition and the building were part of Vicuña Mackenna’s project to transform Santiago into the most European city in South America or, in his words, “the paradise of the New World.”⁸³ As part of this project, the city also opened the Promenade on Cerro Santa Lucía, the Cousiño Park, and the Municipal Theatre of Santiago (which was destroyed in a fire and then rebuilt “like those of Europe”).⁸⁴ Furthermore, the mayor renamed a large number of streets with reference to eminent citizens because their names “serve to perpetuate cherished memories among the citizens.”⁸⁵ Among these, he dedicated a street to Claude Gay.

However, the intention behind these acts was not only to modernise the city, but also to civilise its inhabitants. With regard to the Exhibition, this is evident in the Decree of June 1872 that created it. Therein, Vicuña Mackenna claimed that “we have reached a point at which it is necessary to give the civic festivities of the nation their true nature”⁸⁶ since “until now, the customary fleeting representations have not left any lasting impression of culture and progress in the memory of the people.”⁸⁷ Consequently, it was not only about providing evidence of “Chilean progress”, but also to install it as a component of national memory.

Along similar lines, the mayor believed popular national festivities to be ruled by alcohol, raucous laughter and indecency. Because of this, he sought to celebrate the anniversary of the nation through “something that could be called a cultured, agreeable and civilised promenade,

⁸² Intendencia de Santiago, “Decreto de 1 de marzo de 1873,” *Revista de Santiago* II (1872-1873): 342.

⁸³ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *La Era Colonial* (Santiago: Nascimento, [1869] 1974), 167.

⁸⁴ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Un año en la intendencia de Santiago. Lo que es la capital y lo que debería ser* (Santiago: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1873), 143.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁶ Exposición de Artes e Industria de Santiago, *Memoria de la Comisión Directiva* (Santiago: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1872), 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

rather than whirlwinds of dust, horsemen and vehicles that, until now, have had that name.”⁸⁸ Of course, the Exhibition of Arts and Industry would contribute toward this goal since, in his opinion, events of this kind “awakened a fertile impression of the triumph of intelligence in a cultured society.”⁸⁹ He went on to claim that the exhibitions “as of now are the most accepted means by which the people who are at the forefront of human civilisation show themselves and others the level of culture they have reached.”⁹⁰

With the goal of making the Exhibition an event that would demonstrate the level of civilisation in the country, Vicuña Mackenna appointed a committee of citizens to organise it, all of whom were men and members of the upper class in the capital. The committee indicated that the exhibition’s goal would be to “make our anniversary more solemn through the celebration of intelligence and work.”⁹¹ Furthermore, it defined the four sections into which it would organise the material collected: Fine Arts, Manufacturing Industry, Agricultural Industry and Mining Industry. Each section was further divided into different sub-categories (See Table 4).

By means of the comparative logic that gave structure to his historical thought, Vicuña Mackenna understood the Exhibition of Arts and Industry to be the “current state” of national progress. Imbued with his European experience, the mayor was convinced that Chilean progress was not just an abstract idea, let alone a utopian one. Rather, following the epistemological framework of the modern museum, the country’s progress could be seen and observed in the Exhibition, thus taking on an air of truth. For example, this was the impression of Eugenio María de Hostos. The intellectual reported that, at the Exhibition, “progress is visible to the naked eye.”⁹² Additionally, the Exhibition operated under the same evidence-based logic as the archive: the displays were proof of an irrefutable truth. Thus, the level of progress in Chile and the place it occupied in Western culture could be ascertained through the visual presentation of its own artistic and industrial productions.

That being said, the material analysed here suggests that what the Exhibition sought to provide was not necessarily proof of the forward march of progress *per se*. Rather, it sought to showcase the contrast between the present and the past, in line with the intellectual discourses of

⁸⁸ “Programa de las festividades cívicas de setiembre de 1872,” in *Guía especial de los visitantes a la Exposición de artes e industrias* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República, 1872), 14.

⁸⁹ Exposición de Artes e Industria de Santiago, *Memoria*, 8.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 19.

⁹² Hostos, *Chile en su Exposición*, 28.

Table 4

Section	Groups
Fine Arts	- Architecture. - Sketches and decorative arts. - Sculpture and painting. - Musical instruments and compositions
Manufacturing Industry	- Furniture and tapestries - Textiles, embroideries and “women’s handicrafts”. - “Things intended for nutrition” - Candles and soaps - Distillery
Rural Industry	- Cereals - Legume plants - Industrial plants - Silage plants - Legume roots - Medicinal plants - Wood - Wool and leather
Mining Industry	- Gold minerals - Silver minerals - Copper minerals - Lead mineral - Mercury minerals - Non-metallic minerals

Table 4: Sections and Groups of the 1872 Exhibition of Arts and Industry.

Table drawn up by the author based on various documents found the National Archive and Library of Chile

the period. The organisational committee affirmed that the event would be “a reliable barometer of the state of development of the arts and industry [in Chile],”⁹³ presenting a comparative logic that we can also see in the way the contemporaneous press depicted the Exhibition. For example, *El Ferrocarril* hailed it as a “celebration of curiosity and education” that would allow visitors to “gauge what our arts and our industries are today.”⁹⁴ The day following the inauguration, the same newspaper claimed that “they could not have chosen a better way of commemorating the anniversary of our nation than by giving an account of what we are as art, as industry, as work, as intelligence.”⁹⁵

The organisers hailed the Exhibition of Arts and Industry as a success. The press reported that, after the inauguration, “an avalanche of people had rushed towards it.”⁹⁶ Even though tickets cost one peso, there were days when they sold at a reduced price of 50 centavos. Other days it was free for workers’ organisations, the military and students at public schools.⁹⁷ This was part of the organisers’ intentions to “democratise” access to this “celebration of civilisation”. The committee argued that “the Exhibition would only be partially fruitful if we did not make access possible for certain groups or organisations among our people who would not be able to without making sacrifices to pay for their tickets.”⁹⁸ The results they expected to obtain from this investment was the gradual replacement of popular festivities with the celebrations that, like the Exhibition, would fit within the canon of modern Western culture. According to the committee, popular celebrations were “often far too grotesque and antiquated, like donkey races or sack races, clownish kites or grease poles.”⁹⁹

What we can take from this evidence is that, while the event was organised by the *criollo* élite, this group intended for the visitors to come from beyond the limits of their own social class. Some days before the official opening, an anonymous reader published a letter urging the authorities to do as much as they could to encourage “the people” to attend the event: “Thus, it is desirable to attract as greater number as possible of spectators to such event, to make it an imminently popular celebration, a celebration to which all are invited and with the greatest

⁹³ Exposición de Artes e Industria de Santiago, *Memoria*, 7.

⁹⁴ *El Ferrocarril* 5239, September 6, 1872, 2.

⁹⁵ *El Ferrocarril* 5248, September 17, 1872, 2.

⁹⁶ *El Ferrocarril* 5256, September 29, 1872, 2.

⁹⁷ Exposición de Artes e Industria de Santiago, *Memoria*, 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 7.

number of guests.”¹⁰⁰ This and other appeals were in line with the organisational committee’s intentions. It stated that “it would be almost futile if [the exhibition] was not visited by a great turnout of people capable of acquiring a beneficial education there.”¹⁰¹

According to the official figures, some 31,120 people visited the exhibition in the three weeks that it was open.¹⁰² This figure far outnumbers the 10,000 people that visited the National Museum, the other exhibition space in Santiago, that year.¹⁰³ However, beyond the mere turnout of visitors, I argue that the success of the Exhibition stems from its symbolic aspect: it had managed to make Chile’s progress visible and tangible. In terms of reception and criticism, the *Bellas Artes* journal argued that, with this Exhibition, “Chile has leapt up to the level of the nations of Europe,”¹⁰⁴ and that it has clearly shown that the country was “on the same level as the most civilised peoples.”¹⁰⁵ *El Ferrocarril* came to the conclusion that “one need only peruse the halls of the Exhibition to fully understand that we are a country that is moving forward and has sufficient strength to hold fertile events for progress and civilisation.”¹⁰⁶ In its reports on the final day of the Exhibition, the same newspaper wrote that “the great celebration with which Chile has just solemnised the anniversary of its independence has shown that, even though this republic is not the richest on the continent, it is the one that comes closest to the ideal of an industrious and hard-working nation.”¹⁰⁷ In his memoirs about his visits to the exhibition, Eugenio María de Hostos claimed, (most likely to the delight of Vicuña Mackenna), that “all of the elements that constitute the transformation of Santiago into the *Paris of America* are there, carefully numbered and arranged.”¹⁰⁸

The evidence suggests that the Exhibition of Arts and Industry held in Santiago in 1872 managed to make tangible the country’s level of progress in the eyes of its organisers. Moreover, the presentation of locally made works of art and technology were not merely evidence of the “current state” of national progress; they also contributed to burying and entombing the colonial

¹⁰⁰ *El Ferrocarril* 5239, September 6, 1872, 2.

¹⁰¹ Exposición de Artes e Industria de Santiago, *Memoria*, 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Estimated number and author's own calculation based on the reports of its director, R. Philippi, to the Ministry of Public Instruction.

¹⁰⁴ *Bellas Artes* 2, July 24, 1873, 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ *El Ferrocarril* 5248, September 17, 1872, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *El Ferrocarril* 5262, October 8, 1872, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Hostos, *Chile en su Exposición*, 60. Emphasis in the original.

age in the cemetery of the past, if we are to follow the morbid analogies of its main promoter. Guillermo Matta, chairman of the organisational committee, made this quite explicit, writing that the Exhibition “forever broke the last link in the chain of servile preoccupations handed down to us from the colonial period: in glorifying the arts and industry, we have freed the citizen and glorified the Republic.”¹⁰⁹

It is specifically on this point that it is impossible to disentangle this exhibition from the Coloniaje one. Following the comparative logic that structures Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna’s historical philosophy, in order to gauge and assess the level of progress in the republic, it was necessary to compare it with its antithesis: the colonial period. Reading this alongside the constant analogue made between the past and death that I have identified, we can conclude that the Exhibition of Arts and Industry functioned symbolically as a funeral ritual in which the *criollo* élite buried the colonial period as if in a cemetery. Only in this way, dead and buried, could the colonial period be “resuscitated” the following year without it hindering the march towards progress and modernity. As a parenthesis in time, the Coloniaje Exhibition would temporarily revive an epoch that had apparently been consigned to oblivion.

For these reasons, the material I have analysed leads me to the conclusion that the Coloniaje Exhibition was not just an exercise in *memorabilia*, but rather an affirmative manoeuvre. In contrast, this exhibition served to confirm a conviction that the exhibitory discourse of the Exhibition of Arts and Industry articulated: Chile is an independent country that is distanced from the Spanish regime and, above all else, civilised. Along these lines, in its coverage of the event, *El Independiente* reported the following:

In 1872, the commencement of the festivities was the exhibition of the works of the republic. In 1873, the commencement of the festivities is the exhibition of the works of colony. A singular contrast that spontaneously comes to mind and, at the end of the day, it is not so as it may seem at first sight!¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Guillermo Matta, “Discurso de Apertura de la Exposición,” in *Exposición Nacional de Artes e Industria de 1872, Memorias premiadas en el certamen y documentos que le sirven de antecedentes* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República, 1873), 33.

¹¹⁰ *El Independiente* 2940, September 18, 1873.

Both Exhibitions were part of a drive developed by a new generation of *criollos* who, unlike the cases analysed in the previous chapters, did not see the exhibition of nature as a contribution to their economic projects. The objective here was to prove that Chile deserved a place in the narrative of Western progress and, to do this, it had to differentiate itself from its colonial past. However, the basis for the affirmative nature of the Coloniaje Exhibition did not only lie in a confirmation of this difference, but also in asserting who could govern the fate of the country: local élites.

The Heirlooms of a Greater Family

Much like any exercise in memory, the Coloniaje Exhibition was also a selective one. In the dialectic between the pull to forget and the drive to remember, the exhibition organisers selected pieces from the colonial era that, just like a resurrection, would breathe new life into “their austerity and their generous opulence, their moral nostalgia and their lack of resources.”¹¹¹ According to Vicuña Mackenna, the Exhibition would allow them to “display the colonial skeleton, dressed in its own rich garb and decaying rags before the light of civilisation that today vitalises us and enhances us.”¹¹²

To answer the question of what drove a group of *criollos* to “resuscitate” a time that, as the evidence would suggest, shifted between contradiction and oblivion, I posit that the Coloniaje Exhibition functioned as a selective salvaging operation in which the different manifestations of the oblivion of the colonial process—its negation, omission and concealment—succumbed to certain strategies of restitution. Here, we can see the affirmative nature of the Exhibition. In identifying the problem inherent to the forgetting and negation of the colonial past—the ruling class that governed the country over the latter half of the 19th century were the descendants of those who oversaw it during the last years of the Spanish regime—the Chilean elites sought strategies to get rid of such problem. Resuscitating the colonial past, which only a few years before was but an ominous presence, was not just a strategy for making the progress of the republic visible, but also an exercise that redeemed the *criollos* from their tainted Spanish heritage.

¹¹¹ Vicuña Mackenna, “Carta familiar,” 344.

¹¹² Ibid.

Salvaging that past meant salvaging the history of those groups and, in so doing, drawing a line between them and those dark days when Chile was under the yoke of Spain. Lest we forget that the Chilean *criollo* élite—from the “*libertador*” and “Father of the Nation” Bernardo O’Higgins (son of the viceroy Ambrosio O’Higgins) to Vicuña Mackenna himself—was a tight circle made up mainly of the direct descendants of Spaniards or the agents of empire. They articulated a political project based on their self-representation as members of—to paraphrase Sarah C. Chambers—one big united national family. This version of events, incidentally, coincides with the “exceptional” stability that historiography has attributed to the process of building the Chilean nation-state. In the words of Leslie Jo Frazier, “this stability happened under de facto authoritarian leadership and via the unity of the small oligarchical elite who determined the shape of the emerging political system.”¹¹³

Unlike the disintegration that affected the post-independence élites in most of Latin America, in Chile, the old colonial upper classes (including their religious representatives) soon became the sole oligarchy of the Republic. As Chambers notes, “Chile during the eighteenth century provides an exemplary case of an early modern elite held together by kinship.”¹¹⁴ The late-colonial élite maintained its structural bonds through appeals to a family-centred rhetoric that straddled the line between the colony and the Republic and that, as a group, protected their power from any such rupture. In fact, even as early as 1841, Claude Gay concluded his research noting that the history of Chile “could be seen as the history of a big family.”¹¹⁵

After independence, mainly as a result of the harsh restrictions on political mobility underpinned by the 1833 Constitution,¹¹⁶ the new ruling class repeatedly used the metaphor of the nation as a huge family to give an air of cohesion to their political project. As Chambers argues, “[w]ith the passage of time, it became easier for the state to affirm the ideal image of the Chilean nation as a harmonious family.”¹¹⁷ Thus, the ruling élites fell back on the metaphor of

¹¹³ Leslie Jo Frazier, *Salt in the Sand. Memory, Violence and the Nation State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 33.

¹¹⁴ Chambers, *Families*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *El Araucano* 544, January 29, 1841, 2.

¹¹⁶ The Constitution of 1833 was enacted by President José Joaquín Prieto Vial on 25 August 1833. It defined the republic as a strictly presidential and centralist regime, putting an end to any attempts at federalism. It decreed Catholicism as the official state religion and excluded the worship of any other creed. It legitimised the power of the president, who was also co-legislator with the Congress, over the armed forces. In short, the Constitution favoured an extreme presidentialism that resulted in an oligarchic regime with a marked conservative tendency.

¹¹⁷ Chambers, *Families*, 214.

the family to incorporate (and, in so doing, erase) the diverse range of post-colonial identities under one single grand structure: “the greater Chilean family.”

In this way, the Coloniaje Exhibition participated in the process of constructing a (singular) national identity by exhibiting a network interwoven with objects and images that circulated exclusively among the *criollo* upper classes as if they truly were one big family. There is evidence of this in the strategies that the Exhibition implemented to organise its collections, the forms it used to display them and, above all else, the arguments it used to justify their inclusion in the event. Among these, the politics of putting together the collection rarely went beyond the “family” nature of the objects to put on display. As such, the Exhibition operated as an exercise in curatorship with a massive political charge: through it, the élites voiced their wish to transform their family heirlooms into the historical heritage of the nation.

It is of no little interest that Vicuña Mackenna chose the title “family letter” for his invitation to Monsignor Eyzaguirre to chair the organisational committee for the Exhibition. In his missive, the mayor urged the clergy member, the nephew of Diego Portales,¹¹⁸ not just to accept the position, but also to contribute objects “given that your large and distinguished family has many a precious relic of art left from the colonial age.”¹¹⁹ Eyzaguirre’s contribution included various pieces. *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* reported that “the chairman [of the committee], Monsignor Eyzaguirre, presented a beautifully shaped gold jug that belonged to the Santo Domingo Convent and a gold box that belonged to Mrs Aldunate, the grandmother of the current president of the Republic.”¹²⁰ He also contributed a series of paintings including a portrait of Bishop Manuel de Aldai (Cat. n.48) (Fig. 16). Regarding these pieces, the catalogue notes: “Bishop Aldai is a close relative of the current honourable chairman of the Coloniaje Exhibition committee, Monsignor Don I.V. Eyzaguirre.”¹²¹

In the aforementioned letter, Vicuña Mackenna mentioned the work that had already been done in collecting the pieces that would form the exhibition. Among these, he notes, “the distinguished general Don Manuel Blanco Encalada, as well as various interesting family portraits, still has one of his fourth great-grandfather, the famous general, Don Diego de Leon,

¹¹⁸ See Appendix 4: Biographies.

¹¹⁹ Vicuña Mackenna, “Carta familiar,” 342.

¹²⁰ *El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, August, 1873, npn.

¹²¹ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, III.

captain of the Nun Lieutenant [...].”¹²² Furthermore, he notes that “one of the members of the committee is the owner of a series of family portraits,”¹²³ and that “a beautiful family portrait that the late and illustrious Don Ignacio Reyes owned is no less interesting, and represents his distinguished father, Don Judas Tadeo Reyes.”¹²⁴

We can also identify a similar occurrence with regard to the system that the Exhibition used to classify its collections. The decree passed in March 1873 to confirm the event listed eight groups, the first of which is the “historical portraits and family paintings” category. During the organisational process, they added a further three groups including a ninth one for “autographs and family trees”. I posit that this makes it clear that there was a need to connect “historical” objects with the history of the families that ran the Exhibition. This leads me to the conclusion that, rather than merely recalling the colonial period, the Exhibition presented it as the history of the families that unshackled Chile from the chains of Spanish imperialism.

This becomes even clearer on the day of the inauguration. At the event, Horacio Pinto Agüero, a member of the organisational committee, thanked Monsignor Eyzaguirre for his contributions to the exhibition, remarking that “as a member of an old and distinguished family having, at the same time, numerous friendships, he could also count on the support of very useful people. His friends and relatives were very eager collaborators.”¹²⁵ He offered the same gratitude to Vicuña Mackenna, who “held very important information about the families of the two most populous cities in the country.”¹²⁶

We can see the full extent of this matter by analysing the exhibition catalogue. Written and published by Vicuña Mackenna, it provided a list of the six-hundred objects on display, classified by collection. Most of them are accompanied with a short description. Interestingly, however, those descriptions are barely related to the object in and of itself. They are more

¹²² Ibid. Known as *La Monja Alférez* [the Nun Lieutenant], Catalina/Antonio de Erauso (1592–1650) was a Basque nobleperson who, just before taking final vows to become a nun at age fifteen, escaped from the convent in San Sebastián where they had lived since the age of four. Dressed in men’s clothing, Erauso lived successfully as a man for almost twenty years, for a brief period in Spain and later in the New World. Contemporary scholars have examined their figure as an example of the unstable nature of modern identity borders: Erauso’s story challenges modern binarisms, such as male/female; saint/sinner; civil/military; and Basque/Spanish, among others.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Claude Gay. “Prospecto de la historia física y política de Chile. Santiago, 28 de enero de 1841.” in Stuardo Ortiz, *Vida de Claudio Gay*, Vol. II, 279.

¹²⁵ Horacio Pinto Agüero, “Discurso de inauguración en la Exposición del Coloniaje,” *Discursos de Monseñor Ignacio Victor Eyzaguirre i de Don Horacio Pinto Agüero en la inauguración de la Esposicion del Coloniaje en Setiembre 17 de 1873*. (Santiago: Sudamericana, 1873), 10.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

concerned with the families that circulated and used the objects, offering a genealogy that fits the objects into a narrative that is strictly limited to family and kinship bonds.

The list of items in the “Historical Portraits and Family Paintings” category, (the name of which already speaks volumes), provides us with clear examples in this respect. Painting 16 is a portrait of Manuel Blanco Encalada, described as a “family portrait, property of General Blanco. This portrait has little importance except that it depicts the grandfather of the distinguished seafarer, who shares his name.”¹²⁷ Item 44 is listed as a portrait of the former Bishop Alonso del Pozo y Silva, stating that “Bishop Pozo i Silva is the great-great-uncle of the current dean of the cathedral and the venerable Bishop Don José Miguel Aristegui.”¹²⁸ Item 56 is listed as a portrait of the former Archbishop of Chiloé, Felipe de Azua, stating that “until quite recently, his great-niece Constanza Cortés i Azua remembered the obstinacy that her great-grandfather Don Tomas de Azua, the Archbishop’s father, put into everything he did.”¹²⁹ Lastly, Item 101 is listed as a portrait of the Public Prosecutor Perez de Uriondo (Fig. 17), with the following description: “Public Prosecutor Uriondo, one of whose sons was the Mayor of Santiago and whose grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren still exist in numerous and lucid generations.”

Apart from these portraits, the descriptions of the objects on display also provide specific references to the family to whom they belonged, highlighting the importance of their surnames. For example, Entry 136 is a piano from 1792 “commissioned by Doña Ana Josefa de Guzmán to be used by her daughter Doña Teresa Larraín y Guzmán, wife of Agustín de Eyzaguirre, who would go on to become an eminent patrician”¹³⁰ (Fig. 18). Entry 173 lists “four pieces of Venetian glass that decorated the halls of the opulent Echeverría family.” Entry 192 is a set made up of “a corset, a pair of gloves and a pair of women's shoes from the middle of the last century, which belong to the Zilleruelo family.” Item 227 is an ivory figure of the Holy Trinity “property of Doña Carmen Mackenna de Vicuña, in whose family it has been in for over a century.”

¹²⁷ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 27.

¹³⁰ Agustín de Eyzaguirre was a *criollo* who presided over the Government Junta in 1814 and served as the provisional President of the Republic between 1826 and 1827.



Figure 16 (Left): “Retrato de don Manuel Alday y Aspée.” (Portrait of don Manuel Alday y Aspée)
 José Legarda, Oil Painting, Lima, 1772.
 Painting Collection. National History Museum of Chile. 3-199.

Figure 17 (Right): “Retrato del fiscal Perez de Uriondo.” (Portrait of Public Prosecutor Perez de Uriondo)
 Unknown Author, [Santiago] Oil Painting, ca. 1800.
 Painting Collection. National History Museum of Chile. 3-265.



Figure 18: “Piano” (Piano)

Juan del Mármol. Wood, Ivory and Metal. Sevilla, 1787.
Furniture Collection. National History Museum of Chile. 3-1329.



Figure 19: “Salterio” (Psalter)

Pascual Castellón. Carved and Polychromed Wood. Lima, 1781.
Tools and Equipment Collection. National History Museum of Chile. 3-1063

Furthermore, there was a range of pieces that made explicit reference to family genealogies. This includes Item 246, “a head of Christ painted on bronze” that “bears the distinction of having the family tree of the Ovalle family on the back of it,” the coat of arms of the Irrarrazaval family (Cat. n.496), the “genealogical records of the Aliaga family” (Cat. n.501), and “the crests of the Barboza family” (Cat. n.580).

Of the utmost interest here is that the catalogue details how the Coloniaje Exhibition managed to embed itself within the rhetoric that articulated the “greater Chilean family” as one single and great nation. We can see this in the use of the figure of the grandparent—specifically when used in the first-person plural: “our grandfathers”—as a form of connecting the past and the present, which also articulates a clear sense of identity and belonging based on family lineage and the paternal bloodline. For example, the weaponry collection is described as holding “the instruments with which our grandfathers broke down the old walls of colonialism.”¹³¹ The portrait of Martín Calvo (Cat. n.17) is “remarkable for the perfection with which it represents the suits that our grandfathers wore.” Regarding the “last barouche of the colonial period” (Cat. n.132), the catalogue notes that “it is one of the authentic ones that our grandmothers used and passed down to their children.” The psalter owned by Ramón Santelices (Cat. n.138) (Fig. 19) has remarkable pictorial motifs “in which there are scrupulously detailed representations of the curious half-leg overskirts that were the favourite regalia of our great-grandparents.”¹³² There is an intriguing description of the portrait of Manuel de Salas (Cat. n.74), founder of the Cabinet of Natural History of the Royal Academy of San Luis (See Chapter 1). According to the catalogue, the painting depicts “*Taita* [Pather] Salas, thusly named with propriety because he was the father of all the progress made in Chile.”¹³³ As a review published in *El Ferrocarril* wrote in conclusion, the exhibition of “the old apparel of our grandparents (...) can be viewed as a pious memory of our forebears or even as a worthwhile lesson.”¹³⁴ Among the sparse mentions of the maternal bloodline, the Exhibition included an “elegant and solid trunk with silver plating” (Cat. n.160) presented as one of the many that “served our great-grandmothers for their sewing, and which they generally kept them close to them.”¹³⁵

¹³¹ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, VI.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 66.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 38. “Taita” or “Tata” are common expressions that refer to the father or grandfather.

¹³⁴ *El Ferrocarril* 5554, September 24, 1873, 2.

¹³⁵ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, 69.

By 1873, the year of the Coloniaje Exhibition, the “distinguished families” that participated in the event by displaying their material and visual assets were the third, if not the fourth generation of descendants of the “fathers of the nation”. This is the same “big family” that Gay referred to some thirty years before and that, as I argue, saw the Coloniaje Exhibition as a way of decoupling themselves from their Spanish past but not from their political power. On the contrary, the Exhibition operated as a space in which the local élites erased their differences to see themselves as the rightful heirs to the power that gave them the right to govern the fate of the nation.

In Conclusion: Decolonising *Coloniaje*

Without a shadow of a doubt, the most common word throughout this chapter is ‘colonial’. I must admit that I was not aware of the use of the word ‘*coloniaje*’ in this sense until I learned about the exhibition that takes centre stage this chapter. In my personal vocabulary, there were somewhat certain definitions for the noun ‘colony’ and its derivatives (colonist, colonisation, colonial). I could even identify, just as I had learnt at primary school, that the colonial period in Chile started with the founding of Santiago in 1541 and ran until 1810, ending abruptly with the first National government Junta. However, the word ‘*coloniaje*’, was not a common one in my linguistic repertoire.

More than with the event itself, my contact with this exhibition involved coming to understand the concept it sought to articulate: What did Vicuña Mackenna and his contemporaries mean when they used the word ‘*coloniaje*’? Apart from the place that the event holds in the configuration of a national memory, the matter of ‘*el coloniaje*’ allows us to sketch out a series of critical reflections regarding the relationship between colonialism and public heritage. The case of the Exhibition analysed in this chapter leads me to the conclusion that, in 19th-century Chile, the *criollo* élites used the terms ‘colonial’ and ‘Spanish’ to refer to the same network of meanings: tyranny, oppression, despotism. Thus, ‘*coloniaje*’ bears particularly negative connotations: it was the time in which the Spanish took advantage of the Chileans.

Against this backdrop, it is perfectly rational that the élites would put their family heirlooms on display in the Exhibition since their intentions were not to recall the colonial period but rather the families that put an end to it. Following this logic, the once oppressed élites now presented themselves as emancipated. That being said, the counterpart to this is that there was no

attempt to question or problematise colonialist practices that those self-same élites upheld over other groups of “Chileans” throughout the 19th century. On the contrary, a conflation in the meanings of ‘*coloniaje*’ and the Spanish Empire allowed internal colonialism to disguise itself in many ways that, to this very day, give shape to the alleged family unity of Chilean identity.

Over the 19th century, specifically during the second half, those same *Criollos* that extolled the end of foreign domination also implemented countless practices of internal colonisation that ended up consolidating racism as the ideology and politics of the State. The ransacking of the indigenous world and marginalisation of Afro-descendant communities are some of the most evident embodiments of this. Just one of the ways in which the Coloniaje Exhibition participated in this structure was, as we have seen, the exhibition of “a *negrito* from Lima.” Since the curatorial team abstained from including any objects from racialised groups in the collection, the presentation of this man as an anachronistic curiosity confirms that those élites deemed him to be beyond the realm of a Chilean identity.

In parallel, it was in the second half of the 19th century that the Chilean state violently conquered indigenous communities that had once managed to live with certain degree of independence from the Spanish empire's regime. The most significant example of this was the poorly named “pacification” or “civilising” of Araucanía, the military process that forcefully brought Mapuche territory under Chilean rule. 1873, the very same year of the Coloniaje Exhibition, was the year that the Chilean state started making the final moves in its conquest of the already pillaged native communities, thus initiating a process of making its population increasingly precarious, the effects of which are still felt to this day.

The aforementioned conflation between ‘*coloniaje*’ and the Spanish empire allowed the élites to restructure their privilege, underpinned by the exploitation of the racialised communities forcefully brought under the control of a project that they did not necessary feel they were part of. The rhetoric of the “greater Chilean family” might make sense within the upper classes, but not necessarily among the rest of the population: indigenous and mestizo communities, the economically deprived and those who had no say in political decision-making. Thus, there was a need to seek out strategies to incorporate these communities and make them part of an identity with national aspirations. It is on this point that, as I have shown by analysing one specific case, we can see the relevance of the practices of collecting and exhibiting objects and images, erstwhile family heirlooms. The exhibition of a collection presented as the heir to a shared past

gave historical coherence to an alleged shared narrative of belonging constructed with specific objectives in mind.

However, the museum sector in Chile is yet to truly engage with these reflections. In January 2022, the National History Museum opened a temporary exhibition that, following along Vicuña Mackenna's logic, would revive the Coloniaje Exhibition. Almost like a meta-resurrection, *Arqueología de una Exposición. La Exposición del Coloniaje (1873)* [The Archaeology of an Exhibition: The Coloniaje Exhibition] (Fig. 20) recreated the original display using the objects from the event that now belong to the museum's collections. The arguments to justify it were, according to the organisers, the commemoration of the first exhibition “which reproduced the foundational events of our past.”¹³⁶



Figure 20: “Arqueología de una Exposición. La Exposición del Coloniaje (1873)”
(The Archaeology of an Exhibition: The Coloniaje Exhibition)
Photography the author, 2022.

¹³⁶ Macarena Ponce de León, “Presentación,” in Alegría, *Arqueología*, 4.

None of the critical approaches laid down in this chapter formed part of the new exhibition. Quite the contrary: the contemporary exhibition replicated the discourse articulated 150 years before, one that saw an alleged shared past of all Chileans in the collection. The introductory text to the short display contextualises the Coloniaje Exhibition as follows:

In 1873, the [Coloniaje] Exhibition came at a time in which art and industry fairs were being held around the world to draw attention to the progress of modernity. Its historical nature allowed them to collect a diverse range of objects that made it possible to clearly represent the cultural legacy of the Colony in Chile. The Exhibition was the first experience of preserving and exhibiting the country's historical and cultural heritage, much of which now forms part of the National History Museum's collection.¹³⁷

I include this example to illustrate the oft-overlooked power of exhibitions and museum in the construction of national identities and narratives of belonging. The collections of the Coloniaje Exhibition are a clear example of what Alfred Gell calls the “capacity for agency” that objects have. In other words, to paraphrase Gell, this a form of instrumentalised action that triggers a presence; their agency, the power to influence their viewers, to make them act as if they are engaging not with dead matter, but with living persons.¹³⁸ The portraits and family heirlooms put on display are a clear example of their agency in projecting the élite's constant presence as the founders of the nation, the patriarchs of the “big family” of the country. This power is such that its discourse echoes repeatedly even over a century after the original exhibition. The resuscitated Coloniaje Exhibition of 2022 did not only displayed part of the 1873 event, but it was also made evident the continuity (then and now) of the colonial legacy and, specifically, the place of the élites in the construction of an allegedly collective memory. Therefore, I would call upon the museum to decolonise ‘*coloniaje*’, and I hope that this chapter may serve a purpose in this process.

¹³⁷ Excerpt from the in-hall introductory text to the exhibition.

¹³⁸ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)

Chapter Five: National Relics

Introduction

On 2 September 1982, during Chile's military dictatorship, Augusto Pinochet's government reopened the National History Museum in the building that operated as the *Real Audiencia* or Royal Court of Law during the colonial period, where it remains to this day. At the inauguration, attended by the dictator and the authorities of the time, the Minister of Education, Álvaro Arriagada, lauded the reopening claiming:

Here [in the Museum], from here on out, we shall house the repertoire of the constant presence of Chileans in the quest for their own perfection. This is reflected in the dignity of the document, in the presence of evidence, in the figure of artifice and the emblems and relics that decorate the ancient and lofty glories of the national being.¹

Arriagada's words perfectly encapsulate the questions that this chapter seeks to answer: How did certain materialities become "historical objects? Further still, how did they bear within them the "lofty glories of the national being"? In order to address these questions, we need to work through the history of the museum in question, the first "history" museum in Chile, to enter into a far broader debate in which material culture, national history and national identity come together to shape out a repertoire referred to as "Chilean heritage." The Minister's speech also contains what I would argue is a key notion for understanding this operation: relics. The ways in which objects and material traces once used, touched, owned or even smelt or tasted by a historical figure of the nation is one of the almost infinite forms of physical contact that turns mere objects into what I define as "national relics."

This context leads me to my first argument: I posit that one of the ways in which an individual identified themselves as belonging to a national community is through the recognition of its relics. As I shall show in this chapter, the Chilean ruling class saw the evidence value and political use of objects, erstwhile mere personal effects, that they could transform into national heritage.

¹ *El Mercurio*. El País. September 3, 1982, C1.

In terms of methodology, the notion of the relic helps me to map out the trajectory of these objects and, in so doing, ascertain how their use and consumption value changed over time. Museums and temporary exhibitions have played a key role in this shift, and this forms the second hypothesis of the chapter: upon entering the museum, objects lose their original use and value to take on new ones, namely, that of national relics. Even though the period studied herein had scant local institutional structures in terms of museums, the evidence does show that the local élites were acutely aware of the potential that these spaces had.

This potential, I would argue, is inextricably linked to an understanding of the museum and of other exhibition spaces as secular temples. In them, national history takes on a sacred value that, as a social practice, triggers a devotional relationship between a community and its heroes. For this same reason, it is no accident that my approach to this phenomenon stems from a perspective that draws on the anthropology of religion. Since they perpetuate a memory, relics are a manifestation of the relentless human struggle against forgetting. However, as part of a museum's collections, the relics covered here become "national" and, in so doing, they participate in the modelling of a specific collective memory. Following these lines, one of the main focuses of this chapter is to identify the forms, agents and objectives involved in shaping out this form of memory.

To corroborate my arguments, I have drawn on a rich corpus of documents, primarily made up of catalogues, inventories and bureaucratic notes that span a somewhat flexible time-frame around the period from 1840 to 1910. In terms of structure, this chapter is organised into two overarching sections, a theoretical one and one that focusses on case studies. In the first section, I frame the notion of the relic and the museum as a secular temple for worshipping it. Although the reader will find some examples grounded in the discussion of specific Chilean events, it is the second section that takes an in-depth approach to two case studies that support the hypotheses laid down in the first one: the relics of Bernardo O'Higgins and those of Arturo Prat. Lastly, as with every other chapter of my dissertation, I place these practices in dialogue with their contemporary counterparts, specifically with the current curatorship of the National History Museum.

None of the hypotheses explored in this chapter question the historiographical consensus regarding the processes that shaped out a Chilean national identity over the course of the 19th century. Rather, my work challenges the limits that other studies on this phenomenon have

placed on what they consider to be the legitimate archive, (namely written documentation). These studies have relegated material culture to a secondary plane that, at best, they describe as illustrative of the “veracity” of the written document. We can see this in the lack of academic studies on this matter regarding to Chile and, more broadly, Latin America. It is precisely in this gap where my study makes its contribution: by implementing an approach that handles the secular from a religious perspective, my work exposes the active role that objects played in the construction of a Chilean national identity, and that of the museum as their channel for legitimisation.

Relics

The word “relic” (from the Latin *reliquiae*) refers to “what remains of a whole.” On one level, the term is used to grant a chronological identity to certain materialities from the past. In this sense, a relic is a piece that has “survived” through time and a synonym of the old. On another level—the one that this chapter explores in greater depth—a relic is a materiality associated not so much with the past as with a specific person or event. These were objects that came into contact with the body of a person that a particular community celebrates, such as their clothing or personal or household belongings: a belt, a cup, a notebook. It could also be the very body, (or what remains of it), of the person in question: bones, hair, nails, teeth or even blood. There is also a certain spatial or temporal dimension to some types of relics. Here, they function as something that bore witness to events that corroborate the worldly presence of extraordinary people: from their footprints up to their deathbeds, spanning places that, as we shall see in this chapter, uphold the veracity of certain narratives.

Despite this framing, my approach to the social usage of relics coincides with the theory put forth by English historian Alexandra Walsham, who argues that it is futile to insist on a singular and closed definition of the word “relic.” Rather, her approach underscores “the slippery, elastic, and expansive nature of this concept and category, and the nebulous boundaries that separate it from other classes of entity.”² Along these lines, any body, object or place has the potential to become a relic. However, this transformation is not ontological nor intrinsic to these entities, but rather the result of cultural negotiations and a community’s shared sense of meaning, which includes the sacredness and veneration that all relics bear. What a given community

² Alexandra Walsham, *Relics and Remains* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

venerates as a relic, for another might appear to be an inanimate object devoid of any meaning. “Relichood”, argues the historian Paul J. Gillingham, “lies in the eye of the beholder.”³

For centuries now, relics have operated as the constitutional elements of different religions.⁴ In Christianity, the worship of bodily remains of the first martyrs was a wide-spread practice, and the nascent ecclesiastical institutions even went so far as to encourage it.⁵ Apart from martyrs, relics believed to be from Jesus Christ himself were some of the inherent elements of early Christian worship practices. For centuries, Christians worshipped his bodily remains such as his umbilical cord, the foreskin from his circumcision or blood spilled at his martyrdom.⁶ This reliquary repertoire also contained materialities that came into direct contact with the Messiah’s body during the Passion. “*Arma Christi*” is an official category that contains some of the most highly prized relics in all of Christianity: the *lignum crucis* (the relics from the True Cross), the crucifixion nails and the remains of the Crown of Thorns. This is a form of residual collecting practice that, as we shall see further on, seeps over into the secular and modern field as the Chilean national relics.

Despite the almost infinite possibilities of elements that could become relics, there is one property that gives them meaning and coherence: relics corroborate the veracity of narratives laden with heroism and sacrifice. Following Arjun Appadurai’s broadly accepted thesis,⁷ if we map out the biography that determines the social life of objects, we can see that the “life story” of relics is marked out their social recognition as part of a historic event. The relics of Jesus Christ, the Ur-hero of Christianity, serve as evidence of his presence on Earth and, thus, the veracity of the gospels. Within this universe, the relics of his martyrdom on the cross are elements that bear witness to the sacrifice *par excellence*: laying down one’s own life for that of

³ Paul G. Gillingham, “The Strange Business of Memory: Relic Forgery in Latin America” *Past and Present* 5 (2010): 206.

⁴ The worship of material and bodily remains was part of religious practices in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as in indigenous cultures in the Americas. Living religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and certain branches of Judaism also produce and consume relics. For a detailed understanding of the place of relics in different religious traditions, see: Strong, Jhon S. “Relic.” in Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. vol.12 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 274-282.

⁵ At this stage, the relationships between the body of the figure of worship and the devoted was tactile and affective: relics were not only touched but also kissed, stroked and embraced. The Archbishop of Cappadocia, Basil of Caesarea (330-379), passed a decree stating that “[t]hose who touch the bones of the martyrs participate in their sanctity.” (*Homily on Psalm 115*). Quoted in Derek Krueger, *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 45.

⁶ For further analysis of the relics of Christ during the Mediaeval Period, see: Caroline Walker Bynum “The Sacrality of Things: An Inquiry into Divine Materiality in the Christian Middle Ages,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78, no.1 (2012): 3–18.

⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1983] 2013)

others. Sacrifice, as we shall also see, seeps into the worship of the figures in the pantheon of Chilean national heroes.

When one examines the phenomenon of relics in Latin America, it is clear that it bears some differences from its European counterpart. Over the course of the colonial period, both the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown promoted the worship of relics as a form of evangelism. However, the region did not have a tradition of saintly or heroic figures that would allow it to transform local objects or bodies into relics. As Alan Knight argues, “[r]egarding relics, Latin America was short in originals.”⁸ Faced with a lack of local productions, the Church imported relics from Europe into the American colonies for the consumption of those living there. The transport of relics to the New World operated through requests sent by the local religious orders directly addressed to the Pope. The few studies that exist on this matter show that there was a predominance of requests and shipments of *lignum crucis* relics, which is proof of their enormous value and popularity. For example, Pope Gregory XIII sent a fragment of the True Cross to the Convent of Saint Augustine in New Spain in 1573.⁹ A century later, in 1673, the Church of Saint Sebastian in the capital of the Viceroyalty had a splinter from the True Cross “of the length of a finger”¹⁰ sent by Pope Paul V. The religious orders established in Chile also appear to have taken part in this system of circulation. Art historian Josefina Schenke argues that “despite the distance of Santiago de Chile from the places in which the *ligna crucis* (literally the “wood of the cross”) were distributed, it was the most common type of relic during the 17th and 18th centuries in this city.”¹¹

The intention behind this brief overview of Christian relics is to provide an example of what historian Patrick Geary describes as “sacred commodities.” These are sacred items that circulated through a system of value, consumption and exchange. Following along Geary’s lines, relics “are bought and sold, stolen or divided, much as any other commodity is.”¹² The understanding of relics as “commodities” allows me to draw them out of the realm of religiosity as the only framework in which they can move around. These are remains that hold a highly spiritual value, while also being laden with economic and cultural value. As Walsham puts it, “if

⁸ Alan Knight, “The Several Legs of Santa Anna: A Saga of Secular Relics” *Past and Present* 5 (2010): 227.

⁹ Juan Ignacio Castorena y Ursúa, *Gacetas de México*, vol. 1, “Gaceta del día 7 de abril de 1730”, 240.

¹⁰ Agustín de la Madre de Dios, *Tesoro escondido en el Monte Carmelo Mexicano* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1986), 78.

¹¹ Josefina Schenke, “Materialidad y santidad: reliquias de *ligna crucis* en Santiago de Chile, siglos xvii y xviii,” *Fronteras de la Historia* 26, no.1 (2021): 124.

¹² Patrick Geary, “Sacred Commodities: the circulation of medieval relics” in Appadurai, *The Social*, 169.

corporeal vestiges and material artefacts function as forms of religious and political capital, they are often also items that have other types of economic and cultural value.”¹³

It is here that secular relics enter the discussion. The operation whereby a body, object or image is detached from its original meaning to take on a sacred one—which I refer to here as the “logic of the relic”—is one that stretches out beyond the confines of the religious world to participate in the sanctification of secular remains. Following this logic, a secular relic is a vestige that is loaded with value, be it personal, family, national or of any community that recognises its sacredness.

Much like the first Christian relics, secular relics are laden with emotional components that span memory, curiosity and devotion. The symbolic value of these vestiges is completely dependent on the community (or person) that acknowledges their sacredness. Family relics transit through small spaces, and their circulation occurs via gestures such as gift-giving and inheritance. To use a personal example, my mother has a necklace passed down through generations of women in her family, which she keeps in a box along with other keepsakes. In that very same box, she also stores my umbilical cord and a lock of hair from my first haircut. If we analyse this through the “logic of the relic”, both the necklace (a material relic) and my umbilical cord and the lock of my hair (bodily relics) kept in a box (a reliquary) are, for my mother, sacred objects since she recognises and venerates her own life story through them.

Moreover, there are relics that invoke recognition from broad and diverse communities, such as a nation. What I call “national relics” are vestiges that corroborate the veracity of specific narratives—the *historia patria*—that also operate as agents of social cohesion and national identity. There have been many well-reasoned studies into ways in which an individual may recognise themselves as a member of a national community.¹⁴ Easily identifiable examples of this would be the flag, the coat of arms and the national anthem, as well as the national history and the heroic figures that give shape to it. However, there has been very little study as to the scope for agency that relics have as elements of social cohesion. Following my line of analysis, I posit that one of the ways in which an individual identifies as a member of a national community is by recognising its relics. Among these, the most common ones are those associated with the

¹³ Walsham, *Relics*, 31.

¹⁴ Among the key works that analyse this phenomenon, I would highlight: Eric Hobsbawm, “Language, Culture, and National Identity.” *Social Research* 63, n.4 (Winter 1996): 1065-1080. Regarding the case of Chile: Bernardo Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas y la cultura en Chile* (Santiago: Universitaria, 2011)

pantheon of heroes who laid down their lives for the nation. In Knight's words, "historical 'heroes' are ten-a-penny, but some have a distinct 'reliquary' association: a material object which carries their imprint or, better, a surviving bit of the heroic body, if not the whole thing."¹⁵

In the context of Latin America, some examples of "national relics" are those of men included in the pantheon of heroes known as the "liberators of America." These include Simón Bolívar's sword,¹⁶ José de San Martín's sabre,¹⁷ Francisco de Miranda's scabbard,¹⁸ Bernardo O'Higgins' sword¹⁹ and a reliquary with thorns from Christ's crown in his Passion that belonged to Miguel Hidalgo,²⁰ (which we could perhaps call a meta-relic). This group also includes, to name but a few, Antonio López de Santa Anna's prosthetic leg,²¹ Eva Perón's childhood toys,²² the glasses that Salvador Allende was allegedly wearing on the day he was murdered, (on display in the National History Museum of Chile),²³ and a cross that contains the chest hair of Francisco de Paula Santander.²⁴ Although there are many relics of this kind, historiography has often relegated them to a secondary plane.²⁵ Paul Gillingham, one of the few academics who has explored the historical agency of relics, mapped out the political usage of the bones of Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec Emperor in Mexico. "Cuauhtémoc's bones", the historian argues, "came to lie at the nexus of both elite and popular ideas about the transcendental and the tactical meanings of national identity."²⁶ This sentence enters into dialogue with my approach to the phenomenon insofar as the study of national relics is a field that is open to the exploration of the relation between vestiges (both material and corporeal) and national identity.

Much like any other relic, the category of "national relics" is the result of a process of resignification and social revaluation. However, there are two properties that set them apart from other types of relics. First, they are recognised as evidence for national history and, second, they

¹⁵ Knight, "The Several," 229.

¹⁶ Held in the collections of the National Museum of Colombia.

¹⁷ Held in the collections of the National History Museum of Argentina.

¹⁸ Held in the collections of the Bolivarian Museum in Venezuela.

¹⁹ Held in the collections of the National History Museum of Chile.

²⁰ Held in the collections of the National History Museum of Mexico.

²¹ Held in the collections of the Illinois State Military Museum in the USA.

²² Held in the collections of the Eva Perón Museum, Argentina.

²³ Held in the collections of the National History Museum of Chile.

²⁴ Held in the collections of the National Museum of Colombia.

²⁵ Of the few studies that cover this topic: María del Carmen Vásquez Mantecón, "Las reliquias y sus héroes," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 30 (July-December 2005): 47-110.

²⁶ Paul Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 9.

belong in the collections of a museum. It is with regards to this latter point that, as we shall see in following section, the museum operates as an institution that adopts the ritual practice involved in all relics. In the words of the anthropologist Steven Hooper, “[t]he common observation that museums and galleries are the new temples is more than a metaphor: it is true at the level of practice.”²⁷

The Museum: A Temple for National Relics

The post-independence ruling classes of Latin America were quick to recognise both the “enlightening” potential of museum as well as their ritualistic nature. Apart from providing an *in-situ* catalogue of the known world, the local élites also understood museums as vessels for the promise of civilisation. This is specifically where their ritual function lies: the shift from barbarism to civilisation. In Chile, the understanding of the museum as a temple that could foster this rite of passage becomes evident when we examine the different variables of the projects implemented during the century of state formation. It is worth noting here that, in 1821, Bernardo O’Higgins’ government debated whether to create a National Museum in order to “in some way bring the science and arts of the cultured countries to us.”²⁸ Among these variables is the recognition of museum architecture as one that has a strong religious component despite its pronounced secular aspirations.

Since their emergence as institutions that drew heavily on Western thought from the late 18th century, the buildings that house museums have always sought to emulate the temples of Classical Antiquity.²⁹ Early museum architecture in Chile is marked out not only by this style but also by its symbolic meaning. At the same time, this makes clear Chile’s explicit adherence to the Western aesthetic canon while also containing matters inherent to religious rites such as worship, respect and even ecstasy. For example, in 1872, the *El Ferrocarril* newspaper described the building that housed the Exhibition of Arts and Industry of the same year as “the alter of the

²⁷ Steven Hooper, “A Cross-Cultural Theory of Relics: On Understanding Religion, Bodies, Artefacts, Images and Art.” *World Art* 4, no.2 (2014): 184.

²⁸ “Senado Conservador, Sesión 373, Ordinaria, en 3 de agosto de 1821. Anexo 357” SCLRCh (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1889), 256.

²⁹ In this respect, Duncan argues: “museums have always been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples. Indeed, from the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, they were deliberately designed to resemble them.” Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 7.

intelligences”³⁰ where “thousands of spectators have gone to lay down the offering of their admiration.”³¹ Regarding the building, Eugenio María de Hostos wrote that “it has become a temple, and one must visit it with respect.”³² A few year later, at the grand opening of the building that housed the International Exhibition of Santiago of 1875, (notably neo-classical in style, which would be granted to the National Museum the following year; see fig.7, p.71), Rafael Larraín, the chairman of the organisational committee, greeted the attendees, welcoming them “to the sacred temple of the Arts and Industry.”³³ At the same event, Guillermo de Larraya, a member of the same committee, proclaimed: “may the halls of this new temple be contemplated with true pride; [...] may the fervent worship of the crowds that flock to reach ecstasy before the breath-taking altars of progress be admired.”³⁴

The foregoing confirms and expands to Latin America the thesis put forth by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, who posit that museum architecture “claims the heritage of the classical tradition for contemporary society and equates that tradition with the very notion of civilization itself, all as part of the process of legitimating the modern state.”³⁵ Following this idea, we can clearly see that the ritualistic property of museums does not lie solely in their architecture, but also in their alleged transformative power. This supports the overarching hypothesis of my dissertation: the Chilean élites saw museums and exhibitions as a means for defining national identity and creating a model for the ideal citizen. We can see evidence of this in the discourses through which the local upper classes managed the creation of specialist museums and thematic exhibitions. For example, in 1869, D.B. Grez³⁶ mentioned the need for the country to have a museum of “national customs.” This, the author argues, would provide the masses with the tools they need for their own transformation. In his own words:

Among the people, the museum nourishes a spirit of observation, as necessary as the philosophy of art, it shapes and perfects taste; it maintains enthusiasm; it rouses the

³⁰ *El Ferrocarril* 5256, September 29, 1872, 2

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eugenio María de Hostos, *Chile en su Exposición de Setiembre* (Santiago: Imprenta de la República, 1873), 68.

³³ Rafael Larraín, “Discurso del presidente del directorio de la Exposición, señor Rafael Larraín Moxo” *Correo de la Exposición* I, n.1 (1875): 3.

³⁴ “Algunos antecedentes sobre la Exposición Internacional,” *Correo de la Exposición* I, n.1 (1875): 2.

³⁵ Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 3.

³⁶ Art historian Josefina de la Maza notes that it is possible that “D.B. Grez” might be Daniel Barros Grez, a Chilean engineer, writer and collector born in the Colchagua Valley in 1834. See: De la Maza, *Por un arte nacional*.

imagination; it enlightens understanding; it dispels worry; it generates good ideas and, fostering a love of beauty among the people, it creates admirers at all levels of society so to speak.³⁷

In the speech he gave at the opening of the International Exhibition of 1875, Rafael Larraín stated that the Chilean people “here, shall reinvigorate their manly and enterprising spirit to continue, with greater impetus and new hope, the work of their progress.”³⁸ Some years later, in 1879, the sculptor José Miguel Blanco persuaded the government to accelerate the creation of a fine arts museum. The transformative power that this “temple of art” would provide for the working classes shows through in his words:

Our industrious workers that spend the entire week shut away in the workshop shall bring their children to this temple of art on this public holiday, where they can contemplate the image of our heroes and heroines. Viewing these images shall be healthy entertainment for them, a stimulus for work, for study, for virtue and the sacred love for the nation.³⁹

Blanco’s words encapsulate an idea that spans all of my case studies: the main function of the museum is ideological rather than an aesthetic or educational experience. In their unceasing desire to be acknowledged as members of a modern country, the Chilean élites understood the museum as a sign of political virtue and national identity. This is clearly an example of what Michel Foucault would call a disciplinary institution or, along these same lines, what Tony Bennet terms the “machineries of civic governance.”⁴⁰ That being said, what I want to explore here are the ways in which the museum made this form of governance effective.

Assuming, as I have argued up until this point, that museums align with religious behaviour, I posit that their rituality is structured around the worship of specific figures that articulate their meaning. This is where the “national heroes” enter the discussion, given that both spaces—temple and museum—operate around the veneration of the relics of one or more heroic figures.

³⁷ *Las Bellas Artes* 14, July 5, 1869, 111-112.

³⁸ Larraín, “Discurso,” 4.

³⁹ José Miguel Blanco, “Museo de Bellas Artes. Proyecto de uno.” *AUCh*, vol. LV, n.1 (1879): 399.

⁴⁰ Tony Bennett, *Museums, Power, Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

Heroes

Without a shadow of a doubt, the heroes and Fathers of the Nation—as is the historiographical consensus—played a key role in the formation of Latin American national identities. As the protagonists of the *historias patrias*, their life stories were marked out by events that constitute the ideals of the national project: honour and sacrifice. Chile is no exception to the canon of this genre; on the contrary, the “History of Chile” is an account of the construction of the state and the people who formed it. The narrative reaches its apex with the martyrdom of its heroes, the time at which their earthly lives came to an end and their mythological lives came into being: model citizens whose life stories encapsulate the ideals of the nation.

While written history played a key part in the creation of the pantheon of “national heroes,” in order to consolidate this group, those in charge of such writing needed strategies to corroborate the veracity of these narratives. Among them, the practice of collecting and exhibiting material vestiges and remains was one that fleshed out the identarian and affective function of written history. On display for public scrutiny at the museum, the “national relics” provided evidence to corroborate and bolster the veracity of the historical account. As historian David Lowenthal suggests:

Relics open to public inspection and potentially visible to any passerby provide unmediated impressions of the past. Seeing history on the ground is a less self-conscious process than reading about it: texts require deliberate engagement, whereas relics can come to us without conscious aim or effort. [...] Physical relics remain directly available to our senses.⁴¹

One key property of relics is their capacity to make absent bodies present. This single action is what mobilises the sacredness inherent to the consumption of relics. When put on display as part of a museum collection, the “national relics” resuscitate the epiphanic moments of the nation to establish their place in the collective memory that, while secular, becomes sacred. As I shall show in this chapter, the practices associated with museums and exhibitions were able to successfully configure and install the idea of the museum as a temple to national history. We can see this in the account left by a correspondent for *Zig-Zag* magazine after visiting the

⁴¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 245.

Military Museum of Chile, founded in 1895: “At the threshold, our first impulse was to realise that, in truth, we were entering a temple. The temple that houses the relics of our heroes, won at the price of their own blood,”⁴² the anonymous reviewer writes. “We spoke in whispers,” they continue, “we thought that our outdoor voices would profane the site.”⁴³

In Chile, there is evidence of the early communion between relics and national history in catalogues, inventories and institutional correspondence. As we have seen in previous chapters, the first attempts to create a museum in the country were wound up in the traditions of natural history. However, much to the chagrin of Gay and Philippi, the Chilean élites insisted on including objects in their collections that did not fall within the classificatory criteria of natural science. For example, in 1843, Francisco García-Huidobro, who temporarily acted as the director the National Museum after Gay’s departure, wrote the following to Mariano Egaña, the Minister of Public Instruction:

What, in my opinion, would be the most precious treasure of the Museum, is the most complete collection we can muster of the medals minted in America for any solemn motive, such as the signing of a constitution, the [medals] of honour issued for any notable armed conflict to soldiers that were in the [*illegible*] not as objects of mere intrigue but as monuments to history because they undeniable entrench a memorable event.⁴⁴

García-Huidobro helps to confirm one of the hypotheses put forth in the previous chapters, namely the epistemological shift, (from nature to culture), that the notion of the museum underwent in Chile from the 1840s onwards, which becomes strikingly clear in the second half of the century. Furthermore, his curatorial vision provides proof of the power that objects re-signified as “historical” have as pieces of evidence. Collecting and exhibiting these types of relics, following his logic, have a double function: first, they corroborate the veracity of the historical narrative, and second, they entrench this narrative as an “undeniable” part of national memory.

⁴² “En el Museo Militar,” *Zig-Zag* V, n.225 (June 12, 1909): 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “Carta de Francisco García Huidobro al ministro de Instrucción Pública. Santiago, 5 de febrero de 1843,” ANCh, Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 59, f.38.

García-Huidobro himself is the starting point for the exhibitory trajectory of the first “national relic” that I have been able to find in my research. In 1840, while he was also the director of the National Library, he informed the Minister of Public Instruction that he had moved some of the objects stored in the library to the museum. Among them, there were “the pistols used to murder the late Minister of War and [Commander-in-Chief of the] Navy, Don Diego Portales,⁴⁵ and the shackles in which he was taken from Quillota to [Cerro] Barón,”⁴⁶ as well as a wooden box containing a lock of his hair.⁴⁷ García-Huidobro justified moving these pieces claiming that, in his opinion, the museum was the “natural place for them to be truly stored.”⁴⁸ Decades later, in 1872, the then Mayor of Santiago, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, made his own contribution to the sanctification of the pieces related to “Portales’ sacrifice” by loaning objects from his personal collection to the Exhibition of Arts and Industry that same year. These included “the barouche in which the noble yet unfortunate Don Diego Portales was taken from Quillota to Valparaíso in 1837, at the foot of whose stirrup he was murdered by Captain Florin, on the night of the 6th of June of that year.”⁴⁹ The following year in 1873, the pistols, shackles,⁵⁰ the barouche⁵¹ “pockmarked by bullets and covered in ribbons of mourning,”⁵² and the “hair cut from Mr Portales himself on the day of his death”⁵³ went on display at the Coloniaje Exhibition, presented as the objects of the “martyr minister.”⁵⁴ The 1895 catalogue of the Military Museum list the “bilboes [shackles], with no cotter, with which they restrained the Minister Diego Portales.”⁵⁵ Both the shackles and the lock of hair were part of the

⁴⁵ See Appendix 4: Biographies.

⁴⁶ “Carta de Mariano Egaña a Francisco García Huidobro, Santiago, 25 de agosto 1840,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 29, n.63.

⁴⁷ “Caja contenedor de los cabellos de Diego Portales.” *Sistema único de registro y documentación*, SURDOC (online) <https://www.surdoc.cl/registro/3-34148>

⁴⁸ “Carta de Francisco García Huidobro a Mariano Egaña, Santiago, 21 de agosto 1840,” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 29, n. 63.

⁴⁹ *El Ferrocarril* 5199, July 21, 1872, 2.

⁵⁰ Tenth section: “Armas y Banderas” [Weapons and Flags], item 546: “Barra de grillos que llevaba el ministro Portales cuando fue asesinado en 1837.”

⁵¹ Second section: “Muebles y Carruajes” [Furniture and carriages], item 135: “El birlocho en que fue conducido preso y asesinado don Diego Portales en la madrugada del 6 de junio de 1837.”

⁵² *El Ferrocarril* 5554, September 24, 1873, 2.

⁵³ Section Eleven: “Objetos diversos” [Miscellaneous Objects], item 594: “Pelo cortado al mismo señor Portales el día de su muerte por el vecino de Valparaíso don Enrique Cood.”

⁵⁴ Vicuña Mackenna, *Catálogo*, 65.

⁵⁵ Museo Militar de Chile, *Catálogo del Museo Militar de Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta de la fábrica de munición, 1909), 108.

foundational collection of the National History Museum, created in 1911, where they remain to this day as part of its permanent collections.

An overview of the trajectory of how these objects have been exhibited confirms the central hypothesis of this chapter: upon entering the museum, objects lose their original usage and value to take on a new one, that of a relic. In the previous example, the pistols, shackles and barouche were not only in contact with Portales' body, (the essential condition of any relic), but were also part of the journey that, just like the *via crucis*, would end in his execution by firing squad in 1837. However, as Lowenthal notes, "relics are mute; they require interpretation to voice their reliquary role."⁵⁶ In this way, once the objects are stripped of their previous identity, the museum is the agent that gives them their new voice. From that point on, the identity of those objects will be determined by the story that certifies their direct contact with the central figures and events of national history. Having "belonged-to" or having been "in-contact-with" are the main properties that, in the life story of things, determine their nature as historical remains and, *ergo*, museum pieces.

There is evidence of the foregoing in the repeated attempts made by the government and some private individuals to include "historical" objects in the National Museum, a matter to which its director, Rudolph Philippi put up quite some resistance, as we saw in Chapter Two. Even so, he was not always able to prevent these objects "extraneous to natural history"⁵⁷ from entering the museum collections. For example, in 1872, Vicuña Mackenna sent him a selection of "historical objects" along with a note in which he expressed his satisfaction in "dedicating [the donation] to our national museum which is so poor in mementos of this kind."⁵⁸ Among them, the mayor included the printing press, handle and a screw that belonged to *La Aurora*,⁵⁹ the first

⁵⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past*, 243.

⁵⁷ "Museo Nacional. Su estado i adquisiciones según informes de su Director Dr. R. A. Philippi." Santiago, mayo 20 de 1861," AUCH, vol. XIX (1861): 425.

⁵⁸ *El Ferrocarril* 5263, October 9, 1872, 2.

⁵⁹ This refers to *La Aurora de Chile*, the first Chilean newspaper with substantial pro-independence leanings. It ran from 13 February 1812 to 17 April 1813. The transformation of *La Aurora*'s printing press into a national relic confirms the historiographical thesis of my research, namely, the emergence of a national identity as a result (rather than a cause) of the Chilean independence process. In a brief overview of the creation of Latin American national identities, Benedict Anderson points to the role that the press and the circulation of printed material played in the creation of *Criollo* identities that would go on to become national identities. This thesis is difficult to apply to the case of Chile if we consider that the first printing press reached the country in 1812, two years after the beginning of the revolutionary process. Given that *La Aurora* was a newspaper with a fairly minimal circulation that was only accessible to the small group of literate people in the country, we can see that its transformation into a relic also transforms the heritage of a very limited group into national heritage.

newspaper printed in Chile in 1813. Apart from this “relic from our independence,”⁶⁰ the donation also included some samples of pottery, cloth and “family” articles, as well as other objects that “belonged to” Bernardo O’Higgins, a key figure in Chilean national history, whose relics will be analysed further on in this chapter. The note also lists the surnames of the donor families and the houses where the objects were before they were gifted to the museum.

This donation, one of many other that Philippi could not reject, is indicative of various matters that are important to my analysis. First, Vicuña Mackenna stresses the lack of “historical mementos” in the museum and assumes that, through his donation, he would be contributing towards rectifying this situation. The donation of this type of object, as we saw in the previous chapter, and which I wish to reconfirm here, was a practice through which the élites produced a national heritage articulated around their personal heirlooms, thus contributing towards the shift of these objects from the private sphere to the public one. As we have seen thus far in this chapter, the life story of the object is not only distinguished by their contact with the events and figures in the *historia patria*, but also the visibilisation of the person who, by making an offering, relinquishes these items to contribute towards the formation of a national repository.⁶¹

Moreover, this donation also serves as an example of the semantic shift that these objects underwent as they entered the museum. The material heterogeneity of the group—mechanical parts, textiles and ornaments—was overwritten in favour of their resignification as “historical objects”, which placed them all on the same level. In fact, Vicuña Mackenna seemed to be aware of this shift. At the end of the note attached to his donation, he wrote: “Whatever the intrinsic value of these pieces may be, I might be so bold as to hope that they shall find a benevolent reception in your noble spirit, which I believe they merit, which shall lead them to be conserved in their rightful place in the Museum.”⁶²

The museum as the “rightful place” for the conservation of historical object was not only Vicuña Mackenna’s idea. The insistence of the élites and the government itself on including them in the collections is evidence of the importance that these parties placed on the practice of collecting and exhibiting material evidence of the national narrative. For example, in 1849,

⁶⁰ *El Ferrocarril*, Ibid.

⁶¹ Along similar lines, in museological practices, there is a deep-seated idea of idea of philanthropic donors that, by making donations, become admirable public figures. To name but one example, this practice is noticeable in the naming of rooms in honour of those who donate or economically contribute to the museum’s collections.

⁶² *El Ferrocarril*, Ibid.

Joaquín Prieto's government issued a decree that forced the Museum to house all of the Spanish flags captured by the Chileans during the wars of independence that, until that point, had been kept in the Cathedral of Santiago.⁶³ This collection of flags was one of the first attempts to assemble a material heritage of the nation that could be displayed and socially consumed as evidence. In fact, in 1821, Bernardo O'Higgins himself claimed that "they have been paraded in triumph with all of the military music and hung on the balconies of the Palace of government to be flaunted in public."⁶⁴ Even though, at that point, the country had no museum, the early exhibition of those flags is evidence of an early political awareness of the sensory, affective and mnemotechnic power of relics. "How sweet and varied were the impressions that this spectacle caused!"⁶⁵ claimed the then Supreme Director, stating that: "Tears of honour, courage and joy bathed the faces [of the people who saw them]; prevailing [in them] the memory of that day of blood and glory."⁶⁶

In his memoirs, Philippi noted that, when he became the director of the Museum in 1853, "there were two large units that contained the flags captured from the Spanish at the Battle of Maipú."⁶⁷ This evidence shows that the flags moved through different spaces: from the balconies of the palace of the government, to the Cathedral, and then to the Museum. The fact that the flags were stored in the Cathedral shows that, early in their history, they were understood as relics, hence the need to safeguard them in a holy space. Their transfer from the Cathedral to the museum thus marks a physical shift that, nonetheless, upholds the sacred nature of the objects now housed in a secular temple. Twenty years later in 1873, Vicuña Mackenna requested the flags in order to display them in the Coloniaje Exhibition. On the day of the grand opening, Monsignor Víctor Ignacio Eyzaguirre, chairman of the organisational committee, encouraged visitors to view "the precious relics [from the wars of independence] that, due to the condition of Chile at that time, could be called magnificent."⁶⁸ Among these "precious relics", Horacio Pinto Agüero, secretary of the committee, highlighted the collection of flags, introducing them as

⁶³ "Decreto Supremo" [Official Decree] May 15, 1849.

⁶⁴ *Gazeta ministerial de Chile*, vol 3, n.7 (August 25, 1821): 297-298.

⁶⁵ "Circular del Exmo. Señor Director Supremo del Estado. Santiago, 14 de agosto de 1821," in Francisco Echaurren, comp. *La Corona del Héroe. Recopilación de datos y documentos para perpetuar la memoria del general don Bernardo O'Higgins* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1872), 423.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Philippi, "Historia del Museo Nacional," 8.

⁶⁸ Eyzaguirre, "Discurso," 4.

“those rags of time-worn satin [that] represent the end of the predominance of the dark colonial period and, at the same time, are symbols of the first glory days of the Republic.”⁶⁹

Specifically, during the latter half of the 19th century, there are various examples that confirm the élites’ insistence on expanding the curatorial limits of the National Museum to include material vestiges of the past that would bear witness to the rupture between the colonial past and the republican present. For example, its 1878 catalogue noted that the “historic” property of the “parasol that the Viceroy of Peru used to stroll through the streets,”⁷⁰ (See Fig.14, p.129). The parasol’s value had nothing to do with its technical or aesthetic qualities, but rather with its biography: José de San Martín had allegedly taken it from Lima as part of the spoils of war and given it “to his favourite assistant, General O’Brien.”⁷¹ According to the catalogue, O’Brien, who played an active role in the Chilean independence process, “to celebrate the *Dieciocho*⁷² in 1856, opened it in Plaza de Lima, at the same time uncorking a bottle of champagne and raising a toast in honour of Chile.”⁷³

For the purposes of this study, it would be unproductive to examine the veracity of these narratives. In the worship of relics, belief operates as the fundamental principle. Belief is an affirmative act that precedes ritual practice, or, in other words, relics can never activate their own value if not through belief. “Belief”, argues historian David Morgan, “does not exist in an abstract, discursive space, in an empyrean realm of pure proclamation: “I Believe.” Belief happens in and through things and what people do with them.”⁷⁴ As such, belief is an act that not only requires things but also an intermediary agent, or medium, that gives them meaning. “A medium”, Morgan continues, “is where belief happens.”⁷⁵ When we apply this theory to the case at hand, we can see that museums and exhibitions effectively operate as the medium between the material remains and written history. The mere presence of objects from the past in its collections and exhibition rooms is the act that validates the transformation of things into relics

⁶⁹ Agüero Pinto, “Discurso,” 13-14.

⁷⁰ Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía del Museo Nacional de Chile, en Setiembre de 1878, destinado a los visitantes* (Santiago: Imprenta de los Avisos, 1878), 27-28.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Literally, “el dieciocho” [the eighteenth], in reference to the 18th of September, the day on which Chile started its independence process by forming its first ational Government Junta. Thus, the celebration of the “Dieciocho” as a synonym of the National Holidays, a colloquialism that is still active to this day.

⁷³ Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía*, 27-28.

⁷⁴ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

and, at the same time, legitimises the story that accompanies them. On display in the museum, the national relics confirm a shared belief: the story of the nation.

From its creation in 1833 up until the end of the 1860s, the National Museum of Chile was able to relatively effectively circumvent the repeated attempts to include historical objects in its natural history collections. Apart from the aforementioned attempts, during this period the archive also records a “piece of a stone column that belonged to the house of [Pedro de] Valdivia”⁷⁶; “a sword that belonged to the conquistadores,”⁷⁷ and “a cannon used in the trenches of Talca during the siege of 1859.”⁷⁸ However, it was the 1870s that saw a boom in the collecting, circulation and exhibition of national relics. For example, in 1873, the upper classes of Valparaíso rallied together to send relics that formed part of their family heirlooms to the Coloniaje Exhibition. Among them were “two pistols from Lord Admiral Cochrane”, “a walking stick from Diego Portales” and a set of “plates that belonged to Mr Bunster and were always used in battle by General San Martín.”⁷⁹ The 1878 Guide to the National Museum notes that Unit 27 of its permanent display contains a “blanket that O'Higgins used when he was in Peru; a cavalry blunderbuss of one of the colleague of General Osorio; [a] yellow silver-plated porcelain vase that belonged to General Osorio; [and] a porcelain cup for drinking chocolate, which belonged to Marcó del Pont.”⁸⁰ Two years before in 1876, the Minister of Public Instruction, Miguel Luis Amunátegui, issued a decree that created a “Gallery of Eminent Men in the National Museum.”⁸¹ Its purpose was to display “the portraits of notable figures of Chile that are currently located in various public offices and buildings, and those provided by private individuals” and “the flags captured in the war of independence and the objects of historical significance or memory that the nation possesses or acquires.”⁸² The following year, the Minister asserted that this gallery “shall be a kind of place of honour where we shall pay due tribute in gratitude to the grand servants of the nation.”⁸³

⁷⁶ [Attributed to Francisco García Huidobro] “Inventario de los instrumentos y otros útiles del Museo Nacional,” Santiago, January 7, 1843. ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Justicia, vol. 59.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *El Ferrocarril* 5199, July 21, 1872, 2.

⁷⁹ *La República* 2328, September 6, 1873, 2.

⁸⁰ Museo Nacional de Chile. *Guía*, 29.

⁸¹ “Creación de una Galería histórica de pintura i escultura, i de un Museo de bellas-artes, en el palacio de la Exposicion internacional chilena de 1875.” AUCh, vol.L, n.2 (1876): 421.

⁸² Ibid., 422.

⁸³ Miguel Luis Amunátegui, *Memoria de Justicia, Culto e Instrucción Pública presentada al Congreso Nacional por el ministro del ramo en 1877* (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1877), 107.

Although Amunategui's project never saw the light of day, his mere idea is evidence of the government's intentions to create a space for exhibiting the relics of the struggles for independence that, in this context, represent a prime example of what the ruling classes deemed to be "historical objects." This intention would become a matter of necessity after two key events in the study of national relics in Chile that can also help use to understand the rapid expansion of the country's drive to create a material repository of its past glories. The first of these events is the repatriation of Bernardo O'Higgins' body in 1868, which was previously buried in Lima, where he died in exile. The other is the so-called "War of the Pacific", the conflict that saw the Chilean army engaged in combat with Peruvian and Bolivian troops between 1879 and 1883. As we shall see further on, both of these events led to an exponential increase in material vestiges that brought into question the *status quo* for the practice of collecting national relics and that, as a result, shaped out a repository that, until such point, did not exist.

The Return of the Father

In November 1842, the then President of the Republic, Manuel Bulnes, informed the National Congress of the death of Bernardo O'Higgins, who had died in exile in Lima on the 24th of October that same year. "The oldest *caudillo* of Independence is no longer with us; he who, in one hundred battles, pointed towards so many glory days for the nation,"⁸⁴ the President reported, while also submitting a draft bill to repatriate the body of the late General, then buried in the cemetery of the Peruvian capital. Article 2 of the bill stipulates: "The mortal remains of General O'Higgins shall be exhumed and duly transported from the capital of Peru to the one of this Republic."⁸⁵ Moreover, Article 7 proposes that "a portrait of General O'Higgins, funded by the Nation, shall be hung in honour in the government Chamber, while the gallery of eminent men is being created in the Museum of the Republic."⁸⁶

Even though Congress passed this law, the repatriation of the body took years to effect, and the "Gallery of Eminent Men" never came to be. Although the government put this down to economic reasons, the fact of the matter is that, in the 1840s, O'Higgins was still a controversial

⁸⁴ "Proyecto de lei presentado en noviembre de 1842 por el Ejecutivo al Congreso Nacional," in Echaurren, *La Corona*, 3.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5.

figure who caused a degree of friction in the project of national unity.⁸⁷ However, the 1860s saw a new generation of politicians coming to power who believed that they had overcome this dissension under the metaphor of family unity. Following the prevailing patriarchal logic, the project of the “greater Chilean family” could not come into being until it had the remains of its father figure. It was against this backdrop that Vicuña Mackenna, as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, reactivated the project of repatriating the body of the nation's father in 1864. After five years of formalities, a funerary committee exhumed O’Higgins’ body and brought it from Lima to Valparaíso in December 1868. As Carmen McEvoy argues, the relocation of his remains triggered an explosion of patriotism and “*chilenidad*” that the country had never before seen. “For the Chile of 1869,” the historian writes, “the body-politic tried to unite around the body of the founding father.”⁸⁸

The return of the nation’s father was a key event in the consolidation of the nation ethos of the “greater Chilean family.” However, his bodily remains were not the only element to participate in the sacralisation of his martyrdom following the religious perspective put forth in this chapter. As we shall see in this section, the “return of the hero” set off a chain reaction in the circulation and collecting of his material relics that led to the first “heritage repository” exclusively dedicated to one sole figure in the history of the nation. Insofar as he was the unifying figure of the country, all Chileans would then be children of the same father. O’Higgins’ material vestiges, therefore, became national heritage and the museum, their temple of worship.

The funerary commission exhumed O’Higgins’ cadaver from the General Cemetery of Lima on 28 December 1868. The committee’s report notes the state of decomposition of the body, of which there only remained “bones still held together by his ligaments.”⁸⁹ “Those venerable relics,” the report continues, “were dry, in a mummified state thanks to the clothes

⁸⁷ During his term as a Supreme Director (1817-1823), O’Higgins enacted measures that earned him the distain of an important part of the local *criollo* upper classes. Powerful landowners and conservatives opposed his “liberal” reforms. These included the abolition of noble titles and, as a consequence, the privileges of nobility, such as the “*Mayorazgo*”, a residual part of Castilian law that allowed for property to be passed down intact via primogeniture. He also abolished slavery and created a non-denominational cemetery, which reflected his secular thought. Because of this, the Church opposed his rule. O’Higgins’ government was deposed by a conservative coup on 28 January 1823, and he was exiled from the country.

⁸⁸ Carmen McEvoy, “El regreso del héroe: Bernardo O’Higgins y su contribución en la construcción del imaginario nacional chileno, 1868-1869,” *Los Funerales Republicanos en América del Sur: Tradición, Ritual y Nación 1832-1896*, ed. Carmen McEvoy (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario e Instituto de Historia Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2006), 129.

⁸⁹ “Repatriación. Viaje al Perú de la Comisión enviada por el Supremo Gobierno para trasladar a Chile los restos del Ilustre Jeneral D. Bernardo O’Higgins.” Echaurren, *La Corona*, 73.

that, almost wholly conserved, held the parts of his skeleton together.”⁹⁰ However, when they removed the skeletal remains, his head came detached from the rest of the cadaver and the body was placed “just as it was” in a receptacle prepared by the Chilean government. Following the plan that they had established, his body was cremated, and his ashes were stored in an urn. The following day, the Peruvian government officially handed over the ashes to the Chilean committee and, on the following day, namely the 30th of December, they travelled to the Port of Callao, from which they set sail for Chile.

On 11 January 1869, the funerary committee landed at the Port of Valparaíso. At the docks, the city’s mayor and the other public figures stood in wait and “climbed the very stairs to receive the precious relics.”⁹¹ The entourage reached Santiago the following day where, much like a procession, they presented the ashes and other vestiges of the hero in a funerary carriage that paraded down the main street of the city, Alameda de las Delicias. Thereafter, the committee headed to the Cathedral, where they presented the funerary vase and held mass. The press reported that the local population formed great queues to “pay reverence to the precious relics.”⁹² Apart from the urn containing the ashes, the funerary altar also included “an embroidered general’s jacket that the hero wore, his tricorne and a sword.”⁹³ The following day, the 13th of January, the entourage travelled to the General Cemetery, where they re-buried O’Higgins’ ashes with state honours. “The Chilean nation,” the Minister of War, Francisco Echaurren, claimed “thus fulfilled its most sacred of duties.”⁹⁴

The documentary evidence shows that the “precious relics” that both the press and the government cite do not refer exclusively to O’Higgins’ ashes. Alongside them, there was a set of objects and materialities that “belonged to” or were “in contact with” the Father of the Nation that made up the first repository of national relics exclusively dedicated to the figure of O’Higgins. The funerary committee’s report mentions elements of this kind that are crucial to my analysis:

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 89.

⁹² Ibid., 169.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 189. We understand that it was only O’Higgins’s ashes that were buried in General Cemetery of Santiago, while the urn containing them was kept, as a relic, to be housed in the Museum.

On the morning of the 30th of December, the last preparations were made for departure, and the slab of marble that covered O'Higgins' tomb from the time of his death and the coffin in which his remains had been for so many years were placed on board to be stored in our Museum.⁹⁵

Insofar as they were in direct contact with O'Higgins' body, his coffin and gravestone—the epitaph of which reads: “Here lies in wait of the resurrection the flesh of the most excellent Don Bernardo O'Higgins”⁹⁶—being transferred to Chile is proof that the Chilean authorities were quick to understand these items as relics. Crucially for my analysis, they were also quick to classify them as museum pieces. Following the religious logic set down in this chapter, we shall see how their pieces were imbued with a sacred discourse and, as such, needed a physical space for worship. Here, we can see an example of the idea set forth above of the museum as a secular temple as the ruling class deemed it to be the only space that could and should house the relics of national history. In June 1869, Philippi noted that “the sepulchral urn and various other objects connected to the great patriot Bernardo O'Higgins have been sent to the museum.”⁹⁷ Although the museum director was reticent about including the urn and the various other objects in the Museum's collections, it reached a point that he had no choice but to cave to government pressure. In May 1872, as part of his annual report, he wrote the following:

I have been ordered to place the sarcophagus of the late patriot Bernardo O'Higgins in the Museum, an order that I was unable to fulfil before due to a lack of space in which to keep it; however, now that the new space allows for this, I cannot postpone implementing that order any longer. To do so, I need a cabinet suitable for such a noble object and, as soon as I have the sketch and the budget, I shall ask that you order for me to be granted the necessary funds.⁹⁸

The arrival of O'Higgins' sarcophagus and urn (Fig. 21) in the Museum is a matter that is symptomatic of a network of collecting practices that gathered material vestiges of the man, set

⁹⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁶ Ídem, 72.

⁹⁷ “Museo Nacional. Doctor R.A. Philippi al señor Ministro de Instrucción Pública.” *El Araucano* 3429, October 8, 1869, 3.

⁹⁸ “Museo Nacional. Doctor R.A. Philippi al señor Ministro de Instrucción Pública.” *El Araucano* 3963, September 10 1872, 4.

in motion by the exhumation of his body. In its offices, the Ministry of War conserved and exhibited the “original memorandum of the exhumation of the general’s remains,”⁹⁹ and other “documents related to the exhumation of O’Higgins’ remains”¹⁰⁰ which it would later donate to the Military Museum. Alongside the preparations made for the arrival of the ashes, we know that a committee chaired by Manuel Blanco Encalada, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, passed a ruling in 1868 to erect a statue in his honour. Apart from raising the necessary funds, the committee also put together a small collection of “rather curious documents”¹⁰¹ primarily including the correspondence between O’Higgins and the relatives of the committee members. Prime among these was “another letter of friendship from him [O’Higgins], written twenty-one days before his death, addressed to Vice-Admiral Manuel Blanco Encalada,”¹⁰² probably the only committee member who knew him personally, and “a sketch drawn by the hand of General O’Higgins in 1818, arranging for the creation of our beautiful Paseo de la Alameda, which, at that point, was a dumpsite.”¹⁰³ Vicuña Mackenna, another member of the committee, made donations to the repository from his personal collections, including “autographs of General Bernardo O’Higgins,”¹⁰⁴ a collection of loose papers written by the Supreme Director, which he later put on display at the Coloniaje Exhibition in 1873.

⁹⁹ Record number 1288 of the Military Museum Catalog.

¹⁰⁰ Record number 1289 of the Military Museum Catalog. Both for this and the previous one, it is explicitly stated that they were donations from the Ministry of War.

¹⁰¹ “Nombramiento de la Comisión Directiva de la inauguración del monumento del Jeneral O’Higgins. Santiago, 20 abril de 1872.” in Echaurren, *La Corona*, 621.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 622

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ “Autógrafos del Jeneral don Bernardo O’Higgins.” in Echaurren, *La Corona*, 633.



Figure 21: Urn and Sarcophagus of Bernardo O'Higgins.
Unknown Producer. Wood and other materials. Lima-Santiago, 1868.
Military Academy of Chile Museum.
Photography by Juan Manuel Martínez.

As we can see, Vicuña Mackenna played an important role in the case at hand. Not only did he revive the project to bring O'Higgins' body back, he also participated in the creation of a material repository dedicated to remembering "among his children and grandchildren"¹⁰⁵ that man who "never stumbled, was never scared, never hid his chest from danger: O'Higgins."¹⁰⁶ In 1872, the same year that Philippi was forced to cave in and exhibit the tombstone and sarcophagus, Vicuña Mackenna sent him various "historical objects" that would, in the latter's opinion, would serve to ameliorate the museum's severe lack of pieces of this kind. Among these, the mayor sent him:

- The strap of Capitan-General Bernardo O'Higgins, crafted in Chile in 1820, a gift from Don José Antonio Lira.
- A cotton blanket that belonged to General O'Higgins, given to Don Bartolo A. Riobó in 1860 by a friend of the General, and by him to the undersigned. It was the one that the General used in his hacienda in Montalbán [Peru], and the same one used by Peruvian ranchers in their warm valleys.
- A silver spoon that bears O'Higgins' monogram, a gift from Don Tristán Matta.¹⁰⁷

The lengths to which Vicuña Mackenna and his contemporaries went to create a material repository of O'Higgins' relics is proof of the mnemotechnic power that the group saw in material culture. In their view, objects could trigger a memory that, relic-like, would make the absent body of O'Higgins—the personification of Chilean patriotic discourse—present again. This matter embodies the theoretical approach to relics that this chapter has elaborated. Part of this is the approach that historian Annabel Wharton takes, arguing that relics "are remnants of a history that is threatened by forgetting: they record duration, postpone oblivion and evoke an absent whole."¹⁰⁸ That memory, however, is fleeting. Thus, the importance of the museum as a space that does not only prevent the erasure of these memories, but also entrenches them and anchors them into a collective memory. This is exactly what José Miguel Blanco put forth when

¹⁰⁵ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, "La apoteosis. Una palabra de introducción a la Corona del Héroe," in Echaurren, *La Corona*, XI.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, VI.

¹⁰⁷ *El Ferrocarril* 5263, October 9, 1872, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Annabel Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 9.

he argued that the role of the museum was to “serve as a stimulus for those who feel firmly in their chest the noble desire to honour the nation.”¹⁰⁹

In this way, the National Museum progressively created a collection of Bernardo O’Higgins’ relics that were stored alongside the natural history displays that it had been collecting since its creation (See Appendix 2: Relics of Bernardo O’Higgins). In 1878, its “Gallery of Antiques” displayed “General O’Higgins’ sword,”¹¹⁰ a “blanket used by O’Higgins when he was in Peru,”¹¹¹ and a “walking stick given to Bernardo O’Higgins by Simón Bolívar,” along with other items and those listed above. This leads me to the conclusion that the return of O’Higgins’s body in 1869 was a turning point in collecting and exhibiting practices in Chile. This phenomenon legitimated the “logic of the relic” as the main argument for re-signifying material remains as museum pieces. Broadly speaking, this politics of collecting looked back to the independence period and the first years of state formation, proclaiming the heroism and sacrifice of the important figures of the times, all of them members of the local élites. As Duncan argues, “what the museum presents as the community’s history, beliefs, and identity may represent only the interests and self-image of certain powers within the community.”¹¹²

However, from 1879 onwards, the country experienced a new and different explosion of patriotism, now in real time and wound up in the “War of the Pacific.” Much like the national project that managed to rally around the figure of O’Higgins ten years before, in the 1880s, it did so around the figure of Arturo Prat and his soldiers. As we shall see in the next section, the relics of this naval hero and ones from the War itself would play a key role in the success of this union.

Pratomania or the Relics from the War of the Pacific

On 31 March 1881, the Minister of Public Instruction, Manuel García de la Huerta, passed a decree for the creation of a “War Trophy Room” in the National Museum. The plans, in which Philippi, as the director of the museum, did not intervene, appointed a new committee to:

Create in the National Museum a weaponry room that shall contain one or two examples of the weapons and munitions of all of the systems used in the country, those taken from

¹⁰⁹ Blanco, “Museo de Bellas Artes,” 395.

¹¹⁰ Museo Nacional de Chile, *Guía*, 27-28.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹² Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 92.

the enemy, and all curious objects that can contribute to forming trophies, which could be used for study and historical memory of our current war with the allied republics of Peru and Bolivia.¹¹³

That “current war” to which the Minister refers is what we now call the War of the Pacific, a military conflict that dates back to an old dispute between Chile, Bolivia and Peru to define their borders in the Atacama desert, a region that was rich in saltpetre, which had great economic value at the time.¹¹⁴ The armed conflict started with Bolivia declaring war—with the intervention of Peru as an ally—on Chile, on 1 March 1879. Over one month later, on the 5th of April, Chile declared war on both countries. After four and a half years of conflict, thousands of deaths and enormous economic losses, the war came to an end in 1884 with the triumph of Chile and the annexation of the disputed territories. This happened despite the fact that, at the beginning of the war, the Chilean army was in considerably worse conditions than those of its enemies.¹¹⁵ However, the outbreak of war also led to an outbreak of patriotism the likes of which the country had never seen.

This explains why, despite Chile being in a rather unfavourable situation, the recruitment of civilian volunteers for the war exceeded all expectations. Although there are many underlying causes behind this phenomenon,¹¹⁶ the evidence suggests that all of those who enlisted shared a patriotic discourse. One example of this was Abraham Quiroz, a military volunteer who claimed the only reason he enlisted was to fulfil “his sacred duty of all men to serve their country.”¹¹⁷ When asked if he felt any guilt about leaving his wife to join the fight, another soldier said no,

¹¹³ “Sala de trofeos de guerra en el Museo Nacional. Marzo 31 de 1881,” AUCH, vol. LX (1881): 93-94.

¹¹⁴ The War of the Pacific, also called the Saltpetre War in reference to its original cause, was fought between Chile and the allied forces of Bolivia and Peru, from 1879 to 1884. It grew out of a dispute between Chile and Bolivia over control of a part of the Atacama Desert that lies between the 23rd and 26th parallels on the Pacific coast. The territory contained valuable mineral resources which were exploited by Chilean companies and British capital. Chile gained substantial mineral-rich territory in the conflict, annexing both the Peruvian province of Tarapacá and the Bolivian province of Antofagasta, leaving Bolivia landlocked. As a direct consequence of the war, the Chilean national treasury grew by 900 percent between 1879 and 1902.

¹¹⁵ This situation was largely due to the cuts made to the Ministry of War’s budgets which, from 1875 onwards, affected its ability to purchase weaponry and train their armies. In terms of human capital, historian Carlos Donoso provides some figures that corroborate this imbalance: “While Peru and Bolivia could jointly mobilise almost 120 thousand reserve troops, the national [Chilean] forces only had just over 50 thousand.” (Donoso, “De Soldado,” 237)

¹¹⁶ The State offered 6 pesos when they enlisted and also ensured food and clothing during the entire conflict, as well as a pension for the surviving veterans. For the working classes, most of whom were poor, this was quite the tempting offer.

¹¹⁷ Abraham Quiroz, “Epistolario inédito de su campaña como soldado raso durante toda la Guerra del Pacífico,” *Dos soldados en la Guerra del Pacífico* (Buenos Aires: Francisco de Aguirre, 1976), 56.

“because the nation comes first, before women.”¹¹⁸ Historian Sol Serrano mentions an anecdote that neatly condenses the romantic explanation of the Chilean victory: At some point in the conflict, General Patricio Lynch, Vice-Admiral of the Chilean Navy, asked two soldiers, one Chilean, the other Peruvian, why they were fighting in the war.. The Peruvian responded “for Piérola,”¹¹⁹ and the Chilean said, “for my nation, General.”¹²⁰

Much like the relics, the veracity of this account is of little importance here. The mere existence of the anecdote is proof of the success of the national identity project designed by the Chilean upper classes. Rooted in the ideals of liberal republicanism, the discourse of love for one’s country was the evidence that proved the existence of the “Chilean nation” and, as such, that of a political and cultural community that was legitimately on course towards Western civilisation. Various studies have examined the feedback loop between war and patriotism that, once the former was over, would lead to a consolidation of a “Chilean national identity.” Despite all of these academic accounts, there has been practically no investigation into the impact of the practices of collecting and exhibiting material culture during this period. The aim of this section is to fill that gap. The evidence leads me to the conclusion that the War and patriotic discourse had a huge impact on these practices and, in turn, they contributed towards consolidating patriotic discourse. We can see proof of this in the creation of the War Trophy Room—the starting point for this section—which, as the minister explicitly stated, was intended for collecting and exhibiting “curious objects” from the War.

Many points in this endeavour serve to confirm the hypothesis of this chapter. First, the application of the “logic of the relic” as the underlying politics of collecting. The room contained objects whose main value stemmed from their direct contact with the enemy troops. In fact, in July 1880, in his report for the Minister of Public Instruction, Philippi wrote “I cannot overlook mentioning the highly valuable donation that the Minister of War has made to the Museum of the flags of the Bolivian Aroma battalion from Cochabamba, and the Peruvian [battalion] from Arequipa.”¹²¹ As in the previous cases, their original value shifted in meaning as the objects entered the museum. From that point onwards, their symbolic value outweighed any biographical

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Carlos Donoso, “De soldado orgulloso a veterano indigente: La Guerra del Pacífico,” in *Historia de la vida privada en Chile*. vol. II: “El Chile moderno. De 1840 a 1925,” eds. Rafael Sagredo and Cristian Gazmuri (Santiago: Taurus, 2015), 238.

¹¹⁹ This refers to Nicolás de Piérola, the war-time President of Peru.

¹²⁰ Sol Serrano, *Historia de la Educación en Chile (1810 - 2010)*. vol. II: La educación nacional (Santiago: Taurus, 2013), 12.

¹²¹ “Museo Nacional,” AUCH, vols. LVII- LVIII (1880): 229.

value. Unlike O'Higgins' relics, the value placed on the relics of war as museum pieces does not stem from the record of who they belonged to, but rather from what they represent: Chile's military superiority.

Another point is connected to the historical awareness involved in the practice. Unlike the cases that we have analysed up until this point, the war relics did not serve as evidence of a bygone age, but rather of the present. Their symbolic value hinged upon an event that was going on at the same time as they were collected, which is evidence of an expansion of the temporal limits of what can be classified as a "historical memento." From this point onward, the practice of collecting relics does not exclusively hearken back to the past; rather, it connects directly with its place in the construction of a collective memory mapped out in the present day.

There is evidence of this in the contribution that Vicuña Mackenna made in 1882 to the Weaponry Room created the year before in the Museum. The then former mayor headed up a collecting network structured around the historical nature of the residual objects from the War since, in his words, they were the "exclusive heritage of the nation."¹²² That same year, he wrote to the Minister of Public Instruction to donate "nineteen flags and banderols captured by our valiant soldiers and marines from the enemies of the Republic in both land and sea combat in the current war,"¹²³ asking him to "issue an order to have them placed in the National Museum."¹²⁴ In his note of receipt, the Minister thanked Vicuña Mackenna "for the patriotic dedication with which you have brought together and conserved those symbols of the greatest national glories,"¹²⁵ also confirming the heritage status of the materials and the value of keeping them as "this type of trophy is its [the nation's] exclusive heritage."¹²⁶ As well as the flags, Vicuña Mackenna also included military standards, a mast, some bullets and another small flag that read "*¡Muera Chile! ¡Viva el Perú!*" [Death to Chile! Long live Peru!]¹²⁷.

Even though, until that point, the war relics had been relegated to a role as mere trophies, the donation includes an object that opens up a different horizon, this time framed within the national ideology of sacrifice on behalf of the nation. Vicuña Mackenna notes that he had in his possession "the only authentic memento that exists from the glorious Esmeralda, namely, the

¹²² Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, "Trofeos de Guerra," AUCH, vol. LXII (1882): 428.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 431.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 430.

rope that Prat ordered to cast for the landing of the 21st of May.”¹²⁸ The rope, he continues, “is authenticated by a letter from this most distinguished commander [Admiral Juan José Latorre] when he sent it to me as a generous testament in name of the crew on boards the warship.”¹²⁹

The rope being sent and received as a museum piece once again confirms the applicable of the logic of the relic as the underlying politics of the collection. It is also of note that Vicuña Mackenna also makes specific reference to the authenticity of the piece in a document that records its life story, a matter that hearkens back to the authentication processes inherent to Christian relics. Unlike the flags and banderols captured from the enemy, the piece of rope presented here shifts the focus back to direct contact with a heroic figure as crucial moment in the process of it becoming a relic. Specifically, the figure of Arturo Prat and the Battle of Iquique, a naval engagement—the first in the War, on 21 May 1879—between the Peruvian monitor, the *El Huáscar*, and the Chilean corvette, *La Esmeralda*, captained by Prat. In the conflict, with the Chilean forces facing imminent defeat, Prat jumped ship on to the Peruvian vessel, where he was shot dead. *La Esmeralda* later sank into the waters of the Pacific Ocean as a result of the Peruvian victory. From those same waters, the rope and other remnants from the event were salvaged, and later formed part of the array of relics that are still worshipped across various museums in the country to this day (See Appendix 3: Relics of Arturo Prat and the War of the Pacific).

The interesting part of this event is what the relics from the Battle of Iquique commemorate. Given that Chile lost the battle, what sense would it make to collect and venerate those remains? The tone with which the press reported on the defeat may point us towards an answer. While the Chilean press wrote in 1879 that “Chile has lost a battle, but it has gained a hero,”¹³⁰ its Peruvian counterpart claimed that “[t]he Chileans have lost their minds. They have become idolaters of a new religion called Prat. [...] This is a real Pratomania.”¹³¹ In effect, Prat’s martyrdom represented (and still represents to this day) the embodiment of sacrifice for the nation, the perfect example of laying down one’s life for one’s country. As historian William F. Sater argues, “Prat died for Chile, and an analysis of various primary sources -the press,

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ *La Patria* 5117, April 2, 1880, 5.

¹³¹ “Peruvian newspaper.” Quoted in William F. Sater, *The Heroic Image in Chile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 48.

congressional debates, and public meetings- demonstrates that it was his self-immolation that made him a hero in the eyes of his countrymen.”¹³² However, much like many other historians, Sater overlooks the pieces of material culture in circulation in the collections, museums and exhibitions as part of the array of documents that justify labelling Prat as a hero.

While O’Higgins’ relics opened the floodgates to the practice of collecting material culture associated with a national hero, Prat’s martyrdom and self-immolation in combat led to an expansion in this practice, to such an extent that even Philippi, who had been reticent about allowing this type of objects into his collections for years, seems to have succumbed to *Pratomania* and the outbreak of jingoistic ardour. In 1880, the Director of the Museum reported that he had already prepared O’Higgins’ remains and the first relics from the War of the Pacific for exhibition, stating that “there could be no better purpose for the large hall of the museum than for bringing together all the mementos and trophies of their glory.”¹³³ However, this concession appears to have been a strategy to avoid implementing the Decree of 1879 that would force the Museum to operate as a “Field Hospital” to treat the war-wounded in its halls.¹³⁴ Even though the order was postponed, Philippi wrote to the Minister, in June 1881, to report that:

For five months this lazaretto has occupied not only the main hall and the patio, but also the hall in which the paintings were hung, part of the three rooms for Botany, mammals and birds, the old office of the Exhibition and the taxidermist’s office; because of this, the works have been almost eternally halted and the Museum has had to close its doors to the public.¹³⁵

Between 1881 and 1882, the Museum did, in fact, operate as an emergency hospital. Despite this radical change to its rooms, the director claimed that “there can clearly be no healthier locale for the sick and wounded,”¹³⁶ also reporting, with a certain degree of pride, that

¹³² Sater, *The Heroic*, 52.

¹³³ “Museo Nacional. Junio 9 de 1880,” AUCH, vol. LVIII (1880): 229.

¹³⁴ “Oficio de José Antonio Gandarillas, Ministro de Justicia, Culto e Instrucción Pública, a Rodolfo Philippi, 28 de noviembre de 1878.” The Official Letter read: “Put yourself immediately at the disposal of the Health Committee to establish a field hospital in the central hall of the Exhibition building, the two wings that are not occupied by the National Museum or the Institute of Agriculture, and the large courtyard that should be used for storing the machines -God be with you- Gandarillas.” ANCh, Fondo Ministerio de Educación, vol. 394, item 2018.

¹³⁵ “Museo Nacional. Junio 5 de 1881,” AUCH, vol. LX (1881): 320.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

“no other hospital has had a lower death rate or quicker recoveries”¹³⁷ than the Museum.

Interestingly for our analysis, as many mutilated and wounded bodies came through its doors, the Museum also grew its collections of “mementos” from the war that was still raging with bodily remains from anonymous soldiers, a practice that no other study has detected until now. During the war years, the museum added to its collections “the jawbone of a sailor from the glorious corvette [La Esmeralda]”, a “thighbone of a sailor on La Esmeralda”, “a shoe with a foot inside it,” “hair taken from the cadaver of Sergeant Aldea”, a sailor killed alongside Prat in Iquique; a “a piece of wood from the conning tower of the Huáscar with the congealed blood of [Miguel] Grau” and a “fragment of bone [that] comes from the right tibia” of Grau, the Admiral of the Peruvian Navy.¹³⁸

The appearance of these bodily relics made it possible for other remains of this kind to enter the Museum’s collections. Towards the end of the 19th century, it had various body parts from figures that, once re-signified as museum pieces, corroborated the narrative of national history. Ones from the War of the Pacific were of particular importance, among which I have identified “the hearts of the officers who fell that day [the Bombardment of Valparaíso]: Captain Ignacio Carrera Pinto; and Second-Lieutenants Julio Montt S., Arturo Pérez Canto and Luis Cruz M.,”¹³⁹ “a skull fragment from the Sargent of the 7th Line Brigade, Benigno Peña”¹⁴⁰ and “a mummified skull taken from the allied camp.”¹⁴¹ All of these relics formed part of the first collections of the Military Museum in 1895. However, that museum’s catalogue expressly states that they were a donation from the National Museum, which is evidence of both ruling classes insistence on including these “mementos” from war in the Museum, and the Director’s insistence on getting rid of them.

Apart from these bodily remains, the Museum also started to put together a collection of the material traces that did not fit the purposes of the Trophy Room. An analysis of the archive leads me to the conclusion that, during the war years, the wreckage of La Esmeralda came to form a collection of national relics that, despite the story of defeat behind them, set in motion a conjunction between “memory of the past” and a patriotic discourse of sacrifice. Among these,

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Museo Militar, *Catálogo*, 77.

¹³⁹ “En el Museo Militar,” *Zig-Zag* V, n.225 (June 12, 1909): 7.

¹⁴⁰ Record number 1365 of the Military Museum Catalogue.

¹⁴¹ Record number 1569 of the Military Museum Catalogue.

in 1883, the Museum recorded having “a piece of wood,” “a piece of copper sheet,” “a rope,” and “a pennant” from La Esmeralda.¹⁴² In terms of the exhibition, Philippi reported that those relics “have found their place in the large hall in which the flags hang taken from the Peruvians and Bolivians in the current war, which have been sent to the museum.”¹⁴³ This shows that there was a curatorial intention underpinned by the understanding of these vestiges as pieces that should be seen and be put on public display.

It is reasonable to surmise that the pieces and fragments of La Esmeralda operated under the same fragmentary logic as the *lignum crucis* relics; in other words, as small fragments that referred back to an entire set of sacred attributes. There is evidence of this in a reliquary that contains “a splinter from La Esmeralda”¹⁴⁴ (Fig. 22), which originally belonged to a private collection but became part of the first collections of the National Historical Museum in 1911. In addition to this group, there were also relics that, once the war was over and they had been framed within triumphal patriotism, went on to become part of the National Museum. For example, in 1888, Philippi informed the Minister of Public Instruction that “thanks to the munificence of the Supreme government, the Museum has managed to acquire some remains from the glorious Esmeralda, taken from deep within the sea; most importantly, the lid of the compass, the [boat] level, a teapot, two silver spoons, etc.”¹⁴⁵

Despite the *Pratomania* of the 1880s, there are no records of the maritime hero's relics entering the Museum's collection during that decade. This was most likely because his widow, Carmela Carvajal, put together a private collection of her late husband's personal effects. They included his uniform, “made up of a frock coat, a pair of epaulettes and a pointed hat.”¹⁴⁶ The first reference to these relics as museum pieces appears in the 1895 catalogue of the Military Museum under the category “objects that belonged to Captain Prat,”¹⁴⁷ which leads me to suspect that his widow donated them to the museum. Arturo Prat Carvajal, the son of the naval hero,

¹⁴² *Memoria del Ministro de Justicia, Culto e Instrucción Pública presentada al Congreso Nacional* (Santiago: El Progreso, 1883), 371.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ “Relicario con astilla del buque Esmeralda” [Reliquary with splinter of the Esmeralda ship] SURDOC (online) <https://www.surdoc.cl/registro/3-2439>

¹⁴⁵ *Memoria del Ministro de Justicia e Instrucción Pública presentada al Congreso Nacional en 1888* (Santiago: Imprenta de los Debates, 1888), 406.

¹⁴⁶ Museo Militar de Chile, *Catálogo del Museo Militar de Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta de la fábrica de munición, 1909), 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 22: “Relicario con astilla del buque La Esmeralda”
(Reliquary with a splinter from the ship La Esmeralda)

Unknown producer. Wood, Oil painting, Glass. Chile, ca.1879.
Decorative Arts Collection. National History Museum of Chile. 3-2439

donated a cloth jacket and two pairs of trousers that belonged to his father to the foundational collection of the History Museum in 1911.¹⁴⁸ These donations are proof of the museum's role as a secular temple and, furthermore, as a space that facilitated the ritual that transformed family heirlooms into pieces of public and national heritage. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that all of these pieces now form part of the permanent collection of the History Museum, where their value lies in their presentation as objects that "belonged to" Prat, which confirms the persistence of the "logic of the relic" as the politics behind the exhibition.

Alongside the creation of a repository of personal objects, the years directly following the War also saw the collection of objects that had been in direct contact with the naval hero. It consists of a range of materials that circulated among private collections and the National Museum over the final decades of the 19th century, the main value of which stemmed from their having been in contact with Prat's body at the time of his death. Among them were "a medallion of the 'Virgen de los Rayos' that Arturo Prat was wearing at the time of his death,"¹⁴⁹ the "register that Arturo Prat had in his pocket when he fell on the deck of the Huáscar,"¹⁵⁰ and the "sword that Arturo Prat wielded on 21 May 1879, with which he fought until his demise."¹⁵¹ Apart from these relics that had direct contact with his martyrdom, in 1895, the Military Museum also exhibited a "wooden cross that was on the tomb of the immortal Arturo Prat," a "wooden grate placed on the tomb of Arturo Prat" and an "ink drawing placed on the tomb of Arturo Prat."¹⁵² The practice of collecting the hero's funerary objects confirms that this form of contact transforms them into relics that transcend the limits of the living body, expanding them out to the inanimate corpse. Lifeless bodies, English theorist Deborah Lutz claims, "held a certain enchantment, a charmed ability to originate narrative. Bodies left behind traces of themselves, shreds that could then become material for memories."¹⁵³

The relationship between that which "bodies leave behind" and the creation of memories is the specific focus of this chapter. It is not only the body itself that determines the traces, but

¹⁴⁸ SURDOC. Register number 3-35576: "Pantalón usado por Arturo Prat" [Pants worn by Arturo Prat]; Register number 3-35575 "Pantalón de paño usado por Arturo Prat" [Cloth pants worn by Arturo Prat]; Register number 3-10093: "Casaca usada por Arturo Prat" [Jacket worn by Arturo Prat].

¹⁴⁹ "Sala comandante Arturo Prat." (Commander Arturo Prat Hall) Naval Army Academy of Chile Museum.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Museo Militar de Chile, *Catálogo*, 80.

¹⁵³ Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death In Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15.

also the physical proximity between material culture and bodies, both living and dead. The practices of collecting and exhibiting these objects lead to a conflation in which life and death intertwine, not only as a *memento mori*, but also as the constant representation of the sacrifice. The category of “national relics” that I have used to frame the objects discussed in this chapter encapsulates the ideals held by the Chilean ruling class that, during the latter half of the 19th century, was still working on the construction of a national identity. Towards the end of the century, however, they were able to wind up that process. This was certainly a phenomenon with multiple causes. However, as I have shown in this chapter, collecting and exhibiting objects, material traces and bodily remains contributed towards the collapsing of relics with “historic artifacts,” strengthening a practice that, in terms of museum policy, continued right into the 20th century.

In Conclusion: Relics between Persistence and Resistance

In 1910, within the context of the celebration for the centenary of the Chilean Republic, senator Joaquín Figueroa—the political successor to Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, who died in 1886—oversaw the “Exposición Histórica del Centenario” [Centenary History Exhibition], which set out to “collect everything that involves a memory of times gone by.”¹⁵⁴ In order to create a repository of “memories”, the Senator drew upon two key notions that my investigation covers: the relic and the family. In a press release published in *El Mercurio*, Figueroa publicly called upon the “Chilean nation” to lend or donate to the Exhibition “the relics that our grandparents used during the colony, independence, etc.”¹⁵⁵ This leads me to the conclusion that, even at the dawn of the 20th century, there was still a deep-seated idea of a “national heritage” structured around family heirlooms from the ruling classes, who were also the protagonists of national history.

In the same statement, Figueroa added that objects “that served our forebears during the prehistoric times and the discovery and conquest of Chile”¹⁵⁶ would also be welcome in the Exhibition. The differentiation made between materialities that “served”—in other words, were “subject to”—and those that were “used by”—meaning, those that were in direct contact with

¹⁵⁴ *Circular de la Exposición Histórica del Centenario. A sus delegados* (Santiago: Imprenta Camilo Henríquez, 1910), 3.

¹⁵⁵ *El Mercurio*, July 1, 1910, X. My emphasis.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

figures from the “greater Chilean family”—is evidence of the success of the process of forming a national heritage whose main political principle for collecting was the “logic of the relic.” Even though the Centenary History Exhibition did not produce a printed catalogue, the documents from the preparatory process prove that this was not just an embodiment of the ruling classes’ desire to turn their family heirlooms into public heritage, but rather it also attests to the success of the process incubated during the second half of the 19th century: physical contact as the main value that transforms an object into a “national relic.”

Tracing a genealogical path of the “logic of the relic” in Chilean collecting practices allows me to identify its persistence and contemporary continuities. Over the course of the 20th century, the National History Museum put together an important material and visual repository that it has been presenting as the “heritage of the nation” ever since. A quick look at its catalogue confirms that the “logic of the relic” has been operating as its main politics for forming collections, exhibiting and presenting objects. Almost all of these are given historical value insofar as they “belonged to” or were “in contact with” an important figure or event in the history of the nation. We can see some examples that prove that the practices analysed in this chapter still exists to this day in the current presentation, as a part of the museum’s permanent exhibitions, of “Diego Portales’ shaving razor,”¹⁵⁷ a pair of “overalls used by children in the Droguet-Larrain family,”¹⁵⁸ a “teapot that was part of the tea set on La Esmeralda,”¹⁵⁹ and “the telephone of Carlos Ibañez del Campo,”¹⁶⁰ and from 1952 to 1958. Another piece, presented as an “object that belonged to La Esmeralda,”¹⁶¹ the ship captained by Arturo Prat during the War of the Pacific, also speaks volumes. In this case, the “logic of the relic” operates to such an extent that the material has no other identity other than the story of it being in contact with a glorious event in the historical narrative.

The most significant piece in terms of reliquary persistence in the collection is the display of Ulk (Fig. 23), the Great Dane that belonged to former president Arturo Alessandri Palma (1920-1925 and 1932-1938). This enormous dog died in 1941 and was embalmed at the taxidermy laboratory at the Natural History Museum, then going on to become part of its

¹⁵⁷ MHN, Register number 3-1831.

¹⁵⁸ MHN, Register number 3-3379.

¹⁵⁹ MHN, Register number 3-02413.

¹⁶⁰ MHN, Register number 3-02471. Carlos Ibañez del Campo was President of the Republic from 1927 to 1931.

¹⁶¹ MHN, Register number 3-2690. See also Appendix II.

collections. However, the National History Museum argued that, given its history of physical contact, the museographical value of the dog was far more “historical” than natural. Since 1984, Ulk’s embalmed body has formed part of the Decorative Arts Collection in the National History Museum and is on display alongside other objects that “belonged to” Alessandri.

Ulk’s story is indicative not only of his transformation, (from pet to museum piece), but also the sacralisation involved in putting him on display. In fact, Ulk is a clear example of the aforementioned concept of “sacred commodity.” In 2018, the National History Museum conducted a survey that found Ulk to be the visitors’ “favourite object.”¹⁶² After this, it drew up a marketing strategy that, to this day, uses the dog and other relics as the main elements for merchandising: postcards, calendars and colouring books that, among other formats, offer up the image of the dog as the face of the museum (Fig. 24).

This example is one of many that problematise and call into question the notion of the historical object among the pieces that make up the museum’s collection. The question of what transforms material into a “historical object” finds an answer in my analysis based on their story of physical contact, one that, therefore, does not hide their condition as a relic. Furthermore, the notion of the History Museum as a space through which the worship of relics promoted a sense of patriotism and national identity is an idea that, as we shall see here, developed over the course of the 19th century, was still deep-seated notion in the 20th century, and one that has barely been questioned thus far in the 21st century.

As the surviving witnesses to a past, what we have labelled as ‘national relics’ here are indicative of an archaeology that is open not only to the more classical exercise of contemplating the museum, but also to its worship and its participation in the creation of national identities and patriotism. Much like the public display of exhibits in a police investigation, the rooms of the History Museum display objects and remains that provide evidence of the veracity of national history and of its reproduction in texts and schoolbooks. In this way, regardless of whether the story of ownership behind the object is true or false, the relic-object constitutes a revelation and, from a religious perspective, a symbol of faith: what is shown is true.

¹⁶² Museo Histórico Nacional, *Estudio de audiencias-públicas. Informe de resultados*. April, 2018 (online) https://www.mhn.gob.cl/sites/www.mhn.gob.cl/files/images/articles-86119_archivo_01.pdf



Figure 23: “Ulk. Perro taxidermizado que fue la mascota del presidente Arturo Alessandri.”
(Ulk. A taxidermized dog that was President Arturo Alessandri's pet.)
Taxidermized animal, 1941. Decorative Arts Collection, National History Museum of Chile. 3-2203.

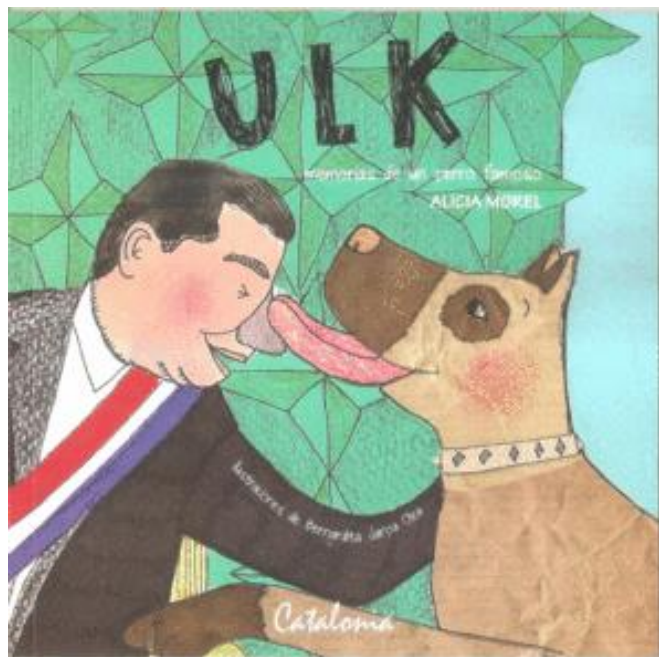


Figure 24: *Ulk. Memorias de un perro Famoso* (Ulk. Memoirs of a famous dog) [Cover]
Santiago: Museo Histórico Nacional-Catalonia, 2018.

The main value that national relics provide is, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, “the constant presence of Chileans in the search of their own perfection.” The words of the former minister Arriagada’s 1982 speech is as a prime example of an idea that, as we have seen in this chapter, dates back to early collecting practices that operated as part of a project to construct a national identity. Following along that path of sacrifice and perfection, national relics are signifiers that glorify and venerate the noble men of history. Those relics invite us to reflect on the social meaning of belief and of the historical narrative as an unquestionable social truth. This reflection does not mean that we should get rid of, let alone destroy, these objects, but rather call them into question. Beyond their glorious stories of physical contact, my proposal is that re-reading the national relics could easily transcend this history of triumphalism. Their value is open to matters inherent to their category, such as affective and sentimental practices, forms of communication with that which is absent, discussions of memory and forgetting and—going against the grain of the museum’s current curatorship—stories of defeat and imperfection.

I wonder if the “sword that Arturo Prat wielded on 21 May 1879 with which he fought until his demise” could pose other questions that go beyond the mere act of sacrifice. I think of his fears: was he scared before he died? I think of his pain: did he suffer? I think of his pride: did he prefer to be shot to death rather than being taken prisoner? I wonder if the “urn in which they brought O’Higgins’ remains back from Peru” could lead us to reflect on the humanity of the hero. O’Higgins died in exile; he never had the chance to form part of the nation that he believed he had created. What did he feel as he lived and died as an exile? Sorrow? Anger? Pain? It is impossible to answer these questions, but by merely articulating them, we can open up possibilities for breathing new meaning into the relics. This chapter hopes to make a contribution towards bringing about this change.

Afterword

In the introduction to my dissertation, I made it clear that I intended to answer the question of how we got here; the question of how and why certain “things” took on a new double identity: from raw nature to “Chilean nature,” from household objects to “national heritage.” To do this, I set about tracing back the trajectory of those practices that, over the course of the 19th century, paved the way for the emergency of the National History Museum of Chile at the beginning of the 20th century. That being said, this very museum has been omnipresent across the previous chapters, almost haunting them. At this point, by way of conclusion, it is necessary to sketch an outline of the trajectory of this institution to identify the relevance of the hypotheses I have set out and confirmed in my dissertation.

The National History Museum was founded on May 2, 1911, by means of a decree signed by the President of the time, Ramón Barros-Luco. However, this specific document goes no further than to mark the foundational moment and the appointment of Senator Joaquín Figueroa as the chairman of the board of governors. As I noted in Chapter Five, Figueroa had been responsible for organising the “Centenary Exhibition” in September 1910 and, due to the success of the event, he felt it was of the utmost importance for the country to have a history museum. According to the Senator, the country needed a museum that could safeguard “with religious respect the numerous objects of hugely valuable historical interest”¹ that until that point were scattered across the country. In February 1911, he drew up an official letter addressed to the Minister of Public Instruction in which he informed him of a range of reasons that, in his opinion, justified the need for the state to invest in a history museum “of noble appeal where the public can reinvigorate their patriotic love,”² also claiming that:

Spontaneously, from the general public, the enthusiastically accepted idea emerged to found a National History Museum, to collect and permanently conserve with great care the relics of our national history, as an objective lesson that our people can benefit from, [and] in which they shall find a useful pleasure that shall temper and elevate their souls.³

¹ “Creación de un Museo Histórico Nacional,” ANAP, Book 2784, February 1911, npn.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Figuerola's petition encapsulates various ideas that I have developed throughout this dissertation. To name but one: the idea of the museum as a transformative institution. As I have previously explained, the ruling class understood the museum—to paraphrase Tony Bennet—as a “civic engine” and the “machinery of modernity;”⁴ in other words, as a crucial institution for the endeavours that sought to transform the population into civilised citizens. However, going beyond this indisputable matter, my analysis of the Chilean case shows that the élites were aware that this power went over and above the “civilising mission.” The arguments laid down by the Senator contain an idea that runs through all of the different cases analysed here: the museum is also a signifier of political virtue and national identity and, as such, a fundamental element in the configuration of feelings of belonging and the consolidation of a sense of “patriotic love.”

For this reason, going against Figuerola's own line of argumentation, the creation of the National History Museum was not a “spontaneous” act, but rather the outcome of practices that were deliberate, calculated towards specific ends and deployed across a range of different projects throughout the 19th century. These practices, as my research shows, ended up consolidating a notion of the museum that operated as a synonym for national identity. We can see proof of this relationship not only in Figuerola's own words but also in the very trajectory of the National History Museum, which also corroborates the persistence of various issues that arose in the first endeavours to create a museum for the country. One of these was the lack of a physical home. Although the History Museum came into being in 1911, it did not have its own building until much later in 1940. In the interim, its collections made their way through different public institutions, while the Museum's main offices were two rooms in the building that housed the Museum of Fine Arts. Just as the post-independence authorities founded a museum without a physical space to accommodate it, a century later, the country's ruling classes did the exact same thing out of a pressing urge to have a history museum that could represent Chilean national identity. Although the National History Museum had a foundational collection, the legacy handed down to it from prior “historical” exhibitions, in 1911, it lacked a building, official staff or any by-laws.

In fact, it was not until 1929, in the context of the creation of the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos [Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums], that the

⁴ Tony Bennett, *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 2017)

Museum finally acquired a regulatory framework. It is possible to imagine that, until such point, the authorities did not feel it was necessary to expressly state an apparent truism: the function of the National History Museum is, as the first article of its by-laws states, collecting and exhibiting “objects that, within history, are relics from national events in which the civil and military nature have collapsed into a singular political aspect.”⁵ This mere definition, set down in the legislation over a century after the first collecting practices identified in my research, confirms various hypotheses in my dissertation. Perhaps the most important of these is the understanding of the museum and its collections as representatives of an unmistakable Chilean national character.

With a brief overview of the provisions legislated in 1929, I can connect them with the ideas that I have studied in my research.⁶ For example, the decree stipulated that the History Museum is to be organised into three sections: Prehistory, History and Military History. The first of these, according to Article 163, “shall group together all objects connected to the ancient Chilean aborigine.”⁷ This confirms my argument in Chapter Three, namely that the museum participated in the symbolic annihilation of indigenous communities, consigning them to a “prehistorical” past and, paradoxically, “Chileanising” them as antiquities.

In turn, the “History” section is set aside for “the political and private life, social currents and customs of Chile”⁸ and its collections would be made up of “the objects that represent such aspects from the Spanish conquest of the territory up until the present day.”⁹ Two aspects of this definition perfectly encapsulate various ideas that run throughout my dissertation. The first of these is the collapsing of the “life of Chile” into the life of its élites and, consequently, the understanding of this social class as the only one that held any historical agency. It is of little surprise then that the “historical” nature of the objects is determined specifically by the fact that they belong to one specific class. Furthermore, the second point is that this agency is also

⁵ “Reglamento para la dirección general de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos,” Ministry of Public Education, Decree 6234, December 29, 1929, Art. 164.

⁶ The By-Laws that regulated the History Museum did so from 1929 to 2017. That year, in the context of the creation of the Ministry of Culture, (and the transfer of all of the national museums from the Ministry of Education to the new one), the definition of the History Museum was updated: “The mission of the National History Museum shall be to make the history of Chile known through the heritage objects that it stores, seeking to provide the national and international communities with access to knowledge on the history of the country, so that they can see in it the identity of Chile, through its roles in compilation, collecting, conservation and dissemination of the tangible and intangible heritage that makes up the historical memory of the country.” Ley 21045, “Crea el Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio” (2017) Capítulo II, Título 1, Párrafo 5, Artículo 32.

⁷ “Reglamento,” Art. 163.

⁸ “Reglamento,” Art. 164.

⁹ Ibid.

determined by contact with the European world. The chronological structure of the Museum repeats the temporal logic of the *historias patrias*, one in which history, “real history”, begins with the arrival, (or rather the invasion, to be fair), of the Spanish troops.

The paradoxical vision of Spain as the enemy and, at the same time, the bridge between Chile and the “civilised” world is also evident here. Even though, by its own logic, the time-frame of history starts with the arrival of the Spanish, the same article stipulates that “in the exhibition of the objects that belong to this Section, care shall be taken no to confuse the era of Spanish domination with that of the Independent Republic.”¹⁰ Here, the Museum reproduces the intellectual discourse that, as we covered in Chapter Four, established an unassailable dichotomy between the colonial past and the present of the Republic. Going beyond this confirmation, it is also of interest to note that, much like with the Coloniaje Exhibition, this distinction is not necessarily determined by the temporality of the objects, but rather with the figures who put an end to the Spanish regime.

Moreover, Article 165 also belies the persistence of another notion that I have analysed in my dissertation. It stipulates that “[the Museum] may also collect objects that, while not necessarily historical, are rarities or curiosities worthy of being conserved and put on display.”¹¹ As I argued in Chapter One, the idea of the “curiosity” was crucial in the history of museum. The curious nature of the objects implies that it is impossible to classify them. Interestingly, this definition makes clear that curiosities are both unclassifiable and lack historical agency. For example, if one searches for the noun “*curiosidad*” or the adjective “*curioso*” in the Museum’s online catalogue, the system brings up a series of objects that it classifies as such. This includes a woman’s fan,¹² a clay jug made by an artisan¹³ and a painting of a duende.¹⁴ Strangely enough, (or perhaps of little surprise), none of the objects catalogued under these terms belong to the “masculine” sphere or the elite class.

The building that the government granted to the Museum in 1940 became insufficient for storing and exhibiting its collections after three decades. In 1978, the military authorities under Pinochet’s dictatorship decided to renovate the old Palacio de la Real Audiencia in the historical

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., Art. 165.

¹² Register number 3-3962.

¹³ Register number 13-1267.

¹⁴ Register number 3-35248.

centre of Santiago, and to grant it to the Museum permanently. Furthermore, for the first time ever, the Museum received a budget that was exclusively set aside for the technical development of its departments and the professionalisation of its employees. As a way of silencing voices that heralded a “cultural blackout” ushered in by censorship, restrictions on free speech and the forced exile of dissidents, the Dictatorship used the project of the “New History Museum” to subdue those who criticised its absolute lack of interest in the cultural sphere.

Much like the cases analysed in my research, the funds that the state funnelled into the Museum clearly had political intentions behind them. Of course, this move was laden with meaning and interest. In a time characterised by institutional instability and social crises, the Dictatorship authorities “resuscitated” ideas that were deeply ingrained in popular conception of national history, understanding the museum as the ideal space for Chileans to come together as if they were one big family. At the re-inauguration in 1982, Enrique Campos, the appointed head of the Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, presented the History Museum as the “beating heart of *chilenidad*,” “an inventory embodied in living and unmistakable signifiers of our national being.” At the end of his speech, Campos, who was also a military figure, handed over the “sacred evidence” contained in the Museum to the “citizens of the nation”, so that “they may enjoy that which truly belongs to them and so that they may feel nothing other than a real Chilean.”¹⁵

Were the reader to visit the National History Museum of Chile today, in 2023, they would see with their own eyes the persistence (and resistance) of a range of matters that, as we have seen, are deeply rooted in pronouncedly racist and evolutionary systems of thought. Its permanent exhibition provides a chronological itinerary structured around events that, now appear, in the kindest of terms, problematic, (even the very name of the “Discovery and Conquest” room draws directly on civilising narratives). There is no denying that this museum, its history and the genealogy that connects it with early nineteenth-century practices is an example of the definition of a museum, with some nuances, agreed upon by those who study this field. Specifically, it is a complex institution that produces specific values, messages and meanings such as, as is the case here, a country’s past.

¹⁵ “Prólogo,” in Hernán Rodríguez, *Museo Histórico Nacional* (Santiago: Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 1982), 11.

So... now what?

In recent decades, the museum has become increasingly relevant as an object of study, so much so that it now even has its own discipline, Museum Studies, which focuses on the analysis of the institution from various perspectives. One of the first conclusions that came to light from this interdisciplinary framework was related to its role in the processes of constructing modern states and national identities. Sharon Macdonald, widely thought to be one of the founding figures of the discipline, argued in 1998 that, in the context of the formation of national states in the West at the end of the 18th century, “museums came to be conceived as symbols of national identity and progress, and as sites of civic education for the masses.”¹⁶

This theory now goes widely undisputed in the field and, as my research shows, it can be broadened out to cultural zones that were originally marginal to the Western gaze of museology. The rapid emergence of “National Museums” in all of the former Spanish colonies in the first decades of the 19th century shows that it is possible to apply this theory, differences aside, to the case of Latin America. As my research has shown, in the case of Chile, the local ruling élites saw the museum as an effective tool to make an abstract notion explicit: national identity, that of their own class and that of the “others.” The different case studies in my research confirm that museums and exhibitions were instrumental in Chile, and they ended up creating a specific image of “national historical heritage.”

However, going beyond the mere corroboration of this theory, my intention here is for my work to enter into contemporary debates that problematise the legacy of the museum in the perpetuation of hierarchical systems of identities, colonial narratives and marginalised and racialised communities. In dialogue with these concerns, museologists Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb have recently called on the field to go “beyond governmentality” to approach the museum “as a site of conjuncture, as a site for the development of theories on the museum, and as a site which is itself generative of theory.”¹⁷ This perspective accentuates the “situated” nature of the knowledge produced by and for the museum. In other words, it circumvents the universalising pretensions of the museum’s discourse to place greater emphasis on its local nature (and that of those who, like me, study it).

¹⁶ Sharon Macdonald, *The Politics of Display: Museums, Sciences, Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 8.

¹⁷ Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb, “Introduction. Museum Theory: An Expanded Field,” in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, eds. Sharon Macdonald and Helen Rees Leahy (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), XLVI.

I wish to end my dissertation by taking up this call and acknowledging that there is still much to do. Although my intention was to highlight the place of the museum and its associated practices in the construction of identities in Chile, I am aware that this is not enough to truly change a structure that is deeply rooted in the collective imagination. However, I do hope that the ideas and critiques that I have elaborated may contribute to a much broader debate that not only deals with the museum as an object of theoretical and conceptual discussion, but also with the communities and subjects that it affects. As is widely accepted, the museum is an institution that produces meanings. I would also add that it produces feelings: emotions, senses of belonging, reflections and disruptions. Tracing problematic historical narratives back to their origins is, in this case, the first step towards making them visible, putting them up for debate and, potentially, changing them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Chronology of Museums and Exhibitions in Chile during the 19th century

Table prepared by the author based on the documentary and bibliographic corpus of his research.

Date	Event
1803	Establishment of the Natural History Cabinet of the Royal Academy of San Luis in Santiago.
1813	The government Junta and the Senate agreed on the creation of a National Museum.
1822	Hiring of Jean-Joseph Dauxion-Lavaysse as director of the National Museum of Santiago.
1830	Hiring of Claude Gay and appointment as director of the Gabinete de Historia Natural de Santiago.
1841	Claude Gay hands over the Cabinet to the government under the name of National Museum.
1843	Exhibition of paintings by the French artist Raymond Monvoisin. First exhibition of visual arts.
1849	Establishment of the Chilean Academy of Painting and a gallery for the exhibition of their works.
1853	Rudolph Philippi takes over the direction of the National Museum
1856	National Painting Exhibition of 1856
1869	National Agriculture Exhibition
1869	War weapons exhibition room at the Army Artillery Barracks
1872	National Exhibition of Arts and Industries
1873	Coloniaje Exhibition
1874	Santa Lucia Hill Indigenous Historic Museum
1875	International Exhibition of Chile
1876	Santa Lucía Hill Painting Exhibition
1877	Painting exhibition at the Palacio del Congreso.
1878	Reinauguration of the National Museum in the former Chilean International Exhibition building
1879	Formation of the Museum of Ancient Weapons
1880	Foundation of the Fine Arts National Museum
1881	Establishment of the "War Trophies" room at the National Museum.
1883	Painting Salon of 1883
1884	National Exhibition
1886	Exhibition "European Contemporary Art"
1886	Chilean Art Salon
1887	Painting exhibition at the National Congress
1894	Establishment of the Military Museum of Chile
1910	The Centenary Historic Exhibition
1911	Foundation of the National History Museum

Appendix 2: Relics of Bernardo O'Higgins

Table prepared by the author based on the documentary and bibliographic corpus of his research.

Type of Relic	Description	Original Collection	Year of Incorporation	Current Location
Contact	General and Supreme Director of Chile Bernardo O'Higgins' dress coat	National Museum	1869	National History Museum
Contact	Urn in which the remains of O'Higgins were brought from Peru.	National Museum	1869	Military Academy Museum
Contact	Canteen carried by O'Higgins on the battlefields	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Bernardo O'Higgins Sarcophagus	National Museum	1869	Military Academy Museum
Contact	Epauettes worn by O'Higgins	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Trunk for O'Higgins' personal use and with which he travelled from Lima to his hacienda.	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Table clock that belonged to O'Higgins	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Alarm clock that belonged to O'Higgins	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Galvanic device for private use by O'Higgins	Military Museum	1895	NI ¹
Contact	Tombstone of O'Higgins' tomb in Lima	National Museum	1869	Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda
Contact	Coffin in which O'Higgins was buried in Peru.	National Museum	1869	National History Museum
Contact	Coat of arms of the urn in which the remains of O'Higgins were brought to Chile.	National Museum	1869	National History Museum
Contact	Angel of the urn in which the remains of O'Higgins were brought to Chile.	National Museum	1869	National History Museum
Contact	Gold cords for O'Higgins' private use.	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	NI

¹ From now on, the acronym NI stands for "No information."

Contact	Silk sash worn by O'Higgins when he was Supreme Director of the nation.	National Museum	1872	National History Museum
Contact	O'Higgins-owned white trace portfolio	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	NI
Contact	General Bernardo O'Higgins' Sword	National Museum	1869	National History Museum
Contact	A pair of dueling pistols, in their box, belonged to Don Bernardo O'Higgins.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A foil used by don Bernardo O'Higgins	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A silver spoon with the inscription of General O'Higgins	National Museum	1872	NI
Contact	Cotton blanket that belonged to General O'Higgins	National Museum	1872	National History Museum
Contact	Letter from General O'Higgins to Manuel Rodriguez	Coloniaje Exhibition	1873	NI
Contact	Scapular that belonged to Bernardo O'Higgins	National History Museum	1983	Museo de Rancagua
Contact	Mechanical watch that belonged to Bernardo O'Higgins in his Montalván hacienda.	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Walking stick given as a present by Simón Bolívar to Bernardo O'Higgins	National Museum	1878	National History Museum
Contact	Handwritten document signed by Bernardo O'Higgins	NI	NI	Museo de Rancagua
Contact	Letter from Bernardo O'higgins at his Montalván hacienda in Peru.	National Museum	1872	National History Museum
Contact	First sketch of the Alameda promenade, made by Bernardo O'Higgins.	National Museum	1872	National History Museum
Contact	Act of Exhumation of the remains of Don Bernardo O'Higgins	Ministerio de Guerra	1869	Museo de Talca
Contact	Armchair desk that belonged to Don Bernardo O'Higgins in Baltimore	Museo de Rancagua	1950	Museo de Rancagua
Contact	Viceroy of Peru Ambrosio O'Higgins's dress coat.	National Museum	Between 1869 y 1895	National History Museum

Contact	Tea cup that belonged to Bernardo O'Higgins when he was Supreme Director.	National History Museum	1935	National History Museum
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Appendix 3: Relics of Arturo Prat and the War of the Pacific

Table prepared by the author based on the documentary and bibliographic corpus of his research.

Type of Relic	Description	Original Collection	Year of Incorporation	Current Location
Contact	Flags of the Bolivian battalion Aroma de Cochabamba.	National Museum	1880	National History Museum
Contact	Esmeralda schooner's masthead.	National Museum	1882	Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna Museum
Body	Piece of wood from the tower of the [vessel] Huáscar with [admiral] Grau's blood clot.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Body	Remains of Admiral Grau, collected by the engineer Mr. Luis Moore from the tower of the Huascar monitor immediately after his capture and a piece of the grenade that killed the admiral, also collected inside the tower. According to the surgeons' examination, the bone fragment corresponds to the right tibia.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A “libro de consumos” of the Huascar meter.	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	Esmeralda's ship level.	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Compass cover of La Esmeralda.	National Museum	1886	National Maritime Museum
Contact	Teapot that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum

Contact	Spoon that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Ladle that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Body	Thigh bone of a crew member of La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	NI
Contact	The wooden cross that had the tomb in Iquique of Lieutenant Ignacio Serrano.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Body	Jawbone of a crewmember of the glorious corvette La Esmeralda.	National Museum	Between 1880 and 1895	NI
Contact	The wooden cross that had the tomb of the immortal Arturo Prat.	Military Museum	1895	Natural History Museum of Concepción
Contact	A crystal cup of La Esmeralda	National Museum	1888	National History Museum
Contact	A cristal glass of Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	A shield of La Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	National Maritime Museum
Contact	Cape of La Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A piece of wood of La Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Wire from Esmeralda taken from the sea.	National Museum	1882	National History Museum
Contact	A piece of a copper plate of La Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Pennant of La Esmeralda from 1879	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A Comblain rifle, taken from the sea.	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Wooden grille placed on Arturo Prat's tomb.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Pen painting placed on the tomb of Arturo Prat.	Military Museum	1895	NI

Contact	Mizzenmast of La Esmeralda	National Museum	1880	National History Museum
Contact	La Esmeralda porcelain and copper utensils.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Lantern of La Esmeralda.	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Body	Hair taken from the corpse of Sarjento Aldea	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Night table made with wood from the Sgt. Aldea's coffin.	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	A wood piece from Esmeralda	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	The uniform of Arturo Prat, consisting of a frock coat, a pair of epaulets and a pointed hat.	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	Book of lists that Arturo Prat was carrying in his pocket when he fell on the deck of the monitor Huascar.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Notebook in Arturo Prat's handwriting	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Captain Condell's uniform, consisting of a frock coat with stripes, cap, sword and the sword he used in the battle of Punta Gruesa.	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	Notebook in Carlos Condell's handwriting.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A small silk handkerchief that belonged to Carlos Condell	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A revolver and six shots, which formerly belonged to Major Thompson and later to Condell.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Bicorn that belonged to Arturo Prat	National History Museum	1911	National History Museum
Contact	Pants worn by Arturo Prat	National History Museum	1911	National History Museum
Contact	Reliquary with splinter from La Esmeralda	Colección privada	NI	National History Museum

Contact	Medal of the "Virgen de los Rayos," worn by Arturo Prat at the time of his death.	Colección privada	NI	Naval Academy Museum
Contact	Sword wielded by Arturo Prat on May 21, 1879	Colección privada	NI	Naval Academy Museum
Body	Piece of [Captain] Miguel Grau's foot.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A stick from La Covadonga	National Museum	Between 1880 and 1895	National History Museum
Contact	Peruvian flag of the Peruvian battalion Junin.	National Museum	1880	National History Museum
Contact	Condell's pocket notebook	Military Museum	1894	NI
Contact	Pants and epaulets that belonged to Condell.	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum?
Contact	Condell's hat	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	Notebook in the handwriting of Arturo Prat	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	General Condell's saber	Military Museum	1895	National History Museum
Contact	Scribe made with wood from the Huascar tower	NI	NI	National Maritime Museum
Contact	Compass of the Huáscar	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Order book of the Huáscar	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Lantern that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Object that belonged to La Esmeralda	NI	NI	National History Museum
Contact	Fragment of rope that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Bell used in La Esmeralda, during the War of the Pacific.	National Museum	1886	National History Museum

Contact	Coffeemaker of La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National Maritime Museum
Contact	White porcelain tureen which belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Dish used on the corvette Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National Maritime Museum
Contact	Cannonball that belonged to La Esmeralda	National Museum	1886	National History Museum
Contact	Armoured tower of the commander of the Huascar	National Museum	Between 1880 and 1895	NI
Contact	Twelve plates corresponding to the armor of the Huascar	National Museum	Between 1880 and 1895	NI
Contact	Boiler of the Huáscar's steam boat	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Water leveler of El Huascar	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Spatula made with wood from the Huascar tower	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Display case that remained on the deck of El Huascar	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	A wreath presented to Grau by the ladies of Peru.	Military Museum	1895	NI
Contact	Helm wheel of the corvette Covadonga	NI	NI	National History Museum
Contact	Letter opener of El Huáscar	NI	NI	National History Museum
Contact	A bolt of El Huáscar	NI	NI	Museo de Talca
Contact	Logbook of El Huáscar	NI	NI	National History Museum
Contact	Bell of El Huáscar	NI	NI	National Maritime Museum

Appendix 4: Biographies

Manuel de Salas (1784-1841)

De Salas was born in Santiago in 1784, in the bosom of a well-to-do family of Chilean criollos. In 1759, his father, José de Salas, was appointed advisor to the Viceroy of Peru, and the family had to move to Lima. There, Manuel de Salas entered the Royal University of San Marcos, where he obtained the degree of Bachelor in Sacred Canons in 1773. The following year, the Royal Court of Lima granted him the title of lawyer.

Back in Chile, he held different public positions. He was, among others, mayor of the Cabildo of Santiago (1775) and alderman of the Cabildo of Santiago (1782). As we saw in Chapter One, he obtained the approval of Spain to found, in 1797, the Royal Academy of San Luis, of which he was the first rector.

Manuel de Salas was a key character in the Chilean independence process, contributing, above all, to the configuration of its legal bases. He participated in the first years of Independence as a congressman, promoting the law that ended slavery in the country. However, when the Spanish army regained power in 1814, he and other patriots were deported to Juan Fernández Island. After the definitive triumph of the independence forces, he returned to Chile at the end of 1817. In 1818, the government of Bernardo O'Higgins appointed him as the first director of the National Library of Chile. After concluding this position, he was elected deputy for two consecutive terms, between 1823 and 1830.

Manuel de Salas died in Santiago, on November 28, 1841.

Bernardo O'Higgins Riquelme (1778-1842)

In the Chilean national imagination, Bernardo O'Higgins is considered the *Padre de la Patria*, and, together with other military heroes, he makes up the pantheon of heroes known as the "Liberators of America." His presence as a military man and ruler was crucial in the entire process of Chilean emancipation from Spanish rule, whether fighting in the battles of Independence or serving as the first Supreme Director of the fledging country.

He was born on August 20, 1778, in Chillán, in southern Chile. His father was Viceroy Ambrosio O'Higgins, who only recognized him as a "natural son" as a teenager. He studied in Lima and then in England, where he met Francisco Miranda, who introduced him to pro-independence ideas. When his father died in 1801, he returned to Chile to take possession of the Las Canteras hacienda near Chillán.

In 1810, he was elected deputy of the newly formed *Junta de Gobierno* and appointed army colonel in 1811. In 1813, he faced the royalists for the first time in the battle of El Roble.

Her rivalry with José Miguel Carrera, the other leader of the Independence, led to confront him, in 1814, in the combat of Tres Acequias. However, O'Higgins joined Carrera to face the invasion of the royalist forces led by Mariano Osorio.

During the *Reconquista* period (Spanish Reconquest), he organized, together with José de San Martín, the Liberation Army of the Andes in Mendoza and led the Chilean offensive. Once the royalist forces were defeated, he assumed as Supreme Director and signed, on February 12, 1818, the Proclamation of the Independence of Chile. As we saw in Chapter One, the first National Museum was created, at least nominally, under his administration.

During his term as a Supreme Director, he took measures that earned him the antipathy of the *criollo* aristocracy. Among them were the abolition of titles of nobility, the suppression of nobility coats of arms, and the creation of the legion of merit and a laic cemetery. The influence of the Masonic lodge -to which O'Higgins belonged-, which was characterized by its rejection of the nobiliary order, can be observed in these dispositions. Due to political pressures, he abdicated on January 28, 1823, and was exiled by the new authorities. He died in Lima, in exile, on October 24, 1842.

Diego Portales Palazuelos (1793-1831)

Portales was born in Santiago on June 16, 1793. His life was brief but politically intense. He came from a family of the Chilean aristocracy of the 18th century. During the "Patria Vieja," he abandoned his studies at the recently founded Instituto Nacional to work with his father at the Casa de Moneda (Bureau of Engraving and Printing), where he developed his vocation for commerce and business. In Peru, he founded the company "Portales, Cea y Compañía," which moved to Chile and signed a contract with the government in 1824 to manage the tobacco monopoly.

Although the business failed in 1826, Portales became linked to the main political sectors and began to define a political opinion that historians have reconstructed from his letters and reflections. In his view, the "peso de la noche" (the weight of the night) should be dropped by a strong law over the Chilean population. This act would develop a private-focused market, prioritizing order over liberties. Later, the Constitution of 1833 would include these principles, institutionalizing the so-called "Portalian order."

In 1831, President José Joaquín Prieto appointed him Minister of War. From this office, he began to organize the war against the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation, led by Bolivian President Andrés de Santa Cruz. Portales promoted the creation of an expeditionary army, gaining an important internal opposition. In practice, Portales operated as president, which generated strong resistance. The "Portales regime" silenced all political sectors, including the military, across the board. For this reason, on June 3, 1837, when the minister was reviewing the Maipú regiment in Quillota, the latter revolted and kidnapped Portales, killing him three days later.

After his death, a traditional image of his life and work immediately began to be forged. The conservative legacy of his constitution remained active for almost a century, and his figure

became part of the pantheon of patriotic heroes. As my work demonstrates, collecting and displaying his personal belongings in different exhibitions have contributed to this process.

Claude Gay (1800 -1873)

According to his biographers, Claude Gay stood out since childhood for his interest in natural sciences. Guided by this spirit, and under the guidance of the Italian botanist Jean-Baptiste Balbis, he travelled through extensive European regions during his youth. Later, in 1822, attended formative lectures at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Here, he studied the principles of naturalism and became part of the French scientific circuit. As such, scientific Pedro Chapuis offered him the position of natural sciences professor in Chile. Gay accepted the offer and arrived in Valparaíso in 1828.

In Santiago, Gay worked as a teacher at the “Colegio de Santiago.” At the same time, he kept ties with the French Muséum as a correspondent. In 1830, as we saw in Chapter One, he was hired by the Chilean government to carry out a scientific journey through the country, to report on its natural resources, to compile the data obtained to prepare a cadastre for the State and to form a Natural History Cabinet. The Frenchman began his journey at the end of that year, travelling through the Atacama and Colchagua regions, in the northern part of the country. During the following years, the scientist travelled through various places in Chile, including the Juan Fernández archipelago (1832), the island of Chiloé (1835), and the central zone (1837). In 1839 he handed over to the government the Natural History Cabinet. That same year, the Minister of Public Instruction, Mariano Egaña, commissioned him to write a political history of Chile. Between that year and 1842, Gay devoted himself entirely to this last work. Also, in 1842 and before returning to France, the government granted him Chilean nationality in recognition of his contribution to the country.

Once back in France, around 1844, he began to disseminate the results of his research by publishing the first volume of his *Historia física y política de Chile* (Physical and Political History of Chile). From then until 1871, (practically the rest of his life), he published the following 29 volumes, the most outstanding of all his works. The thematic distribution is as follows: eight volumes on history, eight on botany and eight on zoology; two on national agriculture; two on historical documents, and another two containing an atlas of images.

Gay died in his native Provence on November 29, 1873.

Rudolph Amando Philippi (1808-1904)

Philippi was born in Charlottenburg, near Berlin, Germany, on September 14, 1808. He studied medicine at the University of Berlin, where he became acquainted with scientific naturalism and the work of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). After finishing his degree in 1830, he decided to follow his vocation as a scientist and naturalist explorer. Thus, he dedicated

himself to expeditions throughout Europe, especially along the Italian coast, where he conducted research on conchology, malacozoology and geology on the volcanoes Etna and Vesuvius.

The publication of some works and the contact with distinguished European naturalists, allowed him to find a job in the German city-state of Hesse Kassel. Here he wrote several treatises on shells and mollusks and worked as a professor of Natural History and Geography. In the capital, Kassel, he carried out his first political activities and joined the liberal government that attempted a revolution against the imperial power structures. The liberal attempt was defeated in 1851, the same year that his brother, Bernardo, returned to Germany from Chile to recruit families to join the colonizing project of the country. Tempted by his brother's offer, Philippi travelled to Chile in 1851.

Philippi arrived in Chile in December 1851. In 1852 he worked as director of the “Liceo de Valdivia” in the region ceded by the government to the German colonists. In 1853, the rector of the University of Chile summoned him to teach botany and zoology. As we saw in Chapter Two, that same year, the government offered him the National Museum of Chile director position. In addition to his work as the Museum director, Philippi collaborated in the plan for the forced annexation of territories to the State of Chile. He also conducted research in the Atacama Desert, on the island of Chiloé and in Patagonia. His work consisted of gathering information on the natural and mineral wealth of these areas in order to justify the importance of their occupation.

In addition, he continued to work as an academic at the University of Chile. He taught natural history, literature, Greek, Latin, metaphysics, chemistry, physics and geography, among others. He worked without interruption as director of the Museum until 1897, when he retired to private life. In 1898, when he turned the age of ninety, the political and academic world paid him a tribute in his lifetime. He died at his home in Santiago on July 23, 1904.

Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna (1831-1886)

Vicuña Mackenna was born in Santiago on August 25, 1831, into an aristocratic family of pro-independence *criollos*. At a very young age, he entered the country's public scene. At the age of 18, he collaborated as a secretary in the “Sociedad de la Igualdad” (Society of Equality). When the government of Manuel Bulnes dissolved the group, its members had to go underground. When he was 20 years old, he joined the revolutionary forces along with his father and brothers in the Urriola mutiny, the failure of which earned him a death sentence. However, he managed to escape from prison and took part in the uprisings of the Revolution of 1851. This time, the defeat meant the first of his exiles.

He lived his exile in San Francisco, in the United States, and since 1853 in Europe. In 1856 he returned to Chile, joining the movement against the conservative president Manuel Montt. Due to his political position, he was exiled again, in 1859, this time to England. As we saw in Chapter Four, it was during this time that he immersed himself in the world of archives and museums, developing a career as a historian in his eagerness to “resurrect” the Chilean past.

In this context, in 1860, he travelled to Peru to pursue research in its archives, with particular emphasis on documentation on Bernardo O'Higgins, of whom he was an open admirer.

On his return to Chile, he soon rejoined national politics. He was a deputy, senator and minister. He actively participated in the process of Chilean territorial occupation to the south. Although his discourse was anticlerical and Americanist, it also had a strong racial accent, sentencing the supposed extinction of the indigenous communities.

In 1872 he was appointed Mayor of Santiago. In this position, he executed an ambitious plan for the urbanization and modernization of the capital. He aimed to transform the city into "the Paris of America." Part of this project included, among others, the canalization of the Mapocho River, the Santa Lucía Hill promenade, and the Coloniaje Exhibition. At the end of the 1870s, he retired from political life and moved to the Aconcagua region. He died there in 1886, leaving an enormous (but also problematic) political and intellectual production legacy to the country.

Arturo Prat Chacón (1848-1879)

Prat was born on April 4, 1848, in Ninhue, a small village in the central valley of Chile. His father's family were Catalan immigrants, and his social context was, although not poor, modest. Because of this, he was granted a scholarship to enter the Naval Academy in 1858, at only ten years of age, graduating in 1864 with the rank of naval officer. While serving with the fleet, he distinguished himself first as a line officer and then as an intelligence officer. Although on active duty, Prat studied philosophy and literature in 1871 at the National Institute and then, in 1875, he obtained a BA. in Laws degree from the University of Chile.

In November 1878, the Navy sent him to Montevideo to observe Argentina's political and military movements, returning to Chile at the beginning of 1879. In February of that year, political and military tension between Chile, Peru and Bolivia triggered the beginning of the War of the Pacific. After the outbreak of the war, and under the orders of Admiral Juan Williams Rebolledo, Arturo Prat took command of the ship *Esmeralda* with the mandate to initiate the plan to attack the Peruvian port of Callao.

On May 21, 1879, Chilean and Peruvian powers clashed in the Naval Battle of Iquique (a city, until then, under Peruvian administration). The unequal correlation of forces and the disadvantage of the Chilean navy was evident from the beginning of the combat. The Peruvian ironclads *Huáscar* and the *Independencia* attacked the two Chilean vessels. Prat held off his more powerful foe until the *Huáscar* rammed his vessel three times. Before his ship sank, however, Prat boarded the *Huáscar*, trying to capture it. Although the Peruvians killed him before he could achieve his goal, Prat emerged, as we saw in Chapter Five, as an example of heroic sacrifice, which has served as a standard of conduct for subsequent generations of Chileans.

