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ARTICLE

Constructing Provenance with Old Collections: The Case of Cumberland Clark

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Abstract

Old collections, real or fake, are a basic part of the collection history of an antiquity or artwork. This article is a starting point for a study of the concept: how old collections are employed, what functions they have, and how fictitious old collections are chosen and constructed. To explore these concepts, the article considers the example of Cumberland Clark, an early 20th-century collector who serves as the putative origin of cuneiform tablets in a handful of present-day collections, most notably the Schøyen Collection. This article looks at the life and collections of Cumberland Clark, then argues that the Clark provenance for current collections is a fabrication, and concludes by looking at Clark in the context of other old collections in order to draw some lessons about fabricated provenance.

Keywords: provenance; antiquities; forgery; old collections; Schøyen Collection; Cumberland Clark; Ibrahim Elias Géjou

Introduction

"Old collections" have long been recognized as a significant phenomenon by researchers of art and antiquities crime. The invention of old collections, at least in the art market, was already considered "among the hoariest dodges" of the trade more than half a century ago.[1] In fact, the "old collection" serves multiple functions for dealers and collections. Besides ostensibly assuring legality or authenticity, it can also add prestige – and therefore value – to items on the market or in collections. Despite these important roles, however, there is to my knowledge no general study of the use of the label and of the concept generally by dealers and collectors.

The current article is intended as a beginning toward that goal. In it, I will consider the case of one such old collector – the Englishman Cumberland Clark, who appears as one of the main sources of the cuneiform tablets currently owned by the Norwegian collector Martin Schøyen.[2] I will begin by discussing Clark's biography and what we know of his collecting activities. I will then turn to the role that his cuneiform collection has played in legitimizing items in the Schøyen Collection and other present-day collections. I will demonstrate that at least one of the provenance documents used to show the link of present-day collections to

[1] Meyer 1973, 90.

[2] See the Statements of Provenance at the beginning of the various Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Cuneiform Texts volumes, starting with Friberg 2007, xi.

Cumberland Clark is a forgery and argue that the Clark provenance has been constructed to launder recently looted tablets. Finally, I will try to draw some lessons from the Cumberland Clark case to understand the use of the concept "old collection" more broadly, including how and why specific old collectors are chosen for this role in laundering antiquities.

Cumberland Clark's Life and Career

Cumberland Clark (1862–1941) was born into a wealthy family in Kensington, London; his father was a solicitor who was able to retire early.[3] In his early adulthood Clark went abroad, the start of "nearly twenty years' experience of life and travel in our Colonies and Dominions," as he would later boast, mostly in Australia.[4] After his return around 1900, he settled back in Kensington and married Elizabeth Caroline Robertina Waterhouse; they had no children. Initially working as a clerk, by 1911 he was a man of "private means" – perhaps because of the inheritance received after the death of his father in 1902.[5]

From the late 1910s until his death, Clark gained attention as a prolific lecturer and writer. He was variously a journalist, playwright, and lyricist. But his literary reputation, such as it was, rested primarily on some 70 books and booklets that he authored.[6] Most of these fall under three topics: literary history and criticism, especially of Dickens and Shakespeare; the British Empire and its colonies; and songbooks. While his studies of literature are still quoted periodically, even in their time his books were not generally popular.[7] To the extent that he is still remembered, he is "arguably Britain's most excruciatingly awful poet" or "the second-worst poet in the English language."[8] Surprisingly, given that he was a collector, Clark seems to have written only rarely on antiquarian issues. The main product of this interest was one of his last works, *The Art of Early Writing.*[9] Beyond this, Clark apparently authored a pamphlet on the Warwick Vase (an ancient marble vase from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli) and a book on the history of Egypt that may never have been published.[10]

[3] 1861 England Census, Grove Hill, District 1, Chislet, Kent; England and Wales Census, 1871, 45 Chepstow Villas, District 21, Kensington Town, Kensington, London; England and Wales Census 1881, 44 Chepstow Villas, District 23, Kensington Town, Kensington, London. Censuses consulted at https://www.familysearch.org/en/ and https://www.ancestry.com.

[4] Clark 1924, [Preface, unnumbered page]; "Ordination Service" 1895; "The Government Gazette" 1899.

[5] England and Wales Census, 1901, District 26, Kensington Town, Kensington, London (Schedule Type 207, Folio 16, Page 23); Kensington and Chelsea, Saint Peter, Notting Hill, Kensington Park Road Marriages, 1857-1909, Register of Marriage (from 1896), page 133; England and Wales Census 1911, Milford Lodge, Bourne Avenue, Bournemouth, Hampshire (Schedule Type 47, Reg. no. RG14, Folio 101, Page 2). Censuses and vital records consulted at https://www.familysearch.org/en/ and https://www.ancestry.com. Probate record for Robert Clark, died 19 June 1902 https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk.

[6] Statements about Clark's bibliography are based on searches of WorldCat and Library Hub Discover, plus the advertisement "Books by Cumberland Clark" in various publications by Clark, e.g., Clark 1926, [p. 5]. See also The Dustman 1938. Issues of the *Kensington News and West London Times* 1922-1935 consulted at https://www.newspapers.com.

[7] "World's Worst Seller" 1932.

[8] Hilliam 2014, 35; Daniels 2018.

[9] Clark 1938.

[10] Clark n.d. Given that Clark's publisher for *The Warwick Vase* (Wass, Pritchard) published other works of his between 1923 and 1930, this pamphlet was probably also published at that time. *The Story of Egypt* appears in a list of "Books by Cumberland Clark" printed in Clark 1918 (unnumbered first page), but does not appear in any bibliographic source and likely never appeared in print.

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Cumberland Clark as a Collector

Clark's first public appearance as a collector was as a coin collector in his late 40s. In 1911 and 1912 he joined the Royal Numismatic Society and the British Numismatic Society.[11] In the following two years, he appears to have taken a regular part in the activities of these societies: he sometimes presented items from his collection and gave lectures on them, and he donated to the British Numismatic Society's Research Fund.[12] Then, in early 1914, he sold two large collections of coins (one classical and one English) via Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge and withdrew his membership in the two numismatic societies.[13] There is no evidence that he collected coins again in the last 37 years of his life. Around this time Clark also collected stone tools: in February 1914 he sold a collection of them, also via Sotheby, Wilkinson, & Hodge, but I am not aware of any further information on how he formed this collection.[14]

In the mid-1910s, Clark appears to have shifted his collecting activities to literary paraphernalia. In particular, he collected portraits of Shakespearean actors and unpublished Dickens manuscripts – correspondence as well as unpublished essays.[15] Between 1918 and 1926 he authored nine works on Dickens (one of these jointly on *Shakespeare & Dickens*). Most of these were publications of the unpublished manuscripts in his collection combined with commentary, varying in length from pamphlets to short books. But by 1926, he had sold (or given) his Dickens library to the bookseller Charles J. Sawyer,[16] and published nothing more on Dickens. Instead, he began to concentrate on Shakespeare. Having already published two works on Shakespeare (including *Shakespeare & Dickens*), he would now write some 15 books on the playwright between 1926 and 1940. In this period, he served as Vice-President of the Shakespeare Reading Society and was a member of the Dugdale Society, dedicated to publishing historical texts from Warwickshire (the county that includes Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon).[17]

Besides coins and stone tools, the only other antiquities Clark appears to have collected are cuneiform tablets. The sole published source for this activity is Clark's 1938 book *The Art of Early Writing*, in which he dedicates a chapter to his own collection. According to Clark, his collection included "many cylinders, tablets, bricks, and fragments" from the Sumerian period to the Neo-Babylonian; among these, he also singles out Assyrian prisms.[18] However, he provides detailed descriptions and photographs of only four specific items: an inscription of Nammaḫani of Lagash, an Ur III cone, and two royal inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II.[19] In this chapter, Clark gives essentially no information on how he formed this collection; and in the preface, he writes only that he had started collecting cuneiform tablets "many years ago."[20]

[11] "Proceedings. 1911" 1911, 381–82; "Proceedings of the Royal Numismatic Society" 1912, 10–11.

[12] "Proceedings. 1911" 1911, 389, 397; "Proceedings. 1913" 1913–1914, 336.

[13] Sotheby, Wilkinson, & Hodge 1914a and 1914b; "Proceedings of the Royal Numismatic Society" 1914, 23; "Lists of Members of the British Numismatic Society" 1915, 384.

[14] Sotheby, Wilkinson, & Hodge 1914c.

[15] Miller and Hill 1917a, 184; Miller and Hill 1917b, 219; "Topics of the Week & Editorial Comment" 1918; Clark 1918, [unnumbered p. 2]; Clark 1919, 27; Clark 1926, 10.

[16] *A Dickens Library* 1936, esp. pp. 5-6, which quotes a preface written by Charles J. Sawyer "some ten years ago" that he was in possession of Clark's Dickens library. In fact, all of Clark's Dickens works were published by 1923, except *Dickens & Democracy* in 1926; according to A. Edward Newton (1924, 203), in 1924 Sawyer owned "the finest Dickens collection in England." It is therefore possible that Sawyer had already acquired Clark's collection by 1924.

[17] *Who's Who in Literature* 1933, 96; Savage and Fripp 1926, 179.

[18] Clark 1938, 120–23; the quotation is from p. 120.

[19] See Borger 1975, 33.

[20] Clark 1938, 5.

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From the above we can begin to form a profile of Clark's collecting habits: it appears that he would focus intensely on one specific field for a few years, after which he would abandon it, sell off or give away his collection, and move to another field. Clark's statement about "many years" might suggest that his cuneiform tablets were an exception to that tendency, though it is not clear how many years Clark had in mind with this vague phrase.

Documents on Clark's Cuneiform Collection

Recently, the Schøyen Collection circulated provenance documentation that could potentially shine a light on Clark's collecting of tablets. Some background is necessary: In August 2021, the Norwegian government seized 83 objects from the collection of Martin Schøyen, after a request from the government of Iraq. Most of these were cuneiform tablets. The Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo was tasked with investigating the seized items; its report, issued in March 2022, concluded that most of the items originated in Iraq and, as there was no documentation of legal export and the items first appeared on the market in the late 1980s and 1990s, should be returned to Iraq.[21] In response, Schøyen's lawyer Cato Schiøtz wrote a letter to the museum on July 1, 2022, insisting that the report was in error, and offering a series of documents to prove that the items had been out of Iraq long before the 1990s – and that they (or many of them) had once been part of the collection of Cumberland Clark. There were two documents specifically tied to Clark, both dated to 1921: a letter from the antiquities dealer Ibrahim Elias Géjou to Clark, offering two boxes of tablets from Warka (ancient Uruk) and Bismya (ancient Adab) for sale (Fig. 1); and a note from the Assyriologist Theophilus Pinches, then of University College London, inventorying a set of 25 tablets that Clark had acquired from Géjou (Fig. 2).[22]

These documents would seem to provide important new evidence on Clark's collecting activities and on the collection history of cuneiform tablets now in the Schøyen Collection. A closer look at them, however, reveals some problems. First, as pointed out by archaeologist Christopher Prescott in his response to Schiøtz, Schiøtz makes inflated claims about what exactly the documents show.[23] According to Schiøtz and Schøyen, the documents prove that Géjou was Clark's main supplier of tablets, including the 925 objects in the Schøyen Collection said to come from Clark's collection.[24] But, at most, the Géjou letter and the Pinches note attest to the fact that Clark made one purchase of 25 tablets from Géjou. The other documentation shows that, over 60 years later, a dealer claimed that hundreds of tablets sold and traded to Schøyen had come from Clark's collection, but with no proof of the relevant transaction – the sale of tablets by Cumberland Clark's heirs to the dealer in question, Mark Wilson – or that the tablets had been inherited from Clark decades earlier.

But there are additional problems. Géjou was a major dealer of all sorts of Iraqi antiquities; he sold more than 17,000 cuneiform tablets to the British Museum alone.[25]

[21] Museum of Cultural History 2022, 1, 13.

[22] Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, Kulturvern - Irak, no. 22, DERES REF. 2021/9715 HAKONI: letter from Cato Schiøtz to Museum of Cultural History, July 1, 2022; attachment 3, Notes on C.C.'s tablets by Theo. Pinches of the British Museum, 1921; and attachment 4, a letter from Géjou to Clark, February 15, 1921. I thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture for releasing these and other documents cited below for publication.

[23] Prescott 2022.

[24] Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, document no. 22, attachment 1, a letter from Cato Schiøtz to Økokrim, September 22, 2021, bilag 1, Martin Schøyen, "Provenance Specification," September 15, 2021.

[25] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=gejou; on Géjou's career, see Ait Said-Ghanem 2023.

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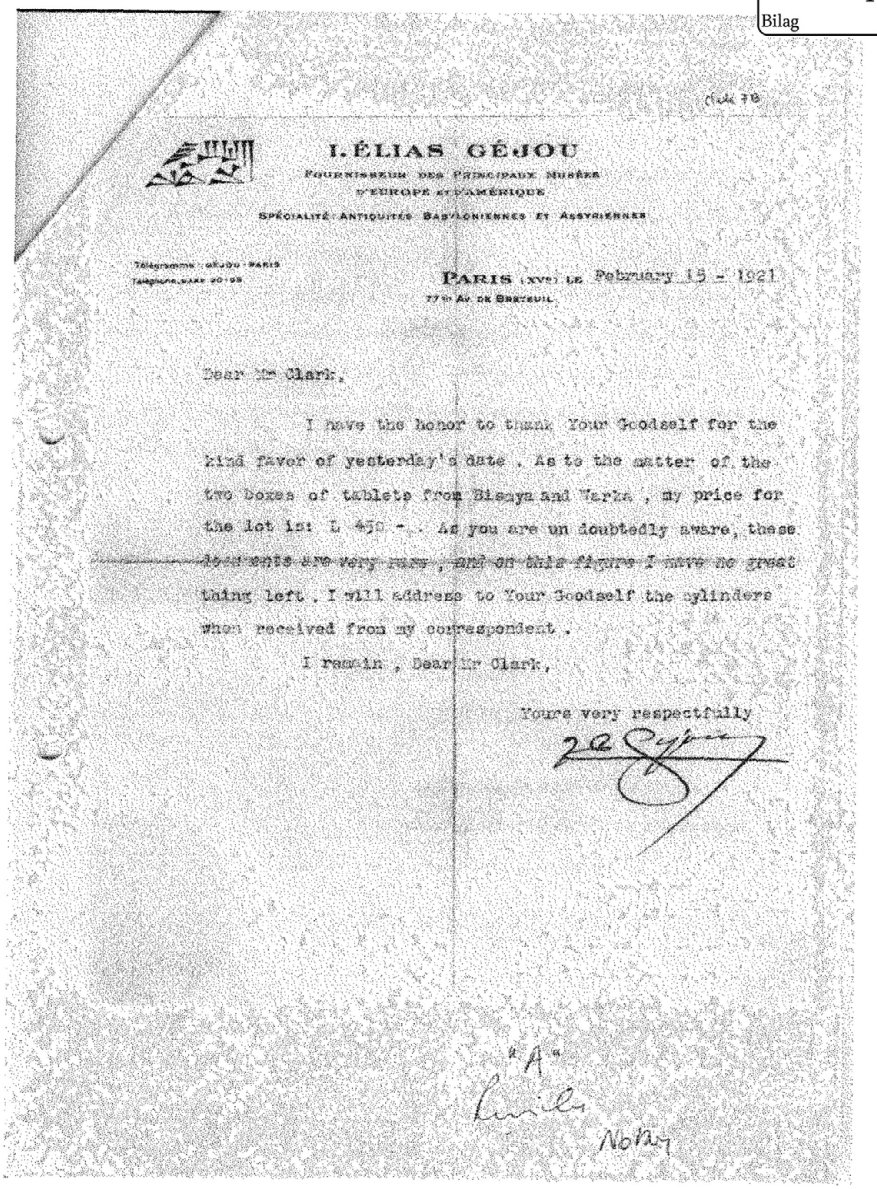

I. ÉLIAS GÉJOU

FOURNISSEUR DES PRINCIPAUX MUSÉES D'EUROPE ET D'AMÉRIQUE

SPÉCIALITÉ ANTIQUITÉS BABYLONIENNES ET ASSYRIENNES

PARIS (XVe) LE February 15 - 1921

77 bis AV. DE BRETEUIL

Dear Mr Clark,

I have the honor to thank Your Goodself for the kind favor of yesterday's date . As to the matter of the two boxes of tablets from Bismya and Warka , my price for the lot is: L 450 - . As you are un doubtedly aware, these dockets are very rare , and on this figure I have no great thing left . I will address to Your Goodself the cylinders when received from my correspondent .

I remain , Dear Mr Clark,

Youre very respectfully

"A"

Figure 1. Letter of I. E. Géjou to Cumberland Clark provided by Schiøtz (courtesy of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture)

In 1920 – one year before the date of the documents – the British Museum purchased 25 tablets from Warka and Bismya from Géjou.[26] The combination of the number of tablets from the Pinches note and the sites from the Géjou-Clark letter is striking, especially

[26] BM 114345-114368, 114370.

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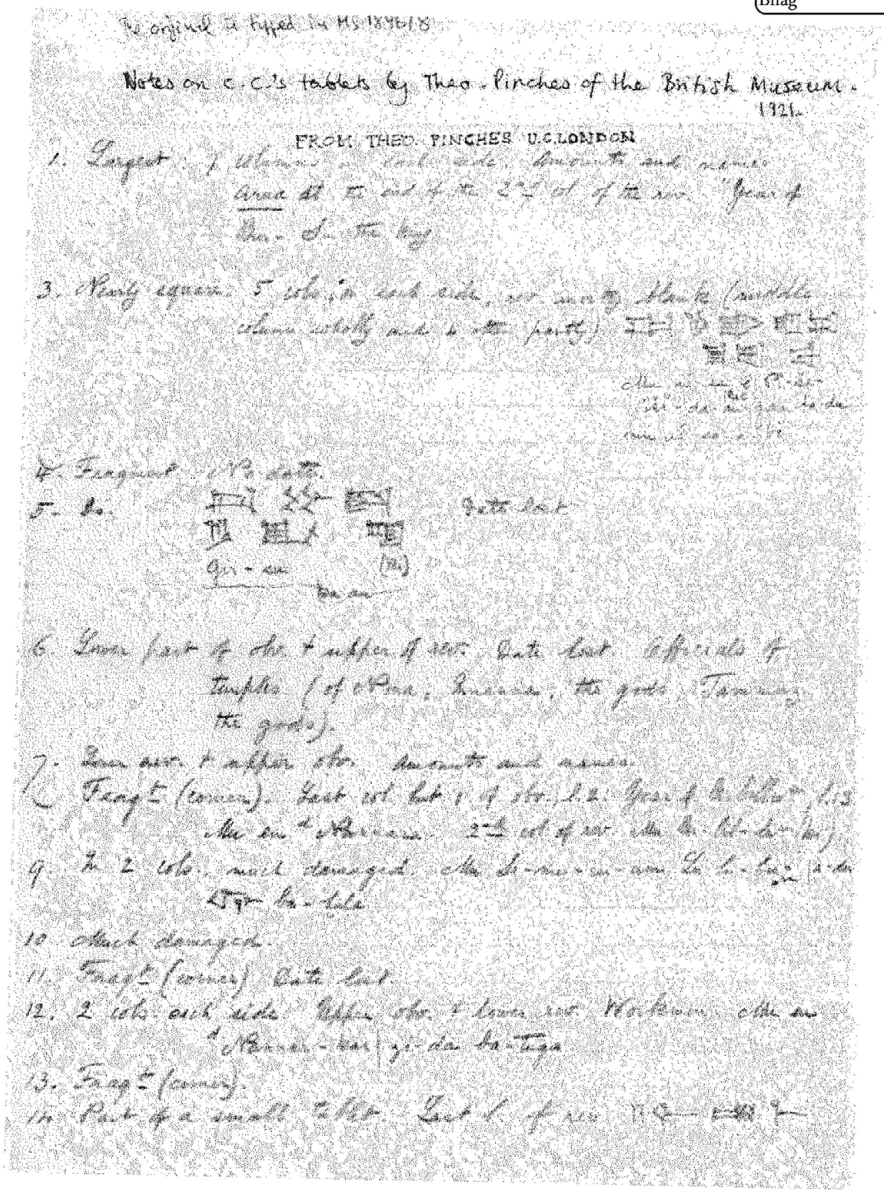

Figure 2. Note on C[umberland] C[lark]'s Tablets by Theophilus Pinches provided by Schiøtz (courtesy of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture)

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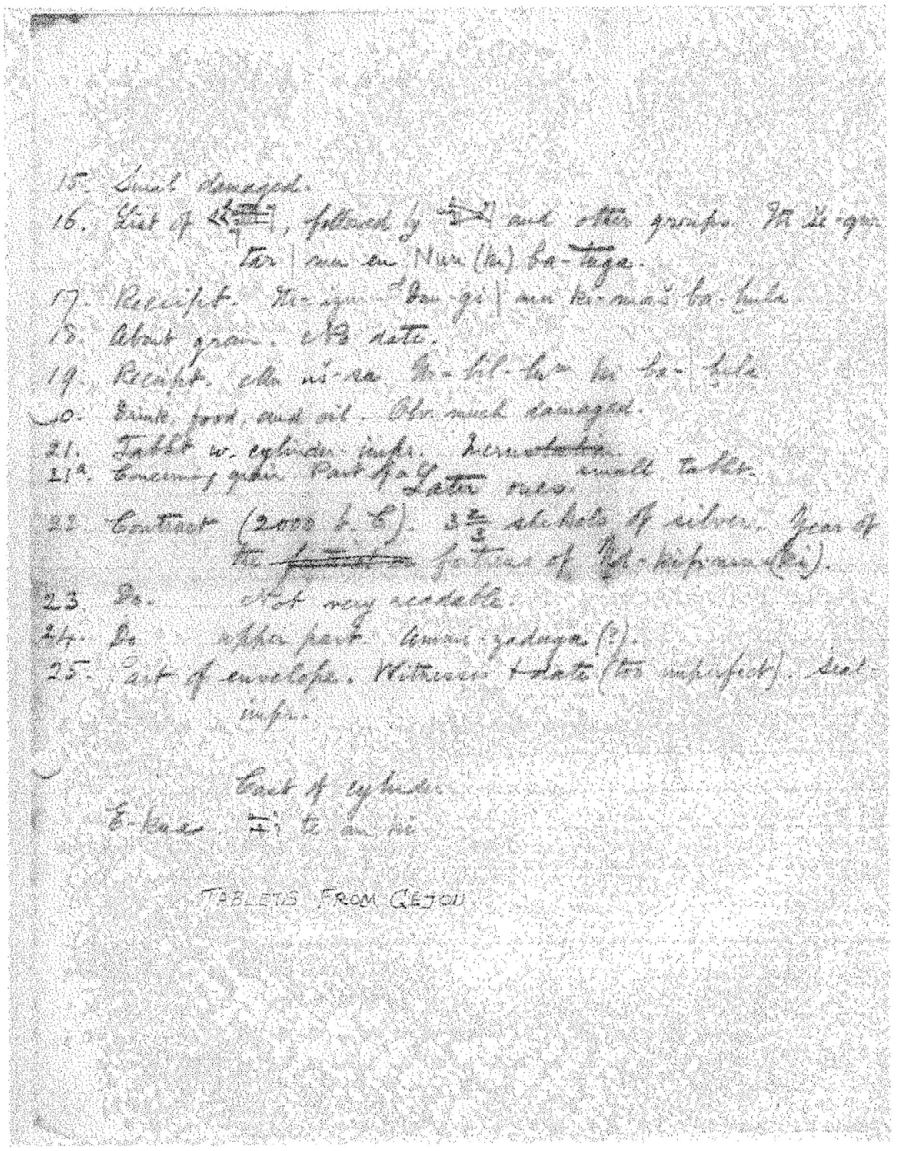

Figure 2. Continued.

since – while Géjou often sold material from Warka – this is the only known sale Géjou made of tablets from Bismya. Beyond this, the Géjou-Clark letter is suspiciously close in several respects to typed letters from Géjou to Wallis Budge in the British Museum archives dating to 1920. The 25 tablets from Warka and Bismya are offered in a letter of

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January 17, 1920.[27] The phrasings of the letter, meanwhile, copy to an unusual extent those in a letter of February 14, 1920;[28] the typed date on the Géjou-Clark letter also seems to be modeled on the February 14, 1920, letter to Budge, including the use of a hyphen between the day and the year ("February 14 - 1920"), which is unparalleled in Géjou's other letters in this period. Most revealing of all, however, is the signature of the Géjou-Clark letter: it is an exact copy of the signature on another of Géjou's letters to Budge, dated February 24, 1920 (Figs 3-5).[29] As signatures are never identical, this is definitive proof that the Géjou-Clark letter is a forgery, modeled on a few different letters from Géjou to Budge in the British Museum archives.[30]

The Géjou-Clark letter appears merely as a poor photocopy or fax, but it – alone among the provenance documentation provided by Schiøtz with his July 1, 2022 letter – is accompanied by a separate statement from a notary dated May 2004, stating that he had seen the originals of documents marked "A" provided by Mark Wilson (Fig. 6). The Géjou-Clark letter is indeed marked "A," but as the letter itself is not notarized, and the letter is not described in the statement, we have no way to know whether the notary saw this specific document, or if the letter was simply marked "A" separately to make it appear that the notary had seen it. At the bottom of the notary's statement, there is a handwritten line "Letter to Clark from Géjou, Paris, 15.2.1921"; however, this appears to be in the dealer Wilson's hand and could have been added at any time. As the statement attests to documents (plural), there must have been one or more other documents marked with "A" in any case; yet only one is listed in this handwritten line.

Nor does the other document, the Pinches note, withstand scrutiny. The only connection of this note to Cumberland Clark is a sentence written in a different hand near the top. Again, we have only a poor photocopy or fax, which makes it difficult to distinguish the details of the note. Based on the angle of the horizontal line running below this note, however, it appears that this sentence was originally on a separate sheet of paper. The note itself, in other words, includes no connection to Clark.[31] Meanwhile,

[27] British Museum, Central Archives, Correspondence Volumes of the Egyptian and Assyrian Department, Year 1920 (Letter G), no. 50.

[28] British Museum, Central Archives, Correspondence Volumes of the Egyptian and Assyrian Department, Year 1920 (Letter G), no. 187. Note in particular that the phrases "on this figure I have not [sic] great thing left" and "As you are un doubtedly [sic] aware" are repeated nearly verbatim in the Géjou-Clark letter. Assyriologist Nadia Ait Said-Ghanem, who has studied Géjou's correspondence at length, indicates that, while there are formulaic expressions that do recur in Géjou's letters, this amount of overlap is unparalleled. According to Dr Ait Said-Ghanem, the February 14, 1920 letter is the only one in Géjou's 45 years of correspondence with the British Museum to even use the word "undoubtedly." I am grateful to Dr. Ait Said-Ghanem for providing copies of the relevant letters and for her insights into Géjou's correspondence.

[29] British Museum, Central Archives, Correspondence Volumes of the Egyptian and Assyrian Department, Year 1920 (Letter G), no. 189.

[30] It may also be significant that the Géjou-Clark letter is on a noticeably smaller piece of paper than the Géjou-Budge letters in the British Museum archives, with the letterhead unusually close to the top edge of the sheet.

[31] There are further problems with this document. According to a later note in a different hand at the top of the document, the Pinches list comes originally from Schøyen MS 1846/8. Prescott (2022) could not find this manuscript in Schøyen's private catalog, but Schøyen (without confirming whether it was in fact in the private catalog) provided detailed descriptions (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, attachment 1, bilag 1, Provenance Specification; Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality, Case no. 2020/2371, Anmodning om søk etter kulturgjenstander i Schøyen-samlingen – Irak, document no. 87, Vedrørende Schøyen - oversendelse av brev til Kulturhistorisk museum (KHM) med bilag, attachment 2, "Rebuttal by Martin Schøyen of the Anonymous Memo from MCH, an Assessment of Points in Schiøtz's Letter Of July 1, 2022," pp. 1–2). According to these descriptions, MS 1846/8 is an unpublished manuscript by Cumberland Clark, "Charles Dickens as an Essayist," including printed pages from Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller* with corrections (by Clark or Dickens?); the descriptions state that there is no date on Clark's manuscript but that it is nevertheless datable (on unstated criteria) to the 1930s. Schøyen wrote that it was included with the tablets

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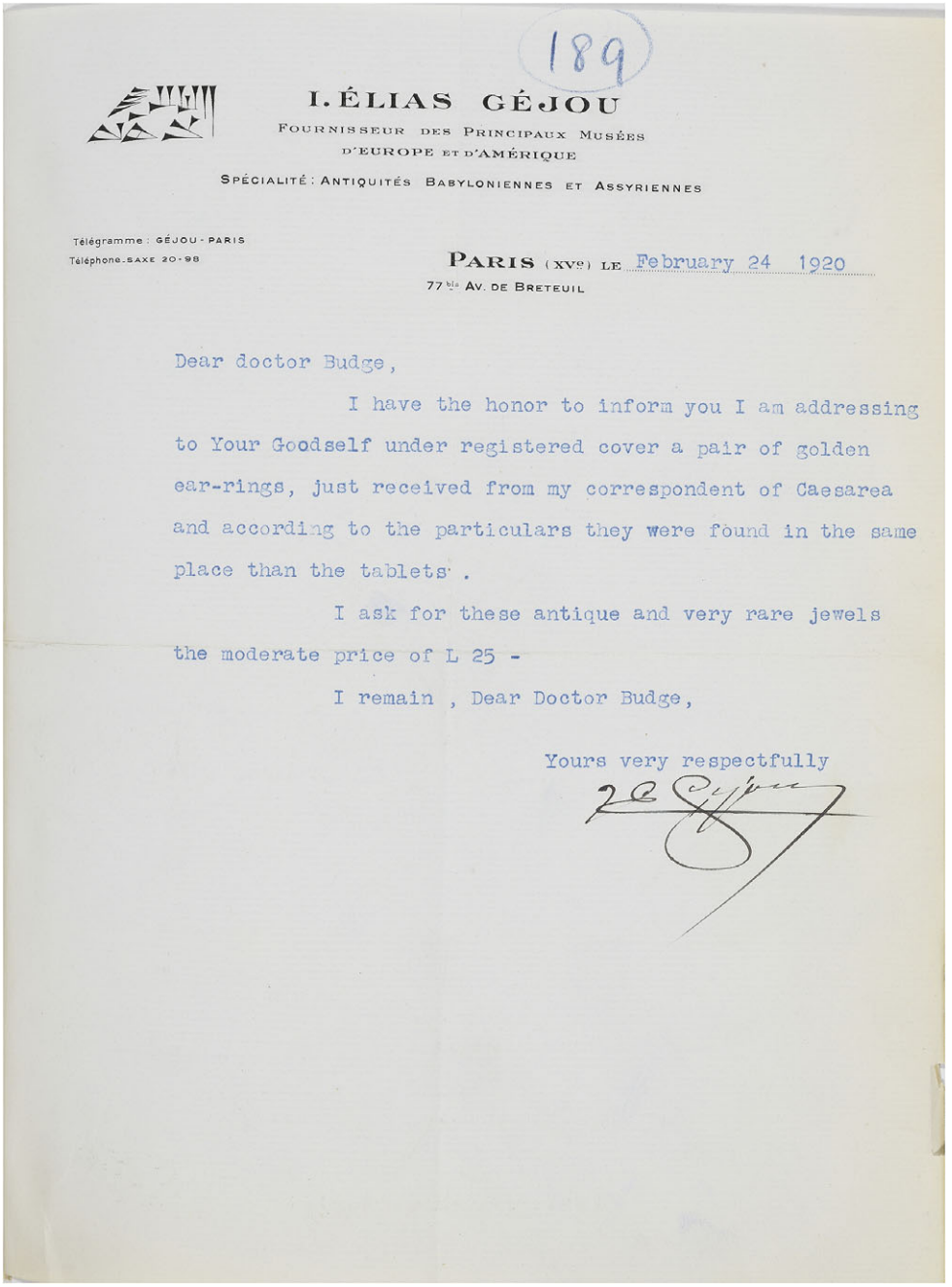

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I. ÉLIAS GÉJOU

FOURNISSEUR DES PRINCIPAUX MUSÉES D'EUROPE ET D'AMÉRIQUE

SPÉCIALITÉ: ANTIQUITÉS BABYLONIENNES ET ASSYRIENNES

Télégramme: GÉJOU-PARIS
Téléphone.SAXE 20-98

PARIS (XVe) LE February 24 1920
77 bis AV. DE BRETEUIL

Dear doctor Budge,

I have the honor to inform you I am addressing to Your Goodself under registered cover a pair of golden ear-rings, just received from my correspondent of Caesarea and according to the particulars they were found in the same place than the tablets .

I ask for these antique and very rare jewels the moderate price of L 25 -

I remain , Dear Doctor Budge,

Yours very respectfully

J E Géjou

Figure 3. Letter of I. E. Géjou to E. A. Wallis Budge, February 24, 1920 (copyright Trustees of the British Museum)

when they were sold by Clark's heirs. However, as we have seen, Clark sold or gave away his entire Dickens collection by the mid-1920s and stopped writing about Dickens after this point. It is therefore questionable whether the item described by Schøyen is an authentic Clark manuscript. In addition, it is unclear why Pinches's list would have been attached to a manuscript on Dickens.

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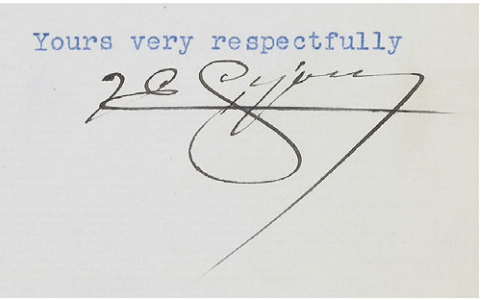

Figure 4a. Géjou signature from letter to Budge (fig. 3)

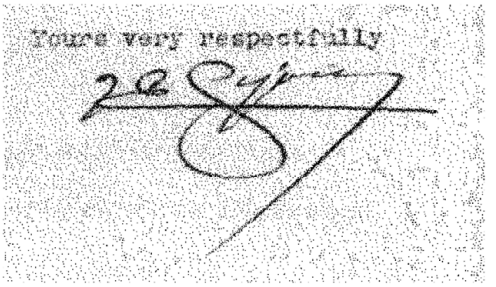

Figure 4b. Géjou signature from letter to Clark (fig. 1)

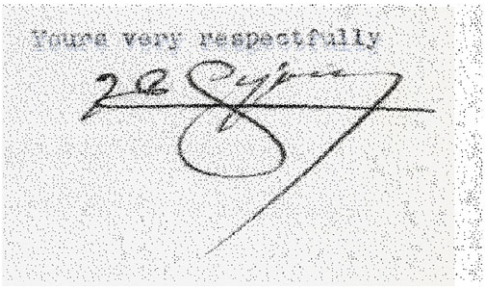

Figure 5. Overlay of two Géjou signatures

the text "Tablets from Géjou" at the end of the note may also be written in a different hand, so it is unclear whether it was originally part of the note. Thus, none of Schiøtz's documentation can be tied to Clark in any way, as the only direct connection is a forged letter.

Altered Provenances

Further problems with the Cumberland Clark provenance appear in an analysis of the provenance entries provided by the Schøyen Collection for its cuneiform tablets and other inscriptions. The Schøyen Collection website features information for a selection of its items. The current version of the collection's website (https://www.schoyencollection.com) does not provide provenance information in most of its collection entries, particularly not for Mesopotamian inscriptions. Previously, however, the Schøyen Collection website was hosted by the National Library of Norway (https://www.nb.no), where entries typically featured provenance information until that information was systematically removed over

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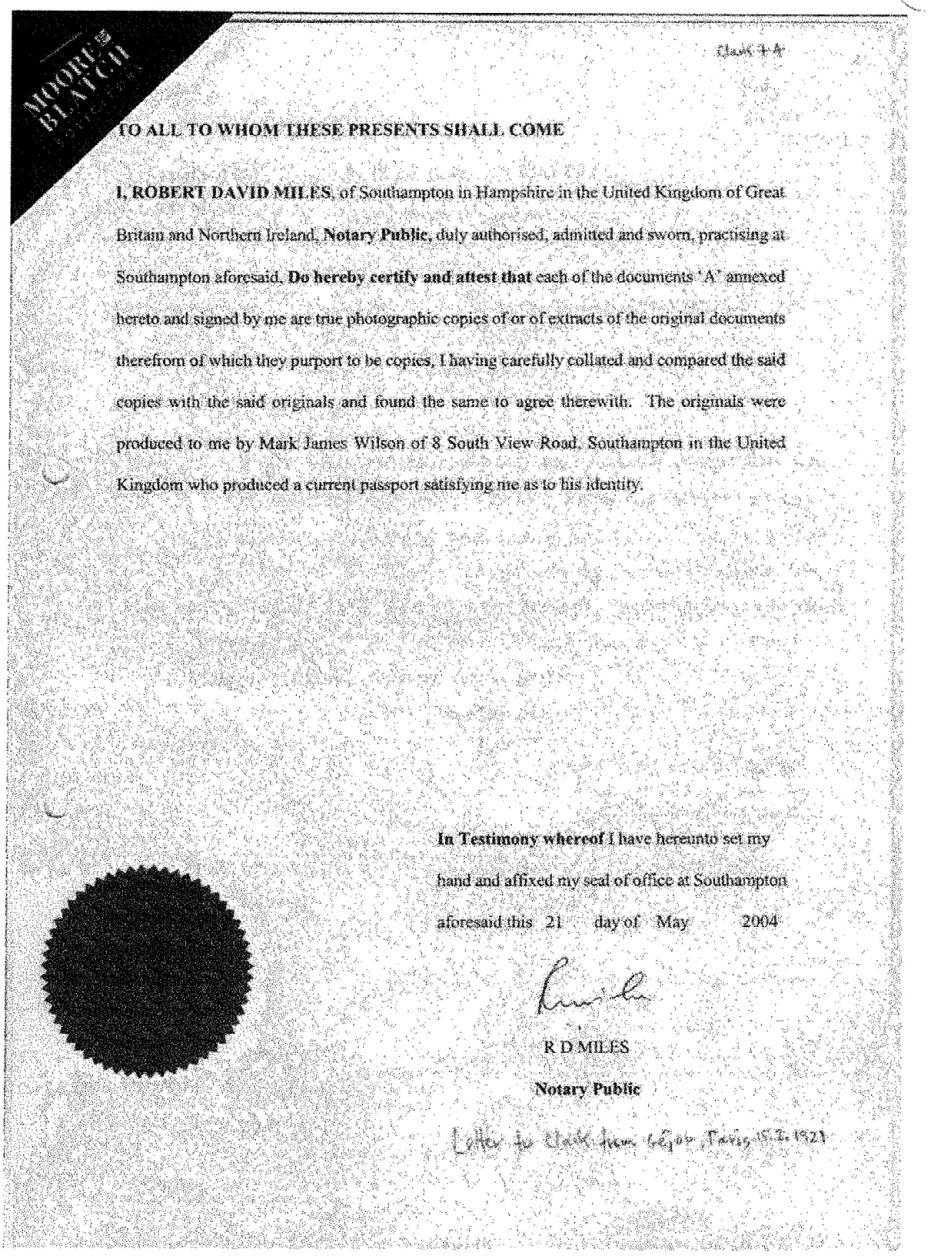

MOORE & BLATCH

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME

I, **ROBERT DAVID MILES**, of Southampton in Hampshire in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, **Notary Public**, duly authorised, admitted and sworn, practising at Southampton aforesaid, **Do hereby certify and attest that** each of the documents 'A' annexed hereto and signed by me are true photographic copies of or of extracts of the original documents therefrom of which they purport to be copies, I having carefully collated and compared the said copies with the said originals and found the same to agree therewith. The originals were produced to me by Mark James Wilson of 8 South View Road, Southampton in the United Kingdom who produced a current passport satisfying me as to his identity.

In Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal of office at Southampton aforesaid this 21 day of May 2004

R D MILES

Notary Public

Figure 6. Notary's statement provided by Schiøtz (courtesy of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture)

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the course of 2004.[32] The pages of this version of the website were cached several times by the Internet Archive (https://archive.org). In addition, provenance information is provided in the Schøyen Collection's published checklists from the late 1990s, though these publish only a selection of items then accessioned. Such information is also included in the collection's comprehensive private catalog; while this catalog has not been made publicly available, its provenance entries for a number of items are cited in the Museum of Cultural History's 2022 report.

Årstein Justnes and Josephine Munch Rasmussen have already demonstrated that the provenances for dubious Dead Sea Scroll fragments in the Schøyen Collection displayed on the collection website were changed often.[33] Normally, we would expect such changes relatively rarely, reflecting the discovery of new information about the collection history.[34] However, Justnes and Rasmussen show the changes are more frequent, with new additions sometimes reflecting information supposedly known long before. The changes, then, appear more like an attempt to make the provenances seem more convincing and to extend the chain of custody further back in time. The same is true of the Cumberland Clark provenance. I have identified six items from the collection for which we have multiple published sources on provenance in which at least one source attributes the item to Cumberland Clark (see Table 1). In every case, the different available sources provide conflicting provenance information. Moreover, Cumberland Clark does not appear in any published source before early 2004. It is noteworthy that the items in question generally appear on the Schøyen Collection website in 2001 or 2002, all with provenances that are inferior to the Cumberland Clark provenances: they do not cite documented collectors and do not extend as far back in time. This fact is especially odd when we consider attachments 5 and 9 from Schiøtz's July 1, 2022 letter to the Museum of Cultural History.[35] These attachments, dated 1989 and 1994, list Cumberland Clark as a major source of tablets that Wilson sold to or traded with Schøyen in those years. Based on these documents, then, the Schøyen Collection would have known of the Cumberland Clark provenance for each item in the table in the late 1980s or early 1990s but would have suppressed that information for an inferior provenance until 2004. However, since we can now prove that the Géjou-Clark letter attached to the July 1, 2022 letter is a forgery, we can no longer consider the other attachments reliable sources. The likeliest explanation for the facts above, then, is that the Cumberland Clark provenance was invented in early 2004. (Note that this would also coincide with the date on the notary's statement attached to the forged Géjou-Clark letter.)

It is also noteworthy that the claimed provenances from the website and catalog are generally ignored in the Schøyen Collection publications, as if the scholars suspect, or even assume, that they are unreliable. These claimed provenances appear only in the general Statements of Provenance at the beginning of the Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Cuneiform Texts volumes. In fact, some publications contradict the Statement of Provenance by explicitly stating that many or most of the tablets published in the volume were definitely or probably looted recently.[36] One of the artifacts in the table above, MS 2855, is discussed in the Museum of Cultural History report and published by Friberg. As the report

[32] Aspevoll 2004, 20.

[33] Justnes and Rasmussen 2021.

[34] Cf. Gill and Chippindale 1993, 622.

[35] Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, document no. 22: attachment 5, letter from Mark Wilson to Martin Schøyen, November 15, 1989; and attachment 9, Agreement of Exchange between Mark Wilson and Martin Schøyen, June 20, 1994.

[36] Brodie 2007, 14, referring to Friberg 2007; Museum of Cultural History 2022, 6–7, referring to Friberg 2007 and Westenholz 2014. Note that Westenholz 2014 publishes Schøyen Collection tablets among others, but is not an official part of the Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Cuneiform Texts series.

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Table 1. Schøyen Collection items attributed to Cumberland Clark where provenance is given in multiple sources (sources: Museum of Cultural History 2022; old Schøyen Collection webpage on National Library website, archived at Internet Archive https://web.archive.org/web/20040215100113/http://www.nb.no/baser/schoyen/contentnew3.html)

Inv. no.	Description	Provenance in 1999 checklist (as cited in Museum of Cultural History report)	Provenance in Schøyen's private catalog (as cited in Museum of Cultural History report)	First appearance on archived Schøyen Collection website pages	Website provenance before 2004	Website provenance Feb–April 2004
MS 2180	Neo-Assyrian inscription (limestone)	N/A	1. Ezida, the temple of Nabû, Nineveh (ca. 646 BC -) 2. Leonard Simmonds collection, UK (1944–1987) and heirs 3. Pars Antiques, London, June 1999	December 16, 2002	1. Ezida, the temple of Nabû, Nineveh (ca. 646 BC–) 2. L. Simmonds Collection, England (1944–1987), and heirs	1. Ezida, the temple of Nabû, Nineveh (ca. 646 BC–) 2. Cumberland Clark Collection, Bournemouth, England (1920s–1945), and heirs
MS 2368	Cylinder fragment	N/A	[1. Kalhu (Nimrud)] 2. Cumberland Clark collection, Bournemouth (1920s–1941) and heirs 3. Private collection, Zürich, Switzerland (1958–) 4. Mark Wilson, Southampton (1987–1994), acquired June 1994	August 4, 2001	1. Palace of King Sargon II, Nimrod [sic], Assyria (722–705 BC) 2. Temple or palace, Babylonia 3. Private collection, Zürich, Switzerland (from 1958).	Same as before
MS 2855	Tablet in Sumerian and Old Babylonian	1…., Babylonia 2. Private Collection, England (1938–1999), acquired June 1999	[0. Babylonia] 1. Cumberland Clark collection, Bournemouth (1920s–1941) and heirs 2. Mark Wilson, Southampton (1987–1994), acquired June 1994.	N/A	N/A	N/A
MS 4536/1	Xerxes quadrilingual alabastron	N/A	1. King Xerxes; the Persian Empire (485–465 BC)	December 16, 2002	1. King Xerxes; the Persian Empire	1. King Xerxes; the Persian Empire (485–

(*Continued*)

Table 1 *Continued*

Inv. no.	Description	Provenance in 1999 checklist (as cited in Museum of Cultural History report)	Provenance in Schøyen's private catalog (as cited in Museum of Cultural History report)	First appearance on archived Schøyen Collection website pages	Website provenance before 2004	Website provenance Feb–April 2004
			2. Found in Western Syria 3. Cumberland Clark Collection, Bournemouth, England (1920s–1945), and heirs 4. Mark Wilson, Southampton (1987–1994), acquired June 1994.		(485–465 BC) 2. Found in Western Syria 3. C. Dodds Collection, England (1975-). [Line 3 removed by April 22, 2003]	465 BC) 2. Found in Western Syria 3. Cumberland Clark Collection, Bournemouth, England (1920s–1945), and heirs
MS 4551	Uruk IV tablet (Sumerian): accounts	N/A	Unknown	December 16, 2002	1. Private Collection of a Gentleman, England (1960–1975) 2. C. Dodds Collection, England (1975–1999) [Line 2 removed by August 1, 2003]	1. Cumberland Clark Collection, Bournemouth (1920s–1945), and heirs, England
MS 4576	Stone weight	N/A	[0. Umma] 1. Cumberland Clark collection, Bournemouth (1920s–1941) and heirs 2. Mark Wilson, Southampton (1987–1994), acquired June 1994.	December 12, 2002	[0. Umma] 1. L. Simmonds Collection, England (1944–1987) and heirs.	Same [present on February 3, 2004, removed by April 26, 2004]

indicates, while Friberg explicitly notes when tablets can be documented in an older collection, there is no such indication given for MS 2855 – implying that scholars believe it was recently looted.[37] Rüdiger Schmitt, who studied the Artaxerxes alabastron MS 4536/2 (a companion of the Xerxes alabastron MS 4536/1 from the Table) also suggested that it had been recently looted.[38]

Other Cumberland Clark Collections

There are two other present-day collections of cuneiform tablets that include items attributed to Cumberland Clark, both currently held by the University of California, Los Angeles:[39]

1. In 2007, an anonymous donor gifted UCLA a group of 25 tablets, asking that the group be called the "Cumberland Clark Cuneiform Tablet Collection." The tablets are described as school exercises, mostly dating to the Old Babylonian period.[40] Again, the reoccurrence of the number 25 is striking.
2. In 2011, the Cotsen Family Foundation donated 215 tablets, mostly Old Babylonian school exercises, to UCLA; this group is known as the Lloyd E. Cotsen Cuneiform Tablets Collection. According to the UCLA webpage for this collection, it was formed by Cotsen over the course of "several decades."[41] However, Gabriella Spada reported (based on personal communication with an unspecified person, presumably at UCLA or the Cotsen Foundation) that most of the collection was formed from two previous collections – the larger one attributed to Cumberland Clark, the smaller to a man named Douglas S. Sharp – and that both were bought in 2002.[42] Most of these tablets (189 of 215) were published in 2008 by the dealer Mark Wilson.[43] In his book, Wilson confirms that most of the tablets derive from two private collections. Though the two collectors are not named, they are described sufficiently so that we can identify them: one collection is attributed to "a writer and traveler who died in 1944 in the United Kingdom," who fits the profile of Cumberland Clark (except that Clark died in 1941); the other, "obtained by a previous owner in Palestine shortly after the close of the Second World War, which then became part of a private collection of miscellaneous antiquities in England," fits the description of Leonard Simmonds and his son Douglas Simmonds – not Sharp – whom the Schøyen Collection identifies as another of its main sources of cuneiform tablets.[44]

Thus, both collections at UCLA appear to have close ties to the Schøyen tablets: all first appear publicly around the same time (mostly in the late 1990s or 2000s), are comprised of

[37] Friberg 2007, 236–41; Museum of Cultural History 2022, 10.

[38] Schmitt 2001, 192.

[39] The connection of these collections to the Schøyen Collection on the basis of the Cumberland Clark provenance was first raised by the Museum of Cultural History report (2022, 10–11).

[40] Online Archive of California, Finding Aid for the Cumberland Clark Cuneiform Tablet collection, Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1600 BCE) LSC.1826. https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt438nf4h2/entire_text/

[41] Online Archive of California, Finding Aid for the Lloyd E. Cotsen Cuneiform Tablets Collection LSC.1883. https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt0t1nf169/entire_text/

[42] Spada 2014, 2, n. 14.

[43] Wilson 2008.

[44] Wilson 2008, x; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, document no. 22: attachment 5, a letter from Mark Wilson to Martin Schøyen, November 15, 1989; see also the Statements of Provenance in the various Schøyen cuneiform volumes, e.g., Friberg 2007, xi.

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similar types of tablets (including many Old Babylonian school tablets), and are attributed to some of the same older collections. In addition, at least two of the collections are connected to Mark Wilson.

There is another point of connection: the Cotsen Collection and the Schøyen Collection each have several tablets from the ancient site Dur-Abieshuh (Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ). This provenance is a red flag. The ancient name of the site is used because its modern identification is unknown to scholarship, though it is known to be somewhere in southern Iraq, probably in the general area of Nippur (Arabic Nuffar). While the existence of this place has been known for many decades, as it is found in a year-name of its namesake, Abieshuh, an Old Babylonian king (and grandson of Hammurabi), tablets from this site first started to appear on the market only in 1998, with most coming up for sale after 2001.[45] All known examples appear in recent collections – the Cotsen Collection, the Schøyen Collection, the former Rosen Collection at Cornell, and some smaller collections,[46] with no examples known in the large public or private collections formed in the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. Thus it has become the consensus of Assyriologists that the site was discovered by looters in the mid- to late 1990s, and the tablets were illegally removed from Iraq after that date.[47] Notably, some of the Dur-Abieshuh tablets in the Schøyen Collection are attributed to Cumberland Clark;[48] of course, it is impossible that a collector who died in 1941 acquired tablets from a site that was only discovered in the 1990s.

Synthesis

Based on this evidence, it is likely that all Cumberland Clark provenances cited by current collections are fabricated.[49] The different collections appear to be connected, meaning that this provenance was likely fabricated by a single person or group of persons working together. The evidence suggests that this fabrication occurred in early 2004: that is when entries on the Schøyen Collection website were changed to include Cumberland Clark, and these entries are the earliest public record of the provenance.[50] The date of the notary's statement also falls in this period, suggesting that the forged Géjou letter was likely created at this time.

Why then? In late 2003 and early 2004, following the US-led invasion of Iraq (and the widespread reports of looting of archaeological sites in the aftermath), Norwegian media increasingly raised questions about the legality of Schøyen's ownership of much of his

[45] Földi 2014, 31; Földi 2017, 11; Charpin 2020, 151–52.

[46] Földi 2017, 9–11.

[47] Földi 2017, 15; Boivin 2018, 17; Gabbay and Boivin 2018, 36 n. 28; Charpin 2020, 152; Steinmeyer 2023, 41.

[48] MS 3057 is attributed to Clark in the handwritten annotations of the letter dated November 15, 1989 from Wilson to Schøyen (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, document no. 22: attachment 5); in the official publication of the tablet, Andrew George (2013, 9) concluded that, while the text of the tablet does not identify it explicitly as from Dur-Abieshuh, its paleography, orthography, and content all match the tablets from there. MS 3206 is attributed to Clark in Schiøtz's July 1, 2022 letter to the Museum of Cultural History (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Case no. 2014/7917, document no. 22), p. 8, and in Schøyen's private catalog (Museum of Cultural History 2022, 151); in publishing the tablet, Piotr Steinkeller (2011, 25) identified its origin as Dur-Abieshuh, citing George's observation that its script matches the tablets from that site. We might have further clarification of these provenances, or know of additional Dur-Abieshuh tablets attributed to Clark, if Schøyen's private catalog were made public.

[49] This idea was first suggested to be likely, at least for the majority of the Cumberland Clark tablets, by the Museum of Cultural History report (2022, esp. 10), based on the more limited range of evidence then available; it was this conclusion that prompted the rebuttal by Schiøtz of July 1, 2022 with its attached documents. See also Barford 2022.

[50] As we have seen, the documents dated 1989 and 1994 that name the Cumberland Clark collection are unreliable.

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material: in *Museumsnytt*, Leif Anker interviewed a police attorney, Hans Tore Høviskeland, who suggested that violating the UN Security Council resolution was punishable by fine or imprisonment up to three years; and the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK was preparing an investigation of the Schøyen Collection (*Skriftsamleren*, "The Manuscript Collector," aired in two parts in September 2004) for its documentary series Brennpunkt.[51] While the documentary focused on two other sub-collections in the Schøyen Collection (the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls of Buddhism" and Aramaic incantation bowls), it brought serious attention to the question of provenance in general.

The motivation seems clear enough. The tablets attributed to Cumberland Clark were probably looted from Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s (this is certain for those tablets from Dur-Abieshuh). Unlike the original provenances provided for these tablets, the Cumberland Clark provenance ties them to a known collector, one who serves to extend the collection histories of the tablets – and particularly the date at which they were out of their source country – further back in time, prior not only to the 1990 UN Security Council resolution barring trade in Iraqi antiquities removed after that date, but also to Iraq's antiquities laws of 1924 and 1936.[52]

Conclusion

Old collections are a critical part of provenance entries for art and antiquities collections. They are displayed prominently in catalogues, with attention drawn to the names of especially famous or important collectors of the past. Their presence serves multiple functions. They allow present-day collectors to represent themselves as the latest link in a chain of great collectors, taking for themselves part of the reflected glory of these past figures. They also provide a measuring stick for present-day collectors, who can boast that their collections rival or even surpass the major collections of the past. Nor is this a matter of merely cultural capital. Associating art or antiquities with famous collectors of the past can add monetary value to those items.[53] This applies even to forgeries. Over the last 60 years, for example, fakes sold by the nineteenth-century Jerusalem dealer Moses Shapira have become fashionable collectors' items, leading to an apparent rise in fake Shapira fakes.[54]

We see these trends with the Schøyen Collection itself. The Statements of Provenance at the beginning of the Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Cuneiform Texts volumes state that "it would not have been possible to collect such a great number of tablets and of such major textual importance, if the undertaking had not been based on the endeavour of some of the greatest collectors in earlier times."[55] The collection's checklists refer to "six great MS collectors that have been mentors of The Schøyen Collection" (Thomas Phillipps, Chester Beatty, Martin Bodmer, Lord Amherst, the Erlenmeyers, and Bernard Rosenthal).[56] Schøyen has repeatedly highlighted his acquisition of more than 1,000 items from Phillipps's collection.[57] These collectors may have been Schøyen's mentors, but his publications also highlight when his collection has outdone them. In comparison to Sir Thomas Phillipps's famous bibliomania, we read that the Schøyen Collection is "far more discriminating as to

[51] Anker 2003, 5; https://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/2004/OFFD12002803; https://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/2004/OFAA12001604

[52] On the relevance of Iraqi antiquities law and UN Security Council resolutions to items in the Schøyen Collection, see Freeman et al. 2006, 76–82.

[53] See, e.g., Delaloye 2017 (= Solomon 2024); Tarmy 2019; *contra* Thompson 2016, 157.

[54] See Press 2021. For an example sold in an online auction, see https://www.kedem-auctions.com/en/content/stone-head-%E2%80%93-forgery-attributed-moses-wilhelm-shapira.

[55] Friberg 2007, xi, with variation in later volumes.

[56] See, e.g., Sørenssen 1997, 5–6.

[57] E.g., Sørenssen 1997, 5; Schøyen 2016, 27.

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the collecting fields and quality" and has "a much greater proportion of early material."[58] Schøyen has shown special pride in collecting fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls – something he referred to as "the ultimate challenge" – and has noted that "[n]one of the great manuscript collectors of the time, such as Martin Bodmer and Chester Beatty, had succeeded in acquiring any fragments from the Judaean Desert."[59]

Clark, by contrast, adds no such prestige value. He is little remembered today, as either an author or a collector. Instead, as argued above, his role should be seen in terms of adding the veneer of legality. Old collections play an important role in establishing both the authenticity and legality of collected art and antiquities.[60] As we have seen, being able to trace antiquities back to past collections pushes the date back when they were removed from their source countries. Thus, it can be argued that they were removed before international agreements (such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention), recent policies of museums and professional organizations concerning ethical collecting and publication practices, or even national antiquities laws in the source countries. Not surprisingly, then, old collections are often used fraudulently to launder stolen antiquities.

Invented old collections take many forms. They can be anonymous, such as the fabled "anonymous Swiss collector,"[61] or named. If named, they may be real collections extended to include items never originally part of them, or completely fabricated collections. Anonymous and made-up collections both save the trouble of providing too much information and eliminate the risk of contradicting known details of well-known collections. We see examples of fictional old collections not only in the art world but also with ancient manuscripts (such as the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, where fake documents tied it to a Hans-Ulrich Laukamp, a deceased acquaintance of the likely forger who had never been a collector) and other kinds of antiquities (the "Thomas Alcock" collection of Egyptian antiquities fabricated by Jonathan Tokeley-Parry).[62] In our example, Cumberland Clark was a real collector, but, nevertheless, was an effective choice: little is known about his collecting activities, in particular his collecting cuneiform tablets. The single published piece of evidence, the chapter from his 1938 book, discusses only four items in detail. Further, he provides no information about when he acquired any of the tablets, from whom, and so on. This makes the Cumberland Clark collection a blank slate for fabricators of provenance.

The Cumberland Clark case is noteworthy for its use of forged provenance documentation to support it. Forged provenance documentation is well attested in the trade of modern art, in order to launder forgeries, but it also occurs in the antiquities trade – often in the form of fake or falsified import and export documentation or falsified dealer registers. In addition, the phenomenon of apparently authentic documents used to launder originally unrelated antiquities is well-attested.[63] The forgery of historic documents to provide a fake provenance for antiquities, while perhaps rarer, is also attested.[64] The Clark case is unusual,

[58] Sørenssen 1997, 5. This section continues: "Most people would say it is a greater achievement to assemble 7500 MSS in the 2nd half of the 20th c. than to collect 60,000 MSS in the 19th c."

[59] Schøyen 2016, 27.

[60] For a general discussion, see Gerstenblith 2019.

[61] https://www.anonymousswisscollector.com/2011/12/q-who-is-anonymous-swiss-collector.html.

[62] Sabar 2016; Gerstenblith 2002, 27.

[63] See, e.g., Kersel 2007, 83–84, 94; Brodie and Kersel 2014, 207; Brodie 2017; U.S. v. Approximately Four Hundred Fifty (450) Cuneiform Tablets and Approximately Three Thousand (3,000) Ancient Clay Bullae, CV 17-3980. Verified Complaint in Rem (E.D.N.Y.).

[64] See, e.g., Norman and Hoving 1987, 75 and True 1993, 13, relating to the Getty Kouros. Notably, the faked provenance documentation of the Getty Kouros involved a forged signature – though in that case one that was detected because it diverged too significantly from authentic examples – and possibly forged letterhead (Felch and Frammolino 2011, 52–53, 68–71, 80–81).

however, in that it involves forgery based on documents in a museum archive. In the art trade, we can point to a case such as the forger John Myatt, whose paintings were laundered by forged provenance documentation inserted by the con man John Drewe in several reputable archives in London.[65] The Cumberland Clark provenance involves nothing so elaborate. However, the forging of a letter from a known dealer to a known collector of antiquities is noteworthy; I am not aware of the exact parallels. The fact that, in our case, both figures are known explains why the forger copied authentic letters in an archive, as it would be necessary to make the forgery believable.

The Cumberland Clark case is also noteworthy for being an example of forged documents for looted Mesopotamian antiquities; the parallel cases that are usually cited involve Egyptian or classical artifacts. The absence of examples of forged provenance documentation for Mesopotamian antiquities – and their relative rarity with other kinds of antiquities – can be easily explained: provenance documents are not generally seen as necessary by either buyers or sellers. It is rare to find any statement of provenance at all (beyond a generic region or country of origin) in either the offer of objects for sale or the exhibition of items purchased on the market, whether these items are classical, Mesoamerican, Southeast Asian, or other.[66] Often the only information is cultural or stylistic attribution, to obscure the specific national origin of the object.[67] Neil Brodie has shown that dealers of Mesopotamian antiquities, too, tend to use generic country or regional designations, with a complete provenance of usually no more than a single word; they take care only to avoid the term "Iraq," as this might bring attention to legal issues (including, in the past, a UN Security Council resolution).[68]

If provenance statements are typically unnecessary, then there is even less need for provenance documentation. Thus, with cuneiform tablets as with other antiquities, documentation tends to emerge only when questions of legality are raised. As we have seen, the Géjou-Clark letter may have been forged in 2004, when Norwegian media had begun asking questions about the ownership of many items in the Schøyen Collection; and it was presented to the Museum of Cultural History in 2022, after the museum report questioned the ownership of many cuneiform tablets. And so, the lesson is clear: as long as the trade in cuneiform tablets and other Mesopotamian antiquities remains relatively unregulated, we should expect to see little forged provenance documentation relating to old collections – because we should expect to see little provenance documentation at all.

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[65] Landesman 1999; Salisbury and Sujo 2009.

[66] See the studies collected by Elia 2009, 245; Thompson 2016, 157, 207 n. 41.

[67] Mackenzie et al. 2020, 31–32.

[68] Brodie 2011, 122–24. We see this trend reflected in the Schøyen Collection as well. Thus, the provenance entry for Aramaic magic bowl MS 1911/1 originally gave its place of origin as "Iraq" (Sørenssen 1997, 63); in later versions, the entry was nearly identical except that the place of origin was changed to "Southern Mesopotamia" (e.g., Sørenssen 1999, 91). Otherwise, all provenance entries I have seen for antiquities from Iraq give either an ancient city name (e.g., "Umma") or an ancient cultural or regional name ("Assyria," "Babylonia"), but never "Iraq."

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