

Rehoming Flinders Petrie's "Homeless Palestinian Collection"

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Abstract

Palestine has a material presence in the story of the founding of the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) in London. The first institute director, Mortimer Wheeler, in his 1953 address on the centenary of Flinders Petrie's birth, tells of the vital role that Petrie's renown, and his "homeless Palestinian collection," subsequently rehomed in Britain, had in the establishment of the IoA. Once secured, the IoA goes on to take a crucial role in the colonial mission of instituting archaeology. Butler explores both the idea, and the operational logistics, of "rehoming." The author begins with a detailed critical reading of Wheeler's address in which the act of "rehoming" and the "Palestinian collection" as critical lenses are used to trace both Petrie's patriarchal persona as the "Father of Palestinian Archaeology" and also new "beginnings" (as Edward Said proposed) and new possibilities for "decolonizing" the collection. The article later places the IoA's unusual beginnings in conversation with the exhibition *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* (2019) that was co-curated with asylum-seekers and refugee groups and held in University College London's Octagon Gallery. The exhibition featured items from the "Palestinian collection" engaged with by Palestinians living in refugee camps in Jordan. The author explores how these new engagements repositioned archaeological collections as a resource for contemporary Palestinians to reflect on and profile alternative experiences of "homelessness" and heritage.

Keywords

Archaeology; heritage; Palestine; rehoming; Flinders Petrie; Mortimer Wheeler; refugees; exhibitions; decolonizing collections.

Introduction – Strange Beginnings

[My] most inspiring association with him [Petrie] was at the time when the proposal for the foundation of what is now the London University Institute of Archaeology was first under serious consideration . . . it was Petrie's name, and the bait of his homeless Palestinian collection, that attracted the anonymous endowment which eventually, in the early thirties, turned the scheme from two dimensions into three. The Petrie Palestinian collection at the Institute of Archaeology is still indeed the biggest and best of its kind in the country. . . . The "spirit of adventure." I suppose that the phrase contains nearly all that makes life worthwhile; but to define it is another matter.

— R. E. M. Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure"¹

Palestine has a material presence in the story of the founding of the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) in London.² The first Institute director, Mortimer Wheeler, in his prestigious presidential address "on the centenary of Flinders Petrie's birth" given to the Royal Archaeological Institute on 13 May 1953, tells "for the first time" the "important" and "decisive part" that Flinders Petrie's "name and reputation" played in the foundation of the IoA.³ It is in this 1953 presidential address that Wheeler highlights how the "bait" of what Wheeler describes as Petrie's "homeless Palestinian collection"⁴ and its movement from Palestine and rehomings in Britain provides the necessary "catalyst"⁵ for the enterprise. Once the "anonymous endowment" is secured, the IoA goes on to take a crucial role in the international mission of instituting archaeology, thereby building on the pioneering legacies of Petrie's excavations in the Middle East.

The encompassing focus of my article is upon both the idea and the operational logistics of "rehomings." This motif is initially present in the above founding of the IoA, with the Palestine Collection acting as a "catalyst," and the decisive act of its "rehomings" regarded as a solution for its (alleged) state of "homelessness." Its materiality thus offers a literalizing force that makes the "dream" of establishing the IoA into a "reality."⁶ Moreover, Wheeler takes this motif forward in his presidential address titled "Flinders Petrie and Adventure." He thus evokes and at the same time further fuses the triad of: the IoA's "strange beginnings,"⁷ Petrie as "Father of Archaeology," and the Palestine Collection as the "Petrie Palestinian Collection," as exemplifications of a powerful "spirit of adventure" that underpin the archaeological quest past, present, and future.⁸ The act of rehomings the Palestine Collection thus merges with this spirit of adventure that Wheeler subsequently repositions as synonymous with both "personal fulfilment" and as "opportunities for fulfilment" as viewed "from a national stand-point." He also positions these dynamics as a resource to articulate exclusivist neo-colonial visions of post-war Britain as both the home/homeland of archaeology and as an internationalizing force operating outward.

In what follows, I begin my critical exploration of the motif of rehomeing by offering a more detailed critical reading of Wheeler's presidential address. Here Wheeler draws out further what Peter Ucko, the seventh director (1996–2005), refers to as the IoA's aforementioned "strange beginnings," while simultaneously grounding them in the context of future aspirations for archaeology post–World War II. As explored later in the article, the term "strange" is used after Ucko to capture the unusual and unexpected dynamics that led to founding the IoA, and more specifically still the curious, even accidental way, in which both Petrie and "his" so-called homeless Palestinian Collection become pivotal to this. As such, this "strangeness" emerges as a centered quality as both Petrie and the Palestine Collection are simultaneously transformed, essentialized, and pressed into the service of increasingly more overt foundational operational logistics.

My wider aim is to demonstrate that the motif of rehomeing and the simultaneous instrumentalization of Petrie and the Palestine Collection has further efficacies once they are recast as a dual critical lens. This dual task, I argue, is one that is not only capable of apprehending the above colonizing tropes of archaeology in relation to Petrie's patriarchal status as the "Father of Palestinian Archaeology" but is also capable of enabling new beginnings and new possibilities for decolonizing the collection. As such, in the latter half of my article I place the IoA's "strange beginnings" and the initial foundational "rehomeing" of the Palestine Collection in conversation with the exhibition *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* held in the Octagon Gallery of University College London (UCL) in 2019, which was co-curated with asylum-seekers and refugee groups.⁹ This modest though ground-breaking exhibition brought together research undertaken as partnerships between UCL staff and those with lived experience of exile and enforced displacement.¹⁰ More specifically, the "Talking Objects" case, located within the wider *Moving Objects* exhibition, featured items from the Palestine Collection selected by Palestinians living in refugee camps in Jordan.¹¹ These new engagements based on long-term ethnographic research repositioned archaeological collections as a resource for contemporary Palestinians to "speak of and to" alternative ongoing experiences and realities of homelessness that look to heritage as part of the quest for better futures.

The *Moving Objects* exhibition, and more particularly the "Talking Objects" case, thus approached the dynamic of rehomeing and the Palestine Collection from very different perspectives to that of the IoA's founding fathers Petrie and Wheeler: notably via the lived experience of Palestinian refugees. The exhibition's title – *Moving Objects* – reflects both the capacity of objects "to move us and move with us in complex, intimate ways," including "moving us" not only to "dream" and "imagine new worlds of possibility" but to "act politically."¹² More specifically, the "Talking Objects" case addressed the power of objects "to 'speak' to and of experiences of displacement, marginalization, and conflict."¹³ The exhibition and, as we shall see, accompanying creative workshops, also explored the double-edged efficacies of archaeology and heritage as that which has the agency to displace and dispossess, yet alternatively

and/or simultaneously, provide “significant loci for repair, revitalization and recovery of persons and ‘lost’ worlds.”¹⁴ Objects as symbolic and material presence thus give substance to both the existence of Palestine as historical reality, and to contemporary Palestinian dreams and aspirations that promise to be literalized as new and alternative “facts on the ground.”¹⁵ Pursuing the latter, not only were objects from the Palestine Collection explored as potential loci for gaining a sense of wholeness and healing synonymous with archaeology and heritage as a vision and material manifestation of deep time and deep pasts, but also for their efficacies in mapping across and collapsing virtual, spiritual, and real worlds.

What interests me then are the colonial and also decolonizing tropes at play and how these trajectories are embedded within certain holistic, imaginative, promises of fulfillment and the fulfillment of promise. The motif of rehome precedes, accompanies, and clarifies such promises that in turn are bound up in acts of materialization that revolve around the possession and movement of objects. An important shared understanding of the vitality of heritage emerges across these colonial and decolonizing tropes. This occurs in the former trajectory as Wheeler employs the encompassing phrase “spirit of adventure” – exemplified by Petrie and “his” Palestine Collection and by extension the IoA – to ultimately embrace the quest to grasp “all that makes life worthwhile.”¹⁶ In the “Talking Objects” case, co-curators from Palestinian refugee camps, similarly but differently, spoke of the Palestinian “spirit” encapsulated within the heritage and tradition of *sumud* as synonymous with steadfastness, resilience, well-being, and action. Moreover, in a further alternative mirroring – or perhaps inversion – of Wheeler’s trajectory of rehome, Palestinian co-curators juxtaposed items from the Palestine Collection with the words of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, whose poem “On This Earth” embraces the land of Palestine from a Palestinian perspective as “what makes life worth living.” Ultimately, this trajectory underpinned the vision of Palestine as home/homeland and rehome as embedded within the aspiration and quests/questions of return. We can assert that heritage is made vital when possessed by those for whom it contributes most to making life worth living. The wider quest/ion that emerges is: what would new beginnings (as Edward Said proposed) as new logics and logistics of rehome look like in contemporary and future contexts?¹⁷ As such, within my article I explore the concept and operational logistics of rehome both to draw out the figurative promises, aspirations, and spirit of fulfillment as well as literal grounded realities and directionalities, and how these dualities and efficacies are inextricably linked.

Bridging Acts: Centenary Celebrations – “Father of Pots” (Abu Bagousheh)

As a bridge to Wheeler’s speech, below I give an overview of how Petrie, his work in Palestine, and the assemblage of the Palestine Collection are part of foundational and formative operational interventionism that turns the “dream,” both of the IoA and writ

larger still of instituting scientific archaeology, into a “reality.” Of note here is that, since Petrie’s death occurred during World War II, which prevented the customary commemoration at that time, there was added emphasis for celebrating his birth centenary in 1953. The centenary celebrations thus consisted of Wheeler’s address on “Petrie and Adventure” and crucially, too, an exhibition titled *The Archaeology of Palestine* (23 June to 31 August) held at the first “home” of the IoA at St. John’s Lodge in London’s Regent’s Park.



Figure 1. St. John’s Lodge, Regent’s Park London. The first “home” of the Institute of Archaeology. Photo courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Iconic images of the Regent’s Park location show Petrie’s name and “London” possessively scrawled on the huge crates containing hundreds of objects from Palestine. As “moving objects,” these photos illustrate the colossal physical process that was involved in operational and grounded logistical processes of rehoming the so-called homeless Palestinian Collection. As we shall see, Petrie and Wheeler can be seen to simultaneously operationalize the more figurative aspects of rehoming alongside the literal. Indeed, this is how they, like the co-curators featured in the second half of this paper, commune with and thus empower the various efficacies of the Palestine Collection.



Figure 2. Crates containing the “Petrie Palestinian Collection” at St John’s Lodge. Photo courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Raising Archaeology to a Science

At the time of the 1953 centenary, a plaque was proposed for Petrie’s home in Hampstead, London, iterating Petrie’s major contribution: “He raised archaeology to a science.” It is a defining moment in which previous amateur antiquarianism and proto-archaeological exploration are left behind. Further accolades afforded Petrie include: father of archaeology, of Egyptology, and of Palestinian archaeology, respectively. Other commentators see him as the pioneering father of those wider domains – museology, conservation, and public archaeology – that make up the then nascent, now flourishing, field of heritage studies. The catalogue that accompanies the 1953 exhibition highlights Petrie’s “contribution to Palestinian archaeology,” especially noting his “pioneering work” at Tal al-Hasi in 1890 for the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF).¹⁸ Petrie’s excavation technique of cutting into the tell revealed the “debris of the decay of successive building periods”: this paradigmatic moment establishes “Palestinian archaeology on a scientific basis.” By ushering in “an entirely new scientific approach,” Petrie’s work marks a break with previous archaeological preoccupations, thus transforming Palestine as biblical object – and its possession by the literalizing forces of “biblical archaeology” – into an object of scientism. The “profound impression” Petrie made sees a particular archaeological logic emerge within which applied mathematics, stratigraphy, and seriation are

routinized as the efficacies of scientific excavation: not just in Palestine but within the whole of archaeological practice.¹⁹

Here too a key link is made with Petrie as the “Father of Pots.”²⁰ The 1953 catalogue continues: “A corollary to Petrie’s establishment of the importance of stratification was the use of pottery as an indispensable means of establishing the date of successive strata.”²¹ Thus, “He recognised that each period had its characteristic pottery, and that the date of these pottery groups would be established by the collection of evidence association with datable objects.” The catalogue reiterates: “All this was accomplished in a six-weeks campaign at Tell el Hesi [sic] in 1890,” adding, “No archaeologist has ever had such an impeccable record of rapid publication. Such was Petrie’s contribution to Palestinian archaeology in a stay of only three months.” Petrie then returned to Palestine in 1926 and during the following thirteen years, “excavated three important sites in Southern Palestine, Tell Gemmeh [Tal Jamma], Tell el Fara [Tal al-Far’a] and Tell el Ajjul [Tal al-‘Ajjul]” (“Ancient Gaza”), objects from which make up the Palestine Collection.²²

Ucko’s aforementioned “object biography” of the Palestine Collection outlines how Petrie gives to the IoA a “large selection of his excavated material” from all three sites: “some 20,000 individual items in all comprising mainly sherds, as well as several hundred complete pots, the contents of several complete sets of grave groups including gold jewelry, faience, and scarabs.”²³ Not only was the Palestine Collection to provide “a uniquely important research collection” but, to ensure “Petrie’s hopes for its future,” accompanying conditions stipulated the way that “Petrie’s Palestinian collection should be housed and displayed.” Petrie thus argued that the IoA, “will make this the Mecca for all students of Palestine and the necessary centre for research and teaching.”²⁴ Archaeology would henceforth be recognized as a serious scientific investigation of the past, through the application of a strict inductivist logic based on a methodology of stratigraphy and seriation initially worked out on the Palestinian material record. A first “homing” of the Palestinian collection was indelibly linked to the *fons et origio* of the subject of archaeology as an event recognizing the archaeology of Palestine.²⁵

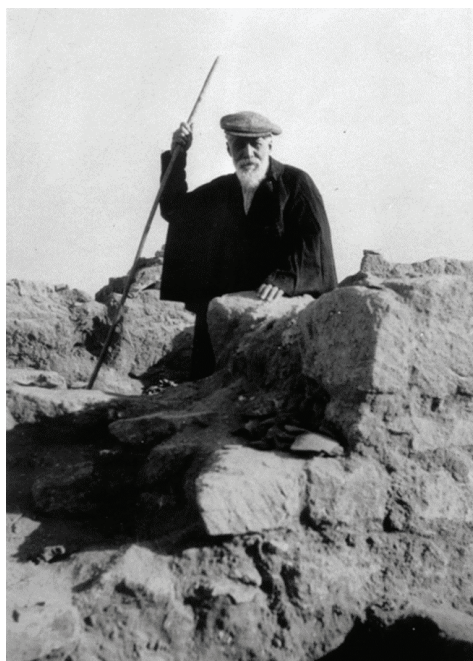


Figure 3. “William Flinders Petrie in 1928, at Tell el Ajjul (?).” Photograph by Canon C. B. Mortlock, courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

Here too archaeology acquires its potent efficacies and its privileged place in its ability to give material substance to “deep” pasts and to literalize as “facts on the ground” the existence of “lost” ancient civilizations. The archaeological logic Petrie puts in place as “pioneer” turns these logics and logistics into a “Western” possession housed within empirical scientific professional practice and as a form of technicist colonial institutional interventionism.



Figures 4 and 5. Display cases, St. John's Lodge. Photos courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Queen, Country, and Commonwealth

The Palestine Collection as critical lens is capable of further “excavating” this first act of rehoming and Petrie’s role in the foundational and formative institutional interventionism that transformed the dream of scientific archaeology as well as the IoA into a reality. By focusing attention on Wheeler’s 1953 address, insights emerge of “Western” colonial tropes, and more specifically British perspectives and positionality. Indeed, Wheeler began his centenary speech by quoting the new queen:

I have it in mind that our Royal Patron, in the course of her Christmas broadcast to her peoples, used the following words: “Above all, we must keep alive that courageous spirit of adventure that is the finest quality of youth: and by youth I do not just mean those who are young in years; I mean, too, all those who are young in heart, no matter how old they may be. That spirit still flourishes in this old country and in all the younger countries of our Commonwealth.” Those words have recurred to me more than once since I first heard them, and I take them as the text for the short address which recent custom demands of me this afternoon.²⁶

Wheeler’s opening remarks see him begin by reiterating and reflecting upon the spirit of adventure: a phrase set in play by no less than the British monarch in her “Christmas broadcast to her peoples.” Referred to by Wheeler, more intimately and possessively, as “our Royal Patron,” he takes the monarch’s words as the “text” for his “short address.” He therefore closely aligns himself to queen, country, and

commonwealth and subsequently takes up the quest of particularizing these wider royal reflections for archaeology. We see exposed a moment in 1953 – coronation year – when aspirations are alive to redeem an “old country” in fusion with the “new.”²⁷ Throughout his speech, Wheeler addresses his audience as “us Britons,” thus positioning archaeology – and by extension Petrie, the Palestine Collection, and IoA – within an exclusive nati/onal, patriotic trope. The spirit of adventure is synonymous with movement – in terms of aspirations, optimism, and promise – if not the urgent need to redeem an “old country” in alignments with youthful life forces and expansionism rather than face stasis, death, and decline.

A theme emerges from the outset: of how encompassing imaginative visions are projected and materialized as “real” operational concerns. The efficacies of archaeological investigations are thus grounded in pragmatic, instrumentalist, methodological interventionism as “facts on the ground.” By positioning “spirit of adventure” as a phrase that “contains nearly all that makes life worthwhile,” Wheeler takes us on a quest to try and articulate what this means not only for foundational and formative “beginnings” synonymous with both Petrie, archaeology/heritage, and the IoA, but for the future of postwar Britain also. The auspicious timing of Petrie’s centenary in the coronation year can be juxtaposed with alternative perspectives, notably those of Palestinians on the ground experiencing the realities of the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba and the violent beginnings, displacement, and deaths that accompanied the creation of the Israeli state.

It is worth pausing to acknowledge the equally “strange” and unexpected structure and content of Wheeler’s address. Published in full in *Antiquity*, Wheeler’s speech consists of six pages: the first two are his attempts to articulate and reflect upon archaeology as emboldening the spirit of adventure. It is not until page four that Wheeler mentions archaeology for the first time, and a further one-and-a-half pages before Petrie first appears. Wheeler, to great effect, gathers momentum before positioning Petrie as the epitome and embodiment of the spirit of adventure, connecting this in turn with the founding of the IoA and the vital role of the Palestine Collection’s rehomeing within it.

Real World of Adventure

From the outset Wheeler’s quest sees him conflate real and imagined worlds in order to grasp what he argues to be the “real world of adventure” in which archaeology operates. Indeed, his whole speech emphasizes the efficacies of the world of the imagination in its relationships to the real. Wheeler starts by highlighting, yet ultimately moving beyond, “rudimentary notions of adventure” synonymous with “Boy’s Own” fiction and the “bygone world” of his “parents and grandparents era” in which, for “the adventurous of spirit it had for the most part to be sought, and sought deliberately.”²⁸ He recalibrates his quest by grasping the extremes of the spirit of adventure. At one end of the spectrum is “adventure of the polite kind” found “within books” indicative of “perfect Victorian gentility” and with the “easy live and quiet die.” At “the other

end of the scale we have that preposterous cult of adventure” that Wheeler argues is synonymous with the “professional adventurer as feigned and false adventuring” and “demonstrative imposture.”²⁹ He reflects on the disappearing opportunities for “real adventure” in his contemporary world and argues, “the enemy of adventure” is the “life of routine” that “smears us into uniformity” and “regimentalizes us.” He outlines a desired scenario in which he positions “adventure” as part of the national heritage and promise of fulfillment for “an ordinary average Englishman, an opportunity of self-fulfilment such as has, through the ages, peculiarly fitted and augmented our accumulative tradition. I am not now discussing the merits of that tradition; I am merely considering, from a national standpoint, personal fulfilment and the opportunities for fulfilment.”³⁰

Wheeler at last turns to address archaeology. He places the discipline outside the “political world,” and within both the “intellectual field” and the “spirit of high tradition of adventure which,” he adds, “is our greatest pride.” To substantiate his claims, Wheeler iterates the achievements of British archaeology, arguing, “Our own victories remain outstanding.” Dismissing prevailing contemporary theses of the “end of discovery” and of a “shrinking world” as “Cassandra” calls, he highlights: “In this very month of May wherein I am now speaking to you, the unscaled height of Mount Everest still lies before us.”³¹ Finally, he issues a challenge to archaeology, telling his audience, “Reflect upon the great expanses of Asia which have not yet been even touched by skilled exploration. Think of Africa, still Dark archaeologically from its innermost recesses to the Indian and Atlantic coastlines.” He makes further gestures to Arabia, to what lies beyond the “iron curtain” and beyond and exclaims, “What possibilities await us!”³²

Wheeler advocates: “From time to time I have sought, with limited power and opportunity, to divert some of our younger archaeologists from their back-yards to these vast horizons. At the risk of inflicting boredom or irritation, I repeat that challenge. Here lies a great opportunity for continuing that high tradition of adventure which is our greatest pride.”³³ It is here that he turns to the grounded operational efficacies of archaeology and to training. “If the political field is closing upon us,” he posits, “the intellectual field still awaits us.” He adds:

Let us train our young people at home under the informed short-range criticism which makes British archaeological training perhaps the most scrupulous and scholarly in the world; but then let us enable them with that training behind them to exploit these immense world problems with the same skill which they now lavish on a burial-mound in Wales or a Roman market-town in England.³⁴

With a rallying cry, Wheeler continues: “Let them, these young people, seize the opportunity, with all that it implies, not only for the discipline which they serve but also for the manhood and womanhood which cannot fail to be enhanced by the whole adventurous process.” With even more fervor, he argues: “Let them go to the ends of the earth, and let them go in numbers, with the thought that ten years of carefully

selective exploration and excavation in the wide open spaces can scarcely fail to tell us more of human achievement than can a hundred years of digging in an English back-garden.” Finally, he reasserts, “As archaeologists, we are unsurpassed in the world.” Then Wheeler reiterates his “general principle” by “plead[ing] for a wider and more adventurous archaeological outlook.”³⁵

At this latter stage in his address, Wheeler finally turns to Petrie, who crucially provides the link needed to exemplify and ground his thesis. Acknowledging Petrie’s “almost universal interests,” Wheeler reflects on a series of vignettes that feature moments in Petrie’s career from “an entirely unknown but very confident young man” to his “death-bed.” As insights into his spirit of adventure, what connects these vignettes are Petrie’s dual mastery of what Wheeler describes as his “quest for precision” and “overmastering ingenuity” that “are at the same time present.” The first three vignettes featuring Petrie illustrate this trope. Collectively, Wheeler depicts in these “curious” stories the “paradoxical character of a man whose microscopically precise measurements of the pyramids of Gizeh [Giza] are almost legendary. By his incredible ingenuity, complex problems were liable to be rendered excessively simple and surmountable, simple problems might be tangled into inextricable complexities.”³⁶

Death of a Patriarch

Wheeler finally describes his “most inspiring association” with Petrie as the “time when the proposal for the foundation of what is now the London University Institute of Archaeology was first under serious consideration.” While Wheeler “drafted the scheme for this Institute in 1926,” he laments, “the realization of the scheme was slow.” Until, that is, Petrie brings his precision to bear on the IoA project: “I took my scheme to Petrie, and he in turn brought out a characteristically detailed plan for floorage and wall-space, every figure worked out to a decimal point.”³⁷ It is here that the Palestine Collection acts as “bait” and “catalyst,” thus transforming “two dimensions . . . into three.”³⁸ While describing Petrie as “genius,” Petrie’s limitations come into view. Using military metaphors, a defensive Wheeler argues, “Petrie fought with the weapons that he knew or himself invented, and in his youth fought better than any of his contemporaries in the East.” The outdated “weaponry,” however, includes the “most notorious example” in terms of Petrie’s “lasting adherence to an obsolete and untenable Egyptian Chronology; but the foible showed itself in many ways. The result was a sometimes disconcerting lack of proportion in thought and action. He would dart headlong up the road, without necessarily glancing at the signpost.”³⁹ The active mind thus producing leaps of imaginative logic that others, including Wheeler and Kenyon while at the IoA, would subsequently update. Omissions here are glaring to the contemporary reader, especially in terms of Petrie’s “sins” currently attracting significant critical scrutiny vis-à-vis his alignment with the eugenics movement.⁴⁰

Instead, in Wheeler’s final vignette, we see Petrie, the epitome of an archaeological scientist, on his deathbed now transformed into a “Biblical patriarch.” As part of the paradox of Petrie’s life, at the same time as the IoA’s “strange beginnings” and the

“rehomeing” of the Palestine Collection, “Petrie himself went to live in Palestine about this period and dropped out of the whole business.” We gain the sense of Petrie as both a pioneer of modernity and science and its repudiation. Here the promise of archaeology is also one of an escape and of rehomeing oneself outside the “West.” On hearing news that “Petrie was dying,” Wheeler thus recalls rushing to Jerusalem to the “peaceful atmosphere of the little hospital where Petrie in his 89th year lay placidly upon his death-bed.”⁴¹ He remembers Petrie “swathed in white sheets, and a sort of turban of white linen was about his head. His grey beard and superb profile gave him the aspect of a Biblical patriarch,” adding that, Petrie’s “mind was running even faster than was its wont, as though it had a great distance still to cover before the approaching end,” and how “in the course of ten minutes it ranged without pause over a wide variety of matters, from the copper implements of Mesopotamia to the lethal incidence of the malarial mosquito at Gaza. I left the room quietly, my little brain stretched by the immensity and impetus of a mind for which there were no trivialities in life and no place of respite.”⁴²

In his concluding reflections, we see Wheeler revert back to his “primary theme” to argue, “Petrie’s life was in fact one long adventure, one long process of search and discovery in many places and under many circumstances.” While contrasting Petrie with Petrie’s own former pupil T. E. Lawrence who was “an adventurer in a sense that Petrie never could have been,” Wheeler reiterates that Petrie’s life of adventure was one that “you can’t buy . . . at Messrs. Thomas Cook’s.” Wheeler’s final thoughts turn toward aspiring a future in which he could “hope that one morning soon my door may open again to some young Englishman – or Scot or Welshman, for that matter – with the light of the sunrise in his eye.”⁴³

New Rehomeings – “Talking Objects” and New Beginnings

How should we best “speak” about the land of Palestine? An object possessed by sacred narratives? The Promised Land of Milk and Honey? As lost homeland? As witness to many possessional acts: of pilgrims, crusaders and ancient to modern colonising projects? And/or as a place that folklore populates with supernatural forces of ghouls and jinn that “speak” of alternative wisdoms, cures and curses? A land that possesses us and acts back?

— Text label, “Talking Objects” case, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition UCL, 2019

The Octagon Gallery is a public space housed under UCL’s iconic dome within the central cloisters and is located close to figures of old and new ancestors.⁴⁴ It was under the nearby gaze of auto-icon and honorary UCL founder Jeremy Bentham before an attempt at a populist move saw him rehoused within UCL’s new student building.⁴⁵ The provost’s office is guarded nearby by the Koptos lions, taken – rehomed –

from Egypt by Petrie; these statues are thus testimony to Petrie's status as Father of Egyptology and further colonial tropes.⁴⁶ In the contemporary moment, the world of institutional ancestors and ancestry is coming in for deep critique. Initiating a new genre of "moving objects," calls are being made to displace and/or rehome selected ancestors – via acts of removal, renaming, displacement, rehoming – and/or acts of destruction that are part of attempts to articulate new ethics/aspirations/futures within alternative visions of fulfilment and quests for what "makes life worth living."⁴⁷

As previously mentioned, the "Talking Objects" case featured items from the Palestine Collection that were engaged with by Palestinians living in refugee camps in Jordan. These engagements took the form of a variety of "Heritage Workshop" sessions in camps in the context of long-term ethnographic research.⁴⁸ This, in turn, provided the basis upon which artefacts were selected from the Palestine Collection synonymous with Petrie as well as from Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in Palestine, also housed at the IoA.⁴⁹ As modest new beginnings and as a second phase of rehoming, such collections were thus repositioned as a resource to reflect on and profile alternative explorations of homelessness and heritage.⁵⁰ The exhibition and accompanying creative workshops offered all participants a means to consider: "How can collections be formed and 'reformed' in relation to conflict and displacement" and "How can displaced people themselves relate to and reinterpret artifacts 'housed' and 'labeled' by UCL Museums (again including collections specifically relating to Palestine held at UCL IoA)."⁵¹ What interests me are the diverse ways co-curators engaged with imaginative worlds within which materiality – including discussion and relabeling of objects, the juxtaposition of their own objects and creative interventions alongside items from UCL collections – offers a literalizing force that holds the promise of turning dream into reality and of articulating new and alternative meaning and truth-value.⁵² The quest of how to "speak" about Palestine emerged as the point of intervention.

The "Talking Objects" case in particular sought to articulate a movement, one that in many senses decentered and redirected the spirit of adventure synonymous with Petrie's



Figure 6. *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement*. "Talking Objects" case. Photo by Stuart Laidlaw, courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

“Palestine” is brought to the refugee camps – often dubbed “Little Palestines” – in various ways. Here heirlooms (*mirath*) or kept objects/inheritance (*irth*) in the form of jewelry, dresses, crafts, photographs, title-deed documents, and house keys emerged as recurrent material symbols and motifs. The section also explored how “dreams” of repossessing Palestine as “lost object” are literalized as sensoria – for example, in the preparation of traditional food, in *dabka* dancing, and in street art.



Figure 8. “Exile” (*Nafi*). Photo by Stuart Laidlaw, courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

The topic of “Home” (*Watan*) was then explored in more depth and within the “dream” of fragments of place being transformed into wholeness. This act of virtual, imaginative rehomeing was accompanied by a wealth of objects old and new. Colonial patriarchs (and matriarchs) were displaced and new constituencies brought into view.⁵⁷ In this reversal of power and authority were placed Petrie’s commentary on the “struggle of the bedouin” and Wheeler’s (this time Margaret, Mortimer Wheeler’s third wife) commentary on the plight of Palestinian refugees in Jericho as constituting the “latest stratum in the life of the place.”⁵⁸ A key omission from Wheeler’s address was Petrie’s significant distribution of Palestinian finds; a label thus highlights: “The objects from these excavations too resist incorporation into the archaeological story alone, resonating with a sense of places and persons too powerful to reduce to one narrative. The distributed finds from such excavations followed the paths of later Palestinian exile to America, Europe, and Australia.”⁵⁹ Thus as migrant, exiled, and moving objects the Palestinian collections (plural) have greater efficacies of circulation. Moreover, a wider, popular, folkloric heritage was also juxtaposed to the Palestine Collection to draw out the limits of scientism and alternative efficacies vis-

à-vis how persons look to objects to provide protection, amuletic and/or medicinal, and to explore the healing powers of such material.



Figure 9. "Home" (*Watan*). Photo by Stuart Laidlaw, courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.



Figure 10. "Home" (*Watan*). Photo by Stuart Laidlaw, courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

The concluding section addressed "Promise" (*Wa'd*) and, as such, spoke of "visions of fulfillment." Items selected for this case included fantastic, creative interventions that used "desire, wish-fulfilment, and dream-work" – often blended with humor and satire – to grasp future promise. The creation of "counter-factual" objects, for example, were present in the promise of the Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour's "Palestinaut" and the "Bethlehem passport" created by "Open Bethlehem," while a subversive re-imaging of folk/fairy storytelling narratives saw the sole of Cinderella's glass slipper symbolically filled with soil from Palestine.⁶⁰ Visions of a return to home/land were also powerful, materialized in a map embroidered by refugees.

Here, one object, this time a ceramic plate made by Palestinian artist Sansour, held particular efficacy in that it distilled – if not stripped bare – the underpinning logic/premise/efficacies of archaeology, notably those put in play by Petrie, while simultaneously providing a locus of reimagining.⁶¹ The plate – presented as an archaeological find and decorated with a design that echoes the *kufiya* (the black and white patterned scarf and iconic symbol of Palestine) – highlights the archaeological preoccupation with pots/ceramics as the archaeological litmus test or basis for recognizing the existence of ancient civilizations. Locating this artwork at the “cross-section between science-fiction, archaeology and global politics,” the plate’s pseudo-authenticity (it is revealed to be a contemporary manufactured item) harnesses the efficacies of irony and satire and pitches us into Sansour’s world of Arab Futurism.⁶² When the “real” becomes “surreal,” Sansour argues that we need to create alternative worlds of critique. In this case, her work depicts a future “rebel leader” “setting up an elaborate operation in order for the future generations of Palestinians to obtain the basic privileges that history has so far denied.”⁶³ As such, this sci-fi operation sees deposits of archaeological ceramics – plates with the *kufiya* design – implanted back in time for contemporary and future archaeologists to find. It is articulated as an act of “narrative terrorism” and thus as a strategy to move beyond the impasse synonymous with the “archaeology wars” and the over-politicized, instrumentalization and weaponization of archaeology by the Israelis state to authenticate and legitimate the “Jewish Homeland.”⁶⁴

Sansour comments in an interview that the Israeli archaeological narrative has been more effective than any legal arguments made about Palestinian human rights and the right of return. She thus explores and subverts the logic of archaeology and pottery as physical indicators, as material proofs and as the promise of entry into, and presence within, the civilizational story and deep pasts, and, crucially, as an essentialized resource for modern nation building. Not only does Sansour’s work reject the Zionist

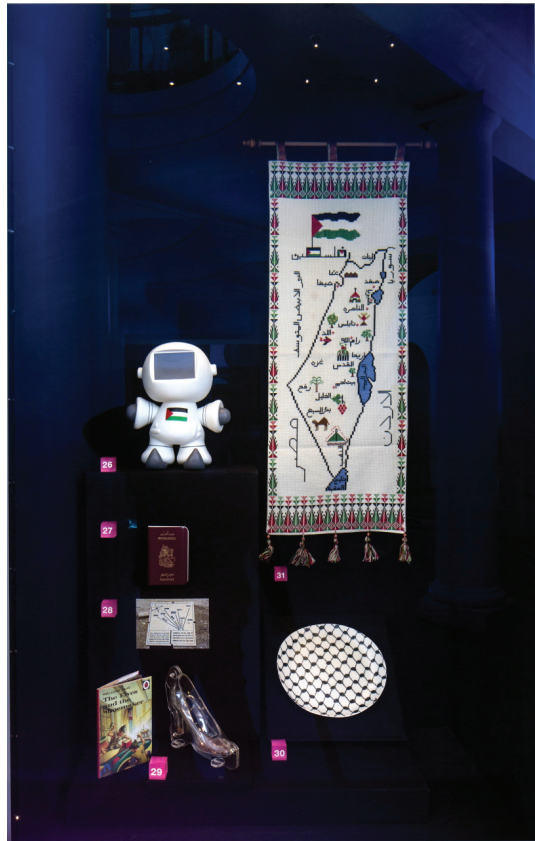


Figure 11. “Promise” (*Wa’d*). Photo by Stuart Laidlaw, courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology.

myth of “the empty land” but tests the extremes of archaeological-heritage quests – including Petrie’s – to point out its brutal banality and exclusionism of Palestinian life forces. She comments, “In its most perverted form, archaeology galvanizes public sentiment, confirms myths of the past and defends them against scrutiny.”⁶⁵ Sansour goes further still and challenges any and all attempts to press such heritage into a monocultural narrative – including within Palestinian repossession of heritage. We are left then to search for a new quest within which Palestinian poet laureate Darwish’s articulation of the “land of Palestine” as what “makes life worth living” emerges as a locus for new beginnings in expressions of sumud and as part of rights culture and one that embraces diversity and heritage as always “on the move.”

Conclusions – What Makes Life Worth Living – Reclaiming “Homeless” Objects

A beginning must be thought possible, it must be taken to be possible, before it can be one.

— Edward Said, *Beginnings*⁶⁶

We have on this land all that makes life worth living.

— Mahmoud Darwish, “On This Earth What Makes Life Worth Living”⁶⁷

The critical movement of this article has followed the “rehoming” of the Palestine Collection as it, first, plays a decisive, pivotal part in securing the “strange beginnings” of the Institute of Archaeology, thereby simultaneously authenticating, embedding, and exporting the new science of archaeology within colonial tropes. Wheeler’s own repossession and reworking of this narrative within the ideal of a new inductive methodologically driven science of archaeology supports his articulation of a vision of a new beginning within an old-new “spirit of adventure,” as he promises to redeem an empire in decline and revive Britain’s future as one of personal and collective national fulfilment.

Within the *Moving Objects* exhibition and more specifically the “Talking Objects” case, another vision and act of rehoming is secured, one that is led by Palestinian voices and creatively draws upon imaginative and real worlds. Palestinian intellectual Edward Said’s perceptive reflections on “beginnings” stresses that a “beginning is a first step in the intentional production of meaning and the production of difference from preexisting traditions. It authorizes subsequent texts – it both enables them and limits what is acceptable.”⁶⁸ The quest and questions to emerge then are: what do “we” and “others” mean and understand in terms of “rehoming”; how can the Palestine Collection as a constellation of “moving objects” – that within the world of the exhibition and imagination crystallize attempts to possess the efficacies of things as part of acts of making life worth living – be taken forward? Where does this otherwise small story about the Institute of Archaeology beginnings and modest *Moving Objects*

exhibition now take us? Following Said's wider discussion of beginnings, where should the efficacies of Palestine Collection move "us" to, as the next movement in a longer quest?

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Endnotes

- 1 R. E. M. Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," *Antiquity* 27, no. 106 (1953): 91 and 87.
- 2 The Institute of Archaeology (IoA) was initially in St. John's Lodge, Regent's Park, before being moved in 1958 to newly built premises in Gordon Square, adjacent to University College London in Bloomsbury as "an independent institute within the University of London," but not until 1986 did it become part of UCL. "History of the Institute – Institute of Archaeology: 80 Years of History 1937–2017," online at ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/about-us/history-institute (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 3 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 92.
- 4 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 87.
- 5 P. J. Ucko, "The Biography of a Collection: The Sir Flinders Petrie Palestinian Collection and the Role of University Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (1998): 386.
- 6 G. Moshenska, "IOA 75 – the Institute of Archaeology," *British Archaeology* 124 (2012): 34.
- 7 Ucko, "Biography of a Collection," 356.
- 8 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 87.
- 9 *Moving Objects - Stories of Displacement* exhibition (18 February–16 October 2019), Octagon, University College London, online at (ucl.ac.uk) bit.ly/3ADAEiP (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 10 The exhibition's guiding motif – *Moving Objects* – was conceived of to reflect upon the "migration of persons, [non-human] animals, and objects across time and space," as led by, "stories of displacement," told by those with lived experience of such tropes. The exhibition drew on the following research projects: Refugee Hosts, UCL Migration Research Unit (UCL Geography), Forced Displacement and Cultural Interventions, the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance in partnership with the Helen Bamber Foundation (see Helen Chatterjee, Clelia Clini, Beverley Butler, Fatima Al-Nammari, Rula Al-Asir, and Cornelius Katona, "Exploring the Psychosocial Impact of Cultural Interventions with Displaced People," in *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (London: UCL Press, 2020), 323–46; and Beverley Butler and Fatima Al-Nammari, "'We Palestinian Refugees' – Heritage Rites and/as the Clothing of Bare Life: Reconfiguring Paradox, Obligation, and Imperative in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jordan," *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2016): 147.
- 11 The specific "Talking Objects" case drew on Heritage Workshops held in selected Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. See Butler and Al-Nammari, "We Palestinian Refugees"; and Beverley Butler and Fatima Al-Nammari, "Heritage Pharmacology and 'Moving Heritage': Making Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Palestine Part of the European Conscience," forthcoming in the volume edited by Kristian Kristiansen, Rodney Harrison, and Nélia Dias and published by UCL Press as part of the CHEurope: Critical Heritage Studies and the Future of Europe project.
- 12 Text label, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition, UCL, 2019.
- 13 Text label, "Talking Objects" case, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition, UCL, 2019.

- 14 Both virtual workshops and face-to-face object-handling sessions were held prior to and during the exhibition that saw co-curators select objects from various UCL collections and juxtapose them next to their own objects and narratives of displacement. On wider discussions of heritage efficacies, see Beverley Butler, "The Efficacies of Heritage – Syndromes, Magics, and Possessional Acts," *Public Archaeology* 15, no. 2–3 (2016): 113–35.
- 15 Regarding more generally the importance of establishing "facts on the ground," see Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 16 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 87.
- 17 Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intentions and Method* (London: Granta, 2012).
- 18 Catalogue, *The Archaeology of Palestine: An Exhibition in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie: 23 June to 31 August 1953* (University of London Institute of Archaeology Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, 1953).
- 19 Catalogue, *Archaeology of Palestine*.
- 20 Alice Stevenson, "Abu Bagousheh: Father of Pots," Petrie Museum, UCL Press, online at ucldigitalpress.co.uk/Book/Article/3/20/83/ (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 21 Catalogue, *Archaeology of Palestine*.
- 22 Catalogue, *Archaeology of Palestine*. The Palestine Collection relates to pre-1948 Palestine and two sites Tell Gemme (Tal Jamma) and Tell el Fara (Tal al-Far'a) are now within contemporary Israel. Our exhibition *Moving Objects* therefore focused on Tell el Ajjul (Tal al-'Ajjul) in Gaza.
- 23 Ucko, "Biography of a Collection," 356.
- 24 Petrie quoted in Ucko, "Biography of a Collection," 360.
- 25 See also Gavin Lucas, *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork: Contemporary and Historical Archaeological Practice* (London: Routledge, 2000), on how paradigmatic moments of archaeology become mythologized.
- 26 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 87.
- 27 Elizabeth II's coronation was in June 1953 at Westminster Abbey in London.
- 28 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 87.
- 29 Wheeler rejects this and other postwar U.S./Americanizing influences.
- 30 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 88.
- 31 This being Wheeler's reference to the scaling of Mount Everest by Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay during coronation year. The summit of Everest was reached on 29 May 1953 and was celebrated as an iconic British achievement of adventurism and an amplification of British patriotism.
- 32 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 88–89.
- 33 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 89.
- 34 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 89.
- 35 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 90.
- 36 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 91.
- 37 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 92.
- 38 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 91. Crucially here, the Palestine Collection was "bait" for an anonymous donation by Mary Woodgate Wharrie to be made and revealed on her death. Tessa Verney Wheeler, Mortimer Wheeler's first wife, is another woman credited with taking a key role in making the IoA a reality. See Gabriel Moshenska, "The Institute of Archaeology: The First 75 Years," *British Archaeology* 124 (May–June 2012): 34–37.
- 39 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 91.
- 40 See Debbie Challis, *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
- 41 Wheeler was then serving with the British military as part of the North African campaigns.
- 42 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 92. For the curious story of Petrie donating his head to science, see Debbie J. Challis, "The Legend of Petrie's Head: An Artist's Response," UCL Culture Blog, 16 October 2013, online at blogs.ucl.ac.uk/museums/tag/head-of-flinders-petrie/ (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 43 Wheeler, "Petrie and Adventure," 93.
- 44 UCL Octagon, online at ucl.ac.uk/culture/octagon (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 45 "Jeremy Bentham Finds New Home in UCL's Student Centre," UCL News, 24 February 2020, online at (ucl.ac.uk) bit.ly/3I6hB3T (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 46 Koptos lion, online at (ucl.ac.uk) bit.ly/3AFnO3r (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 47 These include influences such as the "statue wars" and the Black Lives Matter Movement – more specifically at UCL see "Bricks + Mortals, A History of Eugenics Told through Buildings," online at (ucl.ac.uk) bit.ly/3R8VTQx (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 48 Butler and Al-Nammari, "We Palestinian Refugees"; Butler and Al-Nammari, "Heritage Pharmacology." Also see Chatterjee et al., "Exploring the Psychosocial Impact of Cultural Interventions."

- 49 For the Palestinian collections, see Institute of Archaeology, UCL, online at (ucl.ac.uk/bit.ly/3OzR2qv) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 50 It is worth flagging “A Future for the Past: Petrie’s Palestinian Collection exhibition at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS,” 9 January 2007, the first public exhibition of the Palestine Collection that took a more educational archaeological focus; online at (ucl.ac.uk/bit.ly/3uh6Ru5) (accessed 22 May 2022). Showing alongside it was *50,320 Names* by Palestinian artist-activist Khalil Rabah that imaginatively claimed to have restituted the Palestine Collection for Palestine by listing the historic buildings in Riwaq’s documentation of Palestinian architectural heritage. See Kelly O’Reilly, “The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind,” 3, online at soas.ac.uk/gallery/50320names/file24018.pdf (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 51 See Butler and Al-Nammari, “Heritage Pharmacology.”
- 52 Ultimately, these workshops provided a space for people with lived experience of being displaced from their homes to imaginatively explore their own heritage, and to place alongside the abovementioned collections objects, images, and narratives that participants identify as “empowering” in contexts of displacement.
- 53 See Butler and Al-Nammari, “Heritage Pharmacology.”
- 54 Text label, “Talking Objects” case, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition UCL, 2019.
- 55 Text label, “Talking Objects” case, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition UCL, 2019.
- 56 See Badil, “From the 1948 Nakba to the 1967 Naksa,” online at (badil.org/bit.ly/3QXoc4Z) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 57 “Matriarchs” here references Kathleen Kenyon and her famous excavations in Jericho, which are also housed at the IoA and used in the “Talking Objects” case.
- 58 See Margaret Wheeler, *Walls of Jericho* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).
- 59 Text label, “Talking Objects” case, *Moving Objects – Stories of Displacement* exhibition UCL, 2019.
- 60 See: larissasansour.com/A-Space-Exodus-2009 (accessed 22 May 2022); and (openbethlehem.org/bit.ly/3CLroM6) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 61 See also Butler and Al-Nammari, “Heritage Pharmacology.”
- 62 Larissa Sansour, “In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain,” online at (spikeisland.org.uk/bit.ly/3OzR2qv) (accessed 22 May 2022). See also Claire Norton, “The Counter/Actual: Art and Strategies of Anti-Colonial Resistance,” *Art History & Criticism* 14, no. 1 (December 2018): 28–39.
- 63 Larissa Sansour, “In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain,”
- 18 January–3 March 2016, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, online at lawrieshabibi.com/exhibitions/45/ (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 64 Bluecoat Liverpool, “An Interview with Larissa Sansour,” uploaded 14 June 2017, online at (lawrieshabibi.com/bit.ly/3acZpJn) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 65 “Lawrie Shabibi presents Larissa Sansour ‘In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain’,” 2016, online at (lawrieshabibi.com/bit.ly/3B2Ibcg) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 66 Said, *Beginnings*, 35.
- 67 Mahmoud Darwish, “On This Earth What Makes Life Worth Living,” trans. Karim Abu Awad, The As It Ought To Be Archive, 24 August 2010, online at (asitoughttobe.wordpress.com/bit.ly/3bIvPMo) (accessed 22 May 2022).
- 68 Said, *Beginnings*, 5.