

Culture *Without* Context



The Newsletter of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Issue 15, Autumn 2004

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The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre is a project of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre (IARC) was established in May 1996, under the auspices of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge, England, and it commenced operations in October 1997. Its purpose is to monitor and report upon the damage caused to cultural heritage by the international trade in illicit antiquities (i.e. antiquities which have been stolen or clandestinely excavated and illegally exported). The enormous increase in the volume of this trade over the past twenty years has caused the large-scale plundering of archaeological sites and museums around the world. The IARC will raise public awareness of the problems caused by this trade and seek appropriate national and international legislation, codes of conduct and other conventions to place restraint upon it.

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Front cover. *The temple at Umm el Dabadib, Egypt, which was destroyed in 2004 (see p. 22).*

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Correspondence relating to all aspects of the legal and illegal trade in antiquities is welcome; we will make an effort to print reasonable, non-libellous letters. No unsigned letters will be printed, but names will be withheld upon request.

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Editorial

In June 2004, the Cleveland Museum of Art acquired a bronze statue attributed to the Classical Greek sculptor Praxiteles from Phoenix Ancient Art of Geneva. According to *The Plain Dealer* (12 September 2004), the museum may have paid up to \$5 million for the piece. The statue is said to have been seen on a German estate in the 1930s and still in Germany when it was sold to a Dutch antiques dealer in 1994. It then dropped out of sight until it reappeared on the Swiss premises of Phoenix Ancient Art in 2002. In the September 2004 issue of *The Art Newspaper*, the Cleveland Director Katharine Lee Reid was quoted as saying that the museum had exercised due diligence before the acquisition, but that Phoenix Ancient Art had not revealed to the museum details of the statue's recent provenance. This reticence was understandable, she thought, because the company would want to protect its competitive advantage. Rather confusingly, Phoenix Ancient Art's proprietors Ali and Hicham Aboutaam subsequently stated in a letter published in the November issue of *The Art Newspaper* that '... it is acceptable and common practice, for obvious competitive reasons, to omit all but the last decade of ownership in publishing a history ...'. But the last decade's ownership history of the bronze was exactly what they had omitted to tell the Cleveland. Anyhow, the implication from what Lee Reid said is that the Aboutaams are aware of the statue's history from the time of its purchase by a Dutch dealer in 1994 to their own acquisition in 2002. They will of course also be aware that under EC Regulation 3911/92 on the export of cultural goods from the European Union any cultural object situated on the territory of an EU member state in 1994 (in this case Germany) would have needed to be licensed for export, particularly an object as important as a Classical Greek bronze statue attributed to Praxiteles. The Aboutaams themselves would not necessarily be responsible for acquiring a licence if they had not exported the piece themselves, but any diligent search into provenance by either the Cleveland or Phoenix Ancient Art should have established its existence.

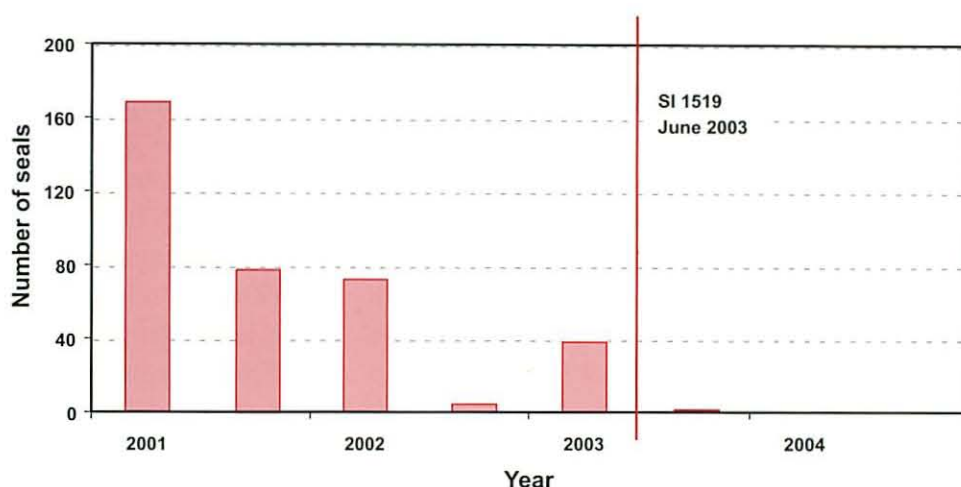
No matter what is the true story of the Cleveland acquisition, it highlights an interesting and significant weakness of current EU legisla-

tion. Unlikely though it seems, the German (or perhaps another EU country's) authorities would have been able to approve export out of Europe — and it has yet to be demonstrated that they did — of a Praxitelean statue that fellow-EU member Greece may have felt to be an important part of its own national heritage, but with no opportunity for Greece to intervene. One possible remedy for this unsatisfactory situation would be to adopt and extend a mechanism of the British export licensing system. Since 1952, it has been the practice in Britain to withhold an export licence on any cultural object considered to be of national, aesthetic or historical importance until there has been time for a British institution to come forward and offer a fair price, and so keep the piece within the UK. If no British offer is forthcoming, an export licence is granted. This system could profitably be extended throughout the European Union, whereby the export of an important piece from one country might be deferred long enough for a purchaser to come forward from a second country. So, for example, if the German authorities had no objection to the export of a Praxitelean bronze, they might postpone approval of its export and offer a Greek institution the opportunity to come forward and purchase the piece.



In June 2003 the UK Government implemented UN Security Council Resolution 1583 by means of the controversial Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) Order (SI 1519) (see 'Editorial', *CWC*, Issue 13). SI 1519 is a strong law as any person who acquires an archaeological object from Iraq without knowing it to have been exported legally before August 1990 is presumed guilty of a criminal offence. There is now evidence to suggest that the strength of this law is having a real deterrent effect on the London market in Iraqi material. The histogram (p. 4) shows the combined number of unprovenanced cylinder seals offered each year at the spring and autumn sales of the two London auction houses Christie's and Bonhams since the beginning of 2001. Most cylinder seals are probably of Iraqi origin, and as such act as a marker for Iraqi material more generally. Although early in the decade large numbers of seals were being consigned for sale, hardly any have been offered since SI 1519 came into force. There are two explanations for this

rapid disappearance off the market of unprovenanced cylinder seals. First, it might be that most seals previously coming onto the market were known to have been recently and illegally moved out of Iraq and so now are too dangerous to sell. Alternatively, it might be that the seals don't have a verifiable ownership history stretching back more than the 15 years that would now be necessary to give them a legal provenance. Either way, the histogram shows once more that most



material reaching the market does not knowingly come from old collections with provenances suppressed to maintain 'competitive advantage' as sources close to the trade continue to maintain.

Textile theft in Ica, Peru: a threat to heritage and its conservation

ANN H. PETERS

At dawn on Friday, 15 October 2004, there was an organized heist of three textiles, the most impressive fabrics on exhibit in the Regional Museum of Ica, Peru. Of the thousands of spectacular examples of Andean textile heritage that have been excavated in the Department of Ica, only these three had been returned so that citizens of the region could see them in their Regional Museum.

This blow to local consciousness of the heritage of the Paracas, Nasca and Wari civilizations is also a blow to archaeologists and museum professionals who dedicate their lives to the custody and defense of regional and national heritage. Consider for a moment the recent history of these three textiles. At the time of their theft, these 1000- and 2000-year-old fabrics were in excellent condition, and for that very reason they were so attractive for theft and sale to private collectors.

The director of the Regional Museum, Susana Arce Torres, is in charge of a collection whose value cannot be measured either in Peruvian soles



Figure 1. Textile MRI-DB-47. Tunic of the Wari culture. Garment of camelid hair, consisting of two long cloths sewn together lengthwise; length 107 cm, width 103 cm, shoulder to shoulder 116 cm. Photograph taken in 1996 of one face of the tunic just before G. Katterman and N. Skov started restoration work.

or in dollars, because they are unique, are from the desert hillsides of Ica, and in many cases are accompanied by information on their original provenience and cultural associations. That information differentiates them from the fabulous collections in Europe, Asia or North America, which are for the most part products of looting and have suffered the accompanying loss of all information on their original context.

As museum director, Arce does not receive public sector financing for inventory, conservation and storage or exhibition of the collections.



Figure 2. Detail of the opening in the collar of the Wari tunic MRI-DB-47, embroidered with a flower. Photograph 1997 by Anita Cook during restoration work by G. Katterman and N. Skov.

Nonetheless, for years she has built collaborative projects with national and international researchers, making the Regional Museum an admirable centre for projects that increase public awareness of the value of the pre-Columbian heritage of Ica and of Peru. As part of these personal and institutional commitments, conservation treatment of the recently stolen Wari tunic (MRI-DB-47) was completed in 1999 by private conservators Nanette Skov and Grace Kattermann, with many years of textile conservation experience with the United States Park Service.

The Regional Museum also receives support from other museums of the National Institute of Culture, particularly the National Museum of Anthropology, Archaeology and History, principal location of the National Museum collections of Julio C. Tello, founder of professional archaeology in Peru. The two beautiful Paracas mantles originally excavated by Tello in what today is the Department of Ica, have been on loan for decades in the permanent exhibits of the Regional Museum. While the linear style red-dominant embroidered mantle (00001-02) has been maintained in an excellent state of conservation, the purple-bordered mantle from Tomb 253 (00037-02), embroidered in a figurative style related to early



Figure 3. Lower part of the Wari tunic MRI-DB-47 with a missing piece, after placement of the interfacing and before the sewing of lining; the latter is now in place. Photograph 1997 by Anita Cook during restoration work by G. Katterman and N. Skov.

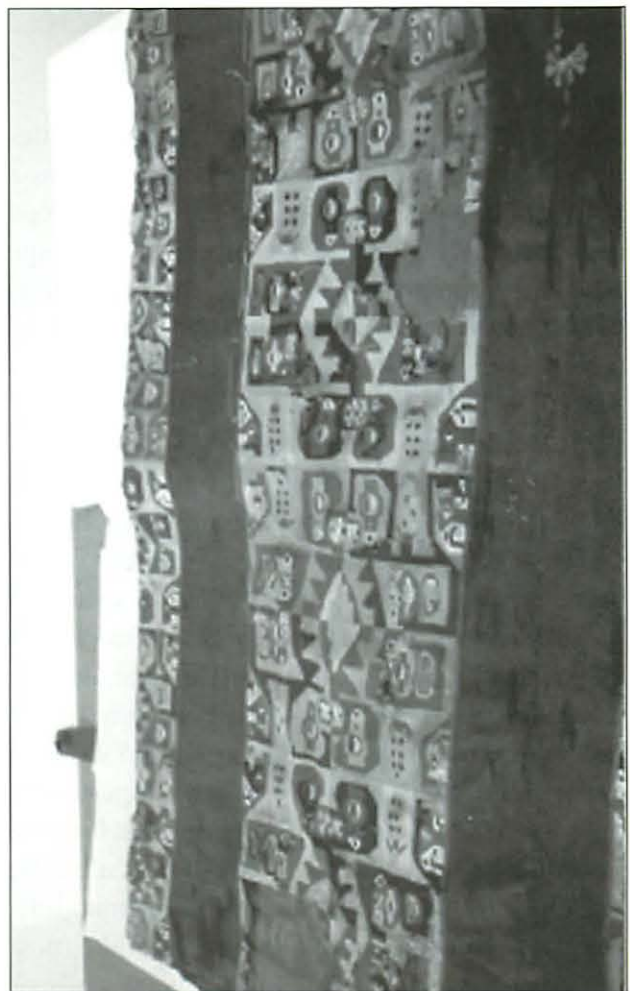


Figure 4. Lateral part of the tunic MRI-DB-47 showing one of the cloths with missing zones where the interfacing was placed, prior to the conclusion of restoration work by G. Katterman and N. Skov. Photograph 1997 Anita Cook.

Nasca, was from the beginning partially deteriorated and had suffered more during its years on exhibit. Particularly, one of the two cotton fabrics

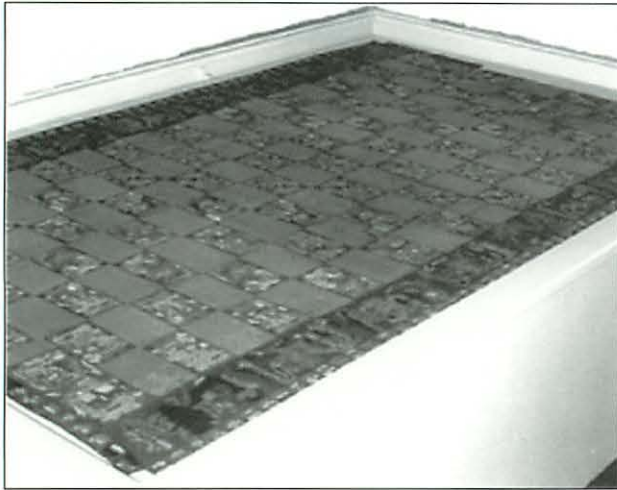


Figure 5. Textile 00037-02. Funerary mantle from the Paracas Necropolis (specimen 5 from tomb 253). Mantle is based on woven panels of red-dyed camelid hair and natural cotton. The embroidered decoration is arranged in panels, with the principal design repeated both in the rectangles on the red ground and on the fully embroidered border panels; dimensions 275 cm by 157 cm. Photograph taken after restoration work.

sustaining the embroidered borders has disintegrated, which left the elaborate embroidery as a mass of unattached thread that barely preserved the form of the monkey-like supernatural image repeated throughout the mantle. Its meticulous conservation was carried out during 2002–3 by archaeologist and textile conservator Carmen Thays Delgado, curator of textiles at the National Museum, together with assistant Luis Peña Calirgos, with logistical support from the INC and financial support from the Banco de Crédito.

By stealing these three textiles, the thieves and the collectors for whom they work take advantage of 80 years of custody, research, conservation and protection of these beautiful and unique examples of the heritage of all Peruvians. They also take advantage of the professional work of national and international experts, supported by both government and non-governmental public institutions. They also steal from the Ica public the three most impressive examples of their glorious past on display in the region — unlike most of their heritage, found behind private walls or in distant countries.

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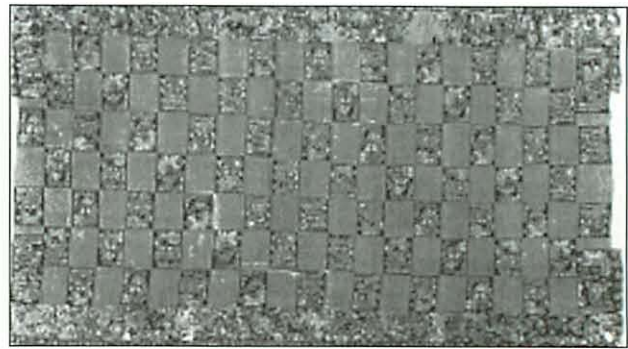


Figure 6. Funerary mantle 253 (5) before restoration.

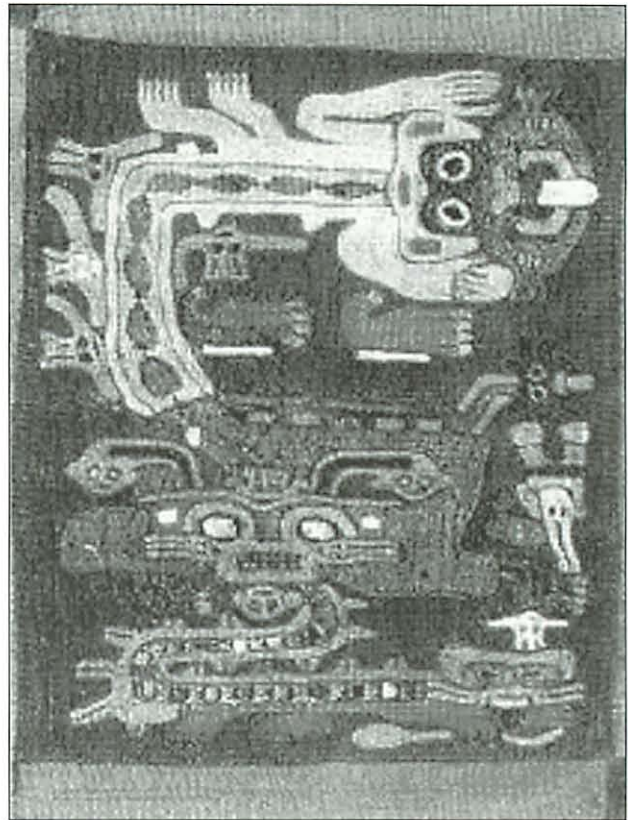


Figure 7. Principal design of funerary mantle 253 (5).

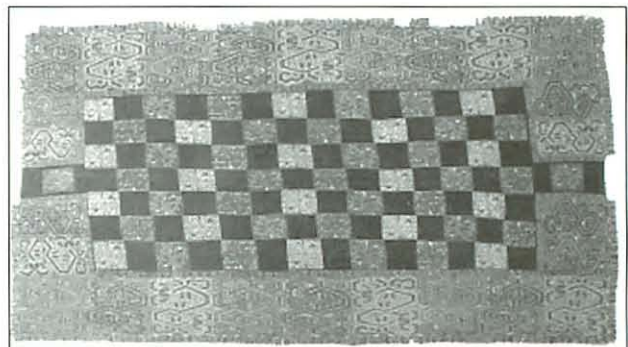


Figure 8. Textile 00001-02. Funerary mantle from the Paracas Necropolis. Mantle includes woven panels in camelid hair and cotton with a camelid yarn fringe and embroidered decoration. Zoomorphic designs in a linear style are repeated over the whole mantle, consisting of a central cloth with decoration of squares in a chequered pattern and two attached lateral bands completely covered by embroidery; length 245 cm, width 131 cm.

'Stolen history' on the internet

FABIO FICUCIELLO

Fragments of history and culture — stolen and sold on the Internet? Regrettably, following a long and thorough investigation, the Italian *Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale* has discovered that this crime is already taking place. The clandestine market for cultural heritage has not encountered any problems on the information network that connects even the farthest and the most remote corners of the world.

In the summer of 2002, in the context of an exchange of information with Interpol, the *Comando Carabinieri* in Rome came to know about a numismatic company selling ancient silver Cypriot coins on the Internet. After thorough verification of this information, the *Carabinieri* specialized in combating the illegal traffic in archaeological heritage, in compliance with the provisions of the 1970 UNESCO Convention to which Cyprus adheres, in collaboration with the Italian magistracy, and with wide-ranging telematic support, located the company responsible.

The investigations discovered that the registered office of the company in question was situated in the Republic of San Marino and therefore outside Italian jurisdiction. However, the company's account was linked to an Internet server that was on Italian territory, even though

just a few metres inside the border. What came to light next was a criminal organization dedicated to the illegal procurement in Italy and abroad of coins and other archaeological finds that were then sold on the Internet. The business was worth millions of euros and there were a huge number of clients worldwide.

Conscious of the importance of what had been discovered, the *Carabinieri*, with the benefit of long experience gained 'in the field' and deploying advanced technologies, conducted a coordinated investigation and succeeded in identifying a site in Romagna (north Italy) where the material to be sold on the Internet was stored. In October 2002, the searches that followed discovered what appeared to be a numismatic treasure trove. It comprised around 10,000 ancient coins, including 150 from the important ancient site of Amathus and a number of other archaeological artefacts dating back to the fourth century BC. The seizure was one of the most important in recent years and was one of the first blows to be struck against the criminal organizations that are trafficking cultural heritage on the Internet.

The work of the *Carabinieri* was praised in April 2003 at an official ceremony in Cyprus where, in the presence of the Cypriot institutions for culture and communications, the Italian Minister for Cultural Heritage and Activities returned the archaeological material recovered during the investigation. In so doing, the Minister restored to the Cypriots the testimony of their history and their culture.

On the basis of information acquired during the research carried out in 2002, further international and national enquiries were conducted, which led to the discovery of more illegal traffic in archaeological and numismatic material on the Internet passing through an international site. Acting on this discovery, during spring 2003 the *Carabinieri* carried out an operation throughout the whole of Italy that was aimed at breaking up this criminal enterprise. It led to the arrest of four individuals and to the seizure of more than 19,000 coins (16,000 bronze, 2600 silver, 94 gold), 400 archaeological arte-



Figure 1. Archaeological material recovered by the *Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale* during operations in 2002.



Figure 2. A coin recovered in 2002.



Figure 3. A coin recovered in 2002.

facts of different types and dates, and 250 pieces of jewellery.

The international collaboration that had enabled the investigation also led to a strengthening of cooperation between Italy and Cyprus. In summer 2004, the *Carabinieri* hosted a seminar in Cyprus for members of the Cypriot police force

where they presented an in-depth analysis of the clandestine market for cultural heritage and discussed methodologies that may be used in the fight against it.

These investigations constitute a very strong sign that the fight against crime, including crimes against cultural heritage, can become efficient and can guarantee important results when international collaboration takes place. Information exchange between the different law enforcement agencies is increas-

ing in modern society, which itself is in continual transformation and increasingly challenged by the multifaceted 'global village' of the Web.

FABIO FICUCIELLO

Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale
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In the News

JENNY DOOLE

Looting and smuggling in Iran

- In January 2001 locals from **Jiroft** in Kerman province, southwestern Iran, discovered and emptied an ancient tomb belonging to an early fourth- to third-millennium culture of great archaeological significance. **Systematic looting** ensued with many further tombs discovered, some estimated to have contained up to 60 objects. Families were allocated 6 m² dig plots. This first phase of looting was finally stopped a year later, when Iranian police arrived in sufficient numbers, confiscating around 2000 objects locally and others in Tehran and Bandar Abbas which were ready for shipment abroad. Initial results of official excavation at the site, which began in February 2003, were published by Yousef Majidzadeh.

Further developments:

- Officials from the Iranian Foreign Min-

istry have **asked their counterparts in London** to investigate reports that a **Kuwaiti citizen has tried to smuggle looted artefacts** to the United Kingdom. The Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization sent photographs and documentation to back up an ownership claim for several objects from Jiroft.

- A **Jiroft artefact** which was to be sold at **Sotheby's** in London on 12 October **will be returned to Iran** following negotiations between the French institution which had acquired the piece and Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization. The French institution had suggested solving the matter via direct co-operation rather than through international bodies.
- Rahmatollah Raouf, commander of the National Cultural Heritage Corps said (CHN, 31 August 2004) that, according to tip-offs, **locals are now digging out their yards and gardens** in search of ancient objects. Law enforcement officers, he said, were not able to police all houses. The only solution is raising public awareness.

- Jiroft items are reported to have appeared on the **Western market in France and UK** catalogued as Middle Eastern or Kerman.
- In October, **two men** convicted of conducting illegal excavations at Jiroft and smuggling antiquities abroad **were sentenced to death** subject to supreme court approval. The legal department of Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization said this was the first time a death sentence had been imposed for antiquities trafficking and hoped that as the executions would be carried out in the town it would put an end to such activities (Iran mania, 4 October 2004).
- In October, following a tip-off police **broke a ring of six smugglers in the southern province of Bushehr**. They seized an inscribed stone tablet, 2 Achaemenid gold bracelets, 3 bronze daggers, and around 80 ancient coins. The group had also looted 9 clay vessels from Jiroft.
- *November*: Iranian police in the central Zagros mountain province of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari **arrested 36 members of an alleged antiquities smuggling gang** and recovered more than 940 stolen Seleucid and Sassanid gold and silver coins, swords, figurines, vases, mirrors and inscribed tablets.

Pakistan/Iran survey

The results of a **six-year survey in Pakistan and Iran** (conducted by Professor Robin Coningham of the University of Bradford, UK, and colleagues from the universities of Peshawar and Tehran) indicate that **90 per cent of major archaeological sites have been looted**. Of 18 newly-discovered first-millennium BC sites, 14 had been damaged by illicit digging, and more than 120 sites in the Tehran plain dating back to 8000 BC showed signs of recent looting. Professor Coningham expressed concern that looted material from the area may end

up on the market in London (see *The Times*, 8 November 2004).

Afghanistan update

- *November*: **Antiquities believed to have been looted or lost** during the plunder and destruction of Kabul Museum, Afghanistan, have been **recovered from more than 100 storage boxes** found in hidden caches in the presidential palace complex and other safe places. More than 2500 items — including Bactrian gold jewellery, gold and silver coins, plaster medallions and carved ivories — had apparently been packaged and stashed away by museum staff fearful for the objects' safety during the Soviet occupation, and miraculously survived the tumultuous years that followed (see *Washington Post*, 18 November, 2004).
- Daan van der Schriek on Eurasianet.org (10 August 2004) reports that:
 - Sayed Raheen, Afghanistan's Information and Culture minister says that he is now **reluctant to visit archaeological sites** because of the **subsequent risk they will be looted**: people think that a ministerial visit must mean treasure and illegal digging begins as soon as he has left.
 - **Ai Khanoum and ancient Balkh** in the north of the country are among those sites particularly **badly plundered**, according to SPACH (Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage).
 - It is **dangerous for those trying to protect archaeology**: in 2003 four police officers were murdered when sent to protect an ancient site, and Raheen adds that he logs numerous instances where people have suffered beatings after informing the authorities about cases of antiquities looting.
 - **Poor wages are an issue**, since there is more money to be made for those involved in looting and smuggling, rather

than protection of the archaeology.

- Raheen believes the **power of warlords is too great** to be overcome by the good efforts being made by UNESCO in launching an awareness campaign urging locals not to destroy their heritage and inform authorities about illegal excavations.



Illicit antiquities in Israel and Palestine

- Lauren Gelfond Feldinger of the *Jerusalem Post* (29 July 2004) reports that:
 - Ron Kehati of the Israel Antiquities Authority estimates that **illegal digging** in Palestinian Authority territory is **up more than 50 per cent**.
 - A Palestinian tomb robber claims **looting is worse since the intifada started**, since there is no other work.
 - He says that **dozens of locals**, who previously made their livings in other ways, **dig illegally in Sebastia** every day.
 - Some **Israeli dealers argue they are preserving Jewish heritage** by purchasing and then smuggling antiquities across the Green Line.
- *May*: **600 antiquities** (including coins, pots, jewellery) were found during a **raid of the Hebron apartment** of a 70-year-old Palestinian man, along with \$200,000 cash. He said the items were nothing to do with him, having been found by his children.
- Six people from Jabel Mukaber, Jerusalem were caught by border police **allegedly digging illegally in a cave** in the Nahal Kidron area where many ancient burials are located.
- A **panel** from the green crystalline glass floor of a Byzantine kiln was **stolen from an archaeological park at Apolonia**, near Tel Aviv in June. The 50 cm square section, a rare example of Byzantine glass, was apparently broken out of the 2 m square floor

using a hammer. Police suspect the crime was commissioned by a private collector.

- Megan Goldin of Reuters reports (15 December 2004) on the **activities of Monzer, a 27-year-old grave robber from the Hebron** area, who learned his looting skills from his father:
 - He is a jeweller by day but at night leads a gang of 10 thieves plundering hills around the city.
 - The team works at night (when they can more easily slip into Israel to pass material on to dealers), dress in dark clothes and use metal detectors, sieves and knives.
 - Such is Monzer's success he drives a new BMW.
 - He says his best find so far was a rare Jewish half-shekel coin sold for \$20,000 to a middleman, and that gold (especially jewellery, which he will break skeletal arms to remove), coins and ceramics are most sought after.
 - The antiquities unearthed end up in London and New York.
 - The only thing that frightens him is the thought of the 'djinn', or ghost said to inhabit the burial chambers. Some thieves apparently bring Muslim holy men to recite incantations and drive the 'djinn' away.



Chinese news

- Chinese museum curator **Li Haitao was sentenced to death** in court in Chengde, Hebei province for his part in the **theft of 259 objects** from the Eight Outer Temples imperial complex where he was responsible for security (see 'In the News', *CWC*, Issue 13). He will appeal. Four accomplices were given jail sentences of two to seven years and fined.
- According to a shopkeeper at Panjiayuan market, **foreign diplomatic staff** based in

Beijing are **involved in smuggling ancient artefacts** out of the country. She says: 'One of my friends, who works at the German embassy, has a brisk business in ancient objects. Customs never look into his luggage, because he's a diplomat.' (*Daily Times*, 26 April 2004)

Guatemalan court action

In court in Guatemala in May, three members of the same family (Salvador Coy Bol, Ciriaco Coy Cabnal and Publio Paau Coc) were **sentenced to three-year jail terms for the 2001 theft of a Mayan altar from the site of Cancuén** (see *CWC*, 'In the News', Issue 13), where Coy Bol had been a security guard. Their defence falsely alleged that others, including the American excavator of the site, Professor Arthur Demarest, were responsible for the theft.

The **convictions are the first against antiquities thieves in Guatemala** and it is hoped will act as a deterrent. Professor Demarest, who endured threats against both himself and his team during the long-drawn-out proceedings, emphasized the importance of contextualized archaeology as a source of income for the local Maya, saying, 'Looters are a minority who are destroying the permanent economic support base of tourism in order to make a quick buck. It [the verdict] is very discouraging to looters because nothing like this has ever happened before' (*The Art Newspaper*, July–August, 2004).

More Phoenix Ancient Art

- **Ali Aboutaam, of Phoenix Ancient Art, was one of 26 people sentenced** by an Egyptian court (see below) to a 15-year prison sentence for involvement in an antiquities smuggling ring. Aboutaam told *The Art Newspaper* (September 2004) that he had been unaware of the trial and his

lawyer had been given instructions to have the *in absentia* verdict nullified.

Yemeni return

In November an **alabaster plaque** dating to about AD 350 and depicting a fertility goddess was **returned to the Yemeni ambassador** to the United Nations at a ceremony in Manhattan. The piece had been seized by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency when it was consigned to auction at Sotheby's for an estimated \$30,000 by **Phoenix Ancient Art**, who claimed that it came from a private English collection. Investigation by Sotheby's showed that it had in fact been **stolen from a museum in Aden in 1994**.

Egyptian news

- **Tariq Suissi** (or Tarek Al-Sweisi), the ringleader of a ring responsible for smuggling hundreds of ancient artefacts out of Egypt (see 'In the News', *CWC*, Issue 13) was **sentenced to 35 years in prison** by an Egyptian court in April. Suissi, a businessman and senior official with the ruling National Democratic Party (from which he has now been expelled) was convicted of stealing, hiding (some in his Cairo villa) and smuggling the objects, and also of possessing drugs, weapons, and money laundering. A senior customs official received a 20-year sentence. The **other defendants** — including police, customs and Supreme Council of Antiquities officials from Egypt, Switzerland, Germany, Kenya and Lebanon — **were tried in absentia** and each sentenced to between 1–15 years (see above 'More Phoenix Ancient Art').
- In June, on their return to work on the tomb of a nobleman (from the era of Pharaoh Akhenaten, 1379–1362 BC) after a six-month break, a team of **archaeologists**

from the University of Pennsylvania discovered that it had been plundered. The mummy of a child and four small items had been removed through a back tunnel leading to a house in the town of Gournā, which is built on top of some 420 Pharaonic period tombs. Its inhabitants are believed to have plundered the cemetery for decades.

- A granite **fragment from a temple wall** stolen from Behbeit el-Hagar, Gharbia in 1990 was **returned to Egypt from the USA** in August. It was offered for sale along with other items for \$7000–9000 by Christie's in New York in June, 2002 but was withdrawn from sale and confiscated by the Federal District Court in Manhattan in October 2003 following notification by the Egyptian government that it had been looted. The relief fragment will now be reinstated in the recently rebuilt wall.
- In October **617 Egyptian antiquities** (including two wooden Pharaonic coffins, and Hellenistic amulets and pots) were **returned from London to Cairo**. They were stolen by Egyptian smugglers, shipped via Switzerland to London where they were seized at Heathrow airport four years ago. It is not known where they were from.
- The Prosecutor-General announced that **10 Egyptians, including three top archaeologists, will stand trial accused of stealing 57,000 antiquities from warehouses** and smuggling thousands of them abroad. The group were arrested in January 2003 following the discovery by customs police at Cairo Airport of Pharaonic, Roman and Greek objects packed in a freight box for shipment to Spain (see 'In the News', *CWC*, Issue 12). The chief of Pharaonic antiquities, Sabri Abdel Aziz, will also face a disciplinary tribunal, charged with negligence of duty.



Looting of and efforts to save Iraq's archaeology

- **John Malcolm Russell**, expert on safeguarding the archaeology of Iraq, was **honoured by SAFE** (Saving Antiquities for Everyone — a non-profit group founded in the last year in response to the looting of the National Museum in Iraq) at a dinner in New York in October (see www.savingantiquities.org).
- Meanwhile, **Zainab Bahrani**, who succeeded John Russell as international advisor to the provisional government of Iraq in May, left the position in August. She **expressed concern over the lack of protection for archaeological sites** in the country.
- The first meeting of the **International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq**, established under the joint auspices of the Iraqi authorities and UNESCO, was held in Paris in May, chaired by Iraqi Minister for Culture Moufid al Jazairi. The committee, which comprises 25 international experts, will **provide advice on measures to improve and reinforce international cooperation** by assisting the Ministry in institutional reform, capacity building and training, devising museum conservation plans, setting up international co-operation systems, coordinating and channelling international aid, strengthening and enforcing national cultural heritage legislation, and recording and planning archaeological sites (see below).
- The **World Monuments Fund**, with the support of the **National Endowment for the Humanities and UNESCO**, is working on a **project to create an Arabic–English data base of archaeological sites in Iraq**, containing information on their condition and threats to their preservation (see *Humanities* magazine, Nov/Dec 2004). Project director, Gaetano Palumbo,

believes the data base may provide authorities with information to help stem pillage from Iraqi sites by mapping where looting occurs so that agencies can co-ordinate efforts and perhaps predict locations of future damage.

- **September: Eight Iraqi customs officers were found dead** in the region of Latifiyah. They were apparently attacked while transporting antiquities (including 70 fragments of cuneiform-inscribed tablets, 12 carved vases, coins, bracelets and jewellery) recovered by Italian police and Iraqi customs who cracked a criminal smuggling gang and arrested two men. The antiquities are now missing.
- **August: Joseph Braude pled guilty** in a New York court to **smuggling three ancient marble and alabaster seals** stolen from Iraq museum and making false statements. He was caught with the items in his luggage at a New York Airport and initially denied he been to Iraq when, in fact, they had been purchased on the black market in Baghdad (see 'In the News', *CWC*, Issue 13).
- In August **Jordanian customs officials seized two boxes containing 18 ancient statues**, suspected to have come from Iraq, during a routine search of a private car at the Al Karama border crossing. The driver claimed they were to be mailed to an exhibition in France.

UNESCO's programme specialist for Iraq, Philippe Delanghe said that, while such theft is nothing new, he now sees more **opportunistic theft**, rather than the theft-to-order previously encountered (*Jordan Times*, 13 August 2004).

Six antiquities (including a winged bull and half-man-half-lion statue, some with possible museum identification labels) were found **hidden in a car driven through the same border crossing** by an Iraqi man in early October.

- During a conference hosted in Amman in May by the Jordanian government and Interpol:
 - Mahmoud Qteishat, director-general of the Jordanian Customs Department called the **looting of archaeological sites in Iraq the crime of the century**. He called on customs, concerned regional and international organizations and neighbouring countries to consolidate efforts and cooperate to impede smuggling. Meanwhile,
 - Donny George of the Iraqi National Museum told Aljazeera (1 June 2004) that: around **15,000 objects are still missing** from the museum; he is sure Iraqi antiquities have been leaving the country via Turkey and Iran; some neighbours, including Jordan, Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are holding stolen objects safe until Iraq requests their return.
 - Interpol chief, Willy Deridder said that **looting is particularly acute in southern Iraq**, and that 10,000 of Iraq's estimated 100,000 sites are 'almost impossible to protect'.
- The head of the **World Tourism Organizations of the United Nations** said the US-led coalition in Iraq needs to establish a **physical presence at threatened archaeological sites**, arguing that their looting and destruction will deprive Iraq of valuable, future tourist revenue.
- In June, Iraqi police announced that, following a tip-off and a sting operation, they had **arrested four men in possession of hundreds of antiquities** (including statuettes, bowls and cuneiform tablets) alleged to have been illegally excavated in the area of ancient Babylon. They were selling the items for just \$100 a crateful (see *USA Today*, 13 June 2004).
- In September a **London dealer handed over to police an ancient incantation bowl** which may have come from Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Syria or Israel.

- A report by archaeologist Joanne Farchakh Bajjalay in the *Daily Star* (21 September 2004) **describes looting in Iraq as out of control**.
 - Archaeologist responsible for the Nasiriya district, Abdul Amir Hamadani, says **more than 100 Sumerian cities have been destroyed** by looters since the beginning of the war.
 - **Efforts by the Italian carabinieri** (including helicopter fly-overs of archaeological sites, foot patrols and arrest and imprisonment of culprits) were **successful in temporarily stemming looting** but apparently terrorized locals and encouraged them to join insurgent armies, highlighting the political difficulties surrounding archaeological protection.
- **70 stolen antiquities were retrieved** from the Oma and Jokha regions by Iraqi antiquities protection police working alongside Italian carabinieri. They were returned to the city museum in Nasiriyah, 350 km south of Baghdad, according to a report by a local newspaper (*Al Sabah*, 22 November 2004).



News from Italy

- A plan by members of the Italian government to **legalize private ownership of antiquities** has outraged archaeologists (see *The Guardian*, 9 November 2004). It is proposed that finds may be purchased from the state for five per cent of their estimated value. Those for the scheme argue that it will mean unknown treasures will be declared, those against regard it as a 'looters' charter' and 'an incitement to theft'.
- A spokesman for the Italian Ministry of Culture in Sicily, said that **Sicily will be severing all ties with foreign museums that display artefacts they believe to have been illicitly smuggled** from the is-

land, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York which holds the 'Morgantina Hoard' which Italian officials say was allegedly illegally excavated and exported via Switzerland and Paris.

- Around **100 ancient Roman artefacts**, including marble busts, vases, and a sarcophagus, have been **confiscated by police in series of raids of homes, restaurants and hotels** in the Naples area. They are the product of extensive archaeological looting in the vicinity.



Smuggling of Nicaraguan objects

June: **Félix Vardal Puerta and Francisco Javier Castillo** (two aid agency doctors) were **arrested in Madrid and Valencia** respectively for allegedly **illegally importing 228 pre-Columbian objects** (including necklaces, chalices and musical instruments more than 2000 years old) from Nicaragua via middleman Donald de Jesús Moreno Tapia. Tapia was sentenced by a Nicaraguan court to six years in prison (see *The Art Newspaper*, October 2004, and VOA 16 June 2004).



UK concern over eBay sales

October: **Head of Treasure at the British Museum, Roger Bland, called on eBay**, the Internet auction forum, to agree to **close down quickly sales of archaeological items when British authorities inform them that they may qualify as national treasure** under the terms of the Treasure Act, 1996. eBay, while not wanting illicit antiquities on the site, has been willing to remove them only if officials can identify them as clearly illegal, which would require information on exactly where and when a piece had been dug up. eBay said they would be willing to agree to a process whereby the British Museum would go

through the arts and antiques unit of the Metropolitan Police, London who would investigate and inform eBay of illegal items.

Cypriot returns and accusations

- *July*: A German court finally ruled that **hundreds of Byzantine icons, mosaic, and artefacts stolen from northern Cyprus** more than 30 years ago and smuggled to Germany will be **returned to the Republic of Cyprus**. The decision follows seven years of legal wrangling. They were found in the Munich apartment of Aydin Dikmen (see 'Cyprus mosaics', *CWC*, Issue 3), who fought for the antiquities through the courts, but could not ultimately prove ownership.
- *August*: The **Attorney-general of Cyprus** announced plans to **request that the European Parliament lift immunity against prosecution for MEP Marios Matsakis** following a series of allegations, including alleged purchase of stolen Cypriot antiquities worth hundreds of thousands of pounds (*Cyprus Mail*).

UK museum and church thefts

- **Ancient Chinese objects have been stolen from two major London museums** in two apparently well-organized, and possibly linked, raids. Nine small items of carved Chinese jade (cups, a bowl, plaques and figurines said to worth around £60,000) were taken from the Victoria and Albert Museum on 4 October and 15 further pieces (jewellery and fingernail guards) from the British Museum later in the month.
- Around **70 tombstones**, including many Roman examples, were **stolen from the**

path to St Catwgs Church, Gelligaer, Caerphilly, Wales, in April. They are worth up to £300 each on market.

Illicit antiquities and Greece

- *Kathimerini* (26 June 2004) highlighted the problem of **lack of protection for archaeological sites in Greece** by publishing a photograph of two young tourists digging illegally at the important site of Mycenae. The foreign schoolchildren used their hands and a pickaxe they found in the vicinity.
- *May*: The **Greek Culture Ministry displayed a recently returned fragment**, once part of the cuirass of a colossal statue of a Roman general/emperor, which had been **stolen from the Amphiaraeion in September 1991**. The piece was smuggled to Germany and returned with the aid of Interpol following its discovery in Munich.

US up-date

- The **Utah US Attorney's Office and federal prosecutors in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico** joined together to announce a **90-day amnesty programme**, to run from May to August, during which people could return Native American artefacts in their possession with no fear of official recrimination. Usually possession of such items would incur federal prosecution and penalties.

In New Mexico, arrowheads, a frog-shaped ceramic canteen, a statue of war god Zuni, ancient pots and sherds were returned, sometimes with apologies, or notes describing how they had been acquired, and in Colorado, human remains, whole pots and some small artefacts were recovered.

- Investigators from the **National Park Serv-**

ice and US Attorney's Office of Nevada went on all-terrain vehicle tourist tours near Logandale with **ATV Adventures Inc.**, and confirmed reports that that **employees of the company were collecting artefacts from archaeological sites** and encouraging clients to look for and take such items as souvenirs — apparently with the knowledge of the owner and general manager of the travel firm. Damage costs were assessed as \$41,798.53 and in June ATV Adventures pled guilty to a felony ARPA offence, and company owner Stoney Ward and the general manager to misdemeanours. In November the company was sentenced to two years probation, restitution fines of \$13,578 and \$60,000 in community service, an \$800 penalty fee and suspension of their access permit to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands for 30 days. Ward and Freeman got six month's home confinement, two years probation, restitution fines of \$3692.97 and personal fines of \$2000 each. The judge told them to spread the word that damaging archaeological sites is wrong, and those doing so will be prosecuted and punished.

- The **trial of two men in Reno for theft of ancient rock art from national forest land** (see 'In the News', *CWC*, Issue 13) has sparked debate as to how best to protect ancient sites. The defendants claim they **did not know they were doing wrong** taking the carved rocks, since there were no signs marking them as ancient, but Fred Frampton, the US Forest Service's chief archaeologist for the area, say signing such locations is like saying 'Dig here for buried treasure' (see *Las Vegas Sun*, 31 May 2004).
- Recent high-profile cases of artefact theft in Nevada have also prompted **efforts to record and monitor the state's archaeological heritage**. The **Nevada Rock Art Foundation**, with a team of around 400 volunteers is now working to protect the 1000 or more rock-art sites. Such volunteer programmes have proven successful

elsewhere, according to Mark Michel, president of the Archaeological Conservancy of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where volunteers monitor sensitive sites and the preservation group acquires archaeological sites on private property. The Bureau of Land Management acknowledges that it does not have the resources to fight looting alone.

- Jerry Howard, curator at the Mesa Southwest Museum and Scott Wood, an archaeologist with the Tonto National Forest, says in the *Tucson Citizen* (29 April 2004):
 - That **demand for ancient Native American pottery** to sell in Internet sales is driving **currently rising levels of looting** in Arizona.
 - He has seen **rare items, probably from graves, sold on eBay**, like some Hohokam artefacts described as excavated from private land in Queen Creek, then sold to a dealer in Scottsdale and even pot sherds are in demand.
 - A **Site Steward Program has been developed** in which hundreds of volunteers patrol specific sites of federal and public land.
 - It is **difficult to prove an object comes from public land**, therefore difficult to prosecute.
 - The **market is hot in Saudi Arabia, Europe and Japan**.
 - Utah rancher **Waldo Wilcox found a series of 1000-year-old Native American sites** on his land, but had kept their existence secret since the 1940s in order to protect them. Archaeologists said the sites, which include thousands of ruins straddling a 12-mile stream and spread over more than 1000 acres, are of great significance and had **never been looted**. (By contrast, every pit house on Indian ruins on government held land to the south of the ranch has been looted, according to Kevin Jones, Utah's state archaeologist).
- The state of Utah purchased the ranch for \$2.5 million and will work to preserve

the sites and allow public access. However, only weeks after their existence was made public, **thieves had made their way to the remote location** southeast of Salt Lake City. A pair of stone knife blades, uncovered by University of Utah archaeologists, was missing.

- The *Billings Gazette* reports (12 September 2004):
 - Four major **looter pits** (one 10 ft long) and two **smaller shovel-size holes** have been found in a **remote rock shelter in Weatherman Draw canyon**, near Montana's Pryor Mountains. The site contains hearth evidence of ancient Native American occupation, and what is left is now being investigated by BLM archaeologists led by Glade Hadden.
 - Hadden says that during the last five years, **looters have increasingly targeted remote canyon sites** on BLM land south of Bridger.
 - A **Crow Tribe Tobacco Society** site in Pryor mountains, found and reported by amateur field walkers, was **looted a week after archaeologists documented the site**.
 - Hadden has conducted rescue archaeology on a possible **rare Fremont site** in the area which appears to have suffered **long-term, illegal looting**. Most of the 100-acre site had been destroyed.
 - BLM field officer Chuck Ward says he has help from **Public Lands Citizen Watch**, a group of six or more Billings citizens who patrol the area in return for minimal expenses when such are available. He has also instigated an **electronic surveillance system** to catch looters in action at one heavily-looted site, with no luck as yet.
 - Chris Finley, cultural-resources manager at neighbouring Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area also described archaeological looting as a 'serious, serious problem'.

Indian arrests

November: Police in **Varanasi, India**, **arrested six men** (two alleged thieves and four alleged middlemen) in Mahujiangar village as they were trying to secure a deal. **Six silver and alloy statues more than 1000 years old were confiscated** — a fraction of what had been stolen. The police, who believe the items were destined for the international market, said that the thieves had no idea of their real value on that market, are looking to make more arrests.

Algerian concerns

- Hussein Umbaz, site director at Talsi, in the Algerian desert, says that **stolen Algerian antiquities are being offered for sale on the Internet** for €1000–100,000 or more. He accused German archaeologists who excavated under government contracts in 1992 of smuggling artefacts out of the country.
- In November five **German tourists were arrested for stealing 130 artefacts from Tassili National Park**. They were sentenced to three months in prison and fined 300,000 Algerian dinar (\$4300) which will go to the authorities responsible for the site. The group, aged 32–53, had disappeared from their tour (sparking a massive search operation by authorities fearful they had been kidnapped by extremists) and were later found camping in the desert with the objects in their vehicle.

Information from Mexico

Mexican collector Guadalupe Chaparro is quoted in the *Houston Chronicle* (19 May 2004), saying that:

- It is **easy to find sellers** of recently-excavated antiquities in villages by merely asking around.
- She usually **pays between \$50–200** for artefacts which would fetch thousands at auction in the US.



Peruvian cases

- **41 pre-Columbian artefacts, were returned to Peru from the US** after a man from Arlington was arrested last year trying to sell them on the black market. Abelardo Sandoval, an archaeologist who helped authorities identify much of the stolen material, said that one of the pieces of textile in the hoard, a burial shroud woven between AD 1100 and 1400 had faded and been damaged by washing at some stage before it was recovered.

US Customs also referred to the case of a Colorado man who was discovered smuggling Peruvian antiquities he had bought from a looter and then concealed in his rock-climbing gear (see *Washington Post*, 1 May 2004).

- *December:* **A Sican period mask is to be returned to Peru** after a collector in Italy handed it to police. The gold and red mercury sulphide mask, which depicts sea god Naylamp, is not recorded as stolen from any museum, collection or site and may have been taken out of the country after being sold by grave-robbers in the 1960s or 1970s. It will be put on display in the National Sican Museum.



Viking artefacts in US

May: Swedish archaeologist Christian Runeby has filed a complaint with Swedish police and asked the Swedish Foreign Ministry

to **petition the US Government to seize Viking artefacts being offered for sale on the WWW site of Faganarms**, a Michigan auction house. Almost 100 swords, knives and horse harnesses, dating to AD 800, were being offered for sale for about \$26,000 are described as having been excavated from a single settlement on Gotland. Under Swedish law all archaeological artefacts are State property and Runeby said that while it is not certain these items had been illegally exported their authenticity should be checked. He believes they may come from the site of Vallstena on Gotland.



Syrian return

Research work by Lindsay Allason-Jones and colleagues at the **University of Newcastle's archaeological museums** (UK) has resulted in a piece of a **Roman lead sarcophagus being returned to the Syrian National Museum**. A member of the public, who had been given the panel by a friend, brought it to the museum as a donation. The ownership documentation was in order but a certificate of authenticity from a French antiquities dealer gave no clue as to provenance. It has now been established that there may be some connection with the Phoenician/Roman city of Aradus.



Illicit antiquities in Bulgaria

- *June:* **Around 30 Thracian treasures have been stolen from a museum** in the Bulgarian town of **Lovech**. Thieves broke into the building and the iron case they were kept in. There is a chance that the items, which were due to be exhibited abroad, may have been duplicates.
- *June:* **23 antiquities** (including eight Roman, Hellenic and Byzantine silver and copper coins, a bronze lion-head latch, a bronze mace, and tobacco pipes) were

found in the luggage of a female occupant of a car driven by a British national, when it was searched by customs at Malko Tanovo checkpoint.

Improved situation at Angkor Wat

- The famous temple complex of **Angkor Wat**, Cambodia, has been **taken off UNESCO's World Heritage danger list** after 12 years. UNESCO said that the last decade has seen many of Angkor's serious problems solved, thanks to international co-operation (including investments of \$50 million), efforts by the Cambodian government (who have set up a specialized heritage protection police division, inventoried cultural goods and organized campaigns against the sale of stolen objects) and UNESCO's own involvement.

New Zealand to sign 1970 UNESCO convention

July: The New Zealand government announced its intention to sign the **1970 UNESCO Convention** and the **1995 UNIDROIT Convention**. The two conventions will be subject to a Parliamentary treaty examination process and referred to a Select Committee which will make recommendations to the government.

Sudanese recovery operation

In August **54 artefacts** (including 19 ancient Nubian statuettes, a Meroe dynasty funerary statue, a prehistoric, ossified skull and many small necklaces, sculptures and razors) **were recovered and four people detained by Sudanese militia**. The objects, worth hundreds

of thousands of dollars, had been stolen from the National Museum of Sudan in November 2003, but the theft was kept quiet to allow undercover investigations. When the thieves found they were unable to get the haul out of the country, they tried to sell to purchasers planted by the Economic Security Branch, were caught and the artefacts found (see *Sudan Times*, 18 August 2004).

Security measures in Hawaii

August: Following reports that **Hawaiian burial artefacts from the Kanupa Cave had been smuggled for sale** on the Big Island, and the day after Native Hawaiian organizations announced that evidence had been found of a break-in at the cave, the **entrance was sealed as a security measure**. State authorities said they would be helping Federal investigations into the break-in and theft (*The Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 August 2004).

Australian museum theft

Five **Roman artefacts**, worth around Au\$300,000, were **stolen from the Australian National University in December**. The theft was discovered by a cleaner in the early hours of the morning; it is believed the thief entered the museum before closing time and hid overnight before leaving through a fire door. The objects were: a bronze bust believed to depict Livia, wife of, or Octavia, sister of Emperor Augustus; a gold and carnelian ring with engraved portrait head, a gold necklace; gold earrings and a vase with twisted handles depicting an erotic male/female scene. The common female theme of the items had led investigators to suspect that the thief may have been working for a collector who ordered a specific assemblage.

Briton released from Turkish prison

Paul Cleasby a businessman from Cumbria, UK was **released from jail** on bail of £3440 by a judge in Antalya on condition that he returned for trial on 28 February 2005. He was arrested returning home from holiday in October when **customs police found a 15 kg pink marble antiquity in his suitcase** which he says he bought from a street vendor.

UK conviction

December: Nighthawk **Richard Tebble**, from South Shields, was **sentenced to one month in prison** and to have his £800 metal detector confiscated (pending appeal) after being caught at night with the detector and a spade on an important Roman/Iron Age site near Market Harborough.

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The fall of Robin Symes

PETER WATSON

Mr Robin Symes, London's best-known and most successful dealer in antiquities, was sent to prison for two years at the High Court in the Strand on 21 January 2005. He was jailed on two counts, one for 15 months, the other for 9 months. Both were for contempt of court. A third charge, for yet another contempt, still hangs over Mr Symes. He was given a one-year prison sentence, suspended, in the summer of 2004 and the judge, Mr Justice Peter Smith, refused to lift the suspension. This means that, unless Mr Symes complies with certain undertakings he has given to the court, while he is in prison, he could serve a further year after his current sentences expire.

The prison sentences were the culmination of a set of circumstances that began in Italy in the summer of 1999. At a dinner, at a rented villa in Umbria, hosted by (the late) Mr Leon Levy, a noted American collector of antiquities, and his wife Shelby White, Mr Symes's partner, Mr Christo Michaelides, fell down some steps, hit his head on a radiator, and died in hospital the next day.

Initially, during the period of intense grief that followed the tragedy, there was no dispute between Mr Symes and Mr Michaelides's Greek family. Mr Symes and Mr Michaelides had lived together since the early 1970s. They had a house in London, flats in New York and Athens, and shared a property on the Greek island of Schinoussa. About a year after the accident, however, the Greek family of Mr Michaelides asked for his affairs to be settled. They took the view that Mr Symes and Mr Michaelides were business partners, that they

(the latter's Greek family) had inherited his share of the business, and they wanted to sell their 50 per cent. They were shipowners, they said, and they knew nothing about antiquities. Mr Symes, however, took the view that Mr Michaelides had only been an employee of the company that traded antiquities, called Robin Symes Limited, and that therefore he, Symes, was the lawful owner of the whole business.

Legal action followed. The Greeks took action in London, and succeeded in having Mr Symes's assets frozen, so that he could only trade with the court's permission and knowledge. Mr Symes took action in Athens, claiming harassment, an action he subsequently withdrew.

The London court eventually decided that Mr Symes and Mr Michaelides *were* business partners, and that therefore the latter's Greek relatives were entitled to 50 per cent of the business assets. In the course of these proceedings, however, Mr Symes, who was then living in Geneva, had his passport impounded, to prevent him leaving the jurisdiction of the court. One of the effects of this was to limit the funds at his disposal. Subsequently, he was unable to pay his solicitors (he had employed several) and, because of this, he was made bankrupt.

So far, this case had been a civil case. However, during the course of the (interlocutory) hearings, it had transpired that Mr Symes, who had originally admitted to storing his assets (mainly antiquities) in five warehouses, in fact had twenty-nine warehouses spread across London, Switzerland and New York. Becoming sceptical of Mr Symes's openness in disclosing his assets, the lawyers for the Greek family, Messrs Lane and Partners, began to examine some of Mr Symes's transactions closely. Mr Symes was followed, and the paperwork for his transactions double-checked.

During this scrutiny it emerged that Mr Symes had sold, or said that he had sold, a Granodiorite Egyptian statue of Apollo to a company in America, Philos Partners, of Cheyenne, Wyoming. When Lane and Partners examined this transaction, it turned out that Philos was a fictitious company, and that the address Mr Symes had said he sent the statue to did not exist. It later transpired that the statue had in fact been sold to Sheikh Al-Tani in the Arabian Gulf. Moreover, it had been sold for \$4.5 million rather than the \$1.6 million that Symes said it had been sold for.

He later explained this discrepancy by arguing that he, in fact, owned only a third of the statue, that the other two-thirds was owned by two colleagues, antiquities dealers in Switzerland, Mr Jean-Louis Domercq and Mrs Frieda Nussberger-Chakos.

Still sceptical of this version of events, Mr Justice Peter Smith ordered a trial to ascertain the true ownership of the Granodiorite statue. Although Mr Domercq and Mrs Nussberger-Chakos were joint defendants in this action, neither appeared in court to defend themselves, though a Swiss lawyer representing both did appear. The court found against the defendants, and concluded that Mr Symes owned the statue in its entirety. He was adjudged to have misled the court, to have broken the conditions of the 'interlocutory regime', which forbade him to trade without the knowledge or the permission of the court and, in July of 2004, given a one-year suspended sentence.

The original action continued. The Greek relatives of Mr Michaelides were still not convinced that Mr Symes had disclosed all the assets of the business that the two partners had owned. In the course of further researches, they found that, apparently, Mr Symes had lied to the court about two further sets of objects. One was a set of art deco furniture, by the designer Eileen Gray, and the other was a statue of Akhenaten. The Eileen Gray furniture, Mr Symes said, had been sold to a Parisian dealer for \$4 million. Lane and Partners eventually traced this sale, and found that Mr Symes had actually sold it for \$14 million, with most of the money lodged in a bank in Gibraltar. The statue of Akhenaten, which Mr Symes said he had sold for \$3.6 million, had in fact been sold for nearer \$8 million, again to Sheikh Al-Tani, with the money lodged in a bank in Liechtenstein.

While Lane and Partners had been pursuing these investigations, Mr Symes had tried to forestall court proceedings by claiming, in the autumn of 2004, that he was mentally incapable of instructing solicitors, and therefore of standing trial. This action failed and Mr Symes was ordered to appear in court again in January 2005.

Until Christmas he had been living at an inn, in a small village near Basingstoke, but just before Christmas he moved into the Savoy Hotel in London. Though bankrupt, Mr Symes has a number of friends who still support him financially. When he appeared in court, however, he claimed he could

not afford to pay for lawyers, and asked for a delay to apply for legal aid. Though the judge was unwilling to do this, a short delay *was* allowed, during which time Mr Symes was twice refused legal aid.

In these circumstances, Mr Symes, unrepresented, produced a witness statement to the court, in which he claimed that the Greek case against him was fabricated. He did not, however, in the opinion of the judge, produce any evidence to support his claims. Elsewhere in the witness statement, moreover, he admitted that he had lied in court, in relation to both the Eileen Gray furniture and the statue of Akhenaten.

The judge took a very severe view of these (now admitted) lies to the court, which involved several million pounds. In his judgement, Mr Justice Peter Smith concluded that Mr Symes had committed ‘a serious and cynical contempt of court’, designed ‘to conceal that he had deliberately taken the proceeds [and] used them for his own purposes’. He said Mr Symes ‘has told numerous lies on oath’

and repeated ‘a false story’.

The judge further said that he was not impressed by Mr Symes’s attempts to suggest that he was confused and muddled by what was going on in court. ‘The admitted contempts show calculated, cynical and well understood acts of deception.’ And he concluded:

Mr Symes must appreciate that he will not be able, if it is his belief, simply to do his time, get his passport back and leave the jurisdiction. There remains a large number of outstanding questions to be answered. Until those questions are answered and dealt with in a meaningful way the possibility of him obtaining his passport back to enable him to leave the jurisdiction is remote ... I perceive [that it is] a long and necessary road that Mr Symes still has to go down before this litigation will come to an end.

The fall of Robin Symes, rapid and complete though it has been, may not be over even yet.

PETER WATSON

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Endangered archaeology of the Kharga Oasis, Egypt

SALIMA IKRAM

The North Kharga Oasis Survey (American University in Cairo/University of Cambridge), directed by Salima Ikram and Corinna Rossi, has been locating, mapping and planning archaeological sites in the northern part of Kharga Oasis in Egypt’s Western Desert since 2001. This entire area, measuring some 400 or so square kilometres, is largely undocumented and contains several standing remains of the Roman period (fourth to fifth centuries AD), including forts, temples, settlement sites and tombs, in addition to prehistoric and Pharaonic remains.

One of the reasons for this survey is that these sites have been subject to vandalism and attack by antiquities thieves, robbers in search of gold, and tourists

removing objects as souvenirs. Thus far, most of the area has been preliminarily documented and a final season of work is planned in 2005. One of the most spectacular sites that the project has documented is the site of Umm el Dabadib, a site 70 km inside the deep desert, consisting of a fort, settlements, cemeteries, industrial areas and underground aqueducts (*qanats*).

During a site visit in November 2004 to the settlement of Umm el Dabadib, one of the project



The temple at Umm el Dabadib as it was in February 2004 ...

directors discovered that a front-loader had been at work, and virtually destroyed the c. second/third century AD multi-phased mud-brick temple that had stood about 13 m high. The temple had been plastered and painted with various motifs, including vines, Egyptian gods and hieroglyphic inscriptions. Only one wall now remains standing, with the remainder being scraped away to below foundation level in the looter's quest for buried treasure. A further investigation carried out by both directors revealed that the damage had not been limited to the temple. A two-storey mud-brick watchtower had been reduced to rubble, while part of the fortified settlement that bordered the fort, chunks of the eastern settlement, and several tombs in Cemetery F had all been attacked by a loader. The two settlements that were vandalized consisted of large mud-brick rooms, roofed by vaults, with, in the case of the eastern settlement, industrial areas on the roof. The tombs that were destroyed had been partially dug into the desert *tafla* with vaulted mud-brick structures constructed over these foundations. Several pottery vessels, painted and plain, as well as fragments of mummies and skeletons were found littering the area.

The site had earlier been vandalized in 1995, when parts of the church were bulldozed by thieves in search of buried treasure that they thought lay under the altar. Presumably a similar



... and the destruction discovered in November 2004.

quest fuelled the 2004 attack. The site is deep in the desert and difficult to patrol with any regularity without access to 4x4 vehicles, and thus is more easily prey to vandalism.

Zahi Hawass, Director General of Antiquities, is hoping to improve the situation in the oasis by providing additional guards with motorcycles in order to protect this and other sites that are similarly in danger. It is hoped that this will also discourage antiquities' thieves, as well as unscrupulous tourists who illegally collect artefacts from the more remote desert sites in Egypt.

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In September 2004 the IARC was awarded the **European Association of Archaeologists Archaeological Heritage Prize** at their tenth annual meeting in Lyon, France. The award recognizes the IARC's 'internationally unique' contribution to European and world heritage protection. Instituted by the European Association of Archaeologists in 1999, this prize is awarded annually for an 'outstanding contribution to the protection and presentation of the European archaeological heritage'. The IARC has helped achieve a major change of British public policy in this area, highlighted by ratification after 30 years of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.



