

Culture Without Context



The Newsletter of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Issue 4, Spring 1999

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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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Editorial

This issue marks a new departure for *Culture Without Context* as its coverage extends world-wide. In future, there will be articles and comment on all countries that are condemned to suffer the continuing depredations of the illicit trade, starting in this issue with accounts of looting in Mali by Dr Kléna Sanogo and in Peru by our own Peter Watson. Established readers may rest assured though that the original Near Eastern focus will not be forgotten.



In his contribution to the conference ‘Who Owns Culture?’ (see page 28) John Merryman suggested that his ‘acquisitors’ discourse’ (the collectors’ point of view) has been excluded from the debate over the antiquities trade. He would be less certain of his opinion if he could spend six months in the *Culture Without Context* office poring over the weekend and financial sections of quality newspapers, where the (usually monetary) benefits of collecting antiquities are regularly trumpeted but only rarely is there any mention of the legal and moral issues involved, or any discussion of the associated looting.

In the Money section of the March 6 issue of *The Guardian*, for instance, there was a piece entitled *Collectors after the Artefacts*, which amounted to little more than an advertising feature for London dealers Charles Ede Ltd and Bonhams the auctioneers. Cypriot pottery was heavily trailed and Joanna van der Lande of Bonhams was quoted as saying that five years ago you could not give away this pottery but now there is a vogue for it. No surprise then to find a large collection of Cypriot Iron Age material, from a private collection built up between the early 1970s and mid 1980s, including a model chariot illustrated in the *Guardian* article, for sale in the Bonhams auction of April 22. There were 31 lots of Iron Age pottery, but only 9 were shown to have been purchased prior to the imposed division of Cyprus in 1974, suggesting that perhaps the subsequent looting has not always been aimed only at the island’s Christian remains. Still, at least some of the material up for sale at Bonhams had a provenance of one sort or another; across

town at Christie’s the day before it had been open season on Cypriot pottery with 39 lots on offer. All in all, the unscrupulous bidder could have walked away from the two sales with 188 unprovenanced Iron Age pots.

On a brighter note, the United States Information Agency announced on April 12 that under Article 9 of the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* the United States had reached agreement with the republic of Cyprus to place import restrictions on Byzantine ecclesiastical and ritual ethnological material unless such material is accompanied by an official export permit issued by the Cypriot Government.



Also at the ‘Who Owns Culture?’ conference Chris Haskett spoke of the cultural and human cost to Tibet of the antiquities trade. There is a large amount of Tibetan material now coming onto the market that was probably removed by the Chinese, but armed gangs are still attacking and despoiling monasteries. The emptying of Tibet seems, though, to be old news in the dealing fraternity. Sam Fogg, for instance, when talking of manuscripts, was quoted (in the February issue of *The Art Newspaper* [page 68]) as saying: ‘It is well known that treasures are coming out of Tibetan monasteries . . .’. The following month Dr Hugo Weihe (in the March issue of *The Art Newspaper* [page 56]) observed that the increasing strength of the market in Southeast Asian material is owing to the current interest in Buddhism and Tibetan art. A clear indication, as if any is needed, that the market is demand driven. Against this background it was difficult to understand what on earth Fabio Rossi was talking about when he claimed about his exhibition of Tibetan ritual and ceremonial objects that he was presenting them in their religious context rather than focusing upon their art-historical importance. How Sotheby’s New York, where his exhibition was housed between March 24–April 3, could provide a proper religious context was not explained. Tibet might have been more appropriate. The catalogue for the exhibition was written by Professor Robert Thurman and David Weldon.



While defending the Metropolitan Museum's policy of acquiring unprovenanced antiquities (in the May issue of *The Art Newspaper* [page 19]), Phillipe de Montebello trotted out the old argument that: 'Better, obviously, to have a work of art, albeit of uncertain origin, displayed, studied, available to scholars, loved and cherished, than thrown back like some worthless chattel into the maw of the vast and all-swallowing unknown.' Obviously? On the contrary, it is not at all obvious. This type of argument has been thoroughly discredited in the world of international law enforcement where it has long been recognized that hostage redemption leads inevitably to more hostage taking, and thus by refusing to negotiate with kidnappers the interests of the larger community are put before those of the individual. This generally agreed principle applies just as much to antiquities with no provenance. Sure, buying an individual piece preserves it for posterity, but at what cost? How many other pieces 'surface' on the market in consequence? How many more robber trenches appear in archaeological sites around the world? How many more museum displays are vandalized?



London is secure in its position as one of the centres of the antiquities trade, and the month of March saw the launch in the United Kingdom of the CoPAT (Council for Prevention of Art Theft) voluntary *Code of Due Diligence*

for auctioneers and dealers in art and antiques. Ostensibly designed to protect the legitimate trade in art and antiques from the activities of thieves and their accomplices, it seems also to be an attempt to head off the imposition of statutory controls as concerns mount about the abuse of the trade for money laundering. There will be fuller discussion of these issues, and of the implications that the *Code of Due Diligence* has for the illicit trade in antiquities, in the next issue of *Culture Without Context*.



As part of his ongoing research into criminal aspects of the antiquities trade Ken Polk of the University of Melbourne has recently visited the antiquities markets of Singapore and Hong Kong and has passed on several interesting anecdotes. When asking in one shop in Singapore about the supply of Buddhist objects from Burma he was told 'of course the material is smuggled, how else can we get it out?' In another shop selling mainly Chinese antiquities he was surprised to see a prominent display of press clippings which dealt with the recent crackdown in China on the smuggling of antiquities. Buy now, while stocks last, seemed to be message. Collectors take note!

NEIL BRODIE

In the News

JENNY DOOLE

Looting in Lebanon

Lebanon, recognizing that, as potential tourist revenue, its rich archaeological heritage is worth 'the same as oil for other Arab countries', is now counting the cost of 15 years of civil war. During this time a vast number of objects were looted from museums and historic sites to be sold overseas or incorporated into local private collections.

In March, in an atmosphere of 'scandal mania', the new government launched an investigation into thefts, illegal deals and the squandering of state funds at the Directorate-General of Antiquities. The enquiry culminated in the arrest, five weeks later, of ex-Director-General of Antiquities, **Camille Asmar**, and 3 of his colleagues for alleged embezzlement.

All archaeological sites and museums were surveyed in order to produce a list of missing antiquities and legitimate owners of antiquities were encouraged to register them so that a systematic list of artefacts, their provenances, and their state of preservation could be drawn up, and ownership licences issued. The revival of a 1932 law gave the enquiry team the status of a judicial police force, empowering them to investigate and raid any shops, private businesses or warehouses they suspected of holding stolen antiquities. Many of the properties raided were owned by influential and political figures.

During the course of the investigation more than 10,000 antiquities were recovered, most of which had either been stolen from archaeological sites or sold by legal owners without permission. It was reported that:

- A white marble pillar believed to be part of the Roman temple in **Tall Araqa** was recovered.
- 7 thefts, including one of Roman silverware from **Baalbek**, may have relieved the state

of \$400 million worth of antiquities.

- The castle of **Sidon** had been stripped of all moveable historical items. Two cannons that once stood at the entrance were traced to a businessman's villa.
- A gold-plate statue and basin from the Temple of Jupiter at **Baalbek** had been smuggled abroad.
- Carved stones from the Hellenistic Temple of Nemesis at **Akkar** were found. The temple was discovered and mapped in the 1970s, but the war postponed plans for its restoration. It has since been reduced to a scattering of rocks left by antique dealers who removed only the more saleable, carved stones.
- The Central Investigations Department of the office for Combating International Crime is also set to investigate the disappearance of a number of artefacts allegedly stolen by the Israelis during their occupation of South Lebanon between 1982–85 and also by militias in various other regions.

In April the government began to return many of the confiscated artefacts to archaeological sites and museums throughout the country. The cost of transport was billed to owners, excepting those who had reported their archaeological holdings to the Directorate-General of Antiquities.

Events took an unexpected turn when the existence of a **criminal ring** smuggling **Syrian archaeological pieces** abroad through Lebanon was discovered. No arrests were made, but there are apparently strong suspicions that the ring's leaders are big business tycoons. Mohammed Behboun, Culture Minister, announced that there was 'proof of the existence of a smuggling network' but the people involved could not yet be identified. Syrian Culture Minister Najjar Attar praised the antiquities campaign and vowed that Syria and Lebanon would work together in this context.



Post-war Cambodia

In **Cambodia**, too, extra efforts are now being made to pick up the archaeological pieces after 30 years of war, during which time the Khmer Rouge systematically stripped many remote and unprotected Angkor-era temples. When the northwestern region of **Anlong Veng** was taken by Cambodian forces last year, they stumbled upon hundreds of abandoned statues, Buddha heads and carvings hidden around jungle guerilla bases and waiting to be smuggled across the Thai border. The authorities are now competing in a race against the smugglers to recover the hoards, enlisting the help of former rebels to guide them through the landmines planted in the areas where they are stashed.

Reports indicate that industrial-scale looting continues, ironically aided by the safer conditions that now prevail, and orchestrated by corrupt Cambodian military officers. In January, King Norodom Sihanouk called on the Prime Minister to stop the theft, and a **government task force** has been set up, on very limited resources, comprising officials from the Ministries of Culture, the Interior and Defence. Cambodian and Thai armed forces have also agreed to work together to stamp out cross-border crime. However, as efforts increase to choke off the illicit trade through Thailand, a new smuggling route has opened through **Singapore**.

- In December 1998 Claude Jacques, a French expert on Cambodian antiquities, recognized a 4-ft-high stone inscription from the remote twelfth-century AD temple of **Banteay Chhmar** on sale for \$8000 in a Thai antique shop. It was part of the loot from an extended raid on the temple made late last year, organized by Cambodian military officials. Witnesses report that several hundred soldiers worked for 4 weeks with heavy machinery removing 500 square feet of bas reliefs, leaving a 36-ft-long breach in the walls around the temple. Reports indicate that the officer responsible has since been identified, al-

though it is as yet not clear whether the looters will be punished.

- A 10-wheel buffalo truck was impounded near the Cambodian–Thai border in Prachin Buri province carrying 85 sacks which contained **117 sandstone carvings** from the raid on **Banteay Chhmar**. The driver is reported to have testified that Cambodian soldiers delivered the pieces to him at a dawn rendezvous. The Thai investigator and a provincial official said a Thai antiques dealer had ordered the artefacts to be stolen and tried to bribe officials in Prachin Buri into declaring them replicas. It appears that the dealer, who runs a luxury riverside showroom in Bangkok, had a portfolio of photographs from Banteay Chhmar and would order specific items to be cut from the temple walls. Cambodian authorities are negotiating for the return of the frieze, which may take months.
- Also pending court proceedings in Thailand are seven pieces awaiting restitution at Bangkok and Phimai. One, from a group of five items (only three of which were genuine), was seized by inspectors in Bangkok's antiques-market district. An inscribed stone attributed to Khmer King Jayavarman VII, it is also from **Banteay Chhmar** and of great historical significance.
- Carvings forming a 14-metre-long section of the walls at Banteay Chhmar are still missing.
- **UNESCO** paid \$800 for **61 ancient sandstone carvings**, either looted or confiscated from smugglers trying to take them to Thailand, to be returned from Anlong Veng to the Siem Reap conservation centre in May. Most came from **Preah Vihear**, a mountain-top temple on the Thai border controlled by the Khmer Rouge until last year. Ten were found decorating the hide-out of Khmer Rouge commander Ta Mok when he was finally captured in March.



International Response

- In late January, a **22-nation, 4-day meeting** was held at UNESCO which looked into the looting of **Banteay Chhmar**. The committee also drafted an international ethical code for art merchants and studied world-wide electronic dissemination of information on stolen art.
- On 20 May the Government of the Kingdom of **Cambodia** submitted a formal request to the Government of the United States seeking protection of certain archaeological materials under Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The matter will be considered by the Cultural Property Advisory Committee in June.

Boston Museum of Fine Arts

The **Boston Museum of Fine Arts** is once again in the spotlight, accused by the *Boston Globe* and a group of eleven archaeologists of acquiring looted artefacts after committing itself in 1983 to an ethical acquisitions policy.

- Of 71 classical artefacts — including numerous vessels from Apulia, marble busts, and a Greek vase from Tuscany — donated or sold to the MFA from mid-1984 to mid-1987, **only ten have any recorded provenance**.
- Three of the objects — **Apulian vases** — are described in the 1993 MFA book *Vase Painting in Italy* as among a ‘host’ of newly discovered artefacts. The current Museum Director Malcolm Rogers has confirmed that the vases had no known owners prior to their acquisition by the Museum during the period 1987–91.
- One of the objects is a rare and archaeologically important **Mycenaean terracotta idol**.
- A major MFA benefactor told the *Boston Globe*, anonymously, that the museum of-

ten turned a blind eye to any evidence that objects had dubious origins and even implied that the MFA itself was complicit in helping to alter provenance information.

An MFA spokesperson chose not to take issue with the allegations, but said the museum does not agree that it acquired the artefacts without exercising due diligence. Controversial retired curator, Cornelius C. Vermeule III, also asserted the MFA ‘tried to do due diligence’ but Alan Shestack, MFA director 1987–94, acknowledged that in the past procedures were not as vigorous as they might have been. The Museum has previously bought material from Robert Hecht and accepted tax-deductible donations from Robin Symes, Torkom Demirjian, Leon Levy and Shelby White, Maurice Tempelsman and Jonathan Kagan.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

The **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, New York has raised \$150 million of private funding to redisplay its unparalleled collection of Greek antiquities. *The Art Newspaper* notes that every one of the new galleries will contain **recent acquisitions**, and that in the US most museums, including the Met, continue to acquire **unprovenanced antiquities**.

Art Museum Directors

The **Association of Art Museum Directors**, USA, decided in January to revise its **code of ethics**. The present code, last revised 9 years ago, contains loopholes which allow museums to remain in wilful ignorance of an object’s past and it does not address the 1970 UNESCO Convention. It is also unclear on issues surrounding the import of objects exported illegally from their country of origin, an action which is not in itself in direct contravention of US Law. Museum directors have said they

would welcome clearer guidelines.



‘Just returns’

The risks inherent in acquiring unprovenanced pieces are clearly demonstrated by the number of recent ‘just returns’. Over the last few months a varied selection of stolen antiquities were welcomed back to their countries of origin — in some cases after encouragement from the courts.

- On 5 February, the **J. Paul Getty Museum** returned to **Italy** 3 objects shown to have been stolen. The decision was not prompted by legal action.
 - **Fifth-century BC Attic red-figure kylix.** Made by **Euphronius**, painted with scenes of the Trojan War by Onesimos, and regarded as one of the museum’s finest pieces. It was purchased from a European dealer in 1983 but was subsequently proven to have been illegally excavated from the Etruscan cemetery of Cerveteri.
 - **Second-century AD copy of a head of Diadoumenos** by Polykleitos. Acquired in 1996 through the combination of gift and purchase of the Fleischman collection, it soon became clear that it was referenced and had been stolen from an excavation store-room in Venosa. (Janet Grossman noted in her contribution to *A Passion for Antiquities*, which catalogued the Fleischman collection, that the head was unpublished. As only about 25 per cent of the pieces featured in *Passion* were previously published, one can only wonder what revelations lie ahead.)
 - **A torso, part of a second-century AD statue of the god Mithra.** Bought from a European dealer in 1982 who claimed it to have been in an English collection for many years, it appeared, intact, in a blurred photograph as part of the Guistiniani Collection and may have been broken up for sale.
- On 4 March Boston businessman **William I. Koch** announced that he would return the ‘**Elmali Hoard**’ — 1661 illegally excavated coins — to **Turkey**. A settlement was reached on the eve of the trial, following a decade-long court battle. Turkey’s Minister of Culture, the Hon. Istemihan Talay, praised Koch’s decision and vowed to continue Turkey’s vigorous efforts to recover the other coins from the hoard and all other antiquities stolen from Turkish soil. Mr Koch was presented with a medal and thanked for safeguarding the coins during the lawsuit.
- After another successful suit by New York lawyers **Lawrence Kaye and Howard Spiegler**, 26 April saw the return to **Turkey** of an intricately carved **walnut panel** from the Sultan’s prayer gallery of the thirteenth-century AD **Great Mosque in Divrigi**, a UNESCO-listed heritage site. Believed to have been lost along with 4 other panels in a fire in 1997, it was offered for sale by London art dealer **Oliver Hoare** at the International Asian Art Fair in New York, March 1998. The US government sued Hoare for its return under the terms of its 1983 ratification of the UNESCO Convention. Turkey also alerted Scotland Yard to the other three panels in Hoare’s possession, and they too will shortly go home.
- **Denver Art Museum** has given back a **carved wooden lintel** taken from the Classic period site of El Zotz in the Petén region of **Guatemala**. Stolen from pyramid temple I, between 1966–68, it was purchased by the museum in 1973 before US legislation was introduced prohibiting the importation of Pre-columbian art. The rare carving depicts a ruler in war regalia and will now be displayed at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología e Etnología in Guatemala City.
- The **Asia Society**, New York, agreed, after 15 years of negotiation, to return an **eleventh-century AD sandstone relief** of a

mother and child to **India**. The sculpture, bought by the Society's founder, John D. Rockefeller 3rd, in 1978 from a London dealer, was discovered to have been stolen from a provincial museum in Dhubela, Madhya Pradesh state. Believing that Rockefeller purchased the piece in good faith, the Asia Society asked the Indian Government to pay for its return and insurance.

Repatriation

Other returns of antiquities also hit the headlines recently.

- Important antiquities, smuggled out of **Egypt** in the early 1990s by convicted dealer **Jonathan Tokely Parry** (see: 'In the News', *CWC* issue 1), were handed over to Egyptian officials by Scotland Yard on 11 March. Antiquities officials have met with representatives of Scotland Yard to try to hammer out a memorandum of understanding on retrieving stolen artefacts which, if it were approved, could serve as a 'model for co-operation with other countries, such as the US and France, where many pieces end up'.
- In April, the **Canadian Government** restored to Syria **39 1500-year-old mosaics** from a group of 86 impounded by customs between 1991 and 1998. Most are already back in **Syria**. The first 54 mosaics were imported from the Lebanon in 1991, declared as handicrafts valued at only Cdn\$200,000. 32 more arrived in 1996 and were judged by archaeologists to be genuine and to have been hacked from floors at the same archaeological sites — believed to be ecclesiastical buildings in Apameia and Epiphaneia in northwestern Syria. No criminal arrests were made as officials were able to proceed more quickly under civil law.

McGill University archaeologist John Fossey commented that 'Canada has been regarded as the back door to get things into the United States' but has now sent a clear message that, for antiquities smugglers, times are changing.

Mosaics

Still on mosaics, the trade magazine *Minerva* has reported that **two mosaic sections** acquired by the **Ménil Collection**, and now on extended loan to Rice University, Houston, appear to belong to a polychrome floor section looted from a Roman building at **Zeugma, southeast Anatolia**. They depict the two principals in the ancient Greek novel *Metiochos and Parthenope*, and appear to be a Roman version of an earlier Hellenistic painting. Other mosaics were stolen from a well-secured area of the site during an organized raid in the summer of 1998.

Sevso Treasure

The Marquess of Northampton is rumoured to have received compensation in excess of £15 million in an out-of-court settlement of his long-running dispute over the **Sevso Treasure**. The Marquess had sued his former law firm Allen and Overy, and his former lawyer Peter Mimirriss, for damages over their advice regarding his purchase of the collection of fourth-century AD Roman silver. Since it has proved impossible to ascertain the original findspot of the hoard — earlier claims by Lebanon, Croatia and Hungary have all been dismissed in a New York Court hearing — its fate will be decided by Lord Northampton and his trustees.

Museum Exhibitions

Recent museum exhibitions have emphasized problems caused by archaeological looting.

- December 1998–February 1999, the **National Archaeological Museum in Athens** displayed a range of artefacts giving an impression of life and religious practices in the late Neolithic. The main body of the exhibition consisted of **53 gold pendants and beads confiscated from smugglers** in October 1997. Honorary museum director, Katie Demakopoulou, pointed out that we cannot be certain if the artefacts constituted a hoard during ancient times, or were the result of the looting of one or more graves, or even of where they came from. One of the two men arrested in 1996 claimed to have inherited the material from his aunt on the Greek isle of Andros. The police informant whose tip-off led to the recovery of the material later received a reward of 136 million drachmae.
- A display of **Scythian gold**, usually kept in storage owing to lack of resources, was mounted at the local lore museum in **Simferopol, Crimea** in an attempt to attract sponsorship and to call attention to the problems of archaeologists in the region. Archaeological expeditions have been halted owing to lack of financing and tomb thieves are making use of the situation to excavate grave goods and ship them abroad. It is reported that three chambers were robbed of **\$300,000 of treasures** last September alone.



Hague Convention

On 26 March, after two gruelling weeks' negotiation 'during which things often looked very bleak because of deep-seated differences between States' a new **Second Protocol to the**

1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted by unanimous consensus. Eighty-four national delegations signed the 'Final Act' of the conference — which was also attended by non-governmental organizations — although this does not commit a State to ratify the new treaty. The meeting enabled the international community to clarify and reinforce measures to counter the alarming new increase in — often deliberate — damage and loss caused to cultural material since 1990 in war zones such as Afghanistan, former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Somalia.

Under the terms of the Second Protocol:

- More precise provisions are brought to the concept of '**military necessity**' and to better heritage protection in situations of civil and domestic conflict.
- In response to significant demands, an improved **system of sanctions** to punish perpetrators of crimes affecting cultural heritage has been adopted.
- A committee supervising the implementation of the Convention will meet once a year and consider applications for financial assistance from a (voluntary contributions) fund to be established.
- The **International Committee of the Blue Shield**, a UNESCO-linked world non-governmental organization for joint emergency co-ordination and response, is formally recognized.

The formal signing ceremony was held on 17 May, but a minimum of 20 States must ratify before the Protocol comes into effect. This could take some time, since most would require new primary legislation to be passed. English and French texts are available on the UNESCO Web site (<http://www.unesco.org/>).



Byzantine Artefacts from Cyprus

As mentioned in the Editorial, the **US Government** in April imposed emergency restrictions, under Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention, on the import of **Byzantine ecclesiastical and ritual ethnological material from Cyprus** unless accompanied by an official export permit. The move was made in response to requests from the Cypriot government and recommendations from the Cultural Property Advisory Committee.

Smuggling in Egypt

Egyptian authorities have arrested Sheik Taj Al Hilali, the controversial **Mufti of Australia's Muslim community**, for alleged involvement in **archaeological smuggling**. It is alleged by Egyptian police that he paid thousands of dollars to 10 people who have been arrested on smuggling charges, intending to carry antiquities abroad to be sold. Four of those arrested are also accused of murdering a police officer who discovered them on a clandestine dig in Qena, 640 miles from Cairo, in southern Egypt. The Sheik has denied any wrongdoing, has volunteered a statement to the authorities and claims he is a victim of circumstances which his enemies are exploiting. Although the Mufti was allowed to leave Egypt temporarily in March the investigation continued and he is now obliged to stay in the country pending his next court hearing in May.

Tourists in Mexico

The need for increased public awareness was highlighted by two contrasting tales of tourists in Mexico.

- On a visit to the Maya ruins of **Palenque**, young Canadian **Pascal Hudon**, aged 20, foolishly acquired 20 small clay figurines

from a local man. Not realizing he had broken Mexican law (according to which all pre-Hispanic artefacts are archaeological treasures and the property of the state), he even more foolishly asked agents at a police road block if they considered the hoard genuine, whereupon he was **charged with theft** and jailed while the authorities considered deporting him. After more than 6 months in Chiapas jail, during which time Hudon went on a hunger strike in protest, he was finally released in April two days before an official visit by the Prime Minister of Canada and after his relatives paid a fine of Cdn\$1200.

- In January, however, tourists were the heroes of the day when they informed the authorities of a man who had offered to **sell them genuine ancient artefacts**. Police located the suspect on the Mexico-Tulancingo highway in Hidalgo, but he fled as they approached, dumping three plastic bags which were found to contain **39 pre-Hispanic objects** including 4 ceramic candelabras, 3 decorated earthenware boxes, a figurine mould, a stone pestle and the handle of an incense burner. These were confirmed as genuine, 'of incalculable value', and reportedly came from the pyramid city of **Teotihuacan**, just outside Mexico City.

Vincenzo Cammarata

The world's largest collection of allegedly stolen antiquities was discovered, late last year, at the home of **Vincenzo Cammarata**, in Enna, Sicily. Despite 12 months of enquiries, officers were unprepared for the array of archaeological treasures recovered: more than 30,000 Phoenician, Greek and Roman antiquities worth about £20 million, most probably plundered from the ruins of **Morgantina**, in central Sicily. Cammarata is now in prison facing charges of **stealing archaeological relics and collaborating with the Mafia**, but denies

the charges, claiming that every artefact is registered with the local department of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs. Five others were arrested on charges of conspiracy and receiving stolen goods, including two lecturers from the University of Catania, Giacomo Manganaro from the Department of Ancient History and Salvo di Bella.

Authorities believe Cammarata, well-known for his wealth and connections, was 'the nerve centre behind the sacking of Italy's archaeological sites'. Investigated after a tip-off from criminal supergrass Maurizio Sinistra, he appears to have been the first point of contact for *tombaroli* selling their illegal finds. It is alleged he would invite Mafia bosses to dine and value stolen antiquities for them, keeping some for himself or selling them on to international dealers on the black market. The investigation is important not only for the organized crime connections revealed but also because **specific information is emerging about every stage of the illicit trade**, including precise smuggling routes out of Sicily through Switzerland and the UK to America.

Cammarata sometimes sent antiquities to Gianfranco Casolari in San Marino, who is suspected of providing false provenance documents for pieces which he sold through his auction house (AES Rude), some apparently to western museums. Museum directors and collectors everywhere now have a chance to examine their records for any pieces bought from AES in case they need to follow the fine example set by the J. Paul Getty Museum and return them to Italy.

In April it was reported that **Silvio Raffiotta**, the Chief Prosecutor of Enna, is also under investigation following accusations by a colleague of valuing looted archaeological material. Raffiotta, in the past known for a number successful campaigns against antiquities smuggling, denies the charges. He is a close personal friend of Vincenzo Cammarata.

Organized Crime

Links between organized crime and the illicit trade in art and antiquities are being reported with increasing frequency.

- In January Spanish police broke up a **major international art-smuggling ring** which had planned to trade stolen masterpieces for cocaine.
- Colonel Cyril Radev, chief of the police branch assigned to fight organized crime in **Bulgaria** (CSBOP) has stated that historic artefacts worth nearly **\$1 billion** were saved last year from illegal export to the West. He cited the figure as part of a general assessment of CSBOP's work during 1998. A source familiar with the activities of the unit told *Radio Free Europe* that since 1985 **25,000 artefacts have been stopped at the border**, but this number is believed to represent only 30 per cent of what has been lost. Buyers are mostly collectors from Austria, Germany and Belgium.



Pakistani Tiles

Jemima and Imran Khan are to sue Pakistan's customs authorities for defamation after she was charged in January with smuggling antique tiles out of the country. Jemima claimed that the charges were ridiculous and being used to discredit her husband by political enemies. Thermoluminescence testing and examination by experts in London are reported to confirm that, far from being 'of paramount archaeological significance' as Pakistani authorities claimed, the tiles are modern.



Looting in China

Reports indicate that Chinese authorities continue to take drastic measures in their attempts to curb widespread looting.

- In January, **Gao Yunliao**, a farmer, was reported to have been **executed** for stealing a Buddha statue from the famous **Longmen Grottoes** in Henan province. Three accomplices received unspecified prison terms. The group broke the Tang Dynasty statue into three pieces while loading it onto a truck and then buried it at Gao's home.
- Also in Henan in January, a **museum worker** in Nanyang City was **sentenced to death** for stealing and damaging **Qing Dynasty relics**.
- In April farmer **Chen Mengxing** from the northern province of Hebei was given the **death penalty** for stealing and accidentally shattering **Beijing's oldest Buddha statue**, officially listed as a rare relic since 1957. Accomplices Liu Xueru and Wang Liqiang were sentenced to life imprisonment. When the heist went wrong, the fragmented sculpture was hidden in the backyard of Liu Xueru's home. It has now been repaired and safely stored in the Beijing Carved Stone Art Museum. Chen Mengxing was also found guilty of stealing a rare Ming Dynasty relic from a temple in Shouyang county in Shanxi Province.

Hong Kong Antiquities Trade

Meanwhile, the *The Art Newspaper* carries reports of hard times on **Hollywood Road**, the antiquities trading area of **Hong Kong**, where a shrinking supply is decimating the trade. Two decades of unrestrained looting are blamed: it is believed that thieves in China may have exhausted the number of graves which can be

unobtrusively excavated (although the situation could reflect hoarding or collecting in China). This has led to the appearance of more **forges** — many of which have reached Western markets, as was seen by the 500 fake Chinese antiquities still presumably at large in the UK (see: 'In the News', *CWC* issue 3) and a reduction in market confidence.

Dealers say, however, that Chinese premier Zhu Rongji's current crackdown on smuggling has left them unaffected, and smuggling kingpins have opened slick new shops in Hollywood Road since it is safer for them to operate in Hong Kong than in China, where looting is now a capital offence (see above). Illicit antiquities appear to be routed through corrupt officials or private syndicates in **Guangdong**, who smuggle them into Hong Kong. More sensitive items are sent through the Portuguese territory of **Macau**, where officials are alleged to be less 'clean and efficient' than those on the Hong Kong border.

Chinese Artefacts

At the New York International Asian Art Fair in March, dealer **Guiseppe Eskenazi** produced some spectacular, previously unseen (and of course unprovenanced) **early Chinese objects**. These included a very rare example of a massive, Shang-period bronze bell, and two Tang-period *lokapalas*, or tomb guardians which, despite their ferocious appearances, had clearly failed in their allotted tasks!

Theft in Alaska

Ian Martin Lynch has the dubious honour of being the first person to be prosecuted in Alaska under the 20-year-old Archaeological Resources Protection Act. He pleaded guilty to **stealing 1400-year-old human remains** from a cave gravesite in southeastern **Alaska**, which

he discovered on a deer-hunting trip in 1997. Although he knew the theft was classed as felony, he described the find as 'really cool' and wondered if the site might be named after him. He now faces a possible six-month prison term and may have to pay \$10,000 to restore the site.



Peruvian Cloak Stolen

At the municipal museum of **Arequipa**, southern Peru last December, someone took off with a **pre-Inca ceremonial cloak** made of parrot feathers and worth \$100,000. They covered the crime up with a chicken-feather substitute and it was only discovered when museum officials noticed that the garment had lost its usual shine. The police were clearly dealing with a thief with a conscience, however, since the cloak was quickly recovered, following an anonymous tip-off, in a nearby church confessional box!



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The Village Voice worldwide

We are always pleased to receive relevant press clippings and news items.



The lessons of Sipán: archaeologists and *huaqeros*

PETER WATSON

CHICLAYO, PERU: The excavations at Sipán in northern Peru (Fig. 1) have been well documented. Three royal Moche tombs, larger and more complex than any found before, revealed skeletons of prominent personages, gold and silver objects, and details about sacrificial ceremonies that greatly added to the understanding of this ancient civilization. The fruits of these excavations have been on display at the National Museum of Peru, in Lima, for several years.

Less well known is the parallel story about the battle between archaeologists and local tomb robbers which, it turns out, may offer important lessons for threatened sites in other areas. What follows is based on interviews with Dr Walter Alva, the archaeologist in charge of excavations at Sipán, with Dr Carlos Wester, Dr Alva's deputy, and Dr Luis Chero, the chief archaeologist on site.

Sipán falls into two, the 'Royal Site' (Fig. 2), the subject of Dr Alva's many publications, and what might be called 'The Other Sipán' (Figs. 3 & 4), an area of tombs about two kilometres away, for non-royal burials. These have received no publicity at all.

It is important to note

that, from the moment the royal tombs were first discovered, by the local investigative police, in 1987, the archaeologists have had an uphill battle convincing the local population, in the modern town of Sipán (about one kilometre away), that *they* are not tomb-robbers who are trying to steal from the villagers what is rightfully theirs. The techniques that Alva and his colleagues have evolved to overcome this resistance are of great interest to archaeologists in similarly-threatened areas.

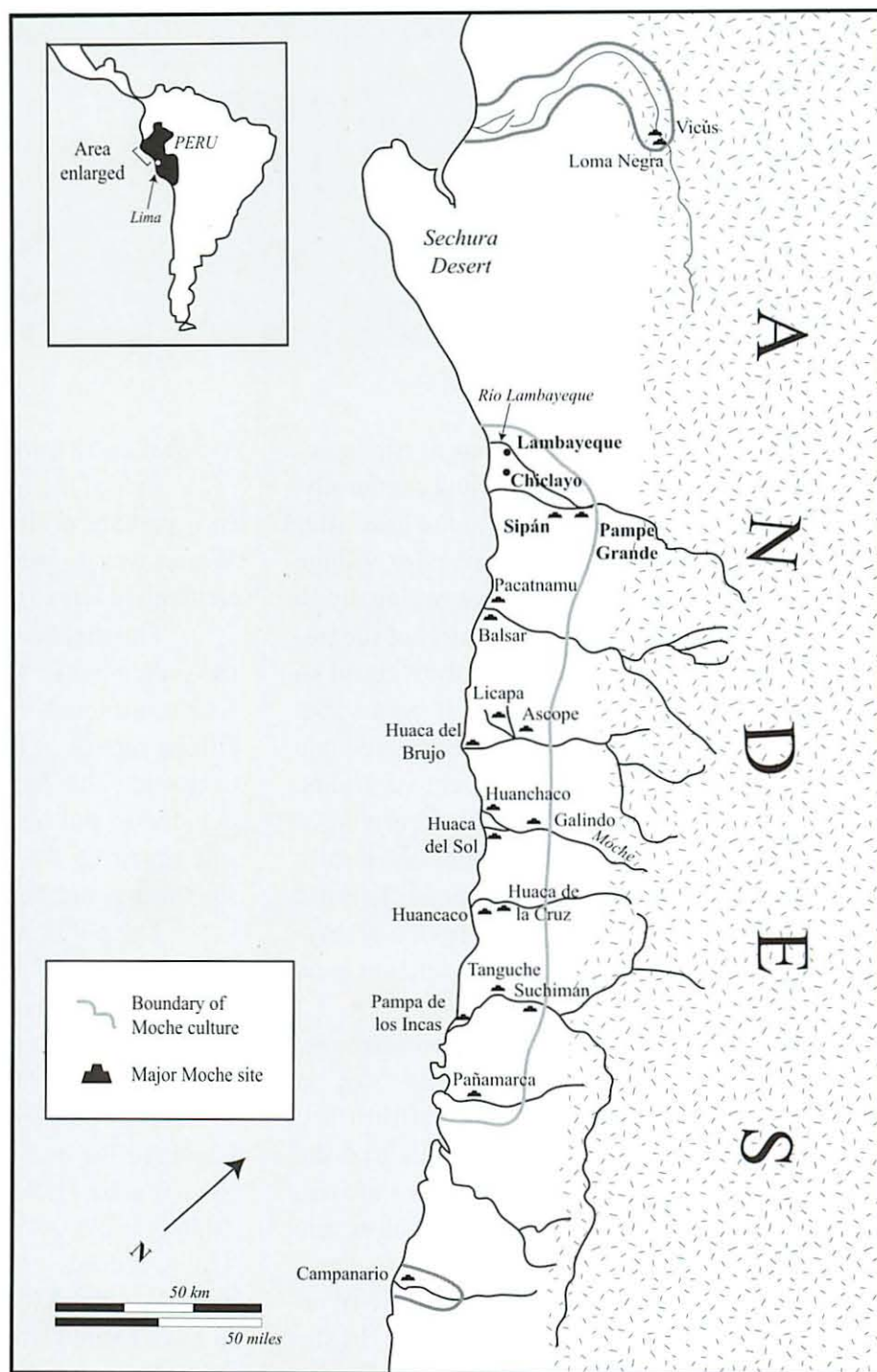


Figure 1. Extent of Moche Culture (AD 100–800).



Figure 2. The 'Royal Site', Sipán.

It turns out that the *huaqeros* at Sipán actually consisted of 34 members of just one family, the Bernal family. Police got on to the case after the Bernals appeared back in their poor village with new cars and women, and were getting drunk for days on end. After the intervention of the police, the archaeologists did what they could to reconstruct what had taken place. It seems that in February 1987 the Bernals had discovered one tomb and had dug for three consecutive nights, taking a statue and a number of gold artefacts. During the raid on the Bernals' house, the family resisted and one of them was shot dead. This did not improve the popularity of the police or anyone 'official' identified with them, such as archaeologists.

There is an irony in all this because one might ask why the Bernals made their 'dig' in 1987. After all, the pyramids and platform had been there since 100–650 AD. It seems that the government archaeologists had been in the area, making a survey, about six months before the Bernals' discovery and this government survey may have suggested to the locals that the pyramids hid something worth looking for. In the circumstances it is fortunate that the family stopped digging when they did. They were just

3–5 feet away from the royal tomb.

Part of the material taken by the Bernals is in a private collection in Switzerland. Carlos Wester was prepared to say this much but refused to identify who exactly has the material.

The discovery of the Bernals' activities by the police led to Alva's legitimate excavation of four more levels of the pyramid. (There are still fifteen metres at the base of the pyramid left to excavate. This has not been done because Alva decided to put his funds into extra security and into repairing the roofs of the structures protecting the digging that has already been completed.)

The publicity received by the discovery of the royal tombs has been remarkable. In 1987 tourists in Chiclayo were 'a handful'. By this year they had grown to 70,000 directly attributable to Sipán (but in 1998, owing to La Niña, it fell back to 43,000). Assuming the average tourist visits Chiclayo for one night, and spends \$200 in the town (the best hotel costs \$66 a night), that makes $70,000 \times 200 = \$14,000,000$ in a normal year. This is a crude calculation but even so sits well alongside the \$250,000 the Bernals are reputed to have earned from their find.

Indirect indications are also favourable. Not only is Dr Alva one of the most famous men in



Figure 3. The 'Other Sipán', showing looted mound.

Peru today but even the policeman on duty at the toll plaza on the road out of Chiclayo knew Carlos Wester and saluted. Posters advertising Sipán, and replicas of objects, are displayed everywhere, from the airport to the casinos. The tombs have really fired the imagination of the whole local population, who see that they can all benefit, not just the *huaqueros*.

After the original publicity, when Dr Alva and his colleagues moved in, the locals were very difficult. Modern Sipán is poor, but not abject. Carlos Wester says, however, that the locals had no idea to begin with what archaeology was. They thought the pyramids belonged to them (in fact, the government owns the land) and they thought there were enough tombs for everyone in the village to have his/her pick.

Security remains a problem to this day but Drs Alva and Wester have devised a number of techniques to overcome the central difficulty. Here they were helped somewhat by the Peruvian context. In particular, excavations at Sipán got going at roughly the time the government finally put the lid on the country's terrorist problem (Shining Path and Tupac Amru). This freed up a lot of specially trained army personnel. Further, the general in charge of special forces was/

is a keen amateur archaeologist and made available not only manpower but equipment (cars, helicopters) whereby the army could carry out rapid reconnaissance of the area. The police were not much respected in and around Lambayeque, the province where Sipán is located, but the army were and when people saw how seriously the military were taking the problem they realized that the government, and the archaeologists, meant business.

After the army moved out, the police took over and though they were better than before the situation was a lot less than perfect. Alva and Wester therefore took matters into their own hands and increased their own security staff — from four to thirty. But, and this is the interesting part, the guards do not spend all their time at the site. They divide their duties between the site and the museum at Lambayeque, the province capital, about half an hour away. The idea behind this is two-fold: to stop the guards getting bored; but, more important, to stop them getting to know, and be corrupted by, the local population.

No less important, Alva and Wester have made it known to the locals that the day-to-day director of the dig, Luis Chero, has absolutely no say in policy. This is for his protection, and that



Figure 4. The 'Other Sipán', showing holes dug by huaqueros.

of his family. Any threats or attacks on him will not affect digging.

In order to service the site as a tourist attraction, cafés and souvenir shops have sprung up (at least five) but this can hardly be said to have spread prosperity from the excavation to the modern town of Sipán. Chiclayo, the big town on the coast, where the hotels and airport are located, has benefited most. This is in some respects unfortunate and not helped by the fact that financial aid for modern Sipán, promised by the government, has so far not materialized.

There is a small on-site museum, which was paid for jointly by the Peruvian government and, for some reason, the Swiss government. Local archaeologists believe that the Swiss involvement is part of an attempt to prove that Switzerland is concerned to be more than a way-station for smuggled artefacts.

Mr Fredy Naupari Pizarro, the proprietor of the café/restaurant at the site, is a local from Sipán who had been an engineer/mechanic before the site opened to tourists. He was obviously in favour of a systematic excavation but said that the only way to attract more tourists was to make further excavations, and therefore produce fur-

ther newsworthy discoveries, and to bring back the material from Lima. This is a possibility, but for security reasons the material will go to the Bruning Museum in Lambayeque, at least an hour away, by car.

The 'Other Sipán'

About two kilometres from the modern town of Sipán is the cemetery. This is the usual Roman Catholic mix of bright flowers and neo-Baroque sarcophagi. It is in fact a rather remote and somewhat wild area, near some foothills. It is also located on top of a huge, pre-Inca burial ground. This is the 'Other Sipán'.

The location is extraordinary. It is a lunar landscape, pitted and neglected, with tumbleweed and gorse in profusion (see Fig. 4). The terrain is very reminiscent of Apulia, south of Foggia in Italy, pitted with illegal excavations for as far as the eye can see. For this is where the ordinary, non-royal inhabitants of Sipán lived and died. As in Apulia, the *huaqueros* work with long T-shaped metal spikes which they insert into the ground looking for the hard roofs of tombs. When they make contact, they dig down, doing much the



Figure 5. Track to the 'Other Sipán'.

same sort of damage as is done in Apulia in the search for pots.

Long after the royal tombs were safe, the other Sipán was not. The track (shown in Fig. 5) was not safe until two or three years ago. Dr Wester, who led the way, fully expected to find *huaqueros* digging there and then. In the event, we didn't see anyone but Wester said that, until 2–3 years ago, anyone travelling on the trail would have been attacked. There were innumerable illegal digs; whole pyramids had been destroyed (Fig. 3).

The looting here has, to an extent, been stopped, thanks to Peruvian technological *chutzpah*: the army bought satellite time and photographed locals looting. On top of that the police and army raided houses randomly in the modern town and found lots of looted material. At the moment the battle over the 'Other Sipán' is being won by the archaeologists but no one knows how long it will last.

Batan Grande

Batan Grande (Fig. 6) is the home of the Sican culture (not to be confused with Sipán). It is much

later (AD 700–1100) and lies to the north of Chiclayo/Lambayeque. It forms part of a Nature Reserve that is 50 miles square and contains seventeen pyramids.

A river, the Lecha, runs through the reserve. In the El Niño of 1983 the Lecha produced a massive flash flood that took away 80 per cent of one of the biggest pyramids. In the storms of 1997 further flooding damaged the same pyramid and undermined the foundations of the Oro pyramid on the other side of the river bed. The river, which changed course permanently after the 1983 Niño, now runs just 17 feet from the Oro. Here, in 1991, the Japanese archaeologist Isumi Shimara discovered some major tombs of Chimu-Inca variety, dating to AD 1375, so there is a real fear that another flood will take away very valuable, unexcavated artefacts.

Batan Grande is well guarded. I met one of the guards and discussed his situation (Fig. 7). He was very fit, and carried a large machete. He had been in the army (in the unit referred to above) and he worked one day in three *but* from 7.30 am to 7.30 am — i.e. 24 hours non-stop. He said he had two problems: locals who came for wood — these he just saw off the reservation; and

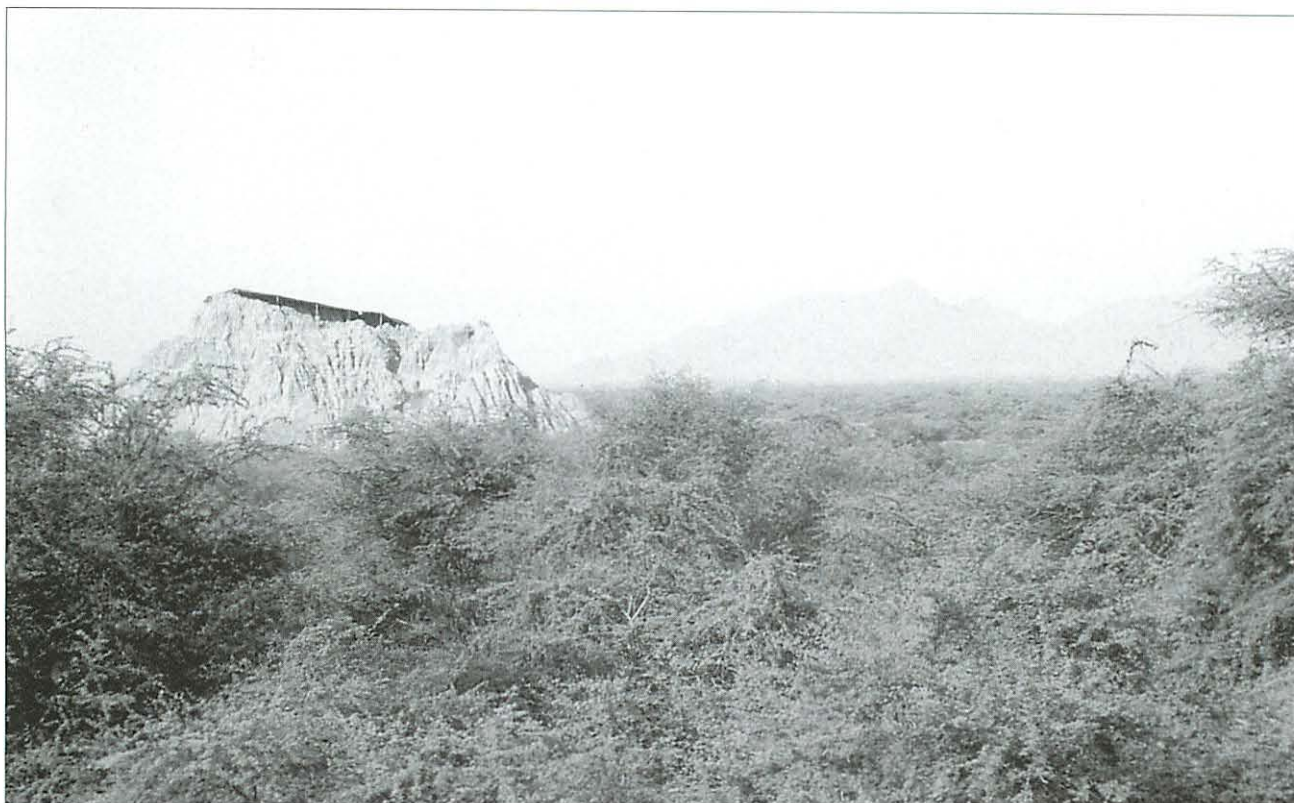


Figure 6. *Batan Grande.*

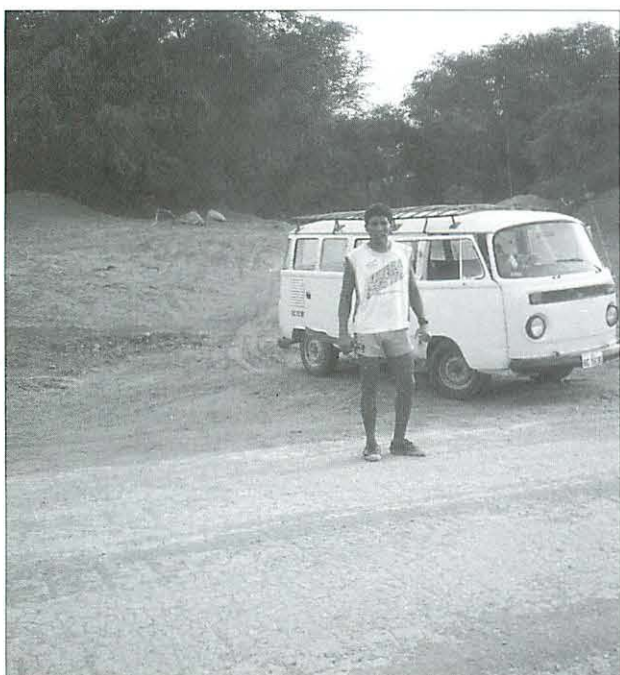


Figure 7. *Guard at Batan Grande.*

second, the *huaqeros*. There are about 9–10 of these every week, he said, and in general his physique and the machete were enough to see them off. But it is a constant battle and his military training undoubtedly comes in useful at times.

Also of interest is the fact that he is paid 400 *soles* a month (about £80), exactly the same as Dr Carlos Wester and the other archaeologists. (The average wage in Peru is said to be 300 *soles* a month.) For a poor country, Peru is making a determined effort to to conserve and protect its heritage.

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The looting of cultural material in Mali

KLÉNA SANOGO

The looting of cultural material, from Africa in general and from Mali (Fig. 1) in particular, is causing great concern at the present time. Starting with the search for exotic and sensational artefacts by early colonial officials, it is a phenomenon that has grown progressively into a vast commercial enterprise which today has reached proportions which no-one would hesitate to call 'cultural genocide' (Brent 1994). This spectacular escalation in the looting of cultural material is due to several factors, but the two most important would appear to be, on one hand, the existence of the international art market and, on the other, the fact that the idea of patrimony,

developed around cultural material and archaeological sites in particular, does not correspond to cultural reality as experienced by the people concerned. This last factor explains much of the destruction that might be termed unintentional, and caused by all types of work (traditional farming, animal husbandry, settlement, quarrying, mineral exploitation, etc.). Unintentional destruction extends, to some degree, right throughout national territory.

As for intentional looting, however, it is motivated by the search for — and acquisition of — cultural objects in order to build a personal collection or else to sell. As stated earlier it goes back to colonial times but its increase is very recent. Initially limited to wooden masks and statuettes acquired because of conversion to Islam or quite simply stolen, the phenomenon has grown throughout the country since the 1970s to include artefacts buried in the ground. This is owing to a combination of two factors: the discovery of terracotta statuettes from Djenné and

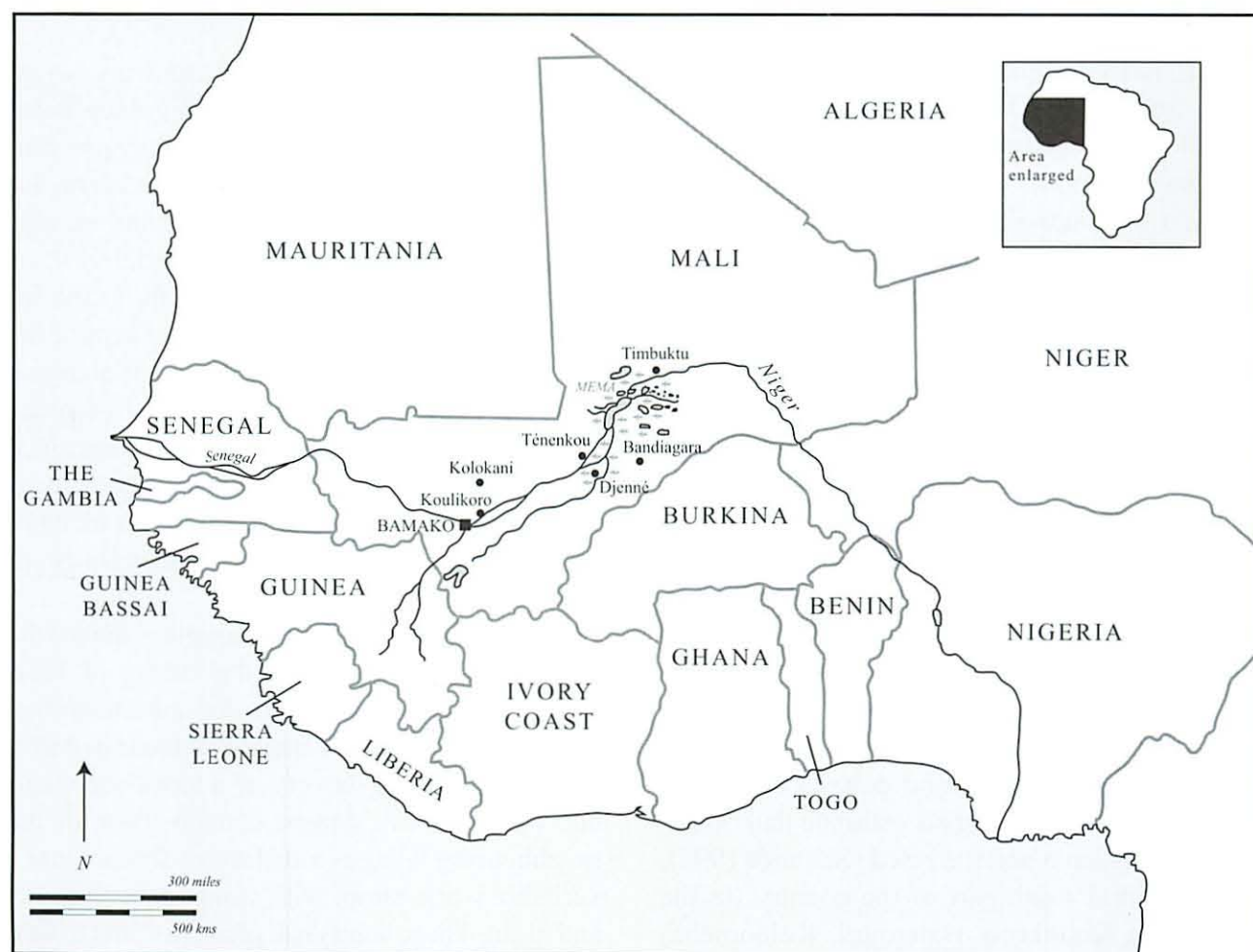


Figure 1. West Africa.

the impoverishment of rural populations caused by the great drought.

Since the 1970s several forms of intentional looting have been observed, of which the collection of surface finds from archaeological sites seems to be the most innocent. It is directed towards material exposed by water running over the surface of sites: jewels (beads in a variety of materials, copper and iron bracelets and rings), ceramics (complete vases or fragments destined to be used as grog), querns and stone grinders. Such collecting is in general practised by women and children in the area of the delta and across the mouth of the Niger. Initially geared towards the satisfaction of local needs, it has recently opened up to the international trade in beads and copper objects which are sold in markets at Léré in the lake region and at Gao. This new orientation will obviously lead to the disappearance of this innocent collecting and drag it inevitably towards increased 'hole-digging'.

The illicit excavation of archaeological sites makes up the second form of intentional looting — by far the most destructive and dangerous. Indeed, archaeological artefacts removed from context are forever dead to science. These illegal excavations are undertaken either by individuals acting alone or by organized groups. When it is an individual, sites are disturbed only on the surface because the activity generally consists of extracting objects partially revealed by erosion — usually vases in which it is hoped to find treasure (terracotta statuettes, jewels etc.). Despite the individual nature of this looting it is not uncommon to find entire sites disturbed over their whole surface, especially when close to modern settlements, because sometimes it can happen that everyone in the village who is able tries his hand. The products of this looting are destined for sale to local representatives of antiquities dealers.

This type of looting is very extensive in the inland delta region and at the mouth of the Niger (Fig. 2). In the inland delta of the Niger, for example, archaeologists estimate that 50 per cent of sites have been affected (Schmidt 1992). In the central south part of the country (in the regions of Koulikoro, Bougouni, Kolondiéba) where the looted monuments are small tumuli, this sort of looting generally leads to total de-

struction of the site. It is in this way that a whole necropolis (of more than 100 tumuli) has been totally destroyed at Sirakorola (Koulikoro region), by people looking for necks of vases which take the form of zoomorphic statuettes made of terracotta. This means that examples of these statuettes which are today held at the National Museum of Mali derive not from scientific research but from illicit excavations; they have been seized, quite by chance, from the possession of a dealer when the vast majority of the plunder had already crossed the national frontier.

The most worrying category of looters, though, are organized groups. Some of the groups work on their own, and those that do so are usually family based. It is a case of true family enterprise with a single person charged with placing the discovered items on the weekly markets of the region concerned.

Secondly, there are groups comprised of people recruited and supported by the antiquities dealers. The latter provide the excavation equipment in return for which all the finds are considered theirs by right.

Both types are responsible for truly devastating digs. Sites are destroyed by deep holes which cover the whole surface or they are simply crossed by deep trenches. In both cases, not only are objects removed, but the sites are also permanently lost to scientific research.

This kind of pillage is specific to the inland Niger delta region where 45 per cent of the 834 sites registered in an inventory of archaeological sites bear witness to excavation by looters. 17 per cent of looted sites have been destroyed by large-scale excavations (2 per cent of these sites are irreparably damaged because of more than 70 per cent destruction) (Dembélé *et al.* 1993).

The most significant example is that of the site of Natamatao close to the village of Thial (approximately 15 km from the administrative centre of the area of Ténenkou). Here in 1990, after the chance discovery of a terracotta statuette by a peasant, dozens of men from all the neighbouring villages transformed the site into a veritable work camp, with teams operating day and night. These teams had plenty of time to turn over the whole site before the accidental death of one of the workers, as a result of subsidence,



Figure 2. *Toguére Hamma Djam, inland delta region, after looting.*

drew the attention of the local authorities. There were arrests and an antiquities dealer was convicted.

Only a few statuettes were seized (they are currently lodged at the National Museum in Bamako). This intervention by the authorities, however, has been beneficial for the area as there has since been a relative lull in such large-scale looting. But at the same time, plunderers have moved on to areas which are less accessible and rarely monitored by the police. At stake are Mema, the lake region, Farimaké and Guimbala. It is probably this area that is the origin of the bronze statuettes of horse riders currently found on the international art market.

Looting occurs, as we have seen, because there is a very profitable international market. However, the actual looters (the first link in the chain), are local people who are completely unaware of the notion of cultural patrimony and are concerned only with problems of survival, and they do not come into direct contact with this market. The intermediaries are the national antiquities dealers who may or may not be aware of what they are doing. They are simultaneously

employers of groups of looters, purchasers of objects sold by independent looters and organizers of the illicit channels of export.

The first impression that might be gained from this sad *tableau* is that there is total indifference to the problem on the part of the national authorities. However, as well as its adherence to all international conventions relating to the protection of cultural heritage, the Republic of Mali is one of the few countries of West Africa to have adopted legislation and regulations which, in spite of some imperfections, when suitably applied, can preserve a large part of the cultural heritage from destruction by people and even nature. The relevant statutes are:

- * Law No. 85-40/AN-RM of 26 July 1985 relating to the protection and promotion of the national cultural heritage;
- * Law No. 86-61/AN-RM of 26 July 1986 relating to traders in cultural objects;
- * Decree No. 275/PG-RM of 4 November 1985 concerning regulations for archaeological excavations;
- * Decree No. 999/PG-RM of 19 September 1986 relating to marketing of cultural objects.

Unfortunately the practical implementation of these different statutes is difficult owing to their poor dissemination (there are only French texts available) and to the non-integration of their intention into the people's awareness and way of life. Even the administrative and legal authorities which are, theoretically, charged in the field with control and suppression are barely aware of the question; moreover, they lack technical competence in the matter (an officer of the law or a customs official is incapable of distinguishing between an authentic piece and a copy). In fact, legislation allows the sale of ethnographic material and copies of archaeological artefacts. Antiquities dealers make the most of this in order to export objects of which sale is forbidden. It is sufficient for them to acquire an export license from the Cultural Heritage Services (currently the National Museum in Bamako) on presentation of ethnographic artefacts or copies. Parcels are not sealed at the National Museum and this service has no control over export — objects presented are simply replaced by authentic pieces when they are packed. If the dealer does not wish to take such a risk then he can quietly cross the frontier overland, as Mali does not possess the means necessary to police its enormous frontier.

Thus we can appreciate the seriousness of the dangers which threaten the cultural heritage of all Africa, and of Mali in particular, all the more because it is impossible to produce the documents confirming ownership of exported objects.

The ultimate solution to the problem of looting would seem to be the removal of demand. In reality the situation is strangely reminiscent of slavery: Europeans and Americans bought and employed slaves because there were, in Africa, both sellers of slaves and slaves for sale: Africans fought with each other to form themselves into 'herds' of slaves because there were buyers who offered interesting things in exchange. One knows the outcome, or rather the end: the abolition of slavery across the Atlantic led to the steady disappearance of the slave trade in Africa! In this regard it is worth pointing out that within the framework of the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership*

of Cultural Property, the US Government has just concluded with the Republic of Mali an agreement forbidding import into the USA of certain categories of cultural material illicitly exported from Mali. It deals, in the first place, with terracotta and bronze statuettes from archaeological sites in the Niger valley, and also all objects from the burial caves at Tellem in the Bandiagara cliffs.

Unfortunately such arrangements cannot be concluded with those countries in Western Europe which constitute the distribution centre of the illicit traffic for the simple reason that these countries have, for the most part, refused to ratify the 1970 Convention.

For its part, the government of Mali has undertaken to inform and educate the population about the concept of cultural heritage. Since January 1994 cultural missions have been established at Djenné, Bandiagara and Timbuktu. These missions are intended to generate interest throughout the country.

Despite this, it is worrying to note that certain scientists, archaeologists, art historians, archaeometric laboratories, editors and museums actively support looting because of the the promotion and publicity they produce, the expertise which they bring to the authentication of objects (description and date), or quite simply by acquiring them. Their involvement helps make the looted artefacts more saleable. Worse still, today, there are people who, wanting to acquire objects with a clear conscience, suggest that the marketing of pieces could serve to finance archaeological research in Africa! Fortunately, we cannot yet include archaeologists among the supporters of this view. It is true that African countries do not have the means to carry out the archaeological research which would help to protect the still-buried elements of a cultural heritage, but to ask archaeology to feed the art market is to demonstrate total ignorance of the aims of archaeological excavations.

The report presented here might give the impression that those engaged in the struggle to protect the cultural heritage are fighting a losing battle. However, there are glimmers of hope. In effect it has been suggested that the attitude of local people changes radically when their cultural relations with archaeological sites are established. For example, although the inland delta of the

Niger is the area where looting is most severe, a site such as Toguéré Somo is completely protected simply because it is accepted that it sheltered Sékou Amadou, the founder of the Peul Empire of Macina, just before one of his battles. There are other cases in which the site is believed to be the home of village spirits (for example Djidiè in the Kolokami area). The newly established Cultural Missions, the development of archaeological and historical research, as well as the popular dissemination of results of this research can develop this trend which constitutes the best guarantee for the protection of cultural material since it is ensured by the people themselves.

International co-operation like that established by the government of the USA would strengthen this approach. This seems to be the way forward if we are to staunch the outflow of cultural material.

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(Translated from the French by Katie Boyle)



Book review

Demakopoulou, Katie & Nicoletta Divari-Valakou, 1997. *The Aidonia Treasure*. Athens: Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Receipts Fund, 31 pp.

The Mycenaean cemetery at Aidonia, near Nemea, was excavated by the Greek Archaeological Service between 1978–80 and again in 1986. Unfortunately, at the time of excavation, it transpired that over ten of the eighteen tombs uncovered had already been looted of their contents, probably only a short time previously. Nevertheless, over two hundred pots and figurines were recovered and the finds from the unlooted tombs provide unique insights into Mycenaean burial ritual, with evidence of sacrificed horses and broken kylikes. In one pit, overlooked by the looters, a secondary burial was discovered accompanied by an impressive collection of jewellery which included three gold signet rings (Krystalli-Votsi 1996).

In April 1993 an important collection of Mycenaean jewellery was offered for sale by auction at the Michael Ward Gallery in New York. Comparison of the Michael Ward material with that excavated in Aidonia revealed such similarities of iconography and technique that an origin in the looted tombs of Aidonia was, if not certain, then at least highly probable, and in May of the same year the Greek Government sued for its return.

The two sides in the dispute settled out of court in December 1993, thus avoiding a costly court case, and the Ward Gallery donated the objects to the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage, a cultural foundation based in

Washington, which subsequently returned the material to Greece in 1996. This book is a good quality, well-illustrated catalogue of the Aidonia material and also provides an account of its identification and recovery.

In returning the material to a non-profit making organization Michael Ward was able to claim a tax deduction of an undisclosed but very possibly, given the collection's original \$1.5 million price tag, substantial sum (Herscher 1998, 811). While the US taxpayer continues (probably unknowingly) to underwrite the illicit trade in antiquities, legitimate academic institutions have in recent years been starved of tax dollars — a situation nothing short of scandalous.

The recovered Aidonia artefacts have now joined the excavation finds on display in the Nemea Museum. The contexts of the plundered tombs have been destroyed, lost forever, but the forthcoming report of the Aidonia excavations, which will contain full descriptions of the intact tombs and their contents, will nevertheless be an important document for all students of Mycenaean Greece.

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Conference reports

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World Archaeological Congress 4: University of Cape Town, 10–14 January 1999

WAC4, as it prefers to be known, included a session convened by Kathryn Walker Tubb (Institute of Archaeology, London) and Neil Brodie (McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge) entitled *The Illicit Trade in Antiquities: Destruction and Response*. Speakers were as follows:

Kathryn Walker Tubb (UK). *Setting the Scene*.

Téréba Togola (Mali). *The Facen in the Mande World: Forces and Difficulties of Preservation*.

Dino Politis (UK). *Problems and Initiatives in Jordan*.

Hester Davis (USA). *Looting Graves/Buying and Selling Artefacts: Facing Reality in the United States*.

Peter Addyman (UK). *Metal Detecting in England and Wales: Catastrophe or Compromise?*

Neil Brodie (UK). *The Export Licensing System in the UK*.

Susan Keech McIntosh (US). *Reducing Incentives for Illicit Trade in Looted Antiquities: the US Implementation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention*.

A resolution was passed forward from the session to the plenary session of WAC, where it was accepted.

Resolution Adopted by the World Archaeological Congress 4, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Believing that the world's cultural heritage cannot sustain the losses resulting from illicit excavation and export of archaeological material;

Taking into consideration the resolution adopted by the Pan-African Congress of Prehistory and Related Studies in June 1995 at Harare, Zimbabwe; the resolution adopted by the UK Standing Conference on Portable Antiquities on 13 November 1997; the resolution adopted at the Annual General Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists on 26th September 1998 at Gothenburg, Sweden; resolution no. 4 adopted by the 19th Assembly of ICOM on 16th October 1998 in Melbourne, Australia; and resolution no. 5 adopted by the participants at the international conference 'Art, Antiquity and the Law: Preserving our Global Cultural Heritage' on 1 November 1998 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA;

Recognizing that international co-operation is essential for the protection of the world's cultural heritage;

World Archaeological Congress 4 held in Cape Town, South Africa, on Thursday 14 January 1999 urges all nations that have not already done so to become party to the relevant international conventions, including the:

Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954;

UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illegal Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970;

Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, 1995.

Who Owns Culture? International Conference on Cultural Property and Patrimony: a conference held at the Casa Italiana, Columbia University, New York City, Thursday 15–Saturday 17 April 1999.

This conference was sponsored by the National Arts Journalism Program and the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America. It was intended to ‘provide an overview of the full range of cultural property and patrimony issues facing cultural institutions, experts, and policymakers’. Participants included art historians, archaeologists, dealers and collectors, journalists, museum directors, government officials and lawyers. In his opening remarks **Michael Janeway** (Director, the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America) emphasized the need to make public the debate over cultural property and with the number of journalists involved media attention was guaranteed.

Inevitably there was some confusion over precisely what was meant by the term ‘culture’. For some speakers culture was obviously art, in the sense of deliberately produced art, while for others it was archaeology. For the 1992 Nobel Laureate in Literature **Derek Walcott** it was language, but to question who owns the English language, he said, is a pointless exercise. Indeed, he continued, questions of who owns what, of who has power over what, are beneath the spirit of humanity. More prosaically, **John Merryman** (Professor Emeritus, Stanford Law School) attempted a broad but still restricted definition when he insisted that, while any human artefact can come to be cultural property, there is a core consisting of works of art, manuscripts and antiquities. It was left to anthropologists **Susan McIntosh** (Professor of Anthropology, Rice University) and **Peter Jemison** (Historic Site Manager, Ganondagan State Historic Site, New York) to include sacred landscapes within the definition and so remind us that cultural realities are not always material.

Susan McIntosh also explained how our views of culture are relative, and suggested the analogy of invisible lenses through which we see and make sense of the world but which are themselves culturally formed. **Karl Meyer** (Author, *The Plundered Past*) provided a practical illustration of this when he compared different national attitudes to rights in cultural and intellectual property, and maintained that it was an ethical rather than a legal requirement to respect the laws of other nations. Just as citizens of the United States expect other countries to respect US laws on copyrights and patents, so should they be prepared to respect foreign laws, embedded in different cultural *milieux*, on the ownership of art and archaeology. Indeed, he suggested, if intellectual property was included in the definition of cultural property then the possibility of a global understanding might emerge.

John Merryman also spoke of his five ‘discourses’, or ideologies, of cultural property and while recognizing many subsidiary ethical and legal issues proposed that the central question to be addressed by the conference was: ‘Should the international rule that a nation cannot enforce the export laws of another be changed?’. From an archaeological perspective, though, this is very much a secondary question. The primary concern continues to be the undocumented (usually, but not always, illegal) excavation, or destruction, of archaeological sites. This concern over disappearing knowledge did not always seem to be fully appreciated by some participants who continued to debate issues of ownership.

Three sessions in particular would have been of interest to readers of *Culture Without Context*.

On Friday morning **Souren Melikian** (Arts Editor, *International Herald Tribune*) was moderator of *The Trade in Art: Where Cultural Property Goes*. After the assertions and anecdotes of some earlier (and later) speakers the opening data storm from **Ricardo Elia** (Associate Professor of Archaeology, Boston University) was a welcome relief. He presented the results of an in-depth study of

the market in Apulian Red-Figure vases from Italy. **Glenn Lowry** (Director, Museum of Modern Art, New York) followed with a re-statement of the argument frequently made by art historians that, although looted objects may lose their original (archaeological) context, once in a museum they acquire a fresh context which provides a new (presumably aesthetic) significance. **Rena Mouloupoulos** (Compliance Director, Senior Vice President, Sotheby's USA) described the role played by Sotheby's when enabling the sale of an antiquity and provided reasons why ownership histories, though often known, are not always revealed. (Melikian interjected at this stage to say that Christie's had refused to send a representative to the conference.) Finally **Gerald Stiebel** (Art Dealer, Rosenberg and Stiebel) argued that works of art are 'cultural ambassadors' which should be exchanged freely on an open market. Summing up **Souren Melikian** reminded the audience that 'art' and 'museums' are Western concepts — in most areas of the world cultural objects may have a ritual or religious significance in their original context which is lost when the object is transferred to a museum.

The final session on Friday was *Antiquities: International Cultural Property?* with **Richard Brilliant** (Director, The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America) as moderator. Opening speaker **Patty Gerstenblith** (Professor, DePaul University School of Law; Editor-in-chief, *International Journal of Cultural Property*) suggested that after the depredations of nineteenth-century imperialism and twentieth-century commerce some areas of the world today are almost devoid of their own cultural heritage. She made the fundamental point that the archaeological heritage is a non-renewable resource and cannot therefore be treated as ordinary property — something to be bought and sold. **Shelby White** (Art Collector) replied for collectors, arguing that most antiquities newly arrived on the market are not looted but are in fact thrown up by modern development projects, and thus are rescued from destruction by the market.

She added that archaeological excavations could in themselves be destructive. **Marion True** (Curator of Antiquities, The J. Paul Getty Museum) explained that the J. Paul Getty Museum had changed its acquisitions policy in 1995 as it was becoming more and more difficult to ascertain that potential purchases were not looted or forged, and that in any case the storerooms of even the new museum contained more antiquities than the display shelving could reasonably be expected to hold. She also outlined the Getty vision for the next millennium, which emphasizes the conservation of archaeological sites and objects and the development of mutually beneficial partnerships with other museums to enable sharing or exchange of displays and expertise. The session concluded with **Christopher Hitchens** (Journalist and Author, *The Elgin Marbles: Should they be Returned to Greece?*) putting forward the case for restitution of the Elgin marbles and **Michael Daley** (Director, ArtWatch) answering with the case against, although as the ensuing discussion slipped into farce it seemed at times that the real issue was the hard or soft pronunciation of the Elgin consonant G, not the marbles themselves.

Then on Saturday morning there was the session *The Developing World: Preservation, Export and Looting*. **Jaime Litvak King** (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) emphasized that the main threat to the archaeological heritage of Mexico is looting, but also raised the issue of forgeries, suggesting that one episode showed about 80 per cent of allegedly Mexican objects on the European market to be fakes. **Clemency Coggins** (Professor of Archaeology, Boston University) pointed out that despite US import restrictions Mayan objects are still pouring into Europe in great quantities. She also touched upon the dilemma facing archaeology as responsible museum exhibitions may actually stimulate demand for illicit antiquities. **Souren Melikian** presented three case studies to show how so-called historians of Persian art have been guilty over the years of poor scholarship and sometimes even of outright vandalism. Finally,

Chris Haskett (Research Fellow, Department of Religion, Columbia University) again reminded the audience that what in the West is regarded as art is in Tibet a record of a perceived reality, not something to be commodified. He also told of the human cost of the illicit trade in Tibet as armed gangs have killed monks in their violent attempts to remove statues from monasteries.

On Friday morning **John Callaway** (Senior Correspondent, WTTW-Chicago Channel 11) set off a desultory discussion when he asked if the United States possessed any cultural artefact of which the sale and export abroad would cause a national outcry. The discussion smouldered on through the conference until finally the accumulated weight of opinion settled upon the Statue of Liberty — not made in America perhaps but an emotive political symbol nevertheless. Callaway's question was picked up on Saturday in the first part of the session *Cultural Property in the United States*, moderated by **Peter Plagens** (Art Critic for *Newsweek*) in which the public and professional reactions to modern art and architecture were brought under scrutiny. **Casey Nelson Blake** (Professor of History, Washington University) pointed out that more recent cultural studies emphasize the role of culture in promoting social cohesion and indeed, already on Friday, **Peter McCloskey** (Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, The Hague) had expressed a similar view when he argued that the cultural heritage of a people represents an order in their world so that its destruction is tantamount to destruction of their society, and thus is to be considered a war crime. The panellists sought to separate public or civic from aesthetic conceptions of culture and were unanimous in agreeing that in the final analysis aesthetic considerations do not trump other issues when it comes to public art. While these discussions might not seem even tangentially related to the antiquities trade the conclusion reached — by a panel of disinterested (in an archaeological sense) experts — is of central relevance. It would imply that the loss of his-

tory entailed by the destruction of archaeological sites — a social or public loss — cannot be excused or justified on aesthetic grounds alone.

On Saturday afternoon, in the session *Ethics and Current Claims: Is there a Fair Solution?* **André Emmerich** (President, André Emmerich Gallery) introduced the concept of 'American exceptionalism', by which he meant that as a nation of immigrants its citizens had a right to possess part of the art of their ancestors. It would seem that the citizens of other countries, the UK for instance, by implication, don't. Another justification of this exceptionalism was also implicit in **Arielle Kozloff's** (Vice President, Ancient Art, The Merrin Gallery) contribution to Thursday's opening session when she suggested that the greatest challenge today is to ensure the survival of cultural material, and that the best means of preservation is storage in a stable environment, whether it be a public museum or private apartment. After the destruction visited upon many European collections, both private and public, during the course of the past two centuries it can only be assumed that Kozloff's vision of a stable environment extends only to the fifty states of the Union, with Switzerland perhaps as a fifty-first repository. Paradoxically, in his talk, Emmerich argued that in view of past and future destruction the best hope for the preservation of art lay in its dispersal.

The intellectual division between 'classics' and 'anthropology' was also on display during the conference so that the repatriation of native American artefacts was discussed in the session entitled *Cultural Property in the United States* while restitution of the Elgin Marbles was debated in the session *Antiquities: International Cultural Property?* As a result, in the latter session, Marion True's interesting observations on the role of the museum in the third millennium were swept aside in discussion by an amusing if tiresome exchange over the marbles while the opportunity for a more innovative airing of the Elgin issue against the background of NAGPRA was lost.

In conferences called to address issues of 'culture' the focus is often blurred and participants seem sometimes to be talking past one another. Such was the case here and in this sense it compared unfavourably with the *Art, Antiquity and the Law* conference held at Rutgers University last November. An audio

broadcast of the conference is archived at <http://www.najp.org/cultureconf.html>.

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Front cover. Looters' holes at the 'Other Sipán'.

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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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