

Culture Without Context



The Newsletter of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Issue 6, Spring 2000

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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

C*Crime Squad* is a BBC1 television programme which goes out in an early evening peak viewing slot. The 'squad' consists of several experts drawn from the police, legal professions and academia and each programme focuses on a particular aspect of British life and attempts to expose criminal goings-on. On 21 February 2000 it was the turn of art and antiques, and the programme included a piece on the antiquities trade.

Crime Squad that night showed the damage caused by Italian *tomboroli* to an Etruscan cemetery, together with an interview with a *tomborolo* who intimated that London was the largest market for their looted material. Back in London there was an interview with James Ede of IADAA and Colin Renfrew, Director of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. What wasn't revealed on the programme was that one month earlier, on 20 January, a *Crime Squad* team had secretly filmed three central London antiquities dealers, asking them about the provenance of pieces offered for sale. Secret filming is a usual tactic of the programme, and indeed some were screened on the night of 21 February, but not the antiquities dealers. Why not? Clearly, in general, the BBC are not averse to using such methods as on their evening news programme of 28 February hidden cameras were in action filming the showroom of a Bangkok antiquities dealer.

It seems that the BBC Head of Current Affairs, Ms Helen Boaden, had ordered the *Crime Squad* films to be cut under threat of legal action from the dealers involved. This seems to imply that there were observations or opinions expressed on film that they would not like to see generally broadcast. We are used to dealers keeping secret details of provenance. Now, it seems, they also want to keep secret the reasons they give to customers for keeping secret the details of provenance. When approached, Ms Boaden defended her decision by saying that the material was not incriminating and that there was no evidence of disreputable activity.

There are two issues here. One is of immediate interest: what was said on camera? The transcripts of the films should be released imme-

diately into the public domain. Ms Boaden might think the contents were not incriminating, but the Italian *Carabinieri* might take a different view, particularly as one dealer apparently admitted to selling antiquities that had still been in Italy two years ago. The second issue, though, is of more general concern. The BBC is a publicly funded broadcasting service, and should be accountable to that public. If it is going to continue to use hidden cameras the public have a right to know under what circumstances, and who decides what is screened. Is the Head of Current Affairs to act as judge and jury? Surely not. Episodes such as this undermine public confidence in the BBC — who knows what other secret films have been dropped under pressure from powerful vested interests, and who now can trust the BBC?

Professor David Wilson, who took part in the programme, describes his own impressions of the antiquities trade on page 5.



Italy's request for the United States to impose import restrictions on a wide range of archaeological material has brought into question the role played by Italy's antiquities laws in encouraging the illicit trade. The argument has been developed, most recently for instance on the front page of December 1999's *Art Newspaper*, that Italy's strict antiquities legislation is partly responsible for the criminalization of the trade and the looting of archaeological sites, and that the archaeology of Italy would be better served by a more lenient legislation on the British model, which allows the private ownership and export of antiquities but which also encourages finders to sell material to museums. This is a complicated — some might say confused — argument, however, and none of its component parts stand up to close scrutiny.

First is the claim that Italy's legislation encourages looting and the illicit trade. Certainly, breaking Italian laws must constitute a criminal act, and thus the illegal movement (smuggling) of antiquities out of Italy is a criminal activity. If the laws were relaxed the trade would become legal, that much is clear, but would such a change in Italy's laws ameliorate the looting? Experience in other countries, the United States for instance, suggests not. The presumption that an increased availability of licit antiquities would diminish loot-

ing presupposes an inelastic demand, but in reality demand can easily be stretched and the market is supply-led. If antiquities trading was decriminalized in Italy the chances are that the market would explode.

It is, in any case, difficult to sustain the argument that Italy's export control is, in practice, unusually draconian. The development of the European single market has caused a dismantling of border controls so that export restrictions within Europe are difficult to police, and antiquities can move around quite freely. This was rectified for cultural material (including antiquities) when in 1993 a unified system of export control was put in place around the European Union, so that antiquities from Italy for instance, exported from another member state, require a licence to be issued in the country of export. In effect, export control was shifted from Italy to the United Kingdom — a major exporter of Italian antiquities. Yet unprovenanced Italian antiquities are exported willy-nilly from the United Kingdom with no checks made on their origin or the legality of their first acquisition. Thus rather than blame the looting on Italy's strict export control, it might be more honest to blame it instead upon the British, and ask what is being done by Her Majesty's Government to exert a level of control over looted Italian antiquities that its EU partner has a right to expect.

The British side of the argument similarly fails to convince. In the United Kingdom any major archaeological site of the kind being looted in Italy would be scheduled. That is to say it would be protected by law and unauthorized excavation would constitute a criminal offence — a situation not dissimilar to that which prevails in Italy. In the United Kingdom there are currently over 13,000 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Antiquities allowed into private ownership in Britain are generally found out of context and, by and large, would not excite a collector to the same degree as an Etruscan bronze or an Apulian vase.

As already suggested, it is certainly the case that British export regulations are more lenient

than Italy's, so that antiquities can, quite legally, be exported, but it does not follow that British archaeology benefits. There has been no systematic study of archaeological destruction in Britain, perhaps because it has not in the past been perceived as a problem. Half an hour spent scanning internet auction sales suggests otherwise. It is anybody's guess what the true scale of the looting is. Until reliable data are available it is simply disingenuous to claim that the British system discourages looting.

Thus there are no clear contrasts to be drawn between the British and Italian legislations. When it comes to the protection of archaeological sites the British system is little different to the Italian. Italian export legislation is not as effective as it could be as it is undermined by the more *laissez-faire* British, and it is not certain to what extent British rules deter looting — if at all. They certainly do nothing to stop the looting in Italy. And the fundamental point remains that the Italian archaeological heritage is far richer than the British, and so much more difficult to conserve. So let us hear no more about Italy's antiquities laws and concentrate instead on the real problem — the marketing of Italy's past in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.



In Britain, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on cultural property has been hearing evidence about the illicit trade from representatives of museums, the trade, archaeological organizations and the police. It is set to publish its report in July. Then on 12 April Mr Alan Howarth, the Minister for Arts, announced that H.M. Government is to hold a separate enquiry into the illicit trade, with the participation of expert advisers drawn from outside the interested Government departments, and will look again at the UNESCO and Unidroit Conventions. The Government also hopes to decide what action needs to be taken sometime during the autumn.

NEIL BRODIE

Undercover in antiquities

DAVID WILSON

Going undercover as a researcher, in this case as a reporter for the BBC1 series *Crime Squad* is not something to be done lightly. All kinds of ethical issues have to be considered, because in the end covert research involves a form of deceit. Nonetheless as Nigel Fielding (1993, 158) observes, covert research can sometimes be justified 'on the basis that some groups, especially powerful élites would otherwise be closed to research'.

One such powerful élite includes antiquities dealers, and we can see aspects of that power in the culture which surrounds their business. For example they choose to advertise a variety of impressive sounding academic and professional qualifications and, in common with most powerful élites, they are remarkably secretive. This secrecy is most apparent in relation to how they come to be in possession of the articles which they seek to sell. The ubiquitous 'The property of a Gentleman' — clearly an allusion to the culture described earlier — might re-assure some of the provenance of a particular item, but would you accept that this was all that you needed to know if you were buying a second-hand car? Context as they say is everything.

What is crime?

As a criminologist I have always been fascinated by the way that some activities come to be described as legal, and others — which might do similar damage — remain legitimate. Look at drugs for instance. Smoking cannabis is quite clearly illegal, despite recent attempts to decriminalize it, whilst alcohol remains legal and drinking one of the favourite pastimes of the British. Both do damage, but we choose to see one activity as criminal and the other as acceptable. Some of the reasons behind this double-standard are historic (and beyond the scope of this short article) but what is of interest is how powerful lobbies maintain an actual campaign to ensure that drinking is seen as culturally desirable, and how the government colludes in this process by raising revenue from the sale of alco-

hol. For the 'we' in the phrase 'we choose' rarely includes you and me, but rather refers to judges, magistrates, politicians, barristers and lawyers who often have very little in common with the man or woman 'in the street'.

Thus 'crime' becomes a label rather than something tangible, and a label that can be applied to an activity by those who have the power to assign that label. Politicians and judges have that power, whereas you and I do not. Indeed in one sense we could abolish 'crime' tomorrow simply by removing that label from those activities which have been labelled as such. And, if you think about it, some lobbies will fight to prevent the label 'crime' or 'criminal' being applied to what they do now and in the future.

Antiquities and 'crime'

I've spent some time discussing the issue of 'what is crime' and 'label' as it is clear that the context and culture in which an activity takes place determines what label will be applied to that activity. The legitimate business of selling second-hand motors is culturally seen as 'dodgy' and suspect, and is perceived to be dominated by 'Del-boys'. On the other hand, art and antiquities is perceived in a totally different way, and Heaven forbid if anyone should challenge that perception.

That's what I did — or at least tried to do — for *Crime Squad*. Going undercover, and posing as a naïve buyer of Etruscan antiquities I was able to see, first-hand, antiquities dealers tout their wares. Asking if they could 'guarantee authenticity' routinely the salesmen — they were all men — would show me guarantee after guarantee, and trade on their 'international' reputations. On the other hand, if I asked where the article actually came from they would become misty-eyed, mentioning 'The Grand Tour', and talk in the most general, unacademic ways. Why should this be so? What should I infer from the obvious evasions of answering a simple question? If I was buying a car I would demand a log book, but seemingly in the antiquities trade all I had was someone's 'word as a gentleman'.

Now all of this wouldn't be so bad if we didn't know that Etruscan tombs have been widely looted, and that the *carabinieri's* art squad are almost daily trying to draw attention to the international trade in stolen antiquities. 'London'

— as I was informed by a *tomborolo* — ‘is central to that trade’, and he then went on to name a number of dealers off the record. Indeed a 1997 Channel 4 documentary drew attention to the fact that many unprovenanced antiquities subsequently found their way into the auction rooms of Sotheby’s (Watson 1999, 4). *Crime Squad* wanted to bring that picture more up to date, but ultimately was frustrated in doing so in the way that it would have wanted to by a series of issues — one of which related to the power of the antiquities trade to fend off criticism. For me as a ‘punter’ this is an illustration of their power, and as a criminologist simply another example of how

the label ‘crime’ comes to be applied or not applied as the case may be.

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In the News

JENNY DOOLE

Steinhardt phiale and other returns

- On 11 February US Customs Commissioner Raymond Kelly officially **returned the Steinhardt phiale to the Italian government**. The phiale has been the subject of long legal battles in the US, but its return was made possible by the US Supreme Court’s refusal in January to hear an appeal against earlier court rulings (see: ‘In The News’ *CWC* issues 2 & 5). It will now be exhibited briefly in Rome, before being put on permanent display in a museum in Sicily.
- FEBRUARY: US Customs officials in Dallas **returned to Italy human bones** believed to have been excavated from Palaeolithic sites in Savona and Imperia by Frederick Hosmer Zambelli. The ‘**Zambelli Collection**’ was offered for sale on an **Internet site based in Texas** by a Dallas archaeologist. After a year-long investigation, following a request from the Italian Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Department of Justice and US Customs Service traced sales to private collectors in Texas, Oklahoma and North Carolina and the artefacts were seized.
- **267 artefacts** looted from the region of Puglia were **returned by France to Italy** in December last year. The objects, including vases, amphorae, platters and terracottas, were seized by French customs agents from an Italian crossing the border from **Luxembourg** to France in 1981. By 1994, Italian police and Interpol had tracked the hoard to a storeroom in the **Louvre**, and after years of wrangling the items have finally been repatriated.
- A marble **head of Nefertari**, wife of Ramses II, was **returned to Egypt** in January. It was amongst pieces brought to Britain by convicted smuggler **Jonathan Tokeley-Parry** (see: ‘In The News’ *CWC* issues 1 & 4). The buyer, who has not been identified, initially refused to return it on the grounds that it was a fake. Examination by the British Museum proved that the sculpture was genuine, although it had been **damaged and disguised** to look like a tourist souvenir by using stone dust drilled from the core of the sculpture to make a new face. The original face may still remain under the fake application. One further piece from the Tokeley-Parry hoard — a head of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, undamaged and unaltered — is still the subject of legal negotiations.



Strong antiquities sales

Following the success of the antiquities sales in New York in December 1999, The Art Newspaper (January) reports that the city has emerged as probably the most important centre for the antiquities trade. A survey of dealers, auction house specialists and museum curators revealed:

- a steady increase in the number of clients spending more than \$50,000 per year;
- that most collectors are professionals — physicians, attorneys, Wall Street traders or technology entrepreneurs;
- the emergence of new collectors from Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Latin America;
- that the stock market is driving the trade: the antiquities market is perceived as undervalued;
- that museum initiatives and exhibitions help drive the market;
- that the illicit trade is considered a ‘dying dinosaur issue’ (Frederick Schultz) although concerns over authenticity may explain relatively low prices;
- that interior designers are making increasing use of antiquities.

Meanwhile in *Minerva* magazine (Mar/Apr 2000), Jerome Eisenberg, commenting on the substantial increase in antiquities sales over the last five years, suggested that ‘the many diatribes against the antiquities trade’ by archaeologists attempting to raise public awareness of looting may in fact have **encouraged new collectors** to begin purchasing antiquities. He noted that while there seems to be plenty of material on the market, one of the biggest problems for auction houses is the scarcity of single-owner sales.

Cambodian update

- **122 pieces** of stolen bas-relief and sculpture have been **returned to Cambodia** from Thailand. They include 117 fragments from the Khmer temple of **Banteay Chmar** (see: ‘In The News’ CWC issues 4 & 5), and 5 from a July 1999 raid on galleries in the **River City antiques mall, Bangkok**.

The items have already been exhibited at Thailand’s National Museum in Bangkok and will now go on display for two months at the National Museum in Phnom Penh as part of Cambodia’s campaign to raise public awareness about looting.

- Cambodian officials say a **formal agreement with Thailand** on co-operation to halt cross-border smuggling is being worked on.
- Emergency restrictions imposed by the US Government on the import of a range of Cambodian sculpture has, according to Rena Mouloupoulos, the worldwide compliance director for Sotheby’s, led to a ‘marked increase in questions from collectors and dealers concerning these sculptures’.



Looting and China

- In January, He Shuzhong, a Chinese legal expert and international treaty negotiator for China’s State Cultural Relics Bureau, **launched a WWW site** (see illustration on p. 8) to publicize the scale of and damage caused by looting in China. The English language site (which receives support from www.museum-security.org) can be found at <http://www.culturalheritagewatch.com>.
- The Chinese State Bureau of Cultural Relics is reported to have sent thirty representatives on a month-long visit to heritage sites in Henan, Hebei, Shanxi and Shaanxi to **increase public awareness** of the problems of heritage protection and preservation.





陵的六十一王真。谁知此我忍？
Lone Works in Qian Tomb. Who is the ruffian?

- A tenth-century **Chinese marble wall panel**, offered for sale at **Christie's New York** in the 21 March auction (sale estimate \$400,000 to \$500,000), has been impounded by US authorities. The lawsuit identifies the piece as one of the carved relief wall sculptures stolen from the **tomb of Wang Chuhzi**, in Hebei Province which was looted in 1994. During the raid ten panels were ripped from the walls of the tomb, which was excavated by archaeologists the following year when two more painted marble reliefs were removed. *The Art Newspaper* (May) suggests that it is extraordinary that Christie's stated in their sale catalogue that the carving appeared to be very closely related to the panels from that very tomb, yet **did not check with Chinese authorities** whether it *was* one of the looted pieces. Christie's is co-operating fully with US Customs investigations, and the consigner **M & C Gallery, in Hong Kong**, may appeal if they choose.
- A large **stone head of Bodhisattva**, in the controversial collection of the **Miho Museum**, Japan (see: 'In The News' *CWC* issue 2), has been identified as **stolen from Box-ing County, China**. Cultural Heritage Watch claimed that a picture of the sculpture had been published in an archaeological report in *Wenwu* magazine in 1983. The Miho Museum's Swiss-based lawyer, Mario Roberty, said that the discovery was a shock to his museum clients since they had **exercised 'careful due diligence'** by checking that it did not appear on any available data base. It had been acquired from **Eskenazi**

Oriental Art, London, in 1996 who had acquired it in good faith from **another London art dealer**. Roberty added that, although under no legal obligation (Japan has not ratified the UNESCO or Unidroit conventions) the Miho Museum would **arrange for sculpture to be repatriated**.

- **FEBRUARY: Three men were executed** for stealing **15 Tang Dynasty murals** from a museum in **Liquan, Shaanxi province**, between 1992 and 1994. Three accomplices (including the wife of one), who gave them keys to the museums were given lesser sentences. The murals, from the tomb of Wei Guifei, an emperor's concubine, were sold on in **Guangzhou** near Hong Kong and two have since been recovered.
- 54 boxes containing **more than 100 ancient porcelain artefacts** were impounded from a boat at **Tianjin**. A Korean man, who was setting sail for Korea with the pieces was arrested.
- Four suspects were reportedly arrested in **Liaoning Province** trying to sell a pair of **bronzes** to undercover policemen for about US\$100,000. Other Eastern Zhou period bronzes were found in the suspects' homes.
- Farmers are reported to have pulled down the 2nd to 9th storeys of a **13-metre-tall pagoda** in Shanxi Province in an attempt to steal the **Ming dynasty walls and Buddhist statues**.



Crucial context

After eight years scholars have restored and partly deciphered a very rare example of **Etruscan writing** on a bronze tablet, but need to know the tablet's true provenance and context in order to understand it fully. Known as the *Tabula Cortonensis*, it was found in 1992 by carpenter Giovanni Ghiottini, allegedly on a building site at **Cortona**, on the Umbrian-Tuscan border. But police believe Ghiottini may not have found it where he claims, and that he

may have tried to sell it. If the object's true history were known, scholars might even be able to locate a **crucial, but mysteriously missing piece** of the tablet.

Illicit antiquities in India

In January, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence agents seized illicit antiquities from a **Singapore-bound** container ship at **Chennai docks**. Documents showed the shipment should consist of 600 bags of rice. In fact, there were only 50, and the rest of the cargo was contraband including the antiquities, deer horn antlers and sandalwood. Three people have been arrested, one being the manager of a Chennai-based export company.

Protection and destruction of Afghanistan's cultural heritage

- A museum, partially funded by the Swiss government and backed by UNESCO, has been established in **Bubendorf, Switzerland** to care for cultural **material looted from Afghanistan**. Its curator, Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, says that the project has the full backing of the Taliban and Northern Alliance governments in Afghanistan. Some archaeological material, including the **Airekhaunum bronzes** has already been sent by sources in the Northern Alliance and some 3000 other pieces are expected to arrive from north and south Afghanistan, Pakistan and Europe, when the museum building is ready. Private collectors and government officials have promised artefacts. The museum is seen as a **temporary safe house** for the collection; when the situation permits, a joint agreement between the Afghan and Swiss authorities will return the objects to Afghanistan.
- *The Art Newspaper* (June) reports eye-witness damage to archaeological sites in Afghanistan, including:
 - the destruction of the Ghandharan site of

Tepe Shutur and the **museum in Hadd** in the late 1980s with objects being sold to Pakistani dealers;

- aerial bombing and then looting of the early Sasanid stupa and monastic complex at **Guldara**;
- the systematic stripping of **Ai Khanum**, the famous site excavated by French archaeologists, again for sale in Pakistan.

Two systems of looting are highlighted: **bottom up**, where locals sell finds to syndicates of middlemen, who sell on to dealers; or **top down**, where collectors put in requests to the dealers, who notify syndicates, who then brief locals about demand for specific objects. The middlemen apparently have research libraries and sometimes 'hire' sites from landowners. There is also evidence that objects stolen from sites in the North are increasingly being **smuggled through Tashkent and Uzbekistan** to Afghan contacts in Russia, and the Russian mafia.

Stolen coin alert

The British Numismatic Trade Association in Britain has warned that an **undeclared British hoard** of third-century AD Roman coins has surfaced on the market in **London and New York**. It is thought to consist of between 6000 and 16,000 coins and include rare examples from the reign of Laelian (AD 268). Although a Continental provenance may have been invented, the *Antiques Trade Gazette* (11 Mar. 2000) has pointed out that dealing in these pieces would still constitute an offence under the **Treasure Act** and, if they were illegally removed from private land, under the **Theft Act**.

Ethical dilemma

The archaeological community has been divided over **Professor Karen Vitelli's** decision to accept money from the **White-Levy archaeological publications foundation** and then criticize her funders for collecting

antiquities. Vitelli received a \$40,000 grant from the foundation, which serves the admirable purpose of enabling archaeologists to publish 'dead digs'. In the introduction to her volume on the Franchthi cave she thanked Leon Levy and Shelby White, who are prominent collectors, but also encouraged them to see the damage caused by collecting undocumented antiquities.

Archaeologists vs looters

More evidence from around the world of the race between archaeologists and looters:

- A **Roman villa** has been discovered near **Boscorease, Campania** following illegal digging there. Among artefacts confiscated from the looters were a carved marble altar, a bronze candelabra, glass vases and a seal which apparently bears the name of the villa's owner.
- The Iraqi Museum has rushed excavation teams to three little-known **Sumerian sites in southern Iraq** following reports of looting. By February the archaeologists had recovered more than **5000 artefacts**, including rare cylinder seals and inscribed cuneiform tablets, which will help reconstruct another page of Mesopotamian history. Looters are believed to have **intensified their activities** in southern Iraq, despite heavy penalties.

Some statistics

- It is estimated that Italian archaeologists have excavated 80 tombs in the area of the ancient town of Crustumerium since 1987, while *tombaroli* have looted more than 1000.
- During 1999 the Italian *carabinieri* recovered 27,000 archaeological pieces, more than twice as many as in 1998.

Red alert on West African antiquities

ICOM (International Council of Museums), with support from the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development and the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, has published a dossier of information about **eight categories of African archaeological objects under particularly serious threat** from looting today. This **Red List** should prove useful for museums, art dealers, and police and customs officials and will be widely distributed as part of a campaign to raise awareness of African archaeological heritage. More information is available at <http://www.icom.org/redlist/>

Controversial new gallery at Louvre

The Louvre has been criticized by ICOM and archaeologists for opening a new £18 million extension to display art from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas on the grounds that some of the exhibits **could have been looted**. Highlights in the new gallery include two newly-purchased **Nok terracottas**, whose export from Nigeria has been illegal since 1943.

International initiatives

In January ICOM signed a memorandum of understanding with the **World Customs Organization** (WCO) to co-operate in the fight against the illicit traffic in cultural property. A further agreement was signed with **INTERPOL** in April. These agreements will **strengthen co-operation** between the three organizations both officially and in practical terms, and **joint projects** should soon be underway, including preparation of tools for raising awareness, setting up training programmes for customs officers, and distribution to customs and police officials of ICOM information on illicit traffic.

Peruvian replicas

The National Institute of Culture, Peru is to **sell reproductions** of ancient Peruvian artefacts at **Lima airport** in an attempt to stem the flow of illicit antiquities via tourists.

Commons hearings

The UK government **Select Committee on Culture** has begun its investigation into '**Cultural Property: Return and Illicit Trade**', and has already heard evidence on behalf of archaeologists, dealers, and the police. The Committee is expected to report its findings in July.

Mufti released

MAY: **Sheikh Taj E-Din Hilaly**, leader of Australia's Muslim community, has returned **home from Egypt**. In January the Mufti was sentenced by an Egyptian court to one year's hard labour for **allegedly conspiring with a smuggling ring** responsible for illegal digs and murder (see: 'In The News' CWC issues 4 & 5). A subsequent appeal found the **judgment invalid**, and on his return to Australia the Mufti announced that he was confident he would be cleared by **further court hearings** in October.

Spanish thefts

Police in **Madrid** have arrested a museum worker following a tip off that he intended to **sell stolen material** on the black market. The warehouse supervisor from the Archaeology Museum of Catalonia allegedly **stole 4000 items**, including Phoenician coins and Etruscan vases, while he was responsible for overseeing the museum's store during the 1990s.

Corinth arrests

JANUARY: Greek police announced the **arrest of two Greek men** — Anastasios Karaholios and Iannis Loris — in connection with the 1990 robbery from Corinth Archaeological Museum during which 271 antiquities and money were stolen (see: 'In The News' CWC issue 5). Guns, drugs and other antiquities were found in Karaholios' home. His father and brother are also being sought and are believed to be in South America. Most of the antiquities from the Corinth raid were discovered in Miami, apparently with the help of one Christos Mavrikis, who had been in prison for carrying out illegal wire tapings for Konstantinos Mitsotakis, Prime Minister of Greece in the early 1990s (who had himself built up an enormous collection of mainly Minoan artefacts which he bought from peasants and on the antiquities market, and has since donated to the Greek State). Six other items from the Corinth robbery, five of which were offered through Christie's New York and sold to two collectors, have now been recovered.

Illicit antiquities in Israel

An increasing number of stories of illicit antiquities from Israel follow archaeologists' warnings of a marked rise in thefts from archaeological sites to feed demand for Millennium souvenirs (see: 'In The News' CWC issue 5):

- **Two men** were each **sentenced to one year in jail** for damaging the Second Temple period site of **Raboa** searching for coins and antiquities. They were caught red-handed with a metal detector, knives and digging equipment. Head of the Antiquities Authority, Armin Ganor, said the sentence may help deter another **six gangs of looters** believed to be operating in the Judean hills.
- MARCH: following a four-year investigation by the Prevention of Theft of Antiquities unit,

a rare **Roman sculpture** was confiscated from a dealer's shop on the Via Dolorosa, Jerusalem, where it was on sale for \$2000. The bust, unusually carved from basalt, was **stolen from a tomb** in a declared but unexcavated ancient site in Northern Israel and probably depicts the woman buried therein.

Importantly, the case has provided the proof for methods used to launder illicit antiquities in Israel. As has long been suspected, **merchants are recording stolen and freshly dug-up antiquities as imports or purchases from other collectors**, which allows them to be put on the market and sold. In this case, the bust was dug up by a local in the Golan Heights, then sold to middlemen, and then to an Israeli dealer who forged documents to indicate that he had imported it from Venezuela. It was then sold to the final dealer in the chain, who is not under suspicion, but the Antiquities Authority have insisted that the others will be tried, and hope that the case will lead to better supervision and control of the licensing of antiquities dealers.

- In March an unemployed artist from Jerusalem was arrested for **allegedly stealing three antiquities** from three separate areas of the **Israel Museum** at different times. They were a jug from Tel Arad, a stela from Hazor and a chalice from Ein Hatzeva. He admitted to stealing other pieces including Roman coins, glass vases, Roman lattices and oil lamps from various archaeological sites. Authorities admitted that he was not a typical antiquities robber since he wanted the pieces in his home, rather than to sell.
- Meanwhile, in January, Zahi Zweig, a third-year **archaeology student** who had brought attention to the dumping of archaeological material during building works, was charged with stealing antiquities and causing damage to archaeological sites. Objects from a number of sites were found in his home, and have now been returned. The Antiquities

Authority stated that they **do not want archaeologists to think that they have immunity** or alibis for taking antiquities.

Turkey to US smuggling

In February, **Joel Malter, a gallery owner from Encino, California** pleaded guilty to **conspiracy to transport 133 artefacts** stolen from ancient tombs in **Turkey**. He faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The wide variety of objects dated from the ninth century BC to twelfth century AD and were worth only \$5000 on the US market. They were recovered in **Oklahoma City** after a complicated chain of events, involving Malter taking possession of the smuggled antiquities when they reached the US, then giving them to a friend after a dispute with a contact in Turkey, then buying them back from federal authorities. **Five people in Turkey have also been convicted** in connection with the case; one worked at the **Incirlik Air Base**, and was considered the main player, another was a **major in the reserve US Air Force**. During the course of the investigations it was established that Malter had dealt in illicit antiquities before.

Lebanese file

Frederick Husseini, the new **head of the Directorate-General of Antiquities** in Lebanon says he has submitted a file on **alleged looting of antiquities by Israelis** during the war years, demanding that stolen antiquities be returned.

Sevso Treasure developments

Art smuggler, **Michel van Rijn**, has claimed that he worked with **Scotland Yard** to help set up a failed sting which was to lead the Yard, Swiss police and the Hungarian government

to the missing pieces of the **Sevso Treasure**, via a **Zurich dealer, Anton Tkalec**.

The *Sunday Times* (20 Feb 2000) reports that there is now convincing evidence that the Treasure was discovered at **Szabadbattyán, Hungary**, by a young local, József Sumegh, who was found hanged in mysterious circumstances in 1980. The paper also revealed that the value of the **out-of-court settlement** awarded to the Marquess of Northampton by his former solicitors Allen & Overy in connection with the case (see In The News CWC issue 4) was a whopping £24 million.

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The Antiques Trade Gazette

Archaeology magazine

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The Observer
The Sunday Times
Sydney Morning Herald
The Times
US Customs Service
The Washington Post

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Red alert in Nigeria

NEIL BRODIE

On 12 May ICOM released its Red List which catalogues African antiquities under imminent threat of looting or theft. The list was drawn up at the AFRICOM-sponsored Workshop on the Protection of the African Cultural Heritage held in Amsterdam in October 1997 and contains eight categories of material, three of which are exclusively Nigerian, and one partly so. That nearly 50 per cent of the Red List is comprised of Nigerian material is a timely reminder of the depredations which that country continues to suffer.

In recent times, the illicit trade in antiquities first began to worry Nigerians during the 1970s and as a result in 1972 Nigeria ratified the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*. In 1977 the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) was established to implement the National Commission for Museums

and Monuments Decree no. 77 which, among other things, forbids any person unauthorized by the NCMM to buy or sell antiquities (Jegede 1996, 128–31). During the 1980s, however, the looting continued and museums were increasingly targeted. In 1987 nine objects were stolen from the National Museum at Jos. Things deteriorated still further during the 1990s when it is estimated that 429 objects were stolen from 33 museums or institutions nationwide (Adeseri 1999b). The Red List reveals that between April 1993 and November 1994, for instance, 40 objects were stolen from the Ife museum while a few years later staff at the Owe Museum were viciously attacked and one was killed. 13 statues were removed from the National Museum of Esie in 1993 and a further 21 in 1995.

It seems that museum staff have been involved in some of these thefts (Jegede 1996, 137; Willett 2000), but that is perhaps excusable when one considers the economic blight that has afflicted West Africa in general over the past couple of decades. Salaries are low and often in arrears and during the 1990s Museum and University staff were forced to strike because of chronic low

pay. As Patrick Darling emphasizes in his article on page 20, the theft and looting of antiquities cannot be seen in isolation, but must be viewed as one part of a larger problem which is at root economic. Indeed, it is a tribute to the professionalism of Nigerian archaeologists that initiatives can still be carried through in the face of Government indifference and economic dislocation.

Corruption at the top is harder to excuse although this now looks set to end as in 1999 the Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched a probe into the NCMM and the Director-General was accused of financial impropriety (Adeseri 1999a,b).

The ICOM Red List is reproduced in full on page 15. Its three Nigerian categories are:

Nok terracottas from the Bauchi Plateau and the Katsina and Sokoto regions. The Nok 'culture' of central Nigeria is thought to have first appeared about 500 BC and to have persisted until AD 200. Nok sites provide some of the earliest indications of iron-working south of the Sahara as well as the first evidence of the use of pottery for figurative sculpture.

Terracottas and bronzes from Ife. Ife, in south-west Nigeria, built towards the end of the first millennium AD, was one of the region's earliest cities and dominated the routes that led from the forests of the Lower Niger region. These anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statues were produced in the area for the following four centuries.

Stone statues from Esie. There are about 800 of these steatite statues which were found together as a cache. Their date is unknown.

The first edition of the earlier ICOM publication *Looting in Africa* led to the seizure by French police of three Ife terracotta heads which were returned to Nigeria in 1996 and already the Red List is having an effect. First under the spotlight

was the Louvre with two newly purchased Nok terracottas. The Louvre claimed that France had agreed with the Nigerian Government to keep the terracottas in exchange for educational help, but the Secretary-General of ICOM remains unconvinced and several Nigerian curators have complained (Henley 2000). This was followed in May by protests from the Governments of Niger and Nigeria that led to the withdrawal of seventeen terracottas from a scheduled sale at the Hôtel Drouot.

These are positive signals but all is still not well. European and North American institutions continue to collect listed material. In a February press release for instance the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts proudly announced its acquisition of a Sokoto terracotta, and included an appreciation of the piece by curator Richard Woodward, but no mention of the theft and destruction. The Nigerian High Commission in London has also complained to Bonhams about its continuing auctions of unprovenanced material from Africa.

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The Red List includes the following categories of archaeological items:

- Nok terracotta from the Bauchi Plateau and the Katsina and Sokoto regions (Nigeria)
- Terracotta and bronzes from Ife (Nigeria)
- Esie stone statues (Nigeria)
- Terracotta, bronzes and pottery from the Niger Valley (Mali)
- Terracotta statuettes, bronzes, potteries, and stone statues from the Bura System (Niger, Burkina Faso)
- Stone statues from the North of Burkina Faso and neighbouring regions
- Terracotta from the North of Ghana (Komaland) and Côte d'Ivoire
- Terracotta and bronzes so-called Sao (Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria)

The rape of Nok and Kwatakwashi: the crisis in Nigerian Antiquities

PATRICK J. DARLING

[Editor's note: This is the text of a report prepared by the author in 1995 at the request of the World Heritage Committee. The term 'Kwatakwashi' refers to material described as Sokoto in the ICOM Red List.]

Throughout history, countries commanding strong military or financial power have encouraged a movement of antiquities and art objects from other nations. Recently, there has been a notable acceleration of this movement, with the looting of unexcavated antiquities in Peru and Egypt receiving the most press attention. The situation in West Africa has received less publicity but is just as worrying. In the 1980s, bronzes were being looted from Jenne in Mali, and fifteenth- to seventeenth-century material was being stolen and sold from Komaland in Ghana and from Bankoni in Mali. Apparently, the Bankoni mate-

rial still appears on the market, but Jenne bronzes are now difficult to find.

The scale of these sales, however, pales into insignificance against the massive influx of 'Nok' and what I will term 'Kwatakwashi' terracottas from Nigeria into Europe in recent times. A few years ago, a Nok head would fetch \$20–30,000 on the world market: now a similar head fetches less than \$100. This report helps to explain how this has happened. It has been given verbally to the Director of Museums and Monuments in Lagos, as well as to the World Heritage Committee Chairman, who has advised me to set it out in writing, together with the range of options to counteract the effects of this organized and systematic rape of some of Nigeria's earliest material culture.

Many of the 'facts' draw heavily on second-hand expatriate gossip in Lagos in 1995 and their veracity would be totally suspect were it not that most 'facts' cross-check well with reports coming from Europe, with odd pieces of unsolicited information, and with previously published data. In the few cases where I have had first-hand experience of the material, I have introduced the personal pronoun to make this clear. This report, therefore, aims to reconstruct what has happened

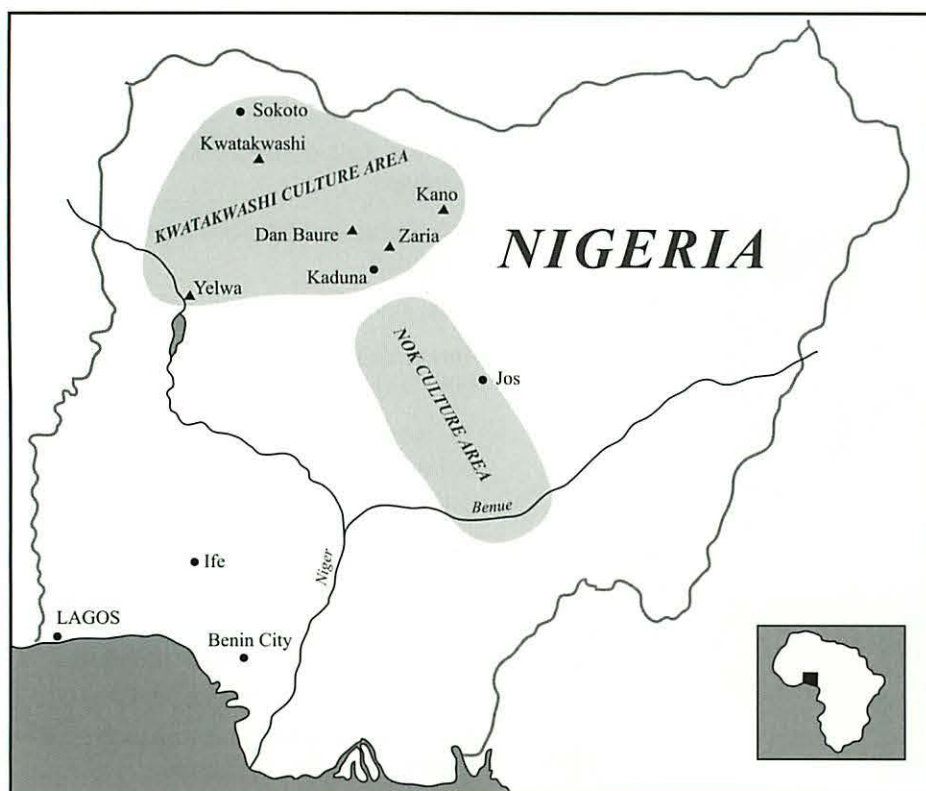


Figure 1. Extent of Nok and Kwatakwashi (Sokoto/Katsina) cultures.

and where, and to suggest various possible remedies: there is neither the data nor the intention to identify any individuals involved.

Archaeological excavations require a legal permit; but this has been by-passed by some people becoming Accreditation Agents in mining, which gives them the right to open the ground in their search for minerals and, therefore, a quasi-legal basis for 'coming across' buried antiquities. It only required a shift in the search focus from cassiterite to surface sherds and past cooking stones (grouped in threes) to considerably increase the incidence of 'coming across' such antiquities. Searching around inselbergs was another fruitful strategy. Numerous diggers, including local villagers, would cover a wide area, then all would converge on sites where terracottas begun to be found.

These strategies became so successful that it is estimated that on average ten terracottas were being discovered in each day of digging, which would have yielded about 3000 terracottas every year. Of these, a few hundred were very good pieces commanding a high market price: they were rapidly removed by key traders to Lome and Cotonou, from where they were sent to Europe. The pieces of secondary value tended to

move much more slowly; and many terracottas were broken *in situ*. Two main 2000-year-old cultures have been affected: Nok, and what I term 'Kwatakwashi' after the hill site from which the best examples of this ancient culture's terracottas have been recovered (Fig. 1).

According to reports from earlier this century, Kwatakwashi was a hill settlement with a shrine of considerable importance (Fig. 3). During the 1994 World Heritage Sites trip, my attention was drawn to this site by Professor Mahdi Adamu (Sokoto), who rated Kwatakwashi second only to Kwiambana in terms of

ancient history in Sokoto State. The Head of Station at Kaduna Museum, Dr Chafe, invited me to travel with him to check on reports about illegal excavations at Kwatakwashi: that arrangement fell through but, as I was travelling that way anyhow, I carried out the work and submitted short reports of what I noted on and around Kwatakwashi hill to the National Museums at Kano and Jos; and included illustrations of what I was able to photograph in my 1994 report on World Heritage Sites for Nigeria (Figs. 2 & 4).

The torsos and heads of these Kwatakwashi figures came from villages some kilometres away from the main high inselberg. They seem to be less finely executed than most Nok ware. One figure has curious horn-like protuberances and may be an effigy of a goat or monkey; another figure is bearded and has been made with distorted legs but no arms; whilst incision has been widely used on a third figurine to indicate fingers and to emphasize features including what may be an umbilical hernia. The rudimentary fingers and shapes are similar to figurines excavated in Yelwa and dated to 1700 years ago. The umbilical hernia feature has been noted on one of the terracottas deliberately smashed by the people of Dan Baure (the fragments being placed in

Gidan Makama Museum, Kano by me in 1985), as well as a terracotta from Gashua recently donated to the National Museum, Lagos.

It is said that the best quality complete figurines up to a metre high were dug from the main Kwatakwashi hill, including one of an old man with an elongated neck and beard; and there were many bowls abandoned by the looters at the site. Similar figurines have been reported from closer to Sokoto and as far north as Kaura Namode; and systematic digging has taken place in inselberg environs over much of northwestern and north-central Nigeria. European art collectors had the figurines thermoluminescence (TL) dated to about 1500–2000 years ago; but there was a limited market for Kwatakwashi ware, which was perceived as being cruder than Nok: its price fell, and searches concentrated on the Nok area again.

The significance of the Kwatakwashi culture lies in its geographical distribution and in its dating. If the findings of ‘grave goods’ and odd figurines from Zaria and Kano are included with the other similar terracottas noted above, then their distribution is roughly coincident with that of all the later Hausa States (see Fig. 1). It would be premature to state definitely that this culture belonged to the ancestors of those now living in Hausaland; but interpretations suggesting otherwise would have to invoke events more traumatic than the nineteenth-century Jihad to displace complete populations over such a vast area. The dating is contemporaneous with the latter part of the Nok culture adjacent to the southeast; and this raises some interesting questions about Early Iron Age cultural dispersion and/or migrations from the Nok northwest to the Kwatakwashi areas. The 1994 spate of looting has caused much damage; but it has also uncovered enough new material to identify the most extensive culture in Nigeria’s early history — and that is a significant positive discovery.

The market shift back to Nok figurines meant that all the half-dozen or so main traders moved to work in roughly the same Nok culture areas by mid-1994. Some excellent pieces were dug out from the area around Mupa Upare Hill between Kachia and Kakarko, and the diggers moved systematically southwards into the Katuga/Kakargo area and then towards Suleja in 1995. Most of the terracottas came from under flat stone



Figure 2. 2000-year-old terracotta head irrevocably damaged by looters.

slabs laid horizontally about 60 cm or so below the surface; but, curiously, there were no reports of buried skeletons in their vicinity. The finds included complete figurines about a metre high and considerably better than anything previously excavated. There were ‘action pieces’ of women grinding, and of men leaning elbows on their knees. There were face masks 60–90 cm in diameter. Humanized heads of various animals included dog and snake effigies (the most common) and some much rarer ones of cat and rhinoceros. Snakes were a common decoration on many pots. As the diggers worked new areas, regional variations in Nok culture art were revealed; but no record was made of which variation came from which region, and there were no photographs to record the supreme examples or the width of variation of ancient Nok art.

In May or June 1994, the work in the Katuga/

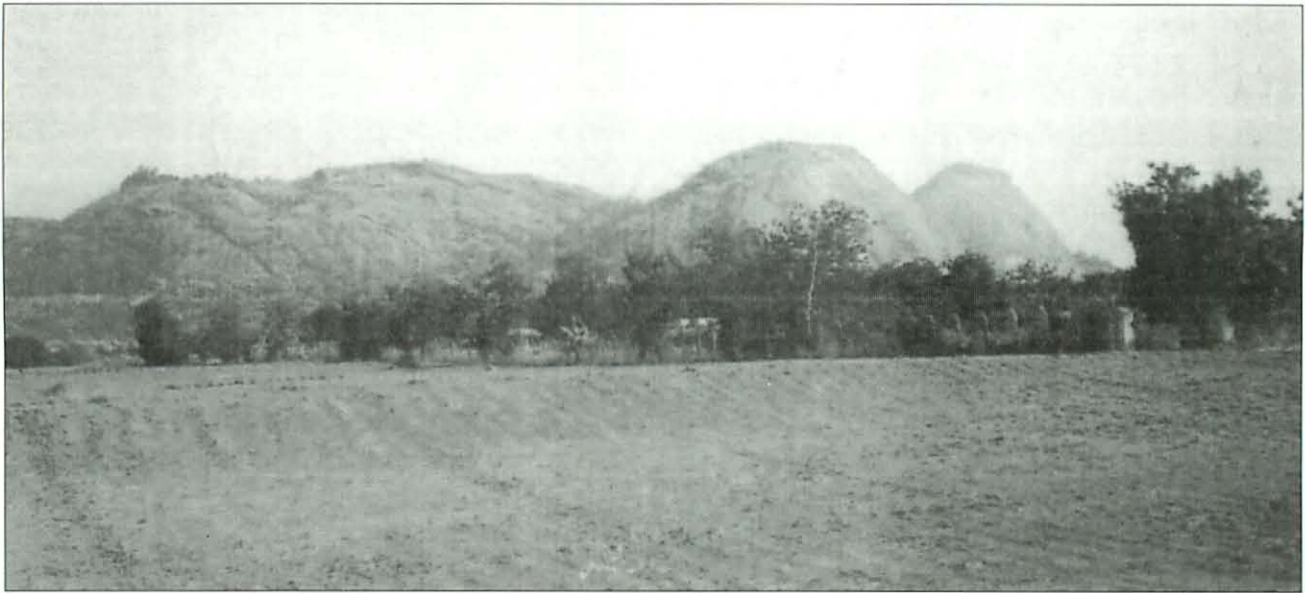


Figure 3. *Kwatakwasshi Hill. A major 2500-year-old religious centre looted of its sacred terracottas.*

Kakarko area was halted and it is claimed that there was police and/or army intervention. Digging resumed in early October 1994. By this stage, those who had heeded the ban on illegal excavation found themselves with severe cash-flow problems, and their scale of operation declined. Two main traders emerged, each being able to employ about a thousand diggers to systematically loot the rest of the Nok culture. Apparently, they both had ostentatious houses; and by July 1995 both had been hit by armed robbers.

The attitudes of local communities to terracotta figurines is important. At Dan Baure (west of Zaria) in 1983, local people told me they had smashed terracottas because they were idols. Similar ideas underlie some thinking at higher levels, which shows little interest in pre-Islamic Hausa history (there are parallels for pre-Christian artefacts in southern Nigeria). At Kwatakwasshi, I found the local leaders puzzled over the age and meaning of the figurines; but most of their people welcomed the opportunity of making money from the mass diggings — each worker then received N1000 for any good find, and the dealers were selling each terracotta for about N35,000. However, at Chafe, the local chief refused to allow any digging. In the Nok culture areas, the price of the best pieces reach a few hundred thousand naira or perhaps more; but it is not clear whether there is any significant feed-back of this revenue to local communities. There have been more refusals by local communities

to allow digging in the areas further south towards Suleja; and this has been a major factor in slowing down the mass diggings. It is not certain whether economic or cultural reasons underlie these increasing refusals; but they provide a ray of hope for future conservation of the remaining Nok culture.

In the 1970s, Victoria Island in Lagos had been the main centre of art dealers. When Nigerian legislation on antiquities became enforced, this activity moved to Lome and Cotonou (in neighbouring Togo & Benin), where the laws permit the exporting of antiques. Tightening up on border controls has inhibited some movement of antiquities; but alternative routes through Nigeria's 'porous borders', including diplomatic bags, have been used to by-pass such measures.

Art dealers in Brussels and Paris appear to be the main recipients; but Germany, Holland, Switzerland and England have been cited as other countries in which dealers are collecting Nok and Kwatakwasshi terracotta figurines. These collections are illegal and, therefore, the items are kept secret. As dealers have been stung by fakes from Nigeria, each terracotta is dated by thermoluminescence: a small hole is drilled in the back of the terracotta and a pottery fragment is taken away for dating together with a polaroid picture of the object concerned. As Nigerian traders wash all the soil out of the terracottas, there is no background soil count and this may affect the reliability and standard deviation of the TL re-

sults. The use of the polaroid picture for the resulting dating certificate means that the private art collector in Europe has the only record of the piece that he has secretly bought. The illegality of the Nok and Kwatakwasshi terracottas means that both dealers and collectors keep their actions covert; and items only very rarely come to light. Consequently, there is almost no record of what Nigeria has lost: almost two complete ancient cultures have been looted, and there are no photographs, no records of associated artefacts, no mapping of past settlement distribution, and no noting of stylistic comparisons or archaeological provenances. In this respect, it could be argued that the law is counterproductive.

Museum thefts are on the increase worldwide and Nigeria has not been unaffected. There have been at least two thefts of objects from the Jos museum public displays; and the pottery museum has also been affected. Recently, other museums have been hard hit. Ife has lost all but a dented bronze head; and Esie, Nigeria's first museum, has lost many of its pieces: both museums have been closed. Less spectacular has been the steady drain of lesser thefts which, in the past, has included the non-return of items loaned out for exhibition elsewhere. In many cases, photographic records and descriptions of the missing objects are poor; and there has been little public outcry over these tragic losses.

Museums and art collections are foreign concepts to most Nigerians. Much of Nigerian art belongs to cultures now being actively rejected by those espousing Islamic or Christian faiths, which are growing at the expense of traditional religions. In a period of austerity, the urgency of meeting daily needs is the main concern of many Nigerians; and the conservation of past culture is regarded as something of a luxury. Most public primary school children never see a museum; so the value of past material culture is not imbued at an early age. As the processes of development and change take place, many of the best elements of Nigeria's past culture are becoming bulldozed, eroded, burnt or stolen. Future generations of Nigerians may be better informed and appreciate the value of what has been lost — albeit too late. The question is not simply one of preventing antiquities being exported or stolen. The value of recorded

knowledge of Nigeria's past cultures should outweigh the value of the cultural objects themselves; for such knowledge leads to a better understanding and appreciation of Nigeria's past culture.

Main options

Options involve processes of choice, prioritization and compromise in the pursuit of multiple, and sometimes conflicting objectives. In the case of the above problems, the range of objectives could include:

- (a) deterring the export of antiquities through legal measures;
- (b) recovering illegally exported antiquities;
- (c) preventing the theft of antiquities from museums;
- (d) obtaining a full record of illegally exported antiquities;
- (e) earning foreign exchange from controlled export sales.

When it comes to policy formulation, though, the present law endorses only objectives (a), (b) and (c) and makes no provision for the objectives (d) and (e). Indeed, the pursuance of objective (b) would be perceived as being hypocritical if there were not strong parallel efforts to meet objective (d); and objectives (a) and (e) appear to be directly contradictory. National Museum policy, therefore, has to decide which are its most important and realizable objectives.

One way of coming to terms with conflicting objectives is to examine the various practical options available to achieve each objective, then aim for what economists term a 'second-best solution', i.e. a pragmatic acceptance that some ideals will be impossible to achieve, and that pursuing them will be of less overall benefit than attempting the issues that can be achieved. The matrix listing helps towards this (see Table 1).

A temporary amnesty on all Nigerian antiquities in Europe would allow art collectors and art dealers to register all major items and to provide a good photographs and TL dates of the finest pieces. Nigeria would then know much more about its early past cultures; major items could be traced back to their original sites and their archaeological provenances reconstructed. A key incentive of such an amnesty would be that registered items could then be sold at public auction. This would encourage collectors to register their

Table 1. Solutions matrix.

Option	Effectiveness for objectives				
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Step up border and airport controls	F	—	P	—	—
Examine diplomatic baggage	P	—	P	—	—
Take known traders to court	F	—	P	—	—
Press Interpol search for stolen property	P	P	P	P	—
Declare temporary amnesty in Europe for registration, recording and auction		F	P	VG	
i) pay nominal compensation for return	P	F	P	P	—
ii) pay market price for return	P	VG	P	G	—
Revise law to allow controlled export	F	P	P	F	G
Loan only replicas of objects for exhibition elsewhere	G	—	G	—	—
Increase the daily usage of museums so that everyone involved receives more job satisfaction and income	—	—	G	—	F
Good-quality recording of museum items	—	F	F	G	F
Rescue archaeology on looted sites	—	—	—	G	—

(Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor)

items and also provide an opportunity for the Nigerian government to buy back particularly fine pieces at nominal or market rates. It is envisaged that the amnesty would operate for only a limited period of about 6–12 months — after which time any unregistered objects would be declared stolen property. The primary objective would be the recording of what has otherwise been lost, with recovery as a secondary objective, as indicated by sub-options (i) and (ii). It is envisaged that an amnesty would yield better results than any immediate moves to step up Interpol policing. Effecting a temporary amnesty would need very efficient follow-up work with art dealers throughout Europe, as well as keeping to a tight time schedule, otherwise the wrong signals could be sent out. Dealers would be responsible for contacting private art collectors to register their items and, to be effective, measures could be taken to protect the anonymity of most collectors and dealers. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), ICCROM, ICOM and key auction houses would keep copies of the final register; and the relevant page entries would be sent to those who had contributed photographs and dates, even if via an intermediate address.

Rescue archaeology of the looted Nok sites has already been proposed by NCMM archaeologists at the National Museum, Jos. Their proposal could be taken a step further to link in looted sites of the Kwatakwashi culture. Such a project would aim to plot the main areas of digging and the precise sites where the main finds



Figure 4. Looted 2000-year-old figurine having a base similar to later altars.

were made. These site spoil heaps would then be rapidly sieved for associated sherds and other artefacts. It would involve liaison with local people who had been engaged in the digging; and this raises a conflict of interests if there is also to be strict enforcement of the law elsewhere. The descriptions of the main finds by local people provide the best hope of linking sites to the finest terracottas photographed from Europe. If a good record of what is lost is considered as being as or more important than intermittent efforts at law enforcement against powerful vested interests, then any conflict of interests can be resolved by separating recording teams from law enforcement teams in time, space and personnel. The conflict would then occur only in areas where mass digging was still taking place.

In the long-run, the problems being experienced in Nigeria and many other parts of the Third World can only be resolved by two factors — an upturn in standards of living for the bulk of the population, and an increased appreciation

of the value of past culture. In the short-run, it may well be more productive to employ a positive strategy mix, as noted above; as this is probably the only way of recording the lost data. However, future prevention and conservation should not be neglected. To achieve a strategy mix without confusing or alienating public opinion is a challenge to any Cultural Resource Management policy. The alternative is to continue with policies which merely chastise offenders without actually rectifying the situation, without recording any substantial data, and without recovering much of what is lost.

Postscript

The above report was submitted to Nigeria's NCMM in August 1995. In October 1995 they replied with a thinly-veiled legal threat against the author but no promise of action. Nevertheless, a very senior NCMM official went up to deal with the looters (who all bowed down in greeting to him) and a committee was set up with the ministry of Mines and Power to sort out the overlap of interests. However, five years later, that the scale of looting

is worse than ever. In the face of the personal greed of the powerful, laws alone are inadequate. All this points strongly to the inadequacy of laws in isolation.

The major cause of economic disequilibrium which underlies the sale of antiquities is capital flight. Over £150 billion has come out of Nigeria into European and US bank accounts in the last few years: i.e. the western economy is propped up partly by Africa — precisely the opposite of what development agencies have been stating. Ultimately, this silent issue will have to be addressed. If not, there will be nothing of cultural value left in Africa: and that would be to the detriment of the whole world.

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Book review

Schick, Jürgen, 1999. *The Gods are Leaving the Country*. Bangkok: Orchid Press, 211pp.

Strangely, it seems that in Nepal statues of the kindly elephant-headed god Ganesha are only very rarely stolen. Are they left alone out of veneration perhaps? No, apparently not. The author of *The Gods are Leaving the Country* suggests instead that as the statues do not accord with Western aesthetic tastes, they are not collected and therefore are not stolen. Pretty much everything else is though, as seen in this book, which provides a photographic record of the damage caused to Nepal's cultural heritage by the superheated 'Asian Art' market.

Jürgen Schick first settled in Nepal towards the end of the 1970s and in 1981 he began photographing the stone sculpture of his adopted country. These statues, which depict deities of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons, might be any-

thing up to two thousand years old and are still worshipped as part of a religious tradition that is very much alive. Unfortunately, it did not take long for Schick to realize that they were under attack as, increasingly, he came across dismembered statues, vandalized shrines and emptied niches. His project changed from being, in his own words, 'a documentation of beauty to a documentation of destruction'. This book is the document of the destruction. It contains 186 photographs of over 160 pieces which have since disappeared or been disfigured, including some 'before and after' photographs, two of which show the appalling mutilation of a sixteenth-century statue of Sarasvati, a beautiful image featured intact on the front cover. The decapitated torso is shown inside.

Schick suggests that by 1970 almost all of Nepal's bronzes had already been smuggled out of the country but that the stone sculpture was still relatively intact. Its removal started early in the 1980s, reaching a peak in 1984, and now not a temple survives in the Kathmandu Valley that

Jürgen Schick
**THE GODS ARE LEAVING
 THE COUNTRY**
Art Theft from Nepal



has not been visited by looters. They were often armed and at Svayambhunath a priest was killed when trying to protect a statue. The despoliation seems now to be in decline, perhaps because, as the author suggests, not much remains to steal. What little does is often obscured by iron grilles or secured by iron bars and cement. Ugly, and not always effective — the sixth-century Ek-mukha Shivalingam of Pashupatinath was set into a large concrete drum; unable to remove it the thieves broke off its nose.

The international dimension is emphasized again and again. Clearly, most of the looted material ends up in public or private collections in the west but there is another telling reminder that the illicit trade in such material is well-organized. The first, German, edition of this book was

published in 1989 and in 1996 the office of its Bangkok publisher was broken into and 80 of the original photographic slides were stolen. The photographs must have had somebody worried.

As a result of this book, and also of Lain S. Bangdel's *Stolen Images of Nepal*, some of the Gods now look set to return. In 1999 a Los Angeles-based private collector returned four pieces to Nepal, including the head of the Sarasvati statue featured on the front cover of the book. The collector wishes to remain anonymous, out of shame perhaps for taking part, however remotely, in a major act of cultural vandalism.

The Gods are Leaving the Country provides a visual commentary on the callous sack of a nation's heritage, and it is difficult in words to convey the full sense, or horror, of its message. It has to be seen, not talked about, and it deserves a wide circulation. At the very least it would be nice to see it piled high in the bookshops of those museums in both the United Kingdom and the United States which continue to collaborate with the trade in the now annual 'Asian Art' weeks.

The Gods are Leaving the Country is available from Orchid Press at the following addresses:

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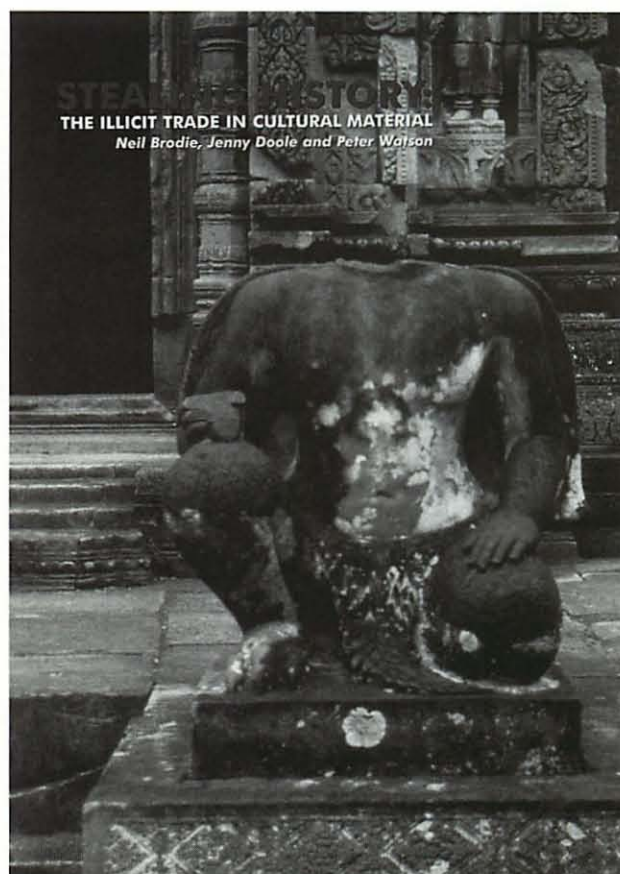
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It is also available from Amazon Books.

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Stealing History: the Illicit Trade in Cultural Material

June 12 saw the launch of *Stealing History: the Illicit Trade in Cultural Material*, a report commissioned by the Museums Association and ICOM-UK, and written by Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Peter Watson. It provides an overview of the illicit trade in archaeological, ethnographic and palaeontological material, and the damage it causes, and makes recommendations for museums to protect them from buying illicit material, and for Her Majesty's Government to help stamp the trade out. *Stealing History* is available from the Museums Association or the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. Please contact Jenny Doole (jd244@cam.ac.uk) for further details.



Front cover. 2000-year-old Kwatakwasshi terracotta from Nigeria irrevocably damaged by looters.

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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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