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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

The value of the trade in antiquities worldwide is a matter for trade denial, academic counter-denial, media speculation, government enquiry, and even the occasional quantitative study. Auction results, of course, are on public record. Sotheby's New York March 2000 sale of Indian and Southeast Asian 'Art' for instance realized just over \$6 million, while three months earlier their sale of Antiquities and Islamic Art raised slightly above \$4 million. It is what goes on outside the auction rooms that interests archaeologists, however, the value of what is termed the 'invisible trade' — although one suspects it is not so much invisible as hidden from the eyes of those who show an unwelcome, because not entirely commercial, interest. Although it is often rumoured that big deals go on out of sight, it is only very rarely that high-value lots are seen in public. One thinks for instance of the Sevso treasure, bought privately over a period of years, and now hoped to be worth about £40 million. At the October *Cultura* antiques fair in Basel another 'treasure' broke cover as David Bernstein offered a ten kilogram cache of Pre-Columbian gold for \$3.5 million. Not up to Sevso standard perhaps, but a tidy sum nevertheless and one that Christie's or Bonhams would be happy to see change hands at one of their London sales.

Cultura was in its second year, with 73 exhibitors, the majority of them dealing in antiquities. All objects above a certain price were passed through the Art Loss Register, thus ensuring the 'highest possible standard of diligence' according to Peter Blome, the Director of the Basel Museum of Ancient Art, writing in an advertising feature of the *International Herald Tribune* (October 14–15 2000). He went on to reassure those readers whose pockets did not quite run to Bernstein's gold that nonetheless there were plenty of objects available to satisfy the more modest budget. Whether these low-value objects were searched on the Register isn't clear — one suspects not. In any event, at the risk of boring our more informed readers, the Art Loss Register cannot (and does not claim to) contain details of antiquities which have been excavated

without record and smuggled without trace. Data bases are invaluable in the fight against art theft, but as a defence against the circulation of illicit antiquities they are of only limited use — a necessary but not sufficient check.

In his advertising piece Professor Blome, who is a member of the board of *Cultura*, was also keen to defend the fair, arguing that the trade saves for posterity many objects that would otherwise have been lost. Hardly an original observation this, but his stance is a brave — some might say rash — one for a museum director. The role of academic and other cultural institutions in helping to legitimize the illicit trade in antiquities has been exposed often enough in the past, usually to the embarrassment of those involved. One can only presume that by lending his name and professional reputation to this commercial enterprise he is confident of its total legitimacy; *Cultura Without Context* hopes his confidence is not betrayed by those he seeks to support.



Antiquities Fairs are seen by some to be the way of the future, allowing dealers to dispense with the costly overhead of a showroom, while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to meet a larger and more diverse clientele. For others, though, the future lies with eBay and similar internet auction sites. At the time of writing there were on eBay over 3000 antiquities on offer, of various qualities, ranging from the rare to the replica. A typical piece is a Babalonian [sic] cylinder seal, claimed to be worth between \$2500–\$3000, and authenticated by Wilfred Lambert, although the date of authentication is not known. eBay is in trouble in the US over the possible sale of fakes and has received letters from the major archaeological organizations expressing their concern that eBay might be used to market illicit antiquities (see In the News p. 12). Their concern is justified. There are huge quantities of Roman coins for sale on eBay described as being from an area 'north of Greece' or, sometimes — more accurately — 'Bulgaria'. It is not surprising then to discover that two illegal shipments of coins from Bulgaria — over 20,000 in total — have recently been intercepted at Sofia and London (see In the News p. 14). Also, on page 17 of this issue Cacho and Sanjuán report on a smuggling ring that had been

marketing looted antiquities from Andalusia on a 'web site based in San José, California'.



Talk of big money deals and Wilfred Lambert brings to mind the mysterious Achaemenid and Sassanian silver and gold seized by New York police in 1986. Authenticated by Lambert and insured for \$18 million, its owner — London-based dealer Houshang Mahboubian — had arranged for its shipment from Zurich to New York where he had conspired with Nedjatollah Sakhai to bring about its theft, presumably in order to collect on the insurance. At the 1987 trial three expert witnesses argued that a large part of the material was fake, but Lambert stood by his original claim of authenticity. The pre-Zurich ownership history of the material does not seem to have been discussed, but, if known, could have spared the jury the discomfort of sitting through four expert testimonies.



In October 1999 the Select Committee of the United Kingdom's Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced an inquiry into the return and illicit trade of cultural property. Select Committees have no authority to legislate and cannot determine Government policy, they can however act as 'lightning rods' for controversial issues by attracting and synthesizing a diverse range of opinions, and are able to make recommendations which may influence Government policy. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry into Cultural Property: the Return and Illicit Trade received 88 written depositions and took oral evidence from 22 individuals or organizations. It was concerned with two issues. First was that of the present-day illicit trade in cultural property: its nature and scale. Second, claims for restitution made against cultural property presently curated within UK museums. Its recommendations as regards the illicit trade were:

- That a clear system for recording the ownership history of a cultural object, linked directly to the capacity to conduct a legitimate transaction, would be an extremely important tool in tackling the illicit trade in cultural property and is therefore desirable in principle. However, we have received persuasive evidence that a compulsory 'log book' providing such a record would face many difficulties, some

of them probably insuperable, and we have concluded reluctantly that such a compulsory 'log book' would not represent a practical way forward. However, where organizations feel that they can establish some sort of voluntary 'log book' within their own resources this would be very much welcomed.

- That the Home Office make a public commitment in the course of this year to establishing a national data base of stolen cultural property and cultural property exported against the laws of countries concerned under national police control. The Home Office should also seek to take forward detailed discussions with the police service, the insurance industry, the art market and private data base operators about the development of an open system which can meet the needs and draw upon the skills and funds of the private sector. Finally, the Home Office should liaise closely with other countries to ensure that any national development is compatible with the wider international development of a data base of stolen and illegally exported cultural property.
- That no changes be made to the United Kingdom's current controls on the export of cultural property.
- That the Government introduce legislation creating a criminal offence of trading in cultural property in designated categories from designated countries which has been stolen or illicitly excavated or illegally exported from those countries after the entry into force of the legislation, with a defence in law based on the exercise of due diligence as defined in that legislation.
- That the United Kingdom sign the 1995 Unidroit Convention and that the Government bring forward legislation to give effect to its provisions and facilitate early ratification.
- Assuming that the two previous recommendations are implemented, it is not recommended that the United Kingdom become a party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

The Government response to these recommendations (published in October 2000) was necessarily circumspect as it has set up its own advisory panel on the illicit trade to review both legislative and non-legislative options for action, which will take the Select Committees recommendations into

account, and which has been asked to report to the Government before the end of November 2000, at which time the Government will then make a further response to the Select Committee.



In Italy, the *Comando Carabinieri* has set up a web site with photographs of over six hundred stolen archaeological objects. It can be found at www.carabinieri.it/tpa/tpa.asp.

NEIL BRODIE

Mosaics and heads of statues plundered from Zeugma

ÖZGEN ACAR

For more than 30 years Turkey has been constructing over 100 dams in southeast Anatolia, both to help solve the energy crisis and to provide the irrigation water necessary for regional development. One of these dams is being built on the Euphrates River. Called the Bireçik dam, after the nearby town of Bireçik, it has caused the inundation of the outskirts of Zeugma, an ancient town 800 metres away. Turkish and foreign archaeologists have worked on rescue excavations in this town, which is famous for its mosaics, but smugglers had already put Zeugma on the map long before either the dam or the archaeologists.

The plundering of mosaics from Zeugma stretches back as far as the nineteenth century.



Figure 1. Headless statues in Gaziantep museum.

One of the most important of these is a panel depicting the sea god Poseidon surrounded by personifications of Roman provinces within medallions. This mosaic is currently on exhibition, in pieces, in St Petersburg and Berlin. Then, for the last 13 years, archaeologists from Gaziantep Museum have been forced to undertake sporadic



Figure 2. Headless statue in Gaziantep museum.

rescue excavations in response to illegal digging and smuggling. Attributions used in various museum catalogues to describe the origins of mosaics, such as 'East Mediterranean', 'near Syria', 'said to be from East Turkey' probably, in fact, refer to Zeugma. For example, there is the second-century AD mosaic in the North Carolina Museum of Art, said to be 'probably from East Turkey'.

In 1987, five life-size statues made of limestone were found during a rescue excavation in front of a rock-cut family tomb after the museum had been alerted to an illegal dig. However, the heads of four of them had been already removed from their bodies, as if they had been guillotined. The bodies are now exhibited in the Gaziantep Museum (Figs. 1 & 2).

On 2 July 1992, museum archaeologists were warned about another illegal dig and arrived on the scene to find a tunnel large enough for a person to get through. At the other end of the tunnel they reached a building of Roman date (end of the second century AD) and on the floor they



Figure 3. Mosaic depicting the wedding of Dionysos and Ariadne.



Figure 4. Mosaic depicting Deianira and Nessos.

found an extremely well-preserved mosaic. This mosaic, measuring 3.25×1.45 m, depicted the wedding of Dionysos and Ariadne — a feast scene in which half-naked gods and goddesses were shown drinking to a musical accompaniment (Fig. 3). The artist who made this mosaic took great pains to illustrate the faces, using approximately 400 of the small colored tesserae, but made do with only 225 tesserae for the clothes and 144 for the background. The archaeologists decided to preserve the mosaic on site and it was locked up. Six years went by without incident, until one night thieves appeared, cut out two-thirds of the mosaic and made off with it. Interpol has been searching for it — unsuccessfully — ever since.

Acting on an application from the Turkish Government, in 1993 art theft agents from the New York FBI went to the Fortuna Gallery on Madison Avenue to seize a marble statue of a young man and fragment of garland taken from Aphrodisias, whereupon they noticed a beautiful mosaic from Zeugma. The FBI informed Turkish officials about this mosaic, which told the tragic story of Dionysos' daughter and Heracles' wife Deianira and one of the centaurs, Nessos (Fig. 4). By coincidence, a photograph of the mosaic turned up in the town of Nizip near Zeugma, among the colour prints of a deceased local photographer. Selim Dere, owner of the Fortuna Gallery, along with his cousin Aziz Dere, had already, some years earlier, played an important part in smuggling out of Turkey a marble sarcophagus depicting the twelve labours of Hercules. This had been found in Perge and was sliced up for smuggling. A few years after being arrested by Turkish police Selim Dere migrated to New York, where he opened an antiques shop. His cousin settled in Canada. The current location of this mosaic is unknown.

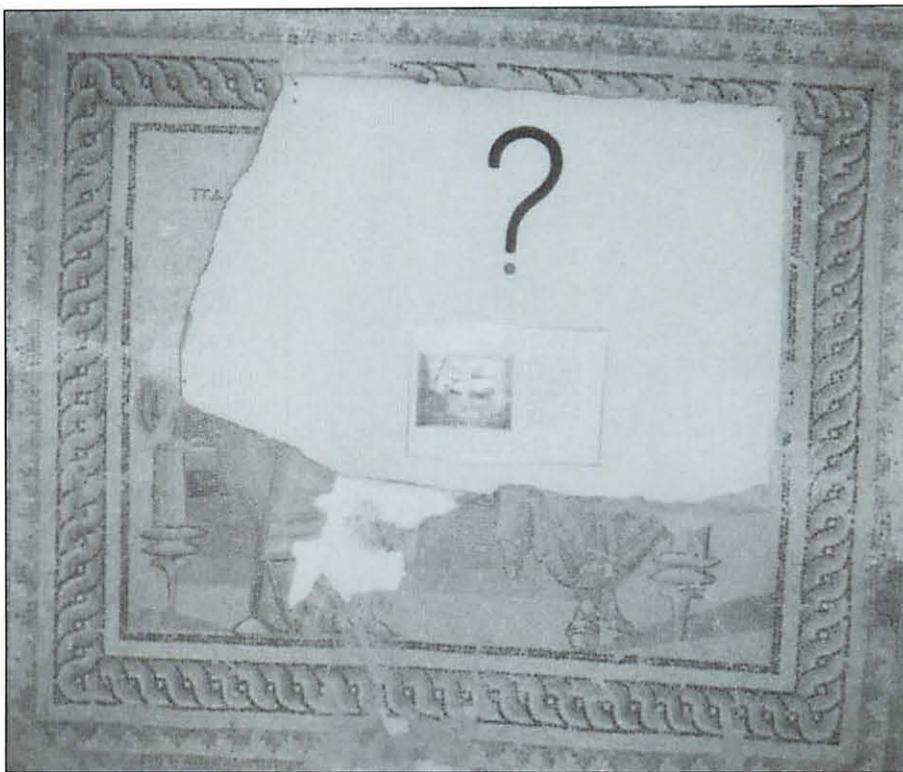


Figure 5. Vandalized mosaic discovered in 1993.

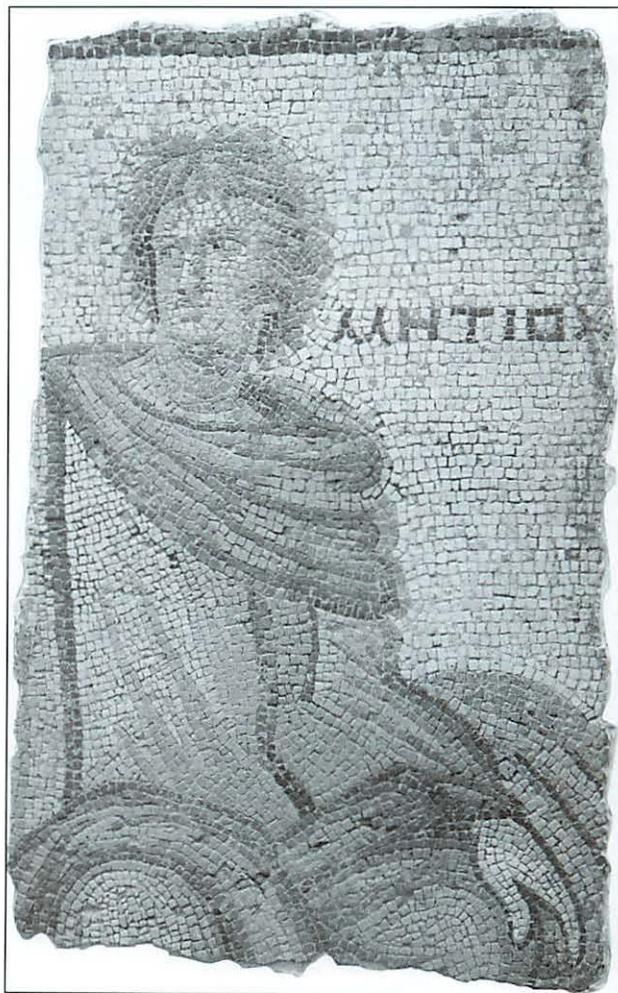


Figure 6. Mosaic fragment depicting Metiochus.



Figure 7. Mosaic fragment depicting Parthenope.



Figure 8. Zeugma's Mona Lisa.

In September 1993, Professor David Kennedy of the University of Western Australia, who worked for one summer in Zeugma, found another tunnel left by looters. Excavations revealed a 2.5 metre square mosaic, from the middle of which the heads of two figures, one man and one woman, had been previously cut out and removed (Fig. 5). Then, in 1998, Canadian mosaic expert Sheila Campbell spotted two mosaics of the eternal lovers, Parthenope and Metiochos, known as the Romeo and Juliet of the ancient world, in the M n il Collection of Rice University in Houston, Texas (Figs. 6 & 7). She established that they were missing pieces of the mosaic found in Kennedy's excavation. The matter was put into the hands of the Turkish Government and Bernard Davezac, Director of the M n il Collection. Both mosaics were returned to Gaziantep Museum on 19 June 2000 where experts are now restoring them prior to exhibition.

Finally, two years ago, in a rescue excavation, archaeologists found a piece of mosaic that has come to be known as *Zeugma's Mona Lisa* or the so-called *Gypsy Girl*. (Although some archaeologists think rather than a woman, it is a portrait of Alexander the Great.) Unfortunately, smugglers had already plundered pieces from around what has become the symbol of the rescue operations at Zeugma (Fig. 8).

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In the News

JENNY DOOLE

Asian art

News and quotes about Asian Art, as London geared up for Asian Art week:

- *Antiques Trade Gazette* (16 Sept.) wonders if continued **pressure from China** to repatriate items will lead to an **increased focus on Southeast Asian** material.
- **Colin Sheaf**, Head of Asian art at Phillips auction house, says that such a quantity of jade objects are now being **faked** that an early **provenance is 'worth everything'** (*The Art Newspaper*, Nov. 2000) He also comments that unprovenanced early material does not sell well, and that 'little recently excavated material is sold at auction' (as one would hope!)
- It is reported (*The Art Newspaper*, Nov. 2000) that as many as **three quarters of all ceramics** fresh on the market in **Hong Kong** may be **fake**. The best fakes apparently come from **Jingdezhen**, in Jiagnxi province where forgers, who are said to work to order from old Sotheby's catalogues, have access to deposits of high-grade kaolin, identical to that used for Song, Ming and Quing porcelain. It is rumoured that now even expensive **thermoluminescence testing**, to check authenticity, can be pointless since fakes have been **injected with radioactive material**.
- Pre-eminent oriental art dealer **Robert Ellsworth** told *The Art Newspaper* (Nov.) that due to worries over the trade in illicit material **provenance is now worth one-third of the price** of an item, especially if it is Asian. But according to Ellsworth, the number of clients keenly concerned about provenance is less than would be imagined, unless they want to donate the object to a major institution in which case it would require **sound documentation**. He adds that if all 'so-

called plundered' material were repatriated 'neglect would destroy 90 per cent of what was returned' although Mr Ellsworth gives no indication as to how he arrives at this percentage. He concludes that 'It's the balance of interest in art, commitment to art and the donating of art that outweighs all the trash written about smuggling and raiding'.



Chinese arrest

September: In China, Wang Haijun and his accomplices were arrested for looting the Song Dynasty (1065) period **cave temple of Qianfudong**, Huanglin County, Shanxi Province in May. During the raid the group is alleged to have tied up watchmen, and chiselled the heads off 89 of the thousand or more **Buddha statues** at the site, in the process damaging many more. The heads had not yet been sold when the culprits were arrested.



Soundbites

- Volume 1 of a new journal, *Public Archaeology* (James & James [Science Publishers Ltd] London), has published a dialogue between Professor **Susan Keech McIntosh** of Rice University, Houston and Professor **Colin Renfrew**, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge on the subject of the '**Good Collector**'. In a response, **Steven Vincent** of *Art & Auction* magazine argues that suppressing the antiquities trade is no answer.
- **James Ede**, chairman of the Antiquities Dealers Association, UK, argues (*Museums Journal* Sept. 2000) that *Stealing History*, a report commissioned by the Museums Association and ICOM UK has got its **arguments wrong**. He suggests that it presents a **one-dimensional argument** about collecting which has fatal flaws, takes issue with figures quoted, and concludes that UK museums should follow stringent rules for

acquisition, but should not allow paranoia to stop them fulfilling their proper functions.

- Leading antiquities fair ‘**Cultura**’ which took place in **Basel, Switzerland** in October, published a statement by board member, Professor **Peter Blome**, Director of the Basel Museum of Ancient Art and Ludwig Collection, explaining that since the collecting of classical antiquities has recently become an area of such politically charged debate, the fair has sought close co-operation with the **Art Loss Register** in London, during the vetting days preceding the sale. All art objects above a given value were **automatically searched** (see *Editorial*).
- In the Sept./Oct. edition of his magazine, *Minerva*, dealer **Jerome Eisenberg** re-states his longheld view that ‘**huge quantities** of unseen and unpublished antiquities sit in the store rooms of Mediterranean museums, . . . slowly **disintegrating** through either, or both, neglect or lack of proper storage conditions.’ He urges that they should be catalogued and duplicate objects from **collections sold** to raise funds and create new supplies of licit antiquities. In a private letter to Eisenberg, not intended for publication, **Neil Brodie** of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre, had argued that from his experience of Greek museums, this description may not be accurate.
- Major General **Roberto Conforti**, head of the Italian Carabinieri’s Protection of National Heritage Squad, **criticized the lack of controls** on works of stolen art in **Britain**. In London to give evidence to the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee’s enquiry into the illicit trade in works of art and antiquities he told *The Evening Standard* (23 May 2000) that around **half of all the stolen pieces** his squad are seeking either end up in **London**, or have passed through before being sold. He said that British **legislation is ‘permissive**, or anyhow “lacunose”’, adding that the origins

of many objects for sale is ‘for British law an almost irrelevant detail’, that Scotland Yard was not properly equipped to tackle the illicit trade, and that auction houses had become a channel for stolen goods through which they could be ‘laundered’ and put back on the market with ‘impunity’.

- *Antiques Trade Gazette* (5–12 Aug. 2000) notes that **political pressure** on the antiquities trade, at least in the UK, only serves to **drive it to Switzerland** and the USA.



Persian seizure

- The mummy of an **ancient Persian princess**, lying in a wooden and gold sarcophagus and dressed in full burial regalia was seized by police from a house in **Quetta, Pakistan** following a tip-off. The owner of the house, **Sardar Wali Mohammad Reeki**, is now in custody and told police he received the mummy from Haji Sharif Bakji (now wanted for questioning), who may be Iranian and claimed he found it in a damaged house after an earthquake in **Kharan, Balochistan**. The pair had apparently received an offer of 60 million rupees (\$1.1 million) for the mummy, although they were asking as much as 600 million rupees. Described by scholars as unique, the mummy is likely to have been stolen from one of the tombs in the areas of **Gyan, Kurh Dam, Da-u-Dakhtar, or Hamadan (Iran)** or come from the Kharan region itself, where looting of burial mounds is rife. Experts are struggling to date the princess who was apparently about 18 at the time of death. Although all features suggest an ancient **Egyptian origin**, inscriptions on the sarcophagus are in cuneiform. According to inscriptions on her gold chest plate, she may have been from the ancient **Persian dynasty of Khamam-ul-Nishiyan** (established in 600 BC) leading to speculation that she might have been the Egyptian wife of a Persian prince whose body was preserved and buried in accordance with the

customs and rites of her native country.

The mummy is now in Karachi National Museum in Pakistan, but a **custody battle** has begun between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, who claim the mummy must have been looted from their territory during the protracted war.



West African news

- A *Sunday Times* investigation (4 June 2000) reports that **West African antiquities**, including tribal crowns, carvings and terracottas are arriving on the market in London in such **quantities** that artefacts that would have fetched £30,000 a decade ago are now on sale for a **tenth of the price**. It found that **organized gangs** with up to 1000 workers have systematically dug up **dozens of protected sites** to satisfy demand in Europe. The **Nigerian High Commission has complained** about the number of goods without provenance being sold openly by auction houses and dealers.

During the investigation, **Michael Telfer-Smollett**, a London dealer in African art sold to the *Sunday Times* for £275 a **Yoruba tribal crown** which Nigerian officials say would have been **banned from export**. He said most of his African material was brought to him by Africans by the bagful and added 'I don't believe the crown was smuggled, but **it's impossible to check**. It's up to the authorities in Nigeria to check it before it comes out'.

- Distinguished Nigerian specialist, **Frank Willet** has reluctantly urged that looted and stolen artefacts should **no longer be returned to Nigeria**, because of corruption in the country. He says that corrupt officials are exploiting their cultural heritage by allowing its **illicit export to dealers and collectors** in the West, and cites **thefts** in recent years from museums at Abadan, Abeokuta, Esie, Jos and Owo.
- Controversy continues concerning the **Lou-**

vre's decision to exhibit two recently purchased **Nok terracottas** in their new gallery for art from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas (see In the News *CWC* Issue 6), opened by **President Chirac** in April. *The Art Newspaper* (June) reports that, according to an unpublished account by an official in the **Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments**, President Chirac first approached the then Nigerian president, seeking approval to buy the pieces (on sale in **Brussels** for a reported \$360,000 2 years ago). Approval was not forthcoming since the Commission believed such a deal would 'confer legality . . . and encourage further looting'. Apparently, in May 1999 President Chirac raised the matter again with the **new Nigerian government**; the National Commission's reservations were overturned and an agreement reached whereby the French would **acquire the pieces** (and one other Sokoto sculpture) with government blessing in return for **technical assistance to Nigerian museums**. The Nigerian president presented them personally when the deal was signed in February.

However, in April, the **Nigerian embassy** in Paris **issued a statement** which referred to the Nok pieces in the Louvre, warned 'individuals or groups against the purchase, sale or export' of such items, explaining that sale, export or transfer **violates various Nigerian laws** and has been condemned by ICOM (see In The New *CWC* Issue 6). Following fresh controversy over the case, generated by archaeologist Lord Renfrew's comments that Chirac had displayed a 'dishonourable attitude', Nigeria's ambassador to Paris, Abiodun Aina, has denied that his government reached an agreement with France and called for the pieces to be repatriated. The case is now being investigated by art crime specialists in the French police.

The Louvre has emphasized that it had no role in the acquisition of the contested statues.



Internet concerns

- In response to outrage from members over **internet auctions of antiquities**, the **Society for American Archaeology**, **Society for Historical Archaeology**, and **American Anthropological Association** sent a letter in July to **Amazon.com** and **eBay.com** (the Internet auction giant) detailing serious concerns about such sales, and asking they cease. The letter argues that it has long been clear that the commercial market for antiquities is the primary stimulus for looting of archaeological sites worldwide, emphasizes the importance of context and provenance, and describes the destruction that looting entails. It goes on to explain that the Internet sale of antiquities has **vastly increased** the number of people who can engage with the market, and highlights the difficulties surrounding the legal status of antiquities and determining authenticity. Interested organisations and individuals were also encouraged to **send similar letters**.
- *July*: The auction of a **piece of stone** (with more to follow), purported to have been chipped from the limestone casing of the **Great Pyramid of Cheops**, Egypt, was **halted by eBay** after experts questioned the legality of the sale and whether the item was genuine. The seller, 'brsteve', claimed he had taken the piece when it was still possible to climb the Pyramid and that it would look great made into a pendant. As bidding reached \$42.99 (from a starting point of \$10.00), Director of Antiquities for the Pyramids, Zahi Hawass, claimed the offer was a **hoax**, insisting that the Pyramids are too heavily guarded for anyone to break off a piece, and that international agreements would prevent the sale of such a souvenir. An eBay spokesman admitted that they believed that it would be **illegal to sell** the item and were consulting with the **US State Department** as a matter of course.
- Six claimants from California have won the

first round in a **legal fight against eBay**, which may have important implications. They say the sports memorabilia they bought via the site proved to be **fake** and argue that eBay should ensure that only legitimate goods are sold on the site. eBay argues that it acts **only as a sales forum** and cannot be held responsible for fraudulent transactions.



International conventions and treaties

- An Agreement, signed by the **US and Nicaraguan governments** providing **US import restrictions** on pre-Columbian cultural material from Nicaragua, went into effect on **26 October**, following an exchange of diplomatic notes. Classes of object subject to restriction include pre-Columbian archaeological material from 8000 BC to AD 1550, which may enter the US if accompanied by an export permit issued by the Government of Nicaragua, or documentation that items left Nicaragua prior to 26 October 2000.
- The **Japanese government** is considering the possibility of signing up to the **1970 UNESCO Convention**. 91 States are now party to the Convention, but **Lyndel Prott**, director of the International Standards Section of UNESCO's Cultural Heritage Division emphasized the importance of getting major art trading nations like **Japan, UK and Switzerland** to sign.
- Negotiations, begun in 1998, continue between **China's Cultural Relics Bureau and the US government** to finalize a **bilateral agreement** to reduce smuggling and facilitate seizure and repatriation of Chinese cultural material. Previous bi-lateral treaties have restricted the import into the USA of archaeological or ethnological material from countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Canada, Mali Cyprus and Cambodia, but it would appear that the Chinese are aiming for a more ambitious agreement which

would include **further conditions** of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The **US Embassy** has offered to **recommend legal experts** to assist the Bureau. There are also issues as to whether the Foreign Affairs Department of the Cultural Relics Bureau, which **maintains close ties with auction houses**, dealers and museums, is the best department to be responsible for monitoring the illicit trade in antiquities.

- *Paris, November:* UNESCO hosted a meeting of international experts on the trade in illicit cultural material to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.



Media activity

- US television station **PBS** has announced that in future they will **address looting issues** and current laws governing collection and importation of archaeological artefacts both **on air and on their Web site**. The statement follows complaints from archaeologists after archaeological objects, including a pre-Hispanic pot from Colombia, were **appraised and valued** in a February broadcast of their show *Antiques Roadshow*, but no mention was made of looting or the legal situation.
- On 27 June **BBC Radio Four's 'File on Four'** investigated the illicit trade in antiquities. During the half hour broadcast, journalist Jolyon Jenkins investigated looting of archaeological sites, thefts from museums, smuggling routes, connections with the drugs trade, and problems of repatriation. The programme covered a lot of ground and featured **case studies from all over the world**, including a looted Mycenaean cemetery, the Corinth Museum robbery (see In the News Issues 5 & 6), the Salisbury Hoard, Apulian vases, the Elmali hoard, looting in the Petén, and the situa-

tion in Nigeria. Among those **interviewed** were James Ede, Ricardo Elia, Jerome Eisenberg, Greek police and archaeologists, Özgen Acar, Howard Speigler, Dick Ellis, Ian Graham, Patrick Darling, Frank Willet, Colin Renfrew and Joanna Van Der Lande of the Antiquities Dealers Association. Jenkins concluded by asking whether 'codes of behaviour based on trust and honour are adequate' to regulate today's trade in antiquities.

- In an article on the **temples of Angkor** in the August edition of *National Geographic* magazine, Douglas Preston reports that more **destruction has been caused by looting** than by war to the Khmer monuments of **Cambodia**. At the complex of Angkor Wat, he found that scarcely a freestanding statue retains its head, while many statues have disappeared completely. Since managers at Angkor mobilized a **security force**, a first for a World Heritage Site, guards have helped reduce theft but looters have transferred their activities to more remote sites such as **Banteay Chmar** near the Thai border (See In the News *CWC* Issues 4, 5 & 6). Preston describes arriving at Banteay Chmar to find a section of the south wall, previously covered with bas-reliefs of a battle, **freshly destroyed** and the area littered with broken stone. The looters had apparently only just left the scene, and a local hermit informed him that 15–20 soldiers from the local post came everyday, sometimes working through the night. (Shortly after his visit Thai authorities impounded a truck carrying 117 blocks of looted relief from Banteay Chmar, see In The News *CWC* Issues 5 & 6.)



Smugglers foiled

- In July **Egyptian police** thwarted an attempt led by a **former police officer** to smuggle abroad **Greek–Roman era artefacts**, including a statue of Aphrodite.
- *August, Egypt:* After an operation lasting

four months, **police in Cairo** foiled an attempt to smuggle \$20 million worth of Islamic antiquities to the United States. **Taha Abdou Ghanem**, owner of a chain of antiques shops, was arrested in Alexandria loading some 100 pieces into a ship about to sail to **Houston**, their ultimate destination being a **Dallas-based firm**.

- In an attempt to stem the trafficking of antiquities through airports and at borders, an archaeologist and art historian have been **employed to work with customs officials at Lima airport, Peru**. In their first two weeks they **confiscated 13 pre-Columbian items** — clearly a small fraction of what is leaving the country. One departing tourist said he had no idea the 800-year-old Chimú pot he was carrying was real.
- *August:* Acting on a tip-off, archaeologists alerted customs officials at the port of **Haifa**, who intercepted a **container load of dozens of crates** packed with antiquities, including ancient coins, pottery, bronzes and small statues looted from archaeological excavations around Israel. The objects ranged in date from Canaanite to Early Arab Periods (3000 BC–AD 1000). The shipment, believed to be one of the largest ever detected in Israel, was apparently destined for the **market in the US**. Amin Ganor, Head of the Antiquities Authority Unit for the Prevention of Theft of Antiquities said the owner of the container — a former antiquities dealer — lives abroad, is known to Unit and is under surveillance.

New laws in Israel?

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that allows merchants, under license, to trade in antiquities. Archaeologists and Israeli lawmakers are working to rewrite laws with the aim of **shutting down this trade**.

- In October, UK Customs seized some 10,000

Greek and Roman coins from a Bulgarian man at Gatwick airport. The suspect was travelling to Orlando, Florida and also carrying steroids.

- In November a man en route to the USA was detained by police at Sofia airport, Bulgaria, carrying thousands of ancient coins and other artefacts including: 1312 silver, 107 gold and 424 bronze Greek, Macedonian, Roman and Byzantine coins; 9 ancient bronze statues; 16 Thracian rings and 8 brooches. It was their most valuable seizure ever, and contained some items of extreme rarity.

Harappan discovery

May: A farmer near the village of Mandi, **Uttar Pradesh**, discovered the largest collection of **Harappan jewellery** ever found in India under a mound of earth, but it was quickly **looted by locals**. Officials, who now have the site under armed guard, were able to **salvage 10 kg** of gold jewellery from the 3 tonne hoard, along with pottery and burnt brick. A **reward** has been offered to villagers to get looted artefacts back, since archaeologists believe they will be **sold on the open market and melted down**. No-one has yet come forward. The find indicates that the Harappan empire was much bigger than previously thought and that for some reason the Harappans had begun moving from their northern territories.

Recent returns

- **Australian Federal Police** have returned to **Greece 31 ancient vases** and 2 Byzantine icons with an estimated value of \$2.2 million. They were discovered during a **drugs smuggling investigation**, in properties owned by **Peter Pylarinos**, who was jailed for drug-related offences. The vases were excavated during the construction of the new Athens subway, and mainly consist of fifth-century BC lekythoi, or oil vessels. They were

awaiting conservation when they were **stolen by night**, in January 1994. Pylarinos has not said how he came into possession of the artefacts.

- An **ancient carved skull and conch shell**, dating to the Mixtec culture, were officially **returned to the Mexican Ambassador** to the United States, at a ceremony held at the Seattle Museum of Art in July. The antiquities (along with **932 other pre-Columbian artefacts**) were seized from the home of collector and looter **Frank Stegmeier** during a sting by Seattle Customs in 1994. Stegmeier, an ex-cop who travelled frequently to Central and South America, sold the items for \$160,000 to a customs agent posing as an art buyer. They were seized on the grounds of violation of federal smuggling statutes and the National Stolen Property Act, which prohibits the transportation and sale of stolen items valued at more than \$5000. Stegmeier eventually received 41 months in jail on various other charges, as part of a plea bargain which required him to return the skull and shell. He insists that the other 932 pieces are his and their status is presently uncertain.
- *Washington DC, June:* **US Customs Service** commissioner Raymond Kelly ceremonially handed over **4 ancient ceramic artefacts to the Italian Ambassador** to the US. They were among **230 pieces recovered** by Customs agents after an investigation into **David Holland Swingler** of Laguna Hills, California. Swingler who, it emerged, was actively engaged in smuggling antiquities from Italy using a pasta import company as cover, was **sentenced by an Italian Court (in absentia)** to 4 years in jail, and fined 12 million lire, has not been prosecuted in the US.
- Objects from the cache, including amphorae, vases, terracotta statues and other items, were among **900 smuggled artefacts** (recovered from the **USA and Europe**, with the help of US customs agents in **Los Ange-**

les and Atlanta), displayed by police in Rome in October. They will be put on permanent display in museums in southern and central regions of Puglia and Lazio, near the sites from which they were looted.

Sotheby's denial

Also among the objects displayed in Rome (see above) was a fifth-century BC **Etruscan cup** depicting a satyr clad in a lion skin which had passed through Sotheby's in 1995. A spokesman for Sotheby's denied that the auction house had been negligent in selling the cup in a London sale when it emerged that the piece had been stolen from a museum storeroom in **Tivoli** during a raid in 1994. It had been found during excavations of an Etruscan cemetery at **Poggio Sommavilla** near Rieti, in Lazio, in the late 1980s. Sotheby's bought the piece 'in good faith' at an **antiquities sale**, and sold it on to a German collector for \$43,000.

Political concerns

- The appointment, in August, of prominent antiquities collector and archaeological benefactor (see In The News *CWC* Issue 6) **Shelby White** to the US President's **Cultural Property Advisory Committee** has shocked and horrified many archaeologists in America. Nancy Wilkie, president of the Archaeological Institute of America, who believed they had successfully lobbied against White's appointment, described the situation as '**like putting a fox in charge of the chicken coop**' (*New York Times*, 15 August). The 11-member committee reviews and advises the president on import restrictions on cultural patrimony that has been pillaged, and comprises scholars, dealers, collectors and members of the public. White's appointment was sponsored by **Senator Daniel Moynihan** (New York, Democrat) and supported by eminent academics (many from institutions which White and her husband,

financier Leon Levy, have funded) like **Katherine Lee Reid**, president of the Association of Art Museum Directors and Director of the Cleveland Museum, and **Glen Bowersock**, Professor of Ancient History at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. White, whose extensive collections include the top half of the **Weary Herakles and the Icklingham Bronzes**, has adamantly insisted that critics have not been able to prove that she owns looted art and, following strong criticism of her appointment in the *Wall Street Journal*, argued that legislation calls for representation from a diverse viewpoint, not just archaeologists on the committee. Her appointment has been interpreted as Bill Clinton's thanks for Senator Moynihan's support for Hilary Clinton's New York election campaign. Senator Moynihan **strongly opposed** the implementing bill for the Cultural Property Advisory Committee and is described as 'a battering ram in Washington for Wall Street and for the financial executives who collect art and serve as museums trustees' (*The Art Newspaper* September 2000).

- Meanwhile, archaeological and preservation communities in America, supported by similar organizations worldwide have been fighting to defeat a bill introduced in the US Senate (**S. 1696: The Cultural Property Procedural Reform Act**) by Senator **Moynihan**, with the support of Senator Charles Schumer (New York, Democrat). If passed, it is argued, this bill would weaken the Cultural Property Implementation Act (CCPIA, passed in 1982) to the point of repealing it. Senator Moynihan felt that **changes were needed** because of a recent 'proliferation' of import restrictions granted by the US to other countries, but made particular note of **Italy's request** for such an agreement, which has been vehemently opposed by the Senator and the trade (see In The News and Editorial *CWC* Issue 5). Bill S.1696 would, according to the Archaeological Institute of America, 'inhibit the US's

ability to enter into agreements with foreign nations to restrict the flow of undocumented antiquities, create a bureaucratic nightmare, and leave the CCPIA unable to carry out the purposes for which it was intended'. Lobbying became a **matter of urgency** when an effort was made to attach a version of the Bill to a trade bill in the final days of Congress, so that it would be passed as part of a package and its **passage assured**.

- An **Advisory Panel**, set up by the **British Government** (see Editorial p. 4) has begun work examining the **illicit antiquities trade**. Headed by legal authority Professor **Norman Palmer** and comprising of a **range of experts** including representatives for the trade, archaeologists and museums, the panel is due to report in November to the Department for Culture Media and Sport, advising whether the UK should sign the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 Unidroit Convention. A government **inter-departmental committee** will then consider their findings.
- 25 July saw the publication of the House of Commons **Select Committee** for Culture, Media and Sport's **report on repatriation and the illicit trade**. During the course of its enquiry the Committee heard evidence from 47 experts, received submissions from more than 60 institutions, visited Greece, Italy, the British Museum and Scotland Yard, and reviewed a wide range of issues (see Editorial p. 4).



Romanian treasure hunters

Efforts by archaeologists in central Romania to investigate remains of the ancient **Dacian culture** are being hampered by **illicit treasure hunters**, who have apparently become active in the region over the last five years because of lenient legislation. Illegal metal detectorists, searching for Dacian gold, are reported to have recovered nearly 350 kg of

weaponry and everyday objects which they then abandon near the site of excavation. Archaeologist Professor **Ioan Glodariu**, says the looters have unearthed around **2000 kosons** (Dacian gold coins) and so many are now entering the market, **across Europe** from Budapest to Paris, that their sale price is constantly declining. He suggests that helicopters should scatter buckshot or other metal across sites to confuse metal detector readings. According to Romanian law archaeological material belongs to the State and, if caught, offenders are fined the equivalent of \$100.

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

## Site looting and the illicit trade of archaeological objects in Andalusia, Spain

SILVIA FERNÁNDEZ CACHO &  
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### Legal framework

The existence of a well-established legal deterrent to the looting of archaeological sites in Spain dates back only to 1985, when the *Ley del Patrimonio Histórico Español* (Law of the Spanish Historical Heritage) was promulgated. This piece of legislation defines rather generally the plundering of an archaeological site as 'any action or omission putting at risk any of the

properties that integrate the Spanish Historical Heritage' (Art. 3). It does not make, therefore, any particular distinction between looting driven by an interest in illicit trade or damage caused to an archaeological site by any other activity (building developments etc.). An interesting contribution of this definition was the introduction, for the first time, of the notion that an *omission of action* may be potentially as damaging (and as illegal) as a direct action of looting (Querol & Martínez 1996, 247).

Since the transfer in the early 1980s of all responsibilities in cultural resource management from the Spanish central government to the regional authorities, the relevant law in Andalusia has been the *Ley de Patrimonio Histórico de Andalucía* (Law of the Historical Heritage of Andalusia), passed by the regional parliament in July 1991. Compared to the 1985 national law,

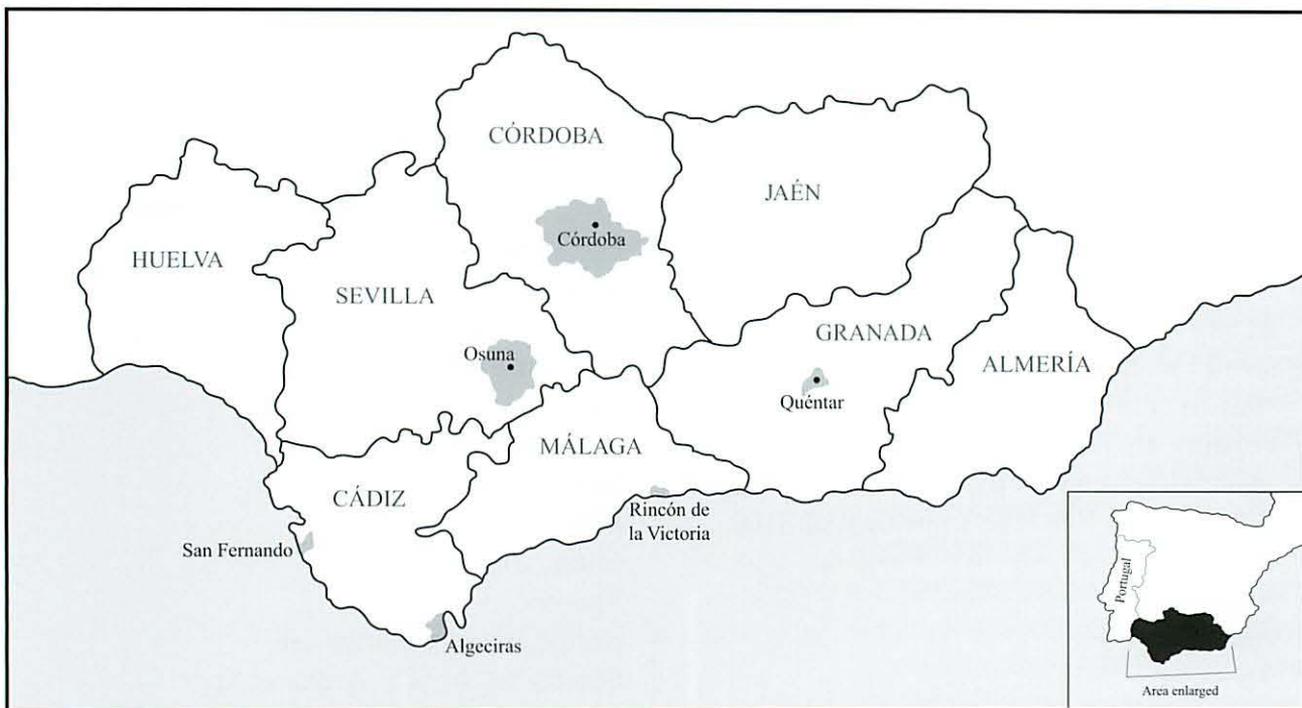


Figure 1. Place and site names mentioned in text.

Table 1. Main causes of damage to archaeological sites. (Source: IAPH.)

|                                    |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Total number of sites              | 12,725 |
| Total number of undamaged sites    | 4441   |
| <i>Number of sites damaged by:</i> |        |
| Mining and quarrying               | 197    |
| Herding                            | 28     |
| Deep-ploughing                     | 860    |
| Surface-ploughing                  | 3034   |
| Terracing                          | 182    |
| Hill-flattening                    | 142    |
| Dredging                           | 24     |
| Looting                            | 1805   |
| Forestry                           | 212    |
| Industrial use                     | 14     |
| Private building                   | 492    |
| Major public works                 | 530    |
| Irrigation agriculture             | 117    |
| Military use                       | 15     |
| Visits                             | 30     |
| Other                              | 527    |

this regional law does not broaden any further the definition of the notion of looting. It does, however, establish a list of infringements hierarchically ordered as ‘very serious, serious, or less serious’. Among the ‘very serious’ infractions are those causing irreversible damage to cultural properties recorded in the general catalogue of the Andalusian heritage. This general catalogue is proposed in Art. 111 as an essential tool for heritage protection. The rate of inclusion of the regional archaeological resources within this pro-

tected list is, however, quite slow, and currently it contains only 8.5 per cent of all archaeological sites documented in the region. Infringements such as ‘the utilisation of metal-detecting devices without authorisation’ (Art. 133) are regarded as ‘less serious’, involving fines of up to 10 million ptas. (approx. 60,000 Euros) ‘but in any case never less than the profit made by the offender as a result of his/her infraction’ (Art.177).

The specific problem of the ‘seriousness’ of the damage caused to the archaeological record by the offender had not been addressed as such by the 1985 Spanish Heritage law and, therefore, the Andalusian bill represented a major conceptual advance. The application of these legal precepts, however, remains problematical insofar as judges have consistently demanded evidence of the offenders being caught *in flagranti* (Rodríguez 2000, 39). Other problems with the implementation of the protective measures contemplated in the 1991 Andalusian Heritage law have derived from the inability and/or lack of interest of town councils to engage in a more pro-active role as agencies of heritage protection, as explicitly stated by the law. A good example is the city council of the small town of Quéntar (Granada: see Fig. 1), which in August 1997 complained bitterly in the media of the constant damage caused by looters (some locals among them) to the rich archaeological heritage

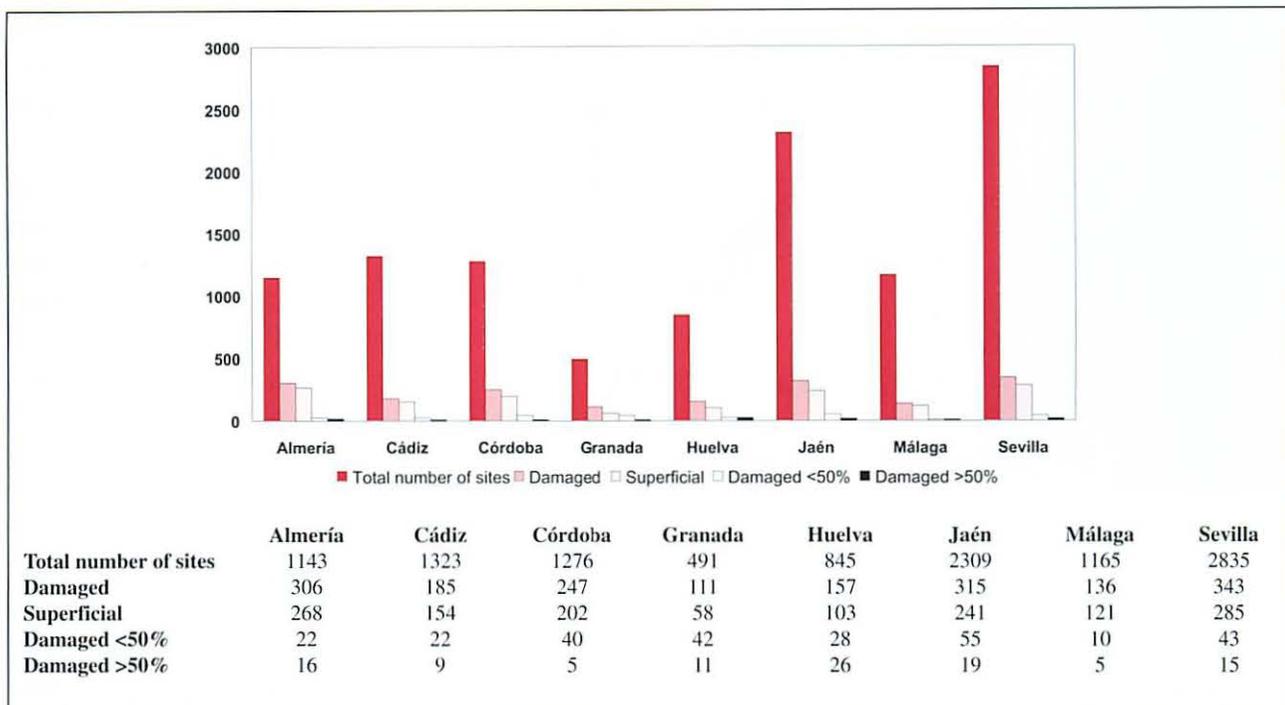


Figure 2. Looted sites by province. (Source: IAPH.)

of its municipality. This council lacked the resources (staff, funding) to prevent archaeological looting as was their wish (*Ideal* August 22nd 1997). In other, more unfortunate cases, city councils treating their archaeological heritage as a second- or third-rate priority within their development programmes have caused serious problems to the conservation of archaeological sites. This was for example the case of the municipality of Rincón de La Victoria (Málaga: Fig. 1), which in April 1995 went ahead with the construction of 600 new dwellings in the vicinity of Cueva del Tesoro, an archaeological site catalogued as *Bien de Interés Cultural* (a legal category that grants additional planning and administrative protection to sites of special value), thus causing a serious conflict with the regional cultural authorities (*El País* April 27th 1995).

### Looting in numbers and cases

Data available from the *ARQUEOS* data base, developed and maintained by the Documentation Centre of the Andalusian Institute of the Historical Heritage (IAPH) (Fernández *et al.* 2000), suggest that at least 65.1 per cent of all archaeological sites documented in the region to date display some form of alteration derived from contemporary human activities (Table 1). This includes, of course, a wide range of industrial, agricultural and urban land uses. However, 14.2

per cent of sites (1805 sites) have been damaged by market-oriented plundering, which ranks no less than second among all causes of deterioration of the region's archaeological sites. Looting is only preceded by agricultural practices such as deep-ploughing and terracing, which affect 30.7 per cent of sites. The extent of the looting by province (Fig. 2) ranges from 11.1 per cent of all sites in Seville to 26.6 per cent in Granada. Nevertheless, since no systematic analysis of this problem has yet been carried out, these figures must be taken only as indicative — they probably underestimate the real overall effects of looting in the region.

According to available reports, damage caused by robbers and illegal amateur archaeologists seems mostly to affect the surface levels of sites. Only a small minority of sites are reported as *completely destroyed* or *destroyed beyond 50 per cent* of their deposits because of looting. This is, however, a rather small consolation considering that surface plundering — which causes irreversible damage to the upper layers of the stratigraphy — may affect up to almost a third of all sites in some provinces.

Some recent examples of site looting in Andalusia suggest that there is a wide range of situations and circumstances that may lead to an archaeological site being partly destroyed by individuals seeking some kind of profit.



**Figure 3.** Phoenician bronzes recovered after Operación Tartessos. (Source: SEPRONA.)

First, there is the more or less occasional looting caused by people not necessarily involved in organized crime. A rather bizarre case occurred in July 1998 in Algeciras (Cádiz: Fig. 1) when the skull of a child of late-medieval date that had been found in an urban rescue excavation was stolen, probably by a local aficionado, and never found again (*El País* July 11th 1988). In a more lucky instance (and which in fact could hardly be described as looting) in October 1999 the SEPRONA (Service for the Protection of Nature) branch of the Guardia Civil recovered two invaluable Phoenician statuettes that a Huelva fisherman had found off the coast thirty years ago. Unaware of their potential economic value, the man had kept both bronzes in his house as good-luck tokens (Fig. 3) (*Huelva Información* October 20th 1999; *Odiel Información* October 20th 1999; *El País* October 20th 1999; *ABC* October 20th 1999).

A much more serious case (which immediately reached the front page of most local and regional newspapers) took place in August 1997 when the police arrested three people who were sighted destroying the Los Nogales bridge, near Córdoba (*Diario De Córdoba* August 22nd, 23rd, 24th & 25th 1997; *El Correo De Andalucía* August 23rd & 24th 1997; *El País* August 22nd, 23rd & 24th 1997; *Diario* 16 August 24th 1997; *ABC* August 23rd & 24th 1997; *El Mundo* August 22nd & 23rd 1997). This bridge is of outstanding importance and was originally constructed as part of the communication network associated with Medina Azahara, the city built by the Cordovan Caliph Abd al-Rahman III in the tenth century

AD. Together with the city, the bridge enjoys the status of *Bien de Interés Cultural*. In this case, the only purpose of the looters was to supply themselves with cheap stone masonry for the refurbishment of their nearby house. Although they were arrested halfway through the job, the damage caused to the bridge affected 20 per cent of its structure. Paradoxically, the cost of the equivalent stone masonry on the market was estimated in 30,000 ptas (c. 180 Euros), way below the 14 million ptas (c. 84,000 Euros) subsequently budgeted for the restoration of the bridge.

Secondly, a more frequent plundering scenario derives from the systematic activities of individuals or groups of individuals who target archaeological sites as a more or less habitual way of earning a living, or simply to obtain additional income and benefits. In July 1994, a resident of the town of Osuna (Sevilla) was arrested and charged with heritage destruction and illicit trafficking of archaeological objects, of which more than 700 were found in his home, including coins, polished stone axes, bronze artefacts, pottery and architectural elements such as capitals (*El País* July 28th 1994). A similar much-publicized case occurred in February 1995, when a man from San Fernando (Cádiz) was found guilty of systematic and long-term plundering of underwater archaeological sites and charged with a fine of 17 million ptas (c. 102,000 Euros). The police had discovered more than 900 archaeological objects in his home, including amphorae, fragments of sculptures and remains of shipwrecks. The man has ever since claimed his innocence and even defined himself as a 'people's heritage curator' (*Diario De Cadiz* April 15th 2000). But his legal battle against the guilty verdict ended when, in a landmark resolution, his appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected on the grounds that 'his collection of archaeological objects largely exceeded what could be expected from a limited series of random finds resulting from a rightful interest in the Past . . .' (*El País* March 18th 1999).

Thirdly, a higher level of sophistication and organization in the looting of Andalusian archaeological sites has been recently revealed. In September 1999, and after a long investigation

called *Operación Trajano*, the SEPRONA uncovered an internet-based ring for the auctioning of antiquities looted from Andalusian archaeological sites (*El País* September 26th 1999; *El Mundo* September 25th & 26th 1999; *Sevilla Información* September 26th 1999; *ABC* September 26th 1999; *Huelva Información* September 26th 1999; *Odiel Información* September 26th 1999). These internet-based auctions had been held since 1997 from a web site based in San José (California, US) and involved clients from Australia, France, Germany, Canada and Portugal. Three people were arrested and charged in Sevilla and more than 9000 archaeological objects (including c. 5000 coins) were recovered (Figs. 4 & 5). The officers also found sophisticated computer equipment, detailed maps of archaeological sites and high-tech metal detectors. The revelations of this case caused great concern in the local and regional authorities responsible for cultural resource management for they have indeed exposed a new generation of more efficiently organized local looters (Rodríguez 2000). These new generation looters do not operate just locally, but aim their activities at profitable international markets. According to the Guardia Civil reports, up to 80 or 90 per cent of antiquities looted in Andalusia end up in the US, UK and Japan (*Diario de Cádiz* April 15th 2000).

### **The war against looting: information, education and suppression**

The war against the looting of archaeological sites in Andalusia is being fought on three different but equally crucial fronts. The first one is the technical control of the archaeological resources, their location, status and characteristics. On this front, the administration has implemented over the last five years more efficient means to manage, process, update and evaluate the information pertaining to the regional inventory of archaeological sites. This has to some extent involved a more comprehensive archaeological coverage of the territory and, therefore, an enhanced control of the archaeological resources. But more impor-



**Figure 4.** Archaeological objects recovered after *Operación Trajano*. (Source: SEPRONA.)



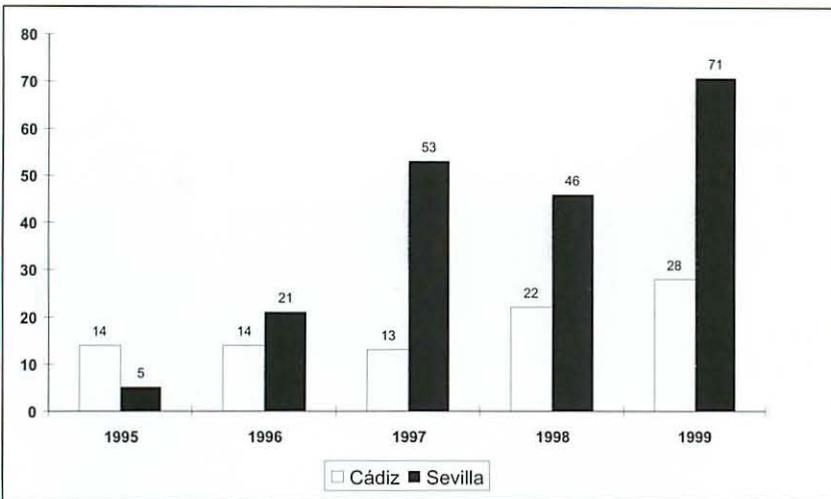
**Figure 5.** Archaeological objects recovered after *Operación Trajano*. (Source: SEPRONA.)

tantly, it has involved the development of new systems to handle the information, with a move from a strictly paper-based system to a GIS-based one (Amores *et al.* 1999; 2000; Fernández *et al.* forthcoming), thus allowing better procedures of data transfer towards those public and private organizations seeking to develop building plans. However, large portions of the regional territory still remain poorly surveyed, and, in the face of rapidly changing patterns of land use, some mechanisms of protection do not seem to work efficiently in stopping the destruction of sites. Hence, further work is badly needed to grant a minimum level of control for all archaeological sites.

The second is, most crucially, educational in nature. Little or no success in the struggle against looting can be expected without public awareness of the finite and exhaustible nature of the archaeological resources as a common herit-

**Table 2.** *The battle against site looting. (Source: SEPRONA.)*

| Province  | Reports | Atestados (charges for serious offences) | Actas (charges for minor offences) | Total |
|-----------|---------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Almería   | 0       | 0                                        | 0                                  | 0     |
| Algeciras | 4       | 0                                        | 0                                  | 4     |
| Cádiz     | 24      | 0                                        | 2                                  | 26    |
| Córdoba   | 86      | 0                                        | 0                                  | 86    |
| Granada   | 2       | 3                                        | 0                                  | 5     |
| Huelva    | 8       | 0                                        | 1                                  | 9     |
| Jaén      | 74      | 0                                        | 0                                  | 0     |
| Málaga    | 7       | 1                                        | 0                                  | 8     |
| Sevilla   | 70      | 0                                        | 0                                  | 70    |
| ANDALUSÍA | 275     | 4                                        | 3                                  | 282   |
| SPAIN     | 464     | 39                                       | 14                                 | 517   |



**Figure 6.** *Reports handled by the SEPRONA in the provinces of Cádiz and Sevilla.*

age and a source of economic development. The situation in Andalusia is evolving quickly, with increasing interest from the written media and the public and a much higher degree of involvement and participation of local authorities in the dissemination of the archaeological heritage. However, positive as this growth in public awareness may be, it still remains largely insufficient. This is particularly noticeable in the most influential communication medium, TV. In Andalusia, the regional public TV channel has opted for an unchallenged focus on an array of popular folkloric and religious traditions that, according to the official jargon, represent the principles of Andalusian cultural identity. Strangely, the archaeological and historical heritages have so far had no role to play in the construction of this cultural identity. Successful British productions such as *Time Team* or *Meet the Ancestors*, that have contributed so much to rise public awareness about the need to preserve the heritage legacy

in the United Kingdom, are simply unheard of among Spanish TV channels. In fact, as recent reviews have shown, archaeology as such is poorly represented (or not represented at all) on Spanish television at large (Ruiz 1996, 96).

The third front in the battle against looting is, obviously, in the hands of the security forces, namely the National Police and Guardia Civil. Since its creation in 1989 as a unit within the Guardia Civil, the SEPRONA has carried out an increasing number of operations against site looting and illicit trade of antiquities (VVAA 2000). Some spectacular cases, like the recovery of the stolen Medieval codex *Beato de Liébana* received extensive media coverage throughout Spain (Cortés 1997, 20–22). Interestingly, training and specialisation courses in cultural heritage matters have proven extremely successful and highly demanded among the Guardia Civil agents, and not only among those deployed in SEPRONA (*El País* December 16th 1996).

But more to the point of this paper, between 1990 and 1996 the number of operations carried out by SEPRONA at a national level has multiplied fivefold, showing increasing efficiency in the struggle against heritage-related crimes. In Andalusia, this can be exemplified in the province of Sevilla (Fig. 6) where the number of reports investigated has in four years multiplied almost tenfold. Apart from the operations mentioned above, data for 1999 show a total number of 275 reports being investigated in the region (although only 7 were criminal in nature), which represents a total 59.2 per cent of the entire country (Table 2). Interestingly, Andalusia covers about one third of Spanish territory, supporting about 21 per cent of the country's population, which evidently means there must be factors other than merely size or demography to account for that significantly higher proportion of looting reports.

## Concluding remarks

In the southernmost Spanish region of Andalusia, site looting is a serious threat to the conservation of the archaeological heritage for future generations. Despite the lack of long-term and precise series of data, evidence does suggest that the incidence of looting in this region may be significantly higher than in the rest of Spain. More specific heritage legislation and growing awareness among local politicians are increasing the pressure on looters. At the same time, police forces and archaeologists are applying new procedures and techniques which contribute to a better protection against heritage-related crime. However, looters are utilizing more sophisticated technology too. Hence, public awareness in its widest sense becomes a factor of fundamental importance in the struggle against those who seek profit from the destruction of public property of historical or archaeological value. Unfortunately, at the present time the outcome of the battle on this front looks grim: little or no attempt has been made so far by the audiovisual media to present the archaeological heritage as a source of knowledge, education, enjoyment and economic development. Evidently, we archaeologists have a further responsibility to face.

## Note

This report would not have been possible without the kind collaboration and provision of data from the Andalusian Institute of the Historical Heritage (IAPH) and the SEPRONA through the Guardia Civil Press Service.

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- August 23rd 1997: Robaban las piedras del puente califal de Córdoba para hacer mampostería
- August 24th 1997: Recuperadas todas las piezas del puente califal de Córdoba
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- October 29th, 1999: A. Manzano, Tartessos, ¿una colonia fenicia?

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- August 23rd 1997: A. Rodríguez, Tres detenidos en el puente de Los Nogales pensaban utilizar las dovelas para tapias de chalés
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- August 24th 1997: A. Rodríguez, Los presuntos expoliadores de Los Nogales, en libertad bajo fianza
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- August 24th 1997: A. Rodríguez, El puente de Los Nogales y la barbarie cordobesa
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March 18th 1999: El TSJA ratifica una multa de 17 millones por coger restos arqueológicos

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October 20th, 1999: F. Arnaiz, El pescador de Historia

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October 20th 1999: E. Ponce, La Guardia Civil recupera en Punta dos estatuillas de la Época de los tartesos.

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### *Sevilla Información*

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## **TV review: *On the Trail of the Tomb Robbers* (Channel 10, Sweden)**

JENNY DOOLE

Once in a while a television programme can make such an impression that things actually change. We saw this in the world of illicit antiquities when Peter Watson's 1997 exposé of dodgy dealing at Sotheby's led to a multimillion pound review of the auction house's methods, and to the end of their sales of classical antiquities in London. Now we have seen it again, in Sweden, because in February Swedish television's Channel 10 screened an equally powerful investigation entitled *On the Trail of the Tomb Robbers*. It made an

impact on the general public, dealers and museums, and even the government. Because of the programme, codes of conduct have been drawn up, policies changed, international investigations launched and the Swedish government has begun the process of preparing legislation which would lead to their signing the 1970 UNESCO convention.

The hour-long broadcast was based on the work of graduate student Staffan Lundén of the University of Gothenburg, and produced by Johan Brånstad of Swedish Television. It aired as part of a series, *Striptease*, which generally attracts an audience of 10 per cent of the Swedish population. The broadcast also generated massive coverage elsewhere — particularly in news media where it featured hourly on the radio, and was covered on the main evening television bulletin, as well as in lead articles in major newspapers.

One of the main tenets of the programme was that, since Sweden has not signed the 1970 UNESCO convention, it is not illegal to import or sell there antiquities which have been illegally excavated or exported from their countries of origin. Lundén and Brånstad showed during the course of their documentary what the shocking realities of this situation are, and contrasted it very effectively with the strict restraints the Swedish government has imposed on the destruction of their own archaeological heritage, including the banning of metal detectors under threat of a 4-year prison sentence. They made extensive use of hidden cameras, through which we heard and saw truly astounding indictments from dealers and museum professionals, and also travelled the world to show the destruction looting is causing on the ground in areas like Peru, Italy and Thailand.

### The investigations

#### *Dynasty and the Buddhas*

During a good-natured discussion with a potential buyer, filmed on hidden camera, two dealers from a Swedish firm called *Dynasty* explained exactly how they smuggled Buddhas from Thailand and Burma: in their suitcases. Specializing in wooden Buddhas (since the metal ones would show up on airport security X-ray) they told how 'you stuff them in your bag and hope for the best'. These scenes were juxtaposed with interviews with Thai archaeologists, explaining the significance and importance of such artefacts to Thai history, and with a Thai Buddhist monk at a village temple from which a Buddha had recently been stolen. Such arguments carried little weight for the dealers, who reasoned that although Thai people see these objects as sacred artefacts, to them they are saleable works of art.

The atmosphere became rather less convivial when Swedish Television confronted the dealers and attempted to question them about what they had unknowingly revealed. In a formal response, the *Dynasty* dealers later said they had been attempting to lighten the conversation by joking when referring to smuggling the items they sell.

#### *The ambassador and his collection*

Ulf Lewin (Fig. 1), former Swedish ambassador to Guatemala, Ecuador and, more recently, Peru (until Feb 2000), has been a keen collector of

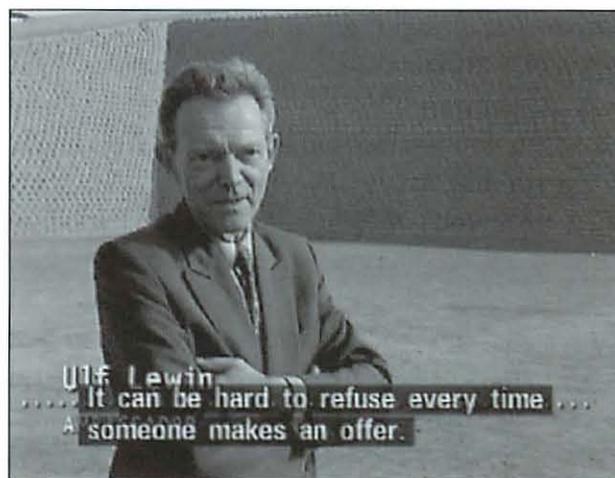


Figure 1. Sweden's ambassador to Peru, Ulf Lewin.

pre-Columbian antiquities for 30 years, and has a genuine interest in South American history. But the programme focused attention on whether he had illegally exported items from his extensive collections for donation and sale to museums and antiquities dealers in Sweden, and whether diplomatic bags had been used to smuggle them out. In question were objects he sold to the Swedish Ethnographic Museum when he was secretary at the Swedish Embassy in Bogota, Colombia during 1968–69. Other objects in salesrooms in Stockholm also came from his collections, according to sales staff, who claimed to have seen Lewin's collections, and remembered them as much larger than the ambassador implied and also recalled Lewin being much keener to sell them for profit than he claimed. Interviews with a clearly flustered Lewin were inter-cut with scenes of Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva (Fig. 3). Alva took the crew through the looted landscapes of Cerro Cavacho and Sipán (see *CWC* Issue 4), where they filmed countless lunar craters and shattered pots left by looters, who are estimated to have destroyed thousands of ancient graves and evidence. The images showed the reality of what Alva called the 'murder of culture'.

This strand of the investigation sparked an international scandal, with Latin-American media dubbing Lewin the 'looter-ambassador'. Reactions in Sweden from the embassies of Peru, Ecuador and Colombia led to the launch of an enquiry by the Swedish Department of Foreign Affairs into Lewin's alleged smuggling of archaeological artefacts from Colombia. The results of their investigation appeared this summer and concluded that Lewin could not be accused of

any wrong-doing since he had acted as part of his job, with the knowledge and consent of the ambassador, and that he had obtained oral permission from Colombian authorities. The Peruvian authorities, unsatisfied with the report have apparently referred the case to UNESCO, and follow-up interviews were broadcast in November with Colombian archaeologists who considered the report a scandal and denied that permissions had been given. The follow-up also presented letters indicating that two other persons (one now ambassador in another country) at the Swedish embassy in 1970–72 had helped a Swedish national acquire and export archaeological material from Colombia. One of the letters speaks of the problems associated with arranging transport for a crate of objects which it is illegal to export and another strongly suggests that disrespect for other countries' laws on export of cultural objects was widespread amongst Swedish diplomats.

#### *Museums, unprovenanced antiquities and the government*

The documentary also addressed the large numbers of unprovenanced antiquities purchased by museums in Sweden, using the case of the Morgantina acroliths (see *CWC* Issue 3) to highlight the controversy and underlying archaeological destruction associated with such acquisitions.

At the private Museum of East Asian Art in the small town of Ulricehamn, the Director's official story of how he acquired artefacts for the collection — from old collections, or sales in Sweden, USA and England — changed significantly when he chatted informally, unaware that

he was being filmed (Fig. 2). He pointed to many items amongst the exhibits and explained how he himself smuggled them from China, using cigarettes and cash as bribes and being careful 'not to buy anything too big to put in his pocket or hand-luggage'. Particularly tricky to get out of the country was the large terracotta funerary horse which took pride of place in the gallery. In response to the programme the Director stated that in his staggeringly indiscrete descriptions of his smuggling activities he could only have been referring to 'a few items that I brought with me by mistake'. The Museum had been proposed for the European Museum of the Year award, but did not win, following the Director's revelations.

At the state Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities the investigators were allowed access to acquisition records and demonstrated that quantities of unprovenanced antiquities were being purchased. They focused on an unprovenanced Apulian fish-plate bought from Sotheby's which was identical to one which they were able to identify in the documents Peter Watson used for his investigation into unethical dealings at the auction house. It emerged that the piece was consigned, along with 20 other items, by Robin Syme's Swiss company in 1983. When confronted with the likely dubious origin of this piece, and asked about the museum's continued purchase of unprovenanced material the museum's spokesperson suggested that 'one has to ignore moral scruples to enrich the collection' and argued that government directives for museum acquisition compelled museums to continue to add to collections by acquiring even unprovenanced material.

When interviewed, however, Marita Ulvskog, Minister for Culture, strongly denied that this was the case. She was less clear cut when it came to the question of Sweden's continued refusal to sign international conventions to protect cultural property saying that, while the Swedish government was in theory keen to sign the 1970 UNESCO Convention, they would only consider doing so when sure they could fulfil the necessary conditions, and preferably when Denmark and Norway do so also. The issue did not seem a high priority and the Minister admitted that it had not been discussed for 30 years. It appears to have become more of a priority in the aftermath of Lundén and Brånstad's exposé, since



**Figure 2.** Director of the Museum of East Asian Art, Ulricehamn, filmed on hidden-camera.

the Department for Culture has indicated that the legislation for signing the UNESCO convention will be put to the Swedish Parliament in Spring 2002, although a decision on UNIDROIT must wait until new laws on good faith purchases are decided.

In the wake of the programme, a temporary ban on acquisitions was imposed on a number of state museums (including the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities) and a Code of Ethics for museums, based on the ICOM code, was quickly drafted.

### Lasting impressions

Lundén and Brånstad's investigation demonstrates once again the impact that a well-researched and well-crafted media investigation can make. It used such powerful images to get its message across that it is difficult to decide which leaves the most lasting impression. Perhaps it was the sight of the Queen of Sweden opening a new exhibition at the Ulricehamn Museum, unaware that the Director in charge of her welcoming committee had smuggled many of the exhibits from China using the sleaziest of methods. Perhaps it was the contrast between footage of meticulous excavations of Viking metalworking scraps by Swedish archaeologists (who struggle, and are obliged by law, to protect even the poorest objects of Swedish origin) and the images of devastation from other archaeological sites abroad. Or perhaps it was the sight of a Stockholm dealer explaining on hidden-camera that the gouges on the back of a Roman statue (bought from Sotheby's, having been consigned to auc-

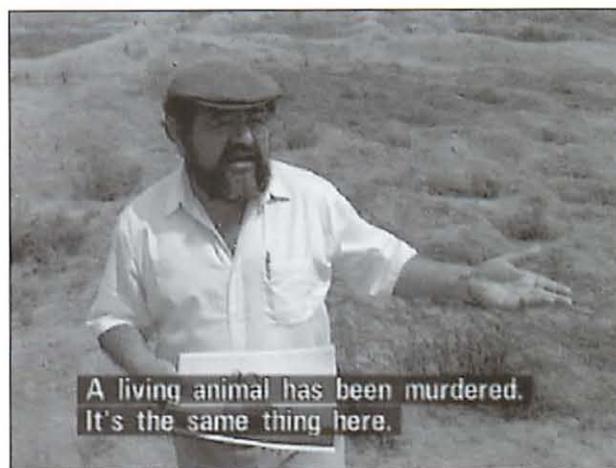


Figure 3. Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva at Cerro Caracho.

tion by Giacomo Medici in 1986) were probably made by a mechanical digger when it was illegally excavated by tombrobbers.

For me, however, the most powerful moment was when a Thai Buddhist monk, devastated by the theft of the Buddha statue which was part of his living religion asked, 'These Westerners who are buying our statuettes . . . what on earth do they do with them?'. Cut to the dealers from *Dynasty* explaining that Buddhas are very collectible and particularly saleable to museums, but also to young people: 'They are very trendy'. Thanks to this excellent programme it is to be hoped that more collectors — young or old, institutional or private — will have a clearer idea of the issues surrounding the trade in illicit antiquities and may realize that 'trendy' isn't.

JENNY DOOLE

Front cover. Zeugma's Mona Lisa.

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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.



