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CHAPTER 13

THE VALUE OF A LOOTED OBJECT

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS IN THE ANTIQUITIES TRADE

MORAG M. KERSEL

Morag Kersel is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at DePaul University. Her research focuses on the interplay between cultural heritage and identity formation. She is interested in how considerations of cultural heritage and the interpretation of the past among local populations are understood vis-à-vis archaeological tourism, the looting of archaeological sites, and the daily interaction between local populations and archaeologists (foreign and national). She has participated in a variety of archaeological projects in the Eastern Mediterranean and co-directs the Galilean Prehistory Project, a new initiative investigating social and ritual organization in the Chalcolithic of the Levant. She is also a co-editor of the Archaeological Heritage and Ethics section of the *Journal of Field Archaeology*.

INTRODUCTION

IN order for looted artefacts to travel from the ground to the consumer they must pass through a series of networks, transit points, and markets. Changing hands numerous times and crossing borders—local, national, and international—these artefacts eventually make their way to auction house showrooms, museum vitrines, and mantelpieces of private collectors. At every stage in this process there are actors and agents who stake a claim to the looted objects and who assign value to the artefacts. For each of these interest groups or publics the ascribed meanings may differ entirely and may even be oppositional in stance.

Much of the data included in this entry is the result of Ph.D. and postdoctoral research conducted over a period of two years of living in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. Over 150 interviews were carried out with various stakeholders involved with the illegal and legal antiquities trade (in Israel it is legal to buy and sell artefacts which pre-date the 1978 Antiquities Law) in the region. The research is what Marcus (1995: 96) refers to as a multi-sited ethnography, 'an ethnography that moves from its conventional single-sited location to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the local and the global, the life world and the system'. The methods used for this investigation included: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic analysis. Although never explicitly asked about the value of looted objects, inferences could be gleaned from the variety of responses of the stakeholders.

The following is an examination of the values attributed to looted artefacts by the assorted publics associated with illegal trade in antiquities. What are the values of a looted object to the looter, the local populace, the government employee, the archaeologist (both local and foreign), the dealer, the law-maker, the collector, the museum, and the tourist? Grounded in ethnographic, criminological, and legal theory, this chapter is a discussion of the values of looted objects and the competing demands for those contested items from the Middle East.

TYPES OF VALUES

If we take Carman's (2002, 2005) discussion of archaeological values as a guiding principle for examining the value of looted artefacts the model would result in a discussion of looted artefacts as both economic and cultural types of capital that can be exchanged and there are a number of values ascribed to these artefacts both singly and in tandem.

In considering the 'value' of artefacts I draw upon Marx's classic definition of value—all objects have value: use value and exchange value. For example, in its original conception the Byzantine oil lamp is useful for lighting a room, but according to Marx under capitalism all objects are reduced to their exchange value (their value or price in the marketplace)—the Byzantine oil lamp may have cost 4 shekels in antiquity. For Marx, actual value is derived when labour power is applied to raw materials within a particular production process. Such a production system in turn creates goods whose value can only be realized through exchange and consumption (Marx 1954, 1956).

Marx's definitions are useful in examining looted objects in the antiquities trade, but Baudrillard's concept of *symbolic* value is integral to understanding the consumption stage of the capitalist process (Baudrillard 1970). In order to examine the question of how a capitalist society can sustain itself, Baudrillard introduced the idea of symbolic exchange—a process in which goods are exchanged as commodities but with the added element of symbolic value or status, which they provide the consumer (Koch and Elmore 2006). According to Baudrillard (1970) all commodities are laden with symbolic value, which has eclipsed their utility and monetary values. Commodities are no longer defined

by their use, but by what they signify (Baudrillard 1970: 6). Looted objects have a symbolic value to the end consumer for their association with distant lands, shared ancestry, and evocations of connectivity to the past. Consumers consume objects laden with symbolic meaning. Once acquired, the looted item can also denote distinction, taste, and social status. For Baudrillard (2001: 129) goods in the marketplace can even take on the role of fetish (an object positioned purely for its symbolic value).

Baudrillard (2001) contends that the fetishized object once contained elements of use value and exchange value, but it now solely possesses a symbolic value. I would argue that this is not the case for looted objects. Through discussions with the various stakeholders in the trade in illegal artefacts, it became apparent that looted items, while perhaps revered and idolized, do not always lose their exchange value—they often retain their economic value for the museum, for the individual collector, and for society at large.

Also useful in considering the value of artefacts and assessing stakeholder perceptions was an examination of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which connects value to artefacts within a specific array of class and institutional settings, reinforcing Baudrillard's conceptions of value. Bourdieu developed the concept of cultural capital to describe the possession of knowledge, accomplishments, and objects, used by people to negotiate their social standing (Johnson 2006). With cultural capital, an economic exchange (buying an artefact) sets in motion a series of uses—some symbolic, some fungible—for other capital. Looted artefacts can represent cultural capital to many of the stakeholders: representing skilled excavation techniques, intellectual prowess in appraising the piece, depicting a sense of adventure as a touristic mnemonic device, and competence in acquisitions for the collector and curator.

Baudrillard expands upon the illustrative power of the Marxian paradigm. The commodity (the looted artefact) possesses three values: use value, exchange value, and symbolic value, and the following will examine stakeholder perceptions of these values vis-à-vis the looted artefact in the antiquities trade. While acknowledging the underpinning analyses of Marx and Baudrillard this discussion will also rely on Carman's (*sensu* Bourdieu) discussions of social and cultural capital.

IDENTIFYING THE STAKEHOLDERS

The process of selling illegally excavated artefacts can be broken down into three spheres or links in a commodity chain—production, distribution, and consumption. A commodity chain is defined by Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986: 159) as 'a network of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity'; in this instance the looted object is the finished commodity. The first link is the artefact cultivation and production stage; the second is the movement of the illegally excavated objects by middlemen and the distribution of the material by dealers; and finally the eventual consumption of the items by private individuals, tourists, and museums. While the first link must

occur in the country of origin the other links can happen locally, nationally, and/or transnationally. At each of the stages there are a number of actors who are involved and who assign meaning to various items unearthed illegally.

The various stakeholders involved with the trade can include a variety of types of individuals (Figure 13.1).

Each stakeholder in the illegal trade in antiquities believes that they have a right to possess, or protect, or purvey (or any combination of these actions) archaeological artefacts from the Middle East. The looters may have no perceived cultural affinity to the artefacts in question, but they recognize that middlemen will pay for the material they illegally excavate. Middlemen assert that they are both meeting consumer demand and adding to the economic stability of the region by providing the looters with added income. Dealers are providing a service by meeting consumer demand. The tourist wants to take home a memento of his visit to the area that will serve as a symbol (Dominguez 1986) of a past visit to a particular place. Museums and institutions with educational mandates have a vested interest in purchasing artefacts, increasing their collections for the purposes of study and edification of the general public and researchers. Architects, conservators, educators, and law-makers may play a role in the trade,

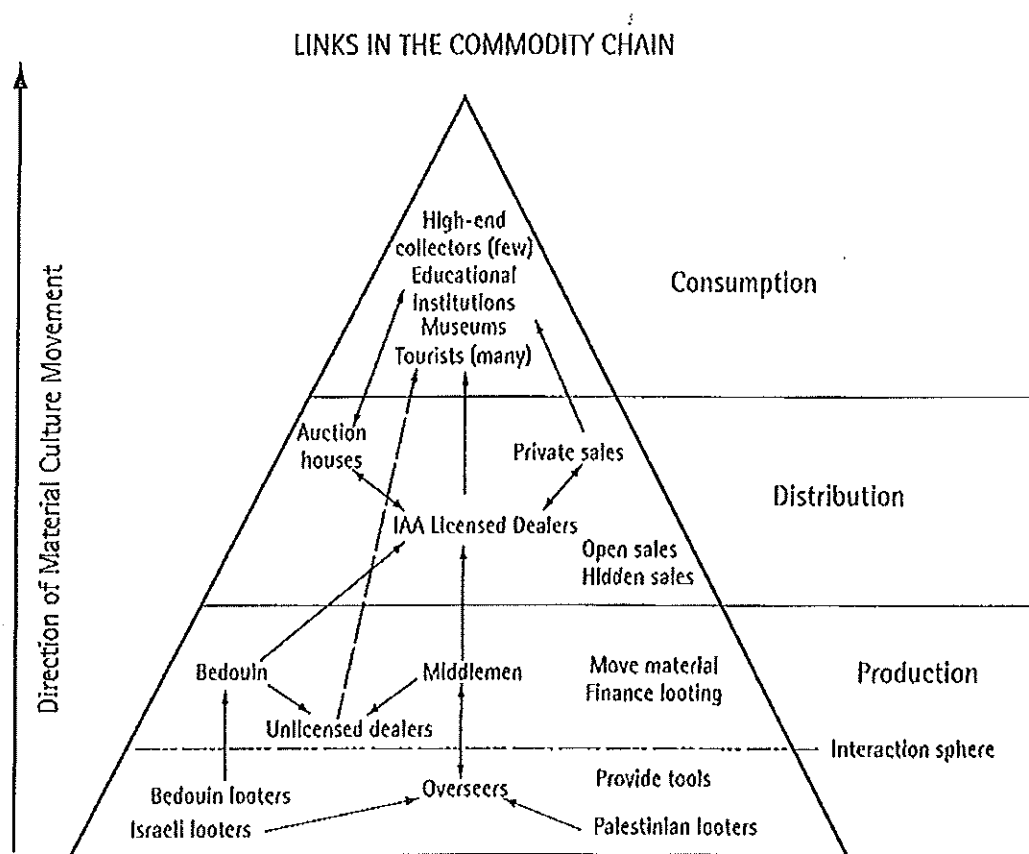


FIGURE 13.1 Stakeholders in the Middle Eastern trade in illegal antiquities pyramid.

through valuing, conservation, research, or legislative efforts. Government employees are attempting to protect the past for the future and are charged with the responsibility of oversight at each stage of the trade. Additionally, this chapter will illustrate that archaeologists also have a vested interest in the looted objects and that they can be involved at all three stages of the trade.

THE VALUE OF A LOOTED ARTEFACT?

Archaeologists

For the purposes of this chapter archaeologists were defined as those people with an interest in the aims and methods of archaeology. Individuals are employed as professional archaeologists either as academics (working for educational institutions), with private companies, or non-governmental, non-profit, organizations. Archaeologists working for governmental agencies were included in the governmental employee stakeholder group, although some of the archaeologists in this category were former government employees. Archaeological sites are directly affected by illegal looting and archaeologists often come into contact with looters and middlemen through the course of their work. The value of an artefact recovered *in situ* is dramatically different from an artefact ripped from its original context and found in the shop window of a dealer on King David Street in Jerusalem.

Decontextualized artefacts—those illegally excavated with no record of find-spot—result in the discipline's inability to refute or confirm claims of authenticity. There is no clearer example of this than the James Ossuary, the first-century AD bone box bearing an inscription that may be one of the earliest known archaeological references to Jesus. Details of the ossuary's find-spot (it was purchased on the antiquities market) called into question its legitimacy, as well as the veracity of biblical narratives. Does this looted artefact have any value to archaeology when we have no idea where it came from, whose bones were housed in the ossuary, or what artefacts and architecture were associated (if any)? Handler (1992) has stated that objects attain their meaning through their associations with other objects, with other words, and through human agency. Once looted, can an object ever be valuable to an archaeologist? Has it lost all meaning? And can the looted object ever be anything else once it has been looted?

For some archaeologists there is still some knowledge to be gained from the study of a looted item, but the discipline remains deeply divided over this issue. Debates over the academic value of looted artefacts are endemic and ongoing (Rollston 2003, 2004; Michalowski 2004). Recent reports concerning an incident involving fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls illustrate that archaeologists are sometimes implicated in the consumption end of the trade (Kersel et al. 2008). For the archaeologist accused of purchasing a Dead Sea Scroll fragment in direct violation of Israeli law, the study of the suspected looted

artefact outweighed considerations of the consequences of purchasing and studying the Dead Sea Scroll fragment. Did the acquisition of the scroll fragments encourage further looting of the area? Does the advancement of human knowledge through the interpretation of the fragment override any concerns that the artefact was looted with no secure archaeological context? Does the research value (Carman 2002) of this rare artefact supersede the loss of knowledge due to the continued destruction of archaeological sites due to the demand for artefacts?

At times archaeologists act as evaluators of archaeological material working in concert with dealers and collectors, enhancing the exchange value of a looted artefact. Archaeologists can (and do) earn extra income by providing their expert opinion and testimony to dealers in archaeological artefacts. Previous research has shown that illegally excavated artefacts enter the legally sanctioned trade in Israel undergoing a laundering process to make them 'legal' (Kersel 2006a, 2008). An integral part of this laundering process is the authentication and valuing of the looted objects by the professional archaeologist. Through a series of interviews with archaeologists I was able to determine that there are archaeologists who actively participate in the legitimizing of illegally excavated artefacts by assigning an economic worth, providing a theoretical find-spot, and a chronological indicator for the decontextualized artefact. In this instance the looted artefact has a significant economic value for the archaeologist, but the economic value of artefacts is not limited to archaeologists; it is also of importance to looters and dealers.

Looters

In a recent article (Kersel 2007) I discuss the reasons why people loot in the Near East. The reasons are complex and belie the prevailing assumption that people illegally excavate to feed their families as some have suggested (Staley 1993; Matsuda 1998; Hollowell-Zimmer 2003). The value of a looted object for this stakeholder group can be, and most often is, economic—the price that one can get for the item. For those who loot as a form of resistance (Abu el-Haj 2001; Kersel 2007) artefacts have a symbolic value as reminders of the Jewish/Israeli past which for some looters must be eradicated from the landscape. As potent reminders of occupation and subjugation of one people over another, looting sites and selling the artefacts bolsters a sense of self-determination, providing some (largely symbolic) measure of control over the situation in Palestine.

For those who loot as a traditional practice the value of the artefact derives from its role in a time-honoured custom that has been in families for generations. The act of looting and the acquisition of artefacts can serve to bind families and communities together and as such the value of the looted object is symbolic in its representation of a community ethos. The sentiment that the objects were left by their ancestors (Thoden van Velzen 1996, 1999; Hollowell 2006) for the present populations to do with as they please is often prevalent. In this instance the value of the object is both symbolic (a potent reminder of familial ties) and an economic use value—the artefacts as items to

be sold in the marketplace and the money garnered from the sale to be used for whatever purpose deemed important by the looters.

Eventually most of the looted objects, whatever the original motivations behind looting (see Kersel 2007), end up with an economic value, and somewhere in the process of reaching the consumer there is an exchange of values in the classic Marxian understanding of the process of capitalism. Once in the marketplace, often as legitimately available material, their primary value is economic in nature and it remains that way throughout much of the process of trade—until the final sale to the consumer, where the object can possess an exchange value, a symbolic value, or both.

Dealers

For dealers—both licensed and illegal—the value of the looted object is almost exclusively an economic one. The object purchased from a looter is important for the price that can be realized from the eventual sale. Dealers range from an individual shoeshine man who sells the occasional coin (see Kersel 2006b) to the international auction houses and high-end antiquities shops located on Bond Street in London, Madison Avenue in New York, or Hollywood Road in Hong Kong. The Internet plays an increasingly important role in the trade in looted items as looters can now bypass middlemen dealers selling directly to the consumer (Robbins 2006; Stanish 2008, 2009). In a study of looted artefacts Brodie (1999) illustrates that middlemen and dealers garner the largest profits in the trade, leaving the looters with less than 1 per cent of the profits. Estimates of the actual dollar amount of the trade in antiquities are often bandied about and numbers such as US\$4–6 billion annually (Borodkin 1995; Magness-Gardiner 2004) often appear, but the trade is difficult to estimate because there are illegal elements and accurate reporting of sales is rare. Nor do these estimates take into consideration the Internet, direct sales between looters and consumers, and private (hidden) sales between collectors.

As discussed previously, the exchange value of the looted artefact is increased through knowledge—the authentication of the piece by an archaeologist or knowing the purported archaeological find-spot. But the end result is the same—the value of the artefact is its economic worth in the marketplace regardless of its illegal origins.

Collectors

For the purposes of this study the term collector is broadly construed to include tourists (local and foreigners), private individuals, and those collecting for museums and/or educational institutions. In the acquisition stage, where money changes hands, artefacts have an exchange value in the classic Marxian concept, so that collected artefacts become commodities in that they have an exchange value (Marx 1975 [1844]). For Appadurai (1986) the economic exchange itself creates value for the artefact. Marx (1963: 183) distinguishes between the exchange value and use value of the commodities

(and by commodities here I mean the artefacts that have entered the marketplace) circulating in capitalist societies. Few would dispute that the state of the artefacts as commodities in the marketplace instils them with value: it is a question of which type of value and whether these values have any bearing on the eventual purchase by the consumer.

Once the looted artefact is placed in the marketplace to be collected it can take on a new set of meanings, as noted in Figure 13.2. No longer the utile (shedding its use value) ubiquitous lamp for lighting a darkened room; the collected Byzantine oil lamp with the menorah stamp becomes an esteemed item used to confirm the Jewish past, taking on a symbolic value. The artefact's meaning is moved from one of function to one that is socially or ideologically based in its contemporary context. The lamp is unlikely to be again used as a lighting device and the oil lamp is now a metonym for the existence of Jews in the Levant. The meaning of the collectible is not always as art, or a connection to the past, or technological achievement, or utility. The thrill of the hunt and acquisitions also play an important role in the consumption of archaeological artefacts. The oil lamp also possesses an exchange value that may have been in place since its creation. The original craftsman may have sold the lamp in the ancient marketplace, just as the current antiquities dealer sells the lamp in Jerusalem's Old City. The lamp may also have a new use value as a story-telling device used to illustrate exotic locales.

Some collectors are in search of artefacts that are reminiscent of their visit to the Holy Land—a symbolic meaning for the artefact. These souvenirs are what Gordon (1986) refers to as 'symbolic shorthand souvenirs'—those artefacts manufactured in the past, which evoke a message about the place or person from which they originate. Many theoretical considerations of collecting (Baekeland 1981; Storr 1983; Stewart 1984; Haraway 1985; Baudrillard 1994; Clifford 1994; Belk 1995; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Schwartz 2001) agree that in the final analysis collecting is about control. This view is predicated on the owner-object relationship as a domination-based link whereby the owner of the

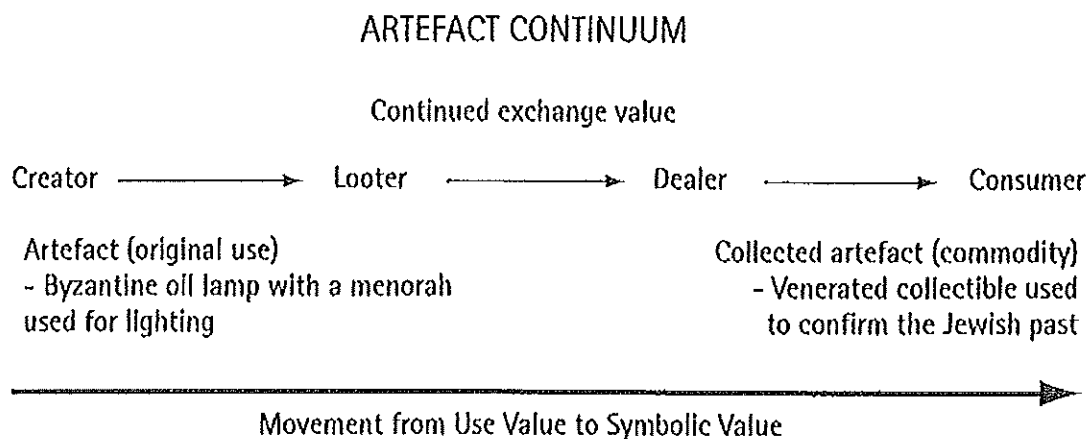


FIGURE 13.2 The Near Eastern artefact continuum.

object (with a symbolic value) is imbued with power over the past through ownership. Israelis buying artefacts looted from Palestine assert their dominance over the collective cultural legacy through authority over the downtrodden Palestinians, who resort to looting as a means of economic survival. In *Orientalism* Edward Said (1978) accuses Napoleon's forays into Egypt and the Levant of being the quintessential model of scientific appropriation of one culture by another. Napoleon participated in what Schildkrout and Keim (1998: 30) refer to as trophy hunting in which large collections of artefacts are a tangible means of showing conquest, domination, and penetration. For the collector the act of purchasing an artefact in the marketplace also conveys dominance over travel, leaving their known comfort zones for destinations and adventures unknown. The purchased antiquity signifies a conquest over a distant land.

Brodie and Luke (2006: 304) have stated that 'most, if not all antiquities collectors consider themselves to be art collectors', viewing the acquisition of art as entry into social circles that may have been denied in the past; they are exchanging economic capital (the investment in archaeological material) for cultural capital (good social standing) in the terminology of Bourdieu (1984). The value of the looted object is not only symbolic, but can also be economic. In December 2007 a 2.5 centimetres high ivory statue was sold at a Sotheby's Auction for US\$57.2 million, prompting a plethora of articles on art and antiquities as the next big investment (Baugh 2007). This reinforces the exchange value of artefacts from the marketplace.

At cultural institutions (museums or educational edifices) the value of looted objects (through bequests, donations, or direct sales) is often in flux. Motivated by civic-minded mandates like educating the public, museums and educational institutions view looted material as a means of exhibiting prowess in the marketplace and domination over rival institutions. In these instances the looted artefacts have both an economic value—revenues generated from visits to the museum, the gift shop, or donations based on the prestige of the establishment—and a cultural value, used in the edification and the betterment of humankind.

The willingness of collectors (including museums and educational institutions) to turn a blind eye to the issue of archaeological find-spot and artefact pedigree ensures that the demand for looted items continues. The acquisition policies of cultural organizations are under increasing scrutiny (Renfrew 2000, 2006), and a movement to return archaeological objects to the archaeologically rich nations where they were found is gaining momentum in the cultural heritage arena. Recently there have been a number of high-profile repatriations of suspect material from institutions and individuals, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, The J. Paul Getty Museum, and Shelby White (Povoledo 2006). Once looted and now repatriated artefacts can act as attractors to museums and cultural centres where paying visitors view the items (an economic value); but they also represent the cultural heritage of a wronged community and success of the vanquished over market nations and collectors (a symbolic/cultural value). Again looted objects possess both a cultural and economic value to the possessors. For the collector the value of a looted object is fluid and can change readily to suit the needs of the possessor.

Government employees and law-makers

A cross-section of people employed by the governments of Israel, Jordan, and Palestine—ranging from those in administration to field archaeologists—were interviewed as a part of this research. Law-makers dealing with cultural heritage were also consulted. These stakeholder groups were primarily interested in the legal value of the looted artefacts—the legislative efforts in each of these states vest the ‘ownership’ of the artefacts in the state. ‘When an antiquity is discovered or found in Israel after the coming into force of this law [1978], it shall within the boundaries fixed by the Director become the property of the State’ (Israel Antiquities Law 5738–1978). This legal definition provides a very clinical value of the artefact—a symbolic representation of the nation. The potential exchange value is left unspoken—a happy consequence of tourism and visits to heritage sites where the state-owned antiquities are housed.

Rarely do looted objects have an overt economic value for these stakeholders, although in Israel there is a proposal for the sale of sherds by the state. The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA)—the government entity charged with safeguarding the cultural heritage of the nation—was considering selling pottery sherds to tourists (Barkat 2003). The problems of storage space and the cost of permanent curation for millions of sherds are confronting the IAA and this is one solution proffered by the current IAA Director. This proposal is fraught with problems, not the least of which is the legitimacy of the state selling what is essentially public property under current Israeli law.

The economic value of looted items is also central to the issue of the legally sanctioned trade in antiquities that currently exists in Israel and which the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage is at present considering. Research shows that looted objects routinely enter the legal market in Israel bypassing any control mechanisms currently in place (Kersel 2006a, 2006b). As discussed previously, the collectors purchasing the items from the sanctioned trade may view the value as symbolic, while the looters and dealers place an economic value on the same items. Law-makers in both Israel and Palestine have long grappled with the oversight and endorsement of a legal trade, which does fuel looting (Kersel 2006b). Again looted objects possess interchangeable, overlapping, economic and symbolic values.

Each of the stakeholder groups forms part of the public for archaeology. Fluctuating and exchangeable values assigned by the stakeholders are an endemic part of public archaeology. Public archaeology purports to be inclusive and to reach and address the needs of a variety of people who interact with archaeology. Looted objects can also be many things to many people—changing to suit the time, place, and needs of individuals, states, and nations. The following case studies provide concrete evidence of the transferable values of looted objects from the various stakeholder positions. These examples also highlight the attendant issues involved with assigning value and whether values are really as interchangeable as we might think and as Bourdieu (1984) asserts.

CASE STUDIES IN VALUES

Looting in the Ghor Es-Safi

In the mid-1990s reports of the devastating looting in the Ghor es-Safi region of Jordan surfaced in the international news. Reports claimed that the archaeologically rich region was being plundered at an alarming rate and the Jordanian Department of Antiquities was doing little to stop the destruction (Politis 1994). Looting in the area was thought to be a direct result of the development work undertaken by an Italian company building an irrigation system in the region in the 1980s. As a result of the excavation of deep trenches for the underground water system, the Italian employees were uncovering large amounts of archaeological material, which were then taken back to Milan, the location of the company's headquarters (Politis 2002: 259). The artefacts were viewed as economic investments, interesting art pieces, and mementoes of the trip to Jordan—both exchange values and symbolic values. Upon seeing that the foreigners were interested in acquiring archaeological material, the local villagers began looting the area searching in earnest for saleable pieces. As a result an elaborate system of trade involving locals, middlemen, dealers in Kerak and Amman, Bedouin, diplomatic pouches, oil barrels on the Dead Sea, and pilots from Royal Jordanian Airlines was established to move material into neighbouring Israel (where the trade in antiquities is still legal) and Europe. Under the Jordanian Provisional Antiquities Law No. 12 of 1976 it is illegal to trade in antiquities.

Based on archaeological and textual evidence, Ghor es-Safi is thought to be biblical Zoar, the city where Lot and his daughters sought sanctuary after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Archaeological remains evident in this region include some large cemeteries from the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Byzantine periods, all of which, if undisturbed, would provide some valuable evidence for reconstructing information about these periods in the southern Levant (Politis 2002) and for confirming biblical narratives. Tombs are often the most lucrative for looting and the pillaging of these sites has been ongoing since the early 1980s.

The local inhabitants of the Ghor es-Safi (most of whom who are Muslim) feel no cultural connection with the material being looted and 'feel no guilt in disturbing these graves' (Politis 2002: 259). Demand for archaeological material is so great they have even started looting the Islamic tombs, 'prepared to disregard the sanctity of their deceased ancestors in a frenzy to collect saleable *objets d'art*' (Politis 2002: 259). In his examination of the looting in this region, former Director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities (DOA) Ghazi Bisheh (2001: 115) cites a number of factors affecting the decision to loot: high unemployment; a lack of awareness of the importance of cultural heritage; archaeological sites that are viewed as an impediment to growth and development; and the prevailing attitude of local inhabitants that unearthed artefacts are a legitimate source of income. For the locals the value of the looted object was economic. Early efforts

by the Jordanian DOA to lessen or halt the looting were unsuccessful. In response to the worsening situation and the 'lunar-like landscape' (see Figure 13.3) of the region an independent strategy for cultural heritage protection was established. The approach included a buy-back component.

The strategy, developed by concerned archaeologists working in the region, consisted of three parts:

1. recording and photographing all objects recovered during looting;
2. the collection of as many objects as possible for the Jordanian DOA and for eventual placement in a local museum (the buy-back element); and
3. returning to the original find-spot of the looted objects—getting the exact provenience of the material (Politis 2002: 262).

In order to carry out the strategy, a methodology was developed which included developing relationships with notorious dealers and looters in the region in order to gain information and artefacts. These contacts then led to making further connections and identifying the key players in the networks of buyers and sellers.



FIGURE 13.3 Looted landscape at Bab Edh Dhra, Jordan. (Photo: Morag Kersel.)

Information gathering often has an element of *quid pro quo* and, in order to establish better relationships with the looters and dealers involved with illegal activities, the initiators of this programme approached the Jordanian DOA about purchasing the looted archaeological material. In exchange for information, looters and dealers would receive financial compensation for the artefacts in their possession—further reinforcing the exchange value of the artefacts. The archaeologists (under the auspices of the Jordanian DOA) would receive artefacts and associated contextual information.

With the approval of the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities and the Director-General of Antiquities, we began purchasing some of the more important antiquities directly from the tomb robbers. This had a double effect. It helped gain the confidence of the poor tomb robbers and disrupted the dealing network. (Politis 2002: 263–4)

For the archaeologists the justification for initiating the buy-back programme was the 'saving the artefacts for the public argument', assuring all those concerned that the artefacts were being purchased to be placed in an eventual museum in the Ghor es-Safi region, which would bring valuable tourist dollars to the area—both an exchange value and a symbolic/educational value for the once looted items. At the same time the archaeologists were disrupting the traditional trade networks by buying directly from the looters, bypassing the middlemen and dealers in the surrounding towns and cities. In a direct justification of the programme Politis (Politis 2002: 264) states:

Meanwhile, the inscribed tombstones that were recovered from the tomb robbers have been fully recorded and studied, and are now in the final stages of publication. The fact that the tombstones were recorded and/or collected directly from tomb robbers in the Ghor es-Safi (thereby preventing them from being sold to antiquities dealers) not only established a provenance for the stones, but also facilitates the return of those that did leave the Ghor es-Safi area as well as Jordan.

The inscriptions were purchased, studied, and published. Their exact provenience is known, and they will eventually be housed in a museum in the Ghor es-Safi area. The archaeologists repeatedly emphasized that the material was staying in the country and not going to the private home of a collector in Japan or New York. Is the current value of the looted artefact now academic/symbolic or does the artefact retain its exchange value now enhanced by its placement in a museum? Or does the looted artefact have a use value as a didactic tool for museum visitors?

Banking on culture in Mali

The demand for artefacts from Africa is not a new phenomenon—it began in earnest with early colonial contact and continues to the present day (Schmidt and McIntosh 1996). One need only look at the various auction catalogues to see that ethnographic and archaeological material from Africa is considered an extremely desirable class of material culture to collect. Material from the Dogon region in Mali is among the most highly sought, as is apparent from the country's landscape, pock-marked with looter trenches and holes (Sanogo 1999). According to Sanogo (1999: 22), looting in Mali has

traditionally taken on two forms. The first is surface find collection, usually the purview of women and children seeking ceramics, jewellery, and stone grinders, once for private consumption but now for the tourist market. The second is full-scale illegal excavation, which is occurring extensively across the country. Artefacts recovered from these activities are sold directly to tourists or to local middlemen who sell to dealers in the larger cities (Sanogo 1999). A 1994 study reports that 45 per cent of the 834 registered archaeological sites have been looted on some level (Brent 1994). The looting of Mali has been likened to a cultural genocide (Bedaux and Rowlands 2001).

The CultureBank was established in response to the growing loss of the community's material cultural heritage through illegal excavation and the subsequent sale of artefacts. The CultureBank has three main functions; community museum, microfinancing institution, and educational centre. Through this initiative the inhabitants of Fombori in north-eastern Mali and the surrounding areas who have cultural items in their possession are eligible for small business loans—over a four- to six-month period at 3 per cent interest per month—after depositing their objects in the local community museum (Deubel 2006). A historical documentation process determines the economic value of the object, which establishes the amount of loan. A questionnaire is completed for each artefact (ethnographic or archaeological) and is assessed by the loan manager according to a set formula. The exchange value is based on the information gathered as part of the historical documentation process—the more information the greater the assessed value. If the exact find-spot of the archaeological item is recorded (if known) this raises the economic value of the item. If the piece has a long familial history of ownership this is also recorded and can enhance the object's economic worth.

Once the economic value is established individual owners use their cultural heritage as collateral in exchange for currency, which they use to buy grain, livestock, implements, and the like. Owners in good standing—that is those who have repaid their loans in a timely fashion—can opt to renew these loans for an equal or greater amount, which ensures access to a steady stream of income regardless of the general economic situation (Deubel 2006). This arrangement allows participants to access increasingly larger loans, in sharp contrast to the one-time profit realized by selling artefacts to tourists or to middlemen in the capital, Bamako, and other larger cities. At no time in the process does the individual relinquish ownership of the artefact; even if the participant defaults on the loan; the artefact cannot be sold or exchanged and must remain part of the museum's permanent collection (Deubel 2006).

Between 1997 and 2002, the CultureBank granted 451 loans—at an average of US\$22 per loan—to approximately seventy borrowers (60 per cent of whom were women), indicating renewed loans to the same individuals. The rate of repayment is an extraordinary 94 per cent with women consistently repaying at a higher rate than men (Deubel and Baro 2002). (These are the latest available figures for study, part of the assessment of the CultureBank programme carried out by Tara Deubel and Mamadu Baro of the University of Arizona (see Deubel and Baro 2002). I am grateful to Tara Deubel for supplying information and for a lively email exchange on the subject of the CultureBank concept in general.) In total, the CultureBank has provided US\$14,279 worth of loan funds to the community since 1997 (Deubel 2006).

As a result of the microcredit programme the community museum in Pombori has amassed an impressive collection of material, including archaeological artefacts, gourds, household objects, jewellery, masks, pottery, weaponry, and wooden statues (see Figure 13.4 for a graphic depiction of the types of artefacts in the CultureBank).

At the museum, tourists and local inhabitants alike can engage with the history, significance, and meaning of the past through cultural objects. The objects in their museum setting—like those in the Ghor es-Safi—have a symbolic value for the visitors and locals. Meeting its objective of education centre, the museum sponsors a series of community activities including artisan and conservation workshops, community festivals, historical research, literacy classes, and theatre performances. These activities serve as catalysts in encouraging cultural heritage protection and establishing closer ties between Pombori and the surrounding areas, what Deubel (2006) refers to as increased social capital. The CultureBank attracts people from surrounding villages, helping to establish new social networks, expanding the sphere of interaction, and enhancing business opportunities. At the same time, the museum outreach programmes educate the population on the importance of archaeological site conservation, while actively discouraging the looting of archaeological sites and the sale of cultural items—creating a use value for items as a didactic teaching tool.

One of the key objectives of the museum is to function as a living museum, encouraging local inhabitants to remove their objects temporarily for use in festivals

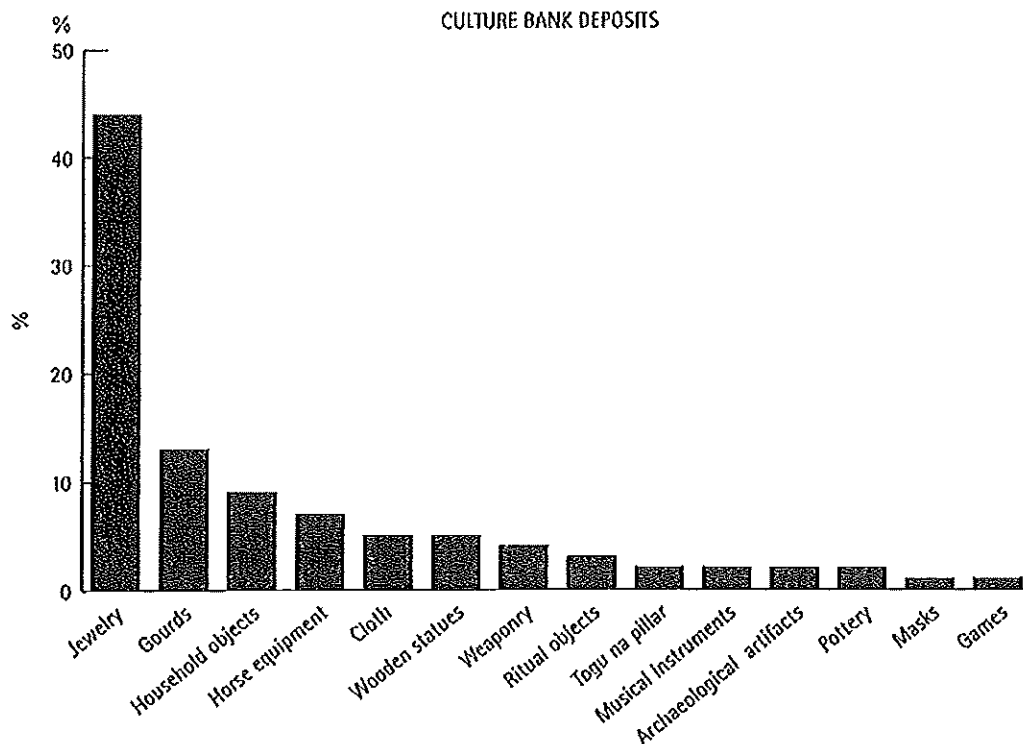


FIGURE 13.4 Types of artefacts in the Culture Bank.

and community events. Another of the museum's functions is as a tourist attraction—drawing in visitors and generating income. Between 1997 and 2002, over 2,000 tourists visited the museum where they spent money on admission, on buying local arts and crafts, and archaeological replicas in the gift shop, as well as taking tours to the nearby Tellem cliff dwellings, providing additional employment opportunities for the local residents of Fombori (Deubel and Baro 2002). Concurrently the once looted items have a symbolic value, a use value, and an exchange value.

In the summer of 2002, an independent assessment of the CultureBank programme was conducted in order to 'evaluate and assess the socio-economic impacts of the CultureBank in Fombori' (for the full assessment, see Deubel and Baro 2002). A series of interviews relating to the social, economic, and cultural impacts of the CultureBank on the Fombori area led the assessors to conclude that 'overall the CultureBank has contributed to a greater sense of cultural pride and awareness of the need to protect and conserve the local heritage on the part of community members' (Deubel and Baro 2002). They were also able to determine that access to monetary loans allowed for greater diversification in the local economy, making the inhabitants less reliant on subsistence agriculture and less susceptible to the vagaries of nature.

What this study did not reveal was whether looting had lessened as a result of the CultureBank or whether inhabitants—adherents of Islam and no longer connected to the material remains of the local Dogon culture—are still actively engaged in the illicit excavation of archaeological sites, perhaps even in order to gain access to loans from the CultureBank. The study did not address issues of assigning value to artefacts and the consequences of such an action. By equating an object with a monetary value—in this instance in the form of a loan—the object is commodified. This process of commodification, through establishment of a price agreed upon between the owner and the CultureBank, means that the object is no longer intended for personal consumption but rather for sale or exchange as an economic commodity (Zuniga 1999). Once removed from the CultureBank, can the object go back to being a cultural item or does it retain its economic value, perhaps enhanced by its use as collateral in the CultureBank?

CONCLUSION

The case studies from Jordan and Mali demonstrate that the values of looted objects are fluid and interchangeable. Values can occur simultaneously. The use value for artefacts is dynamic in that they are almost never used for their original purpose but are often used in didactic ways, recounting past adventures, relationships to ancestors, or to illustrate the deleterious effects of illegally removing such objects from the ground. The symbolic values are as varied as there are artefacts, but meaningful to each of the stakeholder groups. Some of the looted objects are fetishized in the vein of Baudrillard and some represent social capital à la Bourdieu. The capitalist world in which public archaeology plays an increasingly important role continues to determine a prevailing

exchange value for these objects. For almost every stakeholder and at every stage in the commodity chain the looted artefact has some type of economic value—enhanced by archaeological appraisal, demand by the collector, museum display, and appearance in an auction house. Much of the demand for looted artefacts is driven by the desire for symbolic value or cultural capital at the consumption end of the commodity chain. The symbiotic nature of economic value and symbolic value enhances the prestige of consuming a looted artefact, which results in the continued destruction of the archaeological landscape.

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