

Culture Without Context



The Newsletter of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Issue 8, Spring 2001



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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 cultural heritage of Afghanistan, together with that of its neighbouring countries, has been badly plundered for more than a decade now, but a new nadir was reached in March of this year after the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, ordered the destruction of all religious idols. Taliban soldiers responded promptly by blowing up the two large Buddhas of Bamiyan valley, and it is reported that a further 40 statues were destroyed in Kabul Museum, and many more throughout the country. Although this campaign of destruction was ordered for what are ostensibly religious reasons, seasoned Taliban watchers suspect that the motives may have been more political. It is too soon perhaps to discern the Taliban leader's true intentions in all this, an act of revenge perhaps against the inhabitants of the Bamiyan valley who have long opposed him, or of defiance aimed at those in the West who refuse to offer diplomatic recognition or relax sanctions. One thing is clear though. Afghan leaders of all political and religious persuasions seem shocked that the plight of the Bamiyan Buddhas has attracted more international sympathy than that of their compatriots who continue to suffer the effects of prolonged drought and chronic war.

On page 23 we print the UNESCO response to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. With the cultural heritage of Afghanistan now at the point of extinction, UNESCO felt impelled to support 'safe-havens' for objects of Afghan origin, such as the Afghanistan Museum in Bubendorf (Switzerland), provided they are donated, and not sold. How effective will this initiative be? Time will tell, but it seems hamstrung from the outset by what is now seen to be the defining feature of the antiquities trade — no provenance. With no documented provenance, who can know whether a particular piece has been removed from Afghanistan or Pakistan, or whether it is fake or genuine?

Some dealers and museum curators have been quick to capitalize on the situation by claiming that their collecting in the past has actually 'saved' Afghan heritage, and that their example should be followed. UNESCO has been careful

to state that it will accept only pieces with documented provenance, but if past experience is anything to go by we can presume that others will not be so discriminating. Yet the Taliban, remember, are destroying material, not selling it. And the Taliban edict applies only to statues which might be considered idols, not to the entire cultural heritage. Unexcavated sites would remain untouched if looters were not searching for saleable material, and anything turning up on the market which has not been stolen from a documented collection will almost certainly have been torn from an archaeological or historic site. These looted pieces are not fugitives from the religious wrath of the Taliban, to be offered sanctuary, but are the sacrificial victims of Western greed. We should remember too that some of the proceeds from looting are used to keep armed militias in the field, or to launder drug money, while most finds its way into the pockets of shady smugglers and middlemen. A dirty business all round.

In any case, the Bamiyan Buddhas had in fact already been 'saved' during the 1970s when Japanese scholars from Kyoto University spent eight years surveying the Buddhist cave temples of the Bamiyan valley and produced a photo-gravimetric map of the entire area, including the giant Buddhas. This work was published in four volumes, with extended English summaries, and, as the expedition leader — Professor Higuchi — said in 1995, in a statement with prophetic overtones, 'As ever more destruction is visited on these caves, the data base created in the 1970s by our work there gives the world fundamental materials that cannot be recaptured or replaced' (*World Archaeology* 27(2), 300). One day, thanks to this work, it might prove possible to install accurate replicas of the Bamiyan Buddhas, so that the damage will, in some sense, be repaired. They will at the very least be a monument to the painstaking work of Professor Higuchi and his colleagues.

In 1995 it was estimated that 70 per cent of the holdings of Kabul Museum had disappeared, and the figure had not improved by March 2001 when it was reported that only 30,000 out of 100,000 artefacts recorded now survive. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas looks set to be the last act in a long tragedy, but there are no heroes in this story, only victims and villains. The

victims are the Afghan people and their heritage. The villains are too many to name.

 On 24 May 2000 H.M. Government appointed a Panel of Enquiry into the illicit trade in art and antiquities. The panel, comprised of archaeologists and representatives of the trade and of museums, was under the chairmanship of Norman Palmer, Professor of Commercial Law at University College London. The Panel met on twelve occasions and took advice from a wide range of experts before publishing its report in December 2000 (available on-line at <<http://www.culture.gov.uk/heritage/index.html>>). Amongst other things, the report recommended that:

- The UK should accede to the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*.
- It should be a criminal offence to import dishonestly, deal in or be in possession of any cultural object, knowing or believing that the object was stolen, or illegally excavated, or removed from any monument or wreck contrary to local law.
- The current system of export control should be strengthened, and the resources necessary to achieve this be made available.

The significance of these recommendations is amplified when it is remembered that half the panel's members were representatives of the trade and that the recommendations were made unanimously.

In March 2001 the Arts minister Alan Howarth announced that the UK would accede to the 1970 UNESCO Convention, and that H.M. Government was considering the other recommendations made by the Panel. The Panel itself continues to meet as an advisory body.

 Strange things happen in the museum world and some of the stranger happen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. An article in the 25 April issue of the Internet magazine *Forbes.com* alleged that a small, poor-quality Archaic Greek marble head, on loan from an anonymous donor and on display at the Metropolitan, was in fact a fake. The article went on to ask why the museum should want to display

such an undistinguished piece, particularly one it did not own, and suggested that in so doing the Met had provided the head with a respectable pedigree. In a telephone interview with *Forbes.com* the Met denied the head was a fake, but it was taken off display nevertheless. The Metropolitan has since assured *Culture Without Context* that in the view of several acknowledged experts the head is indeed genuine, but also that it had been on loan to the museum since 1999. Why it was exhibited in the first place is still not clear.

 At a meeting of ISCOTIA (see *CWC* issue 5), held at the Cotsen Institute (UCLA) from 26–28 April this year, members were joined by other concerned parties. In view of this increased participation it was decided to enlarge ISCOTIA, and to prepare a mission statement based on the 1999 Cambridge Resolution. Several sub-committees were established, including those with responsibilities for law, education, communication and research. Possible courses of future action were discussed and it was agreed that the enlarged committee should reconvene in spring 2002 at a conference which will address the critical situation in Latin America.

 *No provenance* is what keeps the trade in illicit antiquities alive. Of course, illicit antiquities do have a provenance, an illicit one, but it is deliberately withheld by those who aim to profit, so that it is not possible to distinguish between antiquities which come onto the market legally, and those which have arrived through more dubious channels. When pressed about their policy of not revealing a provenance, or a source, most dealers fall back on commercial arguments — keeping a 'source' secret — or on client confidentiality. Are these always good reasons, though, or are they sometimes merely obfuscation? In the News reports on two museum acquisitions which were discovered to have originally been stolen and so returned — although the museums were under no legal obligation to do so — while at the same time the names of the vendors were kept secret. The J.P. Getty Museum returned a second-century marble sculpture to Italy which had apparently been stolen in 1956. The Miho Museum agreed to hand back a sixth-

century AD stone bodhisattva which had originally been stolen from Shandong province in China. The Getty would not reveal its source. The Miho bought its piece from J.E. Eskenazi Ltd of London, who, when approached by the *New York Times*, also refused to identify their source. While major dealers and institutions continue to protect vendors who pass on stolen material, the trade

in illicit antiquities will continue. Certainly, most dealers will be stung now and then, even the most diligent; it is a hazard of the trade. But surely it is in everyone's interest that those who continually pass on illicit material be named — and shamed.

NEIL BRODIE

The protection of cultural property in the Republic of Korea

JONGSOK KIM

It was at a Christie's auction in New York on 31 October 1996 that a seventeenth-century Korean dragon jar (Catalogue lot no. 25) fetched a record price for porcelain of US\$8.42 million. This bid broke the previous record of US\$3.08 million paid at the same auction house in 1994 for a fifteenth-century Korean porcelain dish. The dragon jar's price in 1996 is still the world record for porcelain on the international art market. The jar was known to have been submitted for sale by a Japanese collector¹ and was bought by a Korean.

During the twentieth century, unquantified, but certainly very large, volumes of Korean cultural property were removed from the country, particularly during the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. Many cultural objects were also destroyed or lost during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953 — some historic Buddhist temples and monasteries in the mountains were bombed during counter-guerilla operations because they were used as hiding places. It is a consequence of these two major historical events that Korean cultural objects are very rare. Therefore, whatever Korean art and antiquities are found on Korean territory are particularly important since they are all that remain in the country of origin — i.e. in their true cultural context.

It is this background — the general rarity of Korean cultural property — that makes theft,

illegal excavation and illicit traffic all the more serious. Over the last few decades in the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea), it was during the 1970s and 80s in particular that illegal excavation of antiquities became a serious problem,² following the growth of a large international art market which placed high monetary values on many types of Korean art, particularly ancient ceramics, sculpture and jewellery. The ROK's economic development had begun in the early 1960s, so that the rise in cultural theft over the next decades followed the general demand for cultural goods that had by then emerged. The late 1970s was another remarkable period when the market for contemporary art began growing rapidly in the ROK. At the same time, high-quality fakes of Korean art and antiquities began to turn up on the ROK's art market,³ and through this the international market as well.

The ROK, like most other countries has few reliable statistics on cultural property theft. This is because, for example, not all thefts are reported to the national authorities, and a loss cannot be identified immediately whenever it happens. The ROK is no exception in this respect. However, both the National Police Agency and the Cultural Properties Administration manage the affairs of the country as regards cultural property theft. Their statistics of cultural property theft from 1992 to 1998 in the ROK are shown in Figure 1.

The *Protection of Cultural Properties Act* provides a core legal structure for the protection of cultural property in the ROK. In addition to municipal laws, the ROK has also acceded to two relevant international conventions. Thus, the legal framework of the ROK in this matter is described as follows:

- *Protection of Cultural Properties Act* (last

Year	Cases	Items
1992	25	1109
1993	35	417
1994	13	270
1995	7	679
1996	16	1947
1997	24	1042
1998	32	1006

Figure 1. Theft of cultural property in the Republic of Korea. (The figures record cases reported to the National Police Agency and the Cultural Properties Administration, ROK only.)

amended 29 January 1999)

- * Enforcement Decree of the Protection of Cultural Properties Act
- * Regulations relative to the Protection of Cultural Properties Act
- 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (entered into force May 1983)
- 1972 UNESCO *World Heritage Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (entered into force September 1988)

The *Protection of Cultural Properties Act's* Article 2 includes a definition of cultural property generally recognized in the ROK. (It uses the plural form of 'cultural properties' since the definition further covers monuments and sites.)

ARTICLE 2, *Protection of Cultural Properties Act*, The Republic of Korea. (Last amended 29 January 1999)

The term *cultural properties* used in this Act means the artificially and naturally shaped national and global properties which possess high historical, artistic, academic or scenic value and fall under one of the following subparagraphs:

1. *Tangible cultural properties*: buildings, classical books, works of calligraphy, ancient documents, pictures, sculptures, crafts, etc.

and other tangible cultural products which are of high historical or artistic value and other archaeological data corresponding thereto;

2. *Intangible cultural properties*: drama, music, dance, craft technique, etc. and other intangible cultural products which are of high historical or artistic value;

3. *Monuments* falling under one of the following items:

- (a) Historical sites such as temple sites, ancient mounds, shell mounds, palace sites, pottery sites and stratified relics, etc. which are of high historic or academic value;
- (b) Scenic places which possess high artistic or scenic value;
- (c) Animals (including natural habitats, breeding grounds and places of origin), plants (including natural habitats), minerals, caves, geological features, biological products and specific natural phenomena which are of high historical, scenic or academic value;

4. *Folklore material*: public morals and customs relating to food, clothing, housing, occupation, religion or an annual event, etc. and clothes, tools or houses used thereby which are indispensable to the understanding of changes and progress in the national life.

The destinations of cultural properties stolen from the ROK have multiplied over the last thirty years. At the beginning of this period, neighbouring Asian art markets such as Tokyo and Hong Kong were the most important for the illicit trafficking of Korean material. Nowadays, however, it is known that stolen Korean items appear for sale on major Western art markets such as London and New York.

Korean Buddhist treasures are probably the most frequent targets of this global traffic. Between 1984 to 1999 453 items were reported as stolen from the ROK's Buddhist temples and monasteries. However, 429 items (94.7 per cent) were 'non-designated' cultural property,⁴ under the designation scheme of the *Protection of Cultural Properties Act*. This legal status of non-designation provides Buddhist stolen items a limitation period of only five years within which

to initiate a legal action for theft — the same as for a normal theft case in the ROK. To solve this problem, the ROK Government announced in August 2000 that the *Protection of Cultural Properties Act* would be amended in order to offer more effective protection for non-designated cultural properties.

Author's note: When indicating general nationality in the article, the author uses the term 'Korea(n)', for example, Korean art — in other cases, the Republic of Korea (ROK), for example, the ROK Government.

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in *The Korea Times* (Seoul) 4 November 1996, 10.
- ² Quoted in *The Kyunghyang Newspaper* (Seoul) 30 April 1999, 3.
- ³ Quoted in *The Hankyoreh Newspaper* (Seoul) 20 July 1999, 21.
- ⁴ Quoted in *The Chosun Daily News* (Seoul) 2 September 2000, 21.

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In the News

JENNY DOOLE

Persian mummy confusion

- It has emerged that a **mummy** seized from a house in Quetta, Pakistan in mid-October 2000 (see In The News *CWC* Issue 7) is a **fake**. It had been suggested the mummy was the remains of an ancient Persian princess possibly looted from the area or nearby, but reports indicate that it is actually the body of a 21-year-old woman **mummified not more than two years ago**. Oscar White Muscarella of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, told *Archaeology* magazine (Jan/Feb) that in March 2000 he had received four photographs of the mummy, with an accompanying letter, offering it for sale to the Museum and explaining that it had been brought from **Iran to Pakistan** by Zoroastrian families long ago. The Iranian government still wants the corpse back, while Pakistani authorities await the results of further tests.
- Meanwhile, in November 2000 Pakistani customs officials seized \$10 million worth of twelfth- to sixteenth-century **Balochi jewellery** on a bus near **Quetta**, allegedly **en route to Karachi** for transport abroad.

Looting around the world

- Officers from Ukrainian special forces, with frustratingly few resources, are attempting to clamp down on the lucrative **grave-robbing industry in the Crimea**. It is estimated that at least \$2 million worth of **antiquities are smuggled west** from the area annually, with some pieces stolen from **Greek and Roman graves** to order for private collections.
- Journalist Sarah Rooney, in a feature on **looting of Khmer sites** in Cambodia (*Sunday Times* magazine 6 January 2001), describes a journey to the remote temple of **Preah Khan**. A local tells her that the past few years have seen a '**free-for-all looting season**' with thefts controlled by a high-ranking military officer who paid villagers about **£16 per carving** and selected specific items. The frenzied looting apparently continued until last year and only stopped because it seems there is '**nothing left to steal**' at the gigantic temple.
- Archaeologists have reported **extensive looting** at a major Iron Age site discovered in Cambodia, **Phum Snay** (see article by Rachanie Thosarat p. 18), which has **destroyed hundreds of burials** and important stratigraphy at the site.

- *The New York Post* (22 April 2001) reports **Palestinians selling artefacts** looted from the Temple Mount site. Amongst other antiquities mentioned are **pottery fragments** dating from around 700 BC illegally offered for sale for \$100,000 and a **carved stone menorah** with seven branches for more than \$1 million.
- *Biblical Archaeological Review* believes that the time has come for orthodox Jews to **review their religious objections** to the excavation of tombs which are in danger from grave robbers. Recent investigations have shown that some of the 1200 graves at the ancient cemetery of **Qumran** contain lead coffins and looters with metal detectors have been locating these, **discarding bones** in the process of extracting the coffins and **smashing skulls** to retrieve any coins which may have been placed on the eyelids of the deceased in ancient times. Hershel Shanks believes that Jewish religious law could be interpreted to **allow excavation, by archaeologists**, of graves which are at risk as long as the bones therein are reburied with dignity and respect.
- More than **300 Ming and Qing Dynasty tombs** in Chuzhou District of Huaian City, Jiangshu Province, China were illicitly excavated by locals during March and April. Many important archaeological sites have been found and looted since water conservation developments on the Huaihe River began in 1999.



Destruction of Afghan cultural heritage

- In March, as Taliban authorities ordered the **destruction of the giant Buddhas at Bamiyan** in the face of international opposition (see Editorial and p. 23), Mehrabodin Masstan, a representative of the Afghan opposition alliance said that, at the same time,

the **smuggling of pre-Islamic heritage** from the country was gathering pace, adding 'We are losing our past. This is yet one more tragedy for our country' (Reuters 2 March 2001). It has been pointed out that **no registry** of Afghan antiquities exists and **neither is Afghanistan a member of Interpol**, making retrieval of stolen material even more problematic.

- The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas **boosted interest** in ancient Afghan heritage, and law enforcement officers in Pakistan said they were prepared for a **fresh wave of smuggling**.
- **10 truck-loads of pieces from the destroyed Bamiyan Buddhas** were reportedly driven by middlemen to **Peshawar, Pakistan**, for sale in the town's antiquities markets. A leading UK dealer in Pakistani and Afghan artefacts, **George Bristow** of Artique in Tetbury, said he had been approached by 'one of his regular buyers in Peshawar' with pieces which may be recognizable and joinable (*The Telegraph* 7 April 2001). He was also offered a nearly life-sized **Gandharan black schist Buddha** and other **frieze fragments** which he believed might have been of interest to the Victoria and Albert Museum but may already have been bought by **a Japanese collector**.
- Scott Baldauf (*Christian Science Monitor* 20 March 2001) describes his visit to an **antiquities shop in Peshawar** where, in a showroom behind a false door, the dealer offered a **wide range of artefacts** from an ancient Greek terracotta head to carved Buddhist altarpieces. Any size Buddha is procurable, but purchasers were advised that they might experience **difficulties in smuggling** bigger pieces through the airport.

It seems every antique shop in Peshawar has old-looking Buddhas on sale, but since more have come out of Afghanistan, and with fewer Japanese and European tourists visiting Pakistan as a result of trade sanctions, **prices have fallen**. Authentic pieces

are now apparently worth less than some mass-produced reproductions.

- Investigators in London, a centre for the sale of illicit Afghan antiquities, believe there is a **'loose network' of low-profile dealers**, working from home and selling mainly small, and therefore **difficult to police**, objects to collectors world-wide (*The Observer* 11 March 2001).
- *The Art Newspaper* (April 2001) and *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 December 2000) with help from **Robert Kluyver** from the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) take this opportunity to recap the development during the last few years of **demand-driven, organized plunder** of antiquities in Afghanistan. Specifically mentioned are:
 - the **museum of Tepe Shotor**, on the site of a Buddhist monastery near the border with Pakistan, stripped 'very professionally' in a single day;
 - looting of almost all the **sixth- to eighth-century frescoes** in Bamiyan;
 - the Hellenic city of **Ai Khanum**, Bactria reduced to its foundations;
 - a Buddhist statue from the central valley of Saighan, which had reportedly been sold for \$95,000;
 - a **private collector in Tokyo** who has allegedly bought several Gandharan reliefs looted from Kabul Museum (prices reach \$1 million for a Buddhist schist panel);
 - **Nasirullah Khan Babar**, formerly Pakistan's minister for the interior, who admits purchasing one of the looted **Begram ivories** for \$100,000, arguing that he holds it 'in safe keeping' although it has been alleged he may have been part of a scheme to sell the ivories back to Afghanistan.

Kluyver suggests that 'professional' looting only **subsided as supplies of identifiable antiquities became scarcer**, and that it was at this stage that 'amateur' digging escalated.

- **James Cuno, Director of the Harvard University Art Museums**, writing in *The Boston Globe* (11 March 2001) uses the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas to push forward the argument that **'nationalist' approaches have been less successful than 'internationalist'** with regard to the protection of cultural heritage. He maintains that the Afghan government's restrictions on trade and ownership of cultural property **did not protect Afghan cultural heritage** and the same is true of the situation in Italy, adding that such policies put world treasures at risk and create an illicit market for antiquities. He also urges an urgent rethink by the new US administration with regard to their **position on bi-lateral agreements** signed under the auspices of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Cuno's arguments were **challenged in a subsequent letter from Claire Lyons** of the Getty Research Institute (18 March 2001) who suggests that 'the banner of universalism' has sometimes been used as a cover under which some US museums have knowingly acquired looted antiquities, thereby providing incentives for continuing destruction of archaeological sites.



Greek police raids

- *February*: Police questioned archaeologist **Nikolaos Anayiotakis**, following the discovery of about **7000 ancient coins and thousands of other ancient artefacts** found in his home in Heraklion, Crete.
- *March*: **Dimitrios Gerakis**, a farmer from Marathon, was arrested under Greek antiquities laws and charged following the discovery, under one of his freshly-tilled fields, of a life-sized, one-ton, fourth-century BC, headless **statue of Cybele** seated on a throne. It is not known whether the piece was found there or had been reburied after removal from another findspot. Gerakis had allegedly been **trying to sell the piece** (es-

estimated to be worth Dr100 million or \$260,000) to police posing as dealers for many millions of drachmas.

- *March*: Police in Crete charged a **German painter and Greek construction worker** with alleged **antiquities smuggling**, after finding a wide range of antiquities — including carved stone seals, clay statues, bronze cups, coins, other objects and Byzantine icons — in their homes.
- *April*: After arresting **Panagiotis Benos**, Greek police confiscated one hundred bronze and two silver coins, dating to ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods, and third-century BC loom weights (one of clay, two of lead). Benos claimed he found them in a rubbish bin and was charged with **possession of antiquities**.



Fakes and faking

- **Michel Brent**, writing in *Archaeology* magazine (Jan/Feb) stated that, since the 1980s, nearly **80 per cent** of apparently ancient **terracottas smuggled from Mali** have been **fakes**. He interviewed a forger who said he had added the body and hind legs to a genuine fragment of a ram unearthed at Dary on the river Niger in 1986. Residents of the village confirmed the story. Brent claimed that the piece was **auctioned at Sotheby's** New York in 1991, as part of the **Kuhn collection** (at which time a thermoluminescence test registered the piece as ancient) and it sold for \$275,000. The same forger identified pieces of his skilled work in the collections of **Baudouin de Grunne**, the **Barbier Museum (Geneva)** and the **Boston Museum of Fine Arts**.

Brent suggests various **reasons for the marked rise in forgery** of West African terracottas:

- collecting trends;

- publication since 1980 of photographs for forgers to work from in monographs, auction catalogues and art books;
- the relative 'newness' of the market which makes identifying forgeries more difficult;
- the recent emergence of 'investor' collectors, less knowledgeable about antiquities;
- and lack of care, especially amongst American buyers, in establishing authenticity.

- In a new book *The Lie Became Great: the Forgery of Near Eastern Cultures*, published February, **Oscar White Muscarella** highlights more than a thousand Near Eastern artefacts in museum collections around the world as **possible forgeries**. He condemns the existence of a '**forgery culture**' in which he claims professors, curators, scientists, museum officials and trustees, dealers, smugglers, auction house employees, collectors and forgers **all collude**, and which results in museums sometimes knowingly displaying fake objects, donors of fakes receiving tax benefits, not to mention distortion of the archaeological record and our understanding of the past. **Harold Holtzer of the Metropolitan Museum**, where Muscarella works and where 45 suspicious pieces were pinpointed, **strongly contests Muscarella's conclusions**. Among the interesting statistics Muscarella claims are that:

- 40 per cent of objects tested by the Oxford Thermoluminescence Laboratory are proven to be fakes;
- half the antiquities brought for sale at Sotheby's are fake;
- 25,000 forgeries of ancient art enter the market each year.



Compiling data

- During March and April, teams of archaeologists from the **University of California and the University of Cambridge**, England, in collaboration with Albanian colleagues, began an archaeological survey

of an area of the **western coast of Albania** believed to be the location of the ancient Greek colony of **Epidamnos**. Jack Davis of UC, said that looting of archaeological sites throughout Albania makes this mission a **urgent priority** in order to identify ancient sites that should be studied or preserved.

- **Canadian Heritage** in Ottawa and Whitford Environment Ltd have brought together a **team of archaeologists and cultural heritage experts to produce a report** on the extent, nature and location of looting of archaeological sites and underwater wrecks in Canada, and connections with illegal export of archaeological resources. The research project, which will concentrate particularly on the last five years, follows reports of **site looting and unauthorized trafficking of artefacts** from professionals in every region of the country and will invite public participation.
- The **TAY project** (The Archaeological Settlements of Turkey) has created an **online data base** of Turkey's archaeological sites. The project has been working for eight years to log the country's archaeological heritage in the face of increasing threats from urbanization, agricultural activities, dams or **illegal digging**. Some sites have been completely destroyed. The World Wide Web site (<http://tayproject.eies.itu.edu.tr/enghome.html>) presents an interactive collection of inventories, maps, photographs and sketches and will, TAY hopes, be a model that other countries — especially in the Mediterranean area — will follow.

International meeting

The **11th Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee** for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation was held in **Phnom Penh**,

Cambodia in March. The meeting looked at the cases of the Parthenon Marbles (currently in the British Museum), the so-called Bogazköy sphinx (currently in Berlin), and a report on cultural property displaced during WWII intending to establish a series of **principles for inter-state settlements**.

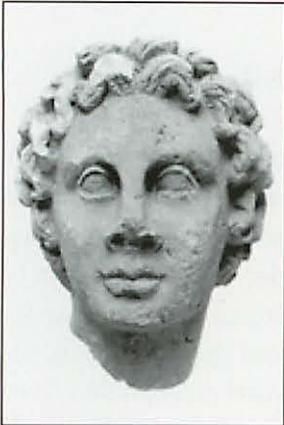
Mysterious deposit

Following an anonymous telephone call, **six fragments of Roman frescoes** were found abandoned on the doorstep of London antiquities dealer **James Ede**, who immediately contacted the police. Rare examples from the first century BC, they were apparently the results of clandestine excavation, chiselled from the wall of a villa being excavated in **Pompeii** in the 1980s. Experts noted extensive damage, which presumably occurred during their removal. Major Ferdinando Musella of the artistic heritage protection squad in Rome told *The Times* (25 March 2001) that investigations led them to believe that the same pieces were discreetly **offered for sale in London** by an Irish businessman who apparently decided to abandon them as 'investigative pressure' intensified. Ede suggested that they were left at his premises because of his prominence in the London antiquities world.

Antiquities thefts

- **Pre-Columbian artefacts** (valued at around \$267,700 in 1996) have been stolen from a locked basement store below the **Mary Couts Burnett Library** at Texas Christian University. The 110 Aztec and Mayan ceramics — donated to TCU from the Moorehead Collection between 1996 and 1997 — were last seen in February 2000 and had been stored in plastic wrappings and boxes, which were left behind. Several remaining pieces were damaged.

- In March the **British Museum** confirmed that a **marble hand was stolen** from an ancient Greek sculpture in November 2000. The hand, which had been attached with a metal rod to the wall fragment from the Temple of Apollo, Bassae, was said to be worthless separated from the relief.



Head from a statuette of Alexander the Great stolen from Cyrene. Mid-late Hellenistic.



Enthroned female statuette stolen from Cyrene. Mid-late sixth century BC.

- A World Wide Web site (www.cyrenethefts.org) has been created to alert the world about the **theft of at least 15 stone heads**, excavated from the Extramural Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at **Cyrene, Libya** between 1969 and 1981 by the Kelsey Museum, University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania Expedition. They were stolen sometime in late 1999 or early 2000 from storerooms used by the Expedition, after thieves broke in through a broken window. The sculptures are of particular archaeological

significance, and there is speculation that they were **smuggled to Egypt** shortly after their theft. All are, thankfully, well-documented and studied, with the publication in press.



UK issues

- On 14 March, at a meeting of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, the Rt Hon Alan Howarth, Minister for the Arts **announced that the UK Government had taken the decision to accede to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property** as soon as normal Parliamentary and other formalities have been completed.

He cited the publication of the **Palmer report** in December 2000 (see Editorial) as an important landmark in developing public policy in this area 'not least because it represents for the first time a consensus between all those groups interested in the trade in cultural objects on practical measure to improve the current situation'. It has been agreed that the Panel should **continue in existence** to advise on how to implement other recommendations in the report.

- *March:* As the UK government lauded the success of the **portable antiquities reporting scheme** (a voluntary code encouraging England's and Wales' estimated 50,000 metal detectorists to report finds of antiquities to local museums) at the launch of the latest report on the initiative, some **archaeologists expressed grave concerns**. The report shows a 50 per cent rise in the number of objects reported (31,783) most of which were returned to their owner after passing through the recording process, and some bought by museums. The value of the scheme was clear in the case of objects that owners had thought of little interest but were of particular archaeological significance, or when reported finds led to the detection of undiscovered archaeological sites. But, as the *Guardian* reported (24 March 2001), archaeologists remain divided about the value of a programme which encourages metal-detecting, citing reports of **massive night-time damage to sites** under scientific excavation. Archaeologist Percival Turnbull

pointed out the existence of ‘a sizeable criminal element, who not only **loot and trespass**, often on protected sites, but who routinely create false provenances for material’.

- April saw the **second antiquities sale** hosted by up-market London department store, **Fortnum & Mason**, despite protests by leading archaeologists Colin Renfrew of the McDonald Institute, Cambridge and Alex Hunt of the Council for British Archaeology, who accused the shop of indirectly encouraging looting. Fortnum & Mason argues that the items on sale (supplied by dealer Chris Martin and his company Ancient Art) were everyday items, surplus to overstretched museums. Prices ranged from £30 to £20,000, with objects from Roman and Egyptian statues to Greek pots. Norman Palmer, chairman of the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Illicit Trade commented that, while there may be **no legal objection to the sale, ethical buyers should think carefully** before making a purchase. (*The Times* 2 April 2001).



Italian developments

- *January*: Archaeologists in the United States were delighted when the governments of the **United States and Italy signed a landmark agreement** to protect pre-Classical, Classical and Imperial Roman archaeological material. The agreement — long resisted by the dealing fraternity, who have claimed it to be indecipherable, un-enforceable and anti-free trade (see In The News *CWC* Issues 5 & 7, and Editorial *CWC* Issues 5 & 6) — **prohibits the import** of such material into the US without an export permit issued by Italy or verifiable documentation that it left Italy prior to 23 January 2001, the date of the agreement. Prominent dealer in Mediterranean antiquities, **Jerome Eisenberg** said the agreement created a **dealing minefield**, telling the *Washington Post* (20 January 2001), ‘No-

body ever imports Italian antiquities from Italy. What kind of proof do I need if I buy something in Switzerland?’.

- Souren Melikian, reporting on the spring antiquities sales (*International Herald Tribune* 5 May 2001), suggests that the **US/Italy agreement has contributed to a shift in attitude**, in that ‘buying antiquities that *might* be suspected of having been illicitly dug up recently will henceforth be seen as a **huge commercial risk**’. He argues that this new mood outweighs the legal provisions of the treaty, extends beyond Italian material to the whole antiquities market and was evidenced by museums acquisitions from **Christie’s, London** where purchases by the British Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Arts and others seemed **suitably cautious**.
- *The Telegraph* (8 April 2001) reports on increasing **efforts by the Italian State** to protect archaeological sites such as **Vejo and Cerveteri** from looters. Initiatives include **evening stake-outs** to catch *tombaroli* in the act and **police helicopter patrols**. Plans have also been announced for a detailed **object ‘biography/passport’** to go with ancient artefacts, which will be necessary for legitimate sales.
- Christina Ruiz of *The Art Newspaper* (March 2001) filed a report on the **life of a tombarolo** who allegedly controls looting at the ancient Etruscan city of **Veii**. Among the details revealed were:
 - He had **trained with his father**, also a skilled tomb robber and is now said to have a **team of men** working under him.
 - He estimated that he had broken into **several hundred tombs**, on average one every ten days, to retrieve vases, statuettes, mirrors, ornaments, jewellery and other golden objects.
 - Tombs (which take three men approximately two nights to break into, and must then be left for 24 hours so that fragile grave goods can oxidize and harden), if

they have not been previously looted — either in antiquity or modern times — will yield about **30–40 vases** in addition to other saleable artefacts.

- The *tombarolo* expressed some frustration at receiving ‘**only 20 per cent of the profits**’ on selling loot to middlemen — who are described as well-educated, establishment figures with international contacts — for low, fixed prices (which apparently keep supply steady), usually within 24 hours of the theft.
- Bronze items are **more valuable than gold** because they are easier to authenticate.
- Some **farmers accept a cut of profits**, but some apparently refuse to work with the tomb robbers for fear that illicit activity will encourage the State to protect the land and thus restrict agriculture.
- Objects are **smuggled** in containers carrying car parts, food or marble (with some marble blocks hollowed out, stolen works secreted in them, and then sealed with stucco).
- The *carabinieri* only come after the *tombaroli* if they receive a tip-off and treat them kindly because they know they are not the ones making the money.
- The *tombarolo* **regrets the damage** he has done to Veii, but feels there is **no alternative** way for him to feed his family.
- He has recently found a necropolis with **hundreds of unexcavated tombs** unknown to archaeologists.



Returns

- In April archaeologists welcomed what was seen as the first major **success of the US/Italy bi-lateral agreement**. After what Col. Roberto Conforti, head of the *Carabinieri*, described as ‘hard bargaining’ (*The Guardian* 18 April 2001), the **J. Paul Getty Museum** in Malibu, California **returned to Italy a second-century bust** of a victorious

athlete, copied from a fifth-century BC original by sculptor Polykleitos, which, it emerged, had been **stolen soon after being excavated from Venosa**, southern Italy in 1956. The Museum refused say who sold them the piece in 1996.

- **285 objects** stolen from the Archaeological Museum of Ancient **Corinth** in 1990 and recovered in Miami in 1999 (see In The News *CWC* Issue 5) were **returned to Greece** in January. The FBI will continue to investigate the whereabouts of 11 pieces from the robbery still missing. A gang of Greek nationals (see In The News *CWC* Issue 6) stood trial for the raid, during which the museum guard was beaten and money stolen. The gang leader **Anastasios Karaholios** was sentenced to life imprisonment — the severest sentence ever passed for an archaeology-related crime in Greece — but has appealed. Two other gang members were acquitted, the trial of one continues, while another two, believed to be in South America, are being tried *in absentia*. **Wilma Sabala** (a friend of one of the gang), in whose Miami home the stolen antiquities had been stored, was convicted in New York in June 2000, after pleading guilty to interstate transportation of stolen property. She had given objects from the robbery to **Christie’s in New York**, where they were bought by **Jerome Eisenberg’s Royal-Athena Galleries** amongst others. Sabala was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.
- The US District Court in New York ordered in March that the **wall panel** stolen from the tenth-century Chinese tomb of Wang Chuzhi in 1994 and impounded from **Christie’s, New York** when it was offered for sale in March 2000 (see In The News *CWC* Issue 6) should be **returned to China** — formalizing an agreement worked out between China, the US Government, Christie’s and the M and C Gallery who consigned the piece from Hong Kong. **M and C Gallery** claimed they been made the scapegoat, and that the case

has cost them over one million Hong Kong dollars. They reportedly purchased the panel for two million Hong Kong dollars (\$256,739) in 1999. Christie's Hong Kong said the auction house generally made careful checks of ownership history.

- The **Miho Museum**, Kyoto, Japan (see In The News *CWC* Issue 2) in April announced that a rare statue of **Bodhisattva** (valued at around \$830,000) in their collection was indeed the one **stolen from a garden building in Boxing**, Shandong Province, China in 1994 (see In The News *CWC* Issue 6). Although under no obligation to return the statue, since Japan has not ratified the 1970 UNESCO or 1995 Unidroit Conventions, the Museum presented the piece, which it claimed to have bought in good faith, to the People's Republic of China. A museum spokesperson stated that the gesture was in keeping with their philosophy that 'art plays a significant role in creating greater tolerance and peace in the world' and China agreed to loan the piece for display in the Miho without charge until 2007 when a major exhibition is planned (*New York Times* 17 April 2001). Philip Constantinidi, a director of **Eskenazi Ltd.** London, who sold the bodhisattva to the Miho via an intermediary in 1995 **expressed surprise at the return** and told the *New York Times* that J.E. Eskenazi was travelling and could not be reached for comment. The statue was apparently purchased from another dealer whom Constantinidi refused to name.
- *May*: The **Munich Museum** announced its intention to return to Egypt a 3300-year-old gold decorated coffin (found in Tomb 55 in the Valley of the Kings, 1907) which had been **donated by a Swiss collector in 1980**. The coffin, but not its gold lid, had **disappeared from the Egyptian Museum** in Cairo in 1931 and will be seen in a Munich exhibition of art from the era of Tutan-khamun in Munich later this year. The Museum will **not ask for compensation** for

more than 200,000 DM spent reconstructing the coffin, which had been found in fragments.

- In May, **New Scotland Yard** was able to return a plundered piece to the **Iraqi authorities** in London. This was a **human head in high relief**, 50 cm high and 40 cm wide, which had been **for sale in a London gallery** and was identified by an Italian archaeologists as coming from the Parthian city of **Hatra** in northern Iraq, several of whose renowned **sculptures have been plundered** since 1990. On being informed of its origin the dealer handed the piece over to the police.



Internet decision

January: In a ruling which was believed to have implications for antiquities sales over the Internet, a San Diego **judge dismissed a lawsuit against eBay** (see In The News *CWC* Issue 7), finding that the Internet auction house **did not vouch for the authenticity** of items for sale on its World Wide Web site. eBay states that, while it discourages fraud and reports it to the authorities, it cannot be held liable.



Mexican enquiries

Mexico's ambassador to Australia confirmed in February that he had written to the **Art Gallery of New South Wales** requesting information about the **ownership history of two Pre-Columbian statues** bought from a Sydney dealer in 1964: one a woman with outstretched arms, the other a woman holding a child and a bowl. He emphasized that this was part of a **general investigation** to inventory Mexican pieces in Australian institutions, and did not mean that all were taken in an illegal way.



US concerns

- In October 2000 **William Dean Jaques** was sentenced to serve six months in a work release programme and five years of federal probation, banned from hunting archaeological artefacts on public or private land and fined \$803.86 in damages after his **conviction for looting archaeology** on the **Malheur National Wildlife Refuge**, Oregon — where sites range from 9000 to 200 years old. An elder of the Burn Paiute Tribe was pleased with the conviction, but said that federal laws should be strengthened as a deterrent, emphasizing that native American concerns run much deeper than the destruction of archaeological contexts. Jaques, who has a **long history of looting convictions**, claims he was surface-hunting arrowheads and doing nothing wrong, although refuge employees **videotaped him digging** for artefacts.
- *February*: Environmental managers at **Riffe Lake, Washington**, fear the **theft of native American artefacts** which cover the lakebed, large areas of which have been exposed following drought conditions. The situation is not expected to improve in the short-term.
- Authorities in **Citrus County, Florida** have reported a **marked increase of looting** on native American sites, which may be connected with the Internet since World Wide Web sites give details of where and how to retrieve artefacts. In recent incidents:
 - more than **50 illegal holes** were dug on a **midden site** (dating from 2000 BC—tenth or twelfth century AD) off the **Withlacoochee river** between Yankeetown and the Gulf of Mexico;
 - **five men** were issued notices to appear in court on trespassing charges (which were later dropped by the land owner) after **suspected digging** of submerged sites on a private island;
 - another investigation was launched in salt marshes in **Bennett's Creek**, also off the

Withlacoochee.

State archaeologist, Jim Miller, says such sites are popular because they are **remote and yield large numbers of points** and other tools and that when word gets out 'literally dozens of the people' show up the next weekend (*St Petersburg Times* 18 April 2001). The State has now begun enforcement initiatives in **conjunction with the Coast Guard**.

- Officials from the **State Institutional Trust Lands**, admitted late last year that they are not sure what to do about the **theft of a boulder etched with prehistoric petroglyphs** stolen during the summer from their lands in southwest Utah county by thieves who towed it off behind their all-terrain vehicle. The agency is **seeking legal guidance** on how to proceed with their investigation. Much ancient rock art from public lands in Utah has apparently been stolen or damaged in the past to be used in garden and interior design, and also by thieves who believe it marks the location of ancient gold mines.
- *December, 2000*: **Ian Martin Lynch** — who was sentenced in 1999 to six months in prison for looting the 1400-year-old skull of a child from the Warm Chuck Village and Burial Site burial site near Prince of Wales Island, southeast Alaska (see In The News *CWC* Issue 4) — has had his **sentence overturned**. The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals said the authorities must prove that Lynch (who said at the time of his conviction that he never meant to anger the native American community in taking the skull from the eroded site) had been aware that the remains were archaeological resources and emphasized that Congress intended the law to discourage looting and grave-robbing by those seeking commercial gain.



Chinese concern

Assistant Professor **Wang Ycheng** of the Institute of History, Chinese Academy of

Sciences believes that a rare Han period **bronze candelabra tree** sold in New York City in late 2000 for a record \$2.5 million **may have been stolen** in 1997 from a tomb in Wushan country, Sichuan province. Storage facilities and sites in the **Three Gorges** area have recently suffered extensive looting and Professor Wang Ycheng calls for **urgent attention** for the archaeological resources in the area.



Telli arrested

The alleged smuggler who is said to have masterminded the removal from Turkey of the **'Elmali Hoard'** (1900 fifth-century BC silver coins looted from Elmali, near Antalya: see In The News *CWC* Issue 4) and other important Turkish antiquities, has been extradited to Turkey from Switzerland. Having avoided extradition since 1985, when he was first taken into custody in Munich as a result of an Interpol bulletin, **Edip Telli was arrested** when he entered Switzerland in the mistaken belief that his arrest warrant had expired. It had in fact been renewed as a result of his alleged involvement with antiquities smuggling in Istanbul in 1991. Media reports in Turkey suggest that big players in the illicit trade have now rushed to Europe **afraid of what Telli might reveal**.



Collection criticisms

The Toronto Star (28 April 2001) accuses the **National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa** of taking 'the principle of repatriated art to a zealous, unnecessary degree' regarding their decision to turn down the bequest of the **Tanenbaum Collection** of about 1800 Chinese tomb artefacts (dating from 3000 BC to 1600 AD, and valued at Canadian \$104 million). The decision was made when experts hired by the museum expressed concerns over the **provenance (or lack of it) of about 25 of the items**, and resulted in the Tanenbaums offering the collection to the **Royal Ontario Museum** in Toronto who, according to the

paper, had 'less shrill reservations. Essentially the ROM decided to put the artefacts on display and conduct the historical detective work afterwards'. Part of that detective work included Canadian **\$25,000-worth of scientific tests** (carried out at the Ottawa Canadian Conservation Institute and in Oxford, England) on 50 objects, which have proved that at least **20 are fakes**. The collection is now the subject of a major new exhibition at the ROM.



New ICOM initiative

ICOM launched a new publication, ***Looting in Europe***, at events in Budapest and Prague. The book is the latest in the important 'One Hundred Missing Objects' series which has highlighted looted objects and associated issues from Africa, Latin America and Cambodia.



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Report from Southeast Asia

RACHANIE THOSARAT

Thailand has legislation designed to safeguard cultural heritage, and yet, despite this, Thailand is also a large market for the sale of illegal antiquities. From time to time, the police undertake a 'crack down', but, as the Internet will soon reveal, dealers are very determined. Thailand has not yet signed the 1970 UNESCO Convention but it is hoped that it will do so in the foreseeable future. Burma also has laws in place to protect the looting and marketing of illegal antiquities, but the border with Thailand is long, and many items such as wooden Buddhas can easily be sent for sale to Bangkok or for illegal export. In Vietnam, looting has grown dangerously with the development of tourism, and antique shops now openly sell looted antiquities. Many Iron Age sites have been systematically looted for small items

of saleable jewellery.

The most serious area of concern, however, is Cambodia. Here, looters can take advantage of the many large temples which are set in remote areas. Most infamous is Banteay Chmar, where an entire wall was removed for sale (Fig. 1). But recent visits by archaeologists to such sites as Beng Mealea, Preah Khan of Kompong Svay, and Koh Ker have revealed systematic looting there too on a virtually industrial scale. The development of mass tourism to Angkor and the opening of the countryside to foreign visitors has only made the situation worse.

Yet not only is the historic heritage of Cambodia under threat, the situation as regards prehistoric sites has also recently worsened. The prehistory of Cambodia is virtually untouched and unknown, but last year, when a new road was built, a large Iron Age site was discovered at the village of Phum Snay in Banteay Meanchay province, about 75 kilometres west of Angkor. Professor Charles Higham, Dr Dougald O'Reilly and I were given emergency permission by the



Figure 1. *Banteay Chmar, Cambodia, showing the hole left by the theft of a section of wall relief.*



Figure 2. *Phum Snay, Cambodia. Looters' holes.*

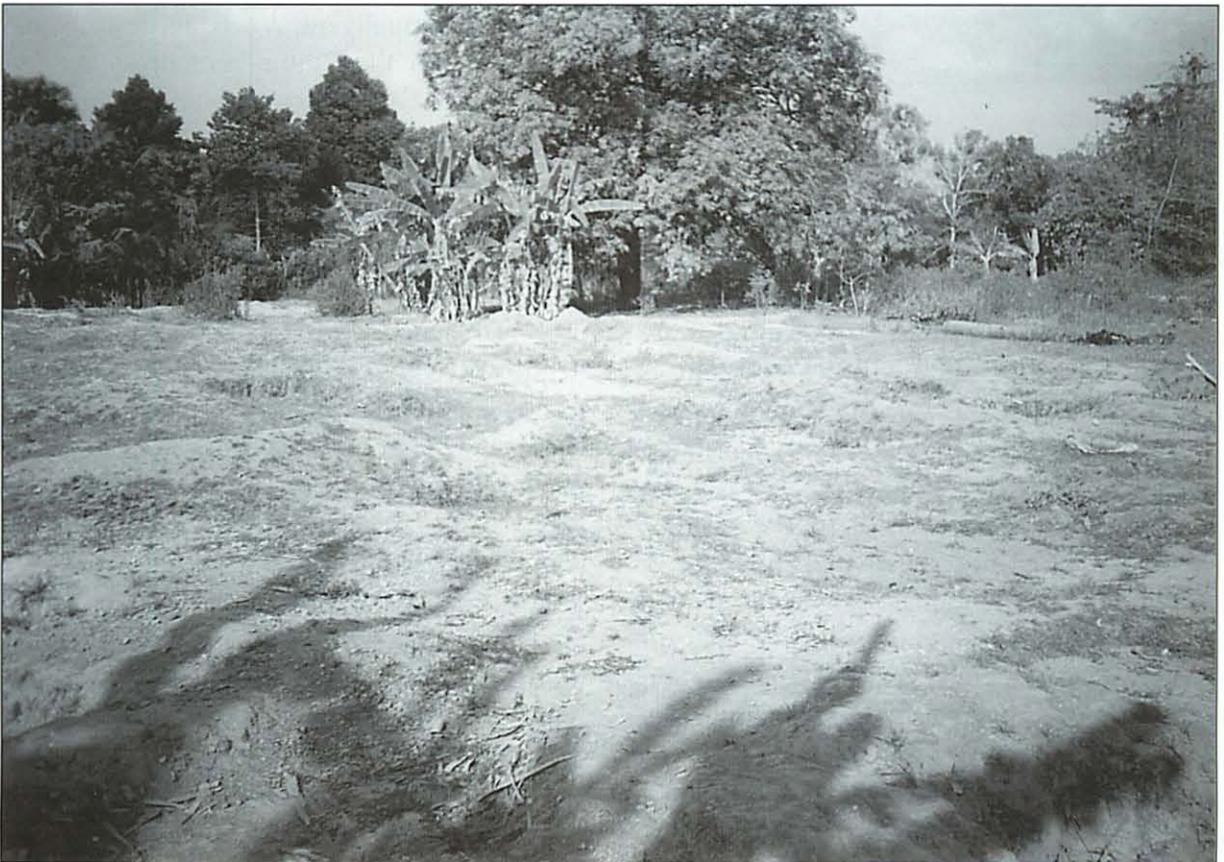


Figure 3. *Phum Snay, Cambodia. Looters' holes.*



Figure 4. *Phum Snay, Cambodia. Human remains left behind by looters.*



Figure 5. *Phum Snay, Cambodia. Human bones left behind by looters.*

Cambodian government to undertake a rescue programme there.

The area is very poor and the villagers live in very primitive conditions — their houses are made of wood and walled with leaves, there is no electricity. When an Iron Age cemetery was revealed under their village, they began wholesale looting. The village today looks as if it has been struck by a hurricane of mortar bombs. There are pock marks everywhere (Figs. 2 & 3). When foreign archaeologists visit, accompanied by local officials of the cultural office, the villagers are told that they are destroying their cultural heritage and are asked to stop, but carry on digging regardless under the very noses of the visiting officials. When we visited the site in January 2001, close inspection of the fields ransacked by looters revealed that some were covered in random pits of various sizes and shapes, but more

recent ones had an orderly plan to them. The latter area contains plots made available for a fee, which accounts for the neater lines of looters pits. Looters place thorn barriers on certain tracks so that, if necessary, they can quickly escape. We employed guards for the 5 by 15 metre excavation area.

The village is littered with broken pottery vessels, iron artefacts, heaps of human skulls and broken human bones (Figs. 4 & 5). The villagers described burials with bronze helmets complete with gilding and iron horns, bronze armour, and much else. We found skulls with green bronze corrosion all over them which confirm this story, although the villagers really only seek beads of carnelian, agate and glass. The finds are bought by middlemen and taken to the Thai border. There, they appear in the Aranyaprathet market, or find their way to Bangkok antique shops. The villagers make very little money, but will continue until there is nothing left. While we were excavating at Phum Snay, we heard of another site recently discovered which was already being destroyed. There will be many more and it seems that the chances of any being left intact are virtually nil. When this destruction was reported in the Phnom Penh press, it only encouraged collectors to turn up and buy directly from the villagers. Some young Americans came to buy, and probably wanted to make a profit on their return to the USA. It is cheaper than buying beads at the Russian Market in Phnom Penh.

Irrespective of legislation and the best intentions of a few people in official positions, there is no clear path for improving this situation. The Banteay Chmar test case shows that, with sharp eyes and determination, it is possible to recover stolen material. Yet even so, although the Banteay Chmar reliefs have now been returned to Cambodia, they are not back at the site. Other reliefs and heads are being lost daily, via routes that go into Thailand and by sea to Singapore or vice versa. The US government has introduced a law banning the importation of Cambodian antiquities, and it would be a step in the right direction if other Western countries were to follow suit.

The looting and sale of antiquities is not an item high on the agenda of any government in

Southeast Asia. However, encouraging tourism and attracting foreign currency are both important objectives. In Thailand, the Government has undertaken many initiatives to promote cultural tourism. There are several examples: the Phanom Rung Historic Park, the Sukhothai Historic Park, the Phimai Historic Park, regional museums such as the King Narai museum at Lopburi and a new museum planned for Surin. Much wealth has been brought to the village of Ban Chiang through its World Heritage status, even if — paradoxically — the villagers now benefiting were enthusiastic looters in the 1970s. The construction of village museums, like the one at Ban Prasat in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, has attracted many visitors and now there are souvenir shops there.

Similar approaches in other countries would certainly be beneficial, for the local people need to realize that their cultural heritage is a way of ensuring prosperity indefinitely, it is not just there for immediate sale to dealers. Cambodia has the priceless advantage of Angkor — a world-class site. It is attracting a growing number of visitors, and is administered by a separate department of state, known as APSARA. The staff of APSARA are doing excellent work in the area of conservation and protection, and employ cultural police for protecting the monuments. Looting and destruction persist, but not in the frenzied way seen at other sites. The rest of Cambodia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. This Department needs a huge injection of funds to encourage the implementation of a programme of historic park creation on the Thai model. It would require the construction of roads, museums and visitor accommodation. How can this be done? The road from Angkor to Banteay Srei, about 25 km long, is now being constructed — by hand. Women and children carry stones in baskets, and lay them out on the road. Then a steamroller flattens them. They are paid with rice. It takes about 6 hours to reach Banteay Chmar from Angkor, the distance by road is about 150 km, but it is hardly any distance from the Thai border. A road linking Angkor with the Thai Historic Parks of Phimai and Phanom Rung could follow the old course of the Angkorean Highway.

Banteay Chmar is breathtaking. It is vast, ruinous, but its walls are covered in wonderful bas reliefs. Many sections of the wall have collapsed, presumably the reliefs are lying face down on the ground. Professor Higham and I were the only visitors there during the course of an entire day, but with investment in roads and facilities it could become one of the outstanding tourist destinations in Southeast Asia. The local people would then benefit financially and have a stake in safeguarding it. This same situation could apply to the Kulen uplands. There, one can only gain admittance by paying the local army unit. It could also apply to Koh Ker, Preah Khan of Kompong Svay, and Beng Mealea, to name but a few of the major provincial temples. But the success of such a policy relies upon there being something left to see, and this depends entirely on the political will of the Government in Phnom Penh to put in place protective measures and to punish those who break the law.

What approaches and messages will be particularly appropriate in the region? Any approach to Southeast Asian governments should include encouragement:

1. to strengthen regional cooperation against illegal looting and marketing of antiquities;
2. to consider the implementation of investment to encourage tourists to visit but not buy;
3. as in Thailand, to develop a rural education programme at village level to inform villagers of the potential value of cultural heritage;
4. to enforce strictly laws forbidding the marketing and sale of antiquities;
5. to engage in inter-governmental discussions to secure cooperation against illegal trade in antiquities between the exploited poorer countries and the rich countries in which the dealers operate;
6. to seek international funding to develop the infrastructure needed to create a system of Historic Parks for tourist development.

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MayaQuest takes on Internet trade in antiquities

JOHN G. FOX

From 19 February to 16 March almost a million grade school students in the United States participated in MayaQuest, an online, interactive expedition to explore the world of the ancient Maya. As the team's archaeologist, I helped lead a team of scientists and explorers as we explored ancient Maya ruins and met with contemporary Maya people in Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala. We sent daily reports, videos and photos back to an interactive Web site via a remote satellite connection.

In addition to learning about the ancient Maya, students participated each week in a feature called 'Make A Difference'. Our team in the field wrote about important issues affecting the Maya region and enabled students to get involved and take action for positive change. One of our most successful efforts targeted the looting of Maya sites and the rising trade of antiquities on the Internet. After learning in-depth about the looting trade and seeing photos of recent looter's

pits at the site of Tikal, 1382 classrooms signed a petition asking Amazon.com and eBay.com to halt the trade of antiquities on their Web sites.

Individual students and classrooms wrote impassioned letters to the Public Relations people at these two companies and received individual responses, although Amazon and eBay mostly reiterated their formal positions on this topic. Amazon.com sent backpacks to one classroom, but they weren't comfortable accepting them. We turned it into a dilemma on our Web site and the kids collectively voted that it would be improper to keep the backpacks, but they thought it might be rude to send them back. So, in the end, they donated them to a domestic abuse shelter in Austin, Texas. The students have become strong advocates for cultural preservation and will continue to put pressure on those involved in the illicit antiquities trade.

Our next expedition, AmazonQuest, will take us to Peru from September 24 to October 26. See our Web site, <http://quest.classroom.com>, for further information on the Quests.

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Conference note

Safeguarding Africa's Heritage was a one-day meeting held at the University of London on 17 March 2001 to discuss the various threats which face the African heritage, defined in its wider sense to include natural as well as cultural resources. Organized by Niall Finneran (School of Oriental and African Studies) and Andrew Reid (Institute of Archaeology), topics ranged from the problems posed by conservation of an Ethiopian codex to the impact of game reserves on indigenous communities. There were presentations

from Mali, Nigeria, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and the Sahara, and included Mohammed Mohammed's account of the loss during wartime of the Somali cultural heritage, and plans for its possible recovery. The closing commentary by Alinah Segobye of the University of Botswana usefully highlighted the political realities of the continent, but ended the meeting on a cautiously optimistic note. The organizers hope to publish the proceedings of the conference as a monograph, which will be very welcome.

UNESCO policy on Taliban

In August 2000 Kabul museum was opened for the first time in a decade and what was left of its collections — badly depleted by looting during the years of civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal in 1988 — were on public display. The president of the museum defended the presence of Buddhist statues by maintaining that they were part of the history and culture of Afghanistan, and not to be feared as religious idols. However, in February 2001, the Taliban leader took a different view, and ordered that all idols, including the two monumental Buddhas of the Bamiyan Valley, were to be destroyed. They were

blown up in March. In response to the Taliban action, UNESCO released the following statement:

Where there is a serious danger to the survival of a heritage, and at the request of the recognized government of the country concerned, UNESCO will arrange safe custody of objects donated to it for the purpose of eventual return to the country concerned when the situation will allow. For this purpose it will support non-profit organizations working to take cultural objects into safe custody. It will not itself purchase objects which are being illicitly trafficked. In the case of Afghanistan, and consequent to the destruction of heritage by the Taliban authorities, UNESCO has established a special programme to assist in the rescue of cultural objects of Afghan origin, at the request of the legitimate government of that country.

Front cover. Banteay Chmar, Cambodia, showing the hole left by the theft of a section of wall relief.

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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.



