

Culture Without Context



The Newsletter of the Near Eastern Project of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Issue 2, Spring 1998

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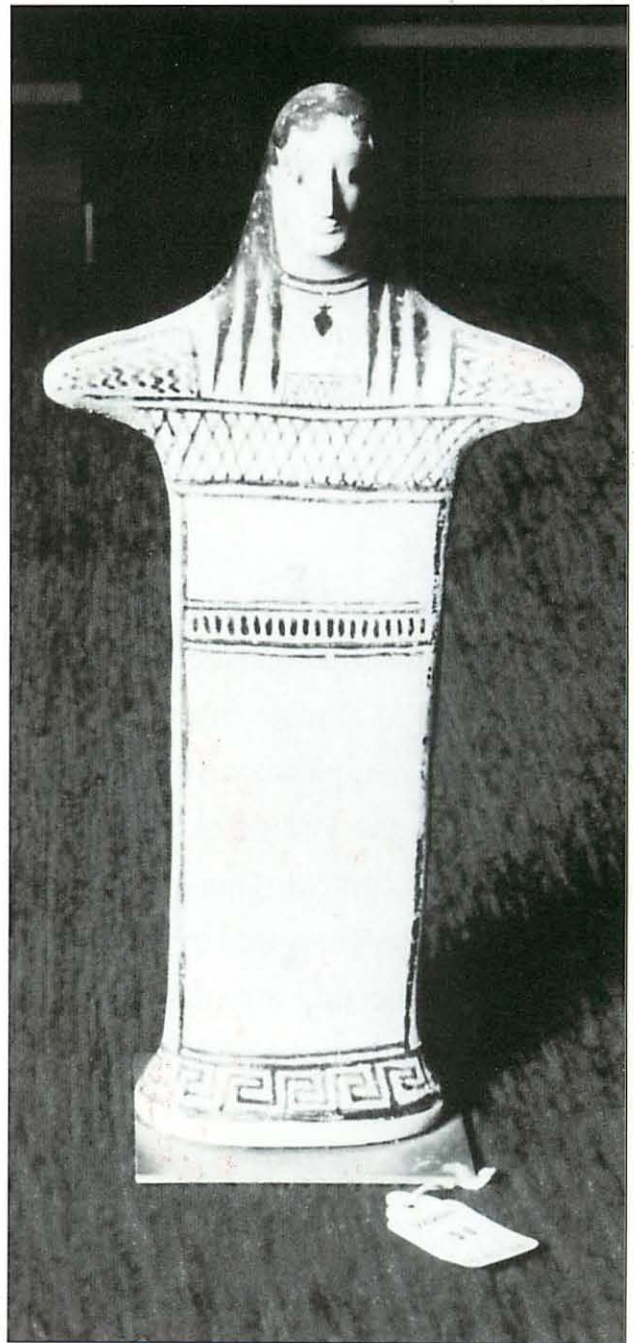
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Correspondence relating to all aspects of the
legal and illegal trade in antiquities is welcome;
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Terracotta Boeotian figurine, 7th century bc (see p. 11).



The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre is a project of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research

Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre (IARC) was established in May 1996, and commenced operations in October 1997 under the auspices of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge, England. Its purpose is to monitor and report upon the detrimental effects of the international trade in illicit antiquities (i.e. antiquities which have been stolen or clandestinely excavated and illegally exported). The volume of this trade has increased enormously over the past twenty years and the associated demand is thought to have caused the large-scale plundering of archaeological sites and museums around the world.

The IARC will bring to the attention of the general public the scale and nature of this destruction (see Statement of Intent on back cover). It will also endeavour to create a climate of opinion which will discourage the collection of illicit antiquities by emphasizing that the true scholarly value of an artefact is irreparably damaged by the loss of cultural information which is caused by its unrecorded divorce from context. Thus the primary concern of the IARC will be to reduce the loss of knowledge caused by the chronic despoliation of sites and museums. Issues of object ownership are of secondary interest but are nevertheless frequently an inseparable part of the problem.



Editorial

The illicit trade in antiquities with regard to Turkey is a problem with two faces. In the first instance, Turkey is a 'source country', with an extraordinarily rich and varied cultural heritage. In the second instance, Turkey is geographically well-placed to be a 'transit country', a pathway for items from neighbouring source countries of the Middle East travelling towards the purchasing countries of Europe.

Turkey has had tough antiquities laws in place since 1906 and in recent years in particular has worked consciously and consistently to repatriate illegally exported artifacts. Many of these efforts have led to success, either through legal settlements or by way of more informal resolutions, in which the American-Turkish Society has often been a useful partner. There have been several high-profile cases involving illegally exported Turkish artefacts, such as the Lydian Hoard, a group of gold and silver vessels and jewellery, wall paintings and statues. These objects were purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in New York over the course of 1966 to 1970 and were a source of controversy since their existence was first rumoured in 1970. The 'hoard' was proved to have come from a cluster of burials in western Turkey and was returned to Turkey in 1993 after a complex six-year legal case which was conceded by the Metropolitan Museum before it could come to trial. For informed discussion of the Lydian Hoard particulars, and illegal trade in Turkish antiquities in general, the best source is Mr Özgün Acar, a Turkish journalist who has been involved with the issue for years (see, for instance, Acar & Mark Rose, 'Turkey's war on the illicit antiquities trade', *Archaeology* 48/2 (1995), 45–56).

The two aspects of source and transit trade intertwine, since modern national borders in the region do not correspond with cultural boundaries in the past. Potentially, an object which appears on the antiquities market in Turkey, or in Europe having arrived via Turkey, may have come from a site in Turkey or from a neighbouring country, and in the absence of documentation it may be very difficult to determine which. For example, several years ago, a regional museum

in southeastern Turkey had bought a cylinder seal brought in by a local resident. Museum officials had not seen anything exactly like it, and details of where it had been found were murky. I looked at it and was surprised to see a distinctive scene of pairs of animals in combat, in a style pointing to manufacture in southern Mesopotamia (now southern Iraq) during the late Early Dynastic Period (c. 2500 BC).

So, was this a seal which had been illegally excavated in Iraq and had found its way to Turkey? Most probably yes, given the scale of the illegal excavation problem in Iraq at present and the porosity of the Turkey–Iraq border. However, there are several other possibilities. The seal could have been manufactured in northern Mesopotamia (in this case Iraq or Syria) in a style much like the contemporary style of southern Mesopotamia (currently Iraq). So the seal may have been illegally excavated from a site in Syria and had slipped across the border to Turkey. To pursue this line further, the seal could have been made at a very northern Mesopotamian site, this time in southeastern Turkey, in a southern Mesopotamian style; in this case it would be unique, but this is not out of the realm of possibility.

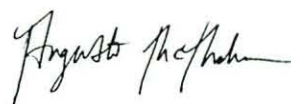
But yet another possibility exists. Assuming the seal was manufactured in southern Iraq, it may still have arrived at a site in Turkey at some time in the distant past, either directly carried by its original owner or by way of a series of exchanges and multiple owners. This movement may have happened either shortly after the seal's manufacture or even centuries later (given that cylinder seals could have 'heirloom' status in the past). So perhaps the seal did come from a site in Turkey, despite its style pointing to a different area of origin. In this case, although it may have been illegally excavated, it would not in fact have been illegally exported. And the further possibility exists that if it had been accidentally excavated from a site in Turkey (i.e. in the course of agricultural or construction work), it would actually have arrived in the best possible context, having been delivered to the local museum.

So we are left with a confusing situation. How would one even go about beginning to determine rightful ownership and original provenance in such a case? The impossibility of such a task is overwhelming. And a cynical, or lazy,

voice asks, why should we bother? Although of good quality, there actually was nothing very exotic about the seal itself. There are literally dozens of Early Dynastic cylinder seals in similar style, with similar scenes, already known from excavations and in museum collections. It did not have an inscription or any other unique features. It would not make any impact on an art historically-based analysis of Mesopotamian culture. But its latent importance lies in its context, now lost forever. If it came from a site in southern Iraq, this is interesting but would probably not in fact change our reconstruction of the past. If it came from a site in Syria or northern Iraq, this is more interesting, and it could slightly alter our perception of the interaction between southern and northern Mesopotamia, depending upon the specific site involved. But if it came from a site in Turkey, there could be a much greater impact upon our concept of this interaction, its extent and its organization. The date of the context, and how much that differed from the probable date

of manufacture, would have also been an intriguing avenue to follow.

Now, decontextualized, the cylinder seal remains a beautiful object, an artefact which can still rightly serve as a 'cultural ambassador', speaking volumes about the artistic genius and symbolic world of a particular cultural group. It is slightly comforting to think that residents of southeast Turkey may have the opportunity to see it in the museum, since it will be unique in that context and can serve as a valuable educational tool. But the vitally important, yet intangible, information it once held about other social and economic aspects is lost. The individual who used the seal and the location and circumstances in which he or she did so have completely vanished. And the object without its history is far less eloquent.



A. McMahon
Editor

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Return of the Birgi Ulu Camii mimbar doors

AUGUSTA McMAHON

It is not just ancient or 'archaeological' material which is at risk in Turkey and other countries of the region. The increased appreciation of and high prices now fetched by Islamic antiquities and antiques on the market have led to thefts of more recent material. For instance, among the thousands of objects looted from the regional museums of Iraq were many of Islamic date, including decorated bronze vessels and lamps, glazed pottery, etc. None of these have yet been recovered.

Even Islamic objects which are still *in situ* and in use are at risk. One such case of theft (a success story, rather than the usual depressing tale of total loss) is that of the wooden double mimbar doors from the Ulu Camii (Aydinoglu Mehmet Bey Mosque) in Birgi, near Izmir on the west coast of Turkey. This area is perhaps better known outside Turkey for its rich heritage of Ionian and Hellenistic sites such as Ephesus, Pergamum and Didyma; but these sites make up only a small part of the total. A number of mosques in Turkey contain beautiful wooden carvings, an art form which reached its peak under early Ottoman rule. The doors in this case date to 1322 (722 Hijra) and thus fall well within the rubric of Turkish antiquities regulations, which prohibit export from Turkey of items made before 1914. The doors are a matched pair with the fronts completely covered by ornate carved plant and geometric motifs, surmounted by a line of gilded Arabic script (Fig. 1). They are only just over 1.5 metres high and each about a half metre wide, an unwieldy package but not above what could be carried by a single person.

The doors were stolen in May 1993. Details of their actual removal from the building are unfortunately unclear. But the path taken by the doors after their removal has been tracked by the Turkish authorities and New Scotland Yard. They were sent by British Airways Cargo from Istanbul to Sofia, Bulgaria, and from there to London. Ultimately, they were sent to Christie's auction house for sale, but only after they had been missing and unheard of for about two years (presumably they

were stored in a warehouse during this time, until it was assumed they were no longer being actively sought). By then, Interpol had been alerted, and detailed information about the doors, including photographs taken while they were *in situ* in the mosque, had been widely disseminated to antiquities dealers, museums, and customs authorities. An employee of Christie's was able tentatively to identify the doors which came to them as being the same as those in the Interpol information. The police were informed on 15 May, 1995, and the doors were subsequently identified for certain by Turkish officials. The complexity of the issue of illegally exported artworks is such, however, that even given the straightforward and unarguable identification possible in this case, the doors were not returned to Turkish hands until five months later, 9 November, 1995.

The success of this case rests on a number of aspects; the primary one being that there was a good photograph of the doors *in situ*, documenting their provenance and proving ownership beyond a doubt. The distinctive nature of the carving and the inscription were also important in matching the photograph to the actual objects. The cooperation of the British police, the Turkish authorities, and the antiquities dealer were also vital. This is one of the earliest cases of such fruitful cooperation between the UK and Turkey;



Figure 1. The Ulu Camii doors after recovery.

previous attempts by Turkey to involve the British police had not achieved such good results.

This success story stands in stark contrast to an earlier case of illegally exported objects from Turkey, in this case the sale of Urartian bronze objects at Sotheby's in London in the mid 1970s (as related by Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a large number of Urartian bronzes began to appear on the market in Munich and London (one estimate of the number of pieces is about 6000). Although the ancient Urartian kingdom (c. 9th–7th century BC) is located in an area now divided among the modern nations of Turkey, Iran, and Armenia, the bronzes appearing in London were identifiable as most probably coming from the sites of Giyimli and Patnos, in eastern Turkey. Giyimli in particular was known to have been systematically looted and to have contained bronze items which closely matched those arriving in London. Patnos was under excavation by a Turkish team during part of the year and had also produced comparable bronze objects, and while the archaeologists were not on the site it would have been vulnerable to looting. Sotheby's was apparently informed of the likely provenience of the objects but nevertheless persisted with their sale.

Sir James Bowker, then Chairman of the Council of the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara, informed the Turkish Embassy of the objects in one sale, and a representative of the Turkish Antiquities Department was dispatched to London with £5000 to attempt to buy back as many objects as possible. This sale was also attended by the Turkish Cultural Attaché to London and by Mrs Maxwell-Hyslop on behalf of the British Institute at Ankara. In the event, £5000 proved not enough to retrieve all of the objects and many were bought by private collectors and thus dispersed. The catalogues of the relevant sales (8 December 1975, 12 July 1976 and 8 November 1976) described them as 'Urartian bronzes from Iran', despite the fact that Sotheby's had been informed that the likely provenance of many of the objects was Turkey. Many of the objects in fact remained in Munich and are now in the *Prähistorische Staatssammlung* of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, where a special exhibit was put on from early September to early December 1976.

Urartian bronze statuettes, weapons, and reliefs have been collected in the West for more than

150 years. A.H. Layard, the excavator of Nimrud in northern Iraq in 1845–47, purchased several Urartian bronzes on behalf of the British Museum during his travels through the region. The objects are skilfully made and often elaborately decorated and inlaid, with an intriguing decorative style, a fusion of Assyrian and local idiom. Their popularity and attendant market demand has undoubtedly led to greater looting of sites. And meanwhile the awkward location of the Urartian sites in politically sensitive areas in modern terms has meant that not very many systematic excavations of Urartian sites have taken place. Thus we are almost in the same situation with Urartian bronzes as with Cycladic figurines, that as many unprovenanced objects are known as are well-provenanced excavated ones. And this has a devastating impact upon our reconstruction of what, exactly, makes up 'Urartian style' in metalwork. The situation is only complicated by the presence of some obvious forgeries among the known bronzes; there may be less obvious forgeries in some collections, still unknown. And since these are by default being used to formulate our concept of 'Urartian' art, they will never be identifiable as fakes.

These two cases offer an interesting contrast; why did one end in success and the other in failure? Clearly the key element is that of documentation. Since the Urartian bronzes had been looted from illegally excavated sites, there was no documentation of their origin; while the *mimbar* doors had been studied and photographed in place. The stylistic arguments applied to locate the origin of the Urartian bronzes may be persuasive but can never be conclusive. Uniqueness of the objects in question is also an important aspect. The nature of the Urartian objects (in particular such items as weapons and vessels, but to a lesser extent such items as statuettes also) is such that there are many which are broadly similar in function, scale, even artistic detail, in contrast to the *mimbar* doors with their unique carving. So what is the damage? The sale and dispersal of the Urartian bronzes, following upon their illicit excavation, destroyed a chance for better definition of and even correction of our reconstruction of Urartian art and its relationship with contemporary Scythian art and the earlier, possibly related, metalwork of Luristan. Both archaeologists and collectors have lost valuable knowledge about the past.

In the News

In November 1997 a fourth-century BC gold phiale, bought in Switzerland by the New York dealer Robert Haber on behalf of the collector Michael Steinhardt in 1991, was confiscated by order of the US attorney. The order was made because the entry documents named Switzerland rather than Italy as the country of origin, and also because the export of the piece from Italy had taken place in direct contravention of that country's patrimony laws. This order sets a precedent as the claim to title of a 'good faith' purchaser was set aside in favour of that of the original owner, in this case the Italian government. Mr Steinhardt has lodged an appeal against the decision and is supported by the American Association of Museums and the Association of Art Museum Directors, who both argue that the 1997 decision acts to unsettle presently established museum collections and will also constitute a threat to future acquisitions. The Archaeological Institute of America has pointed out that the associations' stance is in contradiction of the ICOM Code of Ethics.

The fears of the museum associations are not without foundation. The Italian government is looking to reclaim a hoard of Hellenistic silver, acquired for the New York Metropolitan Museum for \$2.74 million by the dealer Robert Hecht (of Euphronius Krater fame). Like the Euphronius Krater, the Metropolitan claims that the silver belonged first to a Lebanese dealer, Nabil Asfar, who is himself accused in London of selling a looted relief from Nineveh. The Italian authorities claim that the silver hoard was excavated illegally at Morgantina in Sicily before being smuggled out to Switzerland in 1981.

Morgantina is also thought to be the probable source of the Greek acroliths — marble heads, hands and feet — of statues of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone bought by Robin Symes in Switzerland and subsequently sold to the New York collector Maurice Tempelman in 1980 for more than \$1 million (although it is claimed that the *clandestini* received only \$1100 for their labours). The Italian government is preparing yet another case but local schoolchildren had already in 1994 written to Mr Tempelman asking for the return of their history. Italian an-

tiquities, it seems, are now rather a risky investment, especially if their provenance is not known.

In Britain Lord McAlpine of West Green closed his business after his role in the sale of the Salisbury Hoard was made public. This important hoard of bronze objects, apparently discovered in an Iron Age context by two metal detectorists in 1985, was broken up on the market and passed through the hands of several dealers. Lord McAlpine sold part of the hoard in 1989 to the British Museum for £55,000. After an exhaustive investigation the Museum was able to piece together the story of the hoard and showed that it had been excavated without the landholder's consent, and returned those objects held by the Museum to their rightful owner — an ethically correct but not legally necessary action. In an interview with the *Art Newspaper* in January Lord McAlpine reiterated his refusal to reimburse the British Museum for their loss, arguing that he would not be able to recover his money from further up the dealing chain. Once again the public purse paid the price of the illicit trade.

The Sotheby's affair rumbled on to the end of 1997. Although the company did not reveal full details of the internal investigation which was carried out in response to Peter Watson's book *Sotheby's: The Inside Story* — at a cost of \$11 million — they did in December announce that in future they would not offer for sale any object known to have been exported illegally from its country of origin, whether or not it was imported legally into the country of sale. Thus Sotheby's have pledged themselves to go beyond what is required of them by law. The impact of this announcement was lessened somewhat as Dede Brooks, CEO of Sotheby's, revealed that the decision to stop holding sales in London was taken because the real market is now in New York. It was reduced still further when it became clear that the majority of antiquities offered up for sale in their June auction were still without provenance.

Harvard Museums have recently put on display a 1995 purchase of 182 fifth-century BC Greek vase fragments. The director of Harvard's art museums, James Cuno, argued that the pieces had probably been removed from Italy before 1971, the date at which the Harvard acquisitions code took effect, and which forbids the purchase of

material of questionable provenance. The fragments were bought on the advice of museum curator David Mitten from a New York dealer who had in turn purchased them from Robert Guy, of the University of Oxford, who could only have obtained them after 1971. Guy's name has in the past been linked to those of dealers Robin Symes and Herbert Cahn. Mitten has also purchased several unprovenanced antiquities from Robert Hecht (see above). Innocent until proven guilty claims Cuno. Guilty by association counter his critics.

November 1997 saw the opening of the prestigious Miho Museum in Japan which was attended by several well-known figures. Phillipe de Montebello of the Metropolitan and Robert Anderson of the British Museum were present, as was the dealer Robin Symes and the collectors George Ortiz, Michael Steinhardt, Leon Levy and Shelby White. Funded by the Shinji Shumeikai religious organization, the museum's collection is largely of Japanese origin although there is a substantial holding of objects from other East Asian countries, as well as from the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean areas. These latter antiquities have been acquired over the last seven years and are largely without provenance. Inevitably, the authenticity of certain objects has been called into question.

The issue of fakes was highlighted again in the strange case an Egyptian stela — the sepulchral tablet of Sheshonq — put up for sale at Christie's New York in March as a copy with an estimated price of \$200 to \$300. It sold for \$10,350. Was it genuine after all?

In an interview with Barbara Crossette of the *New York Times* in March, the Iraqi Director General of Antiquities gave a graphic account of the looting of his country's archaeology. Sites are quickly stripped by thieves who employ hundreds of bedouin or peasants to dig 'like ants'. Material is smuggled out through neighbouring countries to be sold in Switzerland, Britain and the United States. (In June Saudi Arabia returned 50 antiquities which had been smuggled across the border.) At the monastery of al-Sayda, north of Mosul, one of the oldest monasteries in the Christian world, the monks were held captive in one room while a gang emptied the attached museum of all its relics.

In the Ukraine the ancient Greek site of Chersonesos is reported to be under threat from the

activities of an 'antiquities mafia', but more worrying perhaps is the claim made to the land by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has plans for the 'pagan' site to be redeveloped.

Police in Istanbul seized 188 pieces of Byzantine and Ottoman date from the house of Alparslan Kurtarici, who claimed in April that he had bought the material at markets.

Timbuktu will seem a far away place to some readers although it is very close to the concerns of the IARC. Timbuktu is situated in the Niger Valley, in Mali, and sites there continue to suffer the depredations of the market. The Malian government recently negotiated the return of a stolen twelfth-century terracotta from Jacques Chirac, although rather bizarrely it arrived back home marked as a 'gift from the president of France'. The government is also pressing for the return of two objects currently on display in the new Gallery of African Art in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. William Teel, the owner of the figures, would not disclose their source.

In October 1997 Bavarian police raided three apartments belonging to Aydin Dikman and recovered over 4000 antiquities worth something in excess of \$40 million. Notable amongst them are more than 400 objects looted from Greek Orthodox churches in northern Cyprus soon after the Turkish invasion in 1974. They include two mosaics of the apostles Judas and Thomas which had been torn from the sixth-century church of Panagia Kanakaria and which complement those previously recovered from Peg Goldberg by the Cypriot Government in 1990. Some of the frescoes seized had been looted from the medieval Monastery of Antiphonitis. The police also recovered photographs which apparently show looters removing frescoes from walls. The police action was facilitated by the cooperation of Michel van Rijn, a former accomplice of Dikman (and a beneficiary of the Goldberg sale to the tune of \$250,000). Van Rijn also worked with the Munich-based dealer Serafim Dritsoulas whose gallery was found by police to contain nine more icons when raided in February 1998.

NJB

Information obtained from: *The Times*, *Archaeology*, *The Art Newspaper*, *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*.

Hatra statue and fakes

AUGUSTA McMAHON

A group of four antiquities and alleged antiquities from the Near East offered for sale via Switzerland in recent years, have been brought to our attention. Two of the group are clearly fakes, but at least one (Fig. 1), a large torso section of a limestone statue of King Abdsamya, father of King Sanatruq (II), is genuine. The statue is known to come from Hatra in northern Iraq, and its inventory number is 8.H.247. Two more fragments of the lower portion of this statue are known but have not apparently appeared on the market.* According to reports of the Department of Antiquities in Iraq, Hatra has been looted a number of times in the last five years, and several other statues and reliefs stolen from the site have been successfully retrieved by Iraqi officials.

Of the three pieces offered together with the Hatra statue, one, a rectangular relief with three standing frontal male figures and a Palmyrene inscription along the base (Fig. 2), may be genuine. The head of the central figure is surrounded by a corona of rays which may mark him as the god Aglibol, and he is flanked by two figures wearing helmets and carrying spears and shields. The arrangement of the scene, the placement of the inscription, and the details and proportions of the figures look for the most part correct and

typical of Palmyrene artworks. Similar architectural reliefs with comparable scenes have been found in Syria at Palmyra and Dura Europus, among other sites. But a few minor details arouse suspicion, such as the scarf-like arrangement around the necks of the figures, where a fastened cloak would be more typical. And more difficult to overlook is the apparently total absence of damage to any of the figures and to the frame which surrounds them. The relief has an air of having been only recently carved.

The third, an irregular relief fragment (Fig. 3), is almost certainly a fake. It is very similar to the third register of the Middle Elamite Untash-napirisha stele from Susa (SW Iran), dating to the fourteenth century BC (see Harper *et al.* 1992, *The Royal City of Susa, Ancient Treasures in*



Figure 1. Genuine torso of statue of King Abdsamya, from Hatra in northern Iraq.



Figure 2. Palmyrene relief copy (?).



Figure 3. Copy of Untash-napirisha stele.

the Louvre, no. 80). The relevant section of the genuine stele has a similar fish-tailed figure hold-

ing nearly identical streams of water, framed on the right by a snake and at the top and bottom by horizontal bands decorated with a guilloche pattern. In the case of the piece offered for sale, the guilloche band at the top has been replaced with a pattern of chevrons, perhaps borrowed from the fourth register of the actual object, where this design appears on a tree trunk. Above that band there is a partial cuneiform inscription, while there are human figures in the comparable register on the genuine piece. There

are also two more partial cuneiform inscriptions to the right of the snake on the item offered for sale. These inscriptions are very convincing and have been copied extremely carefully from an original, perhaps from the same stele as the figure. The poses of the fish-tailed figures on the two objects are identical, and there are vases placed along the streams of water at the same points, but the head of the figure on the piece on the market is far too large for the body, and the incised details of the snake's scales seem too sloppy. If this item is a fake, as seems very likely, it is still instructive to note the effort which has been expended upon it and the type of object being copied.

The final piece is even more clearly a fake, a rectangular slab with six lines of inscription above and surrounding a box in which is a solar disk symbol, with wavy lines at the base (Fig. 4). The placement of these elements is unconvincing, though they are at least Mesopotamian in inspiration; and more obviously, the inscription is a very poor copy of the first six lines of the third (and final) column of the stone tablet of the Babylonian king Nabu-apla-iddina (from Sippar and now in the British Museum; published *inter alia* D. Collon 1995, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, fig. 135). The decorative parts of this piece come from the same stone tablet, which

has a solar disk in a prominent position and a wavy line base for the figural scene at the top. The selection of the lines of inscription at the upper right of the original point to this forgery probably having been made by an individual accustomed to reading from right to left.

It is interesting that this group of objects included both a genuine artefact and some probable and some definite forgeries. It can be assumed that different sets of people are responsible for stealing genuine items and for creation of fakes, yet the conduit which places both on the market is, at least in this case, the same. And the effort expended on creation of the fakes has been considerable. The genuine pieces being quoted are not copied faithfully, yet the source is clear enough to be identified in two cases, as the fakes have mostly mixed together intact elements from



Figure 4. Copy of Nabu-apla-iddina tablet.

the originals. In both these cases, the originals are well-published, the tablet being quite widely cited in easily available books on Near Eastern art, while the stele is slightly more obscure but has also been published in clear photographs.

* We are indebted to Trudy Kawami for passing along this information and the images.

The sequestered warehouses

PETER WATSON

In January 1997, acting on the initiative of their Italian colleagues, Swiss police sealed four warehouses in the Geneva Freeport. The warehouses were understood to belong to one Giacomo Medici, an Italian businessman who had been arrested by the Carabinieri art squad, suspected of being the 'mastermind' behind an extensive operation to smuggle illicitly excavated antiquities out of Italy. Mr Medici was held for two months in Latino Prison before being released under house arrest.

The warehouses were found to contain ap-

proximately 10,000 'finely made' antiquities from sites all over Italy — they were of Etruscan, Roman, Apulian, and Campanian origin — and valued at 50 billion lira, or £25 million.

As part of the investigation by the Carabinieri (which had started in 1995, and made use of documents provided by the producers of a Channel 4 'Dispatches' programme originally obtained by an ex-employee of Sotheby's auction house) several objects were recovered in Britain, with the help of Scotland Yard. They included a Corinthian capital, a sarcophagus and a Roman bas-relief that had been stolen some years before from a residence in San Felice Circeo.

These are some of the more than sixty photographs provided by the Carabinieri, showing the objects seized. The warehouses appear to have been more than just storerooms. Two at least were set out as showrooms, with shelves, tables and

seats, presumably where prospective customers could view the objects in relative comfort. Several antiquities had Sotheby's labels attached, giving details of the sales in which they had appeared.

These objects were normally consigned to Sotheby's (and possibly to other auction houses) from three companies, all controlled by Giacomo Medici. They were: The Hydra Gallery, Christian Boursaud and Editions Services. Editions Services shared a fiduciary address with a fourth company, Xoilan Trading, owned by the London dealer Robin Symes.

Consignment notes from Christian Boursaud and Editions Services to Sotheby's in London, showed that on occasion, hundreds of objects were consigned for sale at the same time, with goods valued in excess of £250,000. Comparison of catalogue illustrations also showed that antiquities first consigned by Christian Boursaud, and which failed to sell, were later consigned by Editions Services.

The seizure of the 10,000 objects in the four warehouses is believed to be the largest of its kind ever made. It is understood the Mr Medici is to face trial in Italy later this year.

Following Mr Medici's arrest, and the seizure of the objects, and partly as a result of the Channel 4 'Dispatches' programme, the Carabinieri sent a 300-page document, a *Commission Rogatoire*, to Scotland Yard in London, requesting their cooperation in interviewing a number of British subjects, some of them employees, or ex-employees, of Sotheby's. The results of these investigations have not yet been released.

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Figure 1. View of warehouse.



Figure 2. Showroom area of warehouse.



Figure 3. Shelf of South Italian pottery and figurines.



Figure 4. South Italian krater, 4th–3rd century BC.



Figure 5. Attic red-figure cup, early 5th century BC.

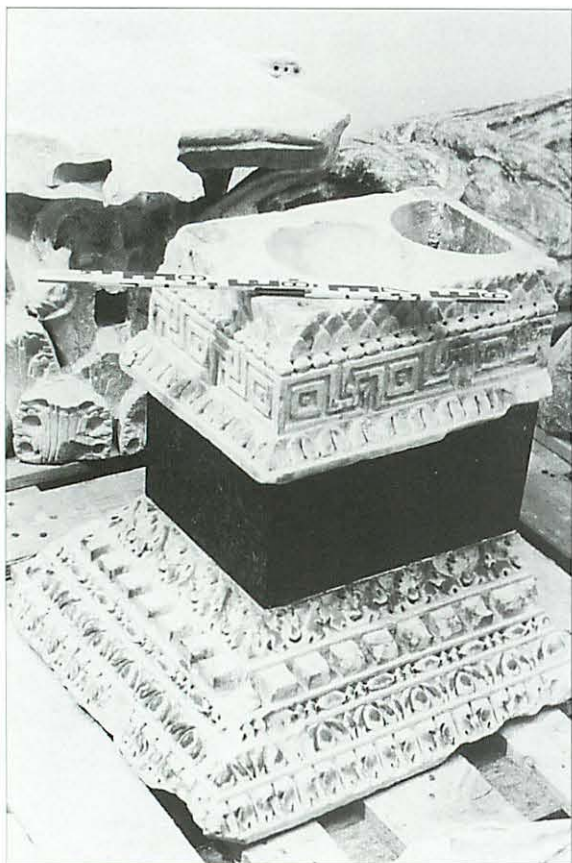


Figure 6. Architectural elements, including a Corinthian column capital.

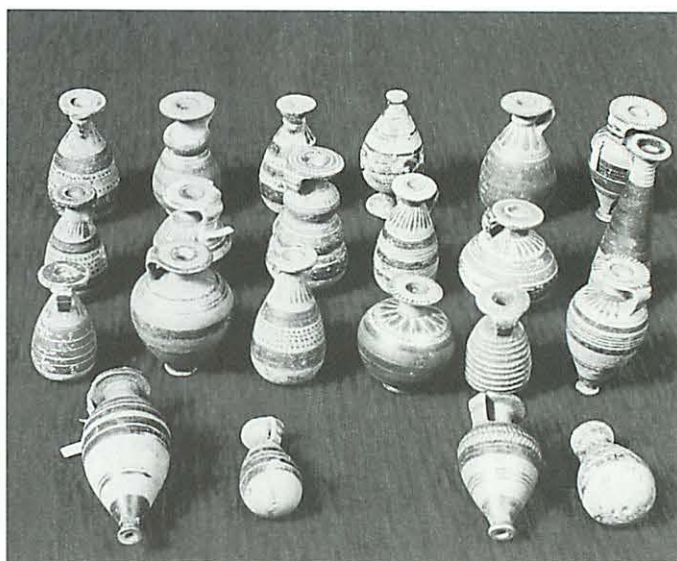


Figure 7. A group of Late Corinthian aryballoi.



Figure 8. A selection of the bronze ornaments and small vessels.

Book Review

COLIN RENFREW

Patrick J. O'Keefe, 1997. *Trade in Antiquities: Reducing Destruction and Theft*. London: Archetype Publications & Paris: UNESCO. 134 pp.

A steady flow of books is now appearing directed in general towards arresting or diminishing the continuing looting of the world's archaeological sites. Among the most informative, particularly in view of the range of opinions expressed, was *Antiquities, Trade or Betrayed: Legal, Ethical and Conservation Issues*, edited by K.W. Tubb (London: Archetype, 1995). The present work, according to the back cover, is the result of a UNESCO initiative: 'In May 1994, the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation recommended that the Director-General of UNESCO be invited to have specialized studies made by experts to clarify issues in cultural objects that are disputed or unclear. This report on the antiquities trade is the first such study.' It offers a convenient summary of some of the issues.

In the Introduction, however, the very questionable proposition is advanced (p. 1) in the context of the commercial circulation of antiquities that: 'Satisfying demand in the short term would give time for measures to operate to lessen or redirect it in the long term . . . In the short term, demand might be satisfied by increasing the flow of objects onto the market.' There are, I know, dealers who (perhaps for obvious reasons) have advanced this dubious notion, which is further considered in the chapter entitled 'Changing the Market'.

The book is written in a series of short sections or (unnumbered) chapters, which include quite numerous and interesting quotations of different points of view, many of them from newspaper reports which are often not readily available elsewhere. There are, however, no detailed case studies of looted sites or of illicitly exported groups of objects, so that the work is

perhaps more useful as a summary than as a primary text. The treatment of the UNIDROIT Convention of 1995, for instance, takes only about one page of text, and the Convention is not quoted in full in the Appendices, which would not have been difficult. The recent volume by Lindel Prott, *Commentary on the UNIDROIT Convention* (Leicester: Institute of Art and Law, 1997) is a more thorough, and for that reason ultimately more useful, contribution in that area.

The Proposal that such matters might be improved by increasing the volume of the flow of antiquities in the market is considered on pages 66 to 75, and the whole chapter 'Changing the Market' is directed towards this notion. It flies, however, against the main point (which is nonetheless set out elsewhere, notably in the section 'Primacy of Information Retrieval') that the principal function of excavations is to provide new information about the past, not objects to fill museums or private collections.

The work is supplemented by a number of Appendices, but these are not adequately referenced: for instance Appendix II, the 'Code of Ethics and Practice of the International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art' gives no precise source or date and no commentary upon the efficacy of the 'Code'. Appendix III gives the 'Text of the British Code of Practice for the Control of International Trading in Works of Art' but again gives no date, nor does it state precisely what body promulgated the 'Code'. Its Article 5 states: 'Violations of this code of practice will be rigorously investigated'. But the 'Code' does not state by whom such an investigation will be conducted nor is the matter further discussed.

This volume may be of use as an introductory survey, for it is wide-ranging and certainly recognizes the ill-effects of looting. But it lacks circumstantial detail and has no pretensions to legal thoroughness. I find it a little odd that this rather insubstantial work should be published under the imprint of UNESCO. At the same time, any responsible treatment of this difficult subject, such as the present book, is to be welcomed.

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Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Statement of Intent

The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre has been established in response to concerns expressed about the loss to our knowledge of the past caused by the illicit excavation of archaeological sites. It intends to:

1. Raise public awareness in Britain and internationally about this issue and seek appropriate national and international legislation, codes of conduct and other conventions to place restraint upon it;
2. Monitor the sale and transfer of illicit antiquities within the UK and raise public awareness of the scale of such sale and transfer overseas;
3. Develop an overview of the national and international legislation bearing on these issues;
4. Argue, as a provisional measure, for the widespread adoption of the central tenet of the 1970 UNESCO convention on the illicit transfer of cultural property, that unprovenanced artefacts which cannot be shown to have been known and published prior to 1970 should be regarded as illicit and should not be acquired by public collections whether by purchase, gift or bequest nor exhibited by them on long- or short-term loan and should not be purchased by responsible private collectors. It should be recognized, however, that local or national museums may on occasion be the appropriate repository for such unprovenanced objects as can be shown with reasonable confidence to have originated within the territory of their responsibility.
5. Seek agreement among national organizations and museums in the UK on the appropriate policy for such bodies to adopt on the acquisition, display and publication of unprovenanced artefacts;
6. Seek to cooperate with dealers and auction houses in furthering the evolution towards the understanding of such issues and the adherence to appropriate practices;
7. Work with the Council for British Archaeology and other British bodies to encourage the application of appropriate principles to portable antiquities originating within the United Kingdom;
8. Investigate and make known illicit activities relating to antiquities in the Near East, Egypt and Asia Minor and to publish such information in the periodical *Culture without Context*;
9. Select such other geographical areas for comparable investigation and publication as may be practicable;
10. Establish working relationships with data-search organizations relating to stolen antiquities (i.e. antiquities which formed part of a recognized collection from which they were stolen) as well as illicitly excavated antiquities which have not, so far as is known, been recognized as forming part of a public collection or a major and well documented private collection;
11. Promote educational measures which will stimulate and develop respect for the archaeological heritage of all nations.