

Rethinking Antiquities: Restitution and Collecting in the Time of ISIS

March 1: Symposium that arose out of the blog and comments thread by US journalist Judith H. Dobrzynski (see <http://goo.gl/uJesSv>) and involving IADAA adviser Ivan Macquisten that questioned the *New York Times* January 9 article on ISIS funding. The highly influential speakers, including the former head of the Homeland Security Antiquities Division, made any useful points and proposals. A timed summary of this symposium is available from Ivan for any IADAA member who would like it. The summary allows you to go directly to the relevant part of the 90-minute video rather than having to sit through it all. Email Ivan at ivan@imacq.com <http://goo.gl/4716Gf>

What do we really know about Islamic State's role in illicit antiquities trade?

Experts at London symposium warn against misinformation and lack of evidence

March 1, 2016. *The Art Newspaper*. Cristina Ruiz reports on the February 27 Courtauld Institute Symposium. Again, no trade are invited to speak. However, Mike Giglio, BuzzFeed journalist who spends a lot of time on the Syrian/Turkish border, says much of what is coming out is fake. ISIS is focused on coins, he says. Sam Hardy of UCL and the American University in Rome, who tracks the illicit sale of antiquities online, says we do not know how much Isis is profiting from this trade because there is no hard evidence. "I compiled all the different numerical claims that have been made about trafficking objects out of Syria. I am 99% sure that all of them are wrong." However, Italy's former culture minister, Francesco Rutelli, accuses the trade and collectors of encouraging the 'bloody' trade in artefacts.

The way to combat this trade on the ground is to provide sustainable development and to change the life opportunities for people who are involved, Sam Hardy said. In Mali, West Africa, the problem of looting has been decreased by 75% using this twin approach, he added.

See his 2015 paper, *Virtues Impracticable and Extremely Difficult: The Human Rights of Subsistence Diggers* here: <https://goo.gl/Avf2at> It puts forward some controversial views that have not found favour with fellow archaeologists but take a pragmatic approach to the issues in hand.

<http://goo.gl/u1NWdl>

How French Art Police Are Hunting ISIS Antiquities Racket

March 8, 2016. Dominique Perrin from the French newspaper *Le Monde* talks to Ludovic Ehrhart, a colonel in the French police who heads the Central Office for the Fight Against Cultural Goods Trafficking (OCBC). For months now, the OCBC has been tracking Syrian and Iraqi antiquities on the Paris market, and is poised and ready to launch an investigation "at the slightest suspicious discovery". There have been no miraculous finds yet. "There are a few small objects and old coins on sites like [eBay](http://www.ebay.com) or Le Bon Coin," Ehrhart says. "But we haven't found anything major." The article goes on to describe how ISIS-linked traffickers target Western countries fond of Middle Eastern art and that the process can take many years before the work appears on the "official market". The reporter writes, that like oil, drugs and weapons, antiquities raise cash for ISIS, incorrectly stating "Experts believe it brings in between \$30 and \$100 million every year."

<http://goo.gl/Cgn5tC>

Antiquities: The spoils of war – What’s really happening to the treasures being looted from the Middle East? Are they funding Isis?

March 11, 2016. Financial Times Collecting supplement. Ivan Macquisten, representing IADAA, provided a detailed briefing to journalist Georgina Adam in this focus on the absurdity of the billion dollar figures being touted in relation to the value of looted antiquities. Documents supplied to her included primary source evidence showing these figures to be false, as well as links to key evidence from the likes of James McAndrew, former head of the Homeland Security Antiquities Division. IADAA’s Jamie Ede and Randall Hixenbaugh are also both interviewed. Importantly, anti-trade campaigner Christos Tsirogiannis is quoted, saying: “I have no proof or even information that looting of antiquities is funding IS terrorist activities.” Michael Will of Europol adds: “We don’t have the evidence that Isis is selling antiquities to fund its activities.”

McAndrew points out that looted gold would not come onto the market because ISIS would want to keep it.

Neil Brodie, having admitted at the recent All Party Parliamentary Group meeting in London on March 8 that there is no evidence of looted Syrian material on the London market, here says: “Archaeological looting in Syria and other countries of the world and the profits made by Isil and other militia groups from the antiquities trade will only be disrupted by serious and sustained measures aimed at preventing the sale of antiquities on the destination market.”

<http://goo.gl/LoUfFh>

To Fight ISIS, Art Dealers & Archaeologists Join Forces

March 11, 2016. The Creators Project. Catherine Chapman, again after a detailed briefing from Ivan Macquisten on behalf of IADAA, focuses on the exaggeration of values surrounding looted artefacts and the encouragement that it gives to looters. James McAndrew points out that shutting down the legitimate trade will not discourage looters, and notes that previous claims of Gulf war antiquities showing up on the US market have yet to yield results. McAndrew also argues the case for addressing the issue on the ground in the conflict zone itself, a view supported by archaeologists, academics and the trade.

Perhaps most significantly, Deborah Lehr, who chairs the Antiquities Coalition, is quoted as saying: “The biggest challenge in this field is that there’s no real information or statistics on the size of this illegal trade.” This should preclude any further propaganda on the Coalition’s part in disseminating dubious figures.

Meanwhile Neil Brodie says that sitting down with the trade to find a workable solution is far from ideal but better than nothing.

<http://goo.gl/JZxpEz>

Looting crisis

March 14. Via Aljazeera.com. George Richards urges promotion of a long-term plan for community engagement to protect cultural heritage, while acknowledging that the immediate Syrian situation precludes that for the moment. He echoes Sam Hardy at the February 27 Courtauld Institute Symposium.

<http://goo.gl/qgq17c>

Law Enforcement Focuses on Asia Week in Inquiry of Antiquities Smuggling

March 17, 2016. *New York Times*. Tom Mashberg reports on a series of raids on Manhattan galleries during Asia Week New York, saying that this year the event “has become the focal point of an aggressive and unusual law enforcement effort”.

The report continues: Federal officials working with the Manhattan district attorney’s office have seized on the festival to orchestrate a series of daily raids that have netted more than a half-dozen antiquities that the authorities say were looted overseas, then smuggled out for later sale by auction houses or dealers.

“For too long, those engaged in the criminal trade in antiquities have viewed the occasional seizure as simply the cost of doing business,” said Matthew Bogdanos, the assistant Manhattan district attorney who obtained search warrants for the raids.

As IADAA members will know by now, Bogdanos is a leading campaigner against the illicit trade. However, he has yet to provide any primary source evidence whatsoever for any of the many and various claims he has made, citing legal and Government confidentiality when asked for it.

As Lark Mason, an Asian antiquities expert and dealer who is chairman of Asia Week, states: ““Why are they not approaching these galleries instead of treating them like criminals trying to do something underhanded,” he said. The items seized this week were all publicized by their vendors online and in catalogs, he said, not sneaked “in to be sold in some smoky back room.”

Very significantly, Deborah Lehr, who chairs the Antiquities Coalition and who is quoted in almost every NYT antiquities article (despite IADAA never even getting a reply to emails), here advocates the “guilty until proven innocent” policy for the trade: “The burden of proof should fall on these global businesses,” said Deborah M. Lehr, the coalition’s founder, “not on the individuals and countries who are victims of the illicit trade, to validate antiquities before any sale.”

To enforce this would risk breaching the Equal Protection clause under the 14th Amendment of the American Constitution, so it is difficult to see how they would do that. Nonetheless, its very mention reinforces the antipathy that the trade is up against.

However, the South East Asian antiquities trade does have a problem as a number of looted pieces have been very publicly returned in recent months.

Here is one of the reasons why:

“Historically, Asian governments haven’t monitored their antiquities in the same way” as nations like Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, said Leila A. Amineddoleh, the former director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation. “It makes them vulnerable.”

The wider concern must surely be how all this reflects on the trade who specialise in Middle Eastern and North African antiquities.

No mention is made of whether any of the items seized has been shown to be looted, fake or stolen, nor whether any of them has been returned to the dealers in question.

<http://goo.gl/ElgCC6>

Another Gallery Is Raided in Antiquities Case

March 17, 2016. *New York Times*. Tom Mashberg reports on NYC raids for the second day running. The tally of raids for Asia Week New York now stands at five.
<http://goo.gl/y7kkon>

Publish the Spink Archive

March 17, 2016: Neil Brodie via his Market of Mass Destruction blog has called for Spink's archive to be in the public domain. He believes Christie's hold the original records of Spink's Asian sales (the auction house bought Spink in 1993 before selling it off in 2002) and says given Christie's have expressed concern about the lack of publicly-available documentation for helping the art market 'vet antiquities', now is the 'opportune moment for the company to help improve the situation by publishing the Spink archive, preferably on-line in collaboration with an appropriate organization or institution'.

<http://goo.gl/mTjqzK>

Antique dealer arrested for smuggling ancient sculpture

March 22: *New York Post*. Japanese antiquities dealer Tatsuzo Kaku, who runs Taiyo Ltd in Tokyo, was arrested on March 14 at the Mark Hotel on East 77th Street for smuggling in the \$1.1 million relic sculpture 'Footprints of Buddha'. Originally looted from the Swat region of Pakistan in 1982, it had passed through Kaku's hands several times, say officials. Reports claim a rival crooked dealer betrayed Kaku to the authorities and that an email trail reveals Kaku's guilty knowledge.

<http://goo.gl/aoAhnC>

Stolen ancient Egyptian statue on its way back from Belgium

March 22: ahrmonline: Egyptian Embassy in Brussels has taken delivery of an Egyptian Middle Kingdom statue reportedly illegally excavated and exported from Egypt before being found in a Belgian auction house two years ago.

<http://goo.gl/2tqgFa>

UNESCO Conference, IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling presents a way forward

March 30: A fuller report on the conference (<http://goo.gl/3kJ93>) will appear next month, but we are happy to report that UNESCO have published the IADAA document on misleading statistics on their website at this link:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/IADAA.pdf>

ISIS 'Department of Artifacts' document exposes antique loot trade via Turkey

March 31: An RT documentary crew have reportedly obtained new documents showing how ISIS raise money from looted antiquities, among other assets, by smuggling them into Turkey. The documents detail illicit ISIS oil business with Turkey, say RT, adding that the documents also "light on jihadists' lucrative trade of looted antiquities along their well-established oil and weapons transit routes". A hyper link through to what purports to be evidence of material showing up on the European market actually links to the discredited January 9 *New York Times* article, which in turn restated 'evidence' that had already been disproved by the time it was published.

RT do not quote any figures for the 'lucrative' trade in antiquities, but do film a captured jihadi saying: "*We, Daesh, know that we financially depend on oil.*" The RT anchor introduces the film, stating that many of Palmyra's "most precious relics" that have been "plundered by ISIL", "have been turning up in auction houses worldwide".

<https://goo.gl/XZHLbW>

From the archives:

Saudi Arabia Destroyed 98% of Its Cultural Heritage

January 1, 2015: Cultural Property Case Resource, USC Gould School of Law

(Re-post by Sally Johnson of earlier blog post from Cultural Security Blog)

This article focuses on Wahhabist influence in destroying heritage sites within Saudi Arabia as "part of a government campaign to "rub out" historical and religious sites throughout the Kingdom.

<http://goo.gl/cLaVRc>