

## IADAA NEWSLETTER – May 2016

There has been a lot of activity this month, including conferences, new draft legislation in the UK and research linked to proposed new EU legislation, all of which is reported below. Increasingly, information is emerging from key sources that challenges the claims of archaeologists, academics and anti-trade campaigners. However, the emergence of well-respected bodies such as National Geographic as an apparent mouthpiece for propagandists is of concern. We are actively challenging them via the web and on social media.

The MANTIS research project (May 31 entry), run by academics in Chicago, confirms what we have always argued in echoing Neil Brodie's views on exaggerated figures. Vincent Geerling's bullet-point summary of the Europol conference provides a wealth of useful information for our ongoing campaign. The trend for new measures to encompass the wider art market is already beginning to win us support from non-antiquities trade professionals.

### ***73 antiquities returned home from US***

MEHR News Agency, May 09: The US has returned 73 Sassanid antiquities to Iran following consultation between the two countries.

<http://goo.gl/6YEDR5>

### ***Obama signs into law new restrictions on Syrian antiquities***

Stars and Stripes, Stripes.com: Washington, May 9: President Obama has signed off the new import restrictions on Syrian cultural property. Proponents of the bill, which passed in The Senate and Congress last month, claim ISIS and other militants have made millions of dollars from the trade (a reduction from the hundreds of millions or even billions previously claimed). The report also states that there have been "buyers in America part of the market for the stolen goods". To date, however, no evidence has been produced to show a single case of this happening in the US. Possible exceptions to the restrictions apply, "such as when rightful owners want to temporarily relocate cultural property to the U.S. for protection", states the report. The report also states that the UN Security Council has previously called for governments worldwide to restrict the trade in Syrian cultural property. The restrictions are due to remain in place for the duration of the Syrian conflict.

<http://goo.gl/YCQ3PF>

### ***Syrian agency fights to save country's archaeological heritage***

Stars and Stripes, Stripes.com: Washington: May 13: Interview with the director of Syria's antiquities agency, Maamoun Abdulkarim, about efforts to protect the country's heritage. A number of interesting and helpful points arise, including acknowledgement that no one has any idea of what has been stolen.

- Emma Cunliffe, a researcher at Oxford University's Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East project, said Abdulkarim's agency had succeeded in saving a huge amount of collections and archaeological sites.
- It is impossible to estimate how much has been stolen, since much of the haul has disappeared into the international black market in antiques. Satellite images of archaeological sites in rebel-held areas show hundreds of exploratory boreholes dug

around them.

- Abdulkarim confirms that “Ninety-nine percent of all 300,000 objects in our collections have been saved”.
- On Palmyra, Abdulkarim states: “At least 80 percent of the sites are undamaged and several more can be completely rebuilt”.

The last three paragraphs are perhaps the most enlightening:

- Unlike the situation with Iraqi antiquities, which flooded markets a decade ago, not many artifacts from Syria have shown up in traditional centers like Paris, Brussels or London, experts say.

Abdulkarim attributes that to a greater sensitivity to stolen artifacts in the international community since the experience with Iraq in the past decade, and to the realization that many of these may be fakes.

“Statues, coins, mosaics, icons and Bibles are being mass-produced in some areas” outside government control, he said. “This ‘Maltese Falcon’ — which the Syrian police impounded last year — is an example.”

<http://goo.gl/Z9PyXC>

### **UNESCO steps in to protect what's left of Syria's Palmyra**

Al-Monitor.com: Aleppo, May 16: UNESCO said it will work with partners to take emergency safeguarding measures for the remaining treasures in Palmyra after noting extensive damage during a recent visit by Mechtild Rosler, director of UNESCO’s World Heritage Center. UNESCO will sponsor a campaign to raise some of the required funds from private donors, foundations and governments. UNESCO and its partners, including the Institute for Digital Archaeology, can use drones to survey damage and create 3-D computer models.

In the meantime, however, “The situation in the ancient city of Palmyra is catastrophic, and what happened is a disgrace and an exchange of roles between the regime and religious extremists,” Anas al-Miqdad told Al-Monitor. Miqdad is the director-general of antiquities, museums and heritage in the opposition Syrian interim government and a researcher at the Sorbonne in France.

His views counter those given by the director of Syria’s antiquities agency, Maamoun Abdulkarim on May 13 (see above), who stated “At least 80 percent of the sites are undamaged and several more can be completely rebuilt”.

<http://goo.gl/c8SrNB>

### **Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill**

May 18: UK Government’s proposed legislation for 2016-17. This revives the abandoned attempt for such a Bill in 2008, with the intention of formally ratifying the Hague Convention. The new draft Bill draws on work by the current All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) advised by the Antiquities Dealers Association in London. Improvements include clear a clear definition of what constitutes an occupied zone. However, although APPG co-chairman Lord Renfrew acknowledged that further work needed to be done on defining cultural property once The Hague Convention had been ratified, the draft bill does not yet do this. While the definition covers “property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people”, it also includes “works of art” and even “reproductions”.

Breaches of this law by the trade, even unintentionally, risk a prison term of up to

seven years. Other concerns remain about rules governing the return of property that is not forfeit, personal liability for people working on behalf of companies. The next APPG meeting is on June 28 and the ADA will make representations on the Bill then.

### **Lust for Loot: Collecting is Driving the Demand for Plunder**

National Geographic: Explorers Journal: May 19. Archaeologist Sarah Parcak initially takes a look at the Hobby Lobby case in the US, involving hundreds of cuneiform tablets allegedly imported from Iraq. She then moves onto evidence of looting from Egypt from 2002-2013 and then the new US Bill on banning the import of Syrian antiquities.

"We need to figure out to what extent looted objects are reaching the West. Archaeologists have so many questions: Is this similar to what we see in the art world, where wealthy individuals have key objects in mind and make that known to people who can make it happen? Are antiquities being sold through the darknet? Parcak asks. (As Vincent Geerling discovered at the Europol conference in a presentation by someone who had conducted a research project into this very 'Darknet' issue, the answer so far is no.)

Importantly, Parcak then talks of giving testimony to the State Department's Cultural Property Advisory Committee in 2015 when Egypt requested import restrictions. She talked to coin collectors concerned about how restrictions would affect them.

"I went over and talked to the collectors, to try to understand their point of view," she writes. "The reality is: we need to create safe spaces for these dialogues. If they could present their concerns and we could present ours, we could find that thin line where we can work together."

Refreshingly, she continues: "As archaeologists, the idea of taking and owning is anathema. But the Hobby Lobby case shows that archaeologists need to do a better job of listening—and of educating people on what careless purchases might be funding. The bottom line: it will take listening on both our parts to change this."

On May 23, Ivan Macquisten posted a comment welcoming Parcak's views on dialogue and adding further comment about the role IADAA and others are playing in the debate. The comment was acknowledged and annotated as "awaiting moderation". However, it has never been published. Nor has Ivan received any message informing him that his comment is unacceptable or has broken any rules.

<http://goo.gl/UbGXPR>

### **How Tomb Raiders are stealing our history**

National Geographic: May 19: This article by Tom Mueller previews the special June issue and focuses on the work of archaeologist Sarah Parcak, who recently won \$1m prize for her work. The article covers looting across the globe but initially looks at an Egyptian coffin seized from a dealer and now stored in New York alongside other 'orphans' of the illicit antiquities trade, including "reliefs from Iraq, Syria and Yemen". It does not say whether these are ISIS linked but, if so, this would be the first evidence of this in the US, so it is surprising that this has not been front page news.

Much of the rest of the article focuses on issues going back two decades or more, encapsulating China and Egypt, the Schultz case, but is short on detail on the current

situation: "...the debate about how to halt looting has reached an impasse". The rest of the article is largely taken up with Parcak's trip to Egypt to see the destruction for herself, although there is also a section on Dubai and several images relating to Cambodia. Space is given over to Christos Tsirogiannis, who appears to dedicate his life to embarrassing Sotheby's and Christie's, although it does not explain that he uses archives to which the auction houses are denied access for due diligence purposes. Tess Davis, of the Antiquities Coalition, and a colleague of Tsirogiannis on the Glasgow research team, is quoted on the lamentable situation in Cambodia. The only further reference to Syria and Iraq is one image and caption acknowledging the problem of fakes and forgeries in Syria. Nonetheless, Syria was the focus of the following entry (see below).

<http://goo.gl/PRcTlz>

### **Europol Conference and speech and notes by IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling**

On May 25<sup>th</sup> Vincent Geerling was invited to make a presentation at Europol HQ in the Hague, the subject "Collecting Ancient Art, an old tradition under attack". Present were representatives of most police art squads and INTERPOL, FBI, WCO, UNESCO and many others. During the day it became clear that nobody had any evidence of terror financing with antiquities.

Key points that came up during the conference as follows:

- Claire Hutcheon of Scotland Yard's Art & Antiques Unit confirmed that they had still had no referrals at all with regards looting.
- One academic said we shouldn't be concerned about the exaggeration of statistics if it serves our purposes;
- Academics and archaeologists depend on journals and the media because they themselves can't get insurance when they want to visit hot spots.
- The head of the German police art investigation team (a woman called Silvelie Karfeld), who said that having worked for 22 years in the shadows on the looting issue, it is only since they have linked it to terrorism that the media have taken an interest. So it is essential for that link with terror financing to be confirmed.
- Karfeld also claimed that a recent Interpol conference had confirmed evidence of ISIS being funded by looting. However, the Interpol representative then intervened to say that she was mistaken and that no evidence had been put forward whatsoever.
- Bonnie Magness-Gardiner of the FBI said looting was taking place on an 'Industrial Scale', but could provide no evidence to support this. She also claimed that only 1% of the Abu Sayyaf documents had been released.
- Magness-Gardiner also confirmed that the FBI stats were based on media reports, academics' claims and interviews with refugees (which shows how important challenging this propaganda is).
- When Vincent asked Magness-Gardiner about Kerry's \$5m reward, she said it was a State Dept matter and she had heard nothing. (This is hardly credible for the FBI.)
- Another delegate, who had conducted a research project into activity on the Dark net, said they had found one or two references to antiquities in a single Arabic forum, but that was it.
- The WCO confirmed that they had no figures on trafficked antiquities because they depend on information being sent to them. As from this year they will actively ask

for information on illicit cultural goods, for their next report. When Geerling said that if it had been as large as illegal weapons and drugs, it would have been in the report already, she answered confirming this.

### **The booming illegal trade in antiquities**

CBS This Morning: May 28: CBS interview National Geographic archaeology writer Kristin Romey about the cover article for the June issue *Tomb Raiders, Looting the World's Ancient Treasures* (Parcak's article referred to above). Even though the article barely touches on Syria and Iraq (see above), that is the entire focus of the CBS interview. Asked about the scale and impact of looting in Syria and Iraq, Romey tells the news anchors that the trade is worth billions of dollars, claims that antiquities are "right up there" with oil as a source of revenue, and the illicit trade in looted Syrian and Iraqi artefacts driven by American collectors who are buying them even now. None of this goes challenged, and at no point is she asked whether she has any evidence to support this. While CBS has form in failing to investigate or question properly, such misinformation from National Geographic, of all bodies, is extraordinary, especially bearing in mind that even hardcore anti-trade bodies such as the Antiquities Coalition don't even believe these claims any more and have said so publicly.

<http://goo.gl/o7QxJx>

### **EU licences plan 'could hit London art market'**

Evening Standard, London: May 27: IADAA members will be aware of the recent EU endorsed survey sent out via Deloitte to look into what measures need to be taken across Europe to tackle trafficking in cultural objects. Although this was signed off on January 22, IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling only received notice of the survey on May 22, with a deadline of May 27 for completion. The content of the survey showed that it was not fit for purpose, nor displayed any understanding of the issues at stake, causing grave concern. An official letter of complaint, co-signed by the chairman of CINOA, remains unanswered. In the meantime, 'mechanisms' under consideration include an EU import licensing system that would affect the wider art market, which has sparked an outcry that Europe would become a much harder place to do business for the art market.

<http://goo.gl/SsKbFa>

### **Targeting cultural antiquities destroys heritage, UNESCO says**

Reuters: May 28. Headlined by video footage captioned 'Drone footage shows Palmyra mostly intact...', this article focuses on UNESCO Director Irina Bokova's concern at the slowness of the response around the world to the destruction in Syria.

<http://goo.gl/ouhVGO>

### **How much money is ISIS actually making from looted art?**

The Conversation: May 31: Fiona Rose-Greenland, Postdoctoral Research fellow at the University of Chicago and speaker at the recent conference on antiquities in Chicago, discusses her research team's work and findings so far. The team is called MANTIS (Modeling the Antiquities Trade in Iraq and Syria) and is attempting to

predict revenues via modeling techniques. It's a little early to come up with exact figures, but Fiona Rose-Greenland currently adheres to the several millions we know about via the Abu Sayyaf papers. She makes the point that even this level of funding is dangerous as the November 2015 Paris attacks cost as little as \$10,000 to stage. However, she is critical of those who exaggerate figures. Her conclusions are worth quoting in full as they echo those of Neil Brodie. Under the heading *The allure of numbers that awe*, she writes:-

And yet, patchy data and methodological challenges do not fully explain why \$7 billion fell to \$4 million in public discussions about the ISIS antiquities trade. What's really going on here, I think, can be explained in two ways. First, there is an overactive collective imagination about how much art is actually worth. It's an understandable proclivity. We hear all the time about astronomical prices paid at auction for contemporary artworks or rare masterpieces. Moreover, antiquities are imbued with mystique. They are treasure, hidden away in the ancient soil and waiting to be rediscovered.

This, in turn, motivates governments and other groups opposed to the Islamic State to describe their actions in attention-grabbing terms. It's a lot easier to call for action against a \$7 billion crime than a \$4 million one.

While market mystique and over-the-top plot lines are fine for Hollywood films and adventure novels, it's no way to understand terrorist finance, and without that understanding we are unlikely to arrive at genuine and lasting solutions.

<https://goo.gl/uwvLuC>