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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART

IADAA NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2020

Christie's launches war on 'unfounded accusations' questioning the origins of objects

Telegraph UK/YouTube: August 30: In what is arguably the most important development of the past month, Christie's has decided to fight back against anti-trade campaign ideologues.

The international auction house has condemned "unfounded accusations" by academics and members of the general public in the rising tide of questions over the provenance of historical objects as they relate to colonialism, slavery and historic conflicts.

At the centre of the row is a 15th century Persian Koran manuscript sold this summer for £7 million. Despite being in the same UK collection for 40 years and having been acquired during a period when it was legal to trade in such objects, concerns were raised over the sale.

Christie's issued a strong statement saying that while it was mindful of nuanced and complex debates over cultural property, "...we are also concerned that there has been a rise in unfounded accusations, spread far and fast on social media, that question the legitimate and legal exchange of these objects and collecting areas".

Despite the sale setting a headline-grabbing £7 million auction record, the Art Newspaper carried a report, shown here, whose headline stated that Christie's had 'quietly' sold off the Koran – the article below the headline making no such claim.

Quran quietly sells for record £7m despite questions over its provenance

Manuscript sold at Christie's first live sale in London since the coronavirus lockdown, but academics say its ownership history should be more transparent

ANNA BRADY
6th July 2020 11:44 BST



As IADAA has long been arguing, at the heart of this ongoing conflict is historic revisionism and the clash between conflicting ethical, moral and legal standpoints. Confusion between these perspectives has frequently led to international legal rights being set aside in favour of specific ethical imperatives that conflict with them.

This is the first example of a major member of the international art and antiques industry, apart from the trade associations, making such a stand. Christie's decision to act in this way has the potential to turn the tide of the debate and lead to a more constructive outcome. We will continue to watch with interest and contribute to the debate as we have over the past few years.

<https://bit.ly/3gHyToM>



Roman emperors: Augustus and Maximinus Thrax

Photoreal Roman Emperor Project

Medium.com: July 24: Fascinating, compelling and even entertaining, a new project employing Artbreeder and Photoshop reveals what the 54 Roman Emperors of The Principate (27 BC to 285AD) really looked like.

Daniel Voshart, the man behind the project, is a Canadian designer who has worked from 800 images of busts to create the likenesses of the 54 Emperors concerned, starting with Augustus (27BC-14AD) and ending with Carinus (283-285 AD) and Numerian (283-284 AD).

You can even buy a print of the complete likenesses of the Principate (see link below).

The image above of two of the Emperors comes courtesy of Voshart.

<https://bit.ly/3lFHiww>

German federal and state governments establish central contact points for the restitution of colonial objects (translated from German)

Monopol magazine: August 3: Germany has established a central contact point to co-ordinate the restitution of colonial era cultural property at a federal level and within each of its 16 states.

These contact points will hold information about collections throughout the country that includes such material so that people and institutions from countries of origin can gain access to them.

“With the establishment of the contact point, the federal, state and local authorities have created an important pre-requisite for a partnership-based dialogue with countries of origin and societies on the responsible handling of collection goods from colonial contexts,” said the head of the contact point and general secretary of the cultural foundation of the states, Markus Hilgert. “This demonstrates the determination of everyone involved in working through German colonial history as part of our social culture of remembrance.”

The number of pieces in question is immense, the article reports. The Ethnological Museum of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which is funded by the federal and state governments, alone has half a million objects. The federal government and the federal states will share the costs for the contact point of around €400,000 for three years.

<https://bit.ly/31m51Zj>

Artifact looters on Facebook helped fund ISIS

Newsmax.com: August 2: Another fake news piece whose headline is not supported in any way by the article underneath it, but which will doubtless continue to do the rounds on social media. In reality, this is another report arising from the ATHAR Project, this time based on another article by The Atlantic from July 31 (see last month’s newsletter).

As we noted then, The Atlantic article “relies heavily on anecdote, journalistic ‘colour’ and interviews with those who run the ATHAR project, but is fairly thin on facts.”

For example, the article concludes: “Every time a sale is made, these admins earn a 20 percent commission—just as ISIS had through its Department of Antiquities.”

What it does not demonstrate is how many of these artefacts are actually fakes rather than looted material, how many sales are actually made, nor who makes the money, let alone how they know that the ‘admins’ make 20 per cent.

All these articles are really about the dispute with Facebook, which has moved to place tighter restrictions on trade, banning the sale of ancient artefacts, a move that the ATHAR Project feels does not go far enough.

At no point does this article, nor the one on which it is based, provide any evidence at all of Facebook sales helping to fund ISIS.

As the RAND Report recently noted (and IADAA pointed out in the last

newsletter), using the fairly simple process of reverse-image search via Google reveals that the majority of pictures posted are actually recycled images from news articles and museum websites. Why is it that the ATHAR project makes no mention of this? Has it really not undertaken this test itself? And if not, why not? As the RAND Report also notes: “Specifically, we found that Facebook is a prominent hub for discussions of antiquities, which may be driving interest in looting by highlighting the wealth that it purportedly generates. By promoting and normalizing looting in Arabic-language groups, Facebook has the potential to drive looting even if there is not sufficient demand in the market to sell the looted goods.”

If we really are going to have any success solving problems that the Facebook issue creates, then accurate reporting, both by researchers and journalists, is essential. Otherwise, all we are left with is agenda-driven propaganda that simply adds to the lack of understanding and contributes further to the problem.

<https://nws.mx/3iOScOs>

UNESCO mobilizes funds and expertise to safeguard Yemen’s cultural heritage

WHC: UNESCO: August 11: “UNESCO has been mobilizing the Heritage Emergency Fund to quickly and effectively respond to crises resulting from armed conflicts and disasters in the country,” this report reveals.

To this end it has been working with international partners to mobilize resources and expertise to safeguard Yemen’s cultural heritage.

This involves running a number of projects to restore private housing and support local authorities as they try to deal with the on-going crisis.

“The Yemeni historical centers of Aden, Sana’a, Shibam, and Zabid are benefitting from an ongoing cash-for-work project funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and specialized local authorities.”

<https://bit.ly/314dEJa>

The Museum of the Bible Is in Discussions With Iraq to Reach a Settlement Over Thousands of Disputed Antiquities in Its Collection

Artnet.com: August 11: This follows on from the Hobby Lobby scandal involving large numbers of items illegally imported to the US for display in their museum.

“While a final agreement is still pending, the Iraqi government has reportedly consented to a \$15 million settlement over 4,000 disputed antiquities in the Museum of the Bible’s collection, which have been handed over to Iraqi control based on the suspicion that they were looted,” says Artnet. “In exchange, the museum may retain the right to display some of the objects on loan.”

<https://bit.ly/3494HAg>

ICOM in turmoil after row over new definition of museums

The Art Newspaper: August 13: ICOM's president has resigned after delegates to its Kyoto conference overwhelmingly voted against holding a vote next year on adopting a new definition for museums. Many see the definition as "a fuzzy collection of political correctness and trendy posturing that would have little legal value", the Art Newspaper reports. "Some expressed alarm at the omission of words such as 'education' or even 'collection', which they consider essential to a museum's mission."

At the heart of the debate is the politicisation of museums.

"One of the former committee members, the US curator Rick West, told the New York Times that the conflict reflects a fundamental debate over whether museums should be just 'houses of collections and beautiful stops on the tourist trail' or engage with wider society. Meanwhile, African delegates of ICOM have accused Europeans of resisting moves towards 'decolonisation' and restitution," the article reports.

The fall-out is so serious that it threatens the entire future of ICOM, says Juliette Raoul-Duval, who chairs ICOM France.

"Should we become a political tool, mostly led by scholars, or stay a professional association, guided by professional criteria?" she asks.

<https://bit.ly/32AtWce>

Ivory Act: no more challenges to new law says Supreme Court

Antiques Trade Gazette: August 17: The Supreme Court of the UK has refused permission for FACT (Ltd), a company set up to fight the proposed ivory trade ban, to challenge the Appeal Court's decision to allow the government to proceed with its policy.

Despite the courts acknowledging that little evidence exists to show that the trade in antique ivory contributes to poaching, the Court of Appeal had ruled that the Government had a right to introduce legislation that was wholly or mainly for the purpose of supporting and encouraging other countries to bring in their modern ivory bans.

Mark Dodgson, secretary general at the British Antique Dealers' Association (BADA), said: "Naturally I am disappointed that the Supreme Court did not allow a further appeal. We all strongly condemn elephant poaching, but the courts acknowledged that there is scant evidence to suggest that the genuine antiques trade represents a cover for a trade in illegally poached ivory in the UK. They also agreed that the scale of the impact of the Ivory Act on collectors and the antiques trade had been under-stated by the Government."

The ban is likely to be enforced in full later this year.

<https://bit.ly/3huGfx7>

In Iraq, Authorities Continue To Fight Uphill Battle Against

Antiquities Plunder

NPR: August 20: A retrospective article on the looting from the Baghdad Museum in 2003, this is largely a soft news report leading into another set of speculative claims over current looting and other associated crimes. Citing the 2017 Brodie study, the report states: “Some archaeologists estimate up to 80% of antiquities for sale on Facebook and eBay lack documentation are likely fake or stolen...”. This is a figure that is highly questionable, not because it may not be accurate, but because no one really has any idea at all. As the recent RAND Report noted, reverse searching Facebook photos on Google showed that many of the items listed for sale were images lifted from museum catalogues and books.

Hosham Dawood, an adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is reported as claiming “looters are digging into unexcavated sites in Iraq’s south, sometimes in coordination with collectors or dealers who put what they find up for sale or auction.

“Unfortunately, the items appear in Christie’s and other places — they go through Dubai, Beirut or Asia. We are following up through Interpol.”

The following paragraphs show that these claims are directly linked to the Hobby Lobby case in which Christie’s are being sued over the \$1.6 million sale of a 3500-year-old cuneiform tablet as the provenance papers appear to have been forged.

<https://n.pr/3lqkHUz>

US-Nigeria requests cultural property protection under Art. 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention

Lexology: August 20: Nigeria has made a request to the USA to increase controls on imports and exports of its cultural patrimony. Article 9 of the UNESCO Convention states:

“Any State Party to this Convention whose cultural patrimony is in jeopardy from pillage of archaeological or ethnological materials may call upon other States Parties who are affected. The States Parties to this Convention undertake, in these circumstances, to participate in a concerted international effort to determine and to carry out the necessary concrete measures, including the control of exports and imports and international commerce in the specific materials concerned. Pending agreement each State concerned shall take provisional measures to the extent feasible to prevent irremediable injury to the cultural heritage of the requesting State.”

While Nigeria has reportedly become a great deal more active in recent months in pursuit of the return of items removed during the 19th century, such as the Benin bronzes, it is not clear what material is currently in jeopardy from pillage.

<https://bit.ly/2QwrGx2>

Stolen ancient vase on its way back home

Cyprus Mail: August 25: Eagle-eyed IADAA



member Costas Paraskevaides has been doing his bit for the restitution cause in this case of an ancient Cypriot vase.

Pictured here, the 6cm high Bichrome ware vase dates from 750-600 BC and had been looted and illegally exported following the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974.

Costas, who owns Art Ancient, based in Chelsea, spotted the vase on the London market and organised its repatriation through the Cypriot High Commission and the Metropolitan Police.

<https://bit.ly/2YU56TN>



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