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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART

IADAA NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2020

UNESCO marks 50th anniversary of 1970 Cultural Heritage Convention with fake campaign

Supporting
an armed conflict
has never been
so decorative.

**Funerary relief
Palmyra, 50-150 A.D.**

This priceless antiquity was stolen in the National Museum of Palmyra by Islamic State militants during their occupation of the city, before being smuggled into the European market. The trade in antiquities is one of the terror group's main sources of funding.



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Funerary relief

ca. 50–150

On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 425

This relief is a type of funerary monument characteristic of the prosperous caravan city of Palmyra during the first three centuries A.D. Reliefs with a representation of the deceased and a short identifying inscription were used to seal burial niches in elaborately decorated communal tombs; those with a half-length or bust format became prevalent sometime after A.D. 65.

The relief depicts the upper body of a woman dressed in a draped garment, pinned at the left shoulder with an elaborate brooch, who faces directly towards the viewer. Her hair is covered by a turban-like headdress, made up of a wrapped cloth with a twisted border, worn over a diadem that covers her forehead. Long, wavy locks of hair fall behind her ears to her shoulders. Tiny plain rings cover the outer rims of her ears. She wears a long veil over her head which covers both arms, leaving only the hands exposed. The left hand holds a spindle and distaff, tools for spinning wool into yarn, which are associated with women's domestic work. The right hand is held raised with the palm facing out, a gesture which may have been protective and is frequently seen on women's funerary portraits from Palmyra. Her expression is serene, and her gaze does not meet the viewer's but looks far into the distance. The iris and pupil of the eyes are marked by incised concentric circles, and the eyebrows are indicated by modeled ridges. Her small mouth is framed by delicately modeled cheeks and chin, with the horizontal lines across the throat adding to the impression of fleshy softness. The relief can be stylistically dated to about 50–150 A.D. because of the hairstyle, and the patterned folds of the garment. An inscription which appears over her right shoulder, difficult to decipher, may have been added later.



Above:
The UNESCO advert that sparked our suspicion and clearly identifies the object as looted by ISIS and sold on the Western market.

Left:
As it appears in The Met Collection, where it is has been since 1901.

In what must be one of the most stunningly cynical attacks on the international art market yet, UNESCO has been caught out promoting a fake campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of its 1970 Cultural Heritage Convention – not once but twice.

IADAA first realised something was wrong in late October when UNESCO launched The Real Price of Art campaign using a bogus figure of \$10 billion as the estimated annual value of illicit cultural property across the globe.

As noted in the October newsletter, the ensuing email exchange revealed UNESCO's source, the fact that it did not support the claim at all and the further fact that no reliable alternative source existed at all for the claim.

Advising UNESCO that in the absence of a reliable source, it was promoting inaccurate information in what is a highly sensitive area, we asked that the error be corrected before it was disseminated any further than it already had been. This was followed by a [letter](#) from CINOA also protesting about the figure.

The advice was ignored and UNESCO continued to promote the figure into November. It remains on the organisation's website.

Then came another shocking revelation: the accompanying advertising campaign was almost entirely fraudulent. IADAA worked with CINOA to expose this when suspicion arose about part of the content. Again, CINOA has written a [letter](#) to UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay to complain formally.

Handled by Paris agency DDB and supervised by senior UNESCO officials Ernesto Ottone Ramirez and Lazare Eloundo Assomo, The Real Price of Art campaign featured posters showing a number of artworks presented as though in the contemporary settings of collectors' homes. Importantly, they are also presented as looted from their source countries and sold via the art market.

However, our joint investigation revealed that the images had been taken from The

Metropolitan Museum of New York and actually showed pieces that had been in the museum's collection legally for decades or longer.

How we unveiled the fake campaign

Suspicions were initially raised by one of the images (above), which showed a funerary relief from Palmyra, dated 50-150 AD. Under the headline 'Supporting an armed conflict has never been so decorative', the accompanying description read: *This priceless antiquity was stolen in the National Museum of Palmyra by Islamic State militants during their occupation of the city, before being smuggled into the European art market. The trade in antiquities is one of the terror group's main sources of funding.*

We realised that such an important piece would have been widely reported in the media if looted by ISIS and later seized, but we knew that it hadn't been. This led to a Google search and within minutes we had uncovered the truth: the relief is actually in the Met Collection, where it can be seen clearly on the museum's website. It was acquired by the museum in 1901, as its provenance states.

Within another few minutes, we had uncovered the rest of the lie.

A Côte d'Ivoire Moon mask dating to around 1880 also featured in the UNESCO campaign. Also presented in a contemporary interior, it was captioned 'How do you erase a whole culture? Piece by piece' and was described as follows: *Moon Mask Côte d'Ivoire, ca 1880 – This African art object was looted in Abidjan as fighting took place following the electoral crisis of 2010-2011. A rare testimony to the pre-colonial history of Côte d'Ivoire, its loss is irreplaceable.*

Again, the mask actually appears in The Met's current collection, where it is described as Moon Mask ca. 1880 of the Baule peoples. The listed provenance dates back to 1954, giving the names of various owners through whose hands it passed in Paris and New York. Sold at Christie's in April 2003, it remained in a private New York collection until 2015, when it passed to The Met.

The head of a Buddha from Afghanistan, dating to the 5th-6th century AD, also featured in UNESCO's advertising campaign. Shown resting on a sideboard among books, it featured under the headline 'Terrorism is such a great curator' and was captioned as follows: *This antiquity belongs to the Kabul Museum. In 2001, a large part of its collections was smashed into pieces by the Taliban. As the group was overthrown later that year, this priceless item was looted by local dealers and smuggled into the US market.*

Except it wasn't. Instead, it too appears in The Met Collection. In this case, not only does the listed provenance show that it was excavated in Tibet or Turkestan during the 1927-28 Trinkler expedition and that it was sold to The Met in 1930, it also cites four Met exhibitions in which it has since appeared, in 1940, 1971, 2007 and 2012-13.

The Met was not the only source for images falsely represented in the UNESCO campaign. Under the headline 'Art knows no frontiers. Neither does organized crime', it pictured what was described as a *Vessel with head Neck Peru, 4th-6th century A.D. – Before standing here, this piece of pre-Columbian art was looted in an illegal excavation by 'subsistence diggers'. It passed through two middlemen, crossed Costa Rica and Florida before being sold to an art dealer in Europe, who sold it himself through an auction house.*

The problem is that none of this is true. Instead it is a stock image from Alamy available for marketing use for around £180.00.

UNESCO's 'clarification' after being caught out

After the Art Newspaper (see <https://bit.ly/3pF7c5S>) published the revelations, UNESCO eventually took down the images and replaced them with others, adding the following 'clarification':

"In an initial version of UNESCO's campaign, the 'Real Price of Art', some posters displayed items from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) database, which is in the public domain. UNESCO's intention was to alert the general public by depicting objects of high cultural value, which should be on display in museums, presented in luxurious private interiors. UNESCO had no intention of questioning the provenance of items in the MET collection.

After discussions with the MET, who is a valuable partner to UNESCO, and in order to avoid any misunderstanding, UNESCO decided to remove all pictures of items from the MET collection. Only three magazines had already been printed. The digital versions of these publications were modified.

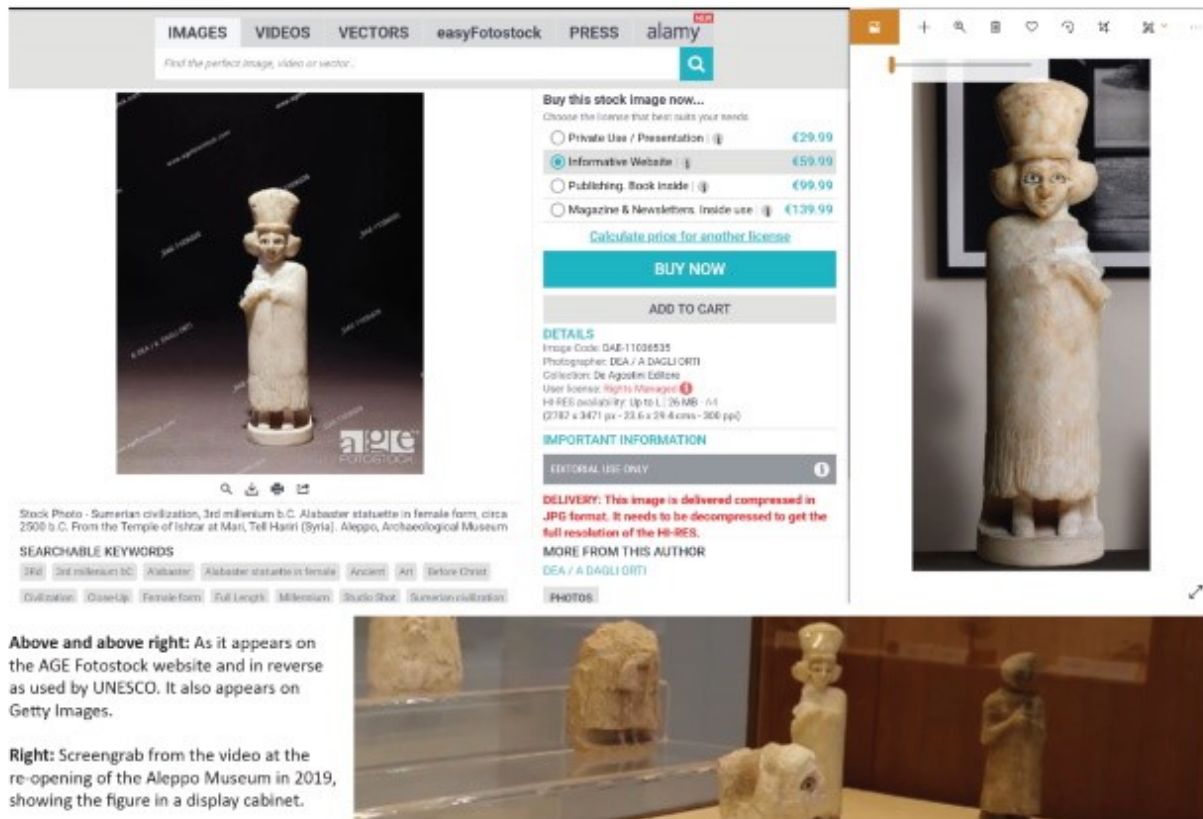
The rationale of the campaign is to capture the attention the general public with a view to encouraging them to exercise due diligence when purchasing cultural property. The campaign has been widely spread and original posters are shown above.

UNESCO regrets the use of MET images that caused any misunderstanding."

Despite the assurances that what had already been published via other internet sources had been modified, this was not the case. Indeed, even now the offending material is still clearly present on the web, as a simple Google search reveals (see, for example, <https://bit.ly/365awiP>).

UNESCO may well regret the embarrassment, but it doesn't seem to have learned from it as the two hastily inserted replacement photos for the campaign testify. One, which retains the original caption almost in its entirety, shows another tribal mask, which UNESCO claims was looted in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire after the 2010 crisis. However, it wasn't, as confirmed via email by the Director of the museum where it remains.

The other replacement advert shows an alabaster figure of a woman wearing polos headwear and an accompanying caption (under the headline *Supporting an armed conflict has never been so decorative*) that tells us: *"This priceless antiquity was stolen from the National Museum of Aleppo when the fighting was at its peak in 2014, before being smuggled into the European market..."*



Stock Photo - Sumerian civilization, 3rd millennium b.C. Alabaster statuette in female form, circa 2500 b.C. From the Temple of Ishtar at Mari, Tell-Hariri (Syria). Aleppo, Archaeological Museum

SEARCHABLE KEYWORDS

3rd Mill. b.C. Alabaster Alabaster statuette in female Ancient Art Before Christ

Duration: Close-Up, Female form, Full Length, Millennium, Studio Shot, Sumerian civilization

Above and above right: As it appears on the AGE Fotostock website and in reverse as used by UNESCO. It also appears on Getty Images.

Right: Screenshot from the video at the re-opening of the Aleppo Museum in 2019, showing the figure in a display cabinet.

Again, not true. Following the earlier debacle in which the Peruvian pottery image was lifted from Alamy Stock Photos, this one comes from one of a series of digital photo archives, such as Getty Images (see <https://bit.ly/364gVL5>). It has been reversed for the purposes of this advert. In addition, the actual statuette itself remains in the Aleppo Museum, appearing on display in a video to celebrate the re-opening of the museum at the end of last year. (See <https://bit.ly/33ecPy6> 1.24 mins in). Another video features Khaled Al-Masri, Director of Aleppo Museums and Antiquities, who states that despite the museum being attacked during the conflict, its collection was entirely saved. (See <https://bit.ly/369XErV>).

“During the crisis the museums was under a fierce attack of armed gangs which directly targeted the museum with different types of mortars and missiles,” he says. “The museum infrastructure was massively affects [sic], nevertheless, its entire antiquities were saved thanks to the Syrian Arab Army efforts along with the museum’s employees who kept such antiquities safe.”

To be caught out once misleading the public like this is bad enough, but to embark immediately on a replacement campaign that is also fabricated beggars belief. Is UNESCO really not going to take responsibility here and do something serious about it?

If the evidence exists, why not publish it?

UNESCO keeps claiming that evidence of trafficking involving the art market is so widespread and clear. If so, why persist in publishing false information and go to such lengths to do so? Why not simply publish the real evidence instead?

The fact is that despite all of the claims over the past few years, very little evidence indeed has come to light linking the legitimate market in Mediterranean Classical civilisation,

Middle Eastern and North African artefacts to looting and trafficking. The only evidence we are aware of at all of terrorism financing links is that from the documents linked to the Abu Sayyaf raid in 2015, and that showed that funds raised projected across a specific 12-month period from trafficking in antiquities, precious metals and minerals combined would be around the \$4 million mark. Note that this is also not connected to the legitimate market in any way.

What this means is that a) the legitimate art market, including collectors, is being targeted and harassed by UNESCO and others in an entirely unreasonable manner that breaches their human rights and b) precious time and resources that should be spent on the priority of protecting vulnerable sites, stemming the growing tide of internet crime and carrying out effective research are being wasted on creating confected scenarios to explain politically driven campaigns for which there is no justification. This has potentially dangerous consequences for the poor and vulnerable in source countries. How does this fit with UNESCO's UN mandate?

The UNESCO advertising campaign is a case in point. During his speech to the Latvia-sponsored conference Opportunities and Challenges of Art and Antiques Market Management in late November, UNESCO's Director of Culture and Emergencies, Lazare Eloundou Assomo, stated that the art market claims trafficking is decreasing has never financed terrorism. The art market does not argue either of these points. Instead it simply states that no evidence has been presented to support the levels of trafficking claimed by anti-trade campaigners and that the only clearly demonstrated link to terrorism financing so far shown is that stated above. This is what available data shows. Independently, the RAND Corporation report, published in May 2020 and based on open source data, also concluded that the claims over trafficking are exaggerated (See <https://bit.ly/3fFnaIt>). Dismissing criticism of UNESCO's The Real Price of Art campaign, Director Assomo said it had been "largely applauded" by all member states – presumably because they were not aware that it had been faked. It will be interesting to see how they react when they find out how their money has been spent.

Calling for more co-operation between the market and other stakeholders and the overcoming of division, he also stated that he wanted to make a clear distinction between the legitimate art market and traffickers. Subscribers will judge for themselves whether UNESCO's campaign does this, especially bearing in mind that three of the confected stories in the adverts – those relating to the funerary relief, Buddha head and Peruvian vessel – all specifically accuse the art market of direct involvement in crime, including the funding of terrorism. We reproduce the offending adverts and the originals [here](#) to allow for a transparent comparison. While UNESCO's online 'clarification' regrets any 'misunderstanding', it stops short of claiming that it did not intend to mislead. Director Assomo expressed his confidence in the success of the campaign, which he helped to supervise, during his Latvian conference speech. Others are far less sanguine about its intentions and consequences because the messages it gave out were clear and unambiguous, leading to a series of questions:

- How did the UNESCO supervisors supervise this campaign?

- Who decided to use the Met images in this way?
- Who knew about it and signed off the campaign and the replacement campaign?
- What is UNESCO doing about it?
- What measures are UNESCO taking to make sure that this doesn't happen again and that those responsible are held to account?
- How does UNESCO rebuild public trust and confidence after this?
- How satisfied is UNESCO that it has followed ethical practice here?

Either the UNESCO officials knowingly deceived the public via this campaign or they were astonishingly incompetent and dangerously unaware of its likely impact. Neither scenario is reassuring.

Let's not forget that UNESCO gave as its source for the \$10 billion figure the Renold study, a joint venture with the European Commission. Setting aside Renold's own denial that the figure could have come from him, surely any joint project should also abide by the Commission's guiding principles.

In November last year, incoming President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyden, set out six guiding principles. One, relating to Interinstitutional relations and better policy making, states: "Proposals must be evidence based, widely consulted upon, subject to an impact assessment and reviewed by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board... A stronger relationship with citizens starts with building trust and confidence. **I will insist on the highest levels of transparency and ethics** [her emphasis] for the college as a whole. There can be no room for doubt about our behaviour or our integrity."

So what does the European Commission President think about its partner, UNESCO's campaign?

Continuing promotion of the bogus \$10 billion figure

A follow-up letter from one of the senior UNESCO officials involved explaining their actions was equally unimpressive in tone and message, concluding that with respect to the bogus figures, "UNESCO has always ensured that the figures put forth are based on serious estimations from a wide range of reputable sources, including from partners and other leading actors involved in the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects".

This utterly ignores the fact that the figures they are using are demonstrably wrong according to the source they, themselves, cited and that this was pointed out to them on October 21. It also ignores the fact that although the images may have changed (albeit equally fraudulently), the message has not and UNESCO continues to accuse the art market and collectors of funding trafficking and terrorism to a huge degree without any evidence to back this up.

Whatever UNESCO says, however, other stakeholders are also considering action. How culture ministries across various countries who fund UNESCO will see all this is also of concern.

Meanwhile, at the same time as all of this was going on, a new body called Our World Heritage has been founded to save at-risk World Heritage sites as "safeguarding has become a secondary concern for UNESCO". (See <https://bit.ly/3Iv3PE>).

Prioritising the security of vulnerable sites is a policy urged by IADAA and others in the trade for years now. Instead of promoting bogus figures and harassing legitimate art market operators, why is UNESCO not focusing on the protection of vulnerable locations around the world? Funding should be used to educate and train local people, to improve security and to pay for schemes that ensure the long-term protection of the most sensitive cultural property – archaeological artefacts – in situ, as stipulated under Article 5 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Cut the problem off at source and you save yourself a great deal of time and money further down the line.

UNESCO’s blatant campaign of harassment against the art market including collectors is evident from its latest latest videos, in which it clearly links the art market to looting, trafficking and the financing of terrorism. It is working against the public interest using the public’s money, as the launch of Our World Heritage illustrates all too clearly. (see <https://bit.ly/35GD9mh>)

Photoshop makes UNESCO policy

Gazette Drouot: November 26: Vincent Noce, the journalist who broke the story in the Art Newspaper about CINOA challenging UNESCO’s \$10 billion claim as the value of illicit trade in cultural property, pens this opinion piece on the fake advertising scandal now casting a shadow over the organisation.

Correctly crediting IADAA with exposing the scandal (see above), Noce calls UNESCO’s actions “shameful and confused”, and notes that it has had to apologize to the Met museum for misusing its images and withdraw them from display with “regrets for the mistake”.

Noce notes the warning issued by the UN general secretariat in April: “Fear, uncertainty, the proliferation of false news create numerous risks of weakening our response to the pandemic”. Considering this, the world has the right to rely on the accuracy and reliability of claims by institutions such as UNESCO, he adds, attributing the shortcomings to the “structural weakening” of the organisation and “ineptitude” of its communications... or possibly to it seeing the “art lover” as the enemy. Is the objective simply to lump the art market in with trafficking gangs and ISIS? he posits. “Some archaeologists are so desperate that they see the elimination of the market as the only means of drying up the looting of sites,” he writes. “Until now UNESCO has followed a more realistic path. It has obtained tangible results, promoting regulation of the sector and calling for serious verification of provenance. Now, it has opted for a propaganda war, the first victim of which is unfortunately her own credibility.”

ART & ENCHÈRES | BILLET D'HUMEUR

Photoshop fait la politique de l'Unesco

PAR VINCENT NOCE

Notre billet sur l'estimation incalculable, de dix milliards de dollars, accordée par l'Unesco au sujet du trafic des biens culturels a suscité un certain émoi. Certains ont en fait voulu de l'argent pour acheter des œuvres, autres, moins secondaires, ont vu le fond du problème : la gravité du pillage archéologique et les dommages irréversibles qu'il occasionne. La campagne est légitime, même si il est toujours tentant de se demander s'il faut en venir à l'Unesco ou au journaliste. La tenue d'une vidéoconférence d'urgence à l'occasion de cinquante ans de la Convention contre le trafic devrait permettre de clarifier cet aspect. En fait, la dispute a pris un tournant inattendu, car dans le « campagne internationale » lancée à cette occasion, a surgi une manipulation encore plus extraordinaire. Pour donner son propos, l'Unesco a publié des vues d'apparences déformées d'objets, et ces images ont été reprises dans les journaux de 2005-2011 : une photo de bas-reliefs algériens « appartenant au musée de Kolob, dont les collections ont été confisquées par les talibans en 2001, après leur de près interdite l'accès au musée en contrebande aux États-Unis », ou encore une sculpture française « pillée par les talibans situés au musée de Palmyre ». Tout que l'Association internationale des antiquaires (AIAA) a écrit spécifiquement que ces œuvres se trouvent depuis belle lurette au Metropolitan Museum (dont les images sont libre de droit), la ville de Beyrouth depuis 1920 et la sculpture depuis 1981. Hommes et œuvres. L'Unesco a

de présenter ses œuvres au musée et celles des reproductions, en affichant « ses regrets pour cette erreur ». Ces objets pillés sont donc de purs inventions de publicistes mal avisés. La reproduction n'a pas servi pour autant, puisque la vidéo de campagne sur le trafic est maintenant celle que sur le site, dans le même décor inventé, on se voit les images d'objets d'art. L'agence française de médiation professionnelle de la publicité a été avisé. « La photo, l'inspiration, la production des images nouvelles constituent autant de étapes d'affaire sans rupture à la production », mentionne au sujet le secrétaire général de l'UNESCO, lançant une campagne contre les

de la chaine ouverte de dix milliards à un fabrication. Sur les images de ces œuvres inventées, le site des articles publiquement publiés par les talibans, est systématiquement positionné une pile de catalogues. Aux yeux de l'agence des Nations unies, le trafic de la culture, le criminel, le complice du terrorisme, c'est l'amateur d'art. La campagne des chiffres ne serait donc pas si innocente, dans le cas où l'objectif serait d'attirer l'attention de l'art dans une nouvelle génération de trafiquants et au service diplomatique de l'Etat islamique. Certains archéologues sont tellement convaincus qu'ils voient l'élimination du marché comme le seul moyen de tout le pillage des sites. Jusqu'à

Aux yeux de l'agence des Nations unies en charge de la culture, le criminel, le complice du terrorisme, c'est l'amateur d'art.

de la news. Le message vient pour toutes les autres que l'association diffuse. Du point de vue des Nations unies par-dessus tout, le monde est en droit d'attendre une parole claire, forte et répétant aux mêmes scientifiques, pas au genre de campagne. Il serait encore tentant d'y voir un incident de provenance, impossible à l'affaiblissement et au succès de l'Unesco et à l'implication de l'agence de communication à laquelle elle est liée. Une autre hypothèse serait que les talibans

L'Unesco avait suivi une voie plus réaliste. Elle a obtenu des résultats tangibles, en promouvant une régulation du secteur et en l'insérant à une véritable vérification des provenances. Désormais, elle a opté pour une guerre de propagande, dont la première victime est elle-même et sa propre crédibilité.

<https://bit.ly/2Jg1qXm>

Finally, rebel experts come to the rescue of Unesco's failing World Heritage programme

The Art Newspaper: November 19: This hard-hitting commentary by Anna Somers Cocks, founder of the Art Newspaper and the former chairman of the Venice in Peril Fund, comes with an authority that cannot be ignored by UNESCO or other leaders in the world of cultural heritage.

“Unesco’s World Heritage Sites programme is not working. It has failed in the way that all idealistic bodies fail when they lose their founding spirit and succumb to the ways of the world,” she writes.

Describing the downward arc of UNESCO’s fortunes from its beginnings in post-war optimism, she attributes its failings to the growth of bureaucracy, “corruption and nepotism” and the replacement of cultural figures with diplomatic emissaries of member states on the World Heritage Committee.

“This speeded Unesco, like the UN, down the path of becoming a stage for nationalist politics, the exchange of political favours between countries, and the suppression of embarrassing truths. And now there is institutional corruption.”

Citing UNESCO’s failure to condemn the cultural genocide perpetrated on the Uyghurs and the long-standing scandal surrounding Venice, she welcomes the nascent rebellion against UNESCO ushered in by Our World Heritage, a convocation of senior former institutional and political insiders.

Somers Cocks concludes: “It remains to be seen how Unesco’s director general, Audrey Azoulay, takes this, but if she has good political instincts she will welcome it. It could be the saving of Unesco, the shield behind which to redeem itself from the political indebtedness that currently makes a mockery of its high ideals, to the detriment of our very fragile world.”

<https://bit.ly/35KWfaT>

New report accuses South-East European States of focusing on drugs trafficking to the detriment of other sectors

November 6: A new report by the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights into responses to illicit trade in South-East Europe says that anti-drugs measures are being prioritised to the detriment of work in other areas, including cultural property.

The Italian NGO report, titled Closing the Implementation Gap: Criminal justice responses to illicit trade in South Eastern Europe and associated challenges, “provides the first region-wide sketch of national criminal justice systems’ challenges and opportunities in tackling the phenomenon of illicit trade more holistically and elaborates a series of recommendations for national and regional leaders and policymakers,” its authors say. Cultural property forms a very small part of the report, in total amounting to a few paragraphs on page 131. Here it acknowledges the lack of data: “Trafficking in cultural property is understudied, and global statistics on it scale are scarce.”

Noting that “anecdotally, it is believed to be a growing sector,” and quoting recent initiatives, such as Operation Pandora, as well as reports about the involvement in Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, it continues: “Country analysis indicates that crime actors in this sector are relatively isolated and opportunistic, with individual looters and professional thieves the main players.”

This is yet another report that flies in the face of regularly made but unsubstantiated claims about the scope, extent and nature of looting and trafficking in cultural property.

<https://bit.ly/3n6wozR>

Pandemic harms efforts to rein in antiquities theft

Yahoo News: November 9: Lockdowns and the abandonment of archaeological sites and museums have left them vulnerable to looters, this article states “with criminals increasingly conducting the trade online”.

This is another article about the Athar Project and its monitoring of social media, as reported on in a number of earlier newsletters.

What we still do not see, however, is how much of what is being offered online is fraudulent along the lines reported by the RAND Corporation study in May. It noted that reverse image searches revealed that much of what was on offer was not genuine items but images lifted from museum websites and online magazines to lure buyers into parting with cash for nothing in return.

Clearly, social media is playing a part in all sorts of crime, but it would be useful if the Athar Project looked into this and published some data, so that a clearer picture could be established of the extent of the real problem involving antiquities.

<https://yhoo.it/3lIfyXU>

Looted artifacts on show in Russia highlight research

DW.com: November 11: A new exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg displays the third instalment of large-scale joint German-Russian research and exhibition projects that fall under the title Europe without Borders.

Titled Iron Age. Europe without Borders, the current show mainly focuses on looting that took place after the Second World War, but aims to put political considerations in the background in favour of cultural co-operation and better understanding.

This article gives a detailed overview.

<https://bit.ly/2HcKD77>

The devil is in the paperwork – don't be caught out by provenance fraud

The Art Newspaper: November 11: Focusing on the rise of online sales in the art market, this article warns of the heightened risk of naïve buyers being caught out by fraudsters as internet sales grow in popularity.

“Rather than a paper trail, it's probably more accurate to now start talking about audit trails when it comes to information surrounding an artwork,” says Susan Mumford, the chief executive of Artaml, a company developing online anti-money-laundering (AML) tools for the art market.

<https://bit.ly/3lLgvP9>

Switzerland returns stolen artefacts to Italy

Swissinfo.ch: November 12: Detailing the return of 27 objects found in the Geneva Freeport, the article reports that they had been collected in Tuscany by a Swiss citizen, now dead, between 1965 and 1968 and were returned on a voluntary basis.

What this article also does is to cite, yet again, the false assumption that illicit trafficking in cultural artefacts is the world's third largest illegal market.

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

Artificial intelligence helps to identify illegal cultural goods (translated from German)

Künstliche Intelligenz hilft, illegale Kulturgüter zu erkennen

IDW: November 12: A new app will use artificial intelligence to automatically provide information on whether an object such as an antiquity has been stolen. Devised by the Fraunhofer Institute for Secure Information Technology with funding from the German government, the Smartphone app allows users to photograph an item, with the photos then being uploaded to a server where something called a “deep learning network” inspects them. A.I. then intervenes to check whether the item bears any similarities to known cultural treasures. If the item is flagged as stolen, the investigator is sent a direct alert. The system can also identify where the item originally came from and if that is deemed to be a region at risk, then that will be flagged up for further investigation.

<https://bit.ly/2INK6ZW>

Fifty years on, Unesco's convention against illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts still shines bright

The Art Newspaper: November 13: Despite the scandal that broke as this article was published (see above), it rightly reminds us that the Convention itself is a well-intended and potentially effective document.

With 140 signatories, the article argues that the Convention “has really come into its own over the past 25 years”, but regrets that it “is not particularly effective as a strict legal document. Many of its provisions are watered down, the inevitable result of international compromise and capitulation”.

The author also highlights the often overlooked importance of Article 7(b): “As for the restitution of unlawfully exported property, the teeth of the convention are found within a single subsection, Article 7(b), which applies only to specific material stolen from a museum, monument or similar institution and listed on an inventory. It does not cover unlawfully excavated antiquities, nor does it extend to export laws, and it is not retrospective. It also requires claimant countries to pay compensation to possessors of the property they are seeking to recover—a challenge for cash-strapped countries of the Global South.”

Whether the author, Assistant Director of the Institute of Art and Law Alexander Herman, thinks it should have been extended to cover those aspects it does not is not clear. However,

it is clear that Article 7(b) is rarely enforced in full, especially fair compensation.

As IADAA has long argued, the provisions of the Convention, especially those under Article 5 and 7, contain the real potential solutions for the long-running divisions between the international art market and those who oppose it, as well as for the protection of cultural property internationally.

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

Unesco, stop citing 'bogus' \$10bn figure, art trade pleads

The Art Newspaper: November 14: (See above)

This includes the statement from Professor Marc André Renold that the \$10 billion claim did not come from him, despite UNESCO citing him as the source.

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

UNIDROIT 25th anniversary conference update

Following on from last month's newsletter, we would like to thank UNIDROIT for adding mention of the contribution made by the international art market, which can be found here: <https://bit.ly/32TU82L>

New York authorities return ancient stele to Egypt

Art Newspaper: November 23: Following on from September's newsletter (see

<https://bit.ly/33iMyyQ>), we learn that Assistant District Attorney for New York Matthew Bogdanos has returned the disputed stele to Egypt. This ignores serious claims of valid evidence proving that it was not looted and trafficked, but exported legally decades ago. It also ignores the possibility of this being shown in court during impending civil proceedings against Paris specialist Cristophe Kunicki. ADA Bogdanos says that export licences involving the stele and other items were faked. However, as the September newsletter detailed, the picture may not prove to be as straightforward as he says. As that newsletter also asks, if it transpires that he has acted in error, who will be held responsible for the consequent loss?

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

Facebook is deleting evidence of war crimes, researchers say

The Verge: November 25: Another update on the Athar Project, this article focuses on the paradox that Facebook is having to deal with when it comes to preventing the sale of trafficked antiquities on its platforms: remove it and close down the offending groups and you also remove the evidence needed for war crimes prosecutions.

“The black market for looted goods is flourishing on Facebook,” it argues. “While the company banned the sale of historical artifacts in June, many of the posts are in Arabic, and Facebook lacks the expertise to properly enforce its new policy.”

It continues: “When Facebook is able to identify groups that flout its guidelines, experts say the company simply deletes them, expunging crucial documentation for researchers studying stolen art. ‘This is critical evidence for repatriation efforts and war crimes,’ says Katie Paul, co-director of the Athar Project. ‘Facebook has created a problem and rather

than turning that into something they could contribute to, they are making it worse.’ ”

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

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