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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART

IADAA NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2020

As it celebrates 50 years of the 1970 Convention, UNESCO really needs take a more responsible stand and stop publishing bogus data as well as misleading the public



UNESCO is launching an international communication campaign to make the general public and art lovers aware of the devastation of the history and identity of peoples wreaked by the illicit trade in cultural goods, which is estimated to be worth nearly \$10 billion each year. As shown by The Real Price of Art campaign, in some cases, the looting of archaeological sites, which fuels this traffic, is highly organized and constitutes a major source of financing for criminal and terrorist organizations.

UNESCO: October 20: In the latest of a string of baseless claims, UNESCO reports that the illicit trade in cultural property is estimated to be worth nearly \$10 billion a year. It's a handy figure to use as a headline to launch its 1970 Convention's 50th anniversary conference and accompanying campaign. However, it gives no source for this claim. "As shown by The Real Price of Art campaign, in some cases, the looting of archaeological sites, which fuels this traffic, is highly organized and constitutes a major source of financing for criminal and terrorist organizations," the article on its website continues.

Launched on October 20, the campaign will include the first International Day against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property on November 14 and an international

conference (November 16-18) organised in partnership with the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Having asked the UNESCO author for the source of the \$10 billion claim, IADAA was sent a copy of the French version of the 2018 Joint European Commission-UNESCO Project report, Engaging the European Art Market in the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property, by Professor Marc-Andre Renold (see second link below) with the message that the evidence was in section C.

It isn't.

As we pointed out to the author, the Renold study doesn't mention a \$10 billion figure anywhere. The closest it comes is in quoting an estimated figure of \$6 billion to \$8 billion from page 50 of the 2011 study by Frank Wehringer listed in the footnotes. However, Wehringer did not give it as his estimate but as a figure "regularly given" without providing any real source for it. He also said that "according to widespread statements, [this] makes it the third largest illegal market after drugs and weapons (according to estimates by UNESCO and FBI according to Anton 2010a: 2)". In fact, as subscribers will know, this supposition is not true, as confirmed by Interpol and the WCO Illicit Trade Reports (the latest published in June yet again put the number of cases being investigated and seizures made in cultural property at 0.2% of the global total reported through the Customs Enforcement Network, whereas for drugs it was 35%/30% and for weapons 8%/8% – other risk categories were much higher than for cultural property, which was by far the smallest category).

In addition, the Renold study itself states: "There are no comprehensive and reliable statistics that would allow us to capture the true scale of illicit trafficking or monetary value of the black market in cultural goods." This is a view adopted by Interpol, which has also stated that it never expects to have any reliable figures, as well as by the RAND Corporation report, studying open source data, published in May 2020.

As IADAA pointed out to the UNESCO author, this is important because in recent years so many misguided policy decisions have been made on the back of false information, with the result that funding and other resources have been diverted away from where they are really needed in the fight against crime, including trafficking.

We then pointed out that in the absence of a reliable source for the \$10 billion claim, UNESCO is currently promoting inaccurate information in what is a highly sensitive area. This being the case, we asked the author to correct the error before it was disseminated any further in the wider media than it already had been. As yet, we have received no further reply and the article (see image above) remains unchanged on UNESCO's website.

Bearing in mind that the express aim of the international communication campaign to which this article is linked is to "make the general public and art lovers aware of the devastation of the history and identity of peoples wrecked by the illicit trade in

cultural goods”, it seems reasonable to expect UNESCO to get its facts right and to correct mistakes when they are brought to its attention. Otherwise it risks misleading the very public it wishes to educate.

If only this were an isolated incident, but unfortunately it’s all too commonplace within UNESCO itself, as the autumn 2020 editorial in *The UNESCO Courier* demonstrates (See third link below).

Written by Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO, it states as fact (“The figures prove it”) that the attraction of illicit antiquities has never been greater, and attempts to justify this using the bogus claim that “The illicit flow of cultural goods is now believed to be the third-largest in terms of volume, after drugs and arms”.

As shown above, this is not true. (See the WCO Illicit Trade Reports 2017-2019), plus all the evidence on the IADAA website, all of which is independently verifiable through the links and references supplied.

Meanwhile Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director of Culture and Emergencies for UNESCO’s Culture Sector, was interviewed on “Antiquités du sang”, *quand pillage et pandémie font bon ménage!* on Radio France Culture on October 24, during which he claimed that estimates put the value of the global trade in illicit antiquities at around \$64 billion (See fourth link below, 7 mins in). Bearing in mind that the world’s leading art market report, the Art Basel Report, estimated in 2019 that the value of the entire global art market was \$67.4 billion, and the legitimate market in MENA antiquities is around 0.5% of this, it would be interesting to learn his source for the claim. During another radio interview, broadcast as part of the BBC World Services’ Business Daily special *Zombie Statistics* on February 20, 2019 (see fifth link below, 5 mins 20 secs in), Assomo was challenged over the inaccuracy of the figures UNESCO had been promoting since 2011. His response: “I don’t think we should enter into a debate about whether these figures are right or not right.” Whilst stating that “today we do not consider it any more important to concentrate on figures”, he claims that looting has increased, a claim immediately challenged by the interviewer, who says: “How do you know... you don’t have a global figure and you don’t support the 2011 [UNESCO report] figure?”

Dismissing the importance of figures is an odd position to take when you headline your campaign with an inaccurate but persuasive \$10 billion figure.

Statistics guru Dr Tim Harford’s response to this on the same radio programme was that it is important to take statistics seriously because they are essential for understanding the world. “If people start treating them in a very cavalier way, that spoils it for everybody, because then people start not trusting statistics... Listing where a claim came from and how it was arrived at is a very important starting point.” It’s time UNESCO followed this advice.

If, as both Ramírez and Assomo keep claiming, the evidence is there and clear, why don’t they produce it, especially when directly challenged to do so by organisations like the BBC? The Ramírez article mentioned above was an ideal opportunity to set

the record straight on this front, yet it did not do so. If the evidence is so clear, why the need to rely on bogus figures instead?

For an organisation like UNESCO, with its reputation and influence, to behave in the sort of cavalier way Dr Harford describes over such a sensitive subject is not only highly irresponsible and damaging, but also contemptuous of the public interest it pledges to serve.

<https://bit.ly/3m5kwOc>

<https://bit.ly/3mlun2F>

<https://bit.ly/34nJ1Aj>

<https://bit.ly/3kHII95>

<https://bbc.in/2Jj9yqg>

Art traffickers: Pillaging peoples' identities

UNESCO: Further extraordinary but unsupported claims from UNESCO, this time written by the French Editor of their media section.

The article shows a distinct lack of understanding of the market and appears to be arguing that because the legitimate global art market was valued at \$64 billion in 2019 (it was actually \$67.4bn), this is evidence of a big demand for antiquities, which in turn encourages in crime. The two are not linked at all. This may be the result of a misunderstanding. The report refers to the global market in art and antiquities rather than art and antiques – the French word for antiques is antiquités and the author is French. Regardless, the implied link is still bogus.

The article also fails to distinguish between antiquities and other cultural property, gives no values for what has been seized, nor reports on how much of what has been seized in the international operations it refers to has been found to be illicit, with resulting successful prosecutions. IADAA's own attempts to source these figures have been largely unsuccessful so far and certainly there appears to have been no follow-up reporting by Europol, Interpol or any of the other agencies involved to clarify the figures. This leaves only assumptions.

Despite this, the article states: "The record seizures give an idea of the magnitude of illicit trafficking in cultural goods in recent decades", and claims that "the number of traffickers has also multiplied", while then going on to undermine these claims by admitting: "The extent of trafficking – which is clandestine by definition – is all the more difficult to assess, as the few statistics that exist are incomplete."

This article offers no evidence to support its claims, while admitting that reliable data does not exist to support them. In short, it is uninformed and a mess, which is concerning when it is published by such an influential organisation as UNESCO.

<https://bit.ly/34gMTCY>

In restive region, Turkey fights rising tide of antiquities trafficking

AA.com.tr: This article is largely an overview of issues Turkey faces over its border with Syria and the risks that gives rise to of antiquities trafficking, as well as what

Turkey is doing about it.

However, it is perhaps most interesting for the following paragraph: “According to a 2016 UN report, the British-based Museums Association estimates that annual profits from the illicit antiquities trade range from \$225 million to as high as \$3 billion.”

The UN report it refers to is the UNODC report: Practical Assistance Tool to assist in the implementation of the International Guidelines for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses with Respect to Trafficking in Cultural Property and Other Related Offences (see second link at the bottom of this article).

Sure enough, on page 8, while acknowledging the difficulty in estimating the value of global trafficking, the report states:

- The Museums Association has estimated that profits from the illicit antiquities trade range from \$225 million and \$3 billion per year.
- The Organized Crime Group of the United Kingdom Metropolitan Police and INTERPOL has calculated that profits from the illicit antiquities trade amounted to between \$300 million and \$6 billion per year.

However, it gives as the source for these United Kingdom, House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Cultural Property: Return and Illicit Trade, seventh report, vols. 1, 2 and 3 (London, 2000). Quite apart from the fact that the committee hearings took place 20 years ago, as anyone who has checked this source will know, it does not corroborate either of these claims.

The alleged claims relate to Chapter II The problem of illicit trade, The nature and scale of illicit trade, but the footnotes tell a different story. Footnote 21 notes the Museums Association talks about “cultural material”, i.e. all art and antiques, not antiquities. The MA’s submission gives a range of figures from £150 million to £2 billion a year and attributes it to the November 24, 1990 Geraldine Norman article Sale of the Centuries, an oft-quoted source which actually contains no such figures. (See <https://bit.ly/31BjEcb>)

Footnote 22 addresses the \$300 million to \$6 billion claim, quoting DCS John Coles of the Met Police, who states: “I conducted some research, going back over 10 years [i.e. to 1990], to try and find out where particular figures that have been bandied around about this subject emanated from. One of the figures is \$3 billion. I have found reports going back 10 years where there is an estimate as high as \$6 billion. At the other extreme of the scale the suggestion is that it could be as low as \$300 million.” However, his assistant, who carried out the research, followed this by correcting him and stating: “I think what we have to actually state from the start is that the cases are really anecdotal. There are no statistics kept. We have to bear in mind that the whole trade, whether illicit or legal, actually encompasses jewellery, works of art and antiquities, and as there is no actual Home Office information that is kept we have had to turn to the insurance companies and the insurance industry to get the figures we have.”

Figures she then quotes relate to insurance companies' estimates of their domestic and commercial annual losses, figures that have nothing to do with either antiquities or trafficking.

(See <https://bit.ly/34nzoBB>)

Why go into all this detail? To show how the trail of false information filters down the years and gains traction through its adoption in official reports by major organisations of international standing who have clearly not checked their sources properly.

As with the UNESCO reports detailed above and the \$10 billion claim, these fake claims are widespread and occur frequently – these examples over just a few days, for instance, but the impact can last for years. Worse, even when identified and brought to the attention of those publishing them, they are rarely corrected. The result is a growing body of policy and legislation based on false premises that often does damage to legitimate interests while not properly addressing the problems it sets out to solve.

A number of other websites have since reproduced this same story, including the bogus figures.

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

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

UNIDROIT 25th anniversary conference

Joanna van der Lande, who chairs the Antiquities Dealers Association, was invited to present an extended article and speak at the conference to mark 25 years of the UNIDROIT Convention on October 8 and 9.

Also invited to speak was Martin Wilson, General Counsel to the auctioneers Phillips. Joanna's presentation, titled *The Antiquities Trade: A reflection on the past 25 years*, touched on the nature of collecting and the trade, on-going challenges between the trade, academia and other stakeholders, and how best to address some of the seemingly intractable problems we face in the future.

While welcoming her invitation to speak, she highlighted the continuing exclusion of market professionals from serious debate about antiquities at most of the major forums. Dwelling on a number of issues, she focused ultimately on the matter of orphan works, just and fair compensation, as set out in the UNESCO Convention, and meaningful engagement with the trade in the debate over how to protect archaeological sites, tackle crime and the future of collecting.

She told delegates: "The time has come to remove the trade from the sidelines – we are integral to any solution but issues of fundamental difficulty for the antiquities market do need to be tackled in order for us to really be able to move in the same direction. This would be a real legacy for UNIDROIT at 25 years."

Mr Wilson considered existing legislation to regulate the trade and how this has built over recent years, culminating in the new EU import licensing regulations and the impending anti-money laundering enforcement.

He also emphasised the need for more effective partnerships, saying: “I realise that if you feel strongly about the repatriation of cultural property it may be very difficult to regard those who sell antiquities as potential partners rather than opponents in the fight against the illicit trade. But the reality is that those involved in the fight against the illicit trade can only win that fight by engaging to a greater extent with the legitimate art market. And by engagement, I mean forming trusted partnerships.” He proposed a joint forum under UNIDROIT and UNESCO “...in which the art market, law enforcement and stakeholders are able to share information and develop effective ways of working together in the fight against the illicit trade. An initiative of this kind would, I think bring about real change and build upon the aspirations and spirit of the UNESCO and UNIDROIT conventions.”

IADAA welcomes the efforts made by UNIDROIT in engaging the industry in this way, with especial thanks to Marina Schneider of the UNIDROIT secretariat.

One word of concern, however: in UNIDROIT’s own report following the conference, while listing many of the speakers by name, no mention is made of the trade’s involvement. This is a shame considering what a significant invitation this was.

UNIDROIT plans to publish the speakers’ full papers in due course.

<https://bit.ly/3kf5Mvz>

Setting the record straight on evidence and statistics relating to looting and trafficking

After the Art Newspaper published its July article on the findings of the RAND Corporation report (Extent of looted in looted antiquities is exaggerated, report claims), see first link below, Antiquities Coalition chairman Deborah Lehr wrote a lengthy letter criticising the coverage and claiming it was inaccurate and misleading. It was published in the October issues of the Art Newspaper.

The problem was that while the Art Newspaper reporting was accurate, Lehr’s letter, headlined Looted art trafficking is far from exaggerated, was guilty of the very criticisms she raised in it.

To set the record straight, IADAA and the ADA responded in kind, with their letter being published in the November issue.

They challenged Lehr’s interpretation of the RAND Corporation report findings in May 2020, highlighting the fact that she herself had been criticised in it for contradictory positions on the figures. They also highlighted the poor quality and inaccuracies of the Ecorys report which she had praised as “ground-breaking” and “rigorous”.

Perhaps most disingenuous of all, Lehr took the Art Newspaper to task over its use of the word exaggerated: “...compared to what?” she asked. “As Rand notes, estimates of the global trade in illicit antiquities range from hundreds of millions to tens of billions of dollars.” As IADAA and the ADA responded: “What it [the RAND report] actually states (pages xi and xii) is that, despite these commonly quoted statistics and, ‘In contrast to these assertions, our research points to a market that looks

smaller and is less organised’.”

The chief difference between the two letters was that IADAA and the ADA gave exact page references in the RAND report for every point they made.

IADAA’s letter can be read at via this [link](#).

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

Ancient Gold Antiquities Seized in Western Iran

Iran Front Page: September 28: Security forces have seized nearly 280 gold relics dating back to the Achaemenid era (550-330 BCE) in the city of Kermanshah, in Western Iran, according to General Amir Rahmatollahi, the commander of the local security unit of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism.

He said security personnel under his command acted on a tip-off. Seven people were arrested in that connection, he said. He added the discovered items (some pictured here) included earrings, medallions, rings and plaques, among other things.



<https://bit.ly/2Gwwgu5>

Further articles picking up on the World Customs Illicit Trade Report 2019

Art & Enchères: October 1: <https://bit.ly/34J3HkY>

Art Critique: October 2: <https://bit.ly/2SEqCbD>

Egypt renews demands to retrieve Nefertiti bust from Germany

Al-Monitor: October 2: This article highlights the story of the bust being ‘smuggled’ out of Egypt in 1913. The dispute is over the terms of partage between the Egyptians and the German archaeological team at the time. The Egyptians claim that the importance of the head means that it would not have been ceded to the Germans, while the latter say it was.

This article explores the history of the dispute and claims.

<https://bit.ly/30Jjf7h>

‘Marlow Warlord’ discovered in Anglo-Saxon burial site

Maidenhead Advertiser: October 5: An Anglo-Saxon warlord buried 1,400 years ago has been unearthed near Marlow, about 50km west of London. Buried with weapons and treasure in a hilltop overlooking the River Thames, the discovery was made at a site first revealed by metal detectorists two years ago.

The site is now subject to a full investigation by the nearby University of Reading Archaeology department.

It is the first discovery of its kind in the region.

<https://bit.ly/2GK7C8V>

Five Ancient Greek coins saved from auction, repatriated from Germany

Greek Reporter: October 5: The 5th and 4th century coins, due to be auctioned in Munich and Zurich, have been returned after being seized by police following the dismantling of a criminal ring by Patras police in Greece in 2016.

<https://bit.ly/33JhqJu>

French MPs debate return of stolen artworks to Benin and Senegal

Yahoo News: October 6: A vote in the French parliament over whether the country should return works of art housed in its museums to Benin and Senegal has led to a wider debate on the morals and ethics of such repatriation.

As this article notes, “Many judge the move to be just a first step towards the rightful return of numerous works of art to their countries of origin. For others this restitution is the tip of an iceberg that could lead to the emptying of some of France’s world famous museums.”

While French culture minister Roselyne Bachelot called it “the beginning of a new chapter in cultural links between France and Africa”, cultural property lawyer Yves-Bernard Debie asked: “How are we going to refuse Egypt now? What about the artworks which were taken by Napoleon, the crowning artefacts of some French museums?”

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

Egypt, France discuss €1bn Strategic Partnership Agreement

Egypt Daily News: October 6: The two countries have been in talks about their current four-year strategic partnership aimed at reviving Egypt’s fortunes across a number of sectors, such as transport, energy, health and culture. The teaching of French in Egyptian schools is another goal. Whether this is linked to the French policy of repatriation (see above) is not clear.

<https://bit.ly/34H98Rs>

The treasures of the world belong to us all

Spiked Online: October 9: An interesting and alternative viewpoint on the issue of repatriation, this article states that assuming the priority is preserving artefacts for future generations, three questions should be answered satisfactorily before any country agrees to return items:

- Under what circumstances were the objects acquired?
- Who are the items being given to?

- How will they be safeguarded once returned?

If the items were stolen, then they should go back, it argues. But if legally traded at the time or handed over as gifts, then they should be left where they are. “Many of those who argue for repatriation tend to assume that all cultural artefacts in Western museums are there because of looting,” it states.

On the question of who should have the items, it argues: “Surely, for a repatriation claim to stack up, there has to be a meaningful connection between an older culture and its modern descendants. But when it comes to ancient civilisations, there is clearly no such continuity.”

Finally, it argues: “Unfortunately, experience shows that many of the countries demanding the restitution of objects have been unable to guarantee their safety.”

To illustrate this point it looks at Egypt: “After the January 2011 revolution in Egypt, over 1,000 objects were stolen from Egypt’s museums, and many of them are still nowhere to be found.”

Taking a sideswipe at nationalist tendencies, the article concludes: “We should be less concerned about repatriating artefacts than preserving them for future generations.”

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

‘The public needs to know the truth’: company that valued Sekhemka statue before its controversial sale speaks out

The Art Newspaper: October 8: Art & Antiques Appraisals, the company originally brought in to value the statue of Sekhemka for Northampton Council a decade ago, has published a detailed account of what went on behind the scenes in the period leading up to its sale for almost £16 million at Christie’s in 2014. The company says it has decided to publish after years of misunderstanding over what really happened and how that has damaged relations between the art market, academics, archaeologists and museums.

At the heart of the story is the revelation that the company went out of its way to keep the statue on display in a public institution, while museums and others failed to do their part to help in this.

The company also argues that Northampton council and museum may well have been better off financially had they adopted the solution proposed by Art & Antiques Appraisals rather than proceeding with the sale. The second link below is to the full article on the company website.

<https://bit.ly/3d9tzug>

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

The Antiquities Coalition’s Recommendations to Combat Financial Crimes in the U.S. Art Market

IELR Blog: This article focuses on a new report published by the Antiquities Coalition at the end of September as part of the debate surrounding new anti-money

laundering proposals in the United States. While the UK has already passed legislation and EU member states are also debating the interpretation of the Fifth Anti-Money laundering directive, progress on legislation in the US is further behind. At the heart of the debate is whether proposed measures are realistic, practical and meet human rights obligations.

The Antiquities Coalition, which has long campaigned for much more legislation restricting art market activity, makes a list of recommendations here, including extending the Bank Secrecy Act to cover the art market, as well as defining cultural property crime as a predicate offence to money laundering to place it on an equal footing with embezzlement, forgery and theft.

Recommendations for art industry associations include developing training schemes to establish common professional standards to educate businesses about the risks of financial crimes – a nice idea if public funding can be made available to support this, bearing in mind the small size of art market firms in general and the very limited budgets currently involved.

Another recommendation is to establish a collaborative consortium that securely pools data and technology to advise on the implementation and management of anti-money laundering compliance programs. Separate companies are already filling the vacuum in the market on this.

The recommendations overview from the report itself may be found at the second link below.

<https://bit.ly/33Hgllc>

<https://bit.ly/3nxW6hN>

Tourist returns stolen artefacts from Pompeii 'after suffering curse'

The Guardian: October 11: A woman, only identified as Nicole, has returned two pieces of a mosaic and parts of a terracotta vase to a travel agent in Pompeii after taking them from a local archaeological site 15 years ago. Claiming the items were cursed, the woman said she had taken them when she visited the site in her twenties. She has since suffered financial hardship and breast cancer.

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

Coronavirus: Iraq's heritage sites suffer renewed wave of looting amid pandemic

Middle East Eye: October 12: The diversion of resources to deal with the pandemic has left vulnerable sites in Iraq exposed to the risk of looters, this article explains. However, much of the article is really a history lesson in what has happened since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Only lower down does it provide any evidence to support the headline, stating: “Last month, the province’s special antiquities police stopped two antiquity smuggling networks and chased down two armed groups in Tell Jokha. In the operation, the antiquities police managed to recover 438 artefacts.” Then, a couple of paragraphs later, Taher Quinn, director of the Dhi Qar’s Antiquities

Inspectorate, tells MEE: “there has been a resurgence in vandalism since last year, especially after the governorate witnessed violent protests that were followed by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic”.

Further interviews add to this picture, including criticism of the state by archaeologist Sala Hatem, who lacks confidence in its ability to control the situation: “In general, the state acts irresponsibly towards the protection of archaeological sites simply because it suffers from a lack of funding, and staff professionalism”.

As IADAA has been arguing for years, focusing on the protection of vulnerable sites should be the absolute priority of governments and NGOs, with international funding directed towards this problem so as to cut off the opportunity for trafficking at source.

<https://bit.ly/3m5aHQk>

Morocco recovers 25,500 rare archaeological pieces seized in France

Al Khaleej Today: October 16: More than 25,500 pieces relating to prehistory and palaeontology seized by French customs in 2005 and 2006 have been returned to Morocco. Of these, 24,459 were fossils or similar pieces, some dating back 500,000 years or more.

<https://bit.ly/2IIKqJ4>

When the buying by museums stops, the looting stops

The New Indian Express: October 17: An article that arises out of claims by New York-based cultural heritage lawyer Leila Amineddoleh, the premise of the argument is that demand for illicit cultural property is so great that it encourages looting. “The market for illegal goods is driven by buyers’ wants, as the trade in looted antiquities is a demand-driven crime...” she writes in a paper entitled The role of museums in the trade of black market cultural heritage property.

The problem is that the evidence doesn’t support this argument at all. As the RAND Corporation report published in May noted, prices and selling rates for antiquities on the legitimate market are rather sluggish, reflecting muted demand. It also found that most looting is opportunistic and carried out by disparate individuals hoping to make a bit of money. This being the case, it seems rather more likely that those who loot are encouraged by exaggerated claims about demand and the money that can be made in papers and articles such as these: “...even 50 years after the UNESCO convention, there is a thriving market for antiquities, creating an unsatiated demand for sacred objects”.

While demand may be stronger for Asian art, including Indian artefacts, these are from a different market than MENA antiquities, but, as usual, the two markets have been conflated here.

<https://bit.ly/37rgWKb>

Hundreds Of Illegal Historical Artifacts Recently Recovered By The

Polish Police!

Ancient Origins: October 19: A seizure from a metal detectorist, this report again highlights the singular rules in Poland, that deems even spent cartridges from World War Two to be cultural property.

In this case, what is thought to be a cache of illegal cultural property includes knives and arrowheads from the Middle Ages, but also a significant number of lead bullets, shells and weapon parts from much later.

<https://bit.ly/35yCe6f>

Ancient African Stone Sculptures Intercepted At Miami International Airport

Miami CBS: October 20: This report is interesting because it includes statistics for 2019 seizures in the US, according to US Customs and Border protection (CBP). The article reports that there were a total of 23 seizures of cultural property in 2019 with a combined value of “nearly \$1 million”.

<https://cbsloc.al/3kgCJrG>

Berlin mystery attack targets 70 museum artefacts

BBC News: October 21: In a bizarre incident, at least 70 art and antiquities, including ancient Egyptian sarcophagi, were sprayed with an oily liquid on Berlin’s Museum Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site that is home to five famous museums. The attack took place on October 3, the anniversary of German reunification, leading to speculation as to whether a far right group were involved.

As much a mystery is why the news was suppressed for some time before being release – apparently other museums were not alerted to the risk of attack.

<https://bbc.in/35Cimiw>

German Museums Are Embarking on Long-Overdue Research Into Chinese Colonial-Era Objects as Part of a €1.1 Million Grant

Art Newspaper: October 22: Although concerning Chinese art rather than MENA antiquities, this article is relevant because it highlights the multi-discipline issue of object repatriation in the wake of protests about colonialism. Provenance is also a key issue, turning the sort of spotlight MENA antiquities have been under for decades on Chinese antiques and antiquities and building a database that echoes that currently under construction at the British Museum for Egyptian antiquities.

“Like many European nations, Germany has felt increased pressure to make its colonial-era collections more transparent, and to restitute objects that have a dubious provenance,” the article concludes.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/german-lost-art-foundation-1917423>

Inside the illicit trade in West Africa’s oldest artworks

Mail & Guardian, Nigeria: October 23: An in-depth article with first-hand

investigation into the underbelly of looting and smuggling Nok terracottas, artefacts from Nigeria's ancient civilisation, c.1500 BC, this piece spends some time dwelling on the issues of how countries should encourage their own people to protect their heritage and how archaeologists behave while on digs, as well as how this can have a damaging effect on the protection of vulnerable sites.

Nigeria's Minister for Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed says: "We have not yet done enough to stop our own people [from looting] and to convince them to protect their own cultural heritage," – a widespread concern across many countries in Africa and elsewhere. "Given the lack of alternative employment opportunities, the state has found this trade nearly impossible to control," the article explains.

It goes on to talk about the pioneering British archaeologist, Bernhard Fagg, who first explored the Nok artefacts. Tribal chief Beno Adamu dismisses Fagg's contribution, saying that local people had long known about the artefacts and their history. And he accuses Fagg of tricking them out of valuable artefacts, adding: "Many people came here, selfish, and used as cheap labour. Then they disappeared and nobody supported us in our development."

The article also casts a shadow over two present-day German archaeologists who conducted digs there between 2005 and 2020, saying that while they had to be forced to work with local academics, they seemed happy enough to work with illegal diggers.

Professor Zachary Gundu, a professor of Archaeology who relates all this, adds: "Africa is often mis-used as a laboratory where European scientists just walk in, experiment and collect data with which they can verify their ideas about the continent."

The article goes as far to state: "It is clear that the line between archaeologist and looter is thin, and that the two professions in some ways depend on each other."

While the article may be dramatic in some of its claims, it does shed light on important themes that all archaeological sites across the world have in common when it comes to balancing the interests of exploration and discovery with conservation and protection.

It is interesting that the direct link to this article has now disappeared from the internet and so the link here is via Pressreader.

<https://bit.ly/34svhUP>

<https://bit.ly/34svhUP>

UK to return looted artefact to Iraq

OCCRP: October 27: This article initially focuses on the UK's plan to return a 4,000-year-old Sumerian plaque to Iraq after the British Museum spotted it for sale online in 2019. The plaque is thought to have been looted during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

However, once the article gets past this, it then moves on to the usual inaccuracies, including quoting the 2018 report by the Standard Chartered Bank (it lists it as

Standards) claiming that the illegal trade in archaeological artefacts is a multi-billion dollar industry.

Getting the name of the source it is quoting wrong is indicative of the level of research applied here, and it is noticeable that the article already includes a correction at the end as it previously misidentified the origin of 5,000 cuneiform tablets.

The Standard Chartered Bank's two-page report, *Combatting Illegal Antiquities Trade*, from December 2018, starts as follows: "The illegal antiquities trade (IAT) is a multibillion dollar criminal industry, estimated to be the third largest type of black market after illegal drugs and the arms trade, and yet it remains unregulated and under-addressed."

As embarrassing as it is inaccurate, this introduction makes the basic error of claiming that illicit trade is not regulated. The fact is that is illegal and so highly regulated by numerous domestic and international laws to prevent it.

The remainder of the report cobbles together various other claims, including statistics – all bogus – which it clearly has not checked.

For a bank to behave in this way is reputationally damaging.

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Ten most wanted antiquities: have you seen these missing artefacts?

The Art Newspaper: October 29: The Antiquities Coalition has produced this list "to highlight that there are still countless missing masterpieces in the world", says chairman Deborah Lehr.

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