



Buhari to Oba of Benin: Nigeria expecting return of 1,130 looted Benin Bronzes from Germany

Vanguard: April 29: Another article (of many) celebrating the prospective return of the Benin bronzes, which takes the moral high ground against British looters, promotes the bronzes as “great cultural and artistic works”, but makes no mention of their grim origins as direct products of a centuries-long slave trade.

“We look forward to a future when these returned antiquities and our arts and culture shall be deployed in generating revenue for the nation,” said Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari. Meanwhile the “The Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, affirmed that Nigeria would continue to assert its rights over all its antiquities around the world.

“He added that the country would not hesitate to implore nations, institutions, men and women of goodwill to see the unfairness in the affairs of one body holding on to the cultural property fashioned by the genius of another.”

This would appear to include items that have been sold and exported legally over the decades.

British geologist, 66, faces the DEATH PENALTY in Iraq for 'smuggling historical artefacts' after he tried to take home a broken shard of pottery he found at historical site

Daily Mail: April 28: The cautionary tale of a British tourist, Jim Fitton, who picked up a few broken sherds from the site he was visiting as holiday keepsakes before packing them in his suitcase for the return journey home to Malaysia where he lives.

Several questions arise: Surely a retired geologist – on a geology and archaeological tour – would have some idea that taking historical artefacts from a preservation site, no matter how broken or unimportant they might seem, might be unwise? Did the site have clear signage forbidding such actions and explaining the penalties? If not, why not?

According to his family: “These fragments were in the open, unguarded and with no signage warning against removal. Tour leaders also collected the shards as souvenirs at the site in Eridu.

“Tour members were told that this would not be an issue, as the broken shards had no economic or historical value.”

Fitton, now languishing in jail in Iraq, potentially faces the death penalty, while his son-in-law’s member of parliament said: “I am committed to doing everything I can by working with the Government to secure the release of Jim who has been so questionably detained in Iraq.”

An announcement that the trial had been put back to June 6 at the request of the defence counsel was accompanied by that counsel’s following questions:

“We don’t have any more details: what site do these pieces come from? What era, what civilisation do they date back to?

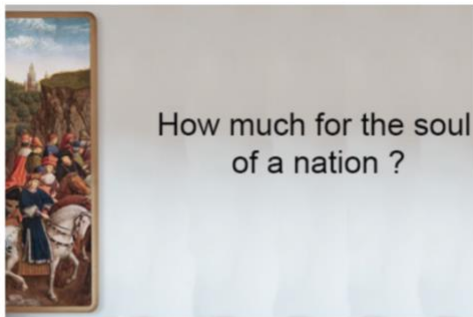
“Is it fenced and protected? Are there signs indicating that these are ancient pieces that it is forbidden to collect?”

They also want the tour guide or an Iraqi official who had been present at the site to give evidence in court as to whether the tourists had received instructions prohibiting them from picking up fragments.

UNESCO/EU Conference: Strengthening the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property

UNESCO: The announcement of this event provides a link back to the 50th anniversary campaign *The Real Price of Art...* and to a clue that IADAA might finally have succeeded in getting UNESCO to drop its bogus \$10 billion claim as the annual value of looted cultural property.

The clue comes from the notification of when the relevant web page was last updated: April 22. This was the day after IADAA complained directly to Assistant Director General Ernesto Ottone Ramirez about the figure still being published on the page, along with continuing claims by UNESCO – including by Ramirez himself – of other unsubstantiated figures linked to trafficking. Ramirez replied stating: “In recognition of the fact that 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, UNESCO no longer refers to the specific global figures relating to illicit trafficking of cultural property.”



2020/97
October 20, 2020 - Last update: April 22, 2022

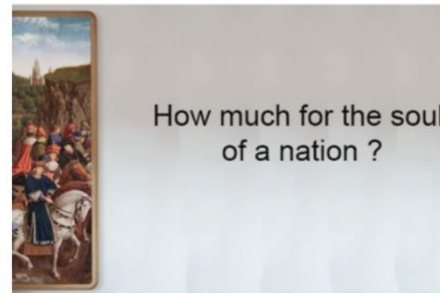
UNESCO is launching an international communication campaign to make the general public and art lovers aware of the devastation of the history and identity of peoples wrecked by the illicit trade in cultural goods.

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 campaign marks the 50th anniversary of UNESCO's Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property adopted in 1970. Developed by UNESCO with concrete measures to combat this scourge, the

Press release >

The Real Price of art: International UNESCO campaign reveals the hidden face of art trafficking



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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 wrecked 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

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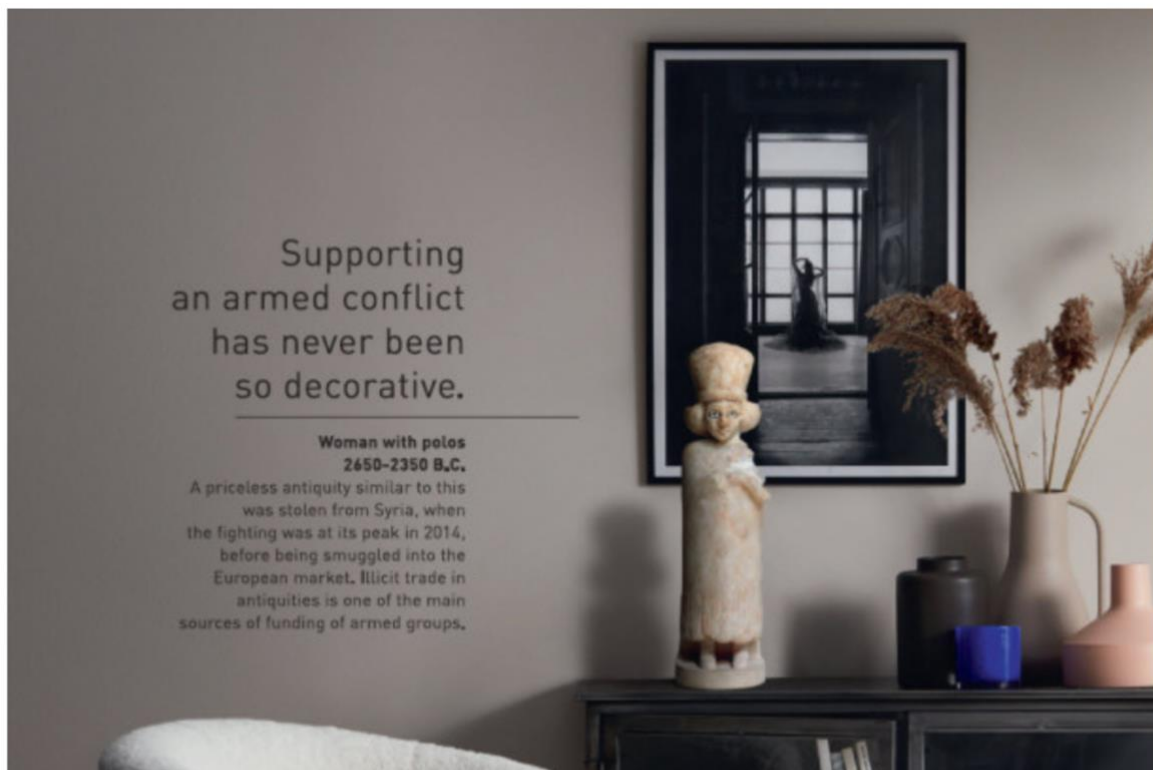
Above: Screenshots taken from UNESCO's website on May 9, 2022. Both show that it was last updated on April 22, the day after IADAA complained to UNESCO's Assistant Director General Ernesto Ottone Ramirez about the false \$10 billion figure. The one on the left, linking through from the promotion of its June 9 event, shows that the figure has been removed. The one on the right, appearing as a UNESCO press release during a Google search, shows the figure still in place.

IADAA welcomes the development. However, a Google search of the campaign linking back to the UNESCO website also shows an updated version where the \$10 billion figure remains in place. After the addition of the April 22 update, as our series of screenshots shows here.

Perhaps UNESCO could investigate and clear the matter up by ensuring that no web search turns up the errant figure.

It would also be reassuring to receive a response from Assistant Director General Ramirez about the request raised in the same email exchange: whether he and UNESCO would publicly promote their correction, at least to the same degree as they promoted the false figure in the first place, bearing in mind that it was still being used on almost a daily basis in the media to damage the reputation of the art market (see *Stealing from history: Inside the multi-million dollar illegal trade in artefacts from the Middle East* below, for example).

In addition, while at least some attempt has been made to remove the false \$10 billion from the website, the same cannot be said about the misleading advertising campaign that accompanied it. Having exposed how the original campaign was faked using images from the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and stock photos from Alamy, IADAA discovered that replacement images also had questionable origins. One still being used in the campaign and illustrated here in a screengrab taken from UNESCO's website on May 9, 2022, shows "Woman with Polos 2650-2350 BC" sitting on a sideboard in a domestic setting as if trafficked and accompanied by the caption claiming that it was stolen from Syria in 2014 during the height of the fighting before being smuggled onto the European market. However, an investigation published by IADAA in 2020 revealed that it had remained in the collection of the Aleppo Museum, where it was clearly visible on display in a cabinet at the reopening of the museum in a 2019 video. Why is it still being promoted as looted 18 months later?



The image and advert, copyrighted to Paris advertising agency DDB, remains on UNESCO's website, as shown here.

Priceless Ancient Greek Artifacts in Ukraine “Looted by Russia”

Greek Reporter: May 2: “Officials in Ukraine say that Russia has looted a number of museums and has removed valuable exhibits, including ancient Greek gold artifacts given by the Greeks to the Scythians,” this report claims.

The loot allegedly includes 198 gold items, from plates and coins to weapons and medals.

Greek Culture Minister Lina Mendoni has called for “urgent” measures to protect Ukraine’s cultural heritage.



Scythian golden gorytos, 4th century BC.

Credit: VoidWanderer, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0/Wikipedia

Roman bust bought at Texas Goodwill for \$35 reveals history of WWII looting

Jerusalem Post: May 8: This is interesting because it begins with the unsourced assertion that “20 percent of all art in Europe was appropriated by Nazis in WWII”, an astonishing and ridiculous claim.

Nonetheless, the circumstances of this discovery show that the exceptional can still happen: in this case the discovery of a 19-inch high bust dating to the 1st century BC, taken from the collection of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, probably by an Allied soldier.

Thirty Pre-Hispanic Artifacts Claimed by Mexico to Be Auctioned in Paris

ARTNews: May 11: Another attempt by Mexico to impose its new domestic law on the rest of the world by dubbing artefacts previously traded legally as illicit, but without providing any evidence to show this.

“The auctions promote looting, illicit trafficking and laundering of goods perpetrated by international organized crime; they deprive the pieces of their cultural, historical and symbolic essence, reducing them to simple decorative objects for individuals and giving rise to a counterfeit market,” the Mexican government claims in close to hysterical fashion.

Perhaps most notable, however, is the failure of the media to question this unwarranted attack on private property. At no point does the article challenge the validity of the Mexican government’s claim and propaganda, nor how it can expect to seize back items that have been exported and traded legally over the centuries.

Iranian archaeologists against bill permitting trade of artifacts

I24News.tv: May 11: Iranian archaeologists have lodged a formal objection to an Iranian parliament draft law to permit a trade in antiquities.

It was reported that 46 out of 290 Iranian MPs proposed the law as the “optimal utilization of ancient objects and treasures”.

According to the ISNA news agency, “Lawmakers said they hope to turn Iran into a ‘regional center’ for antiquities trade, aiming to prevent the ‘cheap smuggling of national heritage’.”

However, the academics protested strongly, writing: “Not only does this plan not prevent the destruction of heritage and unprofessional excavations, but it also legally authorizes looters to destroy our heritage.”

Incredibly rare horse brooch found near Sleaford to be housed at The Collection Museum in Lincoln

Lincolnshire World: May 12: The Portable Antiquities has registered another success with the discovery and conservation of this rare Roman brooch. Found near Sleaford, the cast copper alloy Leasingham Horse Brooch, as it is known, is the first of its kind discovered and dates to 43-410AD. It has now joined The Collection Museum in Lincoln after being unearthed by metal detector Jason Price two years ago.



The Leasingham horse brooch discovered in 2020 by Jason Price. Photo courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Ukrainian Soldiers Discover Archaeological Treasures While Digging Defenses in Port City Odessa

ARTNews: May 16: “Ukrainian soldiers discovered a trove of artifacts while digging ditches in anticipation of a Russian strike in the port city Odessa, the Ukrainian military,” the Ukraine military has announced.

The finds included well-preserved amphorae dating to the 3rd and 4th



Above: The ancient amphorae discovered in Odessa, Ukraine. COURTESY 126TH TERRITORIAL DEFENCE

centuries when Odessa was a Roman settlement called Odessus.

Rival elites leave Iraq's rich cultural heritage crumbling

The National News: May 19: Political infighting, lack of cash, looting and the absence of a strong central governing body are putting Iraq's cultural heritage at increasing risk, according to a report from London-based think tank Chatham House.

"All of historic Baghdad is falling apart and that's a political decision," said Dr Mehiyar Kathem, a senior researcher in the history department at University College London and the lead author of the research paper Cultural Heritage Predation in Iraq.

"A minister told me that the political parties were more interested in land and its commercial values of that area, and were waiting for it to collapse. It's prime real estate."

According to the report, Iraq's cultural treasures and 15,000 archaeological sites have become a battleground between competing Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish political elites to promote their past and future visions of Iraq.

This begs the question as to what UNESCO will do to ensure that Iraq, as a State Party to the Convention, will fulfil its obligations under the articles of the convention to protect find spots.

1,800 rare coins, artifacts seized from illegal antiquities dealer – watch

Jerusalem Post: May 19: In what the Post calls "one of the most significant raids in recent times", the Israel Antiquities Authority is said to have seized stolen coins from the Bar Kochba Revolt, the Persian Period, the Second Temple Period and the reign of the Hasmoneans from an illegal antiquities dealer.

"The IAA suspects the man of having traded illegally in antiquities allegedly without a license for a long time, covering his tracks and smuggling thousands of coins from Israel to countries abroad," The paper reports.

Stealing from history: Inside the multi-million dollar illegal trade in artefacts from the Middle East

The National (UAE): May 21: Few recent articles have managed to get so much so wrong while promoting propaganda as fact. Even the way it uses the graphic (shown here) to juxtapose misleading figures about crime with the value of the global art market is no more than an example of obfuscation and bias, implying that somehow the two are inextricably linked. As noted by IADAA and others many times before, the Interpol figure of 854,742 items reported as seized in 2020 provides no indication of how many of these seizures were justified and so gives no helpful picture of cultural property crime. As the report also noted, the overwhelming majority of items seized were listed as library materials (472,933 or 55% of all seizures globally) seized in Europe. (For a detailed analysis of the Interpol report see the IADAA Newsletter, October 2021)

To list the value of 2020 global art sales under the heading of *Artefacts looting and illegal trade* is little more than an exercise in abject dishonesty and cynicism, which only serves to discredit the article entirely.

But that is not all.



Demonstrating that the authors have failed to carry out any proper research, they go on to quote other well-known falsehoods that have long been discredited including:

- “Cultural property trafficking represents the third-largest international criminal activity – surpassed only by drugs and arms dealing”.
- “In 2020... experts estimate illegal trafficking of cultural property may separately total up to \$10bn every year – a figure that Interpol says has risen over the past decade”. (Another example of why UNESCO should actively publicise its error on this matter.)
- A graphic displaying the bogus \$10 billion claim and also including another false claim: “567,465 illegally taken artefacts seized in 2020 were found in Europe, sourcing them to UNESCO and Interpol when, again, the figure actually refers to the number of items seized, not the number subsequently shown to have been illicit – a figure that has never been given.

Yet again, no attempt is made to distinguish between antiquities – clearly the focus of this anti-market attack – and the wider category of art and cultural property.

Later, the article confounds its own claims, noting: “Figures estimating the annual cost of the illegal antiquities trade vary widely, from hundreds of millions of dollars to billions.” All of these estimates have been shown to be little more than wild guestimates or inaccurately sourced. What follows is the usual and predictable attacks on the legitimate market by the Antiquities Coalition, with, finally, some focus on what Egypt is and should be doing itself to protect cultural sites within the country.

Those who say they want to engage meaningfully with the art market should understand that they will not be trusted if they continue to peddle untruths about it. This continuing behaviour simply shows that they are not acting in good faith.

The Bourgogne Tribal Show

This year the show took place from May 19-22 in Besançon, near Cluny, province Saône et Loire, in France.

For the first time, The Tribal Show, with seventeen participants, was enriched with seven ancient art dealers, all members of IADAA.

This international art fair in the countryside, was established in 2014 and is hosted in the beautiful surroundings of ancient farm buildings of the 15th and 18th century, owned by Bruno Mory, a contemporary art dealer.

In 2022 the exhibitions extended to the castle grounds, allowing for more participants.



The weather was exceptional, the atmosphere very relaxed and on the grand opening day the terrain was bustling with enthusiastic lovers of tribal and ancient art. Every visitor enjoyed the wonderful exhibits, combined in the same inspiring spaces. To complete the experience, at the end of the day, the organisers hosted a hog roast with Burgundy wine from the surrounding countryside flowing uninterrupted. Keep an eye out for the announcement of next year's date. This show in southern Burgundy, not far from Macon, is well worth a visit.

