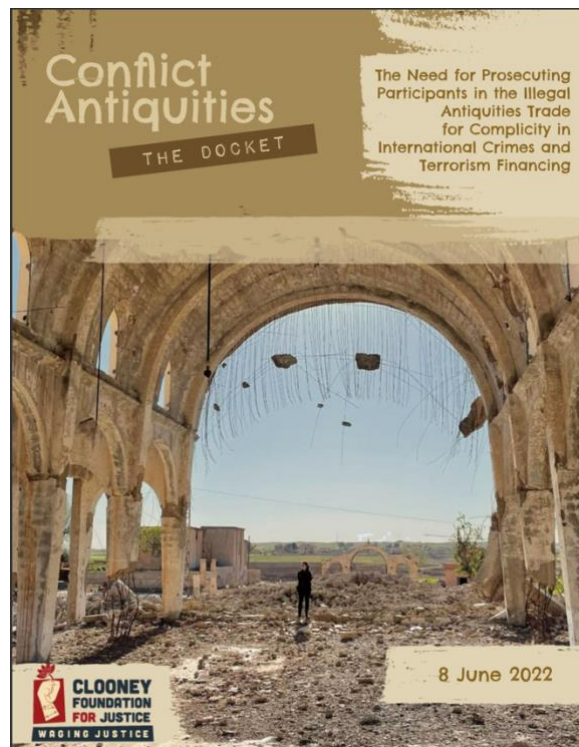




Poor research demanding dramatic outcomes is not a victimless activity

Looted Antiquities: Financing War Crimes and terrorism

The Docket: Clooney Foundation for Justice: June 8: A number of media articles have leapt on this report (*The need for prosecuting participants in the illegal antiquities trade for complicity in international crimes and terrorism finance*), released the day before the latest UNESCO Conference on the fight against trafficking (*see report below*). The report's lead author, Anya Neistat, Legal Director of The Docket, also spoke at the UNESCO conference and grabbed the headlines by stating: "The antiquities dealers trading with ISIS and other armed groups WILL be prosecuted for their involvement in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and terrorism. Such prosecutions would disrupt the looted antiquities trade, and ultimately save people's lives."



Much has been made of the level of research and investigations on the ground in the Middle East to raise the report's level of credibility, but The Docket undermines this immediately by stating as fact a claim that is known to be without foundation: "Looting antiquities has made ISIS tens, if not hundreds of millions of dollars."

The accompanying media release also fatally pumps up the rhetoric, raising unachievable expectations over the report's findings: "An investigation by The Docket – a Clooney Foundation for Justice initiative – into the international networks responsible for the looting and smuggling of thousands of antiquities from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, shows how the trade in these stolen artifacts funds war crimes and terrorism. For ISIS, antiquities became one of the main sources of financing, along with oil and ransoms."

What is it that the Foundation has managed to find at its first attempt that no one else, including governments, the military and intelligence agencies, has spotted over the past eight or more years?

The Docket also accuses European and North American dealers of being “knowingly involved in the conflict antiquities trade”.

“The looting of antiquities is often dismissed as a victimless crime, but it is far from that,” says Neistat. IADAA is unaware of anyone who thinks or has ever claimed that the looting of antiquities is a victimless crime, let alone for it to be an oft-made claim. Again, this baseless statement does not inspire confidence in the reliability of the report itself.

Other questionable claims the release makes include:

- Looted antiquities from Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen are trafficked via complex international networks to western markets. “By following these routes, The Docket was able to gather information showing the links between prominent antiquities dealers operating in Europe and North America to antiquities pillaged in conflict areas.”
- Dealers being tracked knew they were breaking the law.
- Dealers continue to operate [illegally] unhindered.
- “Most researchers agree that looted antiquities have become a multi-million-dollar source of financing for state and non-state actors, which in turn funds the purchase of weapons, recruitment of new members, maintenance of detention facilities, and other activities that allow armed groups to function.”

Cracks begin to appear in the media release itself when the basis for The Docket’s sensational claims turn out to be a) that it has gathered details on more than 300 incidents of pillage in the affected countries, “two thirds of which involve cultural heritage”, and b) “In most cases, the Docket was able to establish which armed groups controlled the sites at the time the pillage occurred”.

These are hardly original findings. Neither shows hard evidence of actual crime, nor does either show any link to the international art market, the main target of the report.

Then we get to the nub of the matter: this is all about campaigning to regulate the art market: “The pillage will continue to fund the activities of terrorist groups so long as there is a largely unregulated international market for illicit antiquities where the dealers operate with impunity.”

To back up its claim that looted antiquities have become “one of the main sources of revenue” for ISIS – a claim no one else has established, while available evidence points to this not being true – The Docket links to a United Nations December 2015 media release announcing the adoption of the well-known Iraq sanctions. However, apart from the fact that this release is now seven years old, the sanctions were adopted to *prevent* ISIS exploiting resources; they provide no evidence regarding the level of looting or revenue raised.

The introduction of [the 127-page report](#) focuses not on The Docket’s own original research, but the on-going case of the gilt sarcophagus returned to Egypt from The Met in New York. The Executive Summary revisits media coverage over the past seven years relating to looting pits and unsubstantiated reports of looting and trafficking, not original research by The Docket.

This is followed by images of items published on the ICOM Red lists of Cultural Objects at Risk, before the report focuses on Freeports and details of how antiquities *might* be

trafficked using them. It repeats the claim that its research “has established” that artefacts pillaged in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen are trafficked to Europe and the US, but produces no evidence that it has found on the ground of this happening.

It stretches credibility further by stating: “The Docket’s work has focused on collecting information that links prominent dealers operating in European and U.S. markets to antiquities pillaged in conflict areas in the MENA region by designated terrorist and other armed groups. Much of this information cannot be shared publicly at present for legal reasons, but this report contains an overview of the available evidence, which points to the viability of prosecutions.”

It then admits that the only cases it refers to by name publicly are those that have already been reported in the media. If that is the case, where is The Docket’s original research to justify its claims?

It says “initial evidence packages” have been shared with prosecutors in several European countries and the US, but that’s as far as it goes. Again, though, bearing in mind the simple mistakes it has made in the presentation of its edited report, how reliable can the redacted “evidence” be?

Methodology

The Methodology section states that primary evidence comes from “hundreds of interviews with witnesses, informants, forensic archeologists and cultural heritage specialists, journalists, law enforcement, officials, policymakers, representatives of international organizations, and others. Field work has been carried out in multiple locations in Lebanon, Turkey, Syria and Iraq.”

A detailed chapter on pillage sites compares pre- and post-war landscapes showing looting pits. As with other similar reports, while it surveys damage, it cannot have any idea about what was found there, so cannot reliably provide volume or value estimates.

The Foundation also reveals how it has acquired images, video and other information dating back to at least 2013 identifying the storage of museum artefacts. And it recounts the targeting and looting of sites by armed groups, but does not identify what was taken.

On page 60, the report returns to the unsubstantiated claim that “most researchers agree” that looted antiquities have provided multi-million dollar funding for atrocities, notably via paying for arms and the commission of terrorist attacks abroad. Here it gives a source for the claim: Wes H Cooper’s *The Dark Side of the Economy: A Comparative Analysis of the Islamic State’s Revenue Stream*, published by the Journal of Terrorism Research in February 2017; and Marina Lostal’s *Islamic State and Illicit Traffic of Cultural Property*, from *The International Criminal Responsibility of War’s Funders and Profiteers*, published in 2020.

Cooper mentions an estimate of \$200 million raised from cultural looting, giving Singer 2015 as the source. Lostal’s paper is not freely available for review.

Singer is Graciela Gestoso Singer, a senior researcher at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, whose 2015 paper for UK Blue Shield, *ISIS’s War on Cultural Heritage and Memory*, states: “It is estimated that ISIS raises US\$200 million a year from cultural looting,” adding: “Indeed, the revenues from trafficked artifacts come second only to oil”, a claim known to be untrue, but lifted word for word from her source, the April 23, 2015 RUDAW article *Stop ISIS and Save Iraq’s cultural heritage* by Tobin Hartnell and Bilal Wahab.

In turn, Hartnell and Wahab also make a number of claims, including the untrue statement that “revenues from trafficked artifacts come second only to oil”, but provide no sources for

them. They make no mention of the figure of \$200 million, so Singer cannot have got it from them, despite her reference.

What seems clear from this is that as with so many other reports of this nature, The Docket is ultimately relying on out-of-date, inaccurate and unsubstantiated sources filtered through a variety of reports that it has not checked, while attempting to boost the credibility of its own claims with statements such as “Most researchers agree” when there is no validity to them.

On page 61, The Docket goes on to reinforce bogus claims about terrorist organisations, starting with ISIL. It claims:

- “The trade in looted antiquities has been identified as the third-largest revenue stream for the terrorist group, although it is difficult to quantify.” Source: Marc-André Renold Blood Antiquities: The Devil is in the Demand, EU AML/CFT Global Facility (Mar 30, 2021)
- “Some estimates suggest that in 2014 alone, ISIL raised \$1 billion, with an estimated profit of US \$200 million for looting cultural artefacts alone, although some researchers have contested these findings.” Source: US Department of State: Documenting ISIL Antiquities Trafficking. Remarks by Andrew Keller, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counter Threat Finance and Sanctions within the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs at the US at the US Department of State (Sep 29, 2015), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/rls/rm/2015/247739.htm>
- “Other estimates vary and suggest that antiquities trafficking generated between US \$6 and US\$8 million, and that it represented ‘up to 15 to 20% of [ISIL’s] resources’, making it the second biggest source of financing after oil resources.” Source: Christophe Pacaud, Le Trafic d’oeuvres d’Art un Financement Important de Daesh, RTL, Sept 20, 2015, [https://www.rtl.fr/actu/international/le-traffic-d’oeuvres-d’art-un-financement-important-de-daesh-7779786809](https://www.rtl.fr/actu/international/le-traffic-d'oeuvres-d-art-un-financement-important-de-daesh-7779786809)

IADAA’s March 2021 newsletter sets out what Renold and his own sources really stated and how this was very different from what The Docket claimed.

The Renold report referenced by The Docket actually concludes: “In reality, it is problematic to provide an assessment of the global extent of the illicit trade in cultural property. Indeed, complete and reliable statistics that might help to estimate the true dimension and scope of the illicit trafficking or the monetary value of the black market in cultural property do not exist.”

If, as all of the international bodies like UNESCO, Interpol, Europol and others now admit, no one has any idea of the scale and value of trafficking or terrorism financing linked to antiquities, the ‘third largest’ source of income claim is groundless.

The Keller comments relate to the Abu Sayyaf raid on May 16, 2015, in which very limited funds raised from antiquities were shown, as Ben Taub’s specially commissioned first-hand analysis later showed. Even with that, Keller never mentions the \$200 million figure attributed to him, instead stating: “The U.S. government assesses that ISIL has probably earned several million dollars from antiquities sales since mid-2014, but the precise amount is unknown.”

The \$6 to \$8 million figure does, indeed, come from the September 2015 article by Christophe Pacaud, but he gives no source for it at all, and the only direct evidence available – that from the Abu Sayyaf raid – makes a mockery of that figure anyway.

Perhaps none of this would matter under normal circumstances, but with the clout and money provided by the Clooney Foundation backing, and its demand for dealers to be charged with war crimes, this sort of approach is simply irresponsible and unprofessional. To have got so much wrong and, apparently, not to have carried out the basic task of researching its own quoted sources properly, is a dereliction of duty, especially for an organisation intending to use the claims to directly influence policy to the detriment of legitimate international business.

This has not stopped the Antiquities Coalition from praising and promoting the report on its website and at a special event.

The Docket's report also makes conflicting claims regarding the evidence it has found. In its conclusion on page 101, it states that its investigation "points to" the existence of well-organized international smuggling networks, whereas on page 83, the introduction to Chapter III, titled Investigations in Europe and the United States, claims that The Docket's research "has established" that archeological material from Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen is being trafficked to Europe and the US via international networks.

It might be one, but it can't be both.

Misleading reports like this are also not victimless, especially when they give rise to viral media coverage that does not bother to check its accuracy and simply reproduces its groundless claims as fact. Apart from the unwarranted damage to honest traders, they also waste the precious time and resources of governments, NGOs and law enforcement, contributing to a misdirection of efforts which allow the guilty to go free while often having serious potential consequences for refugees and vulnerable civilians in conflict zones. Exaggerating the value of crime in this area risks encouraging more people to loot and traffick, a claim supported by archaeologists and academics looking to protect cultural heritage. Local people who take these risks also put themselves at risk.

This makes it incumbent on the authorities to check the validity of the evidence – confidential or otherwise – that organisations submit to them.

As IADAA and others in the trade have made clear over years now, we abhor looting and trafficking. Firstly, because of the damage it does to cultural heritage; secondly, because they are criminal acts; thirdly, because they damage the reputation of honest brokers in the market.

To be absolutely clear: there is no room in the market for criminals. Anyone found setting out to commit crime, especially by being complicit with looting or trafficking, should face the full force of the law.

Compare the claims of The Clooney Foundation's report to that also just published by Project Muse in the Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Volume 10, Issue 2.

The authors include Dr Neil Brodie, a seasoned academic who has long been a critic of the trade for what he views as unethical activities, but who has also proved rigorous in his criticism of campaigners who exaggerate claims regarding trafficking. He has been equally vocal recently about the lack of data and evidence regarding the scale and nature of looting and trafficking and the need to improve funding and research.

Dr Brodie and his co-authors immediately acknowledge what The Docket fails to do: that reporting "was of necessity usually second hand, often speculative, and cannot always be relied upon to provide an objective account of what the situation was 'on the ground'."

By contrast The Docket's conversations with unnamed people on the ground are treated as unassailable hard evidence.

Project Muse does not overclaim. It presents the information derived from interviews alongside detailed purported prices and images of antiquities said to have been sold

inside Syria, while ending by publishing previously unseen Da'esh documents relating to the governance of antiquities. Project Muse takes care to present all of this as claims by its interviewees rather than established facts.

Its evidence points to a dealer at Dura Europos supplying another dealer (who has recently died) in Dubai.

As with The Docket, interviewees pointed to Turkey as the main exit route for looted material.

Where Project Muse really comes into its own is in its analysis. If what its interviewees claim is true, it means that buyers were carrying around extraordinarily large sums of cash.

The researchers note that while it would be "eminently practical" for one person to carry around a bag containing US\$1 million in \$100 bills, "it does pose questions about the security arrangements in place to protect against theft and just who exactly inside Syria would have access to such large sums of hard currency".

The researchers also raise questions about the prices claimed by their interviewees, arguing "Secure knowledge of prices inside Syria is a necessary foundation for assessing the value of the antiquities trade to Da'esh, which in turn is a requirement for successful policy development".

Previous reports have noted "abnormally high prices" in Syria for items later expected to trade on the legitimate market internationally.

"Typically, on the international market, antiquities at source sell for less than 10 percent of the price that might be achieved at destination."

The researchers go into the subject in great detail, comparing prices inside Syria with results in the Sixbid auction archive. The lack of synchronicity is deemed not very helpful.

"Overall, it is difficult to reconcile what appears to be the high price of gold coins in Syria when compared to the prices of similar coins in Europe and the United States or more generally to the price of gold," they conclude. "Yet the reporting from inside Syria is consistent."

If the anticipated correlation between Syrian and Western pricing is not there, what could it mean? More than one possibility presents itself:



PROJECT MUSE®

Some New Evidence Documenting the Involvement of Da'esh in Syria with the Illicit Trade in Antiquities

Isber Sabrine, Ristam Abdo, Neil Brodie

Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Volume 10, Number 2, 2022, pp. 115-136 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press



- Demand for higher prices is being driven by inaccurate claims relating to the value of antiquities in the West.
- Western markets are not the target destination. Instead it could be wealthy collectors within the MENA itself, or further afield, who are prepared to pay more to acquire rare items.
- Money laundering. Antiquities that could be used to get wealth out of the occupied country, rather than more vulnerable large cash sums, command a premium. (This seems the least likely reason.)

Project Muse concludes: “Ultimately, the new evidence we have presented here documenting the very active involvement of Da’esh with the antiquities trade inside Syria raises more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, we believe our understanding of the policies and actions of Da’esh is now on a firmer footing than was previously the case, and it has allowed us to suggest some new avenues for future research.”

In all, Project Muse is the more useful paper because it takes a measured approach that acknowledges stumbling blocks and direction for future research rather than exaggerating its findings and conclusions, an approach that only serves to store up trouble for all concerned.

Two of the authors also presented their findings at a media event on June 15, in which Dr Brodie highlighted the damage done by exaggerated media reporting regarding figures and other inaccurate reporting and how this has led to uninformed and ineffective policy. “What we really want is proper evidence-based research,” he told his audience.

He is right about this and others need to follow his example.

He is less convincing in his plea for EU law to encompass every artefact no matter how small or low value. Applying time-consuming and expensive compliance to such items would be impractical for both customs and importers, as well as uneconomic.

We are constantly being told how NGOs and lawmakers want to engage with the art market for better policy. It’s about time they learnt that treating the market as criminals without any cause to do so is not the way to go about it.

UNESCO Conference Illicit Trade June 9, 2022

Strengthening the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property

A number of useful developments emerged from this conference, starting with the admission from UNESCO’s Assistant Director General for Culture, Ernesto Ortone Ramirez, that statistics surrounding looting and trafficking were “poor”. He also argued that existing rules should be applied more vigorously – IADAA has long argued that we don’t need new regulations, we just need those that already exist to be applied properly.

Several speakers reinforced inaccurate and groundless assumptions, including Historian-Philosopher Krzysztof Pomian, whose keynote speech stated that antiquities trafficking was second only to that of drugs, while also confusing legitimate and illegitimate markets and claiming that everything stolen in Ukraine and Russia would end up feeding the art market. Experts who made significant points included Flora van Regteren Altena, Senior Policy Advisor of the Netherlands Ministry of Culture, who stressed that the international art market was a “very important stakeholder in the process”.

“I sense in the Netherlands with the art market that they want to do good, otherwise they don’t have a job,” she explained. “Their views should be very much taken on board and this is something we missed in the peer-to-peer review [of current legislation].”

They also want to be sure that all countries work the same way for international consistency, she added.

Alan Cole, Head of the Border Management Unit at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, noted that traffickers were “not particularly linked” to the cultural heritage sector, adding that the authorities must establish a relationship with the legitimate market “that does not spook them” and does not unreasonably interfere with their business.

CINOA Secretary-General Erika Bochereau was the sole market voice among the 24 participants – evidence itself of the need for better engagement – and started by dispelling myths over transparency. The authorities have access to buyer and seller information from dealers and auction houses when necessary, she explained.

She also argued for clearer distinctions between questionable online and social media offerings and vetted market operators who are now selling more via the internet after the pandemic.

All eight recent major reports into looting and trafficking – five sponsored by governments – found little evidence of market involvement, she noted, while claimed links between the market and terrorism financing were “exaggerated and not evidence based”.

As the debate moderator Monika Jones, a journalist for Deutsche Welle, noted, people like to blame the market for everything going wrong. However, the US Treasury report into money laundering found the market not to be a priority risk.

Bochereau concluded with four suggestions:

- Get the evidence. Find the who, why, what, when, how of looting and trafficking.
- The trade need an extensive and reliable database where they can check pieces easily and economically PLUS a database of export laws so that information can be easily gathered. It must be historical and include what the laws were of any given place at any given time.
- “Today I am the only one here representing the art market,” she said. “We can help you and give you insight and help with fakes.”
- We want to be part of the process instead of being invited to comment at the end of it.

John Mair (Director of Project Integrity, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) (EBRD) argued for more self-regulation, arguing it was more effective than law-making. Compliance also meant better information along the lines argued by Bochereau: “How can a buyer take responsibility when they don’t have the information available to them?” he asked. “It should be less about the medicine than the illness. Not so much about legislation as whether people get it. The way to effect change is really to get at the public.”

British Museum doubles down on Parthenon Sculptures stance

Museums Association: May 24: The ongoing dispute over the Parthenon Marbles continues with this new development. As the report states, “The British Museum has said it ‘firmly believes’ the Parthenon Sculptures belong in London after a row over the circumstances of their removal from the Parthenon temple in Athens”.

The Greek authorities have now rejected claims by BM deputy director Jonathan Williams – made at the annual meeting of UNESCO’s intergovernmental committee for promoting the return of cultural property – that “most of the sculptures had been retrieved from rubble around the temple rather than being hacked off, as is commonly claimed”.

Until now, arguments for the BM to retain the marbles have centred on the legitimacy of their original acquisition via Lord Elgin and existing law preventing the BM from giving them up. The British government has refused to become involved, saying it is a matter for the BM. However, media reports also now claim that the government is preparing to discuss the matter with Greece despite not informing the BM of the fact.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of this subject, the developments show how far governments will go in using cultural heritage as a political and diplomatic tool.

A Roman Marble Bust Heading to Auction Could Have Ties to Disgraced Dealer Robin Symes, an Antiquities Expert Says

Artnet News: May 24: Yet another claim from Christos Tsirogiannis that involves courting the media to spoil a sale rather than approaching the auction house concerned to raise concerns.

As Artnet News points out, “while Robin Symes has been linked to looted goods, a proven association with Symes would not conclusively indicate whether or not the bust is illegal”. This is especially apt in this case because Tsirogiannis promotes his claim on the basis that no record exists of the bust prior to its auction in 1981, when it sold at Sotheby’s New York. However, had he searched a little more thoroughly, he might have come up with the evidence provided by an IADAA member that showed the bust in an auction catalogue in the late 1960s.

Tsirogiannis also “hopes for greater transparency in the art market”. The market itself would like to see greater transparency as well, starting with direct public access to vital databases for the purposes of the due diligence.

The media frenzy surrounding Tsirogiannis’s publicity drive continued with another article in The Guardian on May 30, which also made the inaccurate claim that the bust “was first recorded on the market in 1981” and that this case “cast a spotlight on the illicit trade in rare and historic artifacts and a murky international world of illicit dealers and secretive collectors”.

The Guardian then expands the article to publicise the work of the New York Assistant District Attorney Matthew Bogdanos, the latest scandal involving the Louvre Abu Dhabi and even Kim Kardashian.

Former Louvre director questioned by police as part of alleged antiquities trafficking investigation

ARTnews: May 25: Arguably the most significant – and certainly the most dramatic – news story linked to antiquities and cultural heritage in the past month involves the arrest, questioning and later charging with “complicity in organized fraud” of former Louvre director Jean-Luc Martinez over alleged links to a trafficking ring.

The charges relate to multi-million dollar acquisitions at the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2016.

Pending further investigation, Martinez was suspended as France’s cultural ambassador.

“Investigators are trying to establish if Martinez ‘closed his eyes’ to fake certificates of origin for five pieces of Egyptian antiquity,” Euronews reports.

He denies any wrongdoing, but this has not stopped the commentariat from assuming his guilt and using that as evidence of significant organised crime in France and the European Union involving cultural property.

The case centres on Martinez’ relationship with two dealers who are also being investigated over trafficking, gang fraud and money laundering, Hamburg-based Roben Dib and

Christophe Kunicki of Paris. They are alleged to have been involved in the trafficking a number of items including a gilt sarcophagus sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that was subsequently seized and returned to Egypt amid claims by the New York District Attorney's office that it has been looted during the Arab Uprising in 2011. By June 10, *the Art Newspaper* noted how the Martinez case had escalated as both The Louvre and the Louvre Abu Dhabi decided to become a civil party in the criminal investigation into possible antiquities trafficking.

"Following the revelations in the media, the Emirati museum wants access to the investigation files, to establish the facts and act accordingly", the Louvre Abu Dhabi's Parisian lawyer Jean-Jacques Neuer told journalist Vincent Noce.

While the institutions are clearly trying to present themselves as the innocent victims of crime, here, questions will inevitably arise over their own due diligence during the acquisitions process.

Unlike many institutions and members of the media, the French Ministry has recognised that Martinez has not been convicted of any offence, as things stand. As *The Art Newspaper* also reported on June 10: "*France's ministers of culture and foreign affairs have decided to retain Martinez in his role as a special ambassador for cultural cooperation, but have asked him to withdraw from discussions around art trafficking 'pending clarification of his legal situation', according to a statement.*"

At the same time, Swiss collector Jean-Claude Gandur filed a suit over the "forged provenance" of a Fayum portrait he bought in November 2014 from the Phoenix Ancient Art Gallery (Geneva, New York). As the *Art Newspaper* report reveals, reaction from Phoenix shows that it, too, is investigating provenance relating to the portrait, which it says came from the Pierre Bergé auction house and its expert, Christophe Kunicki, who is already the subject of charges and investigation alongside dealer Roben Dib.

"Such outcome [the discovery of fake provenance], if verified, would unite Phoenix Ancient Art with the Metropolitan Museum and the Louvre Abu Dhabi in a growing list of possible victims of sales made by Mr Dib and his circle," the report stated.

Although both Dib and Kunicki's guilt is now assumed by many, both deny any wrongdoing and despite, in Kunicki's case, being charged two years ago, neither has yet been convicted of anything.

A similar opaqueness hangs over the fate of Jaume Bagot Peix, arrested in 2018 on trafficking charges thought to be linked to terrorism financing, a case held up at by at least one EU Commissioner in 2019 as proof of art market links to ISIS yet still apparently unresolved four years later. In fact, Bagot Peix has been participating in art fairs. If the evidence is as compelling as the commissioner insisted three years ago, what is the hold-up?

Seized antiquities sent from Ukraine to go on show at British Museum

Art Newspaper: May 31: Early medieval jewellery sent to the UK by post from Ukraine and intercepted at Gatwick Airport will go on show at the British Museum.

The circumstances surrounding their alleged trafficking have not been revealed, but a British Museum spokesman said: "This seizure demonstrates the excellent around-the-clock work Border Force do to search, find and stop these historical artefacts entering the UK illegally, and we will continue to work with international partners to detect such items."



Above: some of the jewellery seized by UK Border Force officials, which had been mailed from Ukraine. Image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

What has happened to France's grand plans to return Africa's heritage?

The Art Newspaper: June 2: France has repatriated just 28 objects since President Macron's bold if controversial commitment five years ago to restore cultural property to its countries of origin.

Populist headlines then have turned into an embarrassing debacle as French institutions attempt to protect their collections, while public opinion on how far such a policy should go remains divided.

This is an object lesson in why politicians need to think out policy clearly before issuing soundbites.

Confusion around the policy has led to a bid by three French senators to set up a national expert commission that would be consulted on any future non-European restitution cases. As the *Art Newspaper* reports, President Macron asked Jean-Luc Martinez, the former director of the Musée du Louvre, to establish a legislative framework for future restitutions. That has now been thrown into disarray by Martinez being charged with offences linked to cultural heritage trafficking (see above).

Government departments' failure to respond to probing questions on policy speak volumes. This debate clearly has a long way to go.

Briton given 15 years in Iraqi jail for smuggling antiquities to appeal verdict

The Guardian: June 6: Following last month's news of the arrest and trial in Iraq of Briton Jim Fitton (pictured here) and German Volker Waldman on looting and smuggling charges relating to antique shards picked up at a tourist site, the courts have now sentenced them to 15 years in prison.

As *The Guardian* reports, Fitton "arrived at court in Baghdad hoping for a short suspended sentence after being charged with collecting fragments from a site in southern Iraq during an organised archaeology tour. Instead, he was found guilty under a Saddam-era law that legal experts should not have applied to the case."

The British government may now intervene with quiet diplomacy, while the case is thought to have damaged Iraq's tourism industry.

While Fitton and Waldman

might be accused of dangerous naivete, Fitton's lawyer argued: "These [items found on Fitton] are the types of things that you can find in a desert abandoned and without a fence, warning signs, protection or security. If they even had the value of one Iraqi dinar, you couldn't find a single item, because they would have been all collected and sold.

"They accused my client according to Iraqi antiquities law which covers statues, pottery heads and things that have archaeological value. We have given the court substantial evidence that he didn't mean to steal antiques and all he had on his person was abandoned stuff which doesn't have any value."



Stolen antiquities trade fuels conflict in Middle East, report says

Middle East Eye: June 9: A good example of the misleading damage that The Clooney Foundation's report is causing. Here is just one quote: "Estimates of the income generated by armed groups vary, but most researchers agree that looted antiquities have become a multi-million-dollar source of financing for state and non-state actors," the report said.

Then the article goes on to quote UNESCO's bogus figure: "According to UNESCO, the illicit trade in cultural goods – of which antiquities trafficking is a part – is worth \$10bn a year. A portion of these profits is known to be used to finance conflicts and global terrorism."

Another article prompted by The Clooney Foundation report that gets it equally wrong by failing to check its facts comes from [NPR](#), which begins: "It's common knowledge that armed non-state groups in the Middle East bankroll themselves with oil and ransom money. But a close third in the pipeline that fuels warlords and terrorists globally? The plunder and sale of antiquities."

Kuwait hands over smuggled antiquities to Egypt

The National News: June 17: Seized at Kuwait Airport in 2019, five Pharaonic pieces have now been returned to Egypt. Investigations continue into the suspected smugglers. The discovery followed another seizure at the airport in 2018, when the cover of a wooden pharaonic coffin was reportedly found by customs officials

EU vice-president takes on disinformation: 'We need to end the digital Wild West'

Atlantic Council: June 23: Welcome if ironic news that Věra Jourová, vice-president of the European Commission for values and transparency, has decided to target fake news and disinformation, calling it “potentially even more dangerous” than conventional weaponry. Jourová may have been inspired to take action by Russia’s propaganda campaign surrounding its invasion of Ukraine, but, as entries in this issue of the IADAA newsletter and much of IADAA’s other work over the past few years has shown, a major cause of fake news has been leading organisations’ failure to check sources properly as they depend on confirmation bias rather than facts to push their agendas.

Jourová might like to start with the European Commission’s own Fact Sheet, [Questions and Answers on the illegal import of cultural goods to finance terrorism](#), published on July 13, 2017, setting out the evidence on which it relied to press ahead with its import licensing proposals for cultural property and the art market.

She also might like to conduct a review of The Docket’s report for the Clooney Foundation (*see above*), claims made in relation to the series of transnational operations (Athena, Pandora et al), as well as the lack of vital information that they should produce regarding the confirmed validity of seizures and successful prosecutions.

UNESCO’s disgraceful 50th anniversary campaign, [The Real Price of Art](#), coupled with the [bogus \\$10 million figure](#) as the annual value of cultural property trafficking that it has failed to publicly acknowledge as wrong, even as it continues to influence media reports, would also be a suitable candidate for examination as Jourová sets about her objective of defending democracy and democratic systems.

A priority should be all of the fake claims relating to looting and smuggling surrounding the US return of artefacts to source countries that have actually been seized under the terms of Memoranda of Understanding, not because their acquisition involved crime of any sort. IADAA is ready to help with information, primary research findings and original source material.

Ukraine seizes stolen antiquities collection after multiple raids in Kyiv

Alarabiya.net: June 24: “Ukraine said on Friday it had seized a huge multi-million-dollar collection of antiquities, allegedly stolen from museums in Russian-annexed Crimea, after a series of police raids in Kyiv,” this report begins.

The raids yielded “several thousand Bronze Age and Medieval artifacts” and more than 6,000 antiquities, including swords, sabres, helmets, amphoras and coins.

It seems that the swoop came as part of an investigation into a former Ukrainian lawmaker who served as a high-ranking official in Crimea prior to its annexation by Russia in 2014.

Iraqi Intelligence arrests artifact smuggling network

Iraqi News: June 27: This article is interesting – beyond the arresting of the criminal network – because it reveals that the Iraqi authorities are now providing financial rewards for citizens handing over artefacts to the government.