

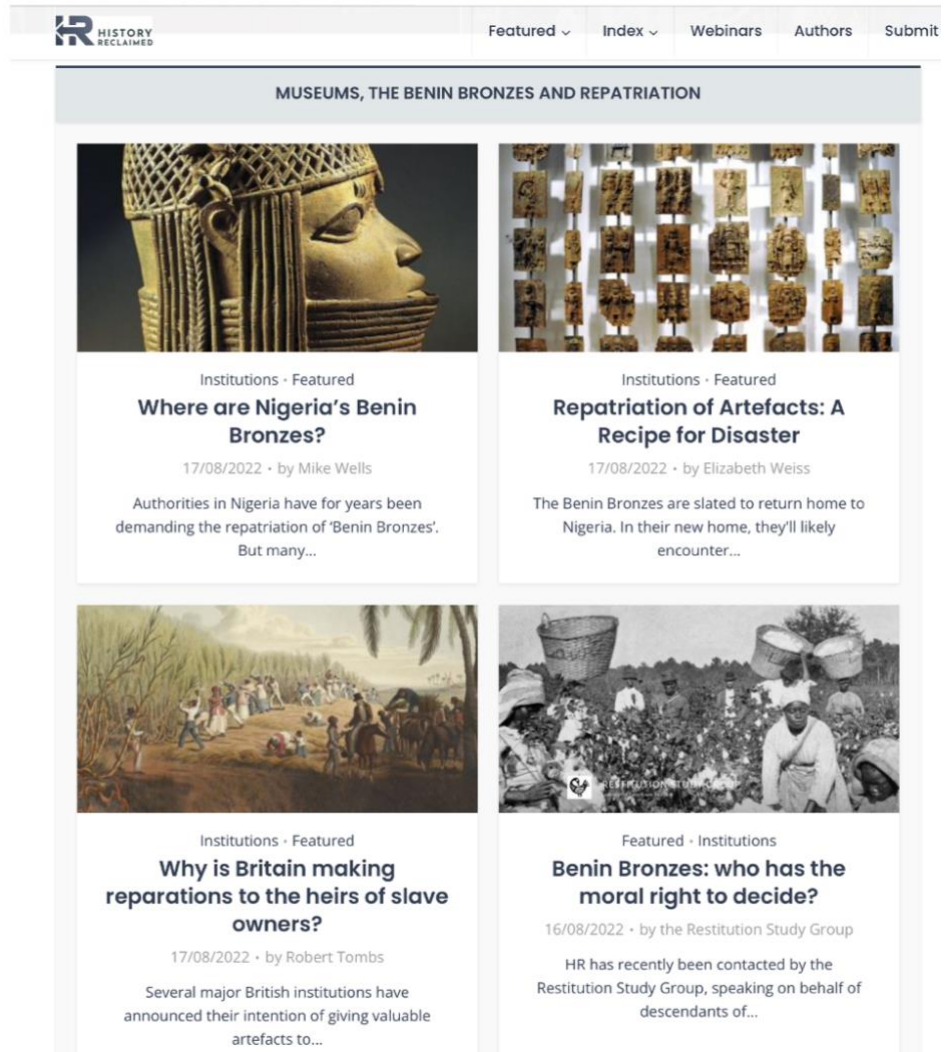


History Reclaimed

It is almost a year since a group of more than 40 leading scholars, authors and journalists came together to found *History Reclaimed*. They did so in reaction to what they see as “the abuse of history for political purposes”. As with similar attacks and campaigns against the legitimate art market, *History Reclaimed* notes how much of these culture wars are pursued in the media, public spaces, museums, education government and business.

“In recent years, we have seen campaigns to rewrite the history of several democratic nations in a way that undermines their solidarity as communities, their sense of achievement, even their very legitimacy,” the organisation states. “Activists assert that ‘facing up’ to a past presented as overwhelmingly and permanently shameful and guilt-laden is the way to a better and fairer future. We see no evidence that this is true. On the contrary, tendentious and even blatantly false readings of history are creating or aggravating divisions, resentments, and even violence. We do not take the view that our histories are uniformly praiseworthy—that would be absurd. But we reject as equally absurd the claim that they are essentially shameful.”

In acknowledging that “history consists of many opinions and many voices”, *History Reclaimed* argues “this does not mean that all opinions are valid, and certainly none should be imposed as a new orthodoxy”.



The History Reclaimed website, showing some of the issues being debated there.

This non-profit gathering of independent scholars has set about challenging distortions of history, providing context, explanation and balance “in a debate in which dogmatism is too often preferred to analysis, and condemnation to understanding”.

The reclamation of artefacts in the wake of colonialism is a much-covered subject, with articles on the Benin bronzes and the Koh-i-Noor diamond, among others.

One article, *The rise of Archaeologists Anonymous*, describes anonymous online chat rooms for those conducting “scholarly research in a way that is simply impossible within the censorious confines of modern academia”.

As with other initiatives now emerging, *History Reclaimed* is evidence of the long-awaited backlash against the tyrannical received wisdom of dominant minority groups that has done so much damage to legitimate business, academic and other public interests, whether in the art market, museums or universities.

*History Reclaimed* also welcomes unsolicited articles by experts, which are vetted before publication.

### **European Union anti-money laundering regulations come up against Charter human rights and data protection rules... and lose**

A European Union Court of Justice ruling in November 2022 addressed the clash between public access to information and the right to confidentiality under human rights law and data protection rules. In an initial ruling, it has found that the demands of the AML legislation were not balanced against the competing rights, effectively rendering the interference of the AML measures disproportionate.

AML regulations place an obligation on those involved in transactions to establish the ultimate beneficiary of those deals. The objective is to prevent goods or money being laundered by criminals using other people or businesses as a front to conceal their real identity.

However, under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, beneficial owners are entitled to protection from the disproportionate risk of interference from others.

In this preliminary ruling, the Court of Justice addressed the interpretation of certain provisions of the EU’s AML directive. It held that, under the Charter, member states’ obligation to ensure that the information on the beneficial ownership of corporate and other legal entities incorporated within their territory is accessible in all cases to any member of the general public is invalid.

“According to the Court, the general public’s access to information on beneficial ownership constitutes a serious interference with the fundamental rights to respect for private life and to the protection of personal data, enshrined in Articles 7 and 8 of the Charter, respectively,” the court’s official release stated.

The court considered that disclosure of such information would enable a potentially unlimited number of people to find out about the material and financial situation of a beneficial owner. This would mean that from then on, the data would be fully in the public domain and could be retained, disseminated and open to abuse.

The court recognised the objectives of the EU’s AML legislation but noted that the potential interference under the legislation was “neither limited to what is strictly necessary nor proportionate to the objective pursued”.

Essentially, the court considered that the upgraded AML law brought with it a “considerably more serious” interference with human rights “without that increased interference being capable of being offset by any benefits which might result from the new regime as compared against the former regime, in terms of combating money laundering and terrorist financing”.

The court sees that part of the difficulty is that the legislation does not clearly define the circumstances under which such an upgraded interference would constitute a legitimate interest when balanced against human rights and data protection.

### **Police Seized Hundreds of Paleolithic Tools, Roman Tiles, Bones, and Other Ancient Artifacts From Two Homes in Spain**

Artnet News: January 3:  
Spanish authorities have seized hundreds of ancient skeletal remains and archaeological artefacts from the homes of two men in the province of Alicante.

“Among the confiscated relics are Paleolithic flint tools, ammonite and nautilus fossils, Neolithic and Bronze-



age mills, Phoenician amphorae, Roman mosaic tiles, and a human skull,” the article reports. Investigations so far have revealed that between the two properties, some 350 archaeological pieces and nearly 200 skeletal objects were uncovered. They are currently being held and conserved by the nearby Archaeological Museum of Dénia as the investigation unfolds.

### **US gives Palestinians looted antiquity owned by Steinhardt, in 1st such repatriation**

The Times of Israel: January 6: Another piece from the Steinhardt collection repatriated, this time an ancient cosmetic spoon. According to the New York District Attorney’s office, Steinhardt had bought it in 2003 from Israeli dealer Gil Chaya, with Manhattan prosecutors accusing Chaya of selling at least 28 stolen antiquities to Steinhardt.

The spoon is said to have been looted from an archaeological site near the southern West Bank city of Hebron, and so was being returned to the Palestinian authority.

No indication was provided regarding the level of evidence showing the item was looted.

The presentation ceremony in Bethlehem on January 5 was attended New York Assistant District Attorney Matthew Bogdanos, who heads up the city’s Antiquities Unit and is widely seen as the scourge of the New York’s antiquities trade. He did not choose to correct the public misstatement at the ceremony from Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security in New York, who repeated the long dismissed claim that “antiquities trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar business”, a claim that is blamed for encouraging looting and which was repeated in the official release issued by the U.S Office of Palestinian Affairs.

### **The Elgin marbles and the rot of ‘decolonisation’**

The Spectator: January 7: As the media turns more of its focus on the reclamation of cultural property by countries of origin, together with associated ethical and moral considerations, an increasing number of article are taking a stand against the anti-trade/anti-museum/anti-collector tide. This is one of them.

It is notable, among other aspects, for the nationality of its author. Zareer Masani is an Indian. India is at the vanguard of countries demanding the return of artefacts on anti-colonial and patrimony grounds. Masani disagrees with its approach and arguments.

First, however, he addresses the newly resurgent matter of the Parthenon – or Elgin – Marbles.

Contradictory media reports reveal that either the British Museum chairman George Osbourne is close to an agreement with the Greek government for their return (on loan), or he isn’t. As other

articles have noted, once returned, whether on loan or not, any hopes of the British Museum getting them back will have vanished.

Masani labels the validity of Greek claims to the marbles as “dubious at best”. His argument is that Elgin acquired them legally at a time when the Parthenon was a neglected ruin, and that Greece “had no legal existence as a state until 30 years later”.

He notes that while Turkish Dragomen under the rule of the Ottoman Empire were cannibalising the Parthenon site, Elgin spent the equivalent of £5 million of his own money to buy and ship them back to England, before selling them to the British Government, which presented them to the British Museum as a gift.

“All these transactions are recorded in relevant documentation, and the new Greek nation, founded with British assistance, laid no claim to the objects until half a century later,” he points out.

He notes that most retrospective legal claims are time barred, leaving only the moral and ethical arguments to rely on, arguments he says are “hugely suspect”: “To begin with, there is no evidence that the population of modern Greece, after two and a half millennia, can legitimately claim descent from either the slaves who built the Parthenon or the Athenian rulers who commissioned it. Populations have migrated, mixed and altered across the world for millennia, so few of us can claim entitlement based on geographical or ethnic continuity since ancient times.”

A former director of Athens City Museum, Dr Dimitris Michalopoulos, who also believes that once loaned the Marbles would never be returned to the British Museum, has called for them to remain in London, arguing: “As I am fairly acquainted with Greek museums, I am convinced the Elgin Marbles are much better preserved in the British Museum than in any Greek one.”

Classical archaeologist Mario Trabucco della Torretta, has already dismissed the Greek case for restitution as immoral, also thinks that an early handover of the Marbles to Greece would be hasty and regrettable: “Once we enlarge the scope of what the champions of restitution are proposing, it quickly becomes apparent that rushing in to settle just one score now is simply kicking the can down the road — and also quite unfair. What we really ought to have is a proper debate, leading to the formulation — if this is at all possible — of a new principle that could really work for all stakeholders and on a global, pluricultural scale. I am still not a fan of the underlying idea, but it is nonetheless a debate I would gladly participate in.”

People like Elgin rescued artefacts doomed to neglect and destruction from obscurity: “It was often through their ‘cultural appropriation’ by these European classicists, Orientalists, Egyptologists and Africanists, whom our ‘decolonisers’ decry, that natives like me learned about our own classical heritage and how to value its remains,” Masani concludes in *The Spectator*. The uncomfortable truth is that Africa and India, lacking any museums, set little store by their heritage until Europeans led the way in establishing their cultural value, Masani adds.

The claim over the Benin bronzes attracts his opprobrium: “They were acquired as entirely legal booty by a British military expedition to punish the King of Benin for the brutal murder of an unarmed British delegation... The blood-soaked bronzes, to which western collectors have given their current financial value, were made from brass quite literally acquired by Benin in return for slaves. A sobering thought perhaps for the ‘decolonisers’, so anxious to return them to the descendants of Benin’s rulers, but not of the slaves whose blood-money they represent.”

### **Raiders of the Lost Artifacts**

Town & Country Magazine: January 8: Under the strapline *The line between preserving and purloining the past has never been less clear*, this article takes an in-depth look at what is happening among museums and collectors in the fight against looted art, alongside the widespread claims for repatriation of cultural patrimony.

Like Zareer Masani in *The Spectator* (above), Sean Elder cites the Parthenon Marbles and the Benin Bronzes, as well as the Rosetta Stone. Unlike Masani, he does not really consider the validity of the claims with reference to these specific items. He also makes the odd mistake: “Unless there is clear evidence an artifact was acquired illegally, repatriation is largely at the discretion of museums.” As IADAA members and other subscribers to these newsletters will know, in the United States objects are regularly seized without any such evidence being available and the burden of proof is now reversed to guilty until proved innocent.

Elder also states that private collectors “don’t have to answer when publicity gets bad” – an odd claim in the wake of the Steinhardt case, and even less convincing when he then goes on to detail James H. Clark’s return of \$35 million worth of Khmer artefacts to Cambodia.

Elder details a useful summary of issues surrounding Cambodian cultural property and the controversy involving the late Douglas Latchford, once seen as a hero for rescuing vulnerable pieces from risk under the Khmer Rouge, but ultimately disgraced as a looter and trafficker. Again, Elder handles the counter arguments well, consulting cultural heritage lawyer Kate Fitz Gibbon on the subtleties surrounding this issue.

Just as relevant is the debate on acceptable provenance: standards have altered almost beyond recognition over the past two decades, leaving museums and collectors, as well as dealers, vulnerable to accusations of collusion in crime or at least of being neglectful of their responsibilities in the glow of academic hindsight.

Leonard Stern’s agreement with the Greek government also comes under the spotlight. Although roundly condemned by those with extremist views on patrimony and the return of cultural property, it is heartening that recognition of the democratic process can still be found in the birthplace of democracy: “While some members of the Greek parliament complained about the deal, saying that the antiquities should be returned outright and that parts of Stern’s collection were of dubious provenance, the Greek culture minister said there was no evidence that any of his Cycladic works had been exported unlawfully.”

Where Elder’s analysis really counts is in recognising that antiquities are not the best target for criminals: “...there are arguably better places to put your money than antiquities, and few collectors are motivated by greed. As the pre-Columbian specialist André Emmerich wrote, “The image of the hermit-like individual gloating over illicit treasure in his castle is a fantasy.””

Of particular note for the antiquities trade and the wider art market is the analogy put forward by Mario Trabucco della Torretta to conclude his October 2022 article in *The Critic*, [The immoral case for restitution](#):-

*“Let’s assume you and I, however unlikely this may be, share a grandfather. The poor man dies, and you get the house whilst I get to keep his portrait (which you didn’t even care much about). After some time, when all is said and done, you come to me claiming back the portrait, saying that the testament may not be valid, that the portrait was originally meant to stay in that house, that you have recently lavishly refurbished the room where you want to put the painting, that you would care for it more than I ever could. On top of this, you accuse me of being “a serial thief”, pointing to the other heirlooms in my house which belonged to different relatives and acquaintances of mine. You keep telling me you have a moral case for getting the painting from me. What moral case can you really argue for? Is any amount of mystification, distortion of the truth, partial presentation of the elements of the case, going to gain you any moral advantage? Can you really build a moral case in an immoral way?”*

We need more journalistic debates of this [and *The Spectator*’s] nature to strike a balance and to ensure that extremist opinions are not treated unquestioningly as fact just because those expressing them shout the loudest.

### **French Archaeologists Make 'Unprecedented Discovery' of What May Be the Remains of a Roman-Era Mausoleum**

Artnet News: January 9: Archaeologists have made what is thought to be an unprecedented discovery in the Auvergne: the remains of a set of Gallo-Roman buildings, including a funerary monument, in the town of Nérès-les-Bains.

Relics found nearby have helped the team date the site to the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### **Antiquities trafficking: six years on, the truth comes out among the fakes (Translated from French)**

Paris Match: January 10: Antiquities dealer Ali Aboutaam has confessed to offences relating to the trafficking of antiquities from the Middle East. The case involves to the 2016 seizure by Belgian Customs of archaeological objects belonging to Phoenix Ancient Art: a marble table and an alabaster stele. Interpol suspected that they had been trafficked from Syria before being shown at BRAFA in Brussels.

*Paris Match*, which had investigated the case, stated that it had found evidence that the items had been transited through the free port of Geneva to Inanna Art Services, a subsidiary of Phoenix Ancient Art. "An export visa issued by the Swiss authorities subsequently allowed Ali Aboutaam to exhibit them in Brussels."

They had already established with Professor Michel Al-Maqdissi of Damascus University that the stele almost certainly came from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Mari in Syria, not far from the Iraqi border.

*PM* also claimed to have obtained access to new documents from Swiss Customs, which led to Ali Aboutaam being convicted of VAT fraud on imported objects in November 2021. And the magazine says the file reveals links with Roben Dib, a dealer at the heart of the investigation into the Louvre Abu Dhabi scandal.

Now the Geneva court has found that the stele's origins have been concealed by forged paperwork arranged by Ali Aboutaam, who was also found to have arranged the faking of provenance for a number of coins.

According to *PM*, Aboutaam has confessed to ordering the forgeries, has accepted the indictment and has no right of appeal. The indictment explains that the purpose of the forgeries was to dispel suspicion of illicit origin and facilitate the movement of items for sale.

Further charges involved the payment of an intermediary to illegally import items into Switzerland that Aboutaam knew or presumed had been acquired illegally, and the failure to obtain from the sellers a written declaration attesting to their right to dispose of the goods, as well as failing to keep a register of acquisitions detailing their origins together with the name and address of the supplier or seller as well as the description and the purchase price.

Ali Aboutaam was given a suspended 18-month prison term and three years' probation. *PM* stated that he had been treated leniently in recognition of his confession, his cooperation with justice, his desire to return ill-gotten cultural property and what the prosecution describes as "sincere repentance".

Further action by the Swiss tax authorities means Aboutaam is likely to face a heavy fine amounting to millions of Swiss francs.

"Too often investigations damage the reputation of the trade without ever coming to any conclusions or providing credible evidence of wrongdoing, so in this case we welcome a clear ruling from the court and the fact that Mr Aboutaam decided to take the co-operative route with the authorities," said IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling. "Any case of cultural property trafficking by an art market professional risks tainting the whole trade, so we must be vigilant against it."

### **Antiquities: A Crooked Market**

Australian Outlook, The Australian Institute of International Affairs: Undated

Anti-trade extremist Christos Tsirogiannis continues to promote his propaganda in this article (labelled as analysis), where he finally calls for the anti-democratic, anti-human rights introduction of the reversal of the burden of proof when it comes to the ownership and legality of artworks.

As usual, Tsirogiannis adopts the double standards approach, calling for absolute proof of legitimacy for artworks while offering unsubstantiated arguments to promote his own case. He wrongly assumes that art market professionals trading in antiquities are only in it for the money, failing to recognise that if money were the only driver, then they would devote themselves to almost any other area of the market or far more lucrative professions.

“Moreover, this trade itself still contributes to the erasure of historical information about our shared past through the vandalism and destruction of the archaeological sites from where these objects were actually looted,” he continues, without providing any evidence to support this.

He goes on to link the trade directly with terrorism financing when no evidence of this has ever been found, the only solid documentation discovered potentially linking artefact looting to terrorism being the 2015 Abu Sayyaf raid, which was not linked to the art market.

Even while he continues with this confused train of thought, he is forced to admit his lack of evidence: “Despite statements to the contrary by members of the market, their continuing lack of due diligence regarding the antiquities they are offering creates the possibility, if not the probability, that such “blood antiquities” are reaching the international market.” Possibility? Probability? What about evidence?

This does not prevent him from immediately stating: “However, even such sales that are fuelling terrorist activities still seem not to be sufficient reason for the market and its clients to shift towards a truly legal market.”

This leads straight into the nub of the matter: “One way forward would be to reverse the burden of proof on the provenance of the antiquities traded. Currently everything is traded “legally,” based on the absence of proof for the objects of illicit origin, which is required to be provided by the authorities. Rather, it should be the case that, by law, the members of the market are those that should offer the proof that each antiquity on sale is accompanied by a documented collecting history which proves its undoubted legal origin.”

As UNIDROIT has recognised, the ongoing challenge of orphan works, where verified legal provenance back to the point of discovery is unavailable – is almost always the case. Valid reasons exist for this, ranging from paperwork being lost over the years to standards of paperwork accepted in the past not being sufficient to meet today’s standards of proof.

Tsirogiannis must be well aware of these arguments as they have been aired often enough but appears wilfully to ignore them in his outlandish demands.

UNIDROIT, the trade and others are working on a constructive way forward to tackle this dilemma; it’s a shame that all the professor can do is throw brickbats from the side lines.

### **Egypt Stops Bid To Steal 10-tonne Ancient Statue**

Barron’s: January 10: The Egyptian authorities have reported the arrest of three people trying to steal a 10-tonne statue of Ramses II in Aswan using a crane.

The statement said police had reported that “three people were arrested in possession of manual digging tools and heavy equipment, a crane”, which they had used in a bid to “lift the statue and excavate antiquities in the area”.

### **US considers rejoining Unesco despite more than \$616m membership debt and Israel-Palestine controversies**

Art Newspaper: January 11: When UNESCO admitted Palestine as a state party member in 2011, the United States was forced to end its association with the organisation under the terms of a 1990 law forbidding funding to any agency that acknowledged Palestine as an independent state. That withdrawal finally came at the beginning of 2019 and, as a result, UNESCO immediately lost around 20% of its funding – about \$80 million a year.

The US left the door open for a return by keeping a seat on UNESCO's executive board, effectively keeping its membership open and so its continuing liability for funding, which this article reports as \$616 million as of December 2020.

Now it seems the US may have found a way back in thanks to a waiver to the 1990 law by Congress in December in recognition of the fact that the United States' continuing absence at the table leaves the way free for China to increase its influence.

"The new US waiver will expire on 30 September 2025, unless renewed by Congress," the article reports. "Any ensuing membership procedure would have to be submitted to Unesco's next General Conference in November 2023, not to mention the negotiation on the reimbursement of the debt."

### **Ein Maulwurf, der Maulwürfe jagen sollte**

Suddeutsche Zeitung: January 13: The German Senate has announced that it does not plan to return the Berlin Pergamon Altar and Nefertiti bust to their countries of origin. Berlin's Senator for Justice Lena Kreck contradicted an earlier argument from state secretary Saraya Gomis that the objects should be returned.

Gomis had told *Tagesspiegel*: "From an anti-discrimination perspective, one has to say: All the cultural assets from other regions of the world do not belong to us, they are here illegally."

However, Kreck disagreed, pointing to differing legal and moral perspectives.

According to the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which oversees Berlin's Neues Museum, where the Nefertiti bust is on display, it was not illegally taken out of Egypt because it formed part of the legal partage approved by the Egyptian Antiquities Administration during the excavation where it was discovered.

*The Art Newspaper* also covered the story, referring to a comment piece by art critic Marcus Woeller titled *Our Mona Lisa must stay in Berlin*, a view not shared by historian Jurgen Zimmerman, who studies German Colonialism.

Despite the continuing cry for colonialist issues to be addressed by the return of objects to source countries, a notable push back against this is developing, with an increasing number of articles by academics, archaeologists and others arguing for items to be retained where they are in Western museums.

### **Looted archaeological artefacts worth more than \$20m returned to Italy**

The Art Newspaper: January 26: Numerous reports published about this official repatriation ceremony in Rome present the story – either in their headlines, copy or both – as though it is a given that all the objects, together valued at \$20 million, were looted.

However, previous reports on this case, together with the lack of transparency from the New York District Attorney's office regarding the strength of evidence, leaves questions as to how certain it is that some or all these objects were looted and trafficked.

As IADAA reported in October 2022, *ARTnews* had taken a closer look at how the Antiquities Unit under Assistant DA Matthew Bogdanos operates, reporting: "Bogdanos relies heavily on circumstantial evidence to get a judge to grant warrants in order to carry out seizures."

As *ARTnews* also reported, the 2020 RAND Corporation report directly accused Bogdanos of being personally responsible for the dissemination of false information about looting and



trafficking. And according to *ARTnews*, “Bogdanos has said he publicly connected the trade with terrorism in order to keep a spotlight on returning antiquities—and despite the report [the RAND report states that evidence to show the link does not exist], he staunchly continues his push to do so.”

This seems to imply that Bogdanos, a public official in law enforcement, is deliberately putting out false information about the very serious issue of terrorism financing to pursue a personal and political cause. If this is so, then hiding behind the ‘classified’ defence to prevent the public assessing the strength of evidence in cases such as the Steinhardt seizures raises serious questions.

As IADAA reported in September 2022, comments from Bogdanos’s superior, DA Alvin Bragg, leave the strength of evidence in this and other cases open to question.

And as IADAA reported in July 2022, further reporting from *ARTnews* included the fact that Steinhardt had denied any wrongdoing and was not convicted of any offence. Instead, he agreed to become subject to a lifetime ban on collecting antiquities. This also raises questions as to the strength of evidence in the case; it is hardly credible that Bogdanos or Bragg would have let Steinhardt off the hook of full prosecution if the evidence was strong enough to convict.

Once again, it is worth remembering that page 7 of the Statement of Facts submitted by the New York District Attorney’s Office in the case states: “To prove a suspected crime, all investigations and prosecutions – whether for antiquities trafficking or murder – may also rely on circumstantial evidence. Indeed, New York State criminal law draws no distinction between the weight or importance of direct versus circumstantial evidence in proving a crime.”

It is this enhanced status granted to circumstantial evidence that appears to have played such an important part in a case where direct evidence of wrongdoing has been so lacking.

As IADAA concluded in July 2002, Steinhardt might have been complicit, guilty or monumentally foolish, but we simply don’t know. We also don’t know for sure how many of the items had been stolen and trafficked. As reported above, any hard evidence is not forthcoming, but none of this has prevented the wider media from firming up the accusations against him and the objects in question, as they have done yet again here in headlines such as the *Art Newspaper’s* here. Other reports effectively firming up the unrevealed evidence in their headlines include:

- *Italy celebrates return of looted artifacts worth \$20 million* (Smithsonianmag.com)
- *\$20 million worth of looted art returns to Italy from the US* (New York Times)
- *US returns trafficked ancient art worth \$20 million to Italy* (CBS News)
- *Italy shows off \$20 million in stolen antiquities* (WAAY-TV 31 News / YouTube)

Other news outlets, including CNN have been more circumspect (*Seized artifacts worth \$20 million are shown off on return to Italy*).

If *ARTnews* can raise serious questions over several months in a series of articles as to the activities and reporting of the DA’s Antiquities Unit, giving clear reasons for its concerns, why does so much of the mainstream and even market media show no curiosity in investigating further?

### ***Archaeologist hails possibly oldest mummy yet found in Egypt***

The Guardian: January 26: Egyptologists have uncovered a Pharaonic tomb near the capital, Cairo, containing what may be the oldest and most complete mummy yet to be discovered in the country, this article reports.

Discovered at the bottom of a 15-metre shaft near the Step Pyramid in Saqqara, it is thought to be 4,300 years old.

The discovery coincides with a review of the use of the term ‘mummy’ by museums, which some curators believe is dehumanising.

“The Great North Museum’s Jo Anderson, said that ‘legends about the mummy’s curse and movies portraying supernatural monsters... can undermine their humanity.’”

The *Mail Online* reported that the word 'mummy' has been used in English since at least 1615, "but some say it has a colonial past as it derived from the Arabic word 'mummiya', meaning 'bitumen', which was used as an embalming substance".

### **U.S.-Egypt Relationship**

Mirage News: January 29: An article arising from a Department of State release, it highlights the importance of antiquities as soft power diplomacy tools.

As well as highlighting their joint campaign for peace in the MENA region, it states: "The United States and Egypt have a shared commitment to strengthening bilateral economic cooperation for the mutual benefit of the American and Egyptian people, including through expanding trade, increasing private sector investments, and collaborating on clean energy and climate technology."

The article also refers to U.S. investment in Egypt: \$600 million to digitize the country's telecoms sector, with \$5.9 billion of US imports to Egypt to support infrastructure projects.

Part of the burgeoning relationship is the Egypt/US cultural heritage bilateral agreement – the Memorandum of Understanding – renewed in 2021 aimed at disrupting trafficking, but whose terms are so restrictive they effectively give Egypt a veto over US imports, with the option of seizing private property in what amounts to little more than state-sponsored theft.

With Egypt's borrowing tripling between 2014 and 2022, it has become the largest client of the International Monetary Fund after Argentina, with its total debt expected to hit \$557 billion by 2026. the country is becoming increasingly vulnerable to its creditors, which in turn is likely to determine which foreign powers win the most regional influence.

Analysis of President Al Sisi's policy argues that he is spending massively on large showcase projects to bolster his authoritarian regime's hold on power, while ordinary Egyptians are faced with economic hardship and a currency crisis, to the point where books have become luxury items. Constant headlines about new archaeological discoveries, the building of new museums and the grand parade of royal coffins as they progressed to a new museum in Cairo in April 2021 all appear to be part of this.