

PERSPECTIVES ON LOOTING, THE ILLICIT ANTIQUITIES TRADE, ART AND HERITAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Today, all over the world looters are pillaging archaeological sites at an alarming rate in search of objects which they can sell. These objects are then sold as 'art' on the antiquities market and end up in private and public collections where they confer social prestige on the new owners. Given the scale of looting and the large output of unprovenanced objects on the market there can be little doubt that many, if not a majority, of these objects have been recently looted, or recently manufactured. There is thus an argument that unprovenanced archaeological objects on the market should be considered to be loot (or fakes) until proven otherwise.¹ Looting (and the production of fakes) is ultimately generated by market demand – that is, by those dealers and collectors who buy and sell while turning a blind eye towards how the objects have come onto the market and who deny that their willingness to continue purchasing these objects provides the incentive to further destruction of the archaeological record. Poor and war-torn countries are especially badly affected by the looting. The market for the loot is mainly located in the more affluent parts of the world. Thus, the flow of objects is from South to North, from East to West, from the poor to the wealthy, from the powerless to the powerful. The trade may, in this respect, be seen as a continuum of a centuries-old western tradition of building up museum collection from 'distant' and 'foreign' peoples and lands.

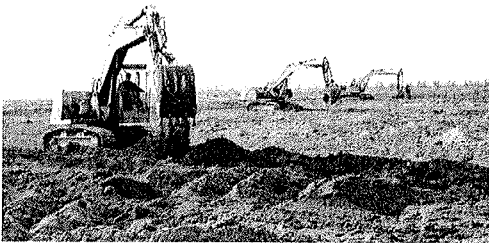
A whole range of looted objects is easily accessible for anyone to see and buy. Commodified loot is offered for sale in the shop windows of antiquities dealers

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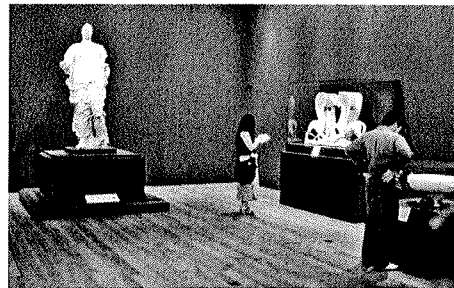
¹ Colin Renfrew *Loot, Legitimacy and Ownership. The Ethical Crisis in Archaeology*. (London: Duckworth, 2000) p.11, 90; Oscar Muscarella *The Lie Became Great. The Forgery of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000) p. 17.

and in the sales rooms of auction houses. A Google search for ‘ancient art’ or ‘antiquities’ brings the prospective customer into contact with numerous objects – from coins and arrow heads sold on e-Bay for a few dollars to statues costing tens of thousands of dollars offered by art galleries with addresses in the city centres of large metropolises. Some of the world’s most well-known museums have also been implicated in the acquisition and display of loot.



Looters using mechanical diggers in the necropolis at Salapia, Apulia.

Photo: © Soprintendenza Archeologica della Puglia, Taranto



Loot on display at the Paul Getty Museum. The objects on exhibit – a statue of a goddess, a pair of griffins and a basin (lekanis) – were looted in Italy in the 1970s, purchased by the Getty in the 1980s and returned to Italy in 2007 and 2010. The griffin and basin are now at the Museo Civico Archeologico “Pasquale Rosario” and the goddess is at the Museo Archeologico di Aidone.

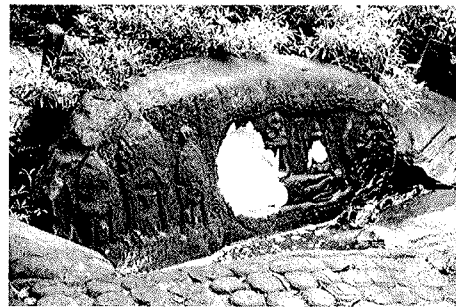
Photo: Staffan Lundén 2001

This article about looting and the consumption of loot will start by presenting a rough sketch of the looting and trade to give an indication of the pace of the destruction of archaeological sites generated by market demand. It then briefly attempts to discuss the motives of the looter and the collector and tries to put looting and collecting into a broader societal context of local and global power relations. Finally, it will treat some of the responsibilities of professionals who work with cultural heritage in relation to the ongoing trade. In this part it will, first, give some examples of how museums and scholars have been involved in activities which have in some way served to legitimise the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects. Secondly, it will discuss how cultural heritage professionals may in a more general way support the trade through their participation in the social construction of such concepts as ‘art’ and ‘heritage’. It will be argued that the contemporary mainstream social production of these (seemingly innocent) concepts serves to endorse a privileged perspective and creates amnesia about past – and also contemporary – social inequality and exploitation.

Hopefully, the article will lead to reflections, not only on the responsibilities of the cultural heritage professional concerning looting and the trade in loot as such, but also on broader issues relating to how the cultural heritage professional’s own

(privileged) position within society affects the knowledge about the past – and the present – which the she/he produces. Thus, the aim of the article is to contribute to the debate about the relationship between the social construction of the cultural heritage professional and the social construction of cultural heritage.

Speaking of perspectives and silences it is perhaps necessary to say something about how this text is focused and mention at least one of the many aspects which is not highlighted here. The point of departure is that – from an archaeological perspective – the problem with looting is the irreversible loss of archaeological data which could have been retrieved through controlled archaeological excavations. Thus for the archaeologist the main concern is the loss of ‘knowledge’ caused by



Above left: *Kbal Spean, Cambodia, Photo: © Vasudha Narayanan*
Above right: *Thieves carved out the faces of Vishnu and Lakshmi early 2003.*
Photo: © Vasudha Narayanan

looting. The article deals less with the many problems inherent in archaeological knowledge production itself, but it should not be forgotten that this knowledge production does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, the archaeological discipline has been, and is still, intrinsically linked to various national and colonial/neo-colonial practices. The knowledge produced by archaeologists is not necessarily beneficial to all members of mankind. It has been argued that the concern of archaeologists with protection of the ‘archaeological record’ has meant that they have endorsed military aggression and become insensitive to the suffering of human beings.² Indeed, this aspect is especially relevant in relation to looting considering that – at least one – archaeologist has recommended killing looters in order to protect archaeological sites. Elizabeth Stone, a professor of archaeology, commenting on the rampant looting on Iraq, has been quoted as saying “I would like to see helicopters flying over there shooting bullets so that people know there is a real price to looting this stuff. ...You have got to kill some people to stop

2 Yannis Hamilakis ‘From Ethics to Politics’ in: Hamilakis, Yannis & Duke, Philip (eds) *Archaeology and Capitalism. From Ethics to Politics* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), pp. 15-40, at pp. 30-32. Cf. David Matsuda ‘The Ethics of Archaeology. Subsistence Digging, and Artifact Looting in Latin America. Point, Muted Counterpoint’ (1998) 7 *International Journal of Cultural Property* pp. 87-97.

this”.³ Despite the importance of the ‘archaeological record’ (and the possibilities of creating more nuances and less romantic representations of the past through this ‘record’ than through the display of decontextualised loot) it is important to stress that the past produced through this ‘record’ is not necessarily only a force for societal good and that preserving it cannot have precedence over the protection of human lives.



*Looters at Isin, southern Iraq, January 2004
Photo: © John Russell.*

THE SCALE OF THE DESTRUCTION AND THE TRADE

Owing to its illicit and clandestine nature, it is extremely difficult to quantify the scale of the looting. Yet, the few surveys which have been undertaken where physical evidence of looting on archaeological sites and monuments have been systematically recorded give an indication of the seriousness of the situation. In Mali, for example, systematic survey work undertaken in 1989 and 1991 revealed that 45 per cent of the sites had been damaged by looting, 17 per cent of these badly. Survey work in a district in northern Pakistan has shown that nearly half of the Buddhist shrines, stupas and monasteries had been damaged or destroyed by looting.⁴ A survey in western Turkey inventorying 397 tumuli from the Lydian and Persian period showed that 357, or 90 per cent, of these tumuli had been damaged by looting. A total of 72, or 18 per cent, of the tumuli had been completely destroyed.⁵

Also in the wealthy parts of the world, looting takes a heavy toll on the archaeological

3 Will Bennett ‘Professor Calls for looters to Be Shot’ *Telegraph* 9 July 2003 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1435653/Professor-calls-for-looters-to-be-shot.html>>, cited by Kathryn Walker Tubb ‘Artifacts and Emotion’ in: Neil Brodie, Morag Kersel, Christine Luke and Kathryn Walker Tubb (eds) *Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and the Antiquities Trade* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 284-302 at 296.

4 Neil Brodie and Colin Renfrew ‘Looting and the World’s Archaeological Heritage. The Inadequate Response’ (2005) 34 *Annual Review of Anthropology* pp. 343-361 at 346.

5 Christopher Roosevelt and Christina Luke ‘Looting Lydia. The Destruction of an Archaeological Landscape in Western Turkey’ in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb, above, note 3, pp. 173-187.



Fifteenth century wooden sculptures in a reredos from Edsele church, Northern Sweden, before and after theft. The sculptures were stolen in September 2000 and recovered in 2005. Photos: © Samir Hussein (left), Björn Grankvist (right).

record. A survey conducted in Sweden of 25 sites where objects of precious metal had been found, revealed that the majority of these sites had been looted by metal detectors. The limited number of sites which had *not* been looted were the ones which had been given an erroneous location in archaeological publications and *Fornminnesregistret* (the register of archaeological sites) which shows that looters use these sources to locate promising sites.⁶

Thefts from museums and religious institutions may also occur on a large scale. The most well-known case is probably the looting of the National Museum in Iraq in 2003 when an estimated 14-15,000 objects were stolen.⁷ A much less publicised case is the looting of the National Museum in Kabul which lost about 70 per cent of its collections in 1993 when the museum was pillaged during the civil war.⁸ In Cambodia hundreds of statues have been stolen from museums and sites.⁹ In Nepal it has been reported that maybe half of the sculptures in Buddhist and Hindu

6 Staffan Lundén 'The Scholar and the Market. Swedish Scholarly Contributions to the Destruction of the World's Archaeological Heritage' in Håkan Karlsson (ed.) *Swedish Archaeologists on Ethics* (Lindome: Bricoleur Press, 2004) pp. 197-247 at 215, cf. Andreas Hennius 'Plundring av fornlämningar. Händer sänt i Sverige?' *Fornvännen* 103, 2008, pp. 29-32, available at <http://fornvannen.se/pdf/2000talet/2008_029.pdf>.

7 Matthew Bogdanos 'The casualties of war. The truth about the Iraq Museum' *American Journal of Archaeology* 109, 2005, pp. 477-526 at p. 477.

8 Juliette van Krieken-Pieters 'Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage. An Exceptional Case?' in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb above, note 3, pp. 227-235 at pp. 228-229.

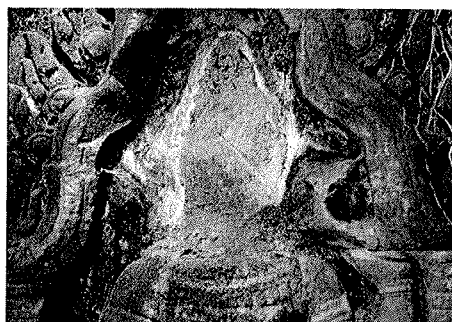
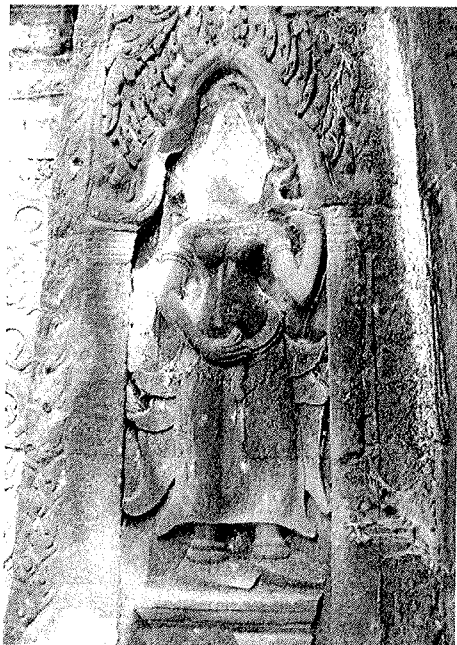
9 'One Hundred Missing Objects. Looting in Angkor' (Paris: Icom, 2007).

temples have been stolen.¹⁰ However, the rich and the politically stable countries are not immune to this problem. Since 1994 more than 200 objects – including pieces of medieval wooden sculpture – have been stolen from churches in Sweden.¹¹ The examples given here of large scale looting and thefts could be multiplied.¹² Although the evidence is patchy, the data presented is hopefully sufficient to show that looting poses a major threat to the world's archeological heritage. The extent of looting is subject to regional variety but there can be no doubt that the situation is alarming.

Just as it is difficult to quantify looting it is also difficult to quantify the volume of the trade both in the amount of objects being traded, the turnover in monetary terms and long term market trends (for example fluctuations in availability of objects from particular regions). Yet, for such studies a very useful source of information is provided by the catalogues published by auction houses.¹³ A look at what some of the major auction houses puts up for sale each year shows that large quantities of objects are sold for vast sums of money. At the twice-yearly antiquities sales at Bonhams (London), Christie's (London and New York) and Sotheby's (New York) around 10,000 objects are sold each year.¹⁴ The annual turnover at Sotheby's and Christie's auctions in New York is in the range of USD 20-30 million.¹⁵

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- 10 Peter Watson and Cecilia Todeschini *The Medici Conspiracy. The Illicit Journey of looted Antiquities from Italy's Tomb Raiders to the World's Greatest Museums* (New York: Public Affairs 2006) at p. 320.
- 11 Mattias Bäckström 'Kyrkostölderna en illegal miljonindustri'. *Sundsvalls Tidning*, 11 Nov. 2003; cf. Mattias Bäckström 'Övervakning, säkerhet och Munchs omåttlighet. Kyrkstölderna i Norrland och kuppen mot Munchmuseet i Oslo' in Johan Kärnfelt (ed.) *I skuggan av samtiden: en vänbok till Sven-Eric Liedman och Amanda Peralta*. Arachne 20 (Institutionen för idéhistoria och vetenskapsteori, Göteborgs universitet, 2006), pp. 51-70 at p. 60.
- 12 For further references, see e.g. Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Peter Watson *Stealing History. The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2000) available at <<http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/links/reading.htm>> at pp. 19-22, Brodie and Renfrew, above, note 4; Neil Brodie 'Introduction', above, note 3, pp. 1-24 at p. 2.
- 13 See the studies by Ricardo Elia 'Analysis of the Looting, Selling and Collecting of Apulian Red-Figure Vases: a Quantitative Approach' in Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Colin Renfrew (eds) *Trade in Illicit Antiquities: The Destruction of the World's Archaeological Heritage*. (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2001), pp. 145-53; Elizabeth Gilgan 'Looting and the Market for Maya Objects. A Belizean Perspective' in Brodie, Doole and Renfrew, above, at pp. 73-87; Vinnie Nørskov *Greek Vases in New Contexts. The Collecting and Trading of Greek Vases. An Aspect of the Modern Reception of Antiquity*. (Aarhus & Oxford: Aarhus University Press 2002) 251-292; Terressa Davis 'Supply and Demand. A Glimpse into the Traffic of Illicit Khmer Antiquities' (2006) 18 *Culture without Context*, available at <<http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/culturewithoutcontext/issue18/davis.htm>>.
- 14 Watson and Todeschini, above, note 10 at p. 320.
- 15 David Gill 'New York Market: Update' at <<http://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/2010/12/new-york-market-update.html>>.

Despite the difficulties of quantifying both site looting and the trade in loot there can be little doubt that there is a general correspondence between looting and market availability. In each of these cases presented above, the data on looting and thefts in various countries – Mali, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc. – may be compared to an output of objects originating from these regions on the antiquities market.



*Left: Angkor, Cambodia, beheaded statue.
Photo: © Staffan Lundén*

*Above: detail from the beheaded statue.
Photo: © Staffan Lundén*

Further confirmation – if such be needed – for the connection between the looting and the marketplace is gained through rare glimpses behind the facades of the trade. Internal documents leaked by a former employee at Sotheby's London have revealed that Sotheby's staff cannot have been unaware of that they were auctioning looted archaeological objects. Members of Sotheby's staff were also personally involved in smuggling objects. As a result of this scandal Sotheby's closed down their antiquities sales in London, but continues their sales in New York.¹⁶ Until fairly recently the majority of the objects sold at auction house sales lacked information as to their provenance.¹⁷ Probably as a result of heightened awareness surrounding these issues, the objects in more recent sales are accompanied with provenance information, which stretches their ownership history a couple of decades back in time (and sometimes even longer). This creates the impression that these major

¹⁶ Peter Watson *Sotheby's. The Inside Story*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) .

¹⁷ Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Peter Watson 'Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material' (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research 2000) 26 <<http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/links/reading.htm>>; Watson and Todeschini, above, note 10 at p. 330.

auction houses now have become reluctant to sell recently looted objects. Yet, the information provided is generally of such a nature that it cannot be verified, and in some cases there is evidence to suggest that it is bogus.¹⁸

It is not only the well-known international auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's which have been selling unprovenanced archaeological material on a regular basis. The major Swedish auction houses have for years been providing Chinese terracotta figurines, and there is strong circumstantial evidence that these come from recent illegal diggings in China and have been smuggled out of the country. In 1999 I enquired with representatives of these three auction houses whether it would be possible to consign objects which had recently been smuggled out from China to their auctions. At both Stockholm's Aktionsverk and Göteborg's Auktionsverk the answer was "yes". The representative at Bukowski's said she preferred objects with a long provenance but explained that this was not because of any moral concerns about selling smuggled objects, but that she was worried about well-made fakes which recently had come onto the market.¹⁹

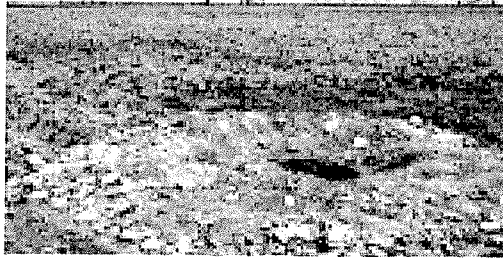
Also the major Danish auction houses Bruun Rasmussen, Ellekilde and Lauritz.com have been selling unprovenanced archaeological material. In 2007 I posed to these auction houses the same question which I had earlier asked at the Swedish auction houses: whether I could consign Chinese archaeological objects which had left China illegally to their auctions. All three auction houses replied that that they had no restrictions against selling recently smuggled objects.²⁰

The glossy pages of auction catalogues provide worrying evidence of the destruction of the world's archaeological heritage. However, auction house sales probably reveal only a small percentage of the total trade and devastation. The majority of the objects pass through the hands of various dealers and thus never come out on the open market. It also seems that it is mainly the objects in the lower price range which are sold through the major auction houses. Comparisons between the relative proportions of different categories of objects originating from the looted sites and the relative proportions of these objects in auction house sales reveals that much of the trade goes on outside the sales rooms of the auction houses. The rampant looting of Etruscan tombs yields both Attic black-figure and red-figure pottery (which was imported to Etruria from Attica in Classical Antiquity). Yet, in the auction sales the black-figure pottery outnumbers the red-figure pottery. This discrepancy can be explained by the price difference between Attic black-figure and red-figure pottery. Amongst collectors red-figure pottery is generally considered to be aesthetically superior to black-figure pottery and therefore red-figure pottery commands higher prices. It is sold on to various private and institutional collectors in a 'private'

18 David Gill 'Raising Eyebrow Over Apulian Fishplate' <<http://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/2011/04/raising-eyebrow-over-apulian-fishplate.html>>.

19 Staffan Lundén, above, note 6 at pp. 202-203.

20 Charlotte Aagaard and Lotte Kaarsholm 'Man kan jo ikke se på tingene, hvor de kommer fra...' *Information* 25 July 2007, available at <<http://www.information.dk/125436>>.



Above: Recently looted tomb in Arpi, Apulia. The ground is littered with the remains of the grave goods and the terracotta tiles which had covered the grave chamber.

Photo: © Daniel Graepler.



Right: Confiscated Apulian Red-figure pottery

Photo: © Daniel Graepler

manner, rather than passing through the public auctions.²¹ A comparison between the content of tombs in Apulia in southern Italy and the market output of Apulian objects reveals a similar picture: these tombs contain metal armour and Apulian red-figure pottery. Yet, while Apulian pottery (which occupies a lower price range than Attic red-figure pottery) has been a staple at the auction houses, the more expensive armour is much more rarely seen there. The armour is sold directly to private and institutional collectors including, for example, the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden which in 1997 purchased a piece of armour alleged to have been looted in Apulia.²² Moreover, Apulian tombs also contain large number of other objects including, for example Daunian ware pottery. Daunian ware tends to be less expensive than the Apulian red-figure pottery as it does not appeal to the modern collector's eye.²³ It is also rare for Daunian ware to come up at auction. This reminds that there are also objects in an even lower price range which are passed on in the market through less exclusive venues (internet sites etc.).

The evidence which emerges from police investigations corroborates the conclusion that the majority of the loot is not sold by the auction houses. Raids by the Italian police against warehouses belonging to the two Italian dealers Gianfranco Becchina and Giacomo Medici revealed that these two men were in possession of about 5,000 and 4,000 objects respectively. A separate police investigation against the dealer Robin Symes has shown that he had about 17,000 objects in 27 different

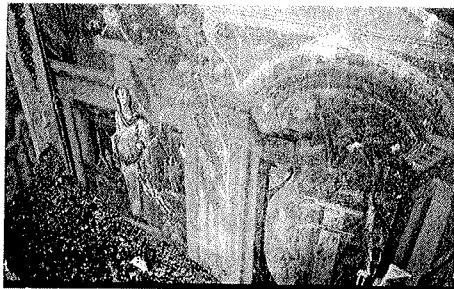
21 Vinnie Nørskov, above, note 13 at p. 270.

22 *Ibid.*, at p. 291: Jos van van Beurden 'A Disputed Cuirass: Italy versus the Netherland's National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden' (2006) 18 *Culture without Context*; Steph Scholten 'An Ethical Dilemma: A Disputed Cuirass in Leiden's National Museum of Antiquities' (Jan./Feb. 2008) *Minerva*, p. 54.

23 Daniel Graepler and Marina Mazzei *Fundort: unbekannt. Raubgrabungen zerstören das archäologische Erbe* (München: Walter Biering, 1993) 16, 23-30.

warehouses. The total market value of all these objects may be US\$ 500 million.²⁴ Through these investigations it has also been possible to map out the routes taken by objects from the looters to the museum show cases, and to show that, in many cases, those involved in the trade, including museum curators, cannot have been ignorant of the fact that they were dealing in loot.

In the raids against Becchina and Medici, the police found thousands of photographs of objects these dealers had sold. Many of the objects were shown covered in dirt and incrustations and the photos had presumably been taken shortly after the objects had been dug out by the looters. Medici's photographic archive also included pictures of Pompeii-style wall paintings *in situ* before their removal. Other photographs showed the wall-paintings in their sorry state after they had been detached (see below).



Photograph taken by looters of Pompeiiian-style fresco before removing it.
Photo: Carabinieri per la tutela del patrimonio culturale



The fresco after removal.
Photo: Carabinieri per la tutela del patrimonio culturale

With the help of these photos, and other documents, a number of objects have been located in the possession of museums and private collectors as well as in the catalogues of various dealers and auction houses. The museums where, so far, such objects have been discovered include the Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Toledo Museum of Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Princeton University Art Museum, the University of Virginia Museum in Charlottesville, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, the Antikensammlung (Collection of Classical Antiquities) in Berlin, the Miho Museum in Japan, the National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid and the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens. Embarrassed by the situation, several US museums have agreed to return more than 100 objects to Italy.²⁵

²⁴ Watson and Todeschini, above, note 10 at pp. 259, 316.

²⁵ David Gill and Christopher Chippindale 'From Malibu to Rome. Further Developments in the Return of Antiquities' (2007) 14 *International Journal of Cultural Property* pp. 205-240; David Gill *Polaroids and unresolved issues* available at <<http://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/2011/04/polaroids-and-unresolved-issues.html>>. David Gill 'Homecomings. Learning



Photograph found in Medici's ware house. The photo shows a marble griffin in a car trunk. Compare with the image on page 110 above, where the griffin is on display at the Paul Getty Museum.

Photo: Carabinieri per la tutela del patrimonio culturale

Investigations such as this give a unique inside view of the trade, how it operates and the amount of destruction it generates. One reason why we have so much evidence in relation to the trade in objects looted from Italian soil is that Italy, being a G8 country, has the resources to carry out huge police investigations involving a wide range of expertise (legal, archaeological etc.) and taking several years. There is no reason to think that similar organised networks of looters, smugglers and dealers do not operate in other heavily looted countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Iran, Iraq, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Syria, Turkey etc. On the contrary, the glimpses we get from various cases suggest that the destruction and trade occur in many places on a similar, if not larger, scale.²⁶ The result of the Italian investigations might be that the purchase of objects suspected, or known, to originate from Italy will be less attractive, but it might well be that dealers and collectors will instead turn their attention to objects originating from other countries which do not possess the capacity to investigate the looting and smuggling of archaeological objects and to institute proceedings against the purchasers of the loot.

Looters and Consumers

Why do some people collect looted archaeological objects and why do some people loot? Both the collecting and looting of archaeological objects are complex social phenomena which reside in a larger local, national and global context. In some cases there is clear evidence that looting is carried out by professional criminals who gain a substantial part of their income from selling the objects they have discovered through ransacking archaeological sites. In other cases – and this is especially the case in the richer parts of the world – looting, for example through metal detecting, may be a leisure activity, a thrilling pastime veiled in romantic notions of finding buried treasure. In the poor parts of the world looting – or subsistence digging –

from the Return of Antiquities to Italy' in Noah Charney (ed.) *Art and Crime. Exploring the Dark Side of the Art World* (Santa Barbara & Denver & Oxford: Praeger, 2009) pp. 13-25; Jason Felch and Ralph Frammolino *Chasing Aphrodite. The Hunt for Looted Antiquities at the World's Richest Museum* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011) pp. 1, 273-308, 321 note 1.

26 Cf. Watson and Todeschini, above, note 10 at p. 318.

may be one of the few means available for survival, or for raising one's incomes slightly above a very meagre standard of living.²⁷

Large-scale looting of archaeological sites and poverty are intrinsically connected. By and large, it is the countries where large strata of the population live in poverty which have the least resources available to protect archaeological sites – through physical supervision of sites and through educational and awareness raising campaigns etc. This combination of poverty and lack of resources for site protection may give rise to looting of endemic proportions. Here it is important to note that poverty on both the regional and national level is linked to external factors. This is especially clear in cases where economic deprivation and breakdown of civil society are a consequence of warfare. For example, in Iraq the looting of archaeological sites was comparatively rare up until the 1980s and few objects of likely Iraqi origin turned up on the antiquities market. The situation changed when economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq after the 1991 war. The sanctions led to economic hardship both for the population in general and cutbacks in the budgets for the authorities responsible for site protection. Large-scale looting of archaeological sites and a surge of loot on the western antiquities market followed. It is both ironic and tragic that the sanctions which forbade trade with Iraq created a booming market for loot from Iraq. The supervision of sites in Iraq improved somewhat in the late 1990s, but when Iraq was invaded in 2003 the National Museum was plundered and the looting of archaeological sites again gained pace. What could, and should, have been done by the US forces (apart from refraining from invading Iraq in the first place) to prevent the looting of the National Museum has been debated.²⁸ Yet, the fact remains that, ultimately, the looting of the museum must be seen in the context of the already existing western market for Iraqi antiquities, which had maintained a well-established looting industry and smuggling routes out of the country.

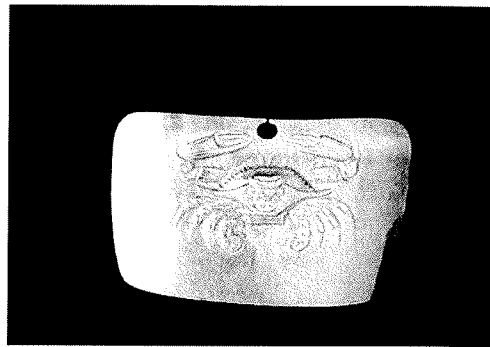
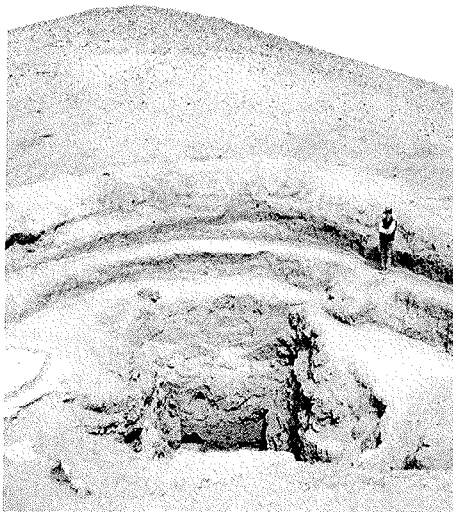
In other cases, the causes for poverty in a country or region may be sought in a wider geopolitical context. In Northern Peru, for example, the cultivation of cane sugar is an important source of income. During the 1980s and 1990s the price of cane sugar dropped rapidly – largely as a result of the deregulation of the world market prices for cane sugar – and looting of archaeological sites became an alternative source of income for many people.

The destruction of archaeological sites through looting may be a consequence of poverty. The preservation of archaeological sites may be a way of reducing poverty.

27 David Matsuda, above, note 2. Jerome Rose and Dolores Burke 'Making Money from Buried Treasure' (2004) 14 *Culture without Context* pp. 4-8 available at <<http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/culturewithoutcontext/issue14/rose-burke.htm>>; Kimbra Smith 'Looting and the Politics of Archaeological Knowledge in Northern Peru' (2005) 70 *Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology* pp. 149-170.

28 Neil Brodie 'Iraq's Archaeological Heritage and the London Antiquities Trade' in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb, above note 3, at pp. 209-210; on Iraq cf. Yannis Hamilakis 'Iraq, stewardship and "the Record": An Ethical Crisis for Archaeology' (2003) 3 *Public Archaeology* pp. 104-111; Hamilakis above, note 2 at pp. 30-32.

To continue the example of the situation in Northern Peru, the site of Sipán, is a good example of how an archaeological site may provide a long-term source of income. Here, in 1987, looters discovered a rich burial site with spectacular gold objects from the Moche period, but the looting was stopped and a rescue excavation started. Now, the neighbouring town where the finds from Sipán are on display attracts a steady stream of tourists who bring larger incomes to the regional economy than would have been gained by looting, although it must be acknowledged that the local population at the Sipán site benefits little from this money.²⁹



Above: Moche period nose ornament from La Mina, sold at Bruun Rasmussen, Denmark and Stockholms auktionsverk, Sweden.

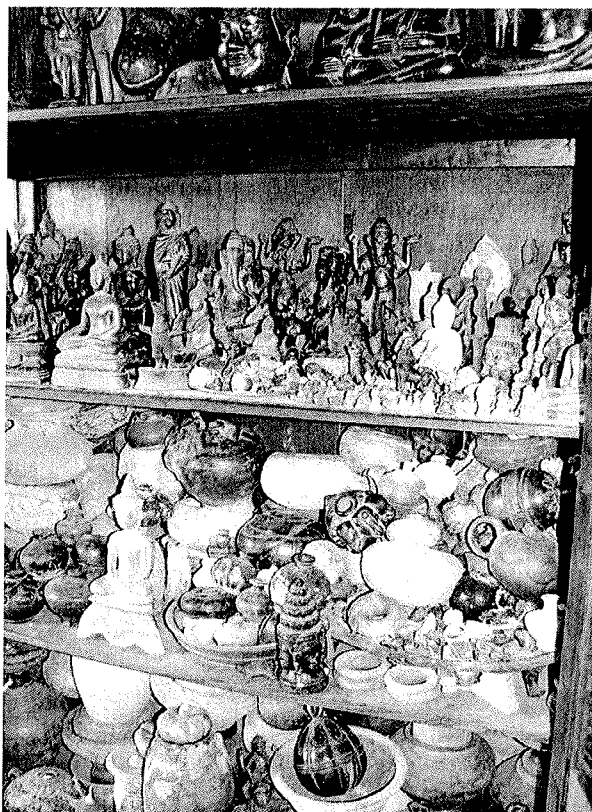
*Left: Looted tomb, La Mina, Northern Peru.
Photo: © Christopher Donnan*

The situation may be compared to the site in La Mina, also in Northern Peru, where a tomb, probably as rich as the one at Sipán, was thoroughly looted in 1988-1989.³⁰ All that remains at the site is the empty tomb, which, needless to say, is not a major tourist attraction. When the objects from La Mina turn up in auction sales in Denmark and Sweden they not only provide a reminder of a lost opportunity to gain knowledge of the ancient Moche society. They are also evidence of a lost chance to gain a sustainable source of income in a part in the world where it is desperately needed. The winners in this trade are the auction houses which gain a percentage from the sale of these objects. The losers are the population at La Mina. Looting is not only a consequence of poverty. In the long run, looting is also a cause of poverty.

Who then buys the loot? The collectors and end consumers of these objects range from persons who buy small inexpensive pieces – pottery, oil lamps and coins – at eBay auctions or perhaps from street vendors or at the local bazaars while

29 Neil Brodie, 'Introduction' in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb, above, note 3, at pp. 1-24.: 3-4, cf. Smith, above, note 25 at pp. 153-154.

30 Staffan Lundén, above note 6, pp. 197-247, at pp. 208-209.



Miscellaneous antiquities, including archaeological objects, for sale at the market in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Photo: Staffan Lundén

on vacation³¹ to those major private and institutional players who purchase objects worth thousands or millions of dollars at 5th Avenue in New York. The reason for wishing to possess archaeological objects may also vary – from the desire to have a souvenir from the vacation to ideas about being brought into communion with the past through the tactile sensation of holding a piece of the past in the hands. Archaeological objects may also be purchased for investment purposes. When advertising their merchandise, antiquities dealers often emphasise that antiquities are a good form of investment.³² Sometimes this assertion is made in a fashion which more or less explicitly informs potential buyers that the objects have an illegal origin. In a news letter from AntikWest, Sweden’s leading dealer in Chinese archaeological object, where ‘investment packages’ in the price range of

50-100 000 SEK are offered, together with deposit in a bank safe, it is pointed out that the prices of Chinese artefacts will probably rise because, among other factors, in China “the excavation sites are becoming better controlled”.³³ Apart from financial value it is often the – perceived – aesthetic qualities of the objects which motivate the collector, who purchases the objects to decorate her/his body or home. In their advertisements antiquities dealers sometimes describe finger rings, necklaces and other pieces of ancient jewellery as ‘wearable’ and point out that archaeological objects are suitable for interior decoration.³⁴ Interior design magazines – where the

31 Morag Kersel, ‘From the Ground to the Buyer. Market Analysis of the Trade in Illegal Antiquities’ in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb, above, note 3, at pp. 188-205.

32 See, for example, the home page of Royal-Athena Galleries <<http://www.royalathena.com/pages/intropages/ancientartasaninvestment.html>> above note 23 at pp. 70, 72.

33 *Unikt och Antikt. Nyhetsbrev från AntikWest* 10:1, 1992, pp. 3, 30.

34 Kathryn Walker Tubb and Neil Brodie ‘From Museum to Mantelpiece. The Antiquities Trade in the United Kingdom’ in Robert Layton, Peter Stone and Julian Thomas (eds) *Destruction and*

homes of the wealthy are shown as examples of good and refined taste for the lay readership – give some insights into how archaeological objects may be used for such purposes. In, for example, an article in *Architectural Digest the International Magazine for Interior Design* a “young dynamic family” in San Francisco express their “adventurous taste” through displaying an Apulian red figure volute crater in the bed chamber and a Han dynasty vessel in their entrance hall.³⁵



Apulian pot on display in a private home in San Francisco.

Photo: © Tim Street-Porter

Originally published in Architectural Digest: The International Magazine for Interior Design

Collectors may also be motivated by the feeling that by purchasing the object she, or he, (most often a he given how the distribution of wealth in the contemporary world is structured according to gender) has saved the object from destruction. Such feelings are enhanced when the collector donates objects to a museum and the museum in exchange expresses its gratitude through naming the donor in the text label accompanying the object or – in case of large donations – by naming a room, a gallery or the entire museum after the donor. Through these donor memorials, when the name of the donor is inscribed in golden letters above the doorway of an exhibition hall or on the facade of the museum, money is exchanged for social status, or, to put it in Bourdieuan terms, economic capital is transformed into social and cultural capital. The generation of vast fortunes is made possible by certain societal rules and structures. When museums celebrate the benevolence and taste of wealthy donors this functions not only to maintain and further the donors’ position within this class hierarchy. The message proclaimed – that society as a whole

Conservation of Cultural Property (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 102-116 at pp. 102-105.

35 Patricia Leigh Brown ‘Romance on Russian Hill’ (Feb. 2005) *Architectural Digest. The International Magazine for Interior Design* pp. 180-185, 249.

benefits from the acquisition of wealth in the hands of a plutocracy – also serves to uphold and legitimise the class structure of society.³⁶

This may be said to be a function of all art donations by the rich and wealthy – whether the donation is comprised of Impressionist paintings or looted Peruvian gold – but when it comes to the collecting and donation of looted archaeological material the notion that society owes *gratitude* to the those individuals – often labelled ‘philanthropists’ – who put money into the looting business becomes especially paradoxical. Also, when archaeological objects from all over the world – but mainly from third world countries – are gathered together and put on display in western museums with the implicit, or sometimes explicit, message that these objects would have been neglected, lost or destroyed in their countries of origin, but have now been saved for posterity by the museum where they can be seen and appreciated by ‘everyone’ (which in practice means those parts of the population on planet Earth which have the opportunity and financial resources to go to these western museums) this subtly serves to reinforce notions of the West as being more developed, peaceful and civilised than the rest of the world. These displays confirm a sense of western superiority and naturalises the global power structures which makes the accumulation of loot in western public and private collections possible.³⁷

The Cultural Heritage Professional and the Trade

What are then the roles and responsibilities of cultural heritage professionals in relation to the looting and collecting of loot? What should the cultural heritage professional do – and refrain from doing – to put restraints on the illicit antiquities trade and the looting it causes?

Unfortunately, academics and museum professionals have occasionally been involved in activities which have served to support the trade. As mentioned above, a number of prominent museums have been implicated in the acquisition of unprovenanced archaeological material. The problematic nature of such behaviour is especially clear when a museum purchases unprovenanced objects and thus injects money into the illicit trade and rewards dealers financially for dealing in objects of questionable origin. However, it is also the case that, when a museum accepts donations of unprovenanced objects, it signals an acceptance of the dealing in and collecting of loot. In such cases the museum often, as mentioned above, also rewards the donor socially. Furthermore, museum acquisitions may serve to increase the market value of particular categories

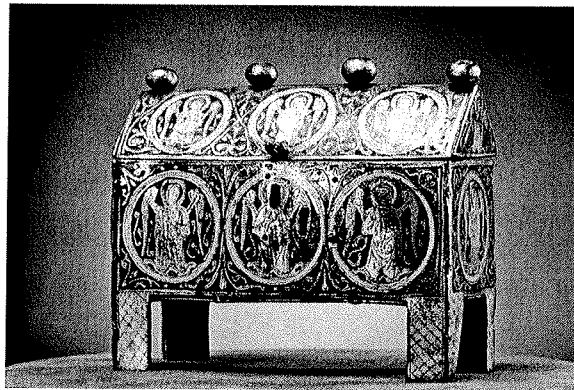
36 Carol Duncan *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

37 For the argument that the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects is beneficial to mankind and that the world’s self-declared ‘universal’ museums have the right and duty to continue acquire such objects, see Kate Fitz Gibbon (ed.) *Who owns the Past? Cultural Policy, Cultural Property and the Law* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); James Cuno *Who owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); James Cuno (ed.) *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

of objects, because an acquisition by a museum highlights the importance of this type of material amongst collectors. In the trade, the term ‘museum quality’ is reserved for the ‘best’ (that is, the most expensive) pieces, and dealers often indicate when objects similar to the ones they have for sale are represented in museum collections (or have been on temporary loan to museums). Thus, to encourage museums to acquire may be a deliberate market strategy.³⁸

The acquisition of unprovenanced objects is in violation of the ICOM Code of Ethics, which stipulates that museums should not acquire – by purchase, gift, loan or bequest – an object if it has been illegally exported from its country of origin, or if there is reasonable cause to believe that the recovery of the object “involved the unauthorized, unscientific or intentional damage of monuments, archaeological or geological sites”.³⁹ The only exception to this contained in the Code relates to material which originates from the territory over which the museum has lawful responsibility,⁴⁰ although, obviously, such acquisitions are not unproblematic from an ethical perspective as they may also encourage looting.

Most museums do not acquire archaeological objects from other countries and



Thirteenth-century reliquary in Limoges style. Stolen from Ullånger church, Northern Sweden in 1999. Purchased by Museo de Artes Decorativas, in Madrid.

The reliquary was returned to Ullånger in 2010 after lengthy negotiations.

Photo Björn Grankvist

38 Staffan Lundén, ‘Skriftsamlaren (The Manuscript Collector)’ (2006) 16 *Culture Without Context* pp. 3-11: 7 <<http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/culturewithoutcontext/issue16/lunden.htm>> at p. 7.

39 ICOM Code of Ethics (<<http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/code-of-ethics.html>>), para. 2.4.

40 *Ibid.*, para. 2.11.

therefore do not run the risk of supporting the trade through their own acquisitions in this way. However, museums may also lend their institutional credibility to the trade in other, more circuitous, ways. Therefore the ICOM Code of Ethics does not only regulate the museum's own acquisitions. The Code also has a general provision which stipulates that museum professionals "should not support the illicit traffic or market in natural and cultural property, directly or indirectly."⁴¹

The activities of Nordiska museet (the Nordic Museum) in Stockholm may be considered in the light of this paragraph. Nordiska Museet is one of Sweden's largest museums, dedicated to the preservation of and representation of *Swedish* cultural heritage. The museum is also responsible for the upkeep of the Swedish export regulation on furniture and other cultural objects. Since 2002 the museum has rented out its premises to the biannual antiquities fair 'Grand Antiques'. Among the dealers present at the fair were the above-mentioned gallery AntikWest which has a large assortment of unprovenanced archaeological objects from China and whose newsletter recommends such objects for investment purposes because the archaeological sites are becoming 'better controlled'. It is a remarkable, regrettable and paradoxical fact that the Nordiska Museet provides space on its premises for a dealer selling artefacts which may be assumed to have been looted in and smuggled out of China. Clearly, the museum gives the general public the impression that it is not opposed to a trade which causes the destruction of the cultural heritage abroad.

Examples such as this, where museums give an indirect authorisation of the trade, are not uncommon. The Armémuseum (the Army museum), another major Stockholm museum has had a showcase from a dealer selling archaeological objects from around Europe. The British Museum has – in a laudable way – criticised internet sites for selling unprovenanced 'British' archaeological objects, yet, the Museum's own magazine contains advertisements for dealers selling unprovenanced archaeological objects from all over the world.

Another way in which scholars may become involved in legitimising the trade is when they agree to research and publish recently surfaced unprovenanced archaeological objects. For this reason the *American Journal of Archaeology* does not accept articles which are the initial scholarly publication of objects whose known ownership history does not reach back beyond 1973, unless the article in question is aimed at discussing the illicit trade and loss of archaeological information caused by looting. The rationale for this prohibition is that scholarly publications of unprovenanced objects serves to give an air of respectability both to the particular object (an object which may be presumed to have been looted) and its owner (who possesses an object which may be presumed to have been looted) as well as the means by which the object has come on the market (looting) and the means by which its current owner has gained possession of it (purchase of a presumably looted object). The scholarly agreement with the trade which such publications signal is enhanced through the euphemisms and laudatory vocabulary typical for

41 *Ibid.*, para. 8.5.

this genre of publications. Academic articles and monographs of unprovenanced archaeological objects often contain prefaces where the scholar express her/his 'joy' at receiving the news that a particular objects has 'come to light' in the hands of a collector who through her/his 'passion' or 'love' has 'saved' and given an 'orphaned' object a 'home'.⁴² This, direct or indirect, praise of the buying and selling of unprovenanced archaeological objects is almost always accompanied by a noteworthy silence on the fact that the object in question may have been retrieved by means which have entailed the destruction of other objects (which may have been less valuable in monetary terms but perhaps equally valuable from a scientific standpoint) as well as the obliteration of a wealth of contextual information. Such silences may be linked to the fact that the scholar – through being granted the permission to study and publish the object by its 'owner' – has become indebted to and dependent on the goodwill of the owner. The scholar will thus have difficulty in criticising the trade in unprovenanced antiquities in general or the acquisition activities of the owner of the particular object. The alliances which are being forged between collectors and scholars in this way may also lead scholars in the public debate on the illicit trade to become, in effect, the spokespersons for the collectors 'right' to purchase and possess loot.⁴³

Archaeological Objects, Art and Heritage

The previous section sought to show the way in which cultural heritage professionals – regardless of their own reasons for undertaking certain actions (or refraining from taking action) – may serve to legitimise the trade. In the cases presented, cultural heritage professionals had acted in ways which, more or less clearly, contravened established codes for professional conduct. However, it is important to acknowledge that cultural heritage professionals are part of creating notions of the past and its material remains in ways which plays into the hands of the market in a much more indirect manner, without necessarily breaking any codes of ethics. Hamilakis⁴⁴ has noted, that there is reason to discuss not only *ethics* (limited to professional responsibility in a strict sense) put also *politics*, that is, the larger contemporary societal impact of 'the past' created by cultural heritage professionals. Following this line of thought this section will treat how the construction of 'art' and 'heritage' is linked to, and serves to naturalise, the illicit trade but also contributes to the reproduction of inequality as such.

Central to the conflict between those who wish to place restraints on the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects and those who support it are diverging opinions on what these objects 'are' and what constitutes their main 'value'. Cultural objects are interpreted within different regimes of value.⁴⁵ From the archaeological

42 Staffan Lundén, above, note 6 at p. 233.

43 Lundén, above, note 38.

44 Hamilakis, above, note 2.

45 Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value' in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge: Cambridge

perspective the value of an object resides in what information it may provide about the society in which it was produced. Hence, the object is only a part of a larger web of interlinked evidence which is provided by an archaeological excavation. For dealers and collectors, on the other hand, the main value of an object resides in its aesthetic qualities. Seen from this perspective it matters little whether the object's original findspot is known or not. The absence or presence of such knowledge does not affect the object's beauty.⁴⁶

However, despite the fundamental difference in the basic outlook regarding the concept of an 'object' between cultural heritage professionals on the one hand and the dealers and collectors on the other, it is noteworthy that when representing the past, cultural heritage professionals tend to present objects – verbally and visually – in ways which emphasise the aesthetic qualities of these objects. When archaeological objects are exhibited in permanent, or temporary, exhibitions in (art) museums under labels such ('The art of...' or 'Treasures from...') through display techniques where dramatic spotlight lighting enhance the objects' visual impact, this suggests certain readings and interpretations of these objects – past and present – meaning(s) and value(s). Such representations imply a universal aesthetic, that is, they convey the notion that these objects which are labelled 'art' today were also seen as art in the societies in which they were once produced and consumed, and that present-day aesthetic appreciation of these objects is, by and large, similar to ancient aesthetic appreciation of these objects.⁴⁷

However, a high degree of correspondence between past and present ways of seeing and valuing objects should not be assumed *a priori*. There is reason to give some consideration to the differences and similarities between past and present ways of accrediting aesthetic and pecuniary value to objects as it provides useful insights into the present-day social construction of esteem for ancient objects. Clearly, certain categories of ancient objects which today are valued highly (aesthetically and financially) were also cherished and treasured objects in the societies in which they were once created. Objects made of gold or silver would be one such category. The amount of labour required for the production of, for example, a gold or a silver bowl (where the extraction of the silver or gold ore may have been the most labour-intensive part) strongly indicates that such objects were very costly and mainly the prerogative of the wealthier strata in any ancient society. Also, part of their appeal in ancient times was through the daunting visual effect these objects had – although ancient silver was presumably often kept and appreciated in its black, tarnished state.⁴⁸ Likewise, in ancient Greek and Roman society, life-size

University Press) pp. 3-63 at p. 15.

- 46 David Gill and Christopher Chippindale, 'Material and Intellectual Consequences of Esteem for Cycladic Figures' (1993) 97 *American Journal of Archaeology* pp. 601-59; Staffan Lundén, above, note 6 at pp. 236-241.
- 47 Gill and Chippindale, above, note 37 at pp. 632-636.
- 48 David Gill and Michael Vickers 'They were Expendable. Greek Vases in the Etruscan Tomb' (1995) 97 *Revue des études anciennes* pp. 225-249 at pp. 237-238.

statues made of stone (often marble) were very costly and affordable for only very few people. As to these statues – today emblematic symbols of Classical Antiquity and an almost compulsory component of any contemporary representation of Greco-Roman society – it is clear that ancient and modern ways of viewing them differ. Modern aesthetic appreciation has celebrated the whiteness of the statues. Yet, in ancient times they were painted in bright colours.

Considering the prices which have in recent years been paid for looted silver treasure and stone statues (for example the fifteen-piece silver set looted at Morgantina (present day Aidone), Sicily and purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in 1981-82 for US\$ 2.7 million and the marble and limestone statue of a goddess also looted at Morgantina and purchased by the Paul Getty Museum in 1988 for US\$ 18 million – see the image above, page 110) it is possible to speak of a certain degree of similarity between ancient and modern expenditure patterns as to silver sets and stone statues. These objects were, and are, part of *élite* consumption.

Yet, in other cases there is little or no correspondence between modern and ancient pricing of artefacts and patterns of consumption. The Attic black and red figure pottery have since the eighteenth century been regarded as ‘high art’ – Winckelmann stated that the figures drawn on ancient pots were worthy a place in a drawing by Rafael – and considerable sums have been paid for these objects⁴⁹ with, as was noted above, a somewhat higher price level for the red figure pottery. Tellingly, when the Metropolitan Museum in 1972 paid US\$ 1 million for an Attic red-figure pot looted in Italy, the pot was compared to and the price equalled, that of a Monet painting which had recently been bought by the Museum.⁵⁰ The price paid was at the time the highest sum paid for any antiquity. Since then, similar, and larger sums, have been paid for Attic pottery. Interestingly, modern scholars have assumed that also in ancient times black and red pottery was held in high esteem, that the makers of these pots (today often referred to as ‘artists’ or ‘masters’) had a high social position in their societies and that the pottery trade was an important part of the ancient economy. This ceramocentric assumption may be seen as a consequence of, and has contributed to, the modern aesthetic judgment and pricing of these pots (usually referred to as ‘vases’ by those championing their importance in ancient society).

However, the prices inscribed on these pots suggest that they costed very little money in ancient times. The average price for a pot has been estimated to 5 *obols*, which was less than a day’s wage. Even the pots painted by those who today have been judged as the most accomplished ancient artists did not command higher prices. In fact, there appears to be no price difference between decorated and plain pottery. Thus, the evidence available suggests that in ancient Athenian society these pots were not prestigious goods part of elite expenditure, but rather that they were circulated lower down in the social hierarchy. When this type of

49 Nørskov, above, note 13 p. 5.

50 Watson and Todeschini, above, note 10.

pottery was deposited in Etruscan tombs, this was probably because these pots were expendable, not because they were extremely valuable. In these societies, the people who occupied the top of the social hierarchy used vessels in gold and silver, and it seems likely that the black glaze on the clay pots mimicked the tarnished black silver. Black- and red-figure pottery was not an independent artistic genre of 'high art' but one which had a set place in an ancient hierarchy of social, economic and artistic value, and in this hierarchy, pottery was placed quite some distance from the top.⁵¹

It is as trivial as it is important to note that modern western museums display objects according to modern western taxonomic categories and systems for judging aesthetic quality, but *present* these taxonomic categories and hierarchies of artistic value as universal and eternal. Contemporary art museums display what is today considered to be 'art'. The kind of 'artworks' typically exhibited in the major art museums include Renaissance and Impressionist paintings, Greek and Roman marble statues as well as ancient black- and red-figure pottery. In the galleries devoted to Greek and Roman art, the pots and marble statues are as a rule displayed together with no hint that according to *ancient* ways of seeing, marble statues and clay vases were miles apart on the social and financial scale.

One of the consequences of this mode of display – where the ancient price differences between clay pots and marble statues is glossed over – is not only that it misses an excellent opportunity to problematise the relation between contemporary and ancient modes of viewing 'art' and to discuss the past (and present) social function of 'art'. It also, most importantly, fails to recognise that the societies in which these 'art works' were made were highly stratified with vast differences in living conditions between those who occupied the top and those who occupied the base of the social pyramid. As such, the exhibition galleries provide a homogenising and idealistic image of 'Classical Antiquity' – an epoch which traditionally has been, and in some circles still is, considered as being the fundament of western civilisation.

Now, this example, of the way in which old clay pots through their transformation into highly esteemed art works have been incorporated into – and become an essential element in – a highly selective narrative about past societies (with certain implications for contemporary western self-understanding) is perhaps extreme in some of its peculiar details, yet not radically different from the way in which 'heritage' is generally constructed and used in the present.

Broadly speaking, that which is designated as 'heritage' in contemporary society is often made up of those tangible (or intangible) remains of the past which, from the

51 Gill and Vickers, above, note 48; Neil Brodie and Christina Luke 'Conclusion. The Social and Cultural Contexts of Collecting' in Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Walker Tubb, above, note 3 at pp. 309-310; Gill and Chippindale, above, note 25 at pp. 214-216; for an alternative view, see John Boardman *The History of Greek Vases. Potters, Painters and Pictures* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) at pp. 156-162.

dominant ideological perspective of today, are considered aesthetically pleasing, grand or monumental. These remains from the past are most often represented in ways which stress reading them and, by implication, the societies in which they came into being, in unifying and idealising ways, at the expense of alternative readings which could have stressed dissonance and conflict.

Yet, as Walter Benjamin has so poignantly remarked, there is reason to look at what we regard as ‘cultural treasures’ with less positive feelings, even with *horror*, because:

cultural treasures owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries.⁵²

Thus “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”. Benjamin also observes that the manner by which these ‘cultural treasures’ are transmitted from owner to owner is also tainted with barbarism.⁵³

What Benjamin points to is that many of the expressions of ‘high culture’ have been, and still are, the possessions of a privileged few, which have come into being through hierarchical and exploitative power relations, and that in many cases the current owners of these treasures have gained possession of them through exploiting these asymmetrical power relations to their advantage.

Benjamin’s ‘cultural treasures’ – the bits and pieces of the past which are usually regarded as constituting society’s ‘heritage’ – contain many different stories and narratives. Thus, heritage has no essence but rather acquires significance depending on the perspective from which it is seen. It takes on different meaning(s) depending on whether it is looked upon from the viewpoint of those who are placed at the upper reaches of the hierarchy and who benefit from this hierarchy, or from the viewpoint of those who are placed at its base, and who are the subjects of exploitation and domination. Yet, when ‘heritage’ is created today by cultural heritage institutions, it is generally seen through the lens of the privileged. This means that the darker sides of ‘our heritage’ or ‘our history’ contained in objects and monuments are generally passed over in silence. The ‘collective memory’ of society is thus a very selective one and not representative of all its members. For example, most exhibitions of ethnographical or archaeological objects originating from non-European countries fail to put the collecting of these objects into the wider context of western expansion and colonial domination which made the gathering together of these objects possible. Thus, the displays not only mute a less glorious side of the objects past, they also silence a darker aspect of the nation past.⁵⁴ Likewise, a

52 Michael Löwy *Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"* (London and New York: Verso, 2005) pp. 46-57.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Vem tillhör museernas samlingar?* (Svenska Uneskorådets skriftserie 3, 2008) at p. 22.

display of seventeenth-century silver coffee pots and sugar boxes would typically place these objects in an art-historical context and perhaps mention the name of the silversmiths who made the objects and the names of their past owners (including the name of the donor of the object to the museum), without a hint that the raw material for these precious objects was provided through slave labour in mines in South America, and that the sugar and coffee contained in the silverware were also produced by slaves. In a similar manner, when castles, mansions and other dwelling places of the elite are made into heritage sites, the interpretative material provided at these sites (guidebooks, audio guides etc.) usually tell only the story of those members of the elite for whom these houses were built. The story of those who actually built these houses and all those who maintained them and served the house-owners (with tasks which included pouring coffee from the silver coffee pots) is rarely told.⁵⁵

How does all this relate to the illicit antiquities trade? The trade cannot be seen outside the context of vastly unequal global power relations. This realisation might give rise to a feeling of despair among cultural heritage professionals. Changing the global structure might be beyond the reach and responsibility of the profession. Yet, the cultural heritage professional has responsibility for and influence over how 'heritage' and 'the past' are represented. Representations of the past, made from the perspective of the privileged, without acknowledgement that the perspective adopted is particular one, but which claims that the past is revealed in a neutral and objective way and where this past is portrayed as 'good', 'glorious', 'harmonious' and 'beautiful' while its darker and exploitative sides are glossed over, serve only to legitimise this privileged perspective and therefore also inequality and exploitation as such. By contrast, meaningful discussions about present-day injustices and social realities may be stimulated by representations of past which point to exploitation and power struggles in the past, and which also highlight that the past today is understood from a multitude of perspectives which resides in various present discursive contexts and power struggles. When making representations of the more recent past and its less glorious aspects, it is important to acknowledge connections and continuances between the past and present. As the Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, writing about the legacy of slavery, reminds us: "the Past often diverts us from the present injustices for which previous generations only set the foundations".⁵⁶ That cultural heritage professionals rarely engage in endeavors to present less sanitised versions of the past is related both to the fact that the individual heritage professional is caught up in an authorised heritage discourse⁵⁷ which has been, and still is, produced by those who occupy a dominant position in society and that the individual heritage professional by virtue of her or his profession has come to occupy a privileged position within society.

55 Cf. Laurajane Smith *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006) at pp.115-165.

56 Michel-Rolph Trouillot *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), at p. 150.

57 Smith, above, note 54.

This is not to say that the heritage discourse cannot be mobilised to resist authority.⁵⁸ Nor is it to say that attempts to destabilise traditional notions of art and heritage and give voice to alternative interpretations of the material remains of the past are entirely lacking. Such initiatives have been made, yet – noteworthy – often by individuals who, by virtue of their (ethnic etc.) identity are positioned on the margins of mainstream society. One interesting and inspiring example is the exhibition/art installation *Mining the Museum*, created by Fred Wilson, an artist of African-American descent. The aim of the exhibition was to give voice to (some of) the silenced histories embedded in museum collections.⁵⁹ Among the exhibits were a museum showcase containing silver vessels in ‘Baltimore repoussé style’ and slave shackles, also made in Baltimore. The showcase was labelled ‘Metal work 1793-1880’. Museums traditionally separate ‘art objects’ from ‘utilitarian objects’ and rarely display objects from these, seemingly distinctly separated spheres of human creativity together. In this installation the taxonomic distinction between ‘art’ and ‘non-art’ was blurred and showed that, in this case, refined ‘high culture’ and its material manifestations (silver vessels), cannot be detached from cruelty and violence and its material manifestations (slave shackles).⁶⁰

Another example, which has direct relevance to the topic of illicit trade and looting, is the exhibition *Spelet om Maya* (The Maya Game) shown at Historiska Museet in Stockholm (Museum of National Antiquities) in 2006-2008. This exhibition was produced by white museum curators but explicitly from a post-colonial perspective.⁶¹ In this exhibition, formed around a temporary loan of excavation material from Guatemala, an archaeological site and the objects discovered at this site were presented from different perspectives. The visitor to the exhibition saw the site and the artefacts from the view point of a number of fictitious characters occupying various positions in interlinked local, national and global hierarchies of class, ethnicity, age and gender. The characters included a middle-aged male Swedish archaeologist, a young female Guatemalan/Mayan archaeologist, a young female Swedish backpacker and new-ager, a middle-aged female, Guatemalan-Swedish photographer, a middle-aged male Guatemalan/Mayan fruit seller and looter, and a middle-aged female Swedish antiquities dealer. By showing the

58 Cf. Yannis Hamilakis and Eleana Yalouri ‘Antiquities as Symbolic Capital in Modern Greek Society’ (1996) *Antiquity* pp. 117-129; Yannis Hamilakis ‘The Other Parthenon. Antiquity and National Memory at Makronisos’ (2002) 20 *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* pp. 307-338.

59 Lisa Corrin (ed.) *Mining the Museum. An Installation by Fred Wilson*. (Baltimore & New York: The Contemporary & New Press, 1994), Fred Wilson ‘Mining the Museum’ in: Ågren, Per-Uno (ed.) *Museum 2000. Confirmation or Challenge?*. Stockholm: Riksställningar) pp. 121-126, at pp. 122-124.

60 For a likely influence by Fred Wilson in a museum text, see the following text on a sugar box in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: <<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/sugar-box-38487>>.

61 Tove Frambäck, *Spelet om Maya. En utställning om arkeologiska berättelser* (Stockholm: Historiska Museet, 2006), Fredrik Svanberg and Katty Wahlberg, *Publik arkeologi*. (Stockholm & Lund: Historiska Museet & Nordic Academic Press, 2007): 84, 90-92.

various interpretations these individuals made of the site and the different kinds of value (scientific, political, symbolic, economic, aesthetic etc.) they attached to the objects discovered there the exhibition pointed to how the past – in this case the ‘Mayan culture’ – is created for various purposes in the present and how conflicts over the ownership and interpretation of archaeological objects are part of a larger context of struggles over resources and power between various parties.

Hopefully such exhibitions will not only raise awareness about the illicit antiquities trade and archaeological site looting – and hence discourage the purchase of loot – but also encourage wider reflections on the global and local unfair distribution of power and resources as well as the role of history and heritage in maintaining or perhaps – through alternative readings – *challenging* these structures of domination.

To sum up, it is important to remind that there is no neutral way of representing ‘art’ or ‘heritage’ (or anything else). This insight should not lead to relativism nor to the conclusion that any representation of the past is as good or valid as the other. On the contrary, given the almost infinite numbers of possible pasts, it is especially important to scrutinise why certain pasts predominate and are seen as neutral and factual representations of a (singular) past. In this context it should be pointed out that attempts to make unbiased and objective representations of this past run the risk of conforming to, and confirming, the dominant societal discourse. Heritage is inherently political. In that sense, the heritage professional does not choose between political and non-political perspectives when producing statements and silences about the pasts. Ultimately, she or he chooses between which political perspective(s) to promote.⁶²

62 Cf. Yannis Hamilakis, above, note 2 at pp. 24, 32-37.