



# Themata 5 E-learning Archaeology, the Heritage Handbook





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# E-learning Archaeology

## the Heritage Handbook

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# Perspectives on looting, illicit antiquities trade, art and heritage *by Staffan Lundén*

→ **LU** Illicit trade, background and scale *by Staffan Lundén*

### sco Introduction

Today, all over the world, looters are pillaging archaeological sites at an alarming rate in search for objects which can be sold for money. The objects they find is sold as 'art' on the antiquities market and end up in private and public collections where they bestow 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, presumably the majority, of these objects have been recently looted, or recently manufactured. Thus, unprovenanced archaeological objects on the market must be considered to be loot (or fakes) until proven otherwise (Renfrew 2000: 11, 90; Muscarella 2000: 17). Looting (and the production of fakes) is ultimately generated by market demand – that is, by the dealers and collectors who buy and sell while turning a blind eye towards how the objects have come on the market and who deny that their willingness to continue purchasing these objects provides the incentive for the further destruction of the archaeological record. Poor and war-torn countries are especially badly affected by this 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.

### sco Introduction – General outline and aim of the module

This module about looting and the consumption of loot proceeds as follows. It begins with a presentation of a rough sketch of looting and the linked trade to give an indication of the pace of the destruction of archaeological sites generated by market demand. It then briefly attempts to discuss what

motivates 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 examines some of the cultural heritage professionals' responsibilities 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 has served to legitimise the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects. Secondly, it will discuss how cultural heritage professionals in a more general way may 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 text will lead to reflection, 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 a cultural heritage professional's own (privileged) position within society affects the knowledge about the past – and the present – which she or he produces. Thus the text wants to contribute to the debate about the relationship between the social construction of the cultural heritage professional and the social construction of cultural heritage.

### sco Introduction – What this module is not about

Thinking of perspectives and silences it is perhaps necessary to say something about how this module is focused and mention at least one of the many aspects which is not highlighted here. The point of departure in the module 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 looting. The text 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 archaeologists' concern to protect the 'archaeological record' has led to the point of them endorsing military aggression and have become insensitive to the suffering of human beings (Hamilakis 2007, cf. Matsuda 1998). Indeed, this aspect is especially relevant in relation to looting considering that – at least one – archaeologist has recommending killing looters to



protect archaeological sites (see discussion in Walker Tubb 2006: 296). 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.

> sco Exercise

#### **sco The scale of the destruction and the trade – Looting and thefts**

Due 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 has 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% of sites had been damaged by looting, 17% 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 (Brodie and Renfrew 2005: 346). A survey in Western Turkey inventoring 397 tumuli from the Lydian and Persian period showed that 357, or 90%, of these tumuli had been damaged by looting. A total of 72, or 18%, of the tumuli had been completely destroyed (Roosevelt and Luke 2006).

Looting also takes a heavy toll on the archaeological record in the wealthy parts of the world. 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 detectorists. 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 (Lundén 2004: 215, cf. Hennisius 2008).

#### **sco The scale of the destruction and the trade – The market: auction houses**

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 turn-over 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 (see the studies by Elia 2001,

Gilgan 2001, Nørskov 2002: 251-292, Davis 2006). A look what some of the major auction houses puts up for sale each year gives shows that large quantities of objects are sold for vast sums of money. At the twice-yearly antiquities sales at Bonham's (London), Christie's (London and New York) and Sotheby's (New York) around 10,000 objects are sold each year (Watson & Todeschini 2006: 94). The annual turnover at Sotheby's and Christie's auctions in New York is in the range of USD 20-30 million (Gill 2010).

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 the output of objects originating from these regions on the antiquities market. Further confirmation – if any 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 object. 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 continue their sales in New York (Watson 1998). Until fairly recently the majority of the objects sold at auction house sales lacked information on their provenance (Brodie, Doole, & Watson 2000: 26; Watson & Todeschini 2006: 330). 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 auction houses now have become reluctant to sell recently looted objects. However, the information provided is generally of such a nature that it is cannot be verified, and in some cases there is evidence to suggest that it is bogus (Gill 2011a).

It is not only the well-known international auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's which have been selling unprovenanced archaeological material on a regular basis. The Swedish major auction houses have been selling Chinese terracotta figurines for years and there is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that these come from recent illegal excavations in China and have been smuggled out of the country. In 1999 I asked representatives of these three auction houses if it was possible to consign objects which had recently smuggled out from China to their auctions. At both Stock-

holm'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 on the market (Lundén 2004: 202-203).

Also the major Danish auction houses Bruun Rasmussen, Ellekilde and Lauritz.com sell unprovenanced archaeological material. In 2007 I asked these auction houses the same question which I had earlier asked at the Swedish auction houses: if I could consign Chinese archaeological objects which had left China illegally to their auction. All three auction houses replied that they had no restrictions against selling recently smuggled objects (Aagard & Kaarsholm 2007).

#### **sco The scale of the destruction and the trade – A look at the invisible trade**

The glossy pages of auction catalogues provide worrying evidence of the destruction of the world's archaeological heritage. However, auction house sales probably only reveal a small fraction 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 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 pottery 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 finds its explanation in 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 more 'private' manner rather than passing through public auctions (Nørskov 2002: 270). Likewise, 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. However, 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, like the National Museum of Antiqui-

ties in Leiden which in 1997 purchased a piece of armour allegedly looted in Apulia. (Nørskov 2002: 291, van Beurden 2006, Scholten 2008). Moreover, Apulian tombs also contain large number of other objects including, for example Daunian ware pottery. Daunian ware does not appeal to the modern collector's eye and is thus less expensive than the Apulian Red figure pottery (Graepler 1993: 16, 23-30). Daunian ware is also rare at auctions. This reminds us that there are also objects in even lower price ranges which are sold in the market through less exclusive venues (internet sites etc).

The evidence which has been forthcoming 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 showed that he had about 17,000 objects in 27 different warehouses. The total market value of all these objects may be 500 million dollars (Watson & Todeschini 2006: 259, 316).

#### **sco The scale of the destruction and the trade – From tombs to museums**

Through these investigations it has also been possible to map out the objects' routes from looters to museum show cases and to show that 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 that these dealers had sold. Many of the objects were shown covered in dirt and incrustations and had presumably been taken shortly after they had been dug out by the looters. Medici's photographic archive also included pictures of Pompeii-style wall painting in situ before their removal. Other photographs showed the wall-paintings in their sorry state after they had been detached.

With the help of these photos, and other documents, a number of objects have been located in the possession of various museums, 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 Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, the Antikensammlung (Collection of Classical Antiquities) in Berlin, the Miho Museum in Japan and the National Museum of Archaeology

in Madrid. Embarrassed by the situation several us American museums have agreed to return about 130 objects to Italy and Greece (Gill & Chippindale 2007, Gill 2011b).

Document found during police raids. On the paper is a chart of how the trade is organized from looters in Italy, via dealers to museums and collectors. The name of several well-known dealers including Giacomo Medici, Gianfranco Becchina and Robert Hecht appear on the chart.

Investigations like this give a unique inside view into the trade, how it operates and the amount of destruction it generates. Part of the reason why this evidence is forthcoming about the trade in objects looted from Italian soil is that Italy, being a G8 country, has the resources to carry out this kind of huge police investigations which involves a wide range of expertise (legal, archaeological etc) and which take 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 like Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Peru, Syria, and Turkey etc. On the contrary, the glimpses we get from various cases suggest that the destruction and trade occurs in many places on a similar, if not larger, scale (cf. Watson & Todeschini 2006: 318). The Italian investigations might contribute to make the purchase of objects which are suspected, or known, to originate from Italy less attractive, but it might well be that dealers and collectors will instead turn their attention to objects originating from other countries with less capacity to investigate the looting and smuggling of archaeological objects and thus less capacity to take the purchasers of the loot to court.

#### > sco Exercise

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### → LU Illicit trade, background and scale by Staffan Lundén

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Useful information is available at these web sites/ mailing lists:

- Heritage Watch: <http://www.heritagewatchinternational.org/>
- Illicit Antiquities Research Centre: <http://www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk/projects/iarc/home.htm>
- Looting matters: <http://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/>
- Museum Security Network: <http://www.museum-security.org/>
- SAFE Saving Antiquities for Everyone: <http://www.savingantiquities.org/>

### → LU The social context of looting and consumption of loot by Staffan Lundén

#### sco Looters and collectors

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 larger local, national and global contexts. 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 discover 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 treasures. In the poor parts of the world looting – or subsistence digging – may be one of the few means available for survival, or for raising one's incomes slightly above a very meagre standard of living (Matsuda 1998, Rose & Burke 2004, Kimbra 2005).

#### sco Looting and poverty

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 regional and national levels is linked to external factors. This is especially clear in cases when economic deprivation and breakdown of civil society is or has been a consequence of warfare. For example, in Iraq the looting of archaeological sites was comparatively rare 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 invading Iraq in the first place) to prevent the looting of the National Museum has been debated (Brodie 2006b: 209-210, on Iraq cf. Hamilakis 2003, Hamilakis 2007: 30-32). 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.

Also 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 for 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. 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 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 (Brodie 2006a: 3-4, cf. Kimbra 2005: 153-154).

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. (Lundén 2004: 208-209). 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 on the auction sales in Denmark and Sweden they do 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 of 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.

#### **sco Collecting and wealth**

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 on vacation (Kersel 2006: 194) to those major private and institutional players who purchase objects worth thousands or millions of dollars on Fifth Avenue in New York. The motives for wanting to possess archaeological objects may also vary – from the wish to have a souvenir from a 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. While advertising their merchandise antiquities dealers often highlight that antiquities are a good source of investment (see for example the home page of Royal-Athena Galleries <http://www.royalathena.com/pages/intropages/ancientartasaninvestment.html> and Graepler & Mazzei 1993: 70, 72). Sometimes this is made in a fashion which more or less explicitly admits that the objects have an illegal origin. In a news letter from AntikWest, Sweden's leading dealer in Chinese archaeological objects, where 'investment packages' in the price range of 50-100 000 SEK are offered, together with deposition 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' (Unikt och Antikt 1992: 3, 30). 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 or his body or home. Advertisements for 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 (Walker Tubb and Brodie 2001: 102-105). Interior design magazines – where the 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 'the adventurous taste' through displaying an Apulian red figure volute crater in the bedchamber and a Han dynasty vessel in their entrance hall (Leigh Brown 2005).

#### **sco The role of museums**

The 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 are made possible by certain societal rules and structures. When museums celebrate the benevolence and taste of wealthy donors this does not only function to maintain and further the donors' position within this class hierarchy. The message proclaimed – that society as a whole benefits from the acquisition of wealth in the hands of a plutocracy – also serves to uphold and legitimise the class structure of society (Duncan 1995).

This may be said to be a function of all art donations by the rich and wealthy – whether the donation comprises Impressionist paintings or looted Peruvian gold – but when it comes to the collection 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 of 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. The 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 (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 Gibbon 2005, Cuno 2008, Cuno 2009).

> sco Exercise

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→ LU Looters and consumers by Staffan Lundén

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→ **LU** The cultural heritage professional and the illicit trade *by Staffan Lundén*

#### sco Professional collusion

What are then the roles and responsibilities of culture heritage professionals in relation to the looting and collecting of loot? What could, and should, the culture 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 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. But also when accepting donations of unprovenanced objects the museum signals acceptance of dealing in and collecting loot. In such cases, the museum often, as mentioned earlier, also rewards the donor socially. Furthermore, museum acquisitions may function to increase the market value of particular categories 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 point out 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 (Lundén 2006: 7).

#### sco Museum ethics

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 the object 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' (2.4). The only exception the Code makes from this role is for material which originates from the territory over which the museums has lawful responsibility (2.11) (<http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/code-of-ethics.html>) 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 therefore do not run the risk of supporting the trade through their own acquisitions in this way. Yet, museums may also lend their institutional credibility to the trade in other, more circumvented, ways. Therefore the ICOM Code of Ethics does not only regulate the museum's own acquisition. 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.' (8.5).

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 previously mentioned gallery AntikWest which has a large assortment of unprovenanced archaeological objects from China and whose newsletter recommend 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 and smuggled out of in China. Clearly, the museum gives the general public the impression that it is not opposed to a trade which causes the destruction of cultural heritage abroad.

Examples such as this, where museums give indirect authorisation of the trade may be multiplied. 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.

#### sco Publishing loot

Another way scholars may become involved in legitimising the trade is when they carry out research and publish on recently surfaced unprovenanced archaeological objects. For this reason the American Journal of Archaeology do 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 (a presumably looted object) and its owner (who possess a presumably looted object) 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 consent with the trade which such publications signal is enhanced through the euphemisms and laudatory vocabulary typical for this genre of publications. Academic articles and monographs of unprovenanced archaeological objects often contain prefaces where the scholar express her or his 'joy' of receiving the news that a particular objects has 'come to light' in the hands of a collector who through her or his 'passion' or 'love' has 'saved' and given an 'orphaned' object a 'home' (Lundén 2004, p. 233). This direct or indirect praise of the buying and selling of unprovenanced archaeological objects is almost always accompanied by a notably silence on the fact that the objects in question 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 idea 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 and thus would have difficulties 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 has also led to those scholars in the public debate on the illicit trade becoming in effect the spokespersons for the collectors 'right' to purchase and possess loot (Lundén 2006).

> **sco** Exercise

**sco** References

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→ **LU** The cultural heritage professional and the illicit trade *by Staffan Lundén*

**sco** Further reading

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→ **LU** Archaeological objects, art and heritage *by Staffan Lundén*

**sco** From ethics to politics

The previous section tried to show how culture heritage professionals – regardless of their own motives for undertaking certain actions (or refraining from taking action) – may serve to legitimise the trade. In the cases presented, culture heritage professionals had acted in ways which, more or less clearly, contravened established codes for professional conduct. However, it is important to acknowledge that culture heritage professionals contribute to creating notions of the past and its material remains in ways which play into the hands of the market in a much more indirect manner, without necessarily breaking any codes of ethics. Hamilakis (2007) 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 examine 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.

**sco** What is an object

Central to the conflict between those who wants to put restraints on the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects and those who support it is diverging opinions on what these objects 'are' and what constitutes their main 'value'. Cultural objects are interpreted within different regimes of value (Appadurai 1986: 15). From the archaeological 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, in contrast, the main value of an object resides its aesthetic qualities. Seen from this perspective it matters little whether the object's original find spot is known or not. The absence or presence of such knowledge does not affect the object's beauty (Gill and Chippindale 1993: 601-602, Lundén 2004: 236-241).

Yet, despite the fundamental difference in the basic outlook upon the concept of an 'object' between culture

heritage professionals on the one hand and the dealers and collectors on the other, it is noteworthy that when representing the past culture heritage professionals tend to present objects – verbally and visually – in ways which emphasise these objects’ aesthetic qualities. 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 which conveys 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 (Gill and Chippindale 1993: 632-636).

#### **sco Past and present ways of viewing and valuing objects**

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 object as it gives 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 needed 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 (Gill and Vickers 1995: 237-238). Likewise, in ancient Greek and Roman society, life size marble statues, were very costly and only affordable by 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 been paid recently for

looted silver treasure and marble statues (for example the fifteen-piece silver set looted at Morgantina, Sicily and purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in 1981-82 for USD 2.7 million and the marble Aphrodite statue also looted at Morgantina and purchased by the Paul Getty Museum in 1988 for USD 18 million) it is possible to speak of a certain degree of similarity between ancient and modern expenditure patterns in regards to silver sets and marble statues. These objects were, and are, part of elite consumption.

#### **sco Pots versus vases and the representation of the past**

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 18th century been regarded as ‘high art’ – Winckelmann stated that the figures drawn on ancient pots were worthy of a place in a drawing by Rafael – and considerable sums have been paid for these objects (Nørskov 2002: 5) with, as was noted above, a somewhat higher price level for the red figure pottery. Tellingly, when the Metropolitan Museum in 1972 paid 1 million us dollars for an Attic red figure pot looted in Italy, the pot was compared to and the price equalled that of a Monet painting the museum had recently bought (Watson 2006: x). 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 in ancient times black and red pottery was also 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 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 did cost 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. Not even the pots painted by those who today have been judged as the most accomplished ancient artists commanded higher prices. In fact, there seem to be no price difference between decorated and plain pottery. Thus, the evidence available suggest that in ancient Athenian society these pots were not prestigious goods that were acquired as part of elite expenditure, but rather that they were circulated lower down in the social hierarchy. When this type of 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 seem 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 far away from the top (Gill & Vickers 1995, Brodie & Luke 2006: 309-310, Gill & Chippindale 2007: 214-216, for an alternative view, see Boardman 2001: 156-162).

It is as trivial as it is important to note that modern Western museums display object 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 are glossed over – is not only that it misses an excellent opportunity to problematise the relationship 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 the living conditions between those who occupied the top and the base of the social pyramid. As such, the exhibition galleries provide a homogenising and idealising image of 'Classical Antiquity' – an epoch which traditionally has been, and in some circles still is, considered as being the foundation of Western civilisation.

#### so 'Our' sanitized heritage

Now, this example, of how 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 how 'heritage' is generally constructed and used in the present.

Broadly speaking, what is designated as 'heritage' in contemporary society are often those tangible (or intangible)

remains of the past which, from the dominant ideological perspective of today, are considered aesthetically pleasing, grand or monumental. These remains from the past are most often presented 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 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.' Thus 'there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'. Benjamin also observed that the manner by which these 'cultural treasures' are transmitted from owner to owner is also tainted with barbarism (Löwy 2005:46-57).

What Benjamin points out 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 which perspective it is seen from. 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 benefits from this hierarchy or from the viewpoint of those who are placed at its bottom and who are the subjects of exploitation and domination. Yet, when 'heritage' is created today by cultural heritage institutions it is generally seen as 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 larger 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's past (Vem tillhör museernas samlingar? 2008: 22). Likewise, a display of 17th 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 was 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 only tell 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 (cf. Smith 2006: 115-165).

#### **sco Representation and privilege**

How does all this relate to the illicit antiquities trade? The trade cannot be seen outside the context of vastly unequal global (and local) power relations. This realisation might give rise to a feeling of despair among culture heritage professionals. Changing the global structure might be beyond the reach and responsibility of the profession. Yet, the culture heritage professional has responsibility for and influence over how 'heritage' and 'the past' is represented. Representations of the past, made from the perspective of the privileged, without acknowledgement that the perspective adopted is particular one, but which pretends 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 only serve 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 is understood today from a multitude of perspectives which reside in various present discursive contexts and power struggles. When making representations of more recent pasts 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' (1995: 150). That culture heritage professionals rarely engage in endeavours to present less sanitised versions of the past is related both to the fact that the individual heritage professional is caught up in an author-

ised heritage discourse (Smith 2006) which has been, and still is, produced by those who occupy a dominant position in society but also to that the individual heritage professional by virtue of her or his profession has come to occupy a privileged position within society.

#### **sco De-sanitizing art and making pluralized representations of the past**

This is not to say that the heritage discourse cannot be mobilised to resist authority (cf. Hamilakis & Yalouri 1996, Hamilakis 2002). 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 – notably – 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 (Corrin 1994, Wilson 2002: 122-124). 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). (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>).

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 (Frambäck 2006, Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007: 84, 90-92). In this exhibition, which was 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 viewpoint of a number of fictitious characters occupying various positions in interlinked local, national and global



hierarchies of class, ethnicity 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 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 and 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 remember that there is no neutral way of presenting ‘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 (cf. Hamilakis 2007: 24, 32-37).

#### > sco Exercises

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