



● Corrupt Operations

| A Look into Antiquity Theft by Professional Institutions

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The theft of knowledge is one of the greatest crimes against humanity. When we recognize looters as grimy money mongers, we become detached because we have no knowledge about them. However, when we come to the realization that our beloved professional institutions are the perpetrators, we feel betrayed; these people are supposed to be the protectors of antiquity, not the thieves. This notion has been understood to a certain extent by legislation, but archaeologists can only do so much—it has largely been the duty of the public to widen the realization of this problem and spread the knowledge. As an archaeologist in training, and certainly a member of the general public, I understand that I must uphold my duties in both of these respects. This project will broaden the understanding of the corruption dealt by professional institutions in terms of looting antiquities. I will achieve this by analyzing these injustices, identifying actions taken by legislation, and recognizing actions taken by the archaeological community, as well as the public.

The injustices dealt by museums entail the acquisition of antiquities to enhance the pres-

tige of the institution. These antiquities range anywhere from paintings to pottery. Roger Atwood, a tour guide at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, relays, “In the last couple of years, U.S. art museums are [...] the market for undocumented antiquities” (2008: 18). This statement shows how aspects of antiquity theft have expanded within recent years, since art museums provide both a large variety of artifacts and a cultural appeal that continues to flourish in America's diverse population. In an attempt to gain prestige, “[One] British museum allowed a collection of Gandharan antiquities to be displayed [...] The actual owner of the collection was never identified by more than the mysterious initials ‘A.I.C.’” (Brodie and Gill 2003: 41). Actions like these are taken not even in the most desperate measures; anything that can be construed as unique to set their institution apart from other museums will be used. Brodie and Gill and Atwood actually mention the same exact event as a prime example of injustice by professional institutions. Brodie and Gill state, “the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired an Athenian red-figured wine-mixing bowl. [It is] not clear where this ob-

ject was found" (2003: 32). Atwood witnessed this first hand as a tour guide: "one piece on my Boston tour was a red Apulian amphora that had no information on its exact origin and had been acquired in the early 1990s--a time of rampant grave-robbing in southern Italy" (2008: 18). Both accounts display the museum as having custody of this artifact with no credibility as to how it became in possession of it. This was displayed regardless. Why? Again, it comes down to enhancing the prestige of the institution. The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) has established certain guidelines, but "a few curators have argued that they go too far" (Rose 2008: 4). These claims only make curators suspicious of illegal activity, and rightly so, as curators are in a chief position, with the authority and façade of credibility.

Often times, the heads of the seemingly professional institutions are the perpetrators of these crimes. In an article by Eliza Gallo, she relays that the former director, Patrick Houlihan, of the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles was, "convicted of illegally trading and selling some \$2.3 million worth of museum artifacts during his tenure from 1981 to 1987" (1993: 22). How exactly did he do this? By stealing from his own institution, using the authorization and credibility that he had built for himself; therefore, no one was suspicious of his actions. Such was the case with the country of Turkey in that it "claimed that it was illegally excavated by [...] Carl Humann and smuggled to Berlin between 1868 and 1878" (Rose and Acar 1995: 56). It is apparent that greed is not restricted by any cultural sense, as professional institutions are, and have been, doing this worldwide. Not only are the curators committing crimes in the sense of actual theft, but also "some professionals sell their expertise on the market" (Brodie and Gill 2003: 39). The

expertise they are soliciting is the determination of which looted items are fakes and which are not; they do this when canoodling with private collectors or when they intend to place the items in their own institutions. However, the money obtained is not always solely spent by the curator themselves: "some use the money obtained from providing a commercial service to support academic research for which there would be no other source of funding" (Brodie and Gill 2003: 39); this was also the case with Patrick Houlihan in that "he said that his covert dispersal of the collection was an attempt to raise the necessary funds. Most of the proceeds from his illicit activity did in fact go to the museum" (Gallo 1993: 22). Even so, this is paradoxical because these actions cancel each other out. One cannot commit a crime that one is seemingly trying to hinder the furthering of, even if it does help one's institution.

In addressing these injustices, it is necessary to look at what the professional institutions are saying. Atwood addresses this by commenting on the book *Who Owns Antiquity?* by James Cuno, president and director of the Art Institute of Chicago: "Cuno recommends bringing back partage, a system by which objects excavated in archaeological digs were divided between the country of origin's cultural authority (usually its national museum) and the archaeologist's home institution" (2008: 18). What would be the sense of bringing this ideal back if it failed in the first place? James Cuno is within the inner circle of museum officials and is hungry for antiquities; therefore, his words are questionable. The system failed for this reason: the museums sought to build their own collections and deprave the original countries of their fair share. Cuno goes on to say, "If undocumented antiquities are the result of looted (and thus destroyed) archaeo-

logical sites, that there is still a market for them anywhere is a problem. Keeping them from the U.S. art museums is not a solution, only a diversion" (Atwood 2008: 18). This statement, as surprising as it is to come out of someone's mouth with this amount of credibility, adds justification to the corruption of professional institutions. Furthermore, it is important to analyze the extent of these injustices, but the ones who should really be looking at them are the heads of legislation... that is, unless they are in on the schemes as well.

Legislation, undoubtedly, has the most power when dealing with the issue of professional institutions looting antiquities. It is the duty of the government to bring these perpetrators to justice. In doing so, there are consequences that have come about as a direct result of the infamous UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) meeting, and then there are actions that legislation has taken otherwise.

UNESCO

Setting up acts, although not necessarily reinforced, at least places rules that these professional institutions are meant to abide by. In 1970, delegates gathered to "draft the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" (Atwood 2008: 18). This was perhaps the first gathering of governments in an attempt to fight this international issue. In accordance,

[The AAMD] has established guidelines for buying artifacts that incorporate many principles long advocated by the AIA [Archaeological Institute of America][...]The AAMD has now accepted 1970--the date of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Property--as a cut off date. The guidelines state that artifacts removed from their likely countries of

origin after 1970 can be acquired only if they have legal export documents. (Rose 2008: 4) These rules were only very recently recognized in 2008, almost forty years after the original convention took place. Personally, I believe this is an outrage to have 1970 as the cut off date. What is their reasoning--because this is simply when the main convention took place? Who is to account for the antiquities looted, most prominently during past wartimes, at times of ideal action? In fact, it was only "the Hague Convention of 1954 [that] resulted from long-standing international efforts to protect cultural heritage in times of war" (Little 2007: 73-74). These "efforts" obviously did not halt the red amphora lamp incident previously mentioned, which occurred in the early 1990s, and did not bring punishment to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Even though "the [UNESCO] convention's basic enforcement mechanism was codified in U.S. law under the Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983 and signed by President Ronald Reagan" (Atwood 2008: 18), this has apparently not stopped professional institutions from committing these acts. Angela M.H. Schuster, co-editor of *The Looting of the Iraq Museum*, states, "although it is believed that the UNESCO Convention has curbed much of the looting of large-scale antiquities like temple fragments and statuary, the most effective controls have come as a result of import bans that went into effect under the convention on specific artifacts from 'specific areas'" (2005: 11). This I understand, but I feel as though this is an attempt to dodge dealings with the past and legal matters because legislation realizes that these injustices have gone on mostly and far before 1970; much like, although not as extreme as, the pardoning of Nixon, they don't want to have to invest the time and effort to deal with the issue.

Other Actions of Legislation

It has generally been the smalltime actions that have caused the most impact (i.e. bans, codes and regulations). In the United States, "the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, for example, run sting operations to catch traffickers in illegally acquired artifacts" (Little 2007: 71). As the United States' museums are famously known for their looting, they have tightened regulations in regard to this. In accordance with the International Council of Museums, "the guidelines stipulate that for a museum to acquire any object [...] the institutions governing body must be able to obtain valid title to the object" (Schuster 2005: 13). These guidelines make the honest effort to restrict illegal museum dealings, but it was apparent that more than guidelines were needed to deal with these happenings. As Schuster states, "significant measures to amend museum acquisition policies have already been taken with the adoption of the Code of Professional Ethics by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1986" (2005: 13). Perhaps a change from this is apparent as this was around the time that the looting committed by Patrick Houlihan was halted; it should be noted that these dealings are international and not solely concentrated on the corruptions of America.

This issue has been recognized not only by ICOM, but also, as is apparent with UNESCO, the United Nations as well. As Schuster states, however, "although Resolution 1546, adopted by the United Nations Security Council on June 8, 2004, further stressed the need for site protection, it unfortunately ranks low on the list of priorities in reestablishing the country" (2005: 10-11). As I previously expressed, countries hold this issue with rather low concern, but perhaps we should move this more to the forefront as our history is being stolen from us along with these material

possessions--especially when men like Cuno are trying to defer the public from such notions as saying these laws are, "nationalist retention cultural property laws [with] an outcome of [what is called] chauvinistic nationalism that has infected governments" (Atwood 2008: 18). When stated by a "professional" in the field, it is hard to fathom that the laws could be considered as having a sense of superiority when they are, in fact, trying to halt this within the museums. This oxymoronic statement justifies, all the more, the illogical notions of professional institutions. And in the end, legislation does win out sometimes, such as with the verdict of Patrick Houlihan: "[he] was sentenced to 120 days in the Los Angeles County Jail, five years' probation, and 1,000 hours of community service unrelated to art, anthropology, or Southwestern cultures. He was also ordered to pay the museum \$70,000 in restitution and to help it locate the artifacts" (Gallo 1993: 22). Let it be known that sometimes, though not always, these professional perpetrators are brought to justice. Furthermore, not only the main legislation, but legislations on all levels are trying to bring back stolen history: "In a show of popular support the mayor of modern Pergamon (Bergama) collected 15 million signatures asking for its [an altar's] return" (Rose and Acar 1995: 56). With this display, hope and optimism are given to smaller communities of archaeological supporters that they too can make a difference. Despite what has been accomplished by legislation, it has often been the support of the archaeological community which has taken actions against professional institutions. A 1990 television documentary called *The African King* "exposed the trade in looted Malian terra-cottas and highlighted the role played by Oxford University's Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, whose thermolumines-

cence laboratory routinely authenticated material" (Brodie and Gill 2003: 39). This program caused uproar within the academic community, and actually caused Oxford University to defer from any further actions regarding this. Little talks about the importance of private foundations in achieving justice: "[organizations] remove sites from the marketplace to reduce the likelihood of looting [...] The Archaeological Conservancy as a private foundation protects sites by purchasing them" (2007: 71). Establishing organizations like these not only gives the public an optimistic outlook, but also tells legislation, as well as the perpetrators, that people care about saving our history. In commenting about his tours, Atwood states, "one goal of these tours (which were organized by the group Saving Antiquities for Everyone) was to puncture the smug arrogance with which museums had passed themselves off as custodians of the past" (2008: 18). In saving antiquities, organizations like these are set up for everyone, as the past belongs to everyone, not just professional institutions. When appealing to the interests of the public, "one response of the archaeological community has been to stop study and publication of material that has no verifiable provenance [...] American journals [...] in 1978 and [...] in 1991 decided to stop publication of papers that deal with looted or illegally exported material" (Brodie and Gill 2003: 39). In this sense, the archaeological community attempted to halt publicity of these actions, but at the same time, these crimes need to be known. Oftentimes, the archaeological community is set up to speak for the public, but sometimes, they are strong enough to speak for themselves.

The public supports private organizations of the archaeological community with high gratitude, but the greater populace has been successful when they've worked together as well.

Little relays that there must be, "public outreach and encouragement of public stewardship [as] another tactic for preservation" (73). As the public becomes more educated and aware that these injustices are taking place, this raises the hopes that they will become more involved. These efforts are ongoing, Atwood relays: "people all over the world battle daily against the illicit antiquities trade, and some are seeing modest success [...] aerial surveillance in Italy, National Park Service rangers in Colorado, and rural citizens' patrols in Mali and Peru" (2008: 18). An international effort is being taken by various supporters of archaeological conservancy and they are constantly providing applications with which to be used in the future. This increasing amount of public involvement makes the archaeological community optimistic that their feelings will be emitted to legislation in hopes of coming to some sort of resolution.

The corruption of professional institutions is something that has to be recognized by legislation and the public, not just the archaeological community. But, as their understandings are being broadened, one idea, contrary to common thought, must be erased: it is true that museums can provide us with a wealth of information when properly excavated and displayed, but "information has been forcibly stripped from the pot without context in the saleroom showcase, which remains only as a sop to contemporary notions of beauty and value, and everyone is the poorer of it" (Brodie and Gill 2003: 35). Everyone is the poorer of it. There is no sense in trying to obtain knowledge from an object that has been tainted. Atwood makes a nice metaphorical statement when speaking about the implications of these actions: "the information given by a prisoner while he is being tortured is unreliable. So is the information given by a looted antiquity;

it has been wrenched from its archaeological context and stripped of its basic history" (2008: 18). Looted antiquities rob everyone of not only our history, but also our knowledge, which could be used for future generations to come. As the title of Atwood's article raises the question of museums being the guardians of antiquity, I believe enough evidence has been shown to prove otherwise.

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