History Lost
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Preface
by the President of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture
Professor Georgios Babiniotis

Anemon Productions, the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre of the University of Cambridge, the Cyprus Department of Antiquities and the 37th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Corinth have undertaken an important initiative:

They have compiled a systematic history of the evolution of the meaning and practice of collecting artworks and remains of the past, which clearly reveals the factors that encourage the illicit movement of antiquities and monumental remains – that is, antiquities theft.

They have recorded the most important cases of the illicit trade in artworks, which reveal the extent of this phenomenon and the well-organised, dark routes followed by it as well as the incalculable damage caused to our cultural heritage by the illegal demand for and distribution of antiquities.

On the basis of this evidence, they have compiled a brief, easily understood, and instructive illustrated exhibition, that throws into tragic relief the great loss inflicted on our society by the illicit trade in antiquities and artworks. The title of the exhibition, "History Lost", is characteristic. Works of art that are removed from the place in which they were found, and which circulate without any documentation linking them to the place and time of their creation, or – worse still – circulate with misleading evidence in order to conceal their illegal origins, cease to be historically documented and are reduced to the level of mere artefacts: that is, they lose their historical value, their most important content, which may be used to reconstitute history and lay the foundations for man’s self-knowledge.

They have enriched the exhibition with interactive games (created by professors and students in the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication of the University of the Aegean) in which the messages regarding the illicit antiquities trade are transmitted easily and pleasantly to the children – our hope for a better society.

This exceptionally fine exhibition, created by Anemon Productions, has been presented in Cyprus and Greece with great success, and has met with great public response. The Hellenic Foundation for Culture feels that the exhibition is not of concern solely to the countries of origin of the illegally traded artifacts. It considers it to be a contribution to the international community, because illegally traded objects come from all countries, antiquities theft is encouraged at an international level, and the loss of historical knowledge affects all peoples and the whole of mankind. It has therefore taken the initiative of presenting the exhibition in various cities outside Greece, in the certainty that this will help to develop a climate in which the illicit trade in antiquities and artworks will be socially stigmatised, a climate that is fortunately being formed at an international level in recent years.

Athens, 2007
And although the disputed acquisitions made by large museums have been widely criticized, looting in the Mediterranean, Africa, Asia and Latin America has become more destructive due to the rise of art market prices.

Taking these developments into account, "History Lost" has adopted a more global perspective and examines the problem of the illicit trade of antiquities in its international dimension, presenting examples from all over the world, from Cambodia and Iraq to Africa and Latin America.

The creation of the exhibition "History Lost" was a challenging initiative, since state authorities in Greece and Cyprus had shown great reluctance to discuss the question of looting and the illegal trade of antiquities in the past: a reluctance shared by almost all countries with a rich cultural heritage but an inadequate state organisation and insufficient financial resources to promote and protect this heritage.

This deficiency has been exploited by museums in the West and private collectors spending large sums of money on the acquisition of new antiquities. This, in turn, is inextricably linked to the looting of antiquities and the destruction of historical evidence.

Many important antiquities from the Mediterranean, discovered in clandestine digs over the last thirty years in Italy, Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, made their first appearance in new large private collections. These have been displayed, borrowed or bought by museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Karlsruhe Museum, and others.

In this effort, the contribution of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre of the University of Cambridge and its director, archaeologist Neil Brodie, was of decisive importance: the Centre had the experience and prestige to present the problem in its international context and was able to adopt a more critical stance towards eminent museums in the West and private collectors.
The highlighting of the global dimension of the illicit trade of antiquities reinforced the basic message of the exhibition and enabled it to distance itself from views that treat cultural heritage as a national or local issue.

Over 100 professionals working in archaeology, history, ethnology, museums and the new multimedia technologies, in Europe and the rest of the world were actively involved in the creation of the exhibition.

“History Lost” has been designed in such a way as to enable visitors to discover the subject through a variety of different levels and applications (texts, photographs, maps, documentary videos and interactive games). The exhibition presents:

- the extent of the illicit trade of antiquities today
- the development of the trade in antiquities from the 16th century to the present
- the significance of the provenance of antiquities and the preservation of their historical value.

Other important contributors to the exhibition were the Cyprus Department of Antiquities and the 37th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Corinth who participated actively in all stages of production. Furthermore, the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication of the University of the Aegean created two interactive games and an interactive map revealing the extent of looting in over forty countries and areas around the world.
Also significant was the contribution of the 17th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Pella, and of journalist Peter Watson, who collaborates with the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre.

Finally, the exhibition was supported by distinguished Greek archaeologists Alexandros Mantis and Yiannis Sakellarakis.

To date, over 40,000 visitors from all over the world have seen “History Lost”, which takes us on a journey from the creation of the Louvre, the British Museum and the Metropolitan, to the looting of the archaeological museum in Baghdad and the sale of stolen antiquities from Greece to auction houses in the USA.

The exhibition was created with the support of the CULTURE 2000 Programme of the European Union and was included in its annual catalogue of the most successful projects for the period 2006-7. It has been hosted by the Cyprus Archaeological Museum in Nicosia (June - August 2006), the Benaki Museum in Athens (September - October 2006) and the Archaeological Museum of Nemea (October 2006 - May 2007).

An outstanding event which accompanied the exhibition was held at the Benaki Museum in October 2006, when British archaeologist Professor Lord Renfrew (founder of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre) gave a talk entitled “Looting the Past (Αρχαιολογικά): from Desecrated Tombs to International Museums”. In this he stated that “the public should distinguish clearly between collectors and museums with sound ethical policies and those less responsible museums whose purchases fuel the ongoing looting of the world’s heritage”.

Recognition of the international scope of the exhibition was further confirmed by the initiative of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture to organise the presentation of the exhibition in cities around Europe and the USA during the period 2007-08, including Trieste (Castello di San Giusto, October 2007) and Lisbon (National Museum of Archaeology, January 2008).
History Lost

The removal of the Parthenon Marbles by Lord Elgin, in 1801, is famous. What is less well known is the extent of the looting of archaeological sites around the world today, and that the majority of antiquities which appear for sale on the art market have been illegally dug and smuggled out of their country of origin. In contrast to the “Elgin” Marbles, the context and provenance of these objects will never be known. We will never know why they were created and what they have to say about our past. Taken out of context, they have lost their historical value. The looting of ancient sites for commercial gain has become the most serious threat to the world’s cultural heritage.
The origins of modern museums are to be found in the royal collections that were assembled in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. At first, these collections were not specialized in any way, but were intended to gather together and display exotic and unusual objects. However, by the eighteenth century, the structure and purpose of these early collections had changed, largely due to the impact of the Enlightenment.

Art collections began to be differentiated from other collections and by the end of the eighteenth century the argument that works of art might stand apart from other natural and artificial objects had prevailed. There was, it was thought, an ideal of beauty that had been realised in the classical statuary of Greece and Rome and the painting of the Italian High Renaissance. It was further argued that a developed aesthetic sense, an ability to appreciate beauty, was a mark of civilization.

The First Collections

The “cabinet of curiosities” of Danish medical doctor Ole Worm (1653) was a bizarre assortment of objects, mixing exotic natural history specimens with antiquities.

The “cabinet of curiosities” of Marquis Ferdinando Cesi (1600-1688) in Bologna, Italy.

The “cabinet of curiosities” of Henry Blundell assembled the largest collection of antiquities in Britain. In 1802, he built a reproduction of the famous Pantheon next to his house north of Liverpool, in which he housed his collection of classical statues.

The Louvre

A critical moment for the developing view of art history was in 1793 when the new revolutionary government of France took the ex-king’s art collection into public ownership and put it on display at the Louvre. The collection was arranged into schools and periods. By 1810, the Louvre had been enriched by Napoleon’s plunder, and it was possible to view sculpture and paintings that illustrated the history and development of European art from its very beginnings in ancient Egypt and Greece. Thus, in the first art museums, Mediterranean antiquities were regarded as works of art, whereas African and American antiquities were classified simply as artifacts.
Antiquities and International Politics

Antiquities first started to be collected as art during the Renaissance, when aristocrats and princes were encouraged to own exquisite classical sculpture. By the eighteenth century, it was a necessary part of any northern European aristocrat’s education to undertake the “Grand Tour”, a pilgrimage to Italy to see the remains of classical antiquity at first hand and hopefully to return home with a collection of antiquities to decorate their great houses. Etruscan and other ancient cemeteries in Italy began to be plundered for their vases. By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, collecting antiquities had become an extension of foreign policy. As the Ottoman Empire started to break apart, Britain and France struggled for ascendency and succession in Greece and Egypt, and their international rivalry later spread to Mesopotamia.

The Elgin Marbles and the Spoliation of Monuments

In 1801, the British navy started transporting the Athenian Parthenon sculptures that had been obtained by Lord Elgin, the British Ambassador to Constantinople. He sold them to the British Museum in 1816. The pediments of the temple of Aphaia were transported to the Glyptothek of Munich, the sculptures from the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus to the British Museum, and the sculptures from the great Assyrian palaces and the Code of Hammurabi to the Louvre.
The tension between these two ways of viewing antiquities— as objects of art or as objects of historical knowledge— has persisted until the present day. And although the two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive, the blind pursuit of antiquities for their artistic qualities alone has entailed the destruction of archaeological sites around the world. This destruction has in turn caused the widespread loss of contextual information that might otherwise have been recovered through systematic excavation and recording. It is this contextual information, now lost through looting, that is necessary for a proper understanding of the historical importance of any antiquity.

**Two Ways to Approach Antiquities**

By the end of the eighteenth century, it had been realised that if specific archaeological sites were carefully excavated and the excavations properly recorded, then the information so obtained could be used to reconstruct history. In 1819, the Danish archaeologist, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, designed a new museum in Copenhagen which arranged prehistoric antiquities in the chronological order of Stone Age – Bronze Age – Iron Age. He had worked out this succession of antiquities from the contexts of their discovery and details of their decoration. He was then also able to speculate about what life would have been like in those different times. The historical perspective of Thomsen’s new museum in Copenhagen differed from the artistic perspective of the Louvre.

**The Museum of Copenhagen**

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**21st Century**

In 2019, the British Museum opened its new ‘Making the Modern World’ exhibition, which traced the development of modernity from the late eighteenth century to the present day. The exhibition included a section on early modern Europe, which explored the ways in which people in this period interacted with the past through the collection and display of ancient and medieval objects. This section included a reconstruction of the famous ‘Museo Pio-Clementino’, a museum in Rome that was opened in 1772 and is now part of the Vatican Museums.

**The Museum of Rome**

In 1772, Pope Clement XIV established the ‘Museo Pio-Clementino’, a museum in Rome that was opened to the public in 1774. The museum was named after Pope Pius VI and featured a collection of ancient and medieval objects that had been acquired by the Papal States. The museum quickly became one of the most important and popular museums in Europe, attracting visitors from all over the world. In the 18th century, the museum was expanded and new sections were added, including a collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts. Today, the ‘Museo Pio-Clementino’ is part of the Vatican Museums and is one of the most important museums in the world.
Greece

In 1821, the Greek War of Independence broke out. It was to drag on for eight years. In 1828, French troops landed in the Peloponnese to help the Greeks. With the example of Napoleon’s Egyptian expedition in mind, the French army included a contingent of scholars charged with recording the ruins of Olympia. By 1829, they were excavating there too, and although the finds were disappointingly few, these were soon on their way to the Louvre.

But things were changing in Greece, and the newly independent state soon took measures to secure its archaeological sites against foreign adventurers. In 1834, the Greek government established state control over its archaeological heritage so as to prevent the removal of antiquities abroad. During the next two centuries, many newly independent countries imitated the Greek experience. However, the continuing discovery of previously unknown prehistoric civilizations, and the founding of new museums throughout the world would soon lead to more trafficking and pillaging of antiquities.

The Museums of the USA

1870 saw the foundation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. More art museums followed. These new American art museums set out to follow the example set by the Louvre and exhibit the history of “European” art. There was to be no place in the main exhibition halls for the art of the Native American peoples, which was relegated to the less prestigious ethnographic museums.

At first, the American museums had to make do with plaster casts of original pieces, and with collecting material from China, Japan and other areas not already exploited by the Europeans. However, when the power of the American economy came to outstrip even that of the British Empire, it was demonstrated just how much art of quality money could buy.
The Looting of Cyprus

The Consul Luigi Palma di Cesnola

Cyprus was heavily pillaged in the middle of the nineteenth century. The American consul in Cyprus, an American officer of the civil war of Italian origin, General Luigi Palma di Cesnola, became an amateur archaeologist in order to profit from the trade in antiquities. He lived on the island from 1865 until 1876 and gathered 35,573 objects mainly from regions where he did not have the authorisation of the Turkish Authorities. Then he auctioned his collection. Although the Louvre and the Hermitage were initially interested, the biggest offer came from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, founded in 1870. Turkish Authorities were informed about the sale and prohibited the export of this enormous collection. Cesnola immediately loaded his treasures onto boats in order to remove them from Cyprus. 5,000 pieces were lost in a shipwreck and the content of scores of boxes turned to dust before arriving in New York. Returning to New York, Cesnola proposed to be appointed director of the Metropolitan Museum and, indeed, took the position in 1879.
One of the First Great Archaeological Excavations

In 1929, the priest at Agia Eirini in northern Cyprus, delivered a terracotta sculpture found in the fields to the curator of the Cyprus Museum. The fact that he addressed the Archaeological Directorate instead of approaching antiquities smugglers led to a unique discovery for the entire Eastern Mediterranean.

The Cypriot Museum assigned the excavation to the Swedish Cyprus Expedition. A temple which had been used from the Late Bronze Age until the end of the sixth century BC was discovered.

Terracottas dating from 625-500 BC were found in their original positions, standing in semicircles around an altar. There were 2,000 statues, from human size portraits to miniatures.

Today, they are exhibited in museums in Stockholm and Nicosia.

The Statue of Septimius Severus

The statue was found accidentally in 1928, in Kythrea. Looters tore it apart in order to find gold in its interior and then sold it. The statue was subsequently restored at the Cyprus Archaeological Museum. It is one of the most famous portraits of Emperor Septimius Severus and one of the few surviving bronze statues worldwide. Even today, it remains a unique discovery for Cyprus.
Changes in the perception of art have changed our view of Cycladic antiquities. Small Cycladic figurines first came to public attention in the nineteenth century when they were considered “ugly” and “barbaric”. However, by the middle of the twentieth century, their simplicity of form and “whiteness” caused them to be viewed as an ancient precursor of modernist sculpture. They thus unexpectedly acquired great commercial value. The result was the looting of the Cyclades, which took place in three phases: the first from the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century, the second between 1950 and 1970, and a third one which continues to this day. Until recently, Cycladic figurines found in official excavations numbered only 143. In total, there are 1,604 known, mainly in various collections. It is estimated that 12,000 tombs and many ancient cemeteries must have been looted to produce this number. The result of this looting is that the Bronze Age history of the Cyclades has been lost.

From the Renaissance through the end of the nineteenth century, the purpose of art was to create beautiful things and to depict reality. Modern Art changed this perception and, in accordance with this new aesthetic, the worth of non-European and many non-Classical antiquities came to be recognised. Thus, through the twentieth century, the antiquities of America, Africa, Oceania, and Asia increasingly came to be seen as art. These then, not surprisingly, also came to attract the attention of art collectors and art museums. Throughout this period, the number of art museums collecting antiquities, particularly in the United States, continued to rise steadily. Therefore, the world’s archaeological heritage came to be threatened both by the increase in number of museums collecting antiquities, and by the widening range of antiquities in demand.
The “Lydian Treasure”, consisting of 363 objects, was looted in 1966, in western Turkey. It was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum, for about $1.5 million. In 1993, following a lawsuit, the Treasure was returned to Turkey.

The steadily increasing number of museums in the United States and the rising demand for antiquities by private collectors in Europe, North America, Japan and Australia have exhausted the supply of legal antiquities. Few objects of the old collections, built up during the period of the “Grand Tour” are appearing on the market. The trade relies mainly on trafficking, theft, and pillage. The situation became explosive at the end of the 1960s, when, approaching the 100th anniversaries of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the demand for impressive new finds caused an escalation of looting. Many new “treasures of unknown provenance” from the Mediterranean appeared on the marketplace, sites were destroyed, and as a result the research of archaeologists around the world was seriously impeded.
The escalating plunder of the world’s archaeological heritage had not gone unnoticed by the international community. In November 1970, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

Although major antiquities importing states such as Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom did not initially sign the Convention, its adoption did change the ethical environment of the trade in antiquities. Already in April 1970 the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania had announced that it would no longer acquire antiquities without convincing documentation of their legitimate pedigree, and, that same year, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) issued a similar statement.

Thomas Hoving, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, declared in 1970 that “the age of piracy has ended”. Perhaps he was wrong; the plunder continued, but with one overwhelming difference. Before 1970, the acquisition of plundered antiquities on a no-questions-asked basis was accepted practice. Today it is a practice whose destructive and often criminal consequences are well recognized.

In 1972, after its ratification by four countries, the Convention went into effect. The first country to sign was Ecuador. Today, 109 countries have adopted the Convention. The USA signed in 1983; Great Britain in 2003.
Although the acquisitions of large museums have been widely criticised, the looting in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has become more destructive. Objects from illegal digs from countries like Mali and Peru—where evidence of entire historical periods has been destroyed—fill museums in Europe and the United States. But, deprived of their archaeological contexts, these objects can say little about history. In Sipan, Peru, however, there has been a successful turn of events. Archaeologists managed to unearth a row of royal tombs that had been overlooked by looters. The site has been transformed: it has a local museum, and has become a significant tourist attraction.

After the UNESCO Convention, museums, collectors and dealers still trading in antiquities of unknown provenance, began to use forged documents to cover their actions. The case of the Euphronios krater, one of the rarest ancient objects to have appeared in a museum during the last sixty years, is a good example. This krater had been purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1972 and was documented as coming from a dealer in Lebanon. He claimed to have inherited it from his father, who had obtained it at the beginning of the twentieth century. It had actually been unearthed in an illegal dig in the Etruscan cemetery of Cerveteri, near Rome, a few years before its purchase. In 2006, the Metropolitan Museum officially announced that the krater will be returned to the Italian state by 2008.
In 1981 the upper part of a statue of Heracles turned up in the collection of Shelby White and Leon Levy, who stated that they were co-owners of the piece together with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

A few years later, the lower half of the same statue was unearthed at an archaeological dig at Perge, near the Turkish town of Antalya.

In 1992, Turkish archaeologists insisted that casts of the two parts be made. They fitted together perfectly, proving that they belonged to the same piece of sculpture.

The Boston Museum and the private collectors, however, refused to return the upper half of the statue to Turkey, and in 1992, it was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"Weary Heracles" has become a symbol of the illicit trade of antiquities.

As it was becoming increasingly difficult for Western museums to buy antiquities, new large private collections (Ortiz, Levy-White and Fleischman) were being formed, containing previously unseen antiquities of unknown provenance. These collections, in turn, were exhibited, borrowed, or bought by museums such as the Metropolitan, the J. Paul Getty, and the Royal Academy in London.

The owners of many such collections joined the boards of large museums. But in the 1990s, there was a reaction against such practices.

An undercover investigation of illegal trafficking in antiquities led to the closing of antiquities sales at Sotheby’s in London in 1997, and in 2002 Frederick Schultz, former President of the US National Association of Dealers in Ancient, Oriental and Primitive Art, was jailed in New York for trafficking in Egyptian objects.

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It was revealed that antiquities stolen from Italy pass through Geneva, Basel and Munich. In each of these cities, named middlemen have links with known restorers who reassemble the fragmented antiquities, fill in any missing pieces and hand them over as good as new. The evidence the Italians have amassed shows that illicit objects, smuggled out of Italy and restored in this fashion, have found their way to many of the world’s major museums—such as the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Louvre in Paris and the Miho Museum in Japan—and to nearly all of the great modern collections of classical antiquities.

A series of high-profile trials in Rome—beginning in 2003—has much improved our understanding of the illicit trade in looted Italian antiquities. Tomb robbers, dealers and a museum curator have all appeared in court. According to Paolo Giorgio Ferri, the Public Prosecutor, and the archaeologists assisting him, no fewer than 100,000 Italian tombs have been looted in recent years, and goods worth half a billion dollars have been spirited out of the country.

The popular J. Paul Getty museum, styled after a Roman villa, on a hillside overlooking the sea in Malibu, California.

The Italian Carabinieri claim that this stone sculpture of Aphrodite, dated in ca. 400 BC, came from an illegal dig in Morgantina, Sicily. The sculpture, which is now part of the J. Paul Getty Museum, will be returned to Italy in 2010.
One of the most important objects to have circulated on the illegal market during the last decade is an ivory head of Apollo, dating from the first century BC. This head is so rare that only two others like it are known to exist, one in the Vatican and one at Delphi, Greece. Found in a field north of Rome, it was sold by the well-known tomb robber Pietro Casasanta to the Munich middleman Nino Savoca for $700,000.

Savoca sold it on to London antiquities dealer Robin Symes for $2 million. He had it on offer for sale in one of his thirty-three warehouses for $30 million. It was recovered by the Carabinieri thanks to a tip-off and now has an entire room to itself in a Rome museum.

Fortunately for the Italians, several of the middlemen – never imagining they would be caught – kept meticulous records of their illegal deals. Thanks to a combination of serendipity and good police work, the records of various middlemen became available to the Italian Carabinieri in the late 1990s. As a result of these actions, Italian archaeologists estimate that looting has decreased by fifty percent.
Looting in Cyprus

The destruction of the cultural heritage of Cyprus took place in three phases, which are shown on the map of the Cypriot Department of Antiquities:

- The period of US Consul Luigi Palma di Cesnola’s activity in the nineteenth century.
- Illegal digs during the twentieth century, until 1974.

As it often happens in countries at war or occupied by foreign powers, the antiquities trade spiraled out of control in the occupied northern part of Cyprus. It is estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 Byzantine icons, mosaics and wall-paintings have been stolen.
The repatriation in 2003 of 159 silver coins from Amathounta was the result of close co-operation between Italy and Cyprus. The collection, which was illegally discovered and exported, consists of ancient Greek coins. From the letters and symbols next to the lion portrayed on both sides of the coins, these have been attributed to the rule of King Evagoras of Salamis and King Roikos of Amathounta, dating to the first half of the fourth century BC.

The extent of the trade was uncovered when German police arrested Aydin Dikmen, a central figure in the looting of religious art from the northern part of Cyprus. Hundreds of stolen pieces were found in his Munich apartment. In 1988, Dikmen sold pieces of a sixth-century AD mosaic that had been torn from the apse of the Church of Panayia Kanakaria at Lythrangomi, to US art dealer Peg Goldberg, in Indianapolis. Cyprus went to court in the US to recover the pieces and won the case. The US judge ruled that Peg Goldberg had not done sufficient research before making the deal to determine whether or not the mosaics had been stolen and could not therefore claim to be an innocent purchaser. In 1991, four mosaic pieces were returned to Cyprus. More pieces of the same mosaic were recovered during the raid on Dikmen’s apartment.
In the mid 1970s, in the village of Aidonia, ten kilometers outside Nemea in southern Greece, an unknown archaeological site was discovered by accident, when a mule fell into a hole. This proved to be a Mycenaean beehive tomb.

The incident was not reported to the Archaeological Service. Many inhabitants of the area started to dig illegally, even using a mechanical excavator. The fighting between rival groups of smugglers – often with the exchange of gunfire – and widespread rumours of looting, finally led to the intervention of the Greek Archaeological Service. Until 1978, fifteen tombs had been robbed. The stolen goods were sold to middlemen who then exported them illegally to Switzerland.

The Aidonia Treasure
Official archaeological excavations began in 1978. The tombs had been stripped almost clean although a small stash of jewellery was discovered intact in a pit in tomb “7”. The official excavations ended in 1980. The tombs were then covered with a tin roof and the finds stored in the Archaeological Museum of Nemea. The stolen goods remained out of sight for thirteen years. In 1993, part of the treasure appeared for sale in a small gallery in New York, owned by Michael Ward. A three-member committee of Greek archaeologists compared the finds of tomb “7” with the “Ward collection”. The results were sensational.

The Greek state tried to stop the sale. The American courts accepted the Greek petition. Ward denied knowing that the material was stolen but, nevertheless, requested a compromise. He agreed to donate the treasure to a cultural foundation in Washington, with the stipulation that after two years the foundation would return it to Greece, so done in 1996. Ward, as a result, obtained a large tax exemption. Yet most of the objects from the illegal digging are still missing. As the case was settled out of court, Ward was never obliged to testify as to how the treasure came into his possession. Looting continues in Aidonia and new tombs were robbed in 2001 and 2002.
The Theft of the Museum of Corinth

At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s many Greek archaeological sites and museums were robbed. On April 12, 1990, thieves seriously injured the guard of the Archaeological Museum of Corinth and stole more than 270 antiquities. This was the largest burglary of a museum in Greece. It was later revealed that the culprits were a family of Greek traffickers living in Venezuela. They transported the stolen merchandise to Miami, Florida, to the house of a Belizean woman called Wilma Sabala. It was noted in their catalogue (edited by Max Bernheimer, Christie’s Deputy Director responsible for antiquities) that the pieces were "The Property of an American Private Collector"!

In 1998, one of the stolen objects was put up for sale by the Royal Athena Gallery of New York, owned by Jerome Eisenberg. Eisenberg had purchased this piece from Christie’s. The American School of Classical Studies at Corinth, founders of the museum in 1932, published a catalogue providing photographs and a full description of all the stolen items in IFAR, a journal documenting stolen art that is distributed to all large museums and art dealers throughout the world.

In December 1997, the thieves decided to trade the stolen goods. They peddled several pieces of ancient pottery and three precious marble busts (of Julius Caesar, Sarapis, and Eros) at Christie’s in New York. Despite the fact that the objects bore museum numbers, Christie’s put them up for auction.
Christie’s then tried to put the marble busts back on the market. The bust of Sarapis was sold under the title: “Property of Various Owners”.

The Director of the American School Excavations at Corinth, Charles Williams, got wind of the sale and notified the FBI. The three busts were returned.

The thieves were captured and sentenced to life imprisonment. No formal charges were ever brought against Christie’s.

A hole had been borne into the base of the head of Sarapis so that it could be placed on an exhibition stand suitable for an auction. A marble head of Dionysus had suffered damage during its transport from Corinth to Miami.

As a result of FBI research at Christie’s, it was discovered that the “American Collector” was Wilma Sabala, who confessed her guilt and was subsequently brought to trial.

According to court records, agent Jim Barkoukis, testified under oath as follows: A man at one of the auction houses had said that a pencil eraser or nail polish remover could be used to remove the numbers from the pieces. Once the stolen goods were tracked down, Greek police and the FBI arrived in Miami. The majority of the stolen artifacts were discovered.

However, the three marble busts of Julius Caesar, Sarapis, and Eros were still missing.
The graves, cities and temples left behind by the civilizations of 5,000 years of Afghan history were severely damaged during twenty-five years of war. The poverty brought on by the fighting has led to a frenzy of pillaging and looting. UNESCO surmises that out of Afghanistan’s 2,800 archaeological sites, eighty percent have been subjected to pillage and destruction.

From 1993 to date, Norwegian collector Martin Schoyen, has bought hundreds of rare Buddhist manuscripts from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Schoyen collection numbers 13,000 pieces and is estimated at $110 million.

Contemporary Trafficking in Antiquities

Cambodia

In 1970, the government of Cambodia collapsed. During the fighting that ensued, its archaeological heritage became easy prey. Fragments of friezes were prised off ancient Khmer temples, and stone statues were decapitated in order to be sold abroad. The museums were also looted. At the Dépôt de la Conservation at Angkor Wat, many sculptures were destroyed, and a large number was stolen. In 1993, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published a catalogue with photographs of one hundred objects stolen from the Dépôt. One was discovered in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and two others at the Honolulu Academy of Art in Hawaii. They have now been returned to Cambodia. Three more were sold at Sotheby’s.

Afghanistan

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Iraq

The archaeological sites of Iraq had been relatively secure until the Gulf War of 1991. Subsequently, as the country sank into chaos, eleven regional museums were broken into and the Assyrian palaces of Nineveh and Nimrud in the north were attacked. After the invasion of 2003, the situation worsened when the National Museum of Iraq was looted. This was the largest-ever museum robbery in the world. At least 13,864 objects were stolen, though the exact number taken from the storerooms remains unknown, as their contents had never been recorded. By 2006, 5,359 objects had been recovered and, of those, 700 were retrieved in Europe and the US, whose markets were the final destination of this trafficking. Moreover, illegal digs in the south have been on the rise such as those at Isin, which has been left riddled with holes made by looters.
The Royal Tombs of Aigai at Vergina

In 1977, archaeologist Manolis Andronikos excavated a large, unplundered Macedonian mound in Vergina, in northern Greece. One of the tombs in it belonged to King Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. Had the tomb been plundered, it would have been impossible to make this determination. Working from pottery found in the tomb, Andronikos was able to date it to 340-320 BC. Burnt bones and remnants of a funeral pyre were found to be those of a man. Furthermore, the wealth, style, and exquisite quality of the burial objects, together with the unique wall-painting and the huge chamber, showed that this was a royal tomb. From this contextual evidence, it was determined that the tomb was that of King Philip II.

But what would have happened if tomb robbers rather than archaeologists had found the site first?

The looters would have taken the objects made of gold, silver and bronze, to sell to dealers. These valuable artifacts would almost certainly have ended up in museums or private collections. However, removed from the tomb that gave them their provenance, these artifacts would have lost their historical significance. Furthermore, once looters opened the tomb, the organic materials and the wall-painting would have been totally destroyed. The unique chryselephantine shield and couches, and the gold-trimmed armour, would have been damaged beyond the point where archaeologists could reconstruct them. With the loss of the contextual information that would have been drawn through the excavation of the tomb, it would have been impossible to determine that the tomb belonged to King Philip II.
Since the excavation of the royal tomb at Vergina, illegal excavations in Northern Greece have increased. A prominent example is the golden Macedonian wreath acquired in 1993 by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles which comes from an illicit dig. Swiss antiquities dealer Christoph Leon sold the wreath with false papers to the Getty Museum for $1,150,000. The Getty Museum acknowledged that the golden wreath belongs to the Greek State and returned it to Greece. But, in contrast to the finds of Vergina, the wreath has lost most of its historical value, as it was not excavated by archaeologists.
Recent Cases of Antiquities Returned to Greece and Italy

Actions taken by countries of origin of illicitly traded antiquities are intensifying in recent years with impressive results.

GREECE

1) The Aidonia Treasure.

The treasure is a group of 312 gold Mycenaean signet rings, sealstones and other items of jewellery, amongst which are many beads made of gold, semiprecious stones, faience and glass paste. Sixteenth – fourteenth century BC.

The collection was discovered amongst the objects that were to be auctioned in New York in 1993. It apparently came from an illegal excavation conducted in Mycenaean tombs at Aidonia, Nemea, in 1977. The finds from the systematic excavation in the area that followed (1978-1980) made it possible to establish that the illegal collection came from the Aidonia cemetery.

The treasure was returned to Greece in 1996 and is now in the Archaeological Museum at Nemea.

2) Bronze statue of a youthful male figure, probably an athlete.

Early Roman period. Early Roman, classicising piece reworking the characteristics of earlier, Classical works.

The statue was seized in Saarbrücken, Germany, in 1998, along with 437 more artifacts from illegal excavations (coins, bronzes, silver and clay figurines, vases and other small objects) that cover a broad chronological spectrum ranging from the eighth century BC to the Byzantine period.

The greater bulk of the objects probably comes from areas within the boundaries of ancient Macedonia.

The statue was retrieved from the sea, probably in western Greece. It was repatriated, along with all the other artifacts, on 8.2.2002. After conservation, it was put on display in 2004 in the exhibition “Agon” in the National Archaeological Museum, after which it was included in the new display of the Bronzes of the Museum.
3) Boeotian grave stele of black limestone with an engraved representation of a warrior.

A dead warrior, Athanias, is depicted holding a spear in his right hand and a shield in his left. The shield has Bellerophon and the Chimaira as its device. Fifth century BC. Purchased from the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1993 and transferred to the National Archaeological Museum from the USA on 31.8.2006.

It is currently still on display in the National Archaeological Museum, awaiting transportation to the Archaeological Museum of Thebes.

The stele has many similarities, typological and iconographic and in terms of the inscription, with other stele in Thebes Museum which come from Boeotia, where a series of illegal excavations have been detected in recent years.

4) Marble votive relief from Thasos. Depiction of a deity enthroned in a naiskos and worshippers approaching from the left. 500-490 BC.

The relief was found built into the fortification wall on the acropolis at Limenas, Thasos, in May 1911. It was stolen from the storeroom of the French Archaeological School’s excavations on Thasos in the early twentieth century and, after wandering amongst various foreign collections, came into the possession of the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1955.

It was repatriated from the USA on 31.8.2006 and placed on display in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, until 25.6.2007, when it was transferred to the 18th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Kavala.

5) Gold wreath with myrtle, apple and pear blossom, with traces of blue and green enamel in places. Hellenistic period (late 4th c. BC).

Found in northern Greece in 1990 by illicit antiquities dealers who sold it to the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1993. An academic committee was formed by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and proved that it came from the region of Macedonia. Similar wreaths have been found in excavations in central Macedonia, and the technical characteristics of the wreath point to Macedonian gold workshops. The wreath was repatriated on 22.3.2007 and is now on display in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

6) Marble Archaic kore. 530 BC. Parian workshop.

Purchased in 1993 from the J. Paul Getty Museum. An academic committee formed in 2006 declared that “the kore most probably comes from Greece, more specifically from the Cyclades, if not from Paros itself.” The statue was transferred to the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, on 22.3.2007, where it is still on display.

7) Marble statue of the first half of the first century AD, copying the type of Apollo Lykeios, made in the third quarter of the fourth century BC.

The statue was found at the end of the nineteenth century outside the south wall of the temple of Pythian Apollo at Gortyn, Crete. It was stolen in 1991 from the Archaeological Collection of Gortyn and located in Switzerland, from where it was repatriated on 13.6.2007. It was placed on display in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, and then transferred to the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, Crete.

8) Figurines, seals, vases, tools that came from Neolithic installations in the area of Larisa (6th-5th millennium BC).

In 1985, armed robbers stole 155 items that came from Neolithic installations, and were part of the Konstantinos Theodoropoulos Collection in Larisa. The brains behind the theft were the well-known German antiquities dealer, Stephan Göricke.
In an article published on 31 March 2007 under the title "Saga of the ‘stolen’ gold wreath could loosen British hold on Elgin marbles", The Times of London notes that these cases increase the pressure on museums that own objects acquired on the illicit antiquities market, and paves the way for the repatriation of other items, such as the Parthenon sculptures.

The Times goes on to say that "Court cases in Italy and Greece are increasing the pressure on museums around the world and could lead to widespread changes in the handling of ancient treasures".

The following year, Göricle tried to sell the stolen items to the State Prehistoric Collection in Munich. 94 artifacts were confiscated by the German police and guarded by a judicial committee in Bamberg. The Greek state first laid claim to the items in 1993, but 14 years were to pass before the 94 artifacts were returned to Greece, in October 2007, in conformity with a decision reached by a Bavarian court.

Göricle was convicted of antiquities theft by a Greek court in 1993, escaped from the prison at Neapoli in Crete in 1995, and died in 2007.

The Theodoropoulos Collection (about 2,500 items) was donated to the Greek state in 1995. The fate of the other 61 stolen objects remains unknown.

The 94 returned objects were temporarily exhibited in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens and are now on display in the Archaeological Museum of Larisa.

**ITALY**

In 2007, 68 ancient artworks that had been illegally purchased by American Museums were returned to Italy. These include some of the most prized sculptures and vases from the J. Paul Getty Museum, the New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

The objects were returned after Italian investigators spent a decade uncovering evidence proving they had been looted from tombs and ruins, smuggled out of the country and trafficked by a network of dealers.

The works were displayed at the Quirinale Palace, now official residence of the President of Italy, from December 2007 to March 2008. They include the Metropolitan’s famous Euphronios krater depicting Hypnos and Thanatos carrying the body of Sarpedon, the Getty’s Asteas krater showing the bull-shaped god Zeus carrying off Europa and a towering marble statue of Vibia Sabina, the wife of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, from the Boston museum.

The exhibition, titled “Nostoi: Returned Masterpieces”, an allusion to ancient Greek epic poems recounting the return of heroes to their native country from the Trojan War, is a symbolic conclusion of the decade-long campaign to repatriate objects looted from Italian soil.

"The odyssey of these objects, which started with their brutal removal from the bowels of the earth, didn’t end on the shelf of some American museum," said Francesco Rutelli, Italy’s vice prime minister and cultural minister, at the exhibition’s opening. "With nostalgia, they have returned. These beautiful pieces have reconquered their souls."

The exhibition curator Louis Godart added: “here, at the Quirinale, we are recovering part of our memory”.

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**Exhibition credits**

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The looting of archaeological sites is still widespread and in some countries so severe as to undermine any hope of establishing a proper history of these lands. Let us remember that the most important loss occasioned by looting, is the loss of information. With the destruction of such sites the context of the finds is lost, even if the finds survive...

Professor Lord Renfrew, archaeologist