

Concerning acquisition of antiquities . . .

For several years the Field Museum has been concerned about the scientific, ethical, legal, and diplomatic problems involved in acquiring new specimens. In regard to biological specimens, the Museum demonstrated this concern in 1970 when it, along with 28 other U.S. museums, issued a statement titled "Guidelines to Biological Field Studies" (*Science* 169:8, July 3, 1970). The cosigners of this statement agreed to observe certain standards in making field collections in order to insure international cooperation in research and to safeguard the existence of rare species. However, the statement was explicitly limited to biological collections. The Field Museum now wishes to establish similar standards with respect to our own acquisition of cultural collections, especially archaeological materials.

The situation in the national and international market for this material has reached a crisis point. Dangerously large quantities of primitive and ancient artifacts are now being stolen or looted, at times in a quasi-legal fashion; smuggled; and sold at high prices. If this market continues to operate at its present scale and in its present rapacious manner, it will quite soon succeed in obliterating large segments of the cultural heritage of mankind. The market for archaeological, anthropological, ethnographic, and artistic objects stands badly in need of regulation. However, the sector of this market most dangerously out of control is the traffic in archaeological objects—the so-called antiquities trade. The antiquities trade is therefore the main focus of this statement.

When the antiquities trade is illicit—when the objects being sold have been illegally excavated or illegally exported from their country of origin—the activity is entirely indefensible.

Whether illicit or not, traffic in archaeological objects is ethically dubious. Proponents of the antiquities trade often argue that some objects have such esthetic or other importance that a dealer or collector has a duty to see them removed from supposedly irresponsible hands in their country of origin and deposited safely in collections in Europe or America. This argument is invalid. Such considerations do not justify despoiling a nation of the finest monuments of its past.

In addition to legality and ethics, there is a third major consideration: the looting of archaeological sites is scientifically disastrous. The cupidity of dealers and collectors has led to such extensive destruction of many archaeological sites that no information about those sites survives or can be salvaged, except for the trivial information contained in the objects removed. The most serious recent destruction of sites has been in Middle America, Peru, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, but important archaeological sites have also been looted and destroyed in recent years within the United States.

The museum profession is not innocent of responsibility for this situation. Although the number of ancient objects in private hands is very great, the museums of Europe and the United States have in the past played a central, critical part in the development of the antiquities trade through their willingness (a) to authenticate objects for public sale; (b) to pay, or advise potential donors to pay, extremely high prices for the objects they do acquire; and (c) to receive through gift or bequest objects of uncertain or illicit origin. In this manner museums have assumed the position of guarantors and price leaders in a market that, due to the prevalence of fraud and speculative investing, would otherwise be markedly less profitable.

The Field Museum, therefore, has adopted several policies, some of which are a codification of existing practices and some of which are new. Their intention is (1) to make certain that the Museum does not inadvertently acquire illicit antiquities; and (2) to promote the reduction and regulation of the antiquities market. [*The formal policy statement is printed on page 6.*]



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