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# The Scholar and the Market

## Swedish scholarly contributions to the destruction of the world's archaeological heritage

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### Abstract

The Swedish market in archaeological objects is dominated by recently looted objects. Often the dealers and collectors are personally involved in the sleazy activities through which the objects reach the market. Despite this, dealers and collectors generally hold a respected place in contemporary society. Why? The paper gives examples of how scholars, by hailing and applauding dealers and collectors, have been part of creating their elevated social position. Also, at a more general level, scholars have created attitudes which make members of the public accept, rather than question, dealing and collecting. Through different outreach activities – especially museum exhibitions – scholars have transmitted the notion that archaeological objects are works of art, to be admired for their beauty only, and that aspects such as archaeological context and ownership history are of little importance.

### The Swedish market in archaeological objects

The aim of this study is to explore various aspects of scholarly entanglement with the Swedish commercial market in archaeological objects. For the purpose of the study it is first necessary to take a look at this market. This topic has not previously been treated in the scholarly literature. The main focus is on the market in objects originating from outside the Swedish borders, but a few

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words will also be said about the market in archaeological objects of Swedish origin. As will be seen below, this distinction between domestic and foreign objects is of importance from a legal, if not a moral, point of view.

Three questions will be asked:

1. What kinds of archaeological objects are offered on the Swedish market and from which parts of the world do they originally come?
2. What is the main source for these objects? "Old collections" or recent looting?
3. If the objects are of recent origin, to what extent do Swedish dealers and collectors have a hand in the dubious undertakings through which the objects come onto the market?

Looking at the international art market, with its huge output of unprovenanced archaeological objects, and considering the large scale of looting around the world, it is obvious that many, if not the majority, of the objects offered for sale on this market are the products of recent clandestine excavations (Cook 1991: 533; Brodie and Doole 2001). Glimpses behind the scene of the trade have provided further confirmation of the connection between looting and dealing. For example, internal documents leaked by a former Sotheby's employee shows that this auction house regularly auctioned recently looted archaeological objects, although employees at the auction house had good reasons to believe (and in some cases knew) that the objects had an illicit origin (Watson 1998). There is no reason to think that the pattern revealed at Sotheby's does not apply to other auction houses, and many other dealers, as well. Clearly, all unprovenanced objects on the market must be suspected of having been recently looted (or recently manufactured), until proven otherwise (Renfrew 2000: 11, 90; Muscarella 2000: 17).

On the Swedish market, too, the majority of the objects lack provenance. But it could be argued that the Swedish market, which is fairly modest in size, cannot be compared with that of countries with major markets in antiquities, such Switzerland, the United

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Kingdom or the US. It could be that generally the prices paid for archaeological objects in Sweden are so low that it would not make economical sense to import archaeological objects (whether recently looted or not) into Sweden with the aim of selling them, rather than selling them in, for example, Zürich, London or New York. If this was the case, the main source for what is marketed in Sweden would be old Swedish collections, not more or less recent looting.

Because the situation on the Swedish market could not be taken for granted by analogy from elsewhere, it needed to be investigated independently. Between 1998 and February 2000 I visited a number (probably the majority) of the Swedish dealers in archaeological objects in the guise of a prospective customer. During these visits I enquired after the origin of the artefacts offered for sale. In general, the dealers were remarkably informative. Most of the conversations with the dealers were recorded with a hidden tape recorder. Other sources of information were also consulted: auction catalogues, media reports and academic publications. With data from these various sources some conclusions on the nature of the Swedish market could be drawn. Obviously, it has not been possible to uncover everything one would like to know about the trade. For example, there is no data to calculate the total annual turnover of the trade, either in terms of money or in terms of the number of objects bought and sold. Also, although it has been possible to find many examples of dealers involved in actions on or beyond the borders of legality, these cases probably represent only the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

During the course of the investigation it became clear that the material gathered could (and should) be used for more than a strictly academic publication. Therefore, in 1999 contact was made with the investigative journalists Johan Brånstad and Hannes Råstam at Sveriges Television (Swedish Television). The result was the documentary *I gravplundrarnas spår* (On the trail of the tomb robbers, Brånstad and Råstam 2000) which was aired on February 29, 2000. (For a review of the programme, see: Doole 2000a).

Beginning with the first question asked above, a survey of the assortment of shops and auction catalogues shows that the vast

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majority (c. 80%) of the archaeological objects for sale are of Chinese origin. Most common are terracotta grave figurines dating from the Han to Ming dynasties (206 BC-AD 1644). They range in price from c. SEK 10,000 to SEK 250,000 (USD c. 1000 to 25,000). Pottery, bronzes, stone heads and terracotta statues are also available. Occasionally architectural parts (pillars, stone slabs) from tombs are offered for sale.

Although the Swedish market is dominated by Chinese artefacts, there is also a wide selection of objects from many other parts of the world to choose from – Pre-Columbian textiles, pottery, gold and silver, Roman marble statues and statuettes (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD), Apulian red figure and polychrome vases (4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BC), Gandharan sculptured heads and relief fragments (1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD), Indian relief fragments (12-13<sup>th</sup> cent. AD), etc.

Continuing with the second and third question asked above, the market in Chinese objects will be discussed first. Chinese archaeological objects have been sought after by collectors since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and throughout the century sites in China have been ransacked to meet this market demand. However, large-scale looting in China only started during the 1980s as a result of the “open door” policy. The scale of looting has continued to grow in the 1990s (He 2001: 19, 23). In 1989 and 1990 alone 40,000 tombs were looted (Murphy 1995a: 54; Murphy 1995b: 71). In 2003 it was reported that at least 220,000 tombs had been plundered in the past 5 years (Beech 2003). On occasion, sites have been ransacked by groups of over 1000 people using bulldozers and dynamite in their work. Archaeological objects are smuggled out of China through most of the major cities, but the main route is via Hong Kong, from where the objects are legally exported throughout the world. Large quantities of objects are smuggled out of the country by tourists, and tourist companies are at times involved in helping the tourists find their objects (He 2001: 23). For updates on the situation in China, see the web page of the non-governmental organisation Cultural Heritage Watch: <http://www.culturalheritagewatch.org>.

Officially, Swedish dealers and collectors specialising in Chinese antiquities do not admit any connections with archaeological objects of recent illicit origin. Usually they claim

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that their sources are “old collections”. At times they may argue that they buy “on the market” from reputable dealers. Unofficially, they give an entirely different picture. In *‘On the trail of the tomb robbers’* the stark contrast between the official and the unofficial side of the trade was well illustrated by the revelations made by Leif Petzäll, Director of the private Ulricehamns Konst och Östasiatiska Museum (Museum of Art and Far Eastern Antiquities at Ulricehamn).

In an interview given when the Swedish queen visited the museum to inaugurate a new exhibition, Petzäll claimed that he acquired the objects for the collection from sales in England, USA and Sweden. He explained that he had never purchased anything in China, because the export of antiquities that were more than 200 years old is not allowed. However, on another occasion Petzäll, unaware that he was being filmed by a hidden camera, proudly pointed out objects amongst the exhibits which he had personally smuggled out of China. He explained that one could only take objects that would fit in a pocket or in hand luggage, and that one should bring along cigarettes and cash to use as bribes if necessary. Larger objects, above hand-luggage size, he bought in Hong Kong, well aware that these had been smuggled from China. He vividly described how archaeological objects, like a large terracotta horse which took pride of place in the museum, were removed from graves in China and taken across the border to end up in the sales rooms in Hong Kong. (In a formal response to the programme, Petzäll claimed that he had only taken a few objects from China, not knowing their true age. For Petzäll’s view, see also: Petzäll 2003.)

One might add that one does not need a bragging museum director to know that this type of large (height over 1 meter) Han dynasty horse is of recent origin. They only started to appear on the market a few years ago. Until then they were unknown to both scholars and collectors and they are not found in “old collections”. Their appearance on the market is probably the result of looting in previously untouched areas yielding this hitherto unknown type of artefact.

Chinese archaeological objects have regularly appeared for sale at Sweden’s leading auction houses (Bukowski’s, Stockholms

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Auktions-verk and Göteborgs Auktionsverk). Generally the auction catalogues give no information on the provenance of the objects.

I once asked a representative of one of these auction houses where these objects come from. The representative, who happened to know that I was an archaeologist, answered that the consignors are generally old widows who sell off the collections they have inherited from their husbands. His answer was in line with what the auction houses state in public. When asked by the press about the sale of a “private collection” of Ecuadorian archaeological objects a spokesman from Stockholms Auktionsverk declared that the auction house had a strict policy and only accepted objects that had been in Sweden for at least 50 years. (See more below on this particular auction.)

Old widows and strict ethics all sounded very reassuring, but when I enquired at these three auction houses if it was possible to consign recently smuggled objects for auction, the answer was different. The experts on oriental art at Stockholms Auktionsverk and Göteborgs Auktionsverk both replied that they had no restrictions on auctioning recently smuggled objects. The Bukowski’s expert preferred objects with a long provenance but explained that this was because she was worried about recent fakes, not because of any ethical considerations about selling smuggled objects. All three made it clear that they were well aware that many objects they had auctioned were of recent illicit origin. The representative of Göteborgs Auktionsverk declared: “if one has such restrictions [against selling illicit archaeological objects] one would soon have nothing to sell”. She also told me that most objects had come on the market in the 1980s and 1990s. (Some of this material was used in a radio broadcast, *Dagens Eko* February 29, 2000, 6 and 8 AM.)

Further confirmation of the recent origin of the pieces offered for sale by the Swedish auction houses is provided by their catalogues. I mentioned above the large Han dynasty horses which have only been on the market for a few years. Such horses have been auctioned by Bukowski’s and Stockholms Auktionsverk. They first appeared for sale in 1998 (Bukowski’s 1998: lot no. 1197). In contrast to the usual absence of provenance information

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in the catalogues, on this occasion the catalogue entry was remarkably informative, naming both an alleged find spot for the piece and hinting at its recent appearance on the market:

Grave figurine, unglazed, dark grey clay fabric, so called. "Heaven's horse". Western Han (202 BC-9 AD), Sichuan province, probably from Majiashan, Xinduxian. // Height 110, length 99,5 cm. // During the last years these unusually large and finely modelled horses have been found in rock cut tombs. Thermoluminescent certificate from Oxford included. Estimated price: SEK 150,000. (Hammer price SEK 130,000; USD c. 13,000).

According to the auction house, the information in the catalogue was provided by the consignor (an unnamed dealer). As the object in question is unlikely to have come on the market in a legitimate way, one wonders where the dealer got the information that it comes from Majiashan (which has a large Han dynasty necropolis). Did the looters tell him?

Horses of the same type have also been sold at Stockholms Auktionsverk. The first was sold in 1999 (Stockholms Auktionsverk 1999a: lot no. 1569). Leif Petzäll, in private conversation, has told me that it was consigned by the financier of the Ulricehamn Museum. Again, in May 2000 Stockholms Auktionsverk put one of these horses up for auction, along with a horse with a carriage (Stockholms Auktionsverk 2000b: lots no. 1578, 1580). The latter had been unsold at a Bukowski's auction the year before. (In this case, too, Bukowski's catalogue had provided the indiscreet information that the objects have been found "during the last years" (Bukowski's 1999: lot no. 1403). When these objects were offered by Stockholms Auktionsverk I alerted the press about their likely recent origin and they were withdrawn on the day before the auction (Torp 2000). Regrettably, other objects, of types that have been known for a long time and thus cannot be securely diagnosed as recently looted, were auctioned. This embarrassing incident seems to have led to a temporary lapse in Stockholms Auktionsverk's sale of Chinese archaeological objects, but in 2002 such objects were once again

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appearing in their catalogues. Bukowski's, on the other hand, declared in 2002 that it had ceased selling unprovenanced archaeological objects (Bäckstedt 2002). This decision may have been the result of unwelcome media attention surrounding one of their previous sales. (P1 Morgon, 6 December 2001; *Kulturnytt* SVT, 6 Dec. 2001; Tunander 2001) At this auction a number of unprovenanced Chinese archaeological objects remained unsold, possibly as a consequence of the publicity. Since Bukowski's made its declaration that it would not auction objects of uncertain origin very few archaeological objects have been offered at their sales. Stockholms Auktionsverk and Göteborgs Auktionsverk continue to offer unprovenanced archaeological objects (Rogsten 2002), but they often remain unsold at auction. It appears that, at least for the time being, these objects have become less sought after by collectors. According to a trade magazine, the prices of Chinese funerary objects have fallen drastically, because of the activities of "unscrupulous looters and smugglers in the Orient" (Antik och Auktion 2002: 73).

Like the Director of the Ulricehamn Museum and the leading auction houses, Swedish dealers officially maintain that their sources of Chinese antiquities are "old collections". (Some dealers argue that archaeological objects can be legally exported from China. Yet, legally exported objects do not seem to make up a large part of what is offered for sale. Objects that are accompanied by export licenses are fairly rare. Once I was able to check the authenticity of an export license. The license proved to be falsified. Whether the object it accompanied – a terracotta horse which, according to the licence, dated to the Han dynasty – was old or contemporary with the licence, I do not know.) Anyway, when talking to the dealers in the guise of a customer, most of them say that the archaeological objects they are offering for sale have been illegally excavated and exported in recent times. What they have to say about the market confirms the reports of looting from China: according to the dealers the supply has improved during the last two decades. As was mentioned above, archaeological objects are smuggled out through most major cities, but the main route is via Hong Kong. Again, this is mirrored in what the Swedish dealers say. Most dealers say that they purchase their objects from Hong

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Kong, but there are some who say that they also order from China. As the archaeological objects can be legally exported from Hong Kong, but not from China, it means that in the first case the Swedish dealer is not breaking any law; in the latter case he is involved in breaking Chinese law. In neither case is the dealer breaking Swedish law.

To complement the dealer's information about their sources it might be noted that I was once present in a shop when a shipment arrived. It came in three large wooden boxes (height c. 1 m, length c. 1.5 m, width 1 m), which contained some 15 grave figurines of various sizes (fig 1). The packing material in the boxes was paper from a Hong Kong newspaper. Clearly, it was not an "old Swedish collection" which had arrived at the shop. On other occasions when visiting dealers, I have seen business correspondence from Hong Kong dealers in their shops. There is also some evidence to confirm that objects are smuggled directly from China to Sweden. In 1995 it was reported that customs officials in Chongqing, Sichuan province, had discovered and intercepted parcels with antiquities which were about to be sent to addresses in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden. Mention should also be made of a feature in the Swedish television news of an anonymous Swedish dealer (called "Thomas" in the interview) who disclosed how he made a living out of smuggling antiquities to Europe.

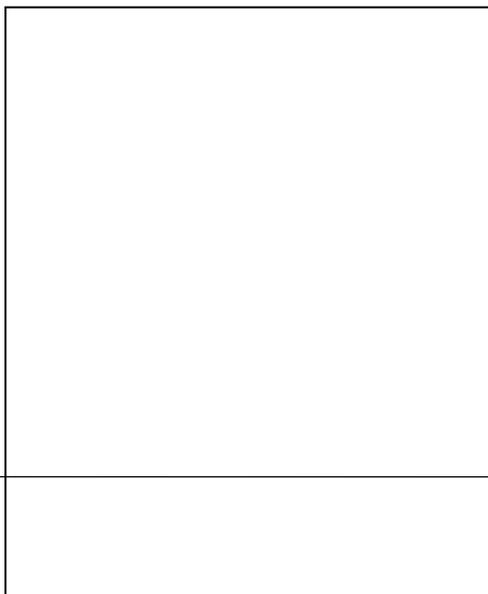


Fig. 1. Wooden crates  
which contained a  
shipment of Chinese  
archaeological objects to  
a Swedish dealer.

The antiquities were bought from different dealers in China. Large artefacts he handed over to his contact in Canton, who arranged to have them smuggled to Hong Kong. Small artefacts he carried over the border personally in his pockets. From Hong Kong the artefacts were transported to Europe. The business was a very lucrative one. “Thomas” estimated he sold artefacts for a couple of millions of Swedish kronor each year (Romin and Rydén 1997).

As mentioned above, tourists often smuggle artefacts from China, sometimes with the aid of tourist companies. Once again, this corresponds to what Swedish dealers relate. Björn Gremner is probably Sweden’s leading dealer in Chinese antiquities. He is known to a wider audience through his appearances as an expert on Chinese antiquities in *Antikrundan*, a popular TV show on antiquities. His company, AntikWest, has a shop in Gothenburg and one in London. In the Gothenburg shop one could (at least until February 2000) pick up a leaflet entitled “Travel to China with AntikWest” which presents the opportunity to go on a tour to China accompanied by a tour leader from AntikWest. The programme included visits to museums, archaeological sites and antiquities markets. When asked about these tours, an employee at AntikWest, who had been a tour leader on a number of occasions, related that he can help the tourists avoid fakes when purchasing antiquities, and also that he can give advice on how to smuggle them. The employee (a retired Swedish customs officer) gave one example on how he had once helped to fool Chinese customs. Modern replicas of ancient grave figurines, which come in boxes

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declaring them to be of recent manufacture, are easily available at tourist shops. Thus when, in this case, a Tang horse was to be smuggled, it was placed in a box made for a modern Tang horse replica and brought as hand baggage through airport customs. The idea was apparently that, in the event of inspection, Chinese customs would then believe that the horse in the box was a modern copy. “Nothing happened”, the man said, “so she just walked right through with an 800 year old horse”. When talking about the grave figurines available at AntikWest, the employee and one of his colleagues, indicated that they came from China in recent years.

Of course, AntikWest’s owner, Björn Gremner, who has also been a tour leader on these tours, denied vigorously that either he or his employees had participated in smuggling from China in any way. Gremner also disputed that looting occurs on a large scale in China (Nyström 2000). When confronted with the fact that his employee’s revelations had been recorded, Gremner claimed that the employee had only been joking (Interview on Gothenburg local radio, 29 February 2000; cf. also Johansson 2003).

The Swedish market situation – with dealers involved to various degrees in the illegal export of artefacts from China – does not seem to be unique. Two dealers in Rome have told me how they smuggle artefacts from China. One brings out his items by air freight from Beijing, the other uses a lorry to Macau. The latter said that the volume of his latest shipment was 10 cubic meters. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that, throughout Europe, there may be hundreds of dealers working in a similar way (for British cases cf. Sylvester 1995; Brodie 1998). In comparison with the major international auction houses, none of these dealers sell a huge number of objects for a vast amount of money. Still, taken together, they are a not insignificant factor when it comes to looting in China.

In sum, it seems to be the consensus among those involved in the trade of Chinese archaeological objects that the biggest market is in fresh finds from China. Other evidence available points in the same direction.

Turning to the market in non-Chinese archaeological material, it is easy to suspect that this is not dominated by objects from “old collections” either. Indeed, on the rare occasions one gets a

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glimpse behind the respectable façade of the trade, this suspicion is confirmed.

Shortly before the screening of the documentary *On the trail of the tomb robbers*, Stockholms Auktionsverk had auctioned a “private collection” of some 200 archaeological objects from Ecuador (Stockholms Auktionsverk 1999b, 2000a). At the time, the auction went unnoticed in media, but as a result of the programme the auction house was asked about the origin of these Ecuadorian objects. The spokesman from Stockholms Auktionsverk was quoted in a newspaper article as saying: “We do not sell smuggled objects. We really want to do everything to avoid people who do these things [i.e. smuggle] getting access to the market.” He explained that it was the policy of the auction house to accept only objects which had been in Sweden for at least 50 years, and added: “We have very strict ethics, if there are any doubts we do not accept the object” (Sund 2000).

A 50 year rule sounded almost too good to be true, and indeed it was not. A few days after the article was published, a former archaeologist, who had appraised the objects for the auction house, came forward. She revealed that the consignor, an Ecuadorian national, had only recently arrived from Ecuador and that it must have been clear to the auction house that his collection was unlikely to have been in Sweden for a long time (Brånstad 2000).

In addition to the “private collection” of Ecuadorian terracotta figurines, Stockholms Auktionsverk also auctioned Peruvian gold, silver, pottery and textiles in 1999 (Stockholms Auktionsverk 1999c). As usual, no provenance information was given. Although auction houses never disclose who the consignors are (thus making them the ideal place to “launder” archaeological objects) it has been possible to rule out that they come from an “old Swedish collection”. All these objects (and a number of objects auctioned at Göteborgs Auktionsverk in the same year) were consigned by a Swedish dealer, who had purchased them at an auction in Denmark the year before (Bruun Rasmussen 1998). Not a single one of the over 200 Pre-Columbian objects offered for sale at this auction had a stated provenance. There is some evidence that the objects were consigned by a Danish company specialising in Pre-Columbian archaeological objects. Denmark has been marked out as a market

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place for freshly looted Pre-Columbian artefacts (Alva 2001: 94), and Peruvian authorities have, in vain, attempted to stop Pre-Columbian auctions in Denmark (information from Blanca Alva forwarded by Maite Domec Sanoja).

I have not been able to trace the market history of the objects auctioned at Stockholms auktionverk any further than to Denmark. But among the objects is a gold nose ornament with an unusual crab design (fig. 2) in Moche I style (200 BC-AD 100). Nose ornaments with similar crab designs appeared on the market after the looting of a tomb at La Mina, Peru in 1988/1989 (fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Moche nose ornament. If authentic, probably looted from La Mina, Peru.

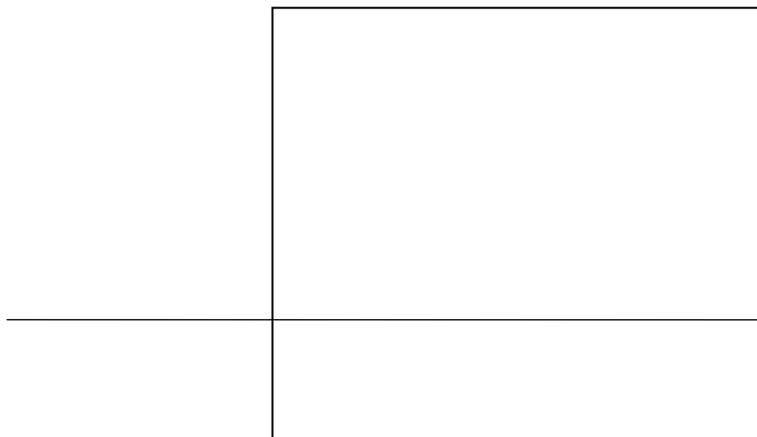


Fig. 3. La Mina, Peru  
1989. The looted tomb.  
Photo courtesy of  
Christopher Donnan.

An idea of what has been lost at La Mina can be gleaned from considering that the looted tomb is thought to have contained a burial equalling those discovered at the famous Sipán site. The Sipán burials have been rated as one of the most important finds in Peruvian archaeology. It may be noted that shortly after the looting of the La Mina tomb, many fake nose ornaments were made and sold along with the real ones. Some nose ornaments with crab designs are probably, but not certainly, authentic. Whether the one offered for sale by Stockholms Auktionverk is the product of an ancient or modern workshop is an open question (Walter Alva, pers. comm.; Donnan 1990: 29-32; Kirkpatrick 1992: 182-86; Narváez 1994).

On the bright side, it may be noted that *On the trail of the tomb robbers* seems to have cooled down the market for Pre-Columbian objects. Since the film was screened very few Pre-Columbian artefacts have appeared for sale at the major Swedish auction houses.

Swedish dealers, too, offer objects straight from the source countries. For example, there are a number of dealers selling archaeological objects from Indonesia – stone heads and busts of statues (in the style of 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cent. central Javanese sculpture), terracottas (in the style of 14<sup>th</sup> cent. east Javanese terracottas) and bronze figurines etc. One of these dealers told me in 1999 (he has since

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closed down his shop and now works for Bukowski's) that he was the source of these objects. According to him they had been smuggled from Indonesia in a container load of modern furniture. Luckily, it seems that a large number of the Indonesian artefacts that come to Sweden by this route are fakes (Letter from Nunus Supardi, 10 May 1999). One of the dealers selling Indonesian objects has been offering a Roman bronze statuette (height 56 cm) for a client. He only had a photograph of it as the actual piece itself was still in Macedonia (FYROM). The dealer was aware that its export from Macedonia was probably illegal, but did not see this as a problem. (Whether the piece is from an "old Macedonian collection" or not is of course impossible to tell. Bronze statues are generally shipwreck finds, and there are recent reports of looting of shipwrecks in the Adriatic Sea.)

In other cases, a recent illicit origin for the objects seems probable, although the Swedish dealer concerned has not been involved in any wrongdoing. In *On the trail of the tomb robbers* a Stockholm dealer, filmed using a hidden camera, showed a Roman statue which he believed to have been recovered by tomb robbers because the statue had gouges on the back made by a mechanical digger (figs 4 and 5). The statue in question first appeared on the market at a Sotheby's sale in 1986. The Sotheby's documents reveal that the consignor was the dealer Giacomo Medici, who is now standing trial in Italy on charges of smuggling antiquities (Watson 1998a: 290-93, 1998b, 1999; Brodie et al. 2000: 27). The Stockholm dealer believed the statue to be from southern Italy, as he knew that tomb robbers in that part of the country used mechanical diggers. In reality, mechanical diggers are used by *tombaroli* in many parts of Italy. For example, the statue group of the Capitoline triad seized in Switzerland in 1994 was recovered with a mechanical digger from a Roman villa near Tivoli in central Italy (Graepler 1995: 26 n. 16). There are, however, objects of south Italian origin on the Swedish market: south Italian red figure and polychrome vases occasionally appear for sale. As will be discussed below, looting in southern Italy has occurred on a vast scale since the 1970s.

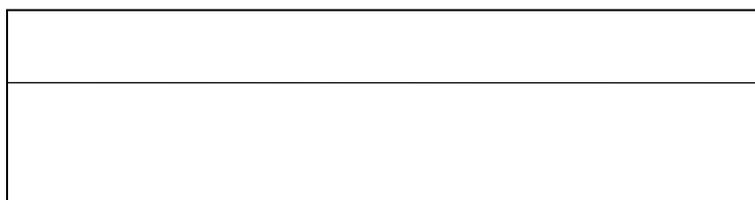


Fig. 4. Roman marble statue offered by a Swedish dealer. Front.

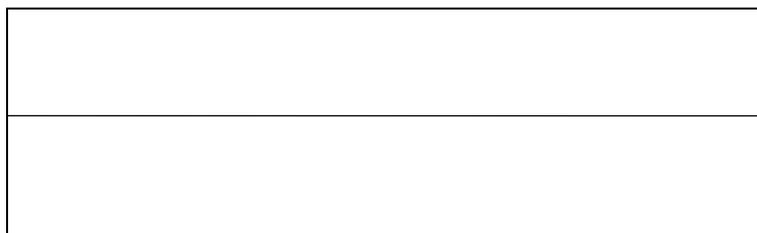


Fig. 5. Roman marble statue, back. Note the three parallel gouges, probably made when the statue was recovered with a mechanical digger by looters.

“Old Swedish collections” do not seem to be the main source for all Gandharan artefacts available either. Particularly since they

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appear in rather large quantities and often have fresh breaks and drill marks (fig. 6).



Fig 6. Gandhara stone head for sale in Sweden. Note the sharp break where the head has been detached from the body.

Although Gandharan artefacts have been looted for a long time, the main outpour onto the international market occurred during the last two decades (Ali and Coningham 1998: 8). A Swedish dealer told me in 1999 that Gandharan artefacts have become much cheaper since the war in Afghanistan. Similarly, a Swedish dealer said in an interview that he could offer Mesopotamian artefacts at bargain prices because the Gulf War had increased the supply (Saag 1996; Lundén and Häggström 1999: 90-91).

Looking at the Swedish coin market, one can note the appearance of Bulgarian coins in recent years. In Bulgaria theft and looting have reached epidemic proportions (cf. Bailey 1993), and there is evidence that huge quantities of coins are smuggled out of the country (Doole 2000b: 14). I could also mention a well-known Swedish coin dealer who in 1995 put up for sale over 300 Anglo-Saxon coins, which were probably part of a hoard looted near Reading in England in 1993 (Roger Bland, pers. comm. 1999, 2002).

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When studying the trade in archaeological objects, one also comes across other kinds of cultural objects with an illicit origin. Several dealers offering Chinese artefacts also sell icons, willingly conceding that they are smuggled from Russia. In one case, Swedish customs intercepted a shipment of icons from Russia. However, the reason for the seizure was not that the icons had been illegally exported from Russia, nor the suspicion that two of them had been stolen (Swedish customs are not allowed to seize an object on the suspicion of theft), but that the smuggler had not paid Swedish import tax and VAT. Once the tax had been paid the icons were released to him (Stockholms tingsrätt 1997; Swedish Radio, *Studio Ett*, P1, 28 March 2000).

In a similar case, a large number of Egyptian archaeological objects were seized by Swedish customs, and given back to the importer when the proper fees had been paid. The question of whether the objects had originally left Egypt legally or illegally was never addressed by the court (Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities 1992).

In *On the trail of the tomb robbers* two dealers, Walter and Kerstin Peterson from a firm called Dynasty Pacific, were caught on hidden camera revealing how they smuggled Buddhas from East Asia in their suitcases. They explained that they only took wooden Buddhas because metal ones would show up on the airport security X-ray. They also said that last time they had been nervous, because Thai customs had recently started a major crack-down, but anyway, all they had to do was “stuff them [i.e. the Buddhas] in the bag and hope for the best”. When the two dealers realised that they had been secretly filmed, they claimed that they had only been joking when describing their smuggling activities.

My studies have focused on the market in Sweden with archaeological objects originating from other countries, but it should also be mentioned that unprovenanced archaeological objects of Swedish origin appear on the domestic as well as the international market. For example, Medieval coins from a hoard probably looted in southern Sweden, have been offered for sale in Denmark (Ian Wisehn, pers. comm.), and coins from a Viking period hoard looted on Gotland have appeared on the British market (Österholm 2000).

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Looting in Sweden is mainly carried out with the help of metal detectors. Archaeological publications and *formminnesregistret* (the register of archaeological sites) provide easy access to information on the location of finds of precious metal. As such sites are likely to yield more finds of the same sort, they are favourite targets. In Sweden, like in so many other countries, thorough studies estimating the scale of looting are lacking. However, a metal detector survey of known treasure sites in Öland, Uppland and Östergötland carried out by archaeologists in the early 1990s gives an indication of the seriousness of the situation. The majority of the c. 25 sites surveyed had been emptied, or almost emptied, of metal objects. At some sites physical evidence of looting, in the form of small holes in the soil, was visible. Only those few sites which had been given an erroneous location in the publications (for example “East of the village” instead of “North of the village”) had escaped looting (Monika Rasch, pers. comm). There are also numerous reports of looting by metal detector users in other parts of the country (Östergren 1985: 11-14; Jonsson and Östergren 1989: 90-98; Lindqvist 1990; Meschke 1990; Hammarstedt 1999; Häggström 1999, 2002; Persson 1999; Granholm 2000: 15-20; Gustavson 2000; Österholm 2000; cf. also the two court cases: Gotlands tingsrätt 1991: a and b). While writing this article, several new incidents of looting were reported from Gotland. Underwater archaeological sites also suffer from extensive looting. In many areas along the Swedish coast there are no undamaged shipwreck sites left. Not only the archaeological heritage is at risk. Since 1994 over 200 objects, including medieval wooden sculptures, have been stolen from churches in northern Sweden (Bäckström 2003).

As for archaeological objects, I should mention that the register of archaeological sites is now being digitalised. The question of who will have access to this data base has not yet been finalised. If it is to become generally accessible, it will provide metal detector users with an excellent tool for locating promising sites.

Summarising the evidence, it is clear that there is a thriving market in archaeological objects in Sweden. Despite official claims to the contrary, the available information suggests that the objects

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mainly derive from recent clandestine excavations. This is not to say that there are no objects from “old collections” on the market, but I have found nothing to suggest that they are the main source.

Some players in this game, like the director of the Ulricehamn Museum, take part in smuggling themselves. Others, like the dealer importing artefacts from Indonesia, order the objects from the source countries and then let someone else do the smuggling. Yet others, like the dealers purchasing from Hong Kong, deal with objects well aware that they have been recently looted and smuggled. Then there are those, like the auction houses, at a slightly greater distance from the illegal activities, who willingly provide a market for these objects. There is not much point in trying to define subtle differences in the level of immorality in these different cases. Taken as a whole, the Swedish trade in archaeological objects is a dirty trade and it generates destruction of archaeological sites all over the world.

### The legal aspect

Swedish law prohibits the unauthorized recovery of archaeological objects. Export of archaeological objects, and many other classes of cultural objects, without a permit is also forbidden. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding *import* law: it is perfectly legal to import into Sweden a cultural object that has been illegally exported from its country of origin. (For EU countries another legal situation applies; as in 1992 an EEC regulation was introduced on the return of objects illegally exported from one member state to another.)

On a few occasions, metal detector users looting archaeological sites in Sweden have been arrested and sentenced (Gotlands tingsrätt 1991ab). Although the question has never been addressed in a Swedish court, it seems that a Swedish resident participating in an illegal excavation abroad or handling an object knowing that it derives from such an activity, could in theory be prosecuted for this in Sweden. As discussed above, dealers selling, for example, Chinese funerary objects, are generally well aware that their merchandise derives from recent illegal excavations. Yet,

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as far as I can tell, the dealers do not seem to be involved in unearthing the objects, and it is extremely unlikely that their knowledge of the illegal origin of the objects could ever be proven in court.

On the other hand, a number of dealers take an active part in the illegal export of archaeological and cultural objects from other countries, and it is possible that a police investigation could produce solid evidence of this. (cf. the case with the smuggled Russian icons, referred to above). Yet, in such a case the act of importing or handling an illegally exported object would not be a violation of Swedish law.

To be fair, this legal situation is not unique to Sweden. The laws on cultural heritage in many other countries are designed in a similar way: objects originating within the country are protected by law, but objects from abroad are not. This has, of course, facilitated the illicit antiquities trade, as the looted objects are usually marketed outside their countries of origin. The 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* and the 1995 UNIDROIT *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* were designed to close these loopholes.

Unfortunately, when the final draft of the 1970 UNESCO Convention was put together, the United States insisted on changes to the text that blurred the convention's requirements as regards import controls. Some countries, like Australia and Canada, interpret the convention as obliging signatories to the convention to regulate the import of cultural objects. Both these countries have implemented legislation outlawing the import of cultural objects that have been illegally exported from their country of origin. Other countries interpret the convention in a narrower sense, and have imposed less stringent import regulations (O'Keefe 2000:13-14, 42-45, 57-61).

For many years Sweden, like many other market countries, declined to ratify the 1970 UNESCO Convention (Lundén and Hågström 1999: 91-94). Finally, in October 2002 – after 32 years of hesitation – the Swedish government took the decision to ratify it (Kulturdepartementet 2002). But Sweden followed the

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minimalistic interpretation of the conventions requirements. The ratification did not lead to any changes in the Swedish law, and it is still legal to import objects smuggled out of other countries. A change in the Swedish law may come with the Swedish ratification of the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention. A memorandum from October 2002 states that Sweden plans to start an enquiry to suggest the changes in the law necessary to become party to the UNIDROIT Convention (Kulturdepartementet 2002: 2). Work on this enquiry did not start until a year later, in March 2004. As for the protection of underwater archaeological sites, one important convention is the 2000 Unesco *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage*. At present there are no signs that the Swedish government plans to ratify it.

### The ethical aspect

Many consider it ethical and even admirable to buy and sell archaeological objects. Why? How come it is socially acceptable to collect looted archaeological objects, when – to make an often used analogy – it is not socially acceptable to collect rare birds' eggs? Why can a collector, who has amassed a collection of looted archaeological objects, put them on display and get the public's approval for it, while the collector of ivory or spotted cats' skins cannot (cf. Renfrew 2000: 12, 20)? Of course, in the latter case it is likely that the objects have been imported illegally. Although Sweden has not implemented any laws concerning the import of cultural objects from countries outside the EU, Sweden has ratified and implemented the 1973 *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES), which forbids the import of and trade in certain endangered or near-extinct species. But the legal situation is only one aspect of the problem. The heart of the matter is rather that, although there is widespread knowledge that the ivory trade contributes to elephant poaching, there is little awareness that the trade in Chinese funerary figurines contributes to grave robbing. On the contrary, in the public imagination dealers and collectors are often cast in the role of culturally sophisticated heroes, who through their love and

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passion for the past *protect* it by putting together their collections (cf. Renfrew 2000: 30).

In the following section I shall argue that the scholarly community is to a large extent to blame for this prevailing notion in contemporary society. A number of scholars have in various ways signalled that dealing and collecting have scholarly approval, and that there is a public and scholarly benefit to be gained from the creation of collections of unprovenanced archaeological objects. Other scholars have done little or nothing to change this image.

### The scholar and the market

On an international level, the issue of scholarly interaction with the trade has been discussed for a long time (cf. Vitelli 1984, Wylie 1996) and several professional organisations have drawn up codes of ethics which include rules on their members' conduct as to the illicit antiquities trade. For example, the Code of Practice adopted by the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) stipulates the following:

Archaeologists will not engage in, or allow their names to be associated with, any form of activity relating to the illicit trade in antiquities and works of art, covered by the 1970 UNESCO convention. (§ 1.6)

For museum professionals the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics (1986, revised 2001) has a paragraph to the same effect:

The museum professional must warrant that it is highly unethical for a museum to support the illicit market in any way, directly or indirectly. (§3.2)

The code further states that museum professionals:

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... should not act in any way that could be regarded as benefiting such activity [i.e. the illicit transfer, import and export of cultural and natural object] in any way, directly or indirectly. (§ 8.6)

Although not all archaeologists, art historians or museum professionals who study the material remains of the past are members of the EAA, ICOM or any of the other organisations which have formulated similar rules, one would have hoped that the argument underlying these rules was clear to everyone: because the trade generates destruction of the archaeological record, it is unprofessional and immoral to support it. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Below, some examples of the direct and indirect support of the trade and the looting process will be discussed.

### Museum acquisitions: a case study

Probably the most straightforward way to support the trade in looted objects is to purchase objects that are likely to have been looted. Therefore, on acquisitions (whether by purchase, gift, loan, bequest or exchange) the ICOM Code stipulates that:

Every effort must be made to ensure that it [i.e. the object or specimen considered for acquisition] has not been illegally acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin. (§ 3.2)

Throughout its history Medelhavsmuseet (the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities) in Stockholm (until recently not a member of ICOM) has acquired objects on the art market to enrich its collections, through the financial support of various generous private benefactors. The museum's own archive material (correspondence, invoices etc.) shows that between 1993 and 1998 the museum acquired over 30 archaeological objects at a total value of more than SEK 4.2 million (USD c. 420,000). (In 1999 no major acquisitions were made and in 2000 the museum adopted an acquisitions policy based on the ICOM Code.) The main suppliers were

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Galerie Arete and Galerie Nefer, Zürich, Bruce McAlpine Ancient Art, London and Sotheby's, New York.

What are the original sources for these objects acquired by the museum? Not surprisingly perhaps, Bengt Peterson, director of the museum from 1993 to 2000, has argued that they must come from "old collections", because they have been bought from reputable dealers (Bengt Peterson pers. comm.).

A few of the objects acquired by the museum are indeed accompanied by information suggesting that they came from "old collections", but the majority are not: they have surfaced on the market in the 1980s and 1990s without any previous recorded history. Although it may be argued that some of these may come from "old collections" which have escaped the attention of scholarship, it seems extremely unlikely that this is the case for all, or even the majority, of these objects. On the contrary, it seems much more probable that they have been clandestinely excavated not long before they appeared on the market.

Most of the objects acquired by the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities could have been unearthed within a very large geographical area. For example, the two Roman marble heads that surfaced on the market in 1985 and were acquired in 1993 (from the above-mentioned Stockholm dealer who on hidden camera offered a statue with gouges made by a mechanical digger) could have come from several of the countries whose present territories lie within the borders of the Roman Empire. In cases like this, when it is almost impossible to tell where an object was unearthed, it is equally difficult to find any evidence for when it happened.

However, stylistic criteria sometimes allow us to narrow down the geographical area from which an object is likely to have come. In these cases it may become possible to make suggestions about when the object was dug up out of the ground. Below, two such examples will be looked into. In these cases it has also been possible to trace the market history of the objects and find out which dealer possessed them when they first surfaced on the market. This throws some light on the "reputable dealer" argument.

In 1997 the museum acquired a Roman funerary relief in marble from Galerie Arete, Zürich for CHF 62,000 (USD c.

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33,000). The relief, dating to c. 160-180 AC, shows a man combing wool (fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Roman funerary relief. Acquired by the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities in 1997.

Its inscription names the deceased, a certain Titus Aelius Evangelus. Interestingly, in 1986 the J. Paul Getty Museum in California (a museum famous for its lack of acquisition ethics) had acquired a sarcophagus front (i.e. a side sawn off from a sarcophagus) with reliefs including a very similar scene and a very similar inscription naming the same individual. Both pieces are thus almost certain to come from the same tomb. Judging from the motifs and workmanship they were presumably manufactured at Ostia, the port town of the city of Rome. Both pieces appeared on the market in the 1980s (Koch 1988: 24-27; Holliday 1993).

There is ample evidence for looting at the cemeteries outside Ostia in the 1970s and 1980s. The marble sarcophagus found by clandestine excavators at the Pianabella cemetery in 1976 is just one of many examples of looting. This case gives a vivid illustration of the destructive nature of looting. Not only does looting destroy archaeological contexts, the objects themselves are often seriously damaged in the process. The front and lid of the

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sarcophagus were decorated in low relief with mythological scenes. To facilitate transport, the looters broke the sarcophagus into pieces – using a blunt instrument such as a sledgehammer – and carried off the decorated front and lid pieces, leaving the undecorated parts behind. By 1981 the looted pieces were offered on the market. In 1982 they were bought by the Antikenmuseum in Berlin, accompanied by a bogus old Swiss collection provenance. Subsequently, in 1991 when their true origin had become known, they were returned to Ostia and reassembled in the Ostia museum with the rest of the sarcophagus (Gallina Zevi 1993; Agnoli 1999: 219-22).

Now, when the funerary relief in Stockholm and the sarcophagus front in Malibu surfaced on the market in the 1980s, it was in galleries run by dealers Bruce McNall and Robert Hecht. These two dealers are hardly men with blameless reputations. McNall has admitted that he and Hecht worked closely together from the early 1970s until the mid-1980s smuggling freshly looted antiquities from Italy and other Mediterranean countries. According to McNall, their sources were often people whom McNall suspected were also dealing in arms and drugs (Burrough 1994). From 1997 to 2001 McNall served a prison sentence for bank fraud charges. Among the many affairs connected to Hecht's name, the most well known is probably the purchase by the Metropolitan Museum of Art of an Attic red figure vase for the record price of USD 1 million in 1972. It had allegedly been looted in Etruria the year before, but according to the "official" version it came from a Lebanese dealer, who kept it lying in pieces in a shoebox for decades. (Meyer 1974: 86-100; Hoving 1993: 307-38). In 1981-82 Hecht brokered another deal with the Metropolitan Museum. He sold them a fifteen-piece set of Hellenistic silver, for USD 2.7 million. This time it was claimed that the objects came from a family of Lebanese antique dealers, who had owned it for more than 20 years. Yet there is strong evidence that it was looted from Aidone (ancient Morgantina) on Sicily at some point in time between 1978 and 1981 (Stille 1999). Apparently, Hecht is still of interest to the Italian police. In 2000 his apartment in Paris was raided on their request.

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Arguably, it *could* be the case that the funerary relief in Stockholm and sarcophagus front in Malibu have a legal origin. They *could* have been unearthed long ago and exported legally before 1902 when Italy imposed regulations on the export of antiquities and they *could* then have remained unknown to the scholarly world in an obscure private collection throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It *could* be a mere coincidence that they then appeared on the market in the hands of two notorious dealers at a time when several incidents of looting were reported at Ostia. But although proof is lacking, the circumstantial evidence suggests that one may also hazard the possibility that they were illegally excavated and smuggled out of Italy not long before their appearance on the market. They are certainly too big to fit into a shoebox.

The second example is similar. In 1994 the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities acquired a red figure fish plate for USD 4600 (fig 8). It belongs to a distinct type of pottery, known as Apulian red figure, which was produced in Apulia in the Italic peninsula from c. 430 BC until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. Unlike, for example, Attic pottery, which was made in Attica and exported throughout the Mediterranean, Apulian pottery had a very limited distribution. The vast majority of the Apulian vases that have been excavated archaeologically have been found in the modern regions of Puglia and Basilicata in southern Italy. Thus it is almost certain that a vase that surfaces on the market has been unearthed in either of these two regions. The fish plate purchased for the museum belongs to a sub-group of Apulian red figure, believed to have been produced in North Apulia, ancient Daunia (McPhee and Trendall 1987: 138, no. 40).

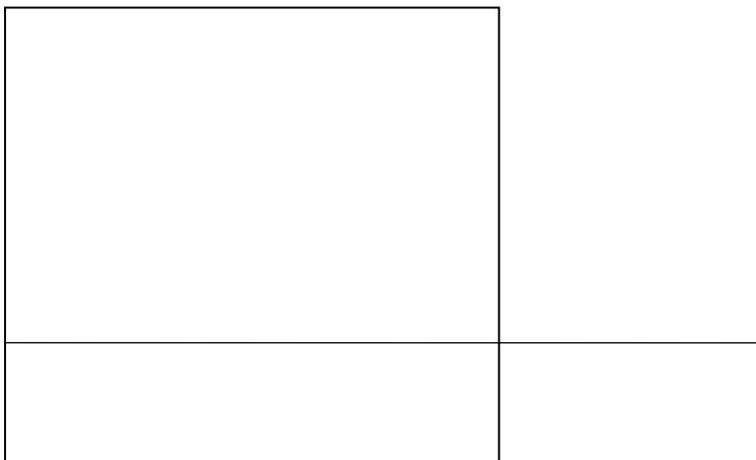


Fig. 8. 4<sup>th</sup> cent. red figure  
Apulian fish plate.  
Surfaced on the market in  
1983. Acquired by the  
Museum of  
Mediterranean  
Antiquities in 1993.

This area, like the rest of Apulia and Basilicata, has witnessed looting on a massive scale since the 1970s (Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 15-16, 32; Graepler 1995: 24-25; Elia 2001). Among the tombs looted in North Apulia one can mention the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC Tomb of the Riders which was looted in 1982 (fig 9) (Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 42-45; Graepler 1995: 27, n. 20, Pastore 2001: 156).

The fish plate in the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities was purchased at Sotheby's, New York, in 1993. According to the auction catalogue it had previously been auctioned at Sotheby's, London, in 1983. The 1983 Sotheby's catalogue does not give any information on the origin of the fish plate, but thanks to Sotheby's internal records we now know it was consigned by Robin Symes. Symes is not a man with a spotless reputation either.

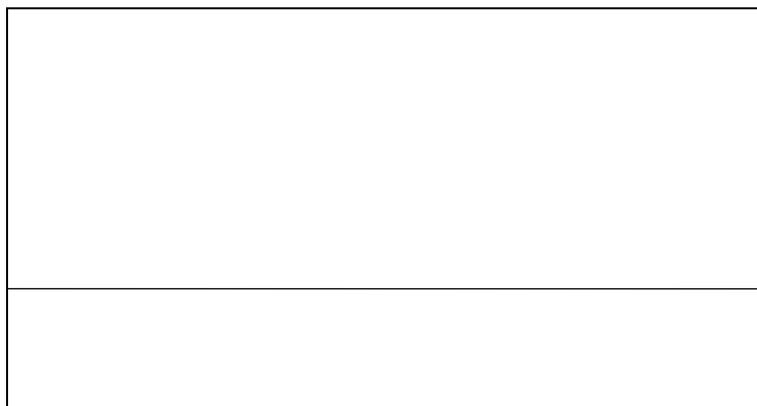


Fig. 9. Apulia, Italy 1982. The entrance to a tunnel dug by looters to reach a 4<sup>th</sup> cent BC tomb. (From Graepler and Mazzei 1993: 42.)

His name is connected to several highly suspect deals. For example, in 1982 he sold two acrolithic sculptures (late 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC) believed to have been looted in Aidone a few years earlier (Stille 1999; Brånstad and Råstam 2000). It is also interesting that he shared an office address in Geneva with the above-mentioned Giacomo Medici, and that the two were Sotheby's major consignors of archaeological objects of Italian origin (Watson 1998a: 202, 1998b; Brodie et al. 2000: 27). (On the looting and marketing of Apulian vases in general, and on Sotheby's role as a vendor of these vases in particular, see Elia 2001.)

Again, it could be a mere coincidence that this fish plate was put up for auction, consigned by a dealer with a questionable record, at a time when massive looting occurred in its likely area of origin. Still, the alternative scenario, that it was freshly looted when it surfaced on the market, must also be considered.

The two examples given here show that when there is some information to suggest an object's find spot and market history, the evidence does not favour the "old collection" scenario. More often than not such information is simply not available. In those cases, the scholar is left with his/her own judgement on whether to think that what seems to apply in the better-documented cases should also apply in less well-documented cases. Lacking solid information, the scholar has to choose whether to believe that the object comes from a hypothetical "old collection" or to look at a connection with more or less recent clandestine excavations. As mentioned above, the former director of the Museum of

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Mediterranean Antiquities prefers the former alternative. Others might favour the latter.

### Legitimizing the trade

To purchase unprovenanced archaeological objects is a very direct way of supporting the trade. There are also various indirect ways through which scholars may support it. This is the reason why the EAA and ICOM codes not only forbid scholars to “engage” (EAA) or “participate” (ICOM) in the trade, but also to give it indirect support by “allowing their names to be associated” with it (EAA), or to “act in any way that could be regarded as benefiting” it (ICOM).

Collectors and dealers strive for, and usually succeed in gaining, social recognition. For them there is much to be gained (socially and financially) from having the approval of the scholarly world and respectable institutions such as museums. As mentioned above, the Swedish market in archaeological objects is dominated by objects of Chinese origin. It might thus be interesting to look at what relation scholars working with Chinese archaeological material have to this trade. Have they refused to have anything to do with it? Have they even spoken out and said that the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects contributes to looting? As far as I am aware, until recently no attempts have been made by the experts on Chinese antiquities to criticise the trade. On the contrary, over the years several scholars have contributed to legitimizing it.

Earlier I mentioned the acquisitive activities of the Ulricehamn Museum. Among scholars with some acquaintance with Chinese archaeology, the museum director’s revelations should not have come as a surprise. To them it must have been abundantly clear that several, probably even the majority, of the archaeological objects purchased by this museum have been recently looted. Yet, despite this knowledge, not a word of criticism regarding the museum and its acquisitions has been heard from the scholarly world. Instead it has been applauded. For example, when the museum was reviewed in an article by Per-

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Olow Leijon, Curator of Chinese art at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, the text is nothing more than a panegyric (Leijon 1998). His only critical remark is that the choice of oak for the showcases is unfortunate, as oak releases fumes that may damage paper and textile materials. He goes on to note that anyway, the cases mainly contain ceramic material. One wonders, would not a word or two on the provenance of the terracotta grave figurines displayed in these cases have been more appropriate? Or perhaps that the damage caused by oak fumes is negligible compared to the damage caused by bulldozers and dynamite when tombs in China are rifled to provide the market with objects such those purchased by the museum and exhibited in its showcases?

Leijon is in good company; several of his colleagues have been known to flatter collectors and extoll collecting. The so-called Tectus collection is a collection of over 100 Chinese antiquities, ranging from the Neolithic to the modern era. It was put together between 1985 and 1990 by Leif Petzäll (future director of the Ulricehamn Museum) for its owner, an undisclosed real estate owner in Gothenburg. In 1995 it was purchased by the Ulricehamn Museum. The publication of the collection in 1991 contains a preface and introduction written by two distinguished scholars in the field: Rosemary E. Scott (curator at the Percival David Foundation, London) and Professor Bo Gyllensvärd (director of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm 1959-1981) (Engel and Petzäll 1991).

The very fact that these two scholars are contributing to the publication of a collection containing unprovenanced archaeological objects is in itself a sign that they support this kind of collecting. What they write further underlines this message. In Scott's preface we read that (p. 7):

Scholarly interest in Chinese ceramics has a long history in Sweden, and this current volume provides excellent evidence that this interest is still strong and active. There have been a number of great Swedish collections of Chinese art objects, most notably that of His Late majesty King Gustav VI Adolf, which is now housed in the Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm. The Late King's collection, however, like most of the other

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major collections around the world, was amassed some years ago when fine pieces were more readily available than is the case today, and there were, in the West, fewer interested collectors. The owner of this collection is greatly to be congratulated on having managed to put together such a fine collection of Chinese ceramics in so short a time and in the more difficult climate of the present day art market. He was apparently first drawn to Chinese ceramics /.../ in 1985. With remarkable dedication between that time and 1990 he sought out and bought the pieces that make up the Tectus Collection which is so superbly documented in this catalogue. In doing so he has succeeded in proving that it is still possible, even today, to form a collection of fine Chinese ceramic wares.

The text, hailing the collector and his “fine” collection, is rather typical of the genre of scholarly introductions to publications of private collections (another example will be discussed below). In this case the collector is further flattered by the implied association with well known collectors such as the former Swedish king. Apparently, what according to Scott adds to the magnitude of this collector’s achievement is that he has bought his objects in “so short a time” and that he has done so “in the more difficult climate of the present day art market.” She does not explain why the “climate” on the market is more “difficult” today than before (apart from mentioning that the number of collectors has grown). Turning to Gyllensvärd’s introduction we are given a hint. Like Scott, his exposé of Swedish collecting starts from its early days (p. 11):

Chinese ceramics have been collected in Sweden for about 100 years. Access to first-class pieces was good on the market both inside and outside China and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of private and institutional collections were created, some of which reached international renown. The most important private collections belonged to members of the so-called China Club, founded in Stockholm in 1929 [Not to be confused with the China Committee founded in 1919] /.../ In 1949, when the Peoples Republic of China was founded, almost all direct export of antiques was forbidden, which brought about a radical change also for the collecting of Chinese

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ceramics. The supply of this desired commodity shrunk drastically on the Western market and at the same time the prices of what was available increased dramatically. This mainly came from private collections which for different reasons were dispersed. /.../ In our country, too, the changing situation was felt. The generation that had created the major collections passed away, their heirs could not, or did not want to, keep them and only a few new collectors of these precious works of art emerged.

From Gyllensvärd's account we learn that the problem is that the "direct (sic!) export" from China became illegal in 1949. Still, the interest in collecting survived this setback and was given a new impetus. He continues:

The foundation of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in 1963, where all public collections dispersed throughout the country were now brought together along with a not insignificant number of private collections donated to the museum, undoubtedly contributed to the growing interest in the field. Now the Swedish public and many foreigners could study Far Eastern art in a rich and to some extent unique collection. /.../ Special exhibitions within the museum and other parts of Sweden helped to spread the interest in China and its art and culture in wider circles and now a new type of collectors and connoisseurs began to emerge.

Where the objects this "type" of collectors buys come from Gyllensvärd does not explain, but his text seems to imply that the source is still pre-1949 collections that have been split up and sold. By the time Gyllensvärd wrote this (in 1991), looting in China had reached epidemic proportions and Chinese archaeological objects were pouring out onto the international antiquities market. In light of this, it seems much more likely that the main source for archaeological objects available at the time was recent looting, not pre-1949 collections. Did Gyllensvärd not know this, or did he know, but preferred not to tell the reader? It is unfortunate that a scholar so blatantly plays into the hands of the dealers and collectors and helps them perpetuate the "old collection" myth.

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Speaking of collusion with the market, Gyllensvärd has acted as a consultant to Bukowski's and AntikWest. In 1992 Björn Gremner at AntikWest took the initiative to award him a travel grant. Then, at Gyllensvärds suggestion, a fund was created (named Bo Gyllensvärd's stipendiefond) giving grants for scholarly studies of China. Gyllensvärd and Gremner are both board members for this fund.

Returning to Gyllensvärd's account, its most remarkable statement is probably that Östasiatiska Museet (the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities) in Stockholm, through permanent and temporary exhibitions, has fostered a new generation of collectors. This statement should not only be seen as an attempt to glorify the museum, by a former director. Sadly, it probably contains a lot of truth. Throughout its history the museum has mounted different exhibitions which signal that it supports the trade in and collecting of archaeological objects.

In 1968 the museum put a private collection on display under the title *Kina som hobby. Valda ting ur Gustaf Hilleströms samling* (China as a hobby. Selected artefacts from the collection of Gustaf Hilleström). As has been pointed out in the scholarly literature, by putting private collections on display in well-respected and prestigious museums, the collections themselves (and their owners) acquire an aura of prestige and legitimacy. A museum exhibition can also add to the collection's market value. (Hilleströms collection was auctioned in 1987. Bukowski's 1987.) In the introduction to the 1968 exhibition catalogue (Gyllensvärd and Wirgin 1968), Gyllensvärd thanks the collector Hilleström for his generosity in giving the museum the privilege to display his beautiful artefacts. Gyllensvärd also takes the opportunity to assure the reader that all the objects in the collection had left China before 1949. (How could he be sure it did not contain post-1949 material?) In Hilleström's own introduction we read that he feels grateful and proud to have some of his beautiful artefacts displayed at our finest museum. He lists a number of distinguished Swedish scholars (including Bo Gyllensvärd) who have helped him in various ways and shared their infinite knowledge with him. Apparently, mutual flattery is part of the game between scholars and collectors.

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In 1968 there was little awareness in scholarly circles that scholars, by legitimating trading and collecting, contributed to the looting process. Thus the solecism of Gyllensvärd and his museum at this point in time may be excused. What is worrying is that the collaboration and reciprocal praising which is so evident in this case still continues.

In 1981-82, under its new director Jan Wirgin, the museum mounted the exhibition *Falskt eller äkta? Kopior, imitationer och förfälskningar av östasiatisk konst* (Fake or Genuine? Copies, imitations and fakes of East Asian art). The exhibition included fake Han and Tang dynasty grave figurines, fake porcelain etc. Wirgin describes the result of the exhibition as follows:

The exhibition made a great impact on the visitors. Ordinary visitors as well as art collectors and art dealers found the exhibition instructive and fascinating and expressed their dismay at the clever modern fakes in different kinds of material, which now has become more frequent, and were grateful for the information the museum had given the public (Östasiatiska Museet 1984: 12-13).

Needless to say, when a state museum mounts an exhibition to teach dealers and collectors how to avoid fakes (so they can purchase genuine looted pieces instead) it conveys the image that the museum officially supports dealing and collecting.

The museum proclaimed a similar message when it put together an exhibition with objects from a commercial salvage operation in 1997. The museum (and the salvager) portrayed the project as a scientific marine archaeological excavation. This proved to be incorrect: divers who participated in the project have revealed that during the salvage operation objects of low commercial value (undecorated storage jars and damaged ceramics) were smashed to pieces and thrown back into the sea. Not surprisingly, when the objects from the salvage are offered for sale, the vendor does not turn down an opportunity to mention the museum exhibition (Lundén and Häggström 1999: 94-99).

One would have hoped that the documentary *On the trail of the tomb robbers* and the massive media coverage it generated

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would also have made an impact on the academic world, and rendered scholars less enthusiastic in their support of the trade. Yet, less than two weeks after the programme was aired and radio had revealed that illicit archaeological objects from China were auctioned at Sweden's leading auction, Mette Siggstedt, Curator at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, gave an interview on fakes. She downplayed the problem of the smuggling of archaeological objects from China and gave advice on how to avoid recent manufactures when purchasing grave figurines. One of her pieces of advice was to purchase from Swedish auction houses (Thuland 2000).

From the interview with a senior scholar and museum curator it is easy to get the impression that the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities condones the trade in Chinese archaeological objects and the looting which provides this market with a steady supply of genuine artefacts.

It is interesting that the homepage of Östasiatiska Museets Vänner (the Friends of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities) pro-vides links to dealers and auction houses (Why not a link to Cultural Heritage Watch instead?). A bulletin published jointly by the museum and the Friends of the Museum between 1981 and 1994, contains advertisements from dealers and auction houses. In one of these advertisements the museum is thanked for "fruitful co-operation" (Östasiatiska Museet 1994: 83). Clearly, to accept advertisements from dealers is to accept the trade.

In a similar manner, Göteborgs Stadsmuseum (the City Museum of Gothenburg) has shown official scholarly approval of the trade. Until 2003 its museum shop included a showcase from the above-mentioned gallery AntikWest (Lundén 2003a). To the visitor this signaled that the museum, dedicated to the archaeology and history of Gothenburg, was not opposed to the trade in Chinese archaeological objects and looting in China. It would be interesting to know if, in principle, dealers in Swedish archaeological objects and retailers of metal detectors were also allowed to advertise in the museum.

The Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities has also glorified collectors and collecting. In 1999 the museum was about to mount the exhibition *Kärlek till Egypten* (Love of Egypt) with selected

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Egyptian objects purchased through the help of a generous benefactor (who also possesses a substantial private collection). Eventually, the exhibition was cancelled due to staff shortages but the catalogue for the exhibition was published (George 1999). In Bengt Peterson's preface we read (p. 5):

This book is dedicated to a Friend of The Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities. It also aims to celebrate a 25-year long active co-operation with reciprocal initiatives with the purpose of enriching the museums collections. Like no other single individual during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our Friend has been able to contribute to making Sweden the home of eminent works of art from the Ancient Mediterranean world. They are of great importance for the qualitative range an important antiquities museum must possess. *Love of Egypt* is the name of this book. It brings together a selection of objects which have all been acquired through our Friend's love and dedication.

This text, in the way it flatters the Friend in question, is rather straightforward and does not need much comment, but it might be noted that, as so often in scholarly prefaces of this sort, acquisitions of archaeological objects (here referred to as "eminent works of art") are made through virtues like "love" and "dedication", not with "cash" or "money". Apparently such words have overtones too profane to describe how the objects are acquired. One also notes that purchases are referred to by the use of the metaphor of giving the objects a "home". Gill and Chippindale (1993: 657) have observed that this euphemism (and the habit of describing objects on the market as "orphaned") subtly imply the notion that the objects themselves want to be purchased and belong to their purchaser. A person who sees the issue from another perspective, thinking that the objects would rather feel more at home in Egypt, might want to use another set of metaphors with less cosy overtones. He or she might want to change the title "Love of Egypt" into "Loot from Egypt" and say that the objects are held "captive" or "imprisoned" in the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities.

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When discussing the choice of words and the meanings they carry, I could mention that a periodical published by the Italian art police, listing looted and stolen objects, bears the title *Arte in ostaggio* (Art held hostage). On its cover is the above-mentioned “hot pot” sold to the Metropolitan Museum by Robert Hecht. Text and image call into question whether, in cases like this, the present location of the object is its natural “home”.

Another way of flattering collectors is to award them medals. In 1987 the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities took the initiative to award its Friend a medal (*Riksantikvarieämbetet/Statens Historiska museums förtjänstmedalj*) for “enriching the museums collections” with objects “often costing more than a million SEK” (Styrenius and Peterson 1987). Likewise, in 1999 Gothenburg University awarded a collector its medal *Pro Arte et Scientia* for having donated “an important collection” of mainly Greek and Etruscan vases with “a significant economic value” to its Museum of Classical Antiquities (Gothenburg University 1999).

To sum up, it is fairly obvious that through hailing collectors, awarding them medals, recommending auction houses, mounting exhibitions to teach dealers and collectors how to distinguish genuine artefacts from fakes, etc., scholars have contributed to giving trading and collecting the esteem it holds in society today. If distinguished scholars applaud such activities, then members of the public see no reason to question it.

### Art versus archaeology

I asked above why the public in general does not feel equally repelled by the collecting of archaeological objects as they are by the collecting of eggs from endangered bird species. Scholarly collusion with the trade of the kind described in the preceding section is part of the answer. But scholarly responsibility does not end here. Not only does it matter how scholars shape the public perception of dealers and collectors, it also matters how they shape the perception of archaeological objects.

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Archaeologists share with the public their knowledge of, and interest in, the past and its material remains through various venues: archaeology courses, popular and academic publications, public lectures, museum exhibitions, etc. Among these forms of communication, museum exhibitions, which reach a large section of the public, and where the beholder comes face to face with the objects, probably has the dominant role in shaping contemporary attitudes (cf. Vitelli 1984: 152; Lazrus forthcoming). With this in mind, we may take a look at how the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities display archaeological objects.

In the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities the objects in the Egyptian and Greco-Roman galleries are put on display in show-cases. They are mounted on perspex stands. Lighting is provided by electric light. Signs typically provide brief descriptions of the objects (e.g. “marble head”), attribute them to a culture (e.g. “Roman”) and give them dates (e.g. “1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD”). Little information on original find spots is given. There are also few recreations of original ancient environments or archaeological contexts. Of course, this is a consequence of the fact that a large proportion of the objects has come to the museum through the antiquities trade. The museum simply does not have the necessary archaeological information. In this respect, the gallery with Cypriot archaeological objects offers a striking contrast. Here, as the signs inform the visitor, the objects come from controlled archaeological excavations carried out by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (1927-31). Information on find spots is given and several closed finds are displayed together. In the Egyptian and Greco-Roman galleries the visitor is in general left in the blue as to when, why and how the objects arrived at the museum. No clues are given as to how objects made thousands of years ago in the Mediterranean manage to end up in our time in showcases in Stockholm. There are no links to bridge this geographical and chronological gap. The few things that *are* known about the objects – the name of dealers who supplied them and the price paid – are not told.

To the archaeologist, the archaeological context of an object is essential for our understanding of the past. Equally important for

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shaping contemporary perceptions of an object is its modern context. Archaeological objects become part of our intellectual culture, one way or another. There is no neutral way of presenting them. To display an archaeological object devoid of information (on archaeological origin and modern history etc.) in a showcase signals that what matters is the object itself. It conveys the message that the question of where the object comes from and how it got to where it is today is not relevant for how we perceive it. Further, as the decontextualised, object-oriented way of presenting is not dissimilar to how, for example, paintings by Picasso are presented in museums for modern and contemporary art, it subtly instills the notion that archaeological objects too are works of art.

Nor is there a neutral way of describing or categorising archaeological objects (or anything else). In the museum's shop the visitor may pick up the above-mentioned *Love of Egypt*. Here he/she may read that to acquire the museum's "eminent works of art" one needs the ability "to see, to feel value, quality and to possess taste". Further cryptic statements, such as that the museum curator is the objects' "servant", add to the aura of majesty and mystery which the text tries to evoke.

When the label "work of art" is attached to an archaeological object, it sets the object into a certain intellectual framework. The viewer is compelled to contemplate aesthetic aspects – the object's (eternal) beauty, the artistic genius of its creator, the quality of workmanship etc. The art label does not encourage the modern viewer to ask: what do the object and its archaeological context tell us about the ancient society in which it was produced? What was/were the meaning(s) attached to it in that society?

Now, if the prime value of an archaeological object resides in its perceived aesthetic qualities, this has further consequences. Because the circumstance under which an object was unearthed does not affect its beauty, it is irrelevant whether it was unearthed in a controlled archaeological excavation or not. From this perspective, looting becomes a complement to archaeology, not its opposite.

The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities also evokes the beholder to regard archaeological objects as art. The exhibits in the museum range in time from prehistory to modern times. When

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looking at more recent periods, it is clear that the museum does not attempt to present a broad spectrum of the material culture of East Asia, but limits itself to presenting objects that fall into the domain of the fine and decorative arts. In the museum's galleries one finds paintings by modern artists (for example, by "a representative of the Vietnamese, French, realistic, impressionistic school", *Östasiatiska Museets Vänner* 2000) but no mundane objects, such as beer cans. When archaeological objects are grouped with more recent objects, generally defined as art, the visitor will probably also put the archaeological objects in the same conceptual category.

Publications produced by the staff of the museum give a similar message. In *Kinesisk konsthistoria* (The Art History of China) by Jan Wirgin (director of the museum from 1981 to 1998) the reader is told that the Neolithic ceramics show us the "creative force of the first Chinese artists" (p. 3) and that such "richly varied, perfect and beautifully shaped" ceramics as those produced during the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279), have not been created in "any other culture, either before or later" (p. 134).

It may be noted that in the art world, too, Far Eastern archaeological objects are put in the same category as more recent material. Under the heading "Oriental art" or "Oriental ceramics", the auction houses provide everything from Chinese Neolithic ceramics to Qing (AD 1644-1912) porcelain. Dealers often have a similar range of objects available and many collections cover the same spectrum. To the collectors there is not much difference between purchasing a Tang dynasty camel or a piece of tableware in Chinese export porcelain. To those concerned about Chinese archaeological heritage the difference is vast, as market demand for the former type of object generates looting while demand for the latter does not.

When discussing what sort of attitudes exhibits such as those at the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities create towards archaeological objects, one may perhaps also ask what mental images they create of the ancient cultures these museums try to present. For example, when Greek and Roman cultures are viewed through objects acquired for their aesthetic appeal on the art market, and displayed as works of

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art, does this not serve to entrench the deeply rooted romantic and idealistic vision of these cultures?<sup>1</sup>

In short, the exhibits in the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities and Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities instill in the visitors certain notions – that archaeological objects are art, that context and provenance are not important and that it is natural for objects to materialise from nowhere in vitrines. Seeing objects in these kinds of exhibitions (which are far from unusual in the museum world) is probably more likely to make the visitors want to start collecting rather than make them think about the ethics of collecting.

Indeed, as was discussed earlier, Bo Gyllensvärd accredited the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities with having spread interest in Chinese art and stimulated the emergence of a new generation of collectors. At least one Swedish collector, Gustaf Hilleström, acknowledges that seeing objects in a museum (the City Museum of Gothenburg) inspired him to start collecting (Gyllensvärd and Wirgin 1968: 5).

Looking outside Sweden, one finds that the influence of exhibitions on market demand has been observed time after time. For example, according to the archaeologist Boubé Gado, as a result of increasing market demand following the international exhibition *Vallées du Niger*, looting is now occurring in Niger at an unprecedented rate (Brodie et al. 53; Gado 2001: 58, 60). Dealers have also noted the role of exhibitions for sparking the collectors' interest (Mason 2000; Brodie et al. 2000: 53). The collectors themselves sometimes acknowledge museum exhibits as a source for their desire to purchase and possess. According to the collectors Shelby White and Leon Levy, seeing a museum collection of Greek griffin protomes made them decide they “had to own” one themselves (White and Levy 1990: ix). As a last example, the heading of an article in *The Art Newspaper* may be quoted: “New finds feed Western appetites. The richest source is

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of how contemporary esteem of a certain group of artefacts – Cycladic figures – have led to distortions of the modern perception of the society in which these artefacts were produced, see, Gill and Chippindale 1993. On Cycladic figures cf. also Renfrew 2003: 51-58.

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China, and interest in Chinese art is fuelled by the Guggenheim exhibition” (Moncrieff 1998).

### The way forward

This paper has given examples of how scholars have acted in the past. To conclude, it might be worthwhile to offer some suggestions on what they could do in the future. Scholars have been part of creating market demand. Thus they have a moral responsibility to try to reduce it.

As argued above, museum exhibitions tend to create attitudes that play into the hands of the commercial market. Yet museum exhibitions could be the ideal vehicle to challenge these notions. Museums of natural history may provide the inspiration. For example, in the exhibits of Naturhistoriska Museet (the Museum of Natural History) in Gothenburg there is a case with a label “Don’t buy their lives”. The case contains objects made of material (ivory, turtleshell etc.) from endangered and near-extinct species, confiscated by Swedish customs in accordance with the 1973 CITES convention. A sign spells out clearly that to purchase these kinds of artefacts is to contribute to the extinction of threatened species. Information material, including a brochure entitled “A souvenir from the journey abroad can turn you into a criminal” is also available.

Among museums of natural history this kind of exhibit is not a unique or revolutionary concept. Among cultural history museums it still is. (Compare this to the City museum of Gothenburg, which until recently had a showcase advertising the gallery AntikWest). Hopefully, the situation will change in the future. Museums displaying archaeological collections should inform their visitors that unprovenanced archaeological objects are likely to be looted (even if the vendor appears to be respectable and reputable) and that to purchase such objects is to support further looting. This message is, of course, to be set into a larger a framework, explaining the importance of archaeological context for providing information about the past.

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This information may be disseminated in various ways, through leaflets, books in the museum bookshop, as well as in permanent and temporary exhibitions. For such exhibitions, many museums have abundant material in their collections and archives. Certainly, information on the origin of the museums' own collections may be a good starting point for making the visitor think about the ethics of collecting.

Again, there are no neutral ways to display objects. To present an object on its own in a showcase creates certain notions. To present it in a reconstruction of its ancient context creates others. To put it on display poking out from the crate in which it arrived at the museum from, for example, a Swiss dealer is to create yet other notions. If you add to this the invoice from the dealer, and some photographs of looted tombs or *tombaroli* at work with mechanical diggers, one creates a healthy contrast to the notion that objects are purchased with "love" and given a "home" in showcases.

Of course, museums have restricted budgets and cannot realise all projects. Yet exhibitions on looting and collecting have been more common in the heavily looted countries than in the market countries (Brodie et al. 2000: 56).<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the problem is not ultimately one of financial resources but financial priorities. If Jordan, Mali and Peru, not well known for their wealthy museums, can afford to mount such exhibitions and information campaigns, it is certainly also possible in the market countries. It is a positive sign that the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities in its recent exhibition *Taranto. A Greek Colony in Southern Italy* did include some information on the looting of south Italian vases (Slej and Göransson 2001: 7, 81, 117-22). But it is not clear whether this was an isolated event or whether it will be followed by others. The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities could certainly have an effect on the market in Chinese archaeological objects, and has begun to take steps in this direction (Fiskesjö 2002).

Although this paper has focused on museums, museum curators are not the only ones to blame for the current situation, nor are they the only scholars who can contribute to changing it.

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<sup>2</sup>For three examples in market countries, see: Herscher 1983; Graepler and Mazzei 1993; Lundén 2003b).

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All forms of academic, quasi-academic or popular presentations of archaeological objects may stimulate collecting. Research on excavated or unexcavated categories of objects may make these categories of objects more marketable (cf. Wylie 1996: 172-75) – especially if the results are presented in publications with glossy photographs and titles like “The art of the X culture”. Even such pure academic exercises as excavation and fieldwork may provide the stimulus for looting (Graepler 1995: 25; Lazrus 1995).

The answer to this is, of course, not that archaeological research or archaeological outreach activities should cease, but that care should be taken to avoid that they do not have the unintended effect of promoting looting, dealing and collecting. For example, much would be gained if scholarly presentations of archaeological objects were accompanied with information to counter the commercial interest the presentation might give rise to. Not surprisingly, dealers selling archaeological objects often sell, or recommend, books to their clients. Similarly, Internet sites selling books by reputable scholars may provide banners recommending antiquities for sale (Lidington 2002: 73-74). Clearly, a dealer would not recommend a book about, for example, red figure pottery or Chinese funerary figurines, which pointed out that to purchase unprovenanced archaeological objects is to underwrite further looting. If the book also explained the hypocrisy surrounding the trade and said something about the moral character of those involved in it, the work in question would be even less useful for stimulating commercial interest in archaeological objects.

Yet, even if all publications by scholars pointed out the connection between collecting and looting and all scholars kept dealers, collectors and their collections at arm’s length, trading and collecting would continue. Although there are many ways in which scholars, voluntarily or involuntarily, may give assistance to the trade, it is not ultimately dependent on scholarly support.

To reduce the current demand for archaeological objects, scholars need to engage actively in providing information about the destruction generated by the trade in unprovenanced archaeological objects. At present we are far from this ideal. Today even university courses in archaeology, art history and museum

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studies often fail to address the topic (cf. Vitelli 1984: 153; Fagan 1993; Lundén and Häggström 1999: 100). For example, how many students in these fields have ever heard of the 1970 UNESCO Convention? If future generations of scholars have no knowledge about the connection between looting and collecting, who will then tell the public?

#### Acknowledgements

Various persons and organisations have contributed with valuable information and assistance to the completion of this article. I am especially indebted to: Anna Nilsson, Gothenburg; Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Colin Renfrew, Illicit Antiquities Research Centre/McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge; the Swedish ICOM section and the Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Artistico, Rome. I am also thankful to Paula Lazrus for showing me her forthcoming article. Although we reach similar conclusions, our respective articles were written independently of each other.

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