

Antiquities as Global Contraband: What do we know and what can we do?

Wed. & Thurs. May 3-4, 2017

Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, University of Chicago

5701 South Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago IL 60637

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

Panel 1: Lessons from Afghanistan

Discussant: Morag Kersel, Department of Anthropology, DePaul University

“Mes Aynak: Past, Present, and Future of an Ancient Buddhist City in Afghanistan”
Brent Huffman (Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University)

Professor and documentary filmmaker Brent E. Huffman will talk about his award-winning documentary film "Saving Mes Aynak," chronicling the fight by Afghan archaeologists to save the ancient city of Mes Aynak, Afghanistan from a Chinese government-owned mining company that plans to open-pit mine the area. The 5,000-year-old archaeological site is also under threat from the Taliban, corrupt government officials and looters. Huffman will talk about the significance of the site, its history, and important discoveries at Mes Aynak including hundreds of Buddha statues, murals, stupas and manuscripts. Professor Huffman will also discuss recent updates like new findings at Mes Aynak and new threats like the Chinese government's recent recruitment of the Taliban to defend Chinese interests in Afghanistan. Huffman will also talk about the ousting of the Manager of MCC, the Chinese government-owned mining company, by the Chinese Communist Party and what this could mean for the future of archaeology at the ancient site.

“Remote Assessments of the Cultural Heritage Situation in Afghanistan:
Results from the Afghan Heritage Mapping Project”

Kathryn Franklin, Anthony Lauricella, Emily Hammer, Rebecca Seifried
(CAMEL Lab, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

Analysis of spatial and temporal patterns in looting and destruction at archaeological sites using satellite imagery has become a focus of multiple research groups working on cultural heritage in conflict zones, especially in areas controlled by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. The Afghan Heritage Mapping Project, carried out by the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes (CAMEL) at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, applies similar methods to investigate looting and destruction at archaeological sites in Afghanistan. Using the time depth provided by high-resolution, time-stamped DigitalGlobe satellite and BuckEye aerial images as well as CORONA and other historical satellite images, we quantitatively document spatial and temporal patterns in looting and destruction from looting, agricultural activity, military occupation, urban growth and other kinds of development at over 500 previously known and newly documented archaeological sites across Afghanistan. This analysis demonstrates that systematic looting of archaeological sites in Afghanistan already occurred decades before Taliban-related conflicts, that there has been no systematic increase in looting in Taliban-controlled areas post-2001, and that major threats to Afghanistan's heritage sites come from development activities, including agricultural expansion, urban growth, and future mining. The analysis thus demonstrates that the situation in Afghanistan differs substantially from that seen in Syria and Iraq, despite some similarities.

“Assessing the Losses: Integrating Data Sources to Develop the First Quantified List of Artifacts Looted from the National Museum of Afghanistan”

Gil J. Stein, Alejandro Gallego-Lopez, and Michael T. Fisher
(Oriental Institute, OI-NMA Partnership, University of Chicago)

The National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA) is the most important repository of cultural heritage in that country. The museum was severely looted, rocketed and burned between 1989 and 2001 during the civil war which followed the Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent period of Taliban rule – losing 70% of its objects while 90% of the museum’s records were burned. From 2012 to the present, the Oriental Institute-National Museum of Afghanistan (OI-NMA) Partnership has developed a database to conduct the first full inventory of the NMA’s remaining holdings. With the inventory now 99.8% complete, we have documented and recorded digital images of almost 140,000 pieces. As a result, we can finally determine not only what objects remain in the museum, but also what objects are missing. In this paper, we compare the available pre-war catalogs, inventories, excavation reports, and photo archives with the records in our database to assess the losses of the NMA. This has allowed us to generate a list of over 600 objects that we can say with a high degree of confidence were either looted or destroyed. Because no complete inventory of the NMA holdings had ever been conducted before the war, we cannot specify a complete list of all missing objects. However, for the first time we can provide the NMA, law-enforcement, and international heritage monitoring groups with a detailed list and images of missing items as the necessary first step toward their location and repatriation. Our documentation protocol underscores the urgent need for all museums to make comprehensive digital inventories of their holdings as an essential precaution to facilitate the recovery of any objects in the event of targeted theft or wholesale looting.

Panel 2: Lessons from Iraq and Syria

Discussant: Fiona Greenland, Neubauer Collegium, University of Chicago

“Protecting Cultural Heritage the Low Tech Way:

The role of non-state actors in preserving Syria’s cultural heritage”
Amr Al Azm (Department of Social Sciences, Shawnee State University)

“Ground-based Monitoring of Looting and Site Damage in Syria and Northern Iraq”

Michael Danti (American Schools of Oriental Research-Cultural Heritage Initiative/
Colgate University)

Abstract: Since August 2014, the American Schools of Oriental Research Cultural Heritage Initiatives (ASOR CHI) has engaged in monitoring, reporting, and fact-finding to assess the impact of the conflicts in Syria and northern Iraq on cultural heritage assets, infrastructure, and personnel. This paper provides an overview of the situation, reviews the bodies of data/evidence acquired by ASOR CHI, and presents the results of emergency response efforts conducted in Syria.

“Satellite Imagery-based Monitoring of Looting and Archaeological Site Damage
in the Syrian Civil War”

Jesse Casana (Department of Anthropology, Dartmouth College)

Abstract: Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the rich archaeological heritage of Syria and northern Iraq has faced severe threats, including looting, combat-related damage, and intentional demolitions of monuments. However, the inaccessibility of the conflict zone to archaeologists or heritage specialists has made it nearly impossible to produce accurate damage assessments. This paper presents interim results of an effort, undertaken in collaboration with the American Schools of Oriental Research and the US Department of State, to monitor looting, destruction, and other forms of damage to archaeological sites using recent, high-resolution satellite imagery. Leveraging a large database of archaeological and heritage sites throughout the northern Fertile Crescent, as well as unlimited access to continually updated satellite imagery from Digital Globe, this project has developed a flexible and efficient methodology to log observations of damage in a manner that facilitates spatial and temporal queries. With more than 5000 sites carefully evaluated, results reveal unexpected patterns in the timing, severity, and location of damage, helping us to better understand the evolving cultural heritage situation in Syria and Iraq, and offering a model for future monitoring efforts.

“Lessons Learned from Iraq and Syria: The Legal and Heritage Perspectives”

Patty Gerstenblith (DePaul University College of Law)

Abstract: The experiences of cultural heritage devastation in Iraq and Syria since 2003 have taught us many lessons in how to respond from both a legal and cultural heritage preservation perspective. This presentation will focus on those lessons and the question of whether we have learned them.

Keynote

“Selling and Destroying Cultural Heritage: Governments’ Proaction, Reaction and Inaction”

Richard Kurin (Smithsonian Institute)

Discussant: James Robinson, Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts,
Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago

Panel 3: *The Past Sold* exhibition panel and reception

Panel discussion moderated by *The Past Sold* co-curators Morag Kersel and Fiona Greenland, followed by a wine and cheese reception.

THURSDAY, MAY 4

Panel 4: The Illegal Movement of People and Things

Discussant: Mark Bradley, Pozen Center for Human Rights, University of Chicago

“Modeling Market Values from Looted Syrian Artifacts:
Preliminary Findings from the Mantis Project”

Fiona Greenland, James Marrone, Oya Topcuoglu and Tasha Vorderstrasse
(University of Chicago – Oriental Institute (OT and TV), Department of Economics (JM) and
Neubauer Collegium (FG))

Abstract: This paper outlines a method for using visible (publicly available) data to impute characteristics of the invisible black market. The method follows a growing trend to use “big data” to answer important policy questions in archaeology; unlike past studies that focus on satellite imagery, our data consist of comprehensive archaeological excavation records and detailed observations of thousands of market sales records. We develop a text-categorization procedure to standardize the sales records’ descriptive text. This categorization produces hundreds of variables that are input to a machine-learning algorithm to match objects between two new datasets, thereby allowing us to impute market prices for excavated objects. We then extrapolate the archaeological data to impute the contents and value of looters’ pits in the vicinity of the excavations. This method provides the first scientifically based estimate of the value and composition of the black market.

“Wildlife Trafficking and US Auction Houses”

Richard Udell (Environmental Crimes Section, US Department of Justice)

“United Nations Security Council Monitoring Team Work Against
Terror Financing ISIL (Da’esh) Smuggling of Antiquities”

Hans-Jakob Schindler (Coordinator, ISIL, (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team,
United Nations Security Council)

Abstract: The presentation will outline the analysis of the ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team of the United Nations Security Council concerning the issue of ISIL antiquities looting and smuggling. The Team has been working on this issue since 2014, analysing and documenting this income stream for the Members of the Security Council. In addition, the Team has made a range of suggestions to the United Nations Security Council Sanctions Committee on how this particularly harmful income stream of ISIL could be countered and disrupted. These recommendations, which were based on close consultations with Member States, relevant international organisations, private sector stakeholders as well as academic experts, led to significant action by the Sanctions Committee as well as the Member States of the Security Council. The presentation will highlight the various areas in which the Team focused its analysis and recommendations as well as the current follow-up work of the Team in this area.

Panel 5: Financing Site Protection and Market Policing: Some Policy Options

Discussant: Daniel Hemel, University of Chicago Law School

“Who Should Pay to Protect the Archaeological Past? A Pigovian Approach”

Larry Rothfield (Department of English, University of Chicago)

Abstract: Almost every country in the world has laws against looting, smuggling, and trafficking in antiquities, laws supplemented by international bans and bilateral interdictions. Yet these laws have been relatively ineffectual, both because enforcers lack the financial resources needed to do their job, and because the peculiar nature and structure of the market for antiquities makes policing it extremely difficult. Economic theory and basic public policy research suggests that given the features of the market for illicit antiquities, it would be useful to impose a Pigovian tax (often called a "pollution tax") on antiquities purchased by residents of "market" countries. Such taxes—imposed on such transactions in goods like tobacco, gas, coal, etc.—are designed to internalize the social costs of economic activities so that the polluting industry either takes measures to clean itself up or pays the government to prevent or mitigate the harm the industry causes. An antiquities tax, tailored to fall more heavily on antiquities with weaker provenance or extremely high prices, would reduce demand directly, insofar as it would increase the cost to buyers, driving some out. But demand from avid collectors is likely to be highly inelastic. The tax they pay in New York or Paris or London, channeled into an antiquities-protection “Superfund” (as was done to clean up toxic chemical sites) or via existing governmental agencies, or contributed to the newly established International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas, could provide a sustainable funding stream to pay for better site security, something archaeologists favor, and to more clearly distinguish licit from illicit antiquities, something dealers have said they support.

“Protecting Antiquities: A Role for Long-Term Leases?”

Michael Kremer (Department of Economics, Harvard University) and Tom Wilkening
(Department of Economics, University of Melbourne)

In order to preserve cultural patrimony for future generations, most countries ban exports of antiquities. However, this may drive trade underground, particularly in low-income and low-state capacity contexts, and cause irreversible damage to cultural heritage. We argue that complementing export bans with fixed-duration, long-term leases can strengthen incentives for maintenance and revelation of antiquities, while preserving cultural patrimony. Allowing only leases rather than sales limits potential losses from corrupt deals between foreign collectors and government officials. Standardized contracts with set lease lengths, insurance requirements, and care requirements may also be necessary to limit corruption and establish a well-functioning market.

“Economically Sustainable Preservation: What Really Works”

Larry Coben (Sustainable Preservation Initiative)

Abstract: Archaeological sites are disappearing at a rapidly accelerating rate. While destruction by ISIS gets all the press, the primary causes of cultural heritage loss are economic: commercial and residential development and encroachment, mining, energy, agriculture and looting to name a few. If the source of the problem is economic, so must the solutions be. In this talk, I discuss what types of economic solutions are most likely to succeed and which are destined to fail, using case studies from actual programs. I will describe why small-scale projects incorporating empowerment and sustainable community development actually work, and why large-scale projects divorced from business reality rarely do. Successful programs allow communities to build their futures and save their pasts.