

ILLICIT TRAFFIC OF ANTIQUITIES (fig.1)



Fig.1

Last year, 2020, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the 1970 Unesco Convention on measures to prohibit and prevent the importation, export, and transfer of illicit cultural goods (fig.2). Up to now, a hundred and forty countries have signed the Convention and combine their efforts to protect the cultural heritage of humanity and to fight the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

1970, the UNESCO Convention

■ The escalating plunder of the world's archaeological heritage had not gone unnoticed by the international community. In November 1970, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

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

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

■ In 1972, after its ratification by four countries, the Convention went into effect. The first country to sign was Ecuador. Today, 109 countries have adopted the Convention. The USA signed in 1983; Great Britain in 2003.



Fig.2

Let us in first place try a brief conceptual and factual approach of the problem of improper or illegal removal of cultural goods from their countries of origin. The phenomenon has its roots deep in the history of the civilized world (**fig.3**).

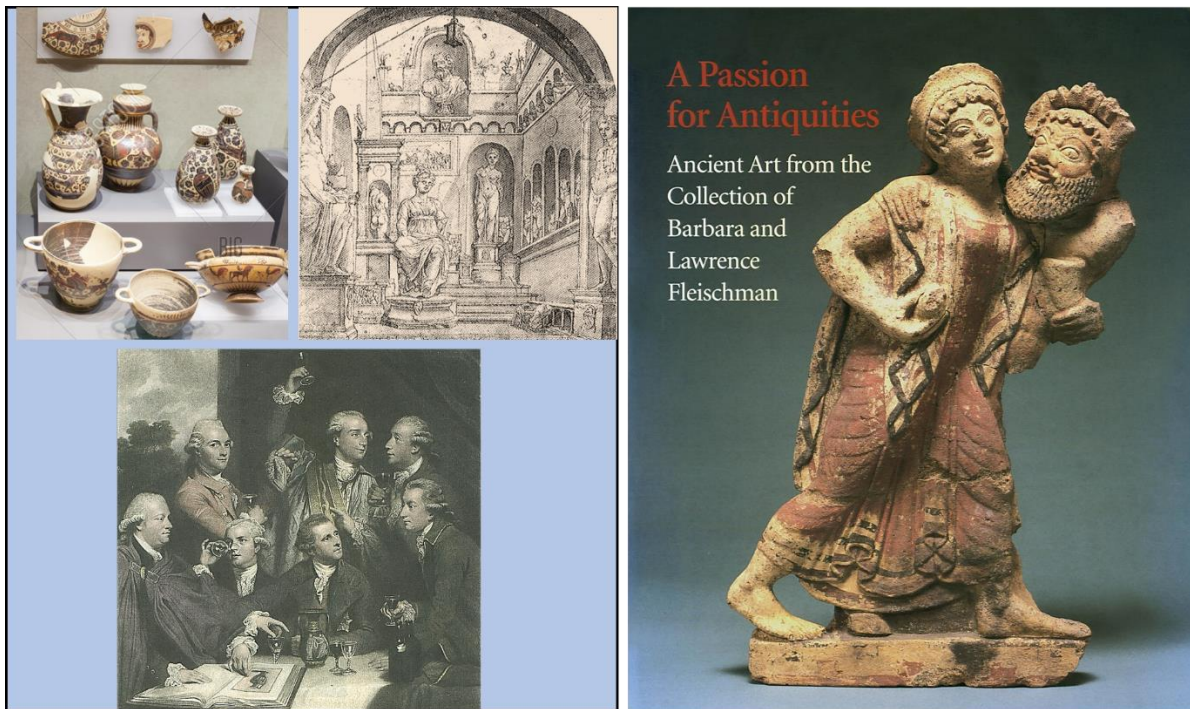


Fig.3

From the artifacts from plundered tombs in Corinth, which flooded in the first century before Christ the market of ancient Rome to the royal collections of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, the Dilettanti Society and the modern private collections, individuals or groups of people stimulated by a developed aesthetic interest and eager to be recognized as especially civilized, embellish their property with works of art, which they do not hesitate to acquire legally or illegally. Big museums with artefacts representing the art history of different cultures want to increase the integrity and attractiveness of their collections and often acquire objects from the black market trade (**fig.4**). The needs and demands of private collectors and museums encourage smuggling of works of art found by chance in agriculture and building, or coming from illegal excavations, looting of archaeological sites and even thefts in museums. In the recent past, we witnessed a considerable increase in the destruction of cultural heritage due to armed conflict (**fig.5**). Organized looting, illicit trafficking and sale of cultural objects that were an integral part of a country's heritage, history and identity accompany in such cases the destruction.

In all these cases, the message from the past preserved to us by objects that are victims of illegal activities is destroyed in a variety of ways. Items that come from

illegal excavation are not accompanied by data referring to the place they were found and the environment in which they were preserved.



Fig.4

Therefore, they cannot be assigned with any certainty to their historical context, for which they would otherwise provide valuable testimony.

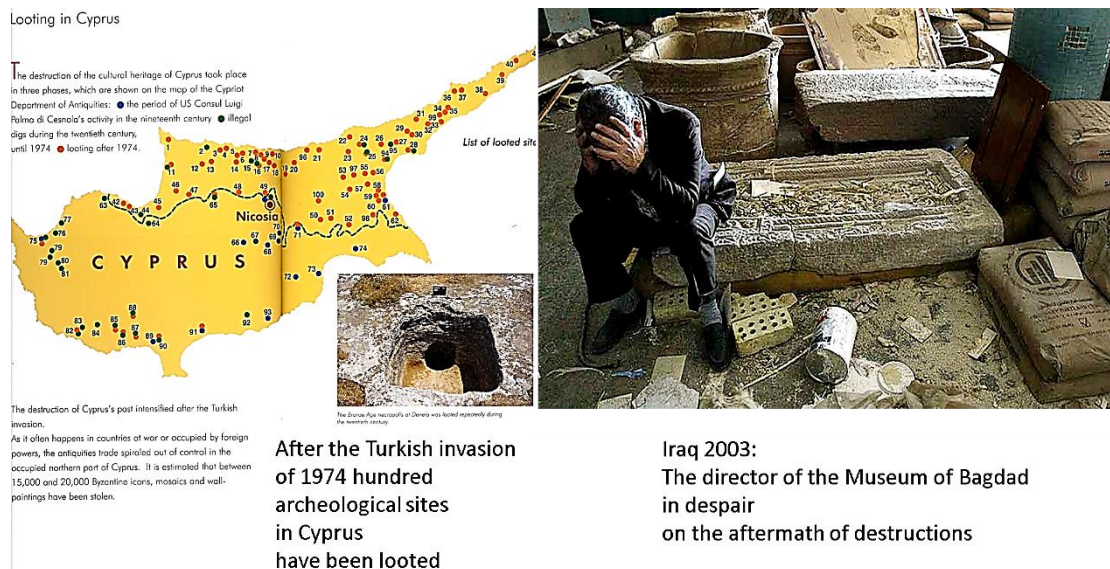


Fig.5

Worse still, those engaging in the illicit trade of cultural goods seek to cover the tracks of their illegal actions by putting the items on the market with false details of their origins, and giving them a forged history. One of thousands of cases that explicitly

shows the loss of the message that artifacts of the past convey to us is the golden wreath from an illegal excavation in Northern Greece (**fig.6**).



Fig.6

The Getty Museum acquired it with false papers and returned it later to Greece. The wreath is equivalent to the one found in the tomb of Philipp in Vergina, but in contrast to it with dramatically diminished historical value, as we will never know where exactly it comes from and who was honored with it. The damage however of cultural property caused by illicit trade, can also be physical. Many art-works are lost or damaged in the course of illicit trading. An eloquent example are the damages on the head of Dionysus (**fig.7**), stolen from the Museum of Corinth and repatriated,

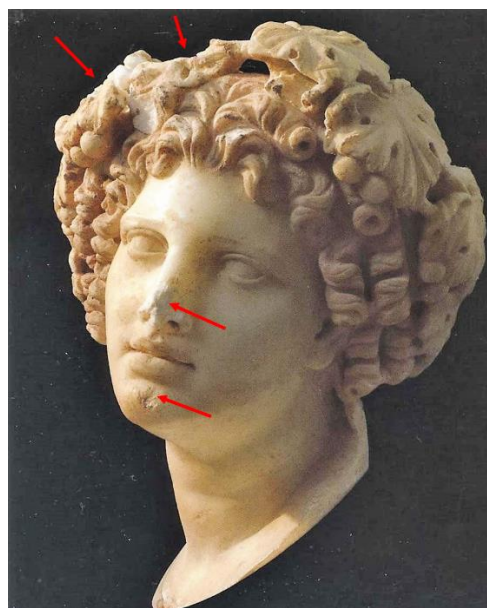


Fig.7

during its transport to Miami. All this is summarized in a comment made by the distinguished British professor of Archaeology, Lord Colin Renfrew on the phenomenon of the illicit antiquities trade: He said; *Let us remember that the most important loss occasioned by looting, is the loss of information. With the destruction of sites and the undocumented removal of objects, the context of the finds is lost, even if the finds survive.* Historical information and knowledge is indeed a most valuable social property. History constitutes the stored treasure of man's experience and the source of his self-knowledge. Just as a person who suddenly loses his memory does not know who he really is and how to advance in his life, so a society deprived of the experience of its history, of its tradition, flounders. It is a commonplace that in order to make progress, people have to stand firmly on the accumulated experience of humankind – that is, on the knowledge of history. And it is the remains of the past – the monuments and the works of art in their context – that transmit most directly the reality of the past. Especially when these monuments and works of art come from periods that have not left a written tradition behind them; they acquire then a unique historical value, since they are our only source of knowledge for their time. Illicit trafficking of cultural goods robs the history of nations; it robs the collective experience of humanity.

In addition to this major crime, it seems that the illicit trade of cultural goods, which is estimated to be worth nearly \$10 billion each year, affects further the health and security of our society. It is connected with drugs trafficking and criminal investigations proved recently that the trafficking of antiquities is a major source of funding for international terrorism.

How modern society reacts to this criminal activity?

The Unesco Convention of nineteen seventy *On the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* has been the decisive step in this field (**fig.2**). The plunder continued after its ratification, but with one overwhelming difference. Before 1970, the acquisition of plundered antiquities on a no-questions-asked basis was accepted practice. Today it is a practice, whose destructive and often criminal consequences are well recognized and socially condemned. The Convention provides a common framework for the States Parties on the measures to be taken for the prevention of trafficking, the restitution of stolen and smuggled works of art, as well as for an international cooperation on the matter. This framework is further specified in the Operational

Guidelines of the Convention complemented by the Operational Directives adopted in 2015.

Another major advance in the fight against the illicit trade of cultural goods took place in 1995. UNESCO asked the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) to study private law questions that were not directly dealt with by the 1970 Convention. The Institute adopted the *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* (fig.8), which supplements that of 1970 in terms of private law and stipulates that all stolen cultural property must be returned.



Fig.8

Committees within UNESCO, such as the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Promotion of the Return of Cultural Property* and the *Subsidiary Committee*, promote internationally the objectives of the Conventions, share good practices and make recommendations to combat the illicit traffic in cultural property. UNESCO is also collaborating with other international partners, mainly the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to strengthen the implementation of the Conventions.

Other international institutions are also engaged in the combat against the illegal traffic of cultural goods. The *Resolution (2347) of the United Nations* in 2017, dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage in situations of armed conflict, and the *Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property of the Council of Europe* (**fig.9**), signed in Nicosia also in 2017 are important contributions to the combat.



Fig.9

Numerous similar contributions are made on national level besides national laws for the protection of cultural heritage. One of them is the Declaration adopted at the initiative of Greece in 2015 at the 3rd Meeting of States Parties to the UNESCO 1970 Convention, which asks the States to take measures in order to prevent illicit trafficking and looting of cultural property, underlines the importance of cooperation at all levels, encourages compliance with the Codes of Ethics of the ICROM and UNESCO, and calls the media to make aware of the public about the respect and the protection of cultural property. Another national initiative is the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2011 (**fig.10**) between the United States and Greece concerning the imposition of import restrictions on archaeological and ethnological material from prehistory through the 15th century A.D. The Memorandum has been up to now twice renewed. However, the most effective measure taken in Greece against the illegal trade of antiquities is the creation in 2008 of the Direction of Documentation and Protection of Cultural Property in the Ministry of Culture (**fig.11**), which systematically and effectively monitors illicit

circulation of antiquities and cares for the return of illegally exported items back to Greece.

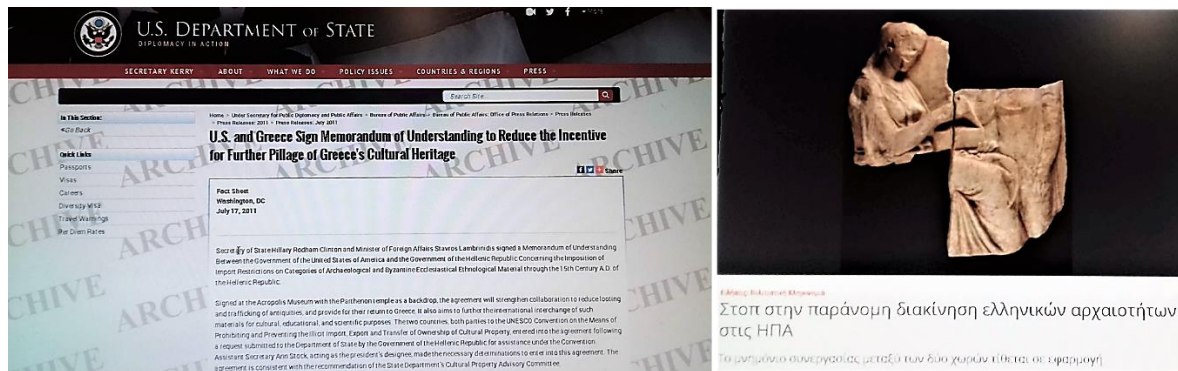


Fig.10

Parallel to this measures many actions are undertaken on international and national level aiming to increase the awareness of the public in respect of the disastrous effects of looting and illicit trafic of antiquities on cultural heritage as a main source of history and conveyor of collective memory. A good example is the exhibition with the title *History Lost. You have been robbed!* (fig.12), created with the support of the *CULTURE 2000 Programme* of the European Union organized by the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Corinth, the University of Cambridge in collaboration with the Greek non-profit company Anemon Productions.

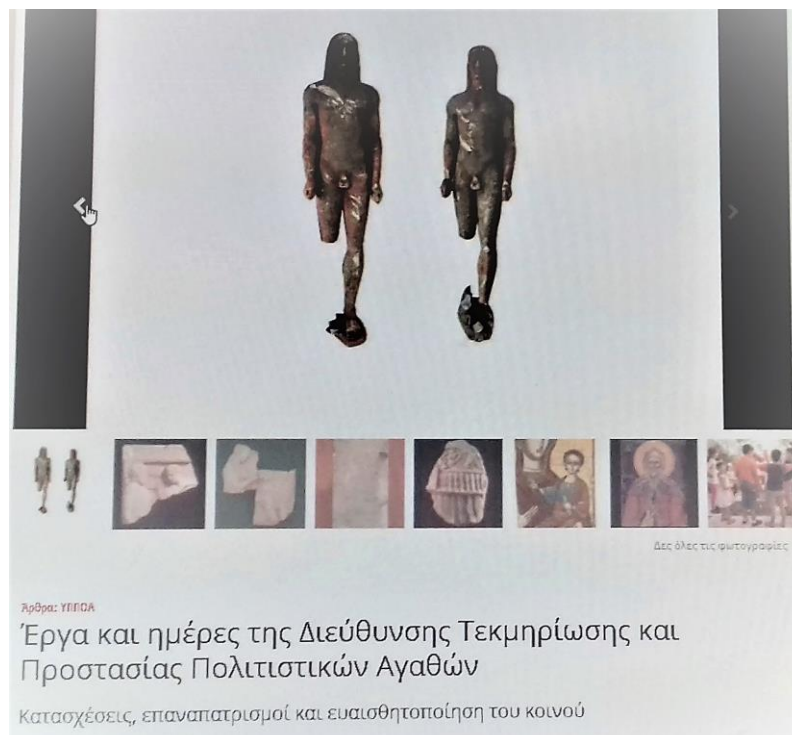


Fig.11

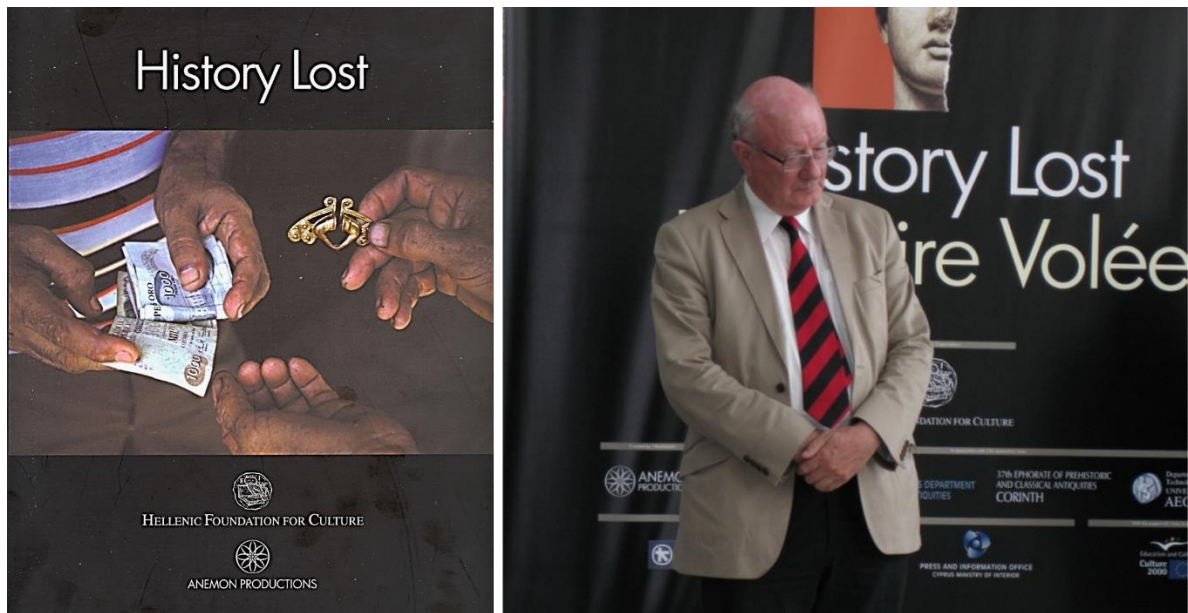


Fig.12

It was exhibited in Nicosia, in Athens and in Nemea in 2006 and then it was enhanced with new exhibits and presented by the Hellenic Foundation for Culture during two thousand seven and ten in Trieste, Lisbon, Dublin and Brussels, in the rooms of the European Parliament. The exhibition demonstrated the factors that gave rise to antiquities theft and their illicit trade, presented the shift in the attitudes of the international community with regard to the issue signaled by the UNESCO Convention of 1970, the present reality, with the looting of cultural goods unhappily continuing and the optimistic perspectives on the matter based on the fact that in recent years there has been a constant increase in the number of cases in which the products of illegal excavation, theft and illicit trading have been located and returned to their place of origin. A most valuable component of the exhibition was the rich information offered on a touch-screen. One could navigate with it through cases of illicit excavation and trafficking in more than forty countries in the five continents of the world and get conscious of the width and depth of this worldwide destructive activity. Another exhibition aiming to the same end was organized in 2012 by the Archaeological Museum of Thessalonike (**fig.13**) under the title *Illicit traffic of antiquities. It's over*. A third photographic presentation under the title *Stolen Past – Lost Future* was organized in 2018 as a travelling exhibition. Parallel to this, conferences on the protection of cultural goods from illicit traffic and the claim for their repatriation, as the one held in Athens in 2008 (**fig.14**), and the International online Conference in Berlin of 2020, organized by the German Federal Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, support the efforts to explore the parameters of the problem and contribute to its extinction.



Fig.13

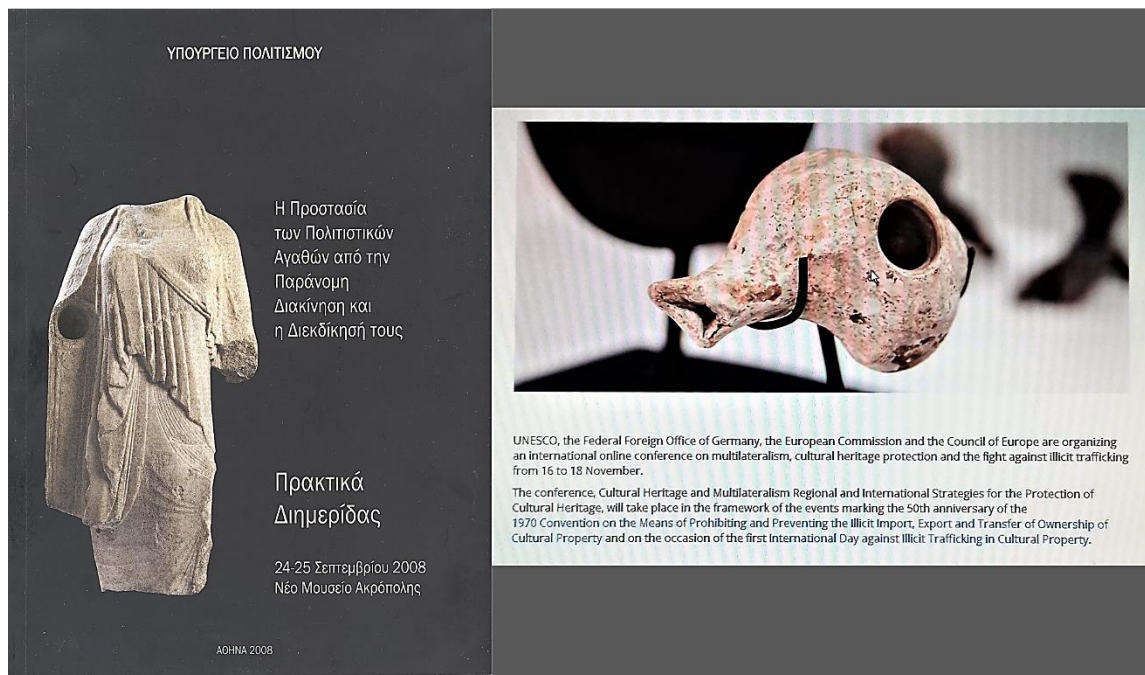


Fig.14

All these measures and efforts produce naturally quite positive results. Individuals and especially museums, become all the more cautious regarding new acquisitions. The sensitization of modern society is manifested in numerous cases of returns of illicitly removed antiquities to their countries of origin by museums but also from individuals, voluntarily or mandatorily after a legal proceeding. Recently, important antiquities have been returned to Italy and Greece by large museums and private

individuals; these were displayed in 2008 in exhibitions in the Quirinale Palace in Rome and the New Acropolis Museum in Athens (**fig.15**). Repatriations of works of art continue until today as some characteristic examples show. A bronze statuette of a horse returns to Greece (**fig.16**) after a long judicial proceeding and the decision of the Court of Appeals of New York in 2020.

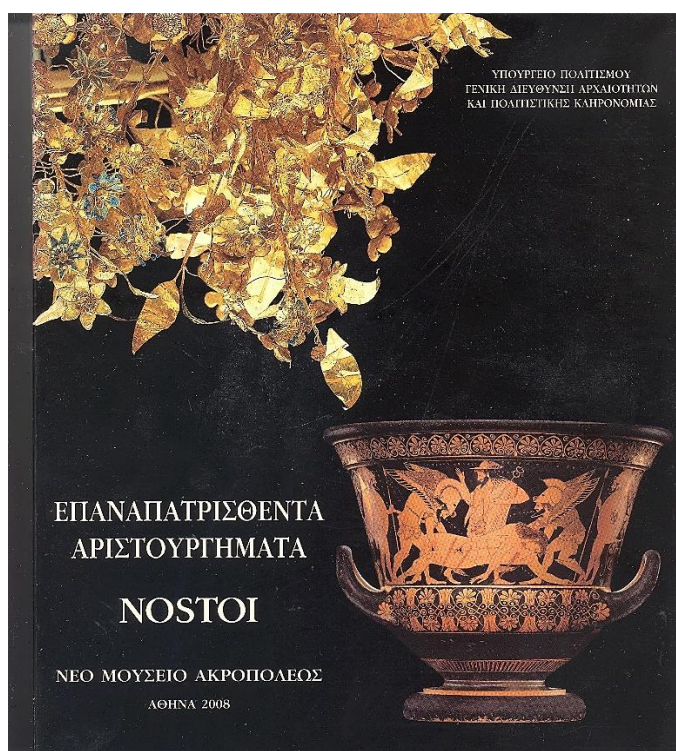
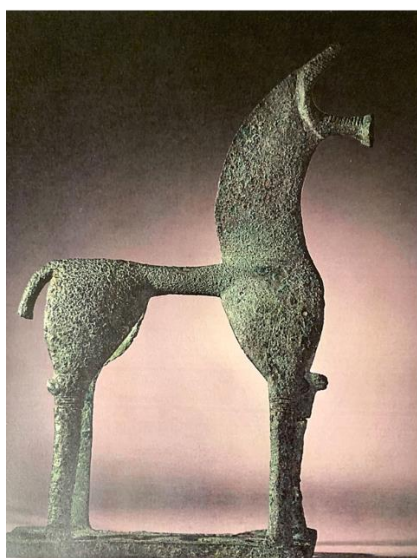


Fig.15



Bronze statuette of a horse, 8th c. B.C.



Icons of Jesus and the Mother of God, 18th century

Fig.16

This year two icons of the eighteenth century stolen from the Monastery of Holy Trinity in Karditsa come back from Lebanon (**fig.16**). Over 5,000 Egyptian artifacts that were in the possession of the Holy Bible Museum in Washington have recently arrived in

Cairo (**fig.17**) thanks to concerned American authorities. A month ago was announced that valuable artifacts of Cambodian cultural heritage will soon return to their home country (**fig.18**).



Egyptian funerary masks

Fig.17



Cambodia: deities. 10th – 11th centuries, and a bronze boat prow, 12th century

Fig.18

Yet despite the positive results of all the above mentioned measures and actions the illicit trade of works of art continues. Cases of illegal excavations and black market

activity are daily announced (**fig.19**). The electronic trade and eBay auctions make the monitoring of illegal circulation of cultural goods much more difficult (**fig.20**).



Fig.19

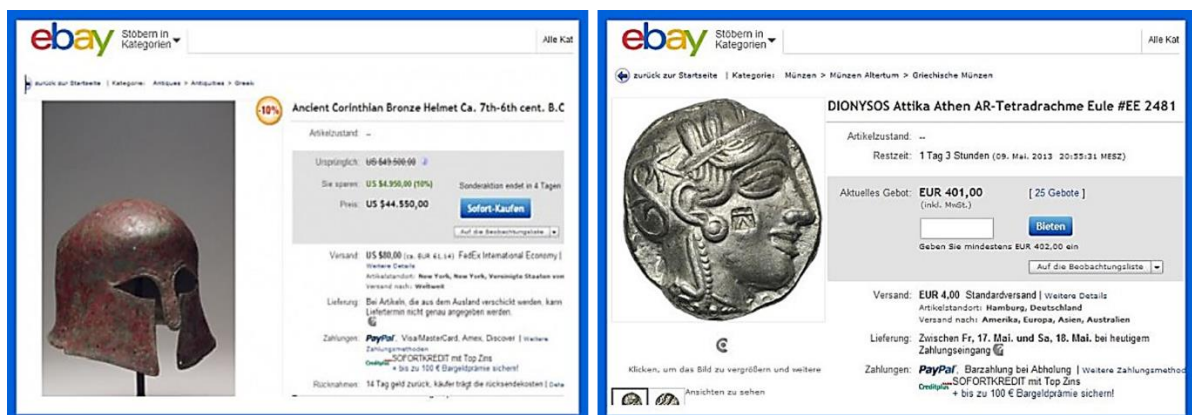


Fig.20

Even more difficult is to claim for repatriation illicitly exported cultural goods before 1970, when the UNESCO Convention was signed. Most characteristic is in this field the case of the Parthenon marbles (**fig.21**). We all were informed these days about the declaration of the British Prime Minister Boris Jonson that the marbles were legally purchased and the answer of the Greek Minister of Culture Lina Mendoni, who proved that he is not well informed. In cases like this one, one should rather try to address the issue in terms of social and cultural ethics as well as of the due management of monuments.



Fig.21

So the fight will continue. Having this in mind efforts are made on national and international level to sensitize young people on the damage caused to cultural property by the illicit trade of antiquities. I will end my talk with an example of this activity in the schools Arsakeia in Athens (**fig.22**) and Thessalonike (**fig.23**). The education of engaged citizen is the best measure to be taken against illicit traffic of cultural property in the future.

Πολιτιστικό Πρόγραμμα Α' Λυκείου (2014-2015)

*Σβήνοντας ένα κομμάτι από το παρελθόν είναι σαν να σβήνεις και ένα αντίστοιχο κομμάτι από το μέλλον.
(Γ. Σεφέρης)*

Γιώργος Σεφέρης

Τρόποι αρχαιοκαπηλίας

- Οι λεηλατημένες αρχαιότητες ξεθάβονται αργά τη νύχτα και παίρνουν τον δρόμο της ξεντιάς
- φτάνουν στα χέρια των «ανώτερων» στελεχών στην αρχαιοκαπηλία
- Προορισμός → η Ελεύθερη Ζώνη της Γενεύης (ως το 2005 οπότε και αναθεωρήθηκε το καθεστώς διακίνησης των προϊόντων χωρίς έλεγχο) → τα διεθνή παζάρια

Στην εικόνα: Στιγμή από ντοκιμαντέρ του BBC για την ελληνική αρχαιοκαπηλία

ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ Α' ΑΡΣΑΚΕΙΟΥ ΛΥΚΕΙΟΥ ΨΥΧΙΚΟΥ

Α' Αρσάκειο Λύκειο Ψυχικού

Διμήτρα Τασάκου • Ελίνα Τσελεπίδου • Μάρθα Τσεπέτη • Χριστίνα Τσιαδή

Ελληνικές Αρχαιότητες στο Μητροπολιτικό Μουσείο, στο Μουσείο του Γκετί και στα Μουσεία του Καναδά

Υπεύθυνη καθηγήτρια: Ζωή Πετρολάιτση

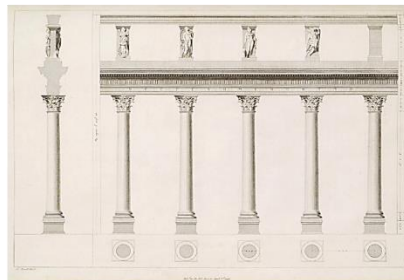
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Fig.22

Πρόγραμμα «Αγώνας για τον επαναπατρισμό των ξενιτεμένων μνημείων»

Αρσάκειο Γυμνάσιο Θεσσαλονίκης, Τάξη Β΄, 2016

Μέσα από τρεις ιστορίες αρχαιοτήτων της Θεσσαλονίκης που ξενιτεύθηκαν οι μαθητές μελέτησαν το θέμα της παράνομης διακίνησης μνημείων και μοιράστηκαν κατόπιν τις εμπειρίες τους με σχολεία του εξωτερικού μέσω e-twinning



Στο Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης με την **Ηρακλειώτισσα**



Η Στοά των Ειδώλων στη Ρωμαϊκή Αγορά της Θεσσαλονίκης και οι «**Μαγεμένες**» που την κοσμούσαν



Μπροστά στο **χρυσό στεφάνι** που επεστράφη από το Μουσείο Γκέτι

Fig.23