

SPECIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SECURITY

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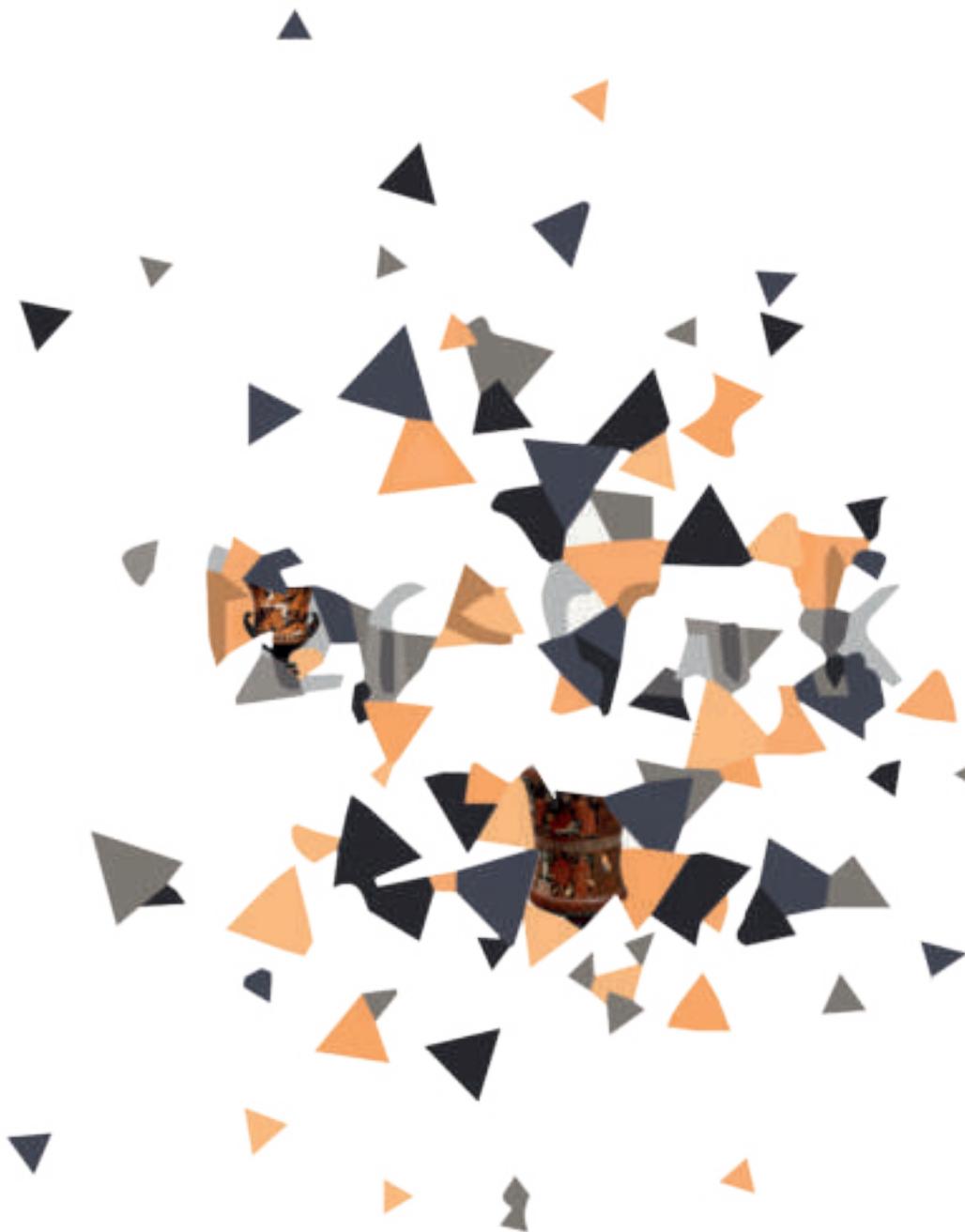
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Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure to present you with this re-issue of the Special Section of Issue 2/2016 of Security Community, the OSCE's magazine, devoted to Cultural Heritage and Security.

Combating the destruction of cultural heritage and trafficking in cultural property is a priority of the Italian 2018 OSCE Chairmanship. We are convinced that this is a threat to security that international organizations must address. Let me explain why.

Photo: OSCE/Micky Kroell



We have experienced a dramatic upsurge in the destruction and degradation of archeological sites and in trafficking of cultural property, not only throughout the OSCE area, but also in the Mediterranean region and beyond. This kind of trafficking is deeply linked to transnational organized crime and corruption networks and the financing of terrorism.

Unfortunately, Italy has been dramatically affected by the looting of archeological sites for centuries. This has resulted in the development of special expertise at the national level in fighting trafficking in cultural property. We therefore believe that we have valuable experience and good practices to share, as well as being able to learn from other participating States.

Since 2016, the Border Security and Management Unit of the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department has been organizing seminars and workshops across the OSCE region, bringing together international experts, government representatives, border and customs officials and police to devise new ways of co-operating across borders to fight trafficking in cultural property. The OSCE should continue and intensify this important work, in co-operation with UNESCO, INTERPOL and all other relevant UN-related agencies and multilateral organizations.

*Alessandro Azzoni
Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE
Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council*



How illicit trade in art and artefacts is robbing us blind and what the OSCE can do

Dennis Cosgrove, who heads the OSCE Secretariat's Border Security and Management Unit in the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department, explains why trafficking in cultural property is a security threat that the OSCE can and should do more to address.

What is the link between cultural property theft and security?

At first glance cultural property theft appears to be very much a boutique area for art dealers and people interested in paintings and cultural heritage. How it relates to security or organized crime is not immediately apparent – or rather, it wasn't until the looting activities of terrorist organizations like Daesh became known.

My first encounter with this was many years ago when as an FBI Special Agent I was working on a case of theft and smuggling from Russia to the United States. There were diamonds and gold involved, which everyone understands have value, and in addition there were pieces of art. It was my first encounter with this area as an investigator. I became aware of the value that art and artefacts have for criminals, and that trying to recover and return them to the rightful owners is not an easy task.

When I joined the FBI Art Crime Team and worked further cases, I also learned that convincing others of the importance of fighting the illicit art trade is not easy. Part of the problem is that there is also perfectly legitimate art trade. There is no legitimate trade in heroin, for example. So you have this blend of legitimate and illicit trade, and that can get very tricky.

Essentially, what has happened in the art world is that the value of artwork and antiquities has skyrocketed; in comparison with the 1990s, prices have gone through the roof. That is what makes this area so enticing, not only for honest investors but for criminals as well.

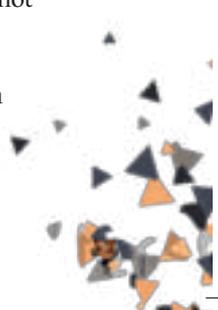
A stolen piece of art can be used as a money laundering vehicle, traded for weapons or drugs – or used to finance terrorism.

Not only has the illegal trade in cultural goods exploded, it is sometimes linked to the illegal arms trade, the trafficking of human beings and migrant smuggling. Organized crime is becoming increasingly engaged in this type of trafficking. In financial terms, while it is difficult to get an estimate, most studies rank illicit trafficking in cultural property closely behind that in weapons and drugs.

How can the problem be tackled?

A lot needs to be done to increase the knowledge of people, especially border and customs officials. This became clear to me when we conducted our first week-long OSCE workshop on combating illicit trade in cultural property in Dushanbe in July, for participants from the different agencies in Tajikistan that deal with cross-border criminality. They learned from experts of INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNESCO, the Afghan Customs Service and the United States Department of Homeland Security. Each of these agencies brought something else to the table.

We had Konstantinos-Orfeas Sotiriou, for example, an investigator with the Greek National Police and passionate archaeologist, accompanying us to museums and sites and explaining: "these are the things you need to look for when you are conducting a search." For some of the participants it was quite an awakening. Without the training they may not have caught even the most obvious illegal shipment of antiquities. I think in the future they will have quite a different reaction when they come across a box of broken pottery that looks old.



Cultural Heritage and Security

What are international agencies doing to combat cultural heritage crime?

There are well-established agreements on the protection of cultural property and prohibition of its illicit trade, such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols.

Recently, there are attempts to criminalize cultural heritage destruction. The International Criminal Court in The Hague will pronounce a sentence in September on the first case in which a defendant (Mr Al Mahdi) admitted guilt to the destruction of historical and religious monuments (in Timbuktu, Mali) as a war crime.

The Council of Europe is preparing a new criminal law convention to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property. The OSCE is participating in the process and we have provided input for specific areas.

The museums and academic community play an important role in combating this illicit trade. The International Council of Museums has a number of helpful tools and useful data bases to assist investigators as does the World Customs Organization. This past April in Vienna the International Conference on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East issued a statement warning that cultural heritage in the Near East and North Africa is in great danger and calling for intense international co-operation at all levels.

There are gaps in the international efforts, however, that need to be filled. The UNESCO conventions, for example, are mostly focused on thefts from museums. The same is true of initiatives by the European Union and the World Customs Organization. There is a lot the OSCE can do in close partnership with the other organizations and agencies that I have already mentioned. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution on protection of cultural property at its 2014 meeting in Baku.

What role could the OSCE play?

First and foremost, we have our expertise in border management, which is central to combating trafficking in cultural goods. We have our border focal points network, our field offices; we can connect people from different agencies in a cross-border, regional context. To me it's a natural fit.

Fighting cultural property crime is closely linked to our other work on transnational threats. You can't look at it

separately from combating trafficking in drugs and weapons: we know that the same groups are engaged, because it's so profitable.

In the OSCE we have an unusual mixture of source, transit and destination countries. The only way to address cultural property trafficking is to bring together representatives from different countries. At the workshop in Dushanbe we had Afghans and Tajiks: not many organizations can do that. Engaging Afghanistan is very important because it has such a serious problem with smuggling of artefacts.

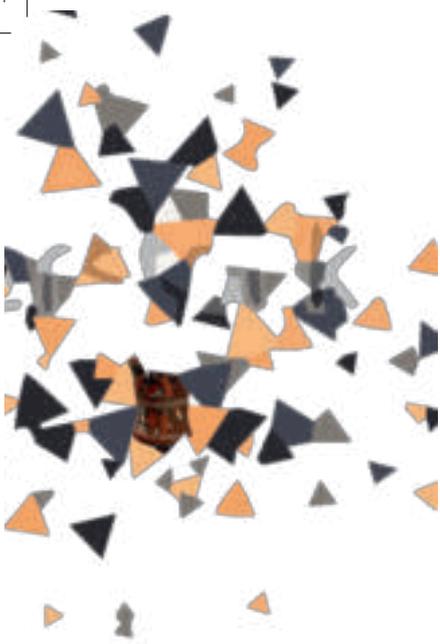
Keeping up with the evolving nature of the illicit artefact trade is an important challenge, which the OSCE is equipped to fulfil. It's not enough to have just training; you have to stay fresh in terms of what is going on: the routes, the people involved, the sellers, the end users – this is changing all the time. But it's no different from trafficking in weapons or drugs or human beings. At the OSCE, we have expertise, networks and forums in all of these fields. We have the POLIS forum for strategic police matters, for example, where we can update one another on the latest trends, trafficking routes and modes of operation.

Another area where the OSCE has experience is working with communities. Local people often know exactly where heritage sites are and what is going on there; they have to be encouraged to step up and protect them.

In terms of expertise, we are very lucky that our OSCE participating States – Greece, Turkey, Italy – have some of the world's best experts. Italy has arguably the best unit for investigating cultural trafficking in the world. We are not short on experts. We hope to organize a regional workshop for Central Asia and one in the Western Balkans region that will involve Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Also, we are looking to future engagement with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation in the Mediterranean region.

NOTE: This interview was conducted in 2016. In 2017 and 2018 the OSCE expanded its work to combat trafficking in cultural property. Practical measures for international and inter-agency co-operation were developed in a multi-stakeholder seminar held in Cyprus and regional workshops held in Italy (for the Mediterranean) and Uzbekistan (for Central Asia), with the financial support of Italy.





Fighting trafficking in cultural property – What the OSCE does

The Transnational Threats Department of the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna promotes co-operation among governments and agencies to tackle the criminal destruction and misuse of cultural heritage. Since 2016, the Department's Border Security and Management Unit (BSMU) has been organizing workshops and seminars on combating trafficking in cultural property for government officials, border and customs officers, police, and practitioners. They bring together a broad variety of stakeholders, including INTERPOL, EUROPOL, the World Customs Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, government agencies and academia to share expertise and build the capacity of officials working on the ground.

Dushanbe, Tajikistan (June 2016)

In June 2016 the BSMU and the OSCE Border Management Staff College held a workshop in Dushanbe for border and customs officers from Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The workshop highlighted how trafficking of cultural property funds organized crime and terrorist organizations, and how different agencies in both countries can co-operate to address the problem.

Larnaca, Cyprus (November 2017)

In Cyprus, the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations in the OSCE area, the BSMU and the Cyprus police's Office for Combating Organized Crime and for the Protection of Cultural Heritage organized an international seminar on

combating the trafficking of cultural property and antiquities. Participants came from many OSCE participating States and from the wide range of professions and agencies that all need to work together to combat this crime.

Vicenza, Italy (November 2017)

The Mediterranean region was the focus of the first in a series of regional workshops, held at the Carabinieri Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units in Vicenza for participants from OSCE participating States, Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and Lebanon. It was organized by the BSMU with the support of Italy, which chaired the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Contact Group in 2017.

Vienna, Austria (April 2018)

Trafficking in cultural property was a key area of focus at the annual meeting of the OSCE Border Security and Management National Focal Points Network organized by the BSMU and the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship, bringing together OSCE officials, international experts and the participating States.

Tashkent and Samarkand, Uzbekistan (May 2018)

The second OSCE regional workshop on trafficking in cultural property was held in Tashkent and Samarkand, Uzbekistan for participants from law enforcement services and ministries of culture of all five Central Asian participating States. Organized by the BSMU with the support of the Italian OSCE Chairmanship, it focused on practical measures to combat trafficking in cultural property in Central Asia.

Chilling assumptions, unanswered questions

A curator's view on trafficking in antiquities

By St John Simpson



Illegally trafficked antiquities identified by the British Museum are repatriated to the National Museum of Afghanistan in July 2012 with the assistance of the British Armed Forces. (UK Ministry of Defence)

Culture is a fragile commodity and one which is easily neglected, damaged and targeted when there is a breakdown of authority or during times of conflict. We have seen evidence of looting, whether opportunistic or carefully planned, at archaeological sites and museums in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Libya. In other cases, monuments and museums are destroyed in airstrikes or figural representations are vandalized, notably at Bamiyan and the Kabul museum in 2001 or more recently in Iraq.

Is this destruction a crude cover for looting, as some journalists have suggested? If so, it would be a direct contradiction of statements made by Taliban and Daesh spokesmen over these years, namely that “all the statues must be destroyed so that no one can worship or respect them in the future”. A more chilling likelihood is that their beliefs and actions are consistent and that they have been attempting an obliteration of alternative ideologies, with foreign denouncements of such actions followed by

further atrocities.

In the meantime there are many other stories of the antiquities market being flooded from Syria and Iraq, yet the evidence for this is either unreliable or incorrect. What are the diggers finding and where is it going? Large Late Roman and early medieval cities such as Apamea are known for their glorious mosaics but decades of archaeological excavation have not produced many spectacular portable finds and this is true of other continuously occupied sites. Broken pottery or glass vessels are not commercially viable; low denomination coins, belt fittings and figurines do have a market but do not give high returns. They may be offered for sale locally, on the Internet or some high street markets but are below the price margin of the serious art market where value is afforded by aesthetic quality and provenance. In fact better returns are offered by supplying fakes as these can be mass produced in safety, and it is no surprise that we see huge quantities of fakes in circulation at the moment.

Role of museums

Effective monitoring and counter-trafficking measures require the collaboration of many partners, including expert witnesses who can advise on sites, collections and objects, law enforcement agencies, dealers, media and the responsible public. Museums can play a key role in this process as they have expert curators and are directly familiar with all these sectors and enjoy good relations with their counterparts in host countries. Within the United Kingdom, the British Museum has been the lead organization in this respect and it works very closely with the United Kingdom Border Force and the Art and Antiques Unit of the Metropolitan Police in London.

After 2003 the British Museum successfully identified, catalogued and repatriated thousands of illegally trafficked antiquities to the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. These included small bronze seals and cosmetic pots from looted Bronze Age cemeteries as well as objects from the Hellenistic Greek and medieval Islamic periods. These are all categories on the International Council of Museum's Red List of Antiquities from Afghanistan, and illustrate how vital such lists are in helping identify the most commonly trafficked types of antiquity.

St John Simpson is the senior curator responsible for the pre-Islamic collections from Iran and Arabia in the British Museum in London.



Why archaeological sites are crime scenes

By Konstantinos-Orfeas Sotiriou

Like most people, I am used to seeing scenes in TV series where a crime has been reported and the police immediately arrive at the site, sealing it off with those yellow strips and prohibiting entry. But what does that have to do with archaeology? In the following article, a bizarre connection between archaeology and crime scenes will be unveiled.

The 18th and 19th centuries were a time when a handful of wealthy people started to be interested in ancient objects from lost civilizations. This was the beginning of archaeology as a science. Inspired by myths and legends, the first pioneer archaeologists conducted expensive and dangerous expeditions to exotic places to dig under difficult circumstances, with only one goal: to find the objects of those mythical civilizations that they had heard about through stories. But were they really the first archaeologists?

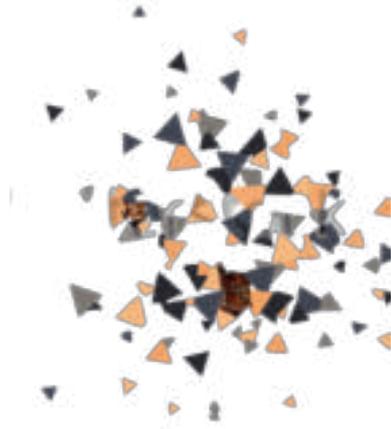
Back in ancient Egypt during the Middle Kingdom, during the Ur III Period in Mesopotamia, during the Minoan and Mycenaean Periods in Greece, ancient looters were also digging with a passion: to find gold and precious stones inside the graves of great kings. So, one could ask, what is the difference between looters and archaeologists?

Throughout the 20th century, archaeological excavations unearthed some of the most exquisite palaces, houses, graves and complexes of humanity's great past. Slowly but surely, interdisciplinary approaches were introduced to archaeology, and soon the concept of archaeological context gained great importance. By the term "context" we mean all the different forms of evidence that exist inside an undisturbed layer.

When an ancient house or building has collapsed after an earthquake or was burned down by conquerors, the remaining debris, if undisturbed, can provide valuable pieces of evidence: pottery, tools, furniture, vessels, cesspits and coins. Using the proper tools, digging meticulously layer after layer and transferring all the information

uncovered to an archaeological diary, archaeologists can re-create the story behind this forgotten place. A variety of questions can then be answered. Who were the inhabitants? Were they Amorites, Minoans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks? What was their main occupation? Through coins, archaeologists can date with extreme precision the period when the story took place. A careful examination of the pottery can reveal the source of their supply of clay. Non-local pottery could reveal relations with other cultures and places thousands of miles away and burned grains inside vessels and cesspits could reveal eating habits.

Someone might argue that looters are doing the same job as archaeologists. But looters are motivated neither by science nor by the study and revival of the past but by profit. Their only motive is the prospect of selling the objects they find – golden rings, clay vessels and idols, ivory objects, swords, shields, helmets and coins – to wealthy buyers. They do not use proper methods, which require careful digging, inch by inch, using the right tools and documenting the whole procedure. Instead they use destructive tools and methods, as they have no time to spare in pursuing their illegal aims. Sometimes they even use big bulldozers, as in one case that was



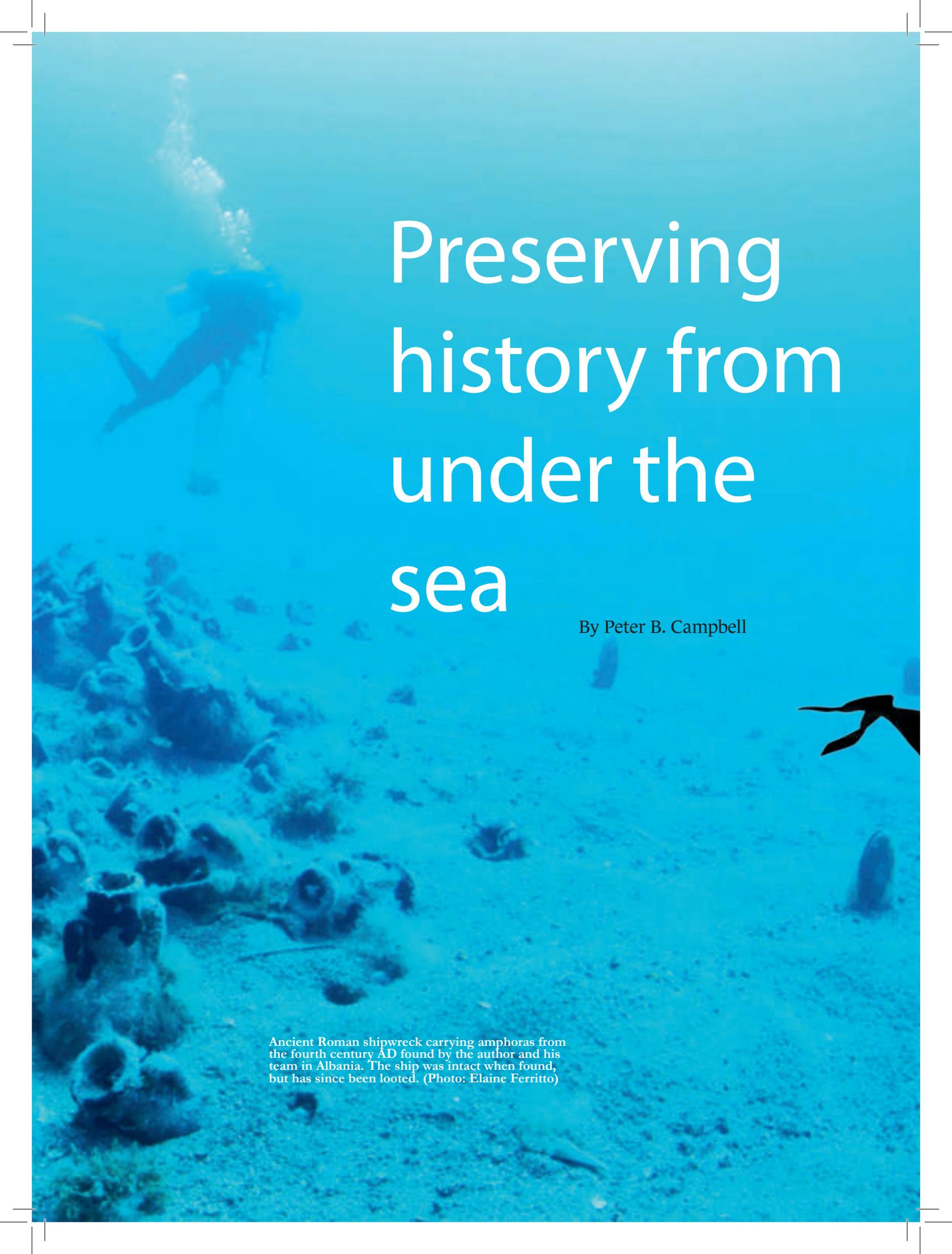
reported to the Department for Combating Smuggling in Antiquities in Athens in 2000. No doubt their methods allow them to find the objects they seek, but during the process they destroy all the rest of the evidence that is so important for us archaeologists.

Great archaeological museums like the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the National Museum in Athens advertise their exhibitions focusing mainly on objects that symbolize wealth and power. Tutankhamun's mask, Agamemnon's mask, Aphrodite's marble statue and golden swords dating back to the Mycenaean Period are excellent artefacts. But in a way they distort the visitors' understanding of what archaeology really means.

Archaeology is the only way humanity has to rebuild its past. A past without any written evidence, dating far back to the Neolithic Period, the Bronze Age Period and the Iron Age. A past that belongs to all of humanity, not to any single nation, and certainly not to the looters who seek only profit. A great past revealed through careful scientific excavation and research, that obliterates the boundaries separating nations and reveals the greatness of our common ancestors. Ancestors who managed to control rivers and through irrigation provided water for their people, who built towns back in 3,500 BC with separate commercial and religious parts. Ancestors who used the natural flow of the Nile and the Tigris and the Euphrates to transport objects from distance places. Ancestors who conducted marriage contracts in 2,000 BC, wrote literature and shared tales such as the Gilgamesh Epic.

Imagine chlorine being thrown onto a crime scene. No fingerprints, no drops of blood, no physical evidence, neither from the victim nor from the perpetrator, nothing would remain for forensic researchers to use as evidence to reconstruct the facts and answer questions regarding the crime committed. In the same way, looters are destroying humanity's great past, our global past, which has yet to be revealed. An enormous number of questions are still waiting to be answered. The means for fulfilling this complex task is and always was archaeology. Being a police officer and an archaeologist has made me realize that an archaeological site has to be treated according to the same principles as a crime scene. Both are in need of our greatest protection and most thorough examination.

Konstantinos-Orfeas Sotiriou is a Sergeant in the Greek Police Force's department against antiquities smuggling and an archeological researcher at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

An underwater photograph showing a diver in the upper left quadrant, swimming towards the right. The water is a clear, deep blue. In the lower left and center, there is a large collection of ancient Roman amphoras, some of which are broken and scattered on the sandy seabed. The lighting is bright, creating a clear view of the scene.

Preserving history from under the sea

By Peter B. Campbell

Ancient Roman shipwreck carrying amphoras from the fourth century AD found by the author and his team in Albania. The ship was intact when found, but has since been looted. (Photo: Elaine Ferritto)

Cultural Heritage and Security

The trafficking of antiquities has been an important issue for many decades, but one area that has been sadly neglected is underwater cultural heritage.

Underwater antiquities differ from those on land. Most objects are inorganic, since marine environments consume or bury material such as wood. Underwater finds include canons, porcelain, precious metals or statues. Many of the intact ancient bronze statues that have survived from antiquity come from the sea, since those on land were melted down for reuse. But precious art is the exception. In Europe, amphoras and ancient wine jugs are commonly looted; in Asia, Chinese porcelain is a lucrative item.

One would think marine archaeological sites would be easier to protect than terrestrial ones since they are fewer and a much smaller population has access to them: free divers, fishermen and SCUBA divers. But these are not the only looters. Commercial operators who work legally as salvors of modern vessels often supplement their business by illegally recovering historic artefacts. They turn off their transponders in culturally rich areas, like the sites

of naval battles, and steal copper from World War I and World War II vessels, canons from sailing ships and ceramics from ancient sites.



UNESCO's 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage addresses such widespread looting. Many nations have strict legislation for their territorial waters. But marine law is complex and enforcing it at sea can be difficult. Monitoring of sites and investigation of looting is rarely undertaken. Ownership of objects can be complicated: within territorial waters, underwater sites belong to the state, except in the case of a sunken naval vessel, which always belongs to its flag nation.

It often falls to border security and customs officials to stop the trafficking of underwater cultural

heritage. Officers can look out for ceramics or metals that are covered in marine growth – shells, coral, or calcium deposits – as an indicator of recent looting. Complete ceramics that are declared or appear to be of great age often come from the sea, as ceramics do not often survive hundreds of years intact on land.

The best practice for border security and customs officials who are faced with a possibly trafficked artefact is to document it with photos and copies of any paperwork and to consult the cultural property database and the specialists of INTERPOL. A looted artefact can sometimes be tied back to a specific shipwreck and in a few cases it has led to the discovery of a previously unknown archaeological site.

As on land, perhaps the biggest crime of underwater looting is the great loss of scientific information. Since the vast majority of ships to be found in the sea carried not gold and silver but everyday items like foodstuffs, most looting attempts are bound to be fruitless. But the recovery of a complete amphora or plate often requires the destruction of the objects around it due to marine concretion processes. Destructive methods such as dragging scallop dredges over the top of shipwrecks cause incalculable damage.

Already half a century ago, pioneer archaeologist Peter Throckmorton had this to say about the destruction of a first century Roman ship by ill-informed skin divers in France in 1957: "A whole chapter in the history of navigation was blown to rubble by some mindless diver, perhaps hunting for nonexistent gold, destroying not from malice but stupidity, like a bored child spilling the sugar on a rainy afternoon. The glory of the world must indeed pass away, but it seems wrong to speed its passage with dynamite and sledgehammers."

As a field archaeologist I have seen entire shipwrecks smashed and in some cases dynamited in the search for valuables. A single artefact for sale is often indicative of the destruction of hundreds of others; the history lost can never be regained.

Peter B. Campbell is a maritime archaeologist and researches antiquities trafficking networks. Read more about his work at: www.peterbcampbell.com.



