



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART
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Info Leaflet IADAA: Protection of Cultural Property

New Developments: No Evidence of Trade in Ancient Art Funding ISIS

Basel, November 25, 2014 – In our press release of October 21, 2014, we pointed out that the validity of the facts and figures presented in the suggestive broadcast “Das geplünderte Erbe” (which have been adopted by many media) of the German trade in ancient art being involved in funding ISIS are extremely unlikely.

During the last week, two articles have been published by independent parties supporting our point of view, one from *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the other the blog ‘Chasing Aphrodite’.

The source of the rumour: The Guardian, June 15, 2014

On June 15, 2014, *The Guardian* reported on the death of a high ranking IS member; Abdulrahman al-Bilawi. Amongst his possession 160 usb sticks were found which were decrypted by officials, including CIA officers. Martin Chulov, *The Guardian* reporter, received information from an unknown source that these usb sticks contained proof of the trade in ancient art funding ISIS:

“They had taken \$ 36 m from al-Nabuk alone. The antiquities there are up to 8,000 years old,” claimed an intelligence official who remains anonymous.

This unverified allegation was taken up by numerous activists and journalists who concocted a purely fictional story about how these ancient objects were sold in the German art trade.

Süddeutsche Zeitung, November 15/16, 2014

It is somewhat ironic that Volkmar Kabisch, who was responsible for the ARD documentary “Das geplünderte Erbe”, has now had to admit – after careful examination of the 160 usb sticks: “But where does the money come from? There has been much speculation about art trafficking, revenues from kidnapping or the sale of oil but no such information can be gained from the documents.”

Nevertheless, his broadcast “Das geplünderte Erbe” is still aired by Phoenix.

The IADAA demands that this and similar broadcasts that are based on false and obsolete information are removed from the program at once.

Chasing Aphrodite

The originator of the rumour currently circulating in the United States of America, that the trade in ancient art provided the second largest source of revenue for ISIS is identified in the blog “Chasing Aphrodite – The Hunt for Looted Antiquities in the World’s Museums”: there, Michael Danti, assistant professor at Boston University, is held liable.

In his function as co-director of a State Department funded campaign to track cultural heritage destruction in Syria, Danti had published an article in the magazine “Foreign Policy” on October 17, 2014, in which he called the illicit trade with ancient objects the second largest source of revenue of ISIS. When asked by the author of the blog, Danti had to admit that his “source” was a report dating to 2005-2006 which could not refer to ISIS for the simple fact that ISIS did not even exist in 2005.

The source would deal with al-Qa’ida and Danti wanted to reach a conclusion by analogy. In this study, though, the category “looting” would not refer to archaeological objects only, but to all stolen commercial goods so that the report sheds no light on the trade in ancient objects.

The report in “Chasing Aphrodite” concludes with the statement: “The truth is we have very little reliable data on the global revenue generated by the illicit antiquities trade, and even less on the role it plays in funding terror groups. It is, to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, a known unknown: we know it happens, but not much more. Claiming otherwise may in the short term bring attention to the issue of looting, but ultimately saps it of credibility – and the urgency to answer those important questions with well-documented research. It can also taint important policy decisions, as Patty Gerstenblith, chair of the State Departments Cultural Property Advisory Committee, noted in response to Danti and similar claims: “Commentators and scholars should avoid sensationalism ... Exaggerated baseless claims hinder rational policies to restrict trade in illegal antiquities.” This is particularly true, and troubling, when such claims come from a highly respected academic group being paid – and held out as the gold standard – by the State Department. When John Kerry gives a speech about looting at the Met, he is using the issue to help justify the escalating U. S. military intervention in Syria. In that context, it is more important than ever to stick to the known knows.”

The International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art can only agree with this. The only way to effectively implement the Protection of Cultural Property is the protection of archeological sites in situ, as outlined in the UNESCO Convention 1970, (article 4) to ensure that the human heritage is preserved for future generations.

The International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art (IADAA) was formed in London in 1993. IADAA is the international association of leading dealers in works of ancient art with high ethical standards. Members adhere to a stringent code of conduct designed to serve not only the interests of their clients but also the integrity of the objects themselves. At present, 32 members from eight countries belong to IADAA.

If you have further inquiries please contact IADAA’s spokesperson in all matters related to the Protection of Cultural Heritage:

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