

NEW DIRECTIONS

The Director Writes

'... nor will they knowingly support this illegal trade by authenticating or expressing opinions concerning such material, and will actively discourage the collection of such material. . . .' These words in The University Museum's Acquisition Policy of May 2, 1978, published in the spring issue of *Expedition*, deal with one particular aspect of the Museum's attitude toward the handling of cultural property 'known or suspected to be illegally exported' from its country of origin. They are words whose implementation has raised a good deal of surprised comment, much of it on the level of 'This can't apply to me/my vase/my statuette/my necklace. I've never looted anything' or 'Well, it was for sale/auction. If I didn't buy it, somebody else would have.' Many people cannot in all honesty see what they are doing as in any way wrong, or undesirable, and think that the Museum, in refusing to authenticate such materials, or to accept them as gifts, is simply cutting off its nose to spite its face.

It really is very important that our friends should understand why we take this stand—particularly why we refuse to authenticate objects unless we can be sure they were legally exported, usually before the passing of relevant legislation in the country of origin.

Our position is really quite simple. An authentication by the Museum does two things. It confers a 'seal of approval' on the object itself and this confirms or even increases its market value. Second, it implies an acceptance by the Museum of the presence of that object in private possession in this country, whatever the actual facts of its coming here may be. Thus authentication only increases the acceptability of the trade in ethnographic and archaeological objects, a trade of which the Museum wholly disapproves.

We ask our friends, therefore, to understand why we take this position on authentication, and why we always ask in detail about the origin of any piece shown to us for identification and authentication and why in many cases we must decline to comment on it. We know that the individuals themselves in most cases acquired such objects in good faith; but we also know that it is on just such natural good faith and wholly understandable interest in personal possession of such pieces that this deplorable trade has flourished and continues to flourish. Against this trade, the Museum, in company with virtually all other major museums of archaeology and anthropology, must and does take its stand.

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