

**Archaeological Institute of America**

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August 24, 2005

The Honorable E. Clay Shaw  
Chairman

Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Shaw:

As President of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), I am writing to express my strong support and the support of the AIA for the inclusion of H.R. 915 Cultural Conservation of the Crossroads of Civilization Act ("A bill to authorize the President to take certain actions to protect archaeological or ethnological materials of Afghanistan") in the Miscellaneous Tariffs bill. This Act grants authority to the President to impose emergency import restrictions to prevent the import into the United States of antiquities and other cultural materials that have been illegally removed from the cultural institutions and archaeological sites of Afghanistan.

This bill is particularly important since Afghanistan has not yet ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention and cannot ask for U.S. Protection in the normal way under the current Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983. The more than 30 years of chaos in Afghanistan since their revolution in 1974, shortly after the UNESCO Convention was written, and lack of effective central authority in the country have prevented Afghanistan from taking the important step of ratification. In the last two decades looting in Afghanistan has been devastating to that country's cultural heritage, and since the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001 and the current war there the situation has become even worse, rivaling, and if anything, exceeding the more familiar situation in Iraq. As partial documentation of this devastation, the AIA's website contains a description of the looting of some major Afghan archaeological sites ([www.archaeological.org](http://www.archaeological.org), see under "Archaeology Watch, Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage"). Among other postings may be found the text of an address "The Impact of War upon Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage" by Mr. Abdul Wasey Feroozi, Director General of the National Institute of Archaeology in Kabul. Mr. Feroozi's text is supplemented by photographic documentation with captions by Dr. Zmaryalai Tarzi, Director for the French Survey and Excavation Archaeological Mission and former Director of Archaeology and Conservation of Historical Monuments in Afghanistan. An article on Dr. Tarzi's current excavations at Bamiyan was published in the January/February issue of AIA's popular publication, *Archaeology Magazine* (abstract at [www.archaeology.org/0501/abstracts/afghan.html](http://www.archaeology.org/0501/abstracts/afghan.html)), and since 1998 there have been several other articles on the cultural heritage problems in Afghanistan in the magazine. As with Iraq, the United States has undertaken a special relationship with Afghanistan and it is very important that concern for preservation of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan be given equal consideration.

Antiquities are looted from sites so that they can be sold at high prices to markets in Western Europe and the United States. The looting of sites often causes irreversible damage to the sites, destroying contextual relationships among artifacts and the contexts in which they were used or buried in the past such as architecture, tombs, hearths, kitchens, temples. Once those relationships are destroyed it becomes impossible to reconstruct the full meaning of such artifacts—how they were used and valued in the past and who used them. This information is crucial to the full understanding and appreciation of the remains of any ancient culture.

It is critically important that the President be given the authority to prevent the import into the United States of looted cultural materials from Afghanistan and thereby reduce the incentive for theft and destruction of archaeological sites in that country. Enactment of this legislation will help the United States to fulfill its obligations to the Afghan people and help to enrich our understanding of the world's and our own cultural heritage.

The AIA was founded in 1879 and chartered by an Act of Congress in 1906 and is now the oldest and largest non-profit organization in the U.S. devoted to archaeology. Our over 8,000 members include not only professional archaeologists but also students and members of the general public. This latter category makes up a large majority of our membership and many of our programs and publications are devoted to educating the public about archaeology and cultural heritage and fostering an appreciation for the role of archaeology in understanding the human past. On behalf of all of our membership I urge you and the members of your committee to approve the inclusion of HR 915 in the Miscellaneous Tariffs bill and help the Afghan people to protect their cultural heritage for themselves and for all of us.

Sincerely,

Jane C. Waldbaum  
President, Archaeological Institute of America