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## **Press Release: Archaeological Institute of America Response to New AAMD Guidelines on the Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art**

The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) applauds the AAMD's revision of its Report and Guidelines on the Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art released on June 4. These new guidelines incorporate many of the principles for museum acquisitions of antiquities that the AIA has long advocated. Among these are requirements that a museum publish its acquisition policy, and that information regarding any new acquisition, including both provenance background and an image, be made publicly accessible.

The AAMD Report also acknowledges that museums have an obligation not to acquire antiquities in a way that will provide a direct and material incentive to looting, and that increased cooperation with countries of origin is the way to achieve both protection of archaeological sites and the continued collecting of antiquities in a responsible manner. Finally, and most importantly, the AAMD has now accepted the standard of 1970 (the date of completion of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property) as a fixed cut-off date for determining whether an undocumented work of ancient art or artifact can be acquired.

Some issues are not resolved by the new AAMD guidelines, such as cases in which a museum cannot establish the full ownership history of an antiquity as far back as 1970. The new guidelines permit such an acquisition to proceed based on the museum's informed judgment, a factor that leaves much to the discretion of the individual museum. This discretion is to be informed by balancing the potential financial and reputational harm to the museum against the benefit of acquiring the object. It is the AIA's hope that concerns for the rights of the country of origin and the potential harm to the world's cultural heritage will be incorporated in this decision.

The AAMD will also establish a web site where any objects whose provenance history cannot be traced back either to 1970 or to legal export from the country of origin must be posted with available documentation and an image. The AIA applauds this step as a way to facilitate eventual restitution of documented objects to their rightful owners. The purpose of the proposed website, however, focuses on ownership rights rather than on preservation of original contexts. In the case of fine art, such as that looted during the Holocaust, restitution to the owner is the primary policy goal; in the case of ancient artifacts, the goal should be to discourage the initial looting of such objects.

The Archaeological Institute of America is the oldest and largest archaeological organization in North America. Its over 8,500 members include not only professional archaeologists and students but many people from all walks of life who share a passion for learning about and protecting the remains of the human past. We look forward to continued discussions with the AAMD regarding the preservation of ancient art and archaeological material, which will be advanced by these new guidelines.