

## **2004 Sotheby's, New York auctions for Chinese Artifacts Data**

Looting and the illegal export of artifacts is depleting China's rich cultural heritage. The problem has grown in scale and intensity over the last 30 years and the results of these activities are seen both in China—where archaeological sites continue to be destroyed--and in the American art market--where trade in Chinese antiquities is a multi-million dollar operation. An examination of Sotheby's in New York helps to illustrate the nature and extent of the problem and demonstrates the desire for Chinese antiquities in the United States.

In 2004 Sotheby's conducted three auctions of Chinese cultural material—one in March and two in September. A total of 657 objects were listed for auction. Of the 657 objects, 168 were archaeological in nature. Eighty-four objects were ultimately sold and grossed over 7 million dollars. Who says the trade in Chinese materials isn't thriving? In contrast, between 2000 and 2003 the total number of Maya objects auctioned at Sotheby's garnered 2.5 million dollars.

The majority of Chinese archaeological objects sold in 2004 were priced between \$10,000 and \$50,000. It must be noted, however, that almost 25% of the objects were sold for over \$100,000.

The archaeological materials that make up this study, span period of time that extends from the Neolithic period (6000 B.C.) to the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1750). Most of the objects dated to the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907). While ceramics and bronzes made up most of the material offered, figurines were most favored by buyers accounting for 45% (38 of 84) of the sales.

What about the provenance of the materials listed for auction, particularly in reference to acquisitions prior to the 1970 UNESCO Convention? Of the 168 objects auctioned only 30 have provenances—ten since 1970. Thirteen of the 30 objects with provenances were acquired before 1989, when China accepted the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the

Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. When considering proveniences or the archeological context of the objects, however, the picture changes dramatically. In 2004, none of the objects offered for auction by Sotheby's of New York, had archaeological context.

The data from Sotheby's auctions indicate the international desire for Chinese materials and further emphasize their value as a commodity. The desire for Chinese artifacts fuels further looting and illegal export as suppliers try to keep up with demand. It is unlikely that people's desire to acquire objects from the past will disappear, therefore it is important for the international community to be aware of the nature and extent of the problem—specifically, what is being sold, how it is being sold, and for how much it is being sold. Acquiring this information will help protect the cultural materials that remain in the ground.

- 1) In 2004 – 168 Chinese objects were auctioned, of which were archaeological.
- 2) The total price of archeological objects sold in 2004 was \$7,254,900.00

**Objects Break Down**

65 Figurines  
 49 Vessels  
 23 Sculpture  
 31 Misc..

**Material Break Down**

69 Ceramic  
 55 Bronze  
 21 Stone (Limestone, Soapstone, Schist)  
 8 Wood  
 15 Misc (Silk, Jade, Silver...)

**Sold** - Out of the 168 objects offered for auction in 2004, only 84 were sold.

<b>Price</b>	<b># of Object sold</b>
under \$10,000 (lowest Price was \$3,900)	21
between \$10,000 and \$20,000	14
between \$20,000 and \$50,000	18
between \$50,000 and \$100,000	12
between \$100,000 and \$150,000	7
between \$150,000 and \$200,000	7
above \$200,000	5

**Time Period**

<b>Dynasty</b>	<b># of Objects</b>	<b>Time Period</b>
Neolithic Period	4	6000 - 2000 BC
Shang Dynasty	12	1600 - 1000 BC
Zhou Dynasty	13	1000 - 221 BC
Han Dynasty	12	206 BC - AD 220
Wei Dynasty	4	AD 220 - 264
Jin Dynasty	4	AD 265-419 AD
Qi Dynasty	5	AD 550 - 577
Sui Dynasty	4	AD 589 - 618
Tang Dynasty	52	AD 618-907
Song Dynasty	14	AD 960-1279
Liao Dynasty	5	AD 970-1125
Yuan Dynasty	4	AD 1279-1368
Ming Dynasty	12	AD 1368-1644
Qing Dynasty	8	AD 1644-1911
No particular Dynasty associated	15	