



## THE LURE OF THE LURISTAN BRONZES

### A Discussion on the Collecting and Plunder of Archaeological Heritage

#### ABSTRAKT

De lockande bronzen från Luristan – En diskussion om samlandet och plundrandet av arkeologiskt arv

*En önskan att äga antika föremål påverkade det arkeologiska arvet och den arkeologiska vetenskapen under första halvan av 1900-talet, en tid då arkeologiska föremål blev populära samlingsobjekt på en bred skala, och då plundrandet av arkeologiskt arv ökade. I denna artikel undersöks iransk arkeologi och plundrandet av föremål som på engelska kallas "Luristan Bronzes", alltså "Bronsen från Luristan". Rollen av samtida etik, museer och forskare diskuteras, tillika med pågående internetförsäljning av bronsföremålen.*

*Med tanke på det arkeologiska arvets framtid är det ytterst viktigt att diskutera och sprida kunskap om kulturarvsfrågor. En bättre medvetenhet om kulturarvets betydelse borde uppmuntras på en lokal och global skala, och man borde dessutom uppmuntra till en mindre tolerant inställning gentemot samlandet av olagligt tillägnade arkeologiska föremål. Forskare och museer har en viktig roll i denna process.*

Keywords: Luristan bronzes, looting, collecting, antiquities trade, Iran.

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeological heritage has been an intriguing topic of research for centuries. The basis of the archaeological knowledge of Western Asia was gained mainly by the pioneering research of European and North American scholars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> A search for knowledge of the ancient past furthered the growth of scientific studies in the West, but the search was executed in a (pro-)colonial culture, which affected how the research was conducted and justified. Archaeological studies may be understood as colonial practices: excavation data and finds were often taken

out of their local context and transferred to foreign collections and museums. Furthermore, archaeological heritage was often lost due to illicit excavation, which was fuelled by the demand for ancient objects by collectors and antiquities markets.

In this article, I will discuss how the plundering of archaeological sites reduces the possibilities to study and understand past heritage. Looting of the sites destroys the stratigraphy and context of the data and objects. Furthermore, with the disappearance of ancient objects to private collections both tangible and intangible heritage are lost. To illustrate these processes and their cultural impact, this article specifically scrutinizes the archaeology conducted in Iran and the looting of ancient objects called “Luristan Bronzes”, which became popular collectibles on a large scale in the 1930s. The scientific interest in the bronzes, the studies and excavations thereof, developed in parallel with illicit trade in the objects. In this study, I consider how colonial attitudes and practices in archaeology affected the looting phenomena. The article follows the fate of the bronzes up to present day Internet sales.

## EARLY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENQUIRIES AND ANTIQUITIES COLLECTING – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western European states competed to acquire information on various ancient cultures of the world. There was also a great drive to obtain antique objects for newly-founded museums and private collections in Europe and North America.<sup>2</sup> Western historians romanticised the practices of archaeology, writing about the heroic and tireless efforts of archaeologists.<sup>3</sup> Newspapers and magazines became more widely accessible to the European middle classes, and the papers brought the news of exciting archaeological discoveries to their reading public. After World War I, the Covenant of the League of Nations defined archaeological remains as a common resource to be utilised by all “able” states.<sup>4</sup> West-European colonialism provided the tools for dominating the archaeology of Western Asian countries. “World museums”<sup>5</sup> were places where cultural objects collected from dominated cultures were displayed for the European and North-American public.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, Western Asia experienced a growth in nationalism which increased the interest in safeguarding national cultural heritage. As the European colonial grip loosened or states achieved their independence, new, stricter legal frames for practices concerning antiquities, archaeology and heritage were implemented in many

countries such as Turkey 1906, Iran 1930, Iraq 1936, and Syria 1963.<sup>7</sup> These laws gave the local heritage officials tools for safeguarding and conserving local and national heritage.

## ETHICAL GUIDELINES – THE GLOBAL STAGE

Since World War II, the international community has acknowledged a need for legal and ethical guidelines in research and heritage preservation on a global scale. The common interest has resulted in the implementation of various international recommendations and conventions like the 1954 Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and the 1970 Unesco Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. Ethical codes for archaeologists and museums were introduced

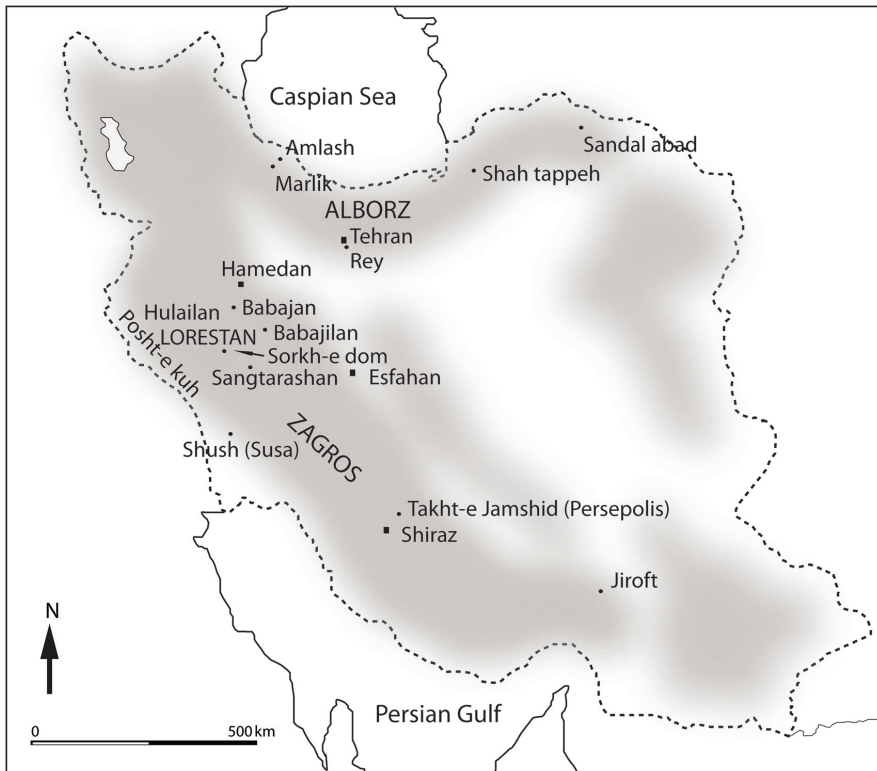


Figure 1. Map of Iran. Location of the archaeological sites and cities mentioned in the text.

mainly in the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>8</sup> The codes have given a framework for the professional archaeological work and helped to strengthen the moral positions of researchers. Advanced discussions of ethical issues in social and cultural studies have generated stronger ethical standpoints in archaeological scholarship,<sup>9</sup> which is demonstrated by the broader involvement of locals in research. The media, officials and scholarly circles have increasingly attended to the illicit trade and its consequences, which has raised public concern to some extent, at least in the western countries.

## A CASE OF LURISTAN BRONZES

In the late 1920s, specific bronze objects became abundant on the antiquities markets of European and North American metropolises. How the first bronze objects came to the antiquities market is unclear. The bronzes' origins were first unknown, but were soon attributed to Western Iran and specifically to the Lorestan and neighbouring Hamadan regions in the central Zagros region (Fig. 1).<sup>10</sup> These bronze objects, called Luristan bronzes<sup>11</sup> (*mefrāghha-ye Lorestan*), have been affected by the excessive collecting, especially of the “Typical Luristan bronzes”<sup>12</sup> which are from the period ca.1400/1200–600 BC (Iranian Iron Age). The Luristan bronzes chiefly consist of votive elements, horse trappings, weapons, whetstones, pins and other decorative implements. They are ornamented with motifs of animals, humans and mythical creatures (Fig. 2 & Fig. 3).<sup>13</sup> Typical Luristan bronzes have been excavated mainly from graves, but also from ceremonial sites.<sup>14</sup>

## OBJECTS TO BE OWNED

*“Mute, yet eloquent: significant Luristan Bronzes:...when specialists in this field have had opportunity to make exhaustive study, we shall undoubtedly have revealed an impressive record of one of man’s earliest endeavours to philosophy of life.”<sup>15</sup>*

Ever since their first appearance, the Luristan bronzes have attracted much attention. Scholars and collectors alike have been intrigued by the fascinating forms, enthralling motifs and unknown meanings of the bronzes' iconography.<sup>16</sup> In 1930, art historian Arthur Upham Pope was planning an international exhibition of Persian art and archaeology to be held in London in 1931. He “advertised” the bronzes for the exhibition in the *Illustrated London News*. It included colour plates of Pope’s own collection of bronzes.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 2. A Luristan bronze finial (538) in the National Museum of Iran. © National Museum of Iran.

The article gives an idea of the high value he attributed to these objects.

Later in the decade, acquiring Luristan bronzes became prestigious, if not an obsession, to European museums and collectors. Museums were assiduous buyers in the antiquities market.<sup>18</sup> Swedish archaeologist Ture Arne considered it essential to have Luristan bronzes in the comparative collection of the Swedish National Historical Museum (*Statens Historiska Museum*), and consequently he bought a collection of about 250 pieces while excavating at Shah Tappeh in Northern Iran in 1932–1933. Later Arne complemented the collection with purchases from various antiquities dealers. Sweden’s Crown

Prince Gustav Adolf also donated to the museum a few pieces of Luristan bronzes (and ceramics) acquired in his travels in Iran and the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the Mediterranean Museum (*Medelhavsmuseet*) in Stockholm has a considerable collection of 494 Luristan objects, mostly bronzes. All these “Luristan bronzes” lack provenience<sup>20</sup> and, as the museum’s researcher Pat Marino points out, they are probably not all from the Lorestan and there are pieces with clearly modern additions.<sup>21</sup>

## OBJECTS TO BE SEARCHED

*“...on the plateaus farther north numerous ancient mounds invited trial excavations ... numerous burial grounds traced which had of late years furnished an abundance of those interesting ‘Luristan bronzes’ for antique markets*

of the West. They all proved to have been systematically plundered by Lur searchers...”<sup>22</sup>

Identifying the origin, context and purpose of the bronzes was a driving motive for surveys and excavations in Iran during the 1930s. In 1934-1935, Pope organized the Holmes Expedition to survey the central Zagros region. The expedition was directed by Erich F Schmidt, whose ongoing projects in Persepolis (*Takht-e Jamshid/Parsa*) and Rey were suspended because Pope considered his survey more important.<sup>23</sup> Schmidt was keen to find horse trappings in his excavations at Sorkh-e Dom in 1938, but he did not succeed.<sup>24</sup> However, to complete the excavated collection, Schmidt bought 21 objects (among them horse trappings) from Tehran antiquities dealers. All the objects were later distributed to different museums and collections.<sup>25</sup>

In 1935 and 1936, Hungarian-British archaeologist Aurel Stein began searching for the bronzes. He surveyed Western Iran and the Lorestan region with a grant from the British Museum and Harvard University. Stein's accounts show that he realised how the investigations would further compound the looting of the sites. He even mentions that the sites should wait for systematic excavations, but it did not prevent him from executing hasty



Figure 3. A Luristan bronze horse bit (539) in the National Museum of Iran. © National Museum of Iran.

excavations in numerous sites around Western Iran. Stein also recounts how he offered to buy bronzes from the locals at a good price and was clearly displeased that only three pieces were brought to him.<sup>26</sup>

The first efforts to resolve the origins of the bronze objects were fruitless, and an unceasing stream of looted objects continued to flow into the antiquities markets in the metropolises of Europe and North America. Illegal antiquities trade also concerned bronze objects called *Amlash/Marlik*, apparently from Northern Iran. In a letter from 1960, the Iranian Ministry encourages the local officials to be alert and prevent ongoing plunder. However, active dealers from Tehran made it difficult to hinder the looting.<sup>27</sup> Earlier, the Iranian authorities had issued permits for commercial excavations hoping to secure at least some degree of documentation of the sites and finds, since personnel schooled in archaeology were too few. A condition for the permits was that a person from the local state-office, usually a school rector or a teacher, was to inspect the excavations, yet the inspectors had neither the time nor the competence to do so. In most cases the “excavators” informed the authorities that nothing had been found.<sup>28</sup> These “excavators” claimed that their work involved serious investigations, but documentation was non-existent, and “excavated” objects were sold abroad.<sup>29</sup>

The uncontrolled excavations and the aforementioned investigations demonstrate the desire for the bronzes: scholars, museums, collectors and dealers all participated in the search. Western scholars partook in scientific investigations funded by European and North American museums. Accordingly, museums expected a substantial share of the found objects.<sup>30</sup> The excavated artefacts were not always sufficient and so scholars bought objects from local dealers or antiquities markets. Commercial “excavators” were also dealers. They urged or hired locals to dig, and sold objects to collectors.

## RENEWED INQUIRIES IN LORESTAN IN THE 1960s

In the early 1960s, the involvement of foreign archaeological teams in Iran increased, and the determination to find the bronzes’ origins gained new momentum. A Danish expedition<sup>31</sup> surveyed the Hulailan Plain (1962–1964), supported by the Danish National Museum, road-construction company Kampsax, and the Carlsberg Foundation.<sup>32</sup> A few years later, British archaeologist Clare Goff excavated at Tappeh Babajan in the western Zagros (1966–1969), funded by the University of London and the British Museum.<sup>33</sup> However, these projects produced little information about bronze artefacts or their context. The Danish expedition finally ended up excavating the early

Neolithic site, and only a few metal objects were found in the excavations conducted by Goff. A Belgian research group eventually excavated *the* Luristan bronzes in an untouched context. Louis Vanden Berghe from Ghent University conducted long-term excavations in the ancient cemeteries of Lorestan's Posht-e Kuh region from 1965–1979, the original context of the bronzes was revealed, and a chronology created.<sup>34</sup>

These enquiries benefited academic studies, especially in the West, where they were mostly published in European languages. For the wider Iranian (or Lorestan) public, these studies barely contributed to knowledge about the local past or raised the awareness of the meaning and value of local heritage.

## FIELDWORK AND LOOTING

The study of the Luristan bronzes shows how scientific studies and illicit digging affect each other; plundered sites are excavated or looting follows a scientific investigation. Scholars have recently noted that archaeological interest in specific sites or artefacts can spark the interest of potential looters and antiquities dealers.<sup>35</sup> However, Stein already noticed this in the 1930s. He knew about the destructive effects that his test excavations had on ancient sites, as did Vanden Berghe.<sup>36</sup> The same applied to the Holmes Expedition: when Schmidt finished the excavations, the site was left vulnerable to the antiquities hunters.<sup>37</sup> The illegal activities are discovered mostly when objects are being smuggled out of the country, which leaves their origin obscure. When the looters are caught red-handed or when details about the location of looted objects or sites are discovered, the site can be studied and rescue excavations conducted. This occurred recently (2006) at two ancient sites in Lorestan, Sangtarashan and Babajilan.<sup>38</sup> Recent research of the earlier scientific field-work<sup>39</sup> is very valuable for gaining some information about the bronzes and their context, which have been so widely destroyed during decades of plundering.

Guarding archaeological sites is difficult, especially those situated in remote places, far away from inhabited areas or main roads. The aims and possible results of excavations ought to be shared with locals, who will thus be included in the projects. Public information campaigns have been launched, and education of the public has often become a part of archaeological projects. Museums, schools, adult educational centres and local heritage centres, together with different kinds of media can effectively educate a heritage-conscious public.<sup>40</sup> Education should not mean forcing our (western modelled)



values on others, but rather distributing information that increases awareness of, and encourages engagement in, the heritage process.

## COLLECTING AND SCHOLARS

Prior to nineteenth century archaeology, European upper classes maintained a tradition of collecting antiquities. Their devotion to the Bible and the roots of Western civilisation formed the framework for the archaeological investigations in Egypt and Western Asian countries. Researcher Ana Vrdoljak discusses how Western countries legitimised free and equal access to archaeological resources with the notion of a common heritage, superior position and the scientific competence of Western scholars. These implied better possibilities to display, study, conserve and protect archaeological remains in the West.<sup>41</sup> The impact of oriental discourse<sup>42</sup> is also further noticeable in the attitudes of influential Western archaeologists in Iran and its neighbours.<sup>43</sup> Attitudes to collecting archaeological objects can be best understood in the aforementioned context of contemporary (Western/European) ideology and world view.

Eminent scholars of early twentieth century Iranian archaeology were collectors themselves and/or were involved in the antiquities trade. Arthur Pope arranged international exhibitions of Iranian art and archaeology, but he also dealt widely with (illicit) antiquities.<sup>44</sup> He praised the dealers' activities in obtaining bronze objects in Lorestan.<sup>45</sup> German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld was deeply involved in Iran's archaeology, and was influential in the implementation of the Antiquities Law 1930. He also executed the first extensive restoration and excavations in Persepolis (1931–1935). Still, as did many of his contemporaries, Herzfeld sold ancient objects for some museums and collections.<sup>46</sup> Ture Arne's acquisitions of bronzes were for the Swedish National Museum. Erich F Schmidt supplemented the considerable excavation finds of the Holmes expedition by buying bronze objects from antiquities dealers.<sup>47</sup>

The prevailing attitude of the excavators in Lorestan can be discerned in their contemporary reports and literature. The looting by the Lur villagers is mentioned by all, and Thrane expresses the frustration the archaeologists felt when encountering layers and graves destroyed by clandestine digging.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the need to find "good" objects to donate to the supporting museums, thereby gaining continued funding and the opportunity to continue archaeological investigations, is clear, as Goff's remarks demonstrate.<sup>49</sup> Museums, as research sponsors, influenced the archaeologists' stances and actions in the field. Museums wanted objects for their displays which con-

tributed to an object-centred idea of archaeology. Although Goff mentions ongoing discussions on ethics, very little comment, let alone discussion, is made regarding the reasons behind the illicit antiquities trade or the impact of collectors and dealers on plundering. Ethical viewpoints on digging and collecting illicit antiquities were yet to be internalised by the actors in the field and were seldom mentioned in archaeological publications or discussions in the 1960s and 70s. Lack of discussion on ethics might have had various reasons, but apparently archaeologists felt that illicit trade was not a matter on which they should take a stance. These ethical questions became an explicit concern later, mainly from the 1990s onwards.<sup>50</sup> Still, Judy Birmingham's<sup>51</sup> apology for studying the objects without context (the Luristan bronzes in the Nicholson Museum collection) suggests an indication of uneasiness and reveals the varied conceptions existing in the 1960s.

In Iran, as in many other countries of Western Asia, the flow of cultural objects out of the country was often assisted by foreign scholars, diplomats and travellers. Though foreigners were given permission to excavate in Iran rather freely, some were denied owing to the fear that the finest objects would be taken abroad and thus lost.<sup>52</sup> Iranian archaeologist Ezzat Negahban presented the issue of illicit trade and the export of excavation finds at the 5th International Congress of Iranian Art & Archaeology held in Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz in 1968. A proposal was set forth to prevent the export of the archaeological objects from one country to another (without official permission). It was signed by a majority of the delegates, and only two foreign participants, Pope and Roman Ghirshman, were against the proposal.<sup>53</sup> Negahban considered these discussions a major act of the Congress. Strangely, in her review of the Congress, archaeologist Edith Porada does not mention the matter at all.<sup>54</sup> However, the decision did not lead to any concrete measures until 1973, when a decree for excavation finds to remain in Iran finally came into effect.<sup>55</sup>

## HERITAGE VS. COMMODITY

Ancient objects can be viewed from many perspectives: as sources of information about the past, as heritage, museum artefacts, art objects, status symbols and as commodities acquired for monetary value with the purpose of profiting through their trade.<sup>56</sup> How did farmers and field-workers in the early twentieth century Iran view the ancient objects? They sporadically illegally dug up ancient objects and exchanged them for small rewards that helped gain the necessities of daily life. These objects were not considered

national or global cultural heritage as defined by Western (academic) standards.<sup>57</sup> Still, national heritage was not an unknown idea. While Negahban was inspecting Sandal Abad in northern Iran in 1960s, a young man told him that dealers encouraged local villagers to dig on the pretence that the diggers were doing their nation a big favour. The found objects, dealers said, would bring fame and glory to Iran, even if they meant only a trivial economic gain for the locals.<sup>58</sup>

Exploiting archaeological heritage has many forms in local contexts. American archaeologist Julie Hollowell has considered the meaning of subsistence digging by natives with scarce resources. She has studied the viewpoints of the natives of St Lawrence Island. The natives perceive ancient objects as heritage their ancestors intended to be utilised.<sup>59</sup> In view of that, villagers permit free trade in the ancient remains of their Island. American archaeologists Siobhan Hart and Elisabeth Chilton discuss individuals' rights to free collecting. They use the concept of "ontological security" to justify local collector's looting habits and describe archaeologists' position towards illicit digging as "essentially erasing these intentional meaningful actions."<sup>60</sup> However, their theory seems difficult to agree with, since free individual collecting overlooks the rights to the past (and the "ontological security") of all other stakeholders, like local communities, schoolchildren, etc. Besides, though local participation can still play a part, in many places looting has currently become an organised business. Examples include dealers and professional criminal gangs attached to violent crime,<sup>61</sup> not to mention the plundering linked to the recent conflicts and wars in Western Asia which have caused irreplaceable damage to archaeological heritage. The level of destruction is well attestable in the satellite images which have been recently used to trace the looting of archaeological sites.<sup>62</sup> Globally, the illegal art and antiquities trade is estimated to be at least one billion U.S. dollars per year.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the question is not about sporadic finds made by local farmers.<sup>64</sup> Such finds are only a small part of the process. The profit of selling ancient objects increases, the further the artefact moves from its original context. Those who profit the most are the collectors.

Heritage *per se* seems valueless to the collectors. Their interest is rather personal, often expressed as a passion for 'addictive' and 'obsessive' objects.<sup>65</sup> Long-time collector Georg Ortiz expresses his collecting as follows:

*"...objects came my way,... as though, imbued with the spirit of their creator, they came to me because they knew I would love them, understand them, would give them back their identity and supply them with a context in keeping with their essence, relating them to the likes. ..."*<sup>66</sup>

Ortiz describes collecting emotionally. His words tally well with how French sociologist Jean Baudrillard has described the collecting of antiquities: deriving from the longing for the myth of origins. Furthermore Baudrillard refers to ancient objects as domesticated signs of the past, which emanate their historicalness to the everyday environment.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, Ortiz's words could be understood in this framework of craving for origins and historicalness. Whatever the emotional basis is for collecting, collected objects have monetary value, and are easily turned to economic profit. In her article in December 2007, Time magazine writer Maria Baugh encouraged even modest investors to acquire antiquities. According to her they are good investments and look fine in one's private showcase.<sup>68</sup>

These antiquities engagements are not about valuing objects as cultural heritage; in fact, heritage is hardly mentioned. In trade, ancient artefacts turn into commodities. Looting is for (dealers'/collectors') economic profit, and there is profit only if there are buyers. As many archaeologists have noted,<sup>69</sup> demand created by the collectors and antiquities market bears the main responsibility for the plundering.

Archaeologists usually emphasise the importance of the context. The artefacts are best studied in their original context, and that information cannot be replaced by studies of objects without provenience in collections.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the damage done by the looting of the sites is not limited to scientific information; the locals are deprived of the possibility to take part in the heritage process, to strengthen their local identity and get acquainted with the past of their region. In contrast, views of collectors and art historians imply that collecting is a means to preserve the ancient objects.<sup>71</sup> For them, artefact provenience is of little or no consequence since adequate information about the past is provided by studying and publishing the objects themselves.

Information and observations about illicit antiquities have been highlighted in various studies during the past two decades.<sup>72</sup> The continuity of illicit trade indicates that obscure provenance does not bother the buyers,<sup>73</sup> and therefore more public discussion and research of the destructive side of the collecting of and trade in archaeological objects is still needed. Scholars and museums have a privileged position for disseminating the knowledge of the past to the public at large. For example, a survey of high school students shows that youth set great store by the role of museums in preserving and displaying archaeological finds and in disseminating knowledge of archaeological heritage.<sup>74</sup>

## CURRENT INTERNET SALES

World Wide Web sales have brought ancient artefacts from all over the world within reach of a wider public. “Finer” pieces or collections are sold at auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s, but a periodical follow-up (since 2007) of the sales of ancient objects of Iranian origin demonstrates that bronzes are also being offered on countless Internet antiquities pages. The exact amount of the bronzes for sale is impossible to estimate, since they have been looted and traded for nearly a century. In the spring of 1960, the Eisenberg catalogue offered 96 Luristan bronzes for sale; no provenance or find context of the objects was mentioned. Nevertheless, information on the bronzes was given as an expert opinion as if results of scientific excavations were available. Eisenberg writes:

*“The first Lur Tombs,..., were obviously the graves of nomadic warrior horse men, for buried with them were bronze and iron weapons, insignia and horse trappings....the horses themselves were often buried with the men.”<sup>75</sup>*

Eisenberg gives the information without reference, and there had not been any scientific excavations where horse trappings were found before 1960. He also mentions women’s graves, but does not mention who had identified the bones belonging to women.

Today ancient bronzes are abundant in Internet sales. For the last few years the number of “Luristan bronzes” has remained quite stable. In January 2014, 197 objects labelled “Luristan bronze” were for sale on eBay.<sup>76</sup> An e-Bay search in February 2016 resulted in 181 items, and the latest search result from April 2017 was 214 bronzes.<sup>77</sup> Only a few had provenances, mostly very vague.<sup>78</sup> A typical example of the Internet antiques market is the antiques.com sales page (table 1).

There were 29 objects labelled ‘Luristan bronze’ by six different sellers/galleries between September and November 2012. The find context of the objects was not mentioned and there was only a rough indication of the region. One item (table 1, no.1) was advertised as an excellent example of a Luristan bronze, even though it was dated ca. 100 BC and mentioned to be possibly Etruscan. Only in two cases was the earlier owner/collection mentioned by name (Table 1, nos. 2 and 20). In other cases, provenance was not specified or was stated with vague information about the previous owner or private collection. A typical way of expressing the earlier owner of an object is to state it comes from “an old English (or German, etc.) collection”, which can be considered an attempt to add respectability and somehow legitimise the

objects of unknown origin.<sup>79</sup> Two objects for sale (Table 1, nos. 3 and 22) had a picture of a ceramic figurine instead of the bronzes that were described in the text.

In many cases the seller appeals to the buyers' emotions. One bronze sword was marketed with the words: "it is crying for a loving home!"<sup>80</sup> To give an authentic aura to the object some of them are accompanied by a short story of historical battles, or other imagined interpretations of their use context.<sup>81</sup> An archaeologist's field number on a "Luristan" spearhead was also presented as a recommendation of authenticity<sup>82</sup>, although the sale of an archaeologically-recovered artefact on eBay is dubious indeed. In antiquities markets, forgeries and replicas are plentiful, and forgeries of the Luristan bronzes already appeared in the 1930s.<sup>83</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS – THE HISTORY OF LOOTING AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM IT

In the colonial settings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Europeans and North Americans viewed the archaeological remains of ancient Western Asia as common heritage to be utilised and collected. Established museums in the West were colonial exhibition spaces; they partly contributed to the increase in collecting and encouraged object-centred archaeology. The public atmosphere in the West, even among academics, was tolerant toward the acquisition of ancient objects without known context or provenance. However, heritage awareness has been gradually improving and professional archaeology has become more ethical, often considering local perspectives and involving the local people in research projects on a wider scale than earlier.

For Iranian archaeology, the impact of the search for the "Luristan bronzes" has been considerable and twofold. Interest in these artefacts brought about a series of excavations/surveys, which represented the first ground-breaking research in the area. The bronzes inspired numerous art and/or archaeological studies. Nevertheless, knowledge acquired through research did not reach the local people, nor did it contribute to their understanding of past archaeological heritage. Why not? Acquired knowledge was not widely disseminated and the research was mostly published in the West, in European languages and in scientific publications with limited distribution. It is also necessary to recognise the destructive effect that the quest for bronzes had, and still has, on the archaeological record, cultural heritage and on our knowledge and perception of the region's past. The looting of the sites was done generally by

Table 1. Luristan Bronzes for sale on internet\*

No	Description of object	Dating/Origin	Provenance	Seller**	Comments
1	Luristan/Etruscan Bronze ibex	ca 100 BC, an excellent example of Luristan bronze	–	AAA	Luristan or Etruscan?
2	Luristan Dagger	–	J. Piscopo Collection	PP	Piscopo collection emphasized
3	Luristan bronze Bicephalous Horse Sculpture	ca 900–700BC, Iran	Near Eastern	BG	wrong picture
4	Luristan Bronze Ibex	ca 1000–800 BC	–	AH	
5	Luristan Bronze Spike-butted Axehead	ca 1000–650 BC	Central Asia	BG	
6	Bronze sword from Ancient Luristan Culture	likely NW Iran, possible Luristan Culture	–	PP	
7	Flanged Hilt Dagger From Luristan	Luristan/Marlik	private collection	PP	Luristan/Marlik?
8	Bronze Luristan Spear Northern Iran	ca 1200 BC, Northern Iran	–	PP	
9	Crescent Hilt Dagger from Marlik or Luristan	ca 1000 BC	private collection	PP	Luristan/Marlik?
10	Luristan bronze Sculpture of a goat	900–600BC, Persian	A promise of certificate of authenticity	AG	emotional text
11	Bronze Dagger Blade Luristan	ca 1000 BC	private collection	PP	Luristan/Marlik?
12	Luristan Bronze Dagger	ca 800	–	PP	
13	Luristan Culture Spear Blade	ca 1000 BC	private collection	PP	
14	Leaf shaped bronze Spear point	ca 1500 BC	–	PP	

\* Luristan bronzes for sale in Antiques.com in 21.9.2012 and 6.11.2012. \*\* AAA = Avery Art & Antiques, AG = Aweidah Gallery, AH = Al Heoub, BG = Barak Gallery, MG = Moorabool Galleries, PP = Priceless Past

No	Description of object	Dating/Origin	Provenance	Seller**	Comments
15	Bronze Spear from Luristan	ca 1500 BC	-	PP	
16	Luristan Bronze master-of-the-animals Figure	8th century BC	-	MG	
17	Luristan Bronze Flanged Hilt Dirk	ca 1000BC	private collection	PP	
18	Bronze Flange Hilted Sword, Ancient Luristan	ca 1000BC, Luristan	-	PP	
19	Luristan SwordW/handle Rivets	ca 1000 BC	-	PP	
20	Luristan Bronze Dagger	ca 1200 BC	C. Ede London in early 1970s	PP	
21	Luristan Bronze Dagger	probably Northern Iran	-	PP	
22	Luristan sculpture of two Rampant gazelles	ca 900-600 BC, Iran	Near Eastern	BG	wrong picture
23	Bronze Flanged Hilt Dagger	ca 1000	private collection	PP	Luristan/Marlik?
24	Luristan Bronze Horse bit	ca 900-600 BC	Central Asia	BG	
25	Luristan Bronze harness fitting FZ.190	ca 900-700BC, Iran	Near Eastern	BG	emonational text
26	Luristan Finial of Janus Idol Figure	8th-7th century BC	Ex. Prominent US	PP	no longer available
27	Bronze Axe Head Amlash or Luristan	-	-	PP	no longer available
28	Luristan bronze Leaf-shaped Sword	from Ancient Luristan	-	PP	
29	Flanged Hilt Bronze Dagger	ca 1000	private collection	PP	Luristan/Marlik?

\* Luristan bronzes for sale in Antiques.com in 21.9.2012 and 6.11.2012. \*\* AAA = Avery Art & Antiques, AG = Aweidah Gallery, AH = Al Heoub, BG = Barak Gallery, MG = Moorabool Galleries, PP = Priceless Past



locals, but the forces that encouraged it were (and still are) to be found in the market countries and world metropolises.

The examples of Internet sales demonstrate that the lure of the Luristan bronzes has not diminished. Trade in bronzes without provenance continues, as does the search for many other ancient objects around the world. To counter looting and trade, collecting illicit archaeological objects should be discouraged on a global scale and in all areas of life. Learning to appreciate one's ancient heritage does not come about automatically; scholars and museums among others should participate actively in the process. More educational and public programmes, studies, discussions and dissemination of acquired knowledge are beneficial in raising awareness of archaeological heritage and its potential. It is crucial to develop means for raising awareness and disseminating knowledge effectively among people living in the vicinities of often remote archaeological sites. Archaeological heritage is at its best in the original context where it was created or deposited and eventually dug up. There the artefacts can tell us much more about past human life and society. The full story of the bronzes from Lorestan can no longer be told. Controlled excavations are too few, and looted bronzes too numerous. If archaeological heritage is cherished, there is still a chance of telling many other ancient stories and also leaving future generations the possibility to gain knowledge of the past.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> E.g. Daniel 1981; Bahn 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> See e.g. Gunter & Hauser 2005: 7–13.
- <sup>3</sup> See Ceram 1974/1949; Daniel 1981; Caubet 1992; see also Moro-Abadía 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> See Vrdoljak 2006: *passim*.
- <sup>5</sup> By “world museums” I refer to large and famous museums of Europe and North America (e.g. The British Museum, The Louvre, The Metropolitan Museum).
- <sup>6</sup> See Hinsley 1989; Barringer 1998.

- 7 The National Heritage Laws of different countries (also revisions) see Unesco 2013; see also Özel 2010 for Turkey.
- 8 ICOM 1989, International Council of Museums: Code of Ethics for Museums; WAC 1990, World Archaeological Congress: Codes of Ethics; SAA 1996, Society of American Archaeology: Principles of Archaeological Ethics; EAA 1997, European Association of Archaeologists: EAA Code of Practice; SARCS 2017, Archaeological Society of Finland: Suomalaisen arkeologian eettiset periaatteet.
- 9 See e.g. Green 1984; Messenger 1993; Brodie et al. 2000; Renfrew 2001; Zimmerman et al. 2003; Brodie et al. 2006.
- 10 Herzfeld 1929; Pope 1930; Histories of field-research of the bronzes e.g. Muscarella 1988; Chegini 1994; Overlaet 2003; Sajjadi 2012.
- 11 In this article, the bronzes are called Luristan bronzes, following the common usage in western literature. The proper Iranian pronunciation is Lorestan, not Luristan, and Lorestan will be used when referred to the geographical area.
- 12 Vanden Berghe 1971.
- 13 See also Modarress-Sadeghi 2015. Luristan bronzes have been produced with different methods: casting (lost wax technique) and hammering.
- 14 E.g. Vanden Berghe 1971. These bronze artefacts have been excavated also at Sorkh-e Dom, interpreted as a shrine (see Schmidt et al. 1989), and at Sangtarashan, possibly a ceremonial site (see Oudbashi et al. 2013).
- 15 Pope 1930: 444.
- 16 See e.g. Portratz 1968: 95–100 for numerous descriptive works about the bronzes.
- 17 Pope 1930.
- 18 E.g. Watson 2011.
- 19 Arne 1936: 2, 99–114; Arne 1962: 5–17.
- 20 Find-spot and context information.
- 21 Marino 2000: 33–36; see also Arne 1962.
- 22 Stein 1940: ix–x.
- 23 Schmidt et al. 1989; Chegini 1994.
- 24 Schmidt et al. 1989: 33–35.
- 25 Schmidt et al. 1989: 73; see also Chegini 1994.
- 26 Stein 1940: 128, 134–135, 223.
- 27 Bahrami & Abdi 2001: 169–170. See also Stark 2001/1934. Freya Stark made field-trips to Lorestan in 1930s and has described antiquities dealers' activities there.
- 28 Kaboli 1991; Negahban 1997: 103–105; Gholamdoust 2012; Modarress-Sadeghi 2015.
- 29 E.g. Mahboubian 1997; see also Negahban's 1997 reflection on the commercial excavations.

- 30 See Goff 1980; Schmidt et al. 1989; Majd 2003.
- 31 Archaeologists on the Danish expedition: Jørgen Melgaard, Peder Mortensen and Henrik Thrane.
- 32 See e.g. Thrane 2001.
- 33 See e.g. Goff 1980.
- 34 Vanden Berghe 1971.
- 35 See e.g. Brodie et al. 2006; see also Tehran Times 10.12.2011: <http://www.tehrantimes.com/arts-and-culture/93349-ruins-of-ancient-city-plundered-in>.
- 36 See Stein 1940: 134–135; Vanden Berghe quoted in Haerinck & Overlaet 2008: 10.
- 37 See Garavand 2012: 349; same happened after Danish Excavations see Thrane 2001: 29.
- 38 Sangtarashan see Oudbashi et al. 2013, and Babajilan see Hassanpour 2012; also Garavand 2012.
- 39 See e.g. Overlaet 2003; Haerinck & Overlaet 2008.
- 40 E.g. Majidzadeh 1991; Brodie et al. 2000; Argyropoulos et al. 2014. Even social marketing has been proposed to alter public attitudes with regard to collecting unprovenanced ancient objects, see Jennings and Rand 2008.
- 41 Vrdoljak 2006: passim; see also Bernhardsson 2005; Goode 2007.
- 42 See Said 1978.
- 43 See Goode 2007: passim, Majd 2003: passim.
- 44 E.g. Many of the bronzes in the PennMuseum collection were bought from Pope. See <https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/310969>; also Majd 2003; Goode 2007; Muscarella 2012.
- 45 See Pope 1930.
- 46 Gunter & Hauser 2005: passim; Kröger 2005: 73 considers Herzfeld dealing antiquities mostly for scholarly purposes.
- 47 Schmidt *et al.* 1989: 73, 493, plates 260–265.
- 48 Thrane 1964.
- 49 Goff 1980: 127, 195.
- 50 See also Brodie 2012: 230.
- 51 Birmingham 1963: 71–82.
- 52 See Negahban 1997; Bahrami & Abdi 2001: 112–113.
- 53 Negahban 1972; Kaboli 1991.
- 54 See Porada 1969.
- 55 Until 1972–1973, all excavation finds were divided, according to contemporary practice, between the foreign excavators (project/institution) and Iranian officials (The National Museum). E.g. Kaboli 1991.
- 56 E.g. Robson *et al.* 2006; Brodie *et al.* 2006.
- 57 Hollowell 2006: 124.
- 58 Negahban 1997: 112–113.

- 59 Hollowell 2006. Hollowell also notes (p. 121) that legal trade neither reduces digging nor lowers prices of the objects.
- 60 Hart & Chilton 2015: 329. They also mention that metal objects are the most looted (p. 325). It implies that later research gets a biased view of the material culture of the site, since metals have already been removed by looters and there will not be a record of their amount and distribution on the site.
- 61 E.g. Petkova 2004; Pringle 2014.
- 62 See e.g. Near Eastern Archaeology 2015.
- 63 The exact amount is impossible to say, but for recent estimates see e.g. May 2017: xii, 35.
- 64 See Elia 2009.
- 65 See Christan Levett's interview in Christie's 2014; also e.g. Gibson 1976; Ellis 2006; Muscarella 2012.
- 66 Ortiz 2006, 20.
- 67 Baudrillard 2005 /1968: 88, 90.
- 68 Baugh 2007.
- 69 See e.g. Özdoğan 1998; Renfrew 2001; Elia 2009; Muscarella 2012.
- 70 Also e.g. Brodie *et al.* 2000.
- 71 See e.g. Ortiz 2006; Boardman 2006; see also Elia 2009 discussion of the issue.
- 72 Among others, see Chippindale & Gill (2000) who have examined classical collecting and the fate of Cycladic figures, and Staffan Lunden (2004) who has studied the illicit market in Sweden. See also Brodie 2012.
- 73 See MacKenzie 2005: 228–229.
- 74 See Modarress 2015; a part of the survey results will be published in Modarress-Sadeghi (forthcoming ).
- 75 Eisenberg 1960: 1. Eisenberg also writes: "...most of the more ornamental pins...were found in the women's tombs..."
- 76 eBay is a webstore, where you can buy all kinds of items. It also offers antiquities for sale. <http://eBay.com/>
- 77 11th January 2014, 25th February 2016 and 11th April 2017.
- 78 See also Modarress-Sadeghi 2015.
- 79 See Chippindale & Gill 2000: 473.
- 80 Priceless Past 2007, *Awesome ancient Persian bronze Sword*: <http://trocadero.com/directory/Antiques>
- 81 E.g. The picture of a goat sculpture (table 1, no 10) was accompanied by an emotional text. The seller interprets the sculpture as a votive, and writes: "We wonder as we hold it today if the gods smiled kindly upon the supplicant and if his wishes were granted?"
- 82 eBay 23.11.2013.
- 83 Stark 2001/1934: 25; see also Moorey 1971.

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