



AAM Establishes New Standards on Collecting of Archaeological Material and Ancient Art

Guidelines Provide Ethical Framework, Designed to Discourage Looting of
Cultural Property

WASHINGTON, DC,(August 11, 2008) — The American Association of Museums (AAM) today announced the establishment of standards regarding museum acquisition of archaeological material and ancient art that emphasize proper provenance of such objects and complete transparency on the part of the acquiring institutions.

The product of two years of concerted research and vetting from the museum field, *Standards Regarding Archaeological Material and Ancient Art* provides clear ethical guidance on collecting such material so as to discourage illicit excavation of archaeological sites or monuments. Crafted by the specially created AAM Task Force on Cultural Property the standards were approved by the AAM Board of Directors at its July meeting in Minneapolis. The complete document can be found below and at www.aam-us.org

“The museum community is deeply concerned about international looting of cultural materials and the resulting destruction of sites and information,” said Ford W. Bell, AAM president. “These standards will help U.S. museums shape their policies and practices to effectively promote the preservation of our common cultural patrimony.”

The new *Standards* require museums to have a publicly available collections policy setting out the institution's standards for provenance — that is, history of ownership — concerning new acquisitions of archaeological material and ancient art. According to the *Standards*, museums should also make

publically available the known ownership history of all such objects in their collections. Finally, the *Standards* recommend November 17, 1970, the date on which the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property was signed, as the minimum date to which museums should require a documented provenance for future acquisitions.

Created by the AAM Board in July 2006, the Task Force included Board members as well as additional professionals with particular expertise in cultural property law, collections management, archaeology, and stewardship of sensitive cultural items. These *Standards*, which identify the issues museums need to address as they refine their own acquisitions policies, are the result.

“The American people rely on museums to preserve and interpret the world’s cultural heritage,” Bell said. “In recent years, however, the public has come to expect that museums, through their collecting activities, do not contribute to the illicit trade in cultural property. Abiding by these standards will ensure that museums are acting legally, ethically and morally.”

Given AAM’s role as the representative organization for the entire field, the *AAM Standards* apply to all types of museums, including art, history, natural history, zoos and aquariums.

A wide range of museum organizations and museum professionals participated in the process that developed the *Standards*, including regional museum associations, AAM’s Standing Professional Committees, affiliated national museum associations, members of AAM’s Accreditation Commission, the Association of Art Museum Directors, the U.S. National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-US) Board, numerous museum attorneys, and others. The *Standards* have been disseminated widely, including to the groups listed above and to AAM’s institutional membership of

approximately 3,000 museums. The *Standards* also are posted on AAM's Web site at www.aam-us.org.

About AAM

The American Association of Museums has been bringing museums together since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. With more than 15,000 individual, 3,000 institutional, and 300 corporate members, AAM is dedicated to ensuring that museums remain a vital part of the American landscape, connecting people with the greatest achievements of the human experience, past, present and future. For more information, visit www.aam-us.org