

STANDARDS REGARDING ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL AND ANCIENT ART

Approved, July 2008, AAM Board of Directors

Preamble

To promote public trust and accountability for U.S. museums, AAM offers the following standards to guide the operations of museums that own or acquire archaeological material and ancient art originating outside the United States.

Standards

1. Collections Policy

Museums should have a publicly available collections policy setting out the institution's standards for provenance concerning new acquisitions of archaeological material and ancient art.

2. New Acquisitions

Museums should:

- rigorously research the provenance of an object prior to acquisition
- make a concerted effort to obtain accurate written documentation with respect to the history of the object, including export and import documents, and
- require sellers, donors, and their representatives to provide all available information and documentation.

Museums must comply with all applicable U.S. law, including treaties and international conventions of which the U.S. is a party, governing ownership and title, import and other issues critical to acquisitions decisions.

Beyond the requirements of U.S. law, museums should not acquire any object that, to the knowledge of the museum, has been illegally exported from its country of modern discovery or the country where it was last legally owned.

In addition, AAM recommends that museums require documentation that the object was out of its probable country of modern discovery by 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.

For objects exported from their country of modern discovery after November 17, 1970, AAM recommends that museums require documentation that the object has been or will be legally exported from its country of modern discovery, and legally imported into the United States.

AAM recognizes that there are cases in which it may be in the public's interest for a museum to acquire an object, thus bringing it into the public domain, when there is substantial but not full documentation that the provenance meets the conditions outlined above. If a museum accepts material in such cases, it should be transparent about why this is an appropriate decision in alignment with the institution's collections policy and applicable ethical codes.

3. Existing Collections

In order to advance further research, public trust, and accountability museums should make available the known ownership history of archaeological material and ancient art in their collections, and make serious efforts to allocate time and funding to conduct research on objects where provenance is incomplete or uncertain. Museums may continue to respect requests for anonymity by donors.

4. Claims

Museums should respectfully and diligently address ownership claims to antiquities and archaeological material. Each claim, whether based on ethical or legal considerations, should be considered on its own merits.

When appropriate and reasonably practical, museums should seek to resolve claims through voluntary discussions directly with a claimant or facilitated by a third party.

5. Fiduciary Responsibilities

Members of the board, staff, and volunteers who participate in the acquisition and management of the collections should be knowledgeable concerning the legal compliance requirements and ethical standards that pertain to antiquities and archaeological materials, as well as the collecting policies and disclosure practices of the museum.

Commitment of AAM

As part of its commitment to identifying and disseminating standards and best practices, AAM will allocate resources:

1. to disseminate these standards widely and frequently along with other references that exist on the topics;
2. to collect and disseminate examples of best practices and policies on acquisitions from the museum community, both in the United States and abroad, as guidelines for other museums;
3. to make the above information available to the museum community through reports, conference sessions, and other appropriate mechanisms;
4. to provide electronic links from AAM's website to resources in these areas;
and
5. to advocate for funding of provenance research on existing collections.

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