

ABSTRACTS SELECTED

HERITAGE, ETHICS AND CRIME

St John SIMPSON

Stolen, saved, returned: collaboration between the British Museum, National Museum of Afghanistan, UK Border Force and other agencies in the successful return of antiquities to Kabul.

This paper reviews the ongoing and close collaboration between the British Museum, National Museum of Afghanistan and British agencies and private individuals in the identification, analysis and return of antiquities to Kabul. These objects include outstanding ivories and a large Gandharan sculpture of the Buddha which had been stolen from the National Museum during the civil war (1992-1994), which were identified in private collections, acquired by a private philanthropist on behalf of Kabul and temporarily exhibited at the British Museum prior to return. Thousands of other objects which are the result of illegal excavation have also been identified as they were seized in the UK and have also been returned to Kabul with the generous assistance of the International Red Cross, British Armed Forces and Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The most important pieces were conserved at the British Museum and are now already on display in Kabul.

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Dr Simpson is a senior curator at the British Museum where he is responsible for the collections from ancient Arabia and Iran in the Department of the Middle East. He curated the special exhibition Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World, which was held at the British Museum in 2011, and is currently preparing a detailed publication of antiquities either stolen from the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul or illegally exported from that country which were identified at the British Museum on behalf of the UK Border Force and Metropolitan Police and returned to Kabul in 2012. This is a collaborative project requested by the Director of the National Museum in Kabul and fulfils part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed between these two museums.