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**Edited by James Cuno: Whose Muse?**

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# INTRODUCTION



## THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

*Consciously or subconsciously, archaeological interpretation and the public presentation of archaeological monuments are used to support the prestige or power of modern nation-states.*

—Neil Asher Silberman<sup>1</sup>

For years, archaeologists have lobbied for national and international laws, treaties, and conventions to prohibit the international movement in antiquities. For many of these years, U.S. art museums that collect antiquities have opposed these attempts. The differences between archaeologists and U.S. art museums on this matter has spilled over into the public realm by way of reports in newspapers and magazines, public and university symposia, and specialist—even sensationalist—books on the topic.<sup>2</sup>

At the center of the dispute is the question of unprovenanced antiquities. In conventional terms, an unprovenanced antiquity is one with modern gaps in its chain of ownership. As it pertains to the United States, since in most cases we are an importer of this kind of material, this means there is no evidence that the antiquity was exported in compliance with the export laws of its presumed country of origin (these are always *modern* laws, hence the qualification above, *modern* gaps). Archaeologists argue that unprovenanced antiquities are almost always looted from archaeological sites or from what would become archaeological sites. But strictly speaking, since provenance is a matter of ownership and not archaeological status, and as





































