

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVENANCE RESEARCH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

PROVENANCE RESEARCH is the process of documenting the chronology of the ownership, location, and chain of custody of an object from its creation through to the current day.

CULTURAL HERITAGE is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSTITUTES ONE OF THE MOST BASIC ELEMENTS OF OUR SHARED CIVILISATION AND DISTINCT NATIONAL CULTURES, AND AS SUCH ITS TRUE VALUE CAN ONLY BE FULLY APPRECIATED WHEN COMBINED WITH COMPLETE INFORMATION ON ITS ORIGINS, HISTORY, AND TRADITIONAL CONTEXT. PROVENANCE RESEARCH THEREFORE BECOMES AN INDISPENSIBLE TOOL IN THE ENDURING PROTECTION OF OUR COLLECTIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE.

While the obligation to protect cultural property within its territory against the dangers of theft, clandestine excavation, and illicit export lies primarily with individual States, the duty to prevent the international trafficking of looted cultural objects is the collective responsibility of museums, galleries, auction houses, and the international community as a whole. This requires not only respecting our own cultural heritage but that of other nations as well.

There can be little doubt, therefore, that comprehensive provenance research needs to constitute an important facet of both museum collection management practices and the international art market. In addition to aiding in the redress of past injustices, provenance research contributes to contemporary cultural heritage protection by ensuring cultural objects without established provenance cannot be openly bought or sold on the international market. This in turn significantly restricts the trade in plundered cultural heritage and reduces supply as the financial incentives to plunder cultural heritage diminish.

Although a number of conventions and declarations concerning provenance research or addressing particular aspects of cultural heritage protection currently exist, more needs to be done to ensure effective regulation of the trade in plundered artworks and antiquities.

CONVENTIONS

PROVENANCE RESEARCH	CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-Allied Declaration against Acts of Dispossession committed in Territories under Enemy Occupation or Control (1943) • Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art (1998) • Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (1999) • Declaration of the Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets (2000) • Terezin Declaration resulting from the Conference on Holocaust Era Assets (2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) • Convention for the Fight Against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property (1970) • Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) • UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995) • Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001) • Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) • Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)