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Chapter One

Lights on the “Dark Age”
- Rethinking the Southern Levantine Early Bronze IV after a Century of Archaeological Investigation
Societal collapse has always been intriguing. For this reason scholars have been attracted to the Early Bronze IV of the Southern Levant (EB IV, ca. 2500-1950/1920 BCE) since the early 20th century. The EB IV is sandwiched between the collapse of the first cities at the end of EB III (ca. 2500 BCE) and the regeneration of urban society in the succeeding Middle Bronze Age (MBA, 1920-1550 BCE), when new cultural elements – generally connected with the Amorites – took the leading role in the entire Levant. This position saw EB IV as a “Dark Age” of social, political and economic collapse and technological regression. Lately, renewed interest in the EB IV has been fuelled by new discoveries, which allow for substantial re-evaluation of this still elusive period.

Archaeological evidence available for EB IV between the 1950s and the 1980s suggested that radical changes took place in the southern Levant after the collapse of the first cities. The presence of small unfortified villages in place of the fortified sites of the EB II-III periods, the fact that cemeteries outnumbered settlements, and the fragmentation of material culture, with several coexisting repertoires of pots and weapons distributed over limited areas, led scholars to conclude that mobility and nomadism rather than sedentism characterized the period. The diffusion of cultural influence from still urbanized Syria, inferable from the spread of cups and goblets inspired by northern prototypes across the southern Levant, was also taken as proof that people were moving, whether refugees, invaders, or pastoralists.
The EB IV was portrayed as a non-urban interlude after the failure of the first urban experiment, which, suddenly at the dawn of the 2nd millennium BCE, made way for the revival of urbanism, likely diffusing from more sophisticated Syria.

But intense field research from the 1980s to the present has revealed a myriad of sedentary EB IV rural villages both east and west of the Jordan River. Rather than a “Dark Age” of decline and recession, the southern Levantine EB IV was a complex phase in which rural components were fundamental. Early research separated phases based on stylistic differences between the ceramic assemblages of different sub-regions. Subsequently, several sites – including Tell Umm Hammad, Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj, Khirbat Iskandar, Bab edh-Dhra‘, Jericho, and, recently, Tell el-Hammam – revealed multiple EB IV strata and evidence for an evolutionary sequence.

Based on this new evidence, scholars have made arguments for the existence of elites and for the social development and technological experimentation, as well as for continuity with the following MBA. Finally, recent studies on ancient landscape,
vegetation and climate demonstrated that there were cyclical episodes of aridification between 2500 and 1900 BCE that might have influenced settlement patterns and developments in the southern Levant during EB IV.

My argument builds on new research that reconstructs a progression, from crisis to recovery and growth. Building on the hypothesis that changes in pottery manufacturing techniques observable from one EB IV sub-phase to the next might be used for inter-site correlation, I attempted to piece together the archaeological evidence from different sites and areas, re-examining the published record from almost 150 sites. The study was boosted by first-hand analysis of EB IV pottery in museums and universities and the opportunity to expose more of the long EB IV sequence at Khirbat Iskandar, working with Suzanne Richard, from Gannon University, and Jesse Long, from Lubbock Christian University.
Based on my re-evaluation, I proposed that there was an early EB IV stage of crisis after the downfall of the EB II-III urbanization, a factor likely accounting for its low visibility in the archaeological record. The ephemeral nature of this early EB IV phase might reflect discontinuities, such as the establishment of short-lived settlements shifting from one place to another. The material culture of this archaic EB IV phase seems rather poor, pointing to technological regression and domestic manufacture, possibly mirroring changes in the socio-economic preconditions behind production.

In my interpretation, from a central EB IV stage, a process of continuous recovery and reorganization led to a final phase of growth, which gradually blended down into a transitional Early-Middle Bronze phase towards the end of EB IV. The beginning of renewed development from the central EB IV phase is suggested by the establishment of a network of well-planned sedentary rural villages, interacting with mobile components specializing in several activities in different areas, such as pastoralism, trade, and crafts. Specialized craft production, with the systematic use of the slow potters wheel, and copper mining, smelting, and trade, were resumed. The circulation of these products suggests that interactions between different regions and agricultural-pastoral communities were at work. Elements of “complexity” also began to appear throughout the southern Levant, indicated by the presence of multifunctional “public” areas, and “warrior” burials with metal weapons and ornaments. New styles in material culture point to local interpretation of foreign elements.
The big picture emerging from the archaeological data for the central and late EB IV phases of sedentary rural communities dynamically interacting with semi-nomads in an organized manner, based on specialization of economic activities. It was during these phases that regional and inter-regional connections were gradually re-established, which fuelled the diffusion of technology, styles and cultural information from the neighboring areas. Although the central and late EB IV stages were non-urban, it seems likely that the first seeds of the MBA urban regeneration were sown during these phases.

Thus, research over the last three decades has deeply changed our understanding of the southern Levantine EB IV, bringing into sharper focus the existence of the internal developments, from crisis to recovery and growth. So far this is mostly understood in terms of relative phases within a six-century-long period. The refinement of an absolute chronology for EB IV phases is a priority, linking stratigraphy at individual sites, ceramic phases, and absolute dates from scientific methods.
Many questions remain. Did the Early Bronze Age urban crisis occur at the same time and pace at every site and region? When did recovery first start and did it occur simultaneously throughout the region? How do these patterns connect with climatic oscillations between 2500-1900 BCE? And how does the southern Levant during EB IV connect with neighboring areas, such as Egypt, the Lebanon, and Syria, for which absolute chronologies are more refined? These and many more compelling questions might be answered by chronological revisions. Unveiling synchronisms will eventually shed light on the social, political and economic intricacies of the southern Levantine EB IV that we are not able to grasp due to the lack of written sources.

Marta D’Andrea is a research fellow at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, and a co-director of the Archaeological Expedition to Khirbat Iskandar and Its Environs, Jordan and the Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project, Jordan.

For Further Reading


Chapter Two

‘Joy Plants’ and the Earliest Toasts in the Ancient Near East
‘Joy Plants’ and the Earliest Toasts in the Ancient Near East

By: Elisa Guerra Doce

Inebriation is a cross-cultural habit whose origins can be traced back to Prehistory. But humans are not the only species fond of the mind-altering effects of certain plants and drinks. Some animals are also attracted to overripe fruits and psychoactive plants. Orangutans, chimpanzees and other primates, elephants, and even birds, have been reported to over-indulge on fermented fruits. The image of an intoxicated moose in Sweden went viral in 2011, when the animal literally got stuck in an apple tree trying to eat more fermented fruits.

A drunken moose after eating fermenting apples in Saro, Sweden (CNN).
In their search for food early humans are likely to have come across plants and mushrooms with peculiar effects. The use of psychoactive plants, many of which are consumed raw, predates the consumption of fermented beverages. As yet there is no direct evidence of these practices during the Palaeolithic. The presence of ephedra, a natural stimulant, in a Neanderthal grave, ca. 60,000 BCE, in Shanidar Cave, northern Iraq, has been considered some of the earliest evidence for the use of mood-altering plants in the Old World. But since this Middle Palaeolithic burial cave has been disturbed in modern times by rodent activity this interpretation is debatable. There is also no direct evidence for the production of fermented beverages during the Neolithic before the invention of pottery, although the technological and technical prerequisites of brewing were well established during the Natufian of the Near East (ca. 12,500-9,500 BCE).

From the Neolithic onwards, however, there is no doubt regarding the consumption of psychoactive plants and alcoholic beverages. The domestication of the opium poppy probably started during the sixth millennium BCE in the Western Mediterranean, spreading from there to the rest of the Old World. Apart from its oily seeds, the exploitation of its narcotic properties cannot be ruled out. The earliest written records suggesting the use the opium poppy date back to the third millennium BCE; Sumerians

The Shanidar IV ´Flower Burial´ (Smithsonian Institution).
appear to have referred to it as *Hul Gil*, the ‘joy plant’, but this claim is still a matter of debate. But by the second millennium BC, there is considerable information evidence for the cultivation of the opium poppy and its ritual use in the Eastern Mediterranean. Among the most interesting examples of religious scenes from the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean (ca. 1600-1100 BCE) that include this plant species are a golden signet ring found by Heinrich Schliemann in the acropolis of Mycenae, and the so-called Poppy Goddess figurine from the Minoan sanctuary at Gazi.

Some scholars believe Sumerian and Assyrian tablets mention other psychoactive plants, including deadly nightshade, mandrake, and hemp. In contrast, Egyptian papyri contain uncontested evidence of the use of different psychoactive plant species from the middle of the second millennium BCE onward. Similar plant descriptions are included in the Bible, and this has given rise to the still controversial hypothesis that ancient Israeliite religion was associated with the use of mind-altering plants in sacramental contexts. Nonetheless, there is direct evidence for the medicinal use of *Cannibis* in Roman times, as indicated by the presence of charred seeds in the tomb of a 14-year-old girl excavated in Beit Shemesh, near Jerusalem, dating to the fourth century AD, probably used as an aide to childbirth.
Direct evidence of alcoholic drinks in the past is based on the identification of residues in the inner walls of archaeological vessels. Traces of the original contents of ancient pottery, invisible to the naked eye, may have been absorbed within the porous ceramic matrix of the vessels and may be detected and chemically identified. To date the earliest chemically confirmed alcoholic drink in the world was found at the Early Neolithic village of Jiahu, in the Yellow River Valley of China (Henan Province), ca. 7000–6600 BCE. Residues adhering to potsherds point to a mixed fermented beverage of wild grapes or hawthorn fruit (Crataegus sp.), rice (possibly a domesticated variety), and honey.

Similarly, wine may have been produced from wild grapes in the Caucasus region during the Neolithic, as suggested by the identification of tartaric acid in pottery jars of that period. Analyses of two ceramic vessels, found at the site of Hajji Firuz Tepe in the Zagros Mountains of north-western Iran, ca. 5400–5000 BCE, showed that they had contained a resinated wine with terebinth tree or pine resin added as a preservative and medicinal agent.

It has been argued that the wild Eurasian grapevine was domesticated somewhere in the arc of mountains extending from the eastern Taurus across Transcaucasia to the
northwestern Zagros, since many archaeological sites from this region have provided grape seeds corresponding to the domesticated variety (Vitis vinifera L. subsp. vinifera). It should be noted that according to the Bible, Noah allegedly planted the first vineyard on Mount Ararat, located in eastern Turkey.

Not long after the domestication of grapes, wine was produced in large quantities in specialized facilities, such as the cave complex of Areni 1, a Chalcolithic site in south-east Armenia, dated to around 4000 BCE. Excavations have unearthed a fully equipped winery consisting of basins that could have served as wine presses where grapes were trodden, and also fermentation vats, storage jars, drinking bowls, and remains of domesticated grapes. Researchers working at the site believe that wine may have been made for mortuary practices, since 20 burials were found next to the winemaking facilities and drinking cups have been found inside and around the graves.

The consumption of alcohol in ancient civilizations of the Near East is well attested to from the fourth millennium BCE through iconographic representations of drinking scenes, archaeochemical analyses of pottery sherds, and later on also through texts dating from the second millennium BCE (such as The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Hymn to Ninkasi, the Sumerian goddess of brewing and beer, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and others). Beer and wine were produced on a large scale, traded along the Mediterranean (as revealed by residue analyses on some amphoras from the Late Bronze Age Uluburun shipwreck), and their consumption was quickly associated with ritual ceremonies.

Beer, weed, wine, opium? It seems that ancient inhabitants of the Near East had a rock and roll lifestyle! Actually, it was quite the contrary, the consumption of psychoactive substances in the ancient Near East differed dramatically from that image. Our predecessors managed to make their use beneficial to society by integrating drug plants and alcohol into social, religious, and medicinal practices. The mind-altering effects of these agents were interpreted as part of a religious experience. Not surprisingly, then, wine had a significant role in Judaism and came to symbolize the blood of Christ for Christians.

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Chapter Three

Kamid el-Loz – a Short Story in 900 Words
By: Marlies Heinz

Across 2000 years of history the residents of Kamid el-Loz, one of the major sites in Lebanon’s Beqa’a plain, lived through:

• three phases of urbanization, de-urbanization and re-urbanization,
• two phases of collapse and the irreversible dissolution of urban life,
• four episodes of imperialist rule.

Can this be summarized in 900 words?
Urbanization, de-urbanization, re-urbanization

The people of Kamid el-Loz set up urban structures three times. The first and second were built during the Middle Bronze Age II period (1750-1550); the third was during the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE). Each city was characterized by a palace and temple, administrative complexes, residential quarters, and workshop areas, indicating functionally differentiated and socially stratified communities. Burials inside both residential houses and the palace demonstrate the importance of social bonds among the population, even after death.
The urban communities of Kamid el-Loz, or at least their political representatives, used iconic buildings like the palace and temple to represent or symbolize the social order of the city. But why make any changes at all, especially in the iconic buildings? Why didn’t holders of political power represent themselves as guardians of local tradition, since this was one of the most powerful tools for political legitimation in ancient Near Eastern societies? Who had founded the three cities, and whose tradition did they signify when setting up these seats of religious and mundane power?

We postulate that all three cities had a functional differentiated and a social stratified society. For the Late Bronze Age, cuneiform texts found in the palace of city three provide important details on the political situation in Kumidi, as the city was called at the time. The Egyptian New Kingdom empire that dominated the entire Levant had effectively disempowered the local ruler of Kumidi and had installed an Egyptian administrator at the site. Kumidi was the base from which Egyptian dominated trade routes, monitored the borders with the Hittite empire, and controlled local villages. However, in the architecture of Kumidi this political “convulsion” remains unseen – but why, if visualization of the ruling order was so important?

The iconic buildings of both city one and two were set on fire, and while the residential areas were not burned, residents abandoned their homes nonetheless, bringing urban life temporarily to an end. Only squatter settlements remained alive, as the few people who stayed reused burnt and decayed
buildings, transformed their functions, installed provisional homes for the living and final resting places for their deceased in the ruins.

The surrender of city three and the developments that followed were different. No one set the city on fire, its buildings, iconic and residential ones, were simply abandoned.
and then decayed. Whether coincidental or connected, the abandonment of Kamid el-Loz occurred at the same time as the Egyptian empire collapsed – and with it the foreign rule over Kumidi.

City three was the last urban settlement in Kamid el-Loz. What followed was a 700 year period of modest rural life (Iron Age I and II, about 1200-540 BCE). Permanent and mobile settlers lived together on the site. No iconic buildings were set up, which means that life at the site went on without any elites, or that the demands of elites did not produce substantial visibility.

The Return of Imperial Rule
Around 550 BCE imperial rule returned to the Levant, beginning with the Persian Empire (ca. 550-330 BCE) that expanded from modern Iran as far west as Greece. Almost at the same time there was a far-reaching cultural break in Kamid el-Loz – all the settlement areas of the site were transformed into a cemetery, a habitat exclusively reserved for the dead. A vast cemetery had come into being; all the deceased were buried in simple pits, some without any burial gifts, while others had exceedingly rich inventories. The timing of this break at Kamid el-Loz occurred with the rise of the Persian Empire. Again, this raises the question: is this a mere coincidence or more?
Rich burial Iron Age III, Persian period

Left: Hellenistic inscribed pottery. Right: Roman sarcophagus.

The Roman settlement in the east
The Persian Empire declined after about 200 years, but not so the imperial domination over the Near East. What followed politically was the rule of the Greeks (about 332-30 BCE). Culturally, Kamid el-Loz saw the reestablishment of a settlement and likewise the continuation of the onsite cemetery, although the burial rites, in particular the entombment of deceased in clay coffins, now left without burial gifts, was new. The new settlers kept close connections with the Aegean, as shown by Aegean pottery and Hellenistic inscriptions. But the Greek inscriptions pose additional questions – who were the settlers residing in Kamid el-Loz, what languages were spoken at the site, and who was literate at the time?

Hellenistic domination fell victim to growing Roman imperialism (30 BCE-300 CE) and in turn almost all aspects of culture at Kamid el-Loz changed. New house forms, burials in stone sarcophagi, new types of pottery, metal and glass objects as well as coins, also appeared for the first time at Kamid el-Loz. These hint at an entirely new cultural orientation of the residents. Only the site’s rural mode of life, and its use by both the living and the dead, recall prior occupations. All the questions asked before – what caused these fundamental changes at Kamid el-Loz and who were the protagonists – must be asked once again.

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Chapter Four

The Dead Sea Scrolls at Seventy
This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. What have we learned over the past three score and ten? First, it has become increasingly recognized that we do not have a “library of the Essenes” in the way that it was previously understood. Not every scroll found in the eleven caves is Essenic. There are scrolls that reflect the views of one or more Jewish sects or schools, most likely associated with the Essenes, but the corpus of 800-900 scrolls known as “the Dead Sea Scrolls” constitute a heterogeneous collection of manuscripts. Within it are texts that belong to Judaism generally in the late Second Temple period, such as the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls. In the past, scholars have marginalized these biblical scrolls, but there is no evidence that they are sectarian biblical scrolls.

Second, the consensus of the Maccabean theory that reigned supreme in the first generation of scrolls scholarship has given way to a different kind of Essene hypothesis, resulting from a reconsideration of the archaeology of Khirbet Qumran and the literary analysis of the different versions of the Rule of the Community from Caves 1 and 4 (1QS and 4QS). A reconsideration of the “communal phase” and the different
periods within it by Jodi Magness, and more recently Dennis Mizzi, has led to a re-dating of the origins of the sect to the beginning of the first, rather than the middle of second, century BCE.

One view that has particular merit is what I have described as “the multiple communities theory”. In the past, it was said that there were at least two different orders of the Essenes: the largely male-oriented, and maybe celibate, community of the Yahad at Qumran, and the married, family-oriented community of the Damascus Document (Josephus, BJ 2.120, 160).

John J. Collins moves the view forward by arguing that there are many more Essene communities. The description by Philo and Josephus of some 4000 Essenes living throughout Judaea is consistent with this view. There is not one, monolithic community of Essenes living at Qumran, but several chapters that flourished at the same time throughout Judaea. Collins anchors his theory on the interpretation of the clause of 1QS 6.3, “in every place where there are ten men of the council of the community”, as referring to multiple communities. More specifically, “of the council of the community” should be understood in the partitive, rather than locative, sense. Multiple Essene communities were dispersed in different settlements at the same time throughout Judaea, and not just at Qumran. For him, this explains why different editions of Serekh ha-yahad or Rule of the Community continued to be copied, and why the more primitive form (in the literary and halakhic sense) of 4QSd was not superseded by the more developed version of 1QS.

Third, the sectarians did not have a developed understanding of “canon”, but they did have the concept of “authoritative scriptures”. I have characterized the sectarian view
of authoritative scriptures as a dual pattern of authority and gradation of authority. They had a broadly bipartite collection of the Pentateuch and an undefined collection of books of the prophets. These traditional scriptures were interpreted and supplemented by other non-biblical but nonetheless authoritative scriptures, such as the book of Jubilees and the pesharim.

Fourth, the religious ideas of the sectarian communities were drawn from what I have called the “sectarian matrix” of ancient Judaism. The sectarian communities reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls are not to be identified with the earliest followers of Jesus and the early church. However, the use of so many of the same or similar terminology and ideas in their writings suggests a connection between them that is difficult to deny. The identification of the Essene Gate and quarter in Jerusalem is consistent with the view that the communities likely interacted with one another.

The theory of the sectarian matrix posits that the Essenes and the followers of Jesus came upon the same biblical texts and distinctive ideas, but drew different lessons from them. These ideas were absent or ignored in Judaism of the period. For instance, the sectarians and early church were the only ones to have used the concept of “the new covenant” from the prophecy of Jeremiah. Other Jews did not comment on “the new covenant” nor did they use it in their writings. The sectarians of the scrolls, Paul and other Christian authors of the New Testament drew on this religiously significant notion of a new covenant in the prophetic writing, but they understood “newness” differently. The covenanters took newness to be a renewal of the old covenant, whereas Paul and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews saw in the Jeremianic prophecy a new dispensation in the life and death of Jesus. The sectarian matrix is a subset of ancient
Judaism with distinctive and overlapping ideas. It is the well from which the Essenes, Christians and other sectarianists drew their inspiration.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have often been hailed as the greatest manuscript discovery. On this seventieth anniversary of their discovery, it is worth asking whether they warrant such a description. Why get excited over some dusty rolls and scraps of ancient Jewish writings? In what sense are they “the greatest”? The public often understands by this sensational description something of a paradigm-shifting significance, comparable to the great scientific discoveries in history. For the scholar, however, the superlative description is much more specific. Compared to what were previously available by way of primary sources dating to the centuries around the turn of the era, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has been revolutionary. We now know so much more about the transmission of the biblical texts and other Jewish literature, sectarianism in the Second Temple period, and the Jewish background to early Christianity.

Timothy Lim is Professor of Hebrew Bible & Second Temple Judaism, and the author of The Dead Sea Scrolls. A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press), the second, updated edition will be published in March 2017. This piece appeared originally at the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins at the University of Edinburgh (New College) on 18 January 2017. It is reproduced by permission.
Chapter Five

Do You Get To Keep What You Find?
By: Eric Cline

There is one question that I am asked all the time, which has a short answer but is long on associated implications. The question is simply “Do you get to keep what you find?” The answer is very short: “No.” Whether you’re working in your own country or in a country other than your own, that nation’s antiquities department will have a set of rules. The best discoveries might go to a national or regional museum, as has been true throughout the history of archaeology, but most of the material will be put into bags and boxes and stored at the local university, museum, or some other place where graduate students and other scholars can come in and study the material during the months (or even years) after the excavation. A six- or seven-week field season can yield enough material for two years or more of study and published findings.

Not only don’t I get to keep what I find, but I don’t think that other people should collect such items either. The consensus among scholars is that there is a direct correlation between private collecting and the looting of ancient sites all over the world. Looters wouldn’t bother stealing things from archaeological sites if they had no place to sell them.

More complex is the issue of museum collections: whether the British Museum, the Louvre, the Met, and other museums should return items that they obtained in the period of European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to their original countries of origin—like the Elgin Marbles, the bust of Nefertiti, and the Rosetta stone. Museums have become much more careful in the past couple of decades to ensure that the objects they purchase have clear provenance, but many looted objects still are displayed in museums that were obtained decades ago when the rules were not as stringent. It is a moral, ethical, economic, and legal problem that cannot be easily resolved. It may be that case-by-case decisions would be best, but even that remains to be determined.
However, right now we are seeing the greatest prevalence of looting of archaeological sites worldwide that has ever been documented, almost certainly fueled by demand from private collectors. The greatest opportunities for looted objects are places where the policing of ancient sites is difficult because of political instability, like Syria and Iraq at the moment. Of course, looting is nothing new; some of the Egyptian pharaohs’ tombs were looted in antiquity, perhaps even immediately after the pharaohs were buried. But now we are seeing an upsurge worldwide in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and even Peru and the United States. Ancient sites are now pockmarked with looters’ pits.

Left: Satellite image of Dura Europos, 02 April 2014, showing looting pits. (US Dept. of State)
Right: Explosion at Nimrud, from ISIS video. (Conflict Antiquities)

Mosul museum exhibits being smashed. (NYT)
On a small scale, illegal digging for antiquities has always been a way of life in some areas and cultures, usually done by impoverished folks hoping to supplement their meager income in some way. It is hard to blame a Syrian villager who excavates cylinder seals to sell to a middleman in order to feed his family when shops are closed, fields are burned, and travel impossible. But now wholesale looting operations seem to have swung into action, including in Syria, where ISIS reportedly sponsored and actively participated in the antiquities trade, looting entire sites and destroying parts of others, such as Nimrud and the Mosul Museum.

I was part of a delegation of observers who went to Egypt in May 2011, after the January revolution of that year. We went to do some “ground truthing” in order to see whether the fresh holes dug into the ground that my colleague Sarah Parcak thought she had spotted in satellite photographs were looting pits. They were. I know. I was there and have pictures. Results of our study were published in the journal *Antiquity* for others to use.
In fact, looted Egyptian antiquities have shown up in auction houses in London and New York, just as looted Iraqi antiquities have. When the Iraq Museum in Baghdad was looted, some of the most famous pieces in the museum were stolen. Many were returned or have been recovered, but others are still missing. Some ended up on eBay, where I and anyone else could see them, until pressure mounted and such sales were forbidden. Despite this prohibition, some looted objects can still be found for sale on eBay.

One of my favorite stories is of someone who was trying to sell a stolen Iraqi item. When examined closely, it turned out to be one of the replicas that had been for sale in the museum store. Colonel Matthew Bogdanos of the US Army, who was put in charge of recovering the items stolen from the Iraq Museum, documents many of these stories in his best-selling book *Thieves of Baghdad*, which was published in 2005.

The looting went far beyond the museum and extended to archaeological sites throughout Iraq, with reports of men armed with both shovels and machine guns illegally digging at sites across the country. At least one, the ancient city known as Umma, has been so thoroughly looted that all that can be seen in the photographs are looters’ pits, rather than ancient buildings or anything else.

![The looted site of Umma. (www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de)](image-url)
The appearance of one-of-a-kind looted objects can cause a dilemma for archaeologists committed to limiting the trade in illegal antiquities. Such seems to have been the case in 2011, when the Sulaymaniyah Museum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq was advised by an Assyriologist in Britain to buy a group of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform that he had been shown by an antiquities dealer. In this case, among the tablets was one that turned out to contain a previously unknown section from the Epic of Gilgamesh. It fills in a large gap within the fifth tablet in the poem where Gilgamesh and his sidekick Enkidu are heading for the Cedar Forest to get timber; this is usually thought to be the same general region where the famous Cedars of Lebanon mentioned in the Bible were located. The new lines describe the noises that they hear upon entering the forest, including birds, insects, and monkeys.

Lost for three thousand years, this tablet filled in an important piece of one of the classics of world literature. The dilemma for archaeologists, of course, is that we don’t want to encourage looting, but also cannot allow such a tablet with valuable information to go into the art collecting market and disappear from public view without making some effort to save it and allow scholars to study it. Discussions on the issue have been prompted by the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many of which were purchased from the Bedouin who had illegally found them in the caves around Qumran; it is frequently asked what would happen if such scrolls appeared on the antiquities market today?

In fact, there is something similar that has happened with more than a hundred—or perhaps as many as two hundred—clay tablets that apparently come from an archive that documents the daily life of Jews who were moved to Mesopotamia during the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BCE and remained there into the fifth century.
legislation is now beginning to be passed, not only about artifacts found in the United States, but also for artifacts found elsewhere and smuggled into the United States. Most recently, the US House of Representatives passed legislation in 2015 that makes it illegal in the United States to sell artifacts that have been looted from Syria. That legislation—now referred to as the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act—was approved by the Senate in April 2016 and signed into law by the president on May 9, 2016. Similarly, a memorandum of understanding between the United States and Egypt was signed on November 30, 2016. This will place restrictions on incoming antiquities from Egypt to help curb the ongoing looting in that country.

As far as I am concerned, and I believe that I speak for many of my fellow archaeologists as well, ancient artifacts are part of our collective heritage, and so we can only hope that the new legislation and agreements will help to curtail the looting going on around the world. More can and should be done, from passing legislation to guarding excavated sites and protecting known but unexcavated remains. Those outside the profession can help by not succumbing to the temptation of purchasing an ancient artifact offered in a Middle Eastern market or seen on eBay. Because everything that we excavate, study, and write about took place so long ago, the question that should concern all of us is how we can stem the loss of knowledge about our own shared past before it is too late.

Eric Cline is Professor of Classics and Anthropology at the George Washington University. He is also co-editor of the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.

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Alex Joffe is the editor of the *Ancient Near East Today*. The publication features contributions from diverse academics, a forum featuring debates of current developments from the field, and links to news and resources. The ANE Today covers the entire Near East, and each issue presents discussions ranging from the state of biblical archaeology to archaeology after the Arab Spring.

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