

The Pennsylvania Declaration

BY ALESSANDRO
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FORTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since Penn Museum Director Froelich Rainey presented the famous *Pennsylvania Declaration*, giving our Museum the distinction of becoming the first in the world to stop collecting archaeologi-

cal objects obtained through the looting and plundering of ancient sites.

Many other museums have since followed the Penn Museum's lead, and bad publicity arising from lawsuits over stolen artifacts—from countries such as Italy and Cyprus—has brought even some of the more reluctant institutions into the fold. But the illicit trade in objects of cultural patrimony continues, and is much greater than in 1970. The desire and covetousness of some private collectors and museums has yet to be sated.

Awareness of the destruction of archaeological sites came to the fore in the 1960s, and museum collecting was thought to be one of the forces driving looting. In 1966 the Penn Museum itself had purchased from George Allen, a Philadelphia antiquities dealer, a collection of Trojan gold said to have come from Turkey. George Bass, the underwater archaeologist and then Assistant Curator of the Museum's Mediterranean Section, was asked to write a report on the collection (see *Expedition* 8(4):26-39), but became frustrated by the lack of archaeological data on the material.

In order to reconstruct the meaning and history of archaeological objects, the context in which they are found must be known. The objects themselves only tell so much. Because the pieces had no scientific provenance, Bass could only make tentative suppositions about ancient trade and the distribution of metalworking, based solely on a physical examination of the specimens.

To Bass, as well as Rainey and other Museum Curators, it was clear that collecting for the sake of possessing a rare object was anathema to the work of the archaeologist. Rainey

Froelich G. Rainey,
Penn Museum Director,
1947–1977. Photograph by
Fabian Bachrach, ca. 1975.
UPM Image #102240.



also foresaw that because the Penn Museum conducted field research around the world, it could not continue to collect while also applying for permits to excavate.

In 1969 Rainey was invited to participate in drafting a statement on the illicit trade of objects of cultural patrimony for a UNESCO convention to be held in 1970. He realized, however, that the convention would not stop the looting of sites. A number of resolutions that came out of the convention were unfortunately weak, including those concerning the importation of cultural material. Although his ideals were not fully realized, Rainey had aimed to establish a “uniform antiquities law” throughout the world. This law would have included a provision for a legal trade in archaeological objects (museum duplicates and objects already in circulation), which he deemed essential in curbing the black market trade.

Rainey was prescient about the convention. Public pressure reduced museum collecting long before the UNESCO convention was even signed into law by the United States, which did not occur until 1983. Penn Museum recognized the inherent conflicts in the antiquities trade early on and took a public stance. *The Pennsylvania Declaration*, 40 years later, can be viewed as a forerunner in the protection of international sites and an important moment in the Museum's rich history. 🏠

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For Further Reading

Meyer, Karl. *The Plundered Past*. New York: Athenaeum, 1973.

Coggins, Clemency. “Illicit Traffic of Pre-Columbian Antiquities.” *Art Journal* 29.1(1969):94, 96, 98, 114.