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The Antiquities Market We Deserve: 'Royal-Athena Galleries' (1942-2020)

Abstract

On September 13, 2020 a quarter of a century had elapsed since the Swiss and Italian authorities raid in the Free Port of Geneva, on the warehouses of Giacomo Medici, later convicted of involvement in cases of trafficked antiquities. Since then, many other raids followed on properties of other notorious antiquities traffickers, thousands of antiquities were confiscated from them and their invaluable archives were discovered and seized. The research on these archives resulted in hundreds of notable repatriations so far, but mainly in the enrichment of our knowledge about the criminal way in which the so-called 'reputable' members of the international antiquities market have been acting since the 1970 UNESCO Convention, which they completely ignored in practice. Despite the numerous occasions on which these 'reputable' members were identified as involved, even today they continue to act in the same way, some without any (or known) legal sanctions. This chapter reviews the illicit associations of one of these 'prominent' members of the international antiquities market, the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' in New York, a gallery run by the antiquities dealer Jerome Eisenberg, who has repeatedly been found selling looted, smuggled and stolen antiquities. I then present seven antiquities, most of them identified in October 2019, one in March 2020, soon before the retirement of Jerome Eisenberg and the closure of 'Royal-Athena Galleries' on October 31, 2020. This piece lays out all the relevant evidence from the confiscated archives and combines everyone involved to illustrate the network that 'circulated' these seven objects. This case study also highlights all the problems that are ongoing in this research field, proving that essentially nothing has changed since 1995, or even 1970, and we indeed deserve the (illicit) antiquities market we still have.

Introduction

The activities of Jerome Eisenberg and his 'Royal-Athena Galleries'

'Royal-Athena Galleries' was a Manhattan-based antiquities gallery belonging to Jerome Eisenberg, an antiquities dealer who claimed to be active in this business for almost 80 years. Above the entrance of his gallery in New York the sign read: 'Royal-Athena MCMXLII'. In

1942, when he was 12 years old, he co-founded ‘Royal Coin Company’ with his father, Samuel A. Eisenberg, dealing in ancient and foreign coins. In 1958 Jerome Eisenberg established ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’ to trade in antiquities, but he had already been dealing in ancient art for at least four years.¹ The gallery also traded 17th-19th century prints and 19th century photographs of classical and Egyptian subjects.² Eisenberg also became the director of ‘Seaby Antiquities’ in London.

In early November 2020, the website of ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’ disappeared, replaced by a note informing that “After dealing in ancient coins since 1942 and ancient art since 1954 we have finally closed our New York gallery and Dr. Eisenberg has retired at the age of 90. For information on our extensive remaining inventory of Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Egyptian and Near Eastern art please contact Hixenbaugh Ancient Art. For other inquiries please contact mail@royalathena.com or 212-355-2034”.

Since 1999 and until his retirement, Jerome Eisenberg presented himself in all his antiquities catalogues as “a leader for several years in the promotion of the ethical acquisition of antiquities by museums and collectors”.³ However, at ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’, Eisenberg had put up for sale vases identified in the archive confiscated from Giacomo Medici,⁴ bronze objects stolen from Italian museums⁵ and vases stolen from the Corinth Museum, part of the biggest museum robbery in Greece.⁶ Regarding the possibility that Eisenberg knew that the vases were stolen from the Corinth Museum, Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the one who acquired the looted Euphronios’ ‘Sarpedon’ krater for the Met, stated on camera: “Of course he would have known. Jerry has been in and out of this grey area for all his life!”⁷ Through Eisenberg’s gallery passed other antiquities that also proved to be illicit and were repatriated to Italy, e.g. the Apulian loutrophoros (acc. no. 1988.431, passing through Medici, Symes-Michaelides, Sotheby’s, Hecht) and the Apulian bell-krater (acc. no. 1988.532) returned in 2006 by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston after acquiring them in 1988 from ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’.⁸

In the 1980s, it was discovered that Jiri Frel, former curator of antiquities at the Getty Museum, was involved in a tax evasion scheme through inflated appraisals of antiquities. The appraisal forms bore Eisenberg’s name and Frel stated that he could help close deals regarding donations of antiquities “by arranging appraisals through his friend Jerry Eisenberg to back up values reported to the Internal Revenue Service”.⁹ Frel’s secretary at the Getty, who was typing the appraisals at Frel’s office, “believed that Eisenberg got paid for each appraisal”.¹⁰ Eventually, Frel left the Getty Museum in mid-1984, stayed in Paris for a while and

¹ Eisenberg 2012, 2.

² Ikon TV [undated].

³ E.g. Eisenberg 2017, 95.

⁴ Godart, De Caro, Gavrioli 2008, 106-107.

⁵ Isman in Godart, De Carlo, Gavrioli 2008, 24; Felch 2012.

⁶ After severely injuring the only museum guard, see Apostolides 2006, 101, 281-284.

⁷ Apostolides, Zirganos 2005.

⁸ Gill, Chippindale 2006, 325.

⁹ Felch, Frammolino 2011, 32.

¹⁰ Felch, Frammolino 2011, 43.

then moved in for a time with Gianfranco Becchina in the dealer's hometown of Castelvetro in Sicily.¹¹ Becchina was also convicted later for his involvement in illicit antiquities cases.

Although Eisenberg's involvement in sales of looted, smuggled and stolen antiquities and his close relations with other traffickers like Gianfranco Becchina were widely published between 2005 and 2008,¹² he continued to offer antiquities linked to convicted dealers. In October 2010 I identified on the website of Eisenberg's 'Royal-Athena Galleries' an additional 16 antiquities depicted in the confiscated Medici, Becchina and Symes-Michaelides archives.¹³ The internationally renowned Italian prosecutor Dr. Paolo Giorgio Ferri (who prosecuted Medici and Becchina, among others) was also notified, and was quoted in the journalist Fabio Isman's article regarding these identifications. Having seen Isman and Gill's publications, the Dutch journalist Theo Teobosch, emailed Professor David Gill and me on March 18, 2011, referring to his meeting with Jerome Eisenberg during the 2011 TEFAF annual exhibition in Maastricht, regarding the case of the 16 antiquities identified in 'Royal-Athena Galleries' in October 2010:

I have spoken with him and I have showed him the Polaroids and then - if I have understood him rightly- he said that the Italian police have said that there was no problem with these antiquities and that he has it in writing that he was allowed to sell them – therfor [sic] he has already sold soem [sic] of the vases from teh [sic] Kluge Collection.¹⁴

I never heard if any Italian authority ever acted regarding any of these 16 identified antiquities. However, in December 2016 and in June 2018, one of them, an Etruscan male figure identified from the Symes-Michaelides archive, was offered for sale by the Gorny & Mosch gallery in Munich, without mentioning Symes and Michaelides in its 'provenance' section, despite the object's image published in Isman's article and its association with the notorious couple.¹⁵

Despite all these, instead of being prosecuted, in June 2012 Eisenberg "was awarded the title of *officiale* in the Order of the Star of Italy by the President of the Republic of Italy for having provided a meaningful contribution to the prestige of Italy in his many publications on Etruscan and Roman art". Since then, Eisenberg advertised this award in each of the annual catalogues of his gallery.¹⁶ As a result of this inexplicable and paradoxical gesture, Eisenberg continued to sell antiquities depicted in the archives confiscated from Medici and Becchina, antiquities connecting him also with other notorious antiquities dealers such as Mario Bruno and Elie Borowski.¹⁷ Furthermore, Eisenberg continued to sell illicit antiquities while advertising his gallery's due diligence procedures and his commitment to the highest ethical standards. In the 'Introduction' of the gallery's 2017 catalogue 'Art of the Ancient World' Eisenberg stated:

¹¹ Felch, Frammolino 2011, 67.

¹² E.g. Apostolides, Zirganos 2005; Watson, Todeschini 2007, 293-294.

¹³ Isman 2011; Gill 2011a-b; Tsirogiannis 2013, 15; Tsirogiannis forthcoming.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Mr Theo Teobosch for his permission to reproduce part of his e-mail.

¹⁵ Tsirogiannis forthcoming.

¹⁶ Eisenberg 2013-2018a, 95; Eisenberg 2019, 90; no catalogue was published for the year 2020.

¹⁷ Tsirogiannis 2015a.

We have devoted over six decades to selling carefully attributed works of art with particular attention to their provenance. This diligence has resulted in an astonishingly low percentage of claims against legal ownership – less than 0.0006% or one out of every 2000 objects! In view of the increasing legislation being passed in several countries to restrict the trade in illegally exported antiquities, we may assure our clients that we continue to proudly conduct a very ethical business and take all of the proper steps to insure that our inventory is free of any possible claims.

Nevertheless, in the very same catalogue where these claims were printed, I identified in early 2017 two illicit antiquities among 176 objects, completely disproving Eisenberg's ethical statements and the accuracy of the percentage given regarding claims. The first, in January 2017, was a section of a Roman marble sarcophagus¹⁸ looted from Greece and depicted in several images from the confiscated Becchina archive. The relief also appeared on the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website and was offered with the note 'P. O. R.', ('Price On Request'), meaning that the price was particularly high (it proved to be on offer for approximately \$500,000) (FIGG. 1-2). The following 'provenance' accompanied the relief:

Ex Swiss art market, April 1991; Dr. H. collection, Germany, acquired from Royal-Athena in April 2000.

Among the evidence in the Becchina archive, I discovered the identity of a Greek middleman who sold the relief to Becchina, and the invoice for Eisenberg's acquisition of the relief directly from Becchina in 1991 for \$95,000. This proved that Eisenberg was deliberately disguising the convicted dealer Becchina with the general term 'Ex Swiss art market'. After I notified the Assistant District Attorney Mr. Bogdanos at the Manhattan District Attorney's (DA's) Office in New York, sending all the photographic and documentary evidence,¹⁹ the relief was confiscated and returned to Greece²⁰ after a repatriation ceremony took place at the premises of the Manhattan DA's Office.

However, although my work on the case and all the relevant evidence were published in details for more than a month before the repatriation ceremony took place,²¹ the Manhattan DA's officials did not credit me by name during the press conference.²² This was immediately picked up by the Press, making the direct connection.²³ In the same Press conference, even the Consul General of Greece, Dr. Koutras, avoided referring to my work and contribution, stating:

On behalf of the Hellenic Republic, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the District Attorney of Manhattan, Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., for his contribution to this achievement, as we proudly accept a part of our heritage. This marvellous marble sarcophagus dated around the 2nd century A.D. will now be returned where it belongs, to Greece. It will be displayed at the National

¹⁸ Royal-Athena Galleries 2017, 6-7. Every object discussed in this study is presented with the descriptive title given to it by 'Royal-Athena Galleries'.

¹⁹ Tsirogiannis 2020.

²⁰ Mashberg 2017.

²¹ E.g. Mödlinger 2017; Albertson 2017a; Karatasou 2017.

²² Manhattan District Attorney's Office 2017a.

²³ E.g. Papadopoulos 2017, including a video.

Archaeological Museum in Athens with a special reference that will point out the decisive contribution of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for its repatriation.

Angel M. Melendez, Special Agent-in-Charge of HSI New York stated [emphasis added]:

I applaud the tremendous investigative efforts by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, the Consul General of Greece in New York, and our HSI Cultural Property, Art and Antiquities unit for working together to recover and return the ancient marble sarcophagus that was stolen nearly 30 years ago. The return of this piece of artwork is another excellent example of what can be accomplished when **law enforcement authorities in the U.S. and abroad partner to identify** and recover historic, stolen works of art.

In the DA's official, written announcement, my name was finally added at the end of the text,²⁴ after I reminded the DA's office to do so, since the initial version did not include me. Still, it did not acknowledge my contribution as making the identification and supplying all the evidence.

The Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports in its official announcement²⁵ also avoided acknowledging my work, stating instead (translated from the Greek original):

Cooperation between Services of the US and of Greece has been extremely constructive, thus proving in practice an absolute commitment to combating the international scourge of illicit trafficking in cultural goods.

This misinformed the public about the way the case unfolded. The Ministry's statement also avoided revealing the identity of the owner of the relief, noting only that the object had been on sale in 'Royal-Athena Galleries'. That Eisenberg was the owner is only one of two possibilities. He could have been acting as an agent for the actual owner. The Ministry's silence on this point effectively protects the 'reputation' of the real owner, especially if that was the anonymous German collector ('Dr. H. '), and goes against the Ministry's previous policy of recording owners of objects when repatriated.²⁶

The case demonstrates that the owner of one of the most 'reputable' antiquities galleries in the world, who was found previously selling looted and stolen antiquities, was offering for sale an important antiquity, knowing that it came from a convicted trafficker, since he himself bought it directly from him 26 years earlier. The relief's accompanying 'provenance' ('Ex Swiss art market, April 1991; Dr. H. collection, Germany, acquired from Royal-Athena in April 2000') was demonstrably an abuse of the term 'provenance'. With this term, Eisenberg deliberately disguised a convicted trafficker (Becchina) in a general reference to the 'Ex Swiss art market', offering no provenance information before 1991, thus leaving any future owner legally unprotected. An additional problem lies in the unidentified 'Dr. H.' in April 2000.

Just a month after I identified the sarcophagus relief, I identified in February 2017, again on the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website and again from the Becchina archive (FIGG. 3-4), a Greek, Attic, red-figured Nolan amphora attributed to the Horrow Painter. The amphora was

²⁴ Manhattan District Attorney's Office 2017b.

²⁵ Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports 2017.

²⁶ E.g. see the entries of the Greek objects in the *Nostoi* exhibition catalogue, Godart, De Caro, Gavriili 2008.

depicted amateurishly in a regular-print image in the Becchina archive, standing on a creased white cloth, encrusted all over and missing part of its rim. A document filed with the photograph gave the first name ('Robertino') of a known Italian looter, who was identified by my colleague Mr Maurizio Pellegrini. Like the sarcophagus relief, this amphora, too, was offered by 'Royal-Athena Galleries' with the note 'P. O. R.' and it was later estimated as worth more than \$250,000.²⁷ Its 'provenance' was just 'Ex C.H. collection, Ann Arbor, Michigan', accompanied by the note: 'Exhibited: Yale University Art Museum, 2003-2015'. The work of my colleague Mr Maurizio Pellegrini on the looter's name established the Italian origin of this Greek vase. I again notified the Manhattan DA's Office. Shortly afterwards, following its confiscation by the New York authorities, the vase was returned to Italy, through another repatriation ceremony that was held at the premises of the Manhattan DA's Office.

However, both the Manhattan DA's office and Mr Francesco Genuardi, Consul General of Italy in New York, in the DA's office announcement referred mistakenly to the vase as Etruscan; my contribution was again mentioned only in general terms in the end of the website announcement, and no mention was made of the invaluable contribution of my colleague Mr Maurizio Pellegrini. Mr Genuardi specifically stated regarding the "marvellous Etruscan [sic] vessel" that:

In a few months, it will be returned to Italy and permanently displayed in one of the museums belonging to the 'Polo Museale del Lazio' with a special mention of the decisive contribution of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for its repatriation [...] This repatriation ceremony represents a tremendous result in the framework of the significant strengthening of the collaboration between Italy and the United States, led on the Italian side by the Italian Embassy in D.C. It is indeed not the first time that American and Italian authorities are involved in this kind of partnership aimed at recovering of stolen artworks.

Regarding this case, Angel M. Melendez, Special Agent-in-Charge of HSI New York, stated [emphasis added]: "**The investigative efforts set forth by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, the Consul General of Italy in New York, and our Cultural Property, Art and Antiquities unit unravelled the mystery of this relic** stolen from the historic site of the ancient Necropolis more than two decades ago. The return of this vase is another instance of solid international partnerships that result in the identification and recovery of historic, stolen works of art".²⁸ This time, The New York Times picked up²⁹ the erasure of the researchers who actually "unravelled the mystery of this relic", referring to my work by name - although unfortunately, still referring to the vase as Etruscan.

Genuardi's and Melendez's references to the contribution of the DA's office and the HSI to the case are of course correct, since, without their legal capacity, the confiscation of any antiquity would not be possible. However, that point would have never been reached without the voluntary work of forensic archaeologists in the identification, analysis of the case and offering of all the relevant evidence, and it is a shame that they did not receive even adequate credit for their research and expertise. Indeed, the work of the pioneering forensic archaeologists Mr Maurizio Pellegrini and Dr. Daniela Rizzo, both their identifications and their gen-

²⁷ Manhattan District Attorney's Office 2017c.

²⁸ Manhattan District Attorney's Office 2017c.

²⁹ Mashberg 2017.

eral contribution to repatriated antiquities has constantly gone uncredited by the Italian authorities; yet there will be repatriations to Italy based on their work for many years to come. The Association for Research into Crimes against Art was the first both to refer to the vase correctly as Attic and to publish the whole truth of the case.³⁰

The DA's website also mentioned that the amphora will be displayed in Italy with "a special mention of the decisive contribution of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for its repatriation." Here is hoping there is also room on the museum's brass ID plate for the name "Tsirogiannis." It was through this diligent researcher's identification, and the earlier work of Maurizio Pellegrini from Rome's Villa Giulia, which ultimately tied this Neck Amphora to the specific group of identified traffickers, middlemen and dealers who had working relationships with Becchina. It is his analysis of the dealer's archival records, which proved to be the critical component of the evidentiary material which ultimately paved the way for the New York DA's office through the request of attorney Matthew Bogdanos, to request that this object be seized.

This case repeats the pattern, that state authorities who have not been involved in the crucial parts of the actual research, claim full credit, or are giving the false impression to the public that this work, offered pro bono by expert forensic archaeologists, was the sole achievement of the prosecution, police and diplomatic authorities. In reality, it is the result of the cooperation of the archaeologists with the DA's office, a cooperation that started with the identification and the provenance research conducted by the archaeologists. The exceptional contribution of the American authorities to these cases should be highlighted, but with the focus on the cooperation they exercised, which is extraordinary compared to that of other state authorities regarding such cases. As happened with several other cases I have identified in the past, like the South Italian bell-krater attributed to the painter Python at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,³¹ the recovery of the Nolan amphora, too, was advertised by the Italian authorities as the work of the Carabinieri Art Squad. In October 2017, the General Consulate of Italy in New York published that these two Greek vases (the bell-krater and the Nolan amphora) and other recovered objects were 'exceptional cultural property', 'items of most [sic] historical importance' and 'extraordinary Italian cultural masterpieces'. However, the consulate added that "the recovery of these works of art is the result of investigations conducted by the Carabinieri TPC in their constant efforts to combat the trafficking of cultural property looted from Italian archaeological sites or stolen from public institutions in Italy".³² In neither of the cases of the sarcophagus relief and the Nolan amphora did the American, the Greek or the Italian authorities refer to 'Royal-Athena Galleries' by name during the period that the case was ongoing or being finalised. However, the international press did so, referring also to the events the way they actually happened.³³ The Italian authorities, despite the repatriations that are being achieved due to my research, not only in these two cases but in many more in the past never showed interest in working with me (let alone thanking me), although I regularly contacted them, and only exceptionally received a bare acknowledge-

³⁰ Albertson 2017b.

³¹ Tsirogiannis 2014; Tsirogiannis 2017a.

³² General Consulate of Italy in New York 2017.

³³ Mashberg 2017; Kontrarou-Rassia 2017; Papadopoulos 2017; Bregman 2018.

ment of receipt regarding the dozens of identifications and the relevant evidence I have sent them.

In a separate case, in April 2017, I also assisted the Manhattan DA's office regarding the seizure of seven antiquities, identified this time by the Italian authorities, again at the 'Royal-Athena Galleries', all of them depicted again in the Becchina archive.³⁴ These seven antiquities were all together valued at approximately \$102,000 and were delivered to the Italian authorities in May 2017. According to the DA's office press release, these seven antiquities were:

A Sardinian bronze ox dating back to the 8th century B.C. valued at \$6,500; a Sardinian bronze warrior wearing a helmet and carrying a bow, dating to the 8th century B.C., and valued at approximately \$30,000; and a Greek bronze Herakles holding the horn of Achelous, dating to the 3rd or 4th century B.C., and valued at \$12,500 [...] An Apulian Xenon kantharos, a Drinking cup decorated with the image of two goats butting heads, dating to the late 4th century B.C. and valued at \$8,500; a Proto-Corinthian oenochoe, a wine jug decorated with rams and panthers, dating to 650 B.C. and valued at \$22,500; a Paestan red-figure lekythos, an oil flask depicting a man holding a plate of fruit, dating to 340 B.C. and valued at \$9,500; and an Attic red-figure lekythos, an oil flask depicting a man holding a lyre, dating back to 430 B.C. and valued at \$12,500.

In this case, where I was not the one who notified the DA's Office, but only assisted with my expertise and various pieces of information, the DA's office adequately credited my contribution.³⁵

Information useful for the examination of the cases in the main body of this chapter is that nothing else was published by the Italian authorities on these seven objects, except that they were all identified from the Becchina archive, while the names of Jerome Eisenberg and his 'Royal-Athena Galleries' were again omitted. However, I can here add that the close examination of the case of the Apulian Xenon kantharos, at least, and notes handwritten on the Polaroid photographs in the Becchina archive, verify that Eisenberg again acquired this vase directly from Becchina. Given that the 'provenance' of this kantharos was presented in the 2017 'Royal-Athena Galleries' catalogue as 'Ex J. M. E. collection, New York, acquired in Basel, February 1994',³⁶ the comparison reveals that Eisenberg deliberately disguised himself as an anonymous New York collector hidden behind the initials 'J. M. E.'. Additionally, Eisenberg again disguised Becchina, in this case simply as 'Basel'. Therefore, in the cases examined below, every time the 'J. M. E. collection, New York' appears, it is now proven that it is Eisenberg himself.

From the cases examined so far, it has been demonstrated that the repeated appearances of looted and stolen antiquities in the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' verified the stronger – and in some cases, direct – bonds of this gallery with illicit archaeological material originating from Gianfranco Becchina, rather than from Medici or Symes and Michaelides. It has also been demonstrated that apparently Jerome Eisenberg was never legally affected by his involvement in any of these cases; instead, he was actually awarded a medal by the Italian state, the cultur-

³⁴ General Consulate of Italy in New York 2017.

³⁵ Manhattan District Attorney's Office 2017d.

³⁶ Eisenberg 2017, 69, no. 105.

al property of which seems to have suffered the most from Eisenberg's business activities. After all this, I would expect that the Italian state authorities would be routinely checking the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website, at the very least.

The latest cases

In October 2019 I identified six more antiquities on the website of 'Royal-Athena Galleries'; I identified a seventh in March 2020. I here present these with all the relevant evidence, after which I will discuss wider implications relating to the network which 'circulated' these antiquities. I will fully describe the relevant images in the confiscated dealers' archives, but where the objects identified are depicted along with unidentified antiquities, these images will be cropped to show only the objects identified, as illustrations in this chapter.

1) An Attic red-figure column krater attributed to Myson

An Attic red-figure column krater attributed to Myson, dated to *ca.* 500-480 B.C., was offered for sale with the note 'P. O. R.' ('Price on Request'). The 'provenance' that accompanied this vase in 'Royal-Athena Galleries' was: 'Ex collection of John Kluge, Charlottesville, Virginia, acquired from Royal-Athena in 1980; J. Z. collection, Rumson, New Jersey'. However, I had identified the same vase in November 2014 in the Christie's antiquities auction scheduled to take place on December 11, 2014 in New York. In that auction, the krater was offered as lot 95, estimated at \$60,000 - 90,000 and was listed as the 'Property from a New Jersey Private Collection'. The 'provenance' accompanying the krater in the 2014 Christie's auction was:

'with Royal-Athena Galleries, New York, 1980.

John Kluge, Charlottesville.

The Morven Collection of Ancient Art; Christie's, New York, 8 June 2004, lot 320.

with Royal-Athena Galleries, New York, 2005 (Art of the Ancient World, vol. XVI, no. 86)'.

My 2014 identification was possible because the same krater is depicted in a photographic archive confiscated by the US Customs authorities, in collaboration with the Italian police, from David Holland Swingler, an individual described as a food importer. In one image, the krater is depicted standing on a carpet, among several South Italian vases lying on the floor, with Greek fragmented black-figured vases and at least one Roman marble head lying nearby and on a Dexion-type shelving unit, similar to the one discovered in the warehouse of Medici at the Free Port of Geneva in 1995. The image is accompanied by the typed caption: "On this page there are groupings of pottery bought on one of my trips to Switzerland". Two other close-up images of the vase in question were also included in the Swingler archive (FIGG. 5-6).

The US authorities confiscated from Swingler's home in Laguna Hills, California, 230 antiquities originating from illicit excavations in Etruscan and Apulian sites. They were later returned to Italy, together with an additional 650 antiquities related to Swingler, recovered from the US and Europe.³⁷ As Dr. Neil Brodie wrote: "Swingler who, it emerged, was actively engaged in smuggling antiquities from Italy using a pasta import company as cover, was

³⁷ Ruiz 2000, Gill 2014.

sentenced by an Italian Court (*in absentia*) to 4 years in jail, and fined 12 million lire, has not been prosecuted in the US".³⁸

I immediately notified the American authorities for this and four more identifications from the Medici and Symes-Michaelides archives and all the antiquities were withdrawn before the auction. However, I was never informed about their subsequent fate. The only exception was a case of the Sardinian marble female idol, estimated at \$800,000 – 1,200,000, which I identified from the Medici archive and was confiscated more than three years later from the premises of the collectors Michael and Judy Steinhardt,³⁹ who were also the consigners of the idol in the Christie's 2014 auction.⁴⁰ Therefore, although the Christie's 2014 'provenance' implied that the owner and consigner of the krater was the 'Royal-Athena Galleries', I was surprised to see it again on offer in the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' in October 2019, despite the US authorities having been offered all the relevant evidence about this krater five years earlier. It transpired that the object had not been seized by the authorities but, like the marble Sardinian idol, simply returned by the auction house to the owner/consigner.

It is worth mentioning that in 2019 Eisenberg on his gallery website was not referring to the 2004 or the 2014 Christie's auctions where the krater was offered, despite the fact that in both cases Christie's named 'Royal-Athena Galleries', and Eisenberg was personally praised in Christie's 2004 catalogue (see discussion below p. 162). As will be demonstrated (see case no. 2 below), this is not an isolated case relating to Christie's.

2) *A large Apulian Gnathia hydria attributed to the workshop of the Baltimore Painter*

A large Apulian Gnathia *hydria* attributed to the workshop of the Baltimore Painter and dated to ca. 325-300 B.C. was offered by 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for \$65,000. The 'provenance' accompanying this vase was similar to the 'provenance' accompanying the Myson krater: "Ex collection of John Kluge, Charlottesville, VA, acquired from Royal-Athena in 1980; Dr. E. collection, North Carolina, acquired from Royal-Athena in April 2005". However, the same *hydria* is depicted in regular-print images, again in the Swingler archive. In one of the images, the *hydria* is depicted in an amateur's attempt to create a professional image, as the *hydria* is standing on a blue velvet cloth which is held in place with white staplers, possibly covering a chair, but not providing a background for the whole vase, since it reaches only half way up the neck. Behind this cloth, a second creased green cloth is visible that extends higher (FIG. 7). In a different image, the same *hydria* is depicted next to another similar *hydria*, both standing in a Dexion-type shelf (image cropped as FIG. 8), similar to the one discovered during the 1995 raid on Medici's warehouses at the Free Port of Geneva.

As happened in the case of the krater (see case no. 1 above), the *hydria* too had been offered in the Christie's 2004 sale of the Kluge collection, as lot 345. However, Eisenberg again on his gallery website omitted this provenance information from the object's entry (see discussion below).

³⁸ Brodie 2000, 15, emboldening original.

³⁹ Albertson 2018.

⁴⁰ Christie's 2014, lot 85.

3) *An Apulian Gnathia bottle*

An Apulian Gnathia bottle, dated to ca. 330-320 B.C., was offered by 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for \$4,000, accompanied by the 'provenance': 'Ex J. M. E. collection, New York, acquired in Basel, September 1988'. However, the same vase is depicted unrestored, in regular-print images from the confiscated Becchina archive. The bottle is depicted balancing on a chair, together with three similar Apulian Gnathia bottles. A semi-transparent sheet of paper covers the back of the chair in an amateur attempt to create a unified background for the four ancient bottles (close-up, FIG. 9).

As for the initials in the provenance: Eisenberg was signing everything as 'Jerome M. Eisenberg' and has stated on camera that his personal collection 'is about 1600 pieces'.⁴¹ As I have demonstrated above, 'J. M. E. collection, New York' is Eisenberg himself, who – according to the 'provenance' he provides – acquired the vase in Basel. Since Gianfranco Becchina operated his gallery through his wife Ursula in Basel, Switzerland, the Becchina image (FIG. 9) proves that the 'provenance' Eisenberg provides for the bottle in reality again is disguising Becchina. One must remember that Eisenberg had used 'Basel' to disguise Becchina in his provenance for the Apulian Xenon kantharos, which in turn recalled the case of the sarcophagus relief (see Introduction above), in the 'provenance' of which Becchina was again disguised by Eisenberg, this time with the phrase 'Ex Swiss art market, April 1991'. In March 2020 the Apulian Gnathia bottle appeared as 'SOLD' on the website of 'Royal-Athena Galleries'.

4) *An Apulian fish-plate attributed to the Darius Painter workshop*

An Apulian fish-plate attributed to the Darius Painter workshop and dated to ca. 340-330 B.C., was already advertised as 'SOLD' on the website of 'Royal-Athena Galleries' at the time of my identification in early October 2019. For whatever reason, the full entry was still available on the website, with the 'provenance' as 'J. M. E. collection, New York, acquired at Sotheby's, London, May 1983'. Therefore, it appears that Eisenberg is the one who acquired the vase from the Sotheby's 1983 auction. The fish-plate's publication and exhibition history were, respectively: "I. McPhee & A.D. Trendall, *Greek Red-Figured Fish-Plates* (1987), p. 125, no. IVA/76" and "The New York International Antiquarian Fine Art Fair, New York, November 2001".

However, the same fish-plate is depicted in a black-and-white image from the Becchina archive (FIG. 10), crossed with an 'X' by a red marker. The object was numbered '17' and below the image a handwritten note gave a price of '£700', while a small round sticker on the plate characterised the fish-plate as Apulian ('AP').

Indeed, documents in the Becchina archive verify that Becchina had consigned this Apulian fish-plate, together with dozens of other antiquities, in the May 1983 antiquities sale of Sotheby's in London under the name 'Anna Spinello'. Spinello was the married name of Becchina's sister and Becchina used her name to sell about 10-15% of his stock.⁴² Several other cases of Becchina antiquities, sold in Sotheby's under the name of Anna Spinello, have been already identified.⁴³ According to documents I found in his archive, Becchina consigned

⁴¹ Artfinding.com 2010.

⁴² Watson, Todeschini 2007, 293.

⁴³ Tsirogiannis forthcoming.

the object with a reserve price of £600 and the object was sold at the May 1983 auction for £700, hence the handwritten note below the Becchina image as well as the red 'X' indicating that it is sold and left Becchina's hands. According to the hundreds of documents discovered in the Becchina archive and related to transactions between Becchina and Eisenberg, it is evident that the two were in direct communication conducting business from at least 1983 to 1995. Recall that the same 'J. M. E.' collection in New York appears as the previous owner of the Apulian Gnathia bottle discussed above (no. 3) and the Apulian Xenon kantharos (see Introduction), both of which originate also from Becchina.

5) *An Apulian Gnathia bowl*

An Apulian Gnathia bowl dated to the late fourth century B.C. was offered for \$6,500 and was accompanied by a semi-familiar 'provenance': "Ex J. M. E. collection, New York, acquired from Reine Margot [sic], Paris, September 2000". However, I identified the same Apulian bowl in a Polaroid image from the Giacomo Medici archive (FIG. 11). In the full image, more south Italian antiquities are depicted standing with the bowl on a white table. Below the image, on the white margin of the Polaroid is written with a black marker the date '13/6/89'.

'La Reine Margot' is a gallery in Paris, through which also passed an Etruscan terracotta antefix which I identified, also from a Polaroid in the Medici archive, in Bonhams (lot 14) on November 7, 2016, three weeks before their November 30 antiquities auction in London. The day after my identification and having notified INTERPOL (who immediately notified the relevant British and Italian authorities) and the European Association of Archaeologists, I saw that the antefix was withdrawn from the Bonhams auction.⁴⁴ Since then, its whereabouts remain unknown, as no state authority ever contacted me regarding that case. While it also remains unknown which path the Apulian Gnathia bowl took from Medici in June 1989 to the 'La Reine Margot' gallery in September 2000, it is now sure that Jerome Eisenberg was the one who bought this antiquity from 'La Reine Margot' gallery in Paris, in September 2000.

6) *An Etruscan bronze male votive figure*

An Etruscan bronze male votive figure, dated to ca. third century B.C. was offered by 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for \$17,500, accompanied by the following 'Provenance': "Acquired at Sotheby's, London, June 1995. Ex J. M. E. collection, New York". The entry separately referred to the previous publication of the same figure in a 1997 catalogue of the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' (no. 47). In that publication it was mentioned that the right foot of the figure was restored.

However, I identified the same figure in both the Medici and the Symes-Michaelides archives. In the Medici archive the figure is depicted in a regular-print image, lying on a carpet, with a green patina covered in soil, and surrounded by several other antiquities; in this Medici image the figure's right foot is missing (FIG. 12). The same figure is depicted in three professional images from the Symes-Michaelides archive, perfectly clean and polished (the green patina was completely removed), but still missing its right foot. This time, the figure is mounted on a cubic wooden base, in the characteristic style of wooden bases that appear frequently in the Symes-Michaelides archive (FIG. 13). This means that the 'Provenance' pro-

⁴⁴ See Mödlinger 2016; Brodie 2016.

vided by the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for this object is more incomplete than the 'provenance' given for any of the other six objects I identified in the gallery discussed in this chapter, since the provenance not only excludes its starting point (here, Medici), but also an intermediate point (Symes and Michaelides).

In addition, the 'provenance' given by Eisenberg on the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website is not only incomplete, but also wrong. The figure was never offered at Sotheby's in June 1995, (it is not depicted in the 'Antiquities and Islamic Art' Sotheby's catalogue for the auction that took place in New York on June 1st 1995), but in the Sotheby's 'Antiquities' auction that took place on July 6th 1995, in London, as lot 131. The correct information appears in the printed 2019 catalogue of the 'Royal-Athena Galleries'. In the Sotheby's catalogue for July 1995, the figure appears still missing its right foot, but already on its cubic base. According to Eisenberg's 'provenance', he must have acquired it in this July auction for £6,900, higher than the estimate (£3,000-4,000). The date of acquisition by Eisenberg means that Symes and Michaelides owned it at some point between the beginning of the figure's modern journey with Medici and the Sotheby's July 1995 auction. It is significant that in the same auction I identified a few more objects, depicted in the same Medici image as this figure, as well as in the Symes-Michaelides archive. The right foot of the figure appears restored only later, in 'Royal-Athena Galleries' publications.

Eisenberg's 'provenance' implies that the figure left his 'collection'/stock at some point since that auction, because he uses the term 'Ex J. M. E. collection' (which he also uses in the cases of the Apulian Gnathian bottle and bowl, cases no. 3 and 5 above), instead of the 'J. M. E. collection' used in the case of the Apulian fish-plate (case no. 4 above). It is interesting that in less than two years after the figure was acquired in the July 1995 auction in Sotheby's, the same figure was offered in the January 1997 'Royal-Athena Galleries' catalogue for \$26,500,⁴⁵ almost four times the Sotheby's hammer price. Additionally, there was no 'provenance' information included in the 1997 'Royal-Athena Galleries' entry, not even a reference to the still-recent Sotheby's auction, perhaps because with the full provenance information available, a potential buyer could make price comparisons and be discouraged from acquiring the figure from the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for such a high price. By 2019, the price had dropped to \$17,500.⁴⁶

7) *An Etruscan bronze nude male dancer or athlete*

In March 2020, an Etruscan bronze nude male dancer or athlete (originally from the top of a candelabrum), dated to *ca.* 420-400 B.C. and offered for \$14,500, was offered for sale in 'Royal-Athena Galleries', with the 'provenance': 'Ex Sotheby's, London, December 14, 1990, lot 235; Swiss collection, 1995'. The website entry also includes references to three older 'Royal-Athena Galleries' publications (catalogues of 1995, 2003 and 2011) in which this figure appeared.

However, like the Etruscan bronze figure (discussed as case no. 6 above), this figure is depicted in the Medici archive (in a Polaroid image), where it is shown lying on a wooden table surrounded by several other unrestored antiquities, still covered with soil and with evidence of recent damage to its right hand and left knee (detail as FIG. 14). In the 1990 Sothe-

⁴⁵ Eisenberg 1997, 12.

⁴⁶ Eisenberg 2019, 19, no 26.

by's catalogue, the figure appears clean and restored, which proves that Medici had the figure in his possession before 1990. Given that Medici was 'laundering' illicit antiquities through Sotheby's in London, buying them back from himself,⁴⁷ combined with the fact that the figure appeared in the 1990 auction under the title 'Various Properties', it is possible that Medici was the consigner of the figure in this auction. Sotheby's and the antiquities market in general continue to obstruct academic and other research by not releasing the identities of consigners and buyers, even when strong links⁴⁸ or even proofs⁴⁹ are published regarding the illicit origin of the objects.

Apart from the fact that once again the starting point of the figure's real and complete provenance (Medici) was not included, there are three additional points to emphasise here. First, in the 1995 and 2003 'Royal-Athena Galleries' catalogues,⁵⁰ no provenance is given for the figure; only in the 2011 catalogue⁵¹ is it stated 'Ex Swiss collection, 1995'. Second, it is not known why the reference to the Sotheby's 1990 auction did not appear before 2017 in any of the printed catalogues of 'Royal-Athena Galleries'.⁵² In 2019, this information appeared only in the website of the gallery (the figure does not appear in the printed 2019 catalogue). The identity of the 1995 Swiss collection remains unknown, if it is not a disguise for Medici (who was raided in September 1995), in a similar way that Becchina is often disguised in the 'provenances' of antiquities originating from him. Finally, in the 1990 Sotheby's auction, the figure was estimated at £5,000 – 6,000 but remained unsold. In 2011 and 2017 the price of the figure was on each occasion \$14,500 and remained the same until Eisenberg's gallery closed in November 2020. I suggested for the previous case (no. 6 above) that the absence of similar information related to a recent Sotheby's auction was probably to stave off price comparisons. However, it remains unknown why, in the present case, 'Royal-Athena Galleries' catalogues excluded seemingly 'legal provenance' information related again to a Sotheby's auction for a much longer period.

Discussion on the network 'circulating' the seven identified antiquities

In order to make clear the way these antiquities were moved into the market, it is useful to visualize these movements (Diagram 1) according to the information the market provides (blue boxes) and the information discovered in the confiscated archives, as well as from information publicly available, as a result of additional provenance research (red boxes). Further observation of the resulting network will generate additional points.

In Diagram 1 above, arrows represent proven direct connections; dotted lines represent potentially direct or indirect connections, in which it is not yet proven whether one or more individuals or companies were involved at some point between the two ends of the connection (e.g. Swingler and 'Royal-Athena Galleries'). Although 'Gianfranco Becchina' and 'Basel, September 1988' are marked as connected, they are probably one and the same. While

⁴⁷ Watson, Todeschini 2007, 137-8.

⁴⁸ E.g. Tsirogiannis 2013,7.

⁴⁹ Tsirogiannis 2014; Tsirogiannis 2017, 67.

⁵⁰ Eisenberg 1995, no. 31; Eisenberg 2003, 17, no. 40.

⁵¹ Eisenberg 2011, 21, no. 37.

⁵² It only appears in Eisenberg 2017, 32, no. 35.

Becchina and Medici antiquities were consigned directly or indirectly to Sotheby's in London, Becchina was selling directly to Eisenberg, while – so far – Eisenberg seems to have acquired Medici antiquities only indirectly. Equally, from examining the Symes' affidavits related to the trial between Symes and members of the Papadimitriou family,⁵³ it appears that Symes (probably with Michaelides) was selling and buying antiquities directly to and from Eisenberg. However, in the case of the votive figure (case no. 6 above) it appears that Symes with Michaelides was connected indirectly with Eisenberg; between them, in this case, was (at least) Sotheby's in London.

The diagram first exposes the omission of the original provenance of each object from the 'provenance' information of its entry on the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website. Each of the convicted antiquities dealers (Medici, Becchina, Swingler) is absent, who in every case represent the starting point of the objects' unfortunate journey into the dark world of the antiquities market. Other convicted and notorious, respectively, dealers are also omitted (Symes and Michaelides). Such an omission is frequently made also by Christie's in New York, a company which is also involved in the sale of looted, smuggled and stolen antiquities.⁵⁴ It is exactly the absence of these convicted and notorious dealers (and, occasionally, of such auction houses) which maintains the thin layer of presumed legitimacy that allows unprovenanced antiquities to 'circulate' for decades in the market, allowing everyone to profit continually from each transaction over the years.

The second point that becomes obvious is that the most central nodes in this map are 'Royal-Athena Galleries 1980 – 2005 (x3)', 'Royal-Athena Galleries 2019 – 2020' and '(Ex) J. M. E. collection, New York'. As I have already demonstrated that 'J. M. E. collection, New York' is Eisenberg himself, it becomes evident that 'Royal-Athena Galleries' were the central point for the movement of these antiquities for up to four decades, in some cases. The fact that the basis of this information comes from the gallery itself should be viewed, not as an advertisement of its successful business over the decades (as maybe intended by the gallery), but as an indication of a dubious and perhaps unlawful participation in a network that deals in – at the very least – 'toxic' objects depicted in the photographic and other evidence presented here. An attempt to clarify the identity of the 'J. M. E. collection, New York' with the staff of the – now closed – 'Royal-Athena Galleries', would have been meaningless anyway, as it is well-known how persistent is the market in guarding this kind of information.⁵⁵ However, the fact that the 'provenance' given by the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' for the Etruscan bronze male votive figure (see case no. 6, above) is 'Acquired at Sotheby's, London, June 1995. Ex J. M. E. collection, New York', combined with the appearance of the same figure in the 1997 'Royal-Athena Galleries' catalogue, seems to further verify that this collection is an euphemism for Eisenberg.

The third point is that the collections appearing in the 'provenance' of these objects on the gallery's website and catalogues are not named, using just initials ('J. M. E.', 'Dr. E.', 'J. Z.') which further confuses the already incomplete provenance. The exception to this is the John Kluge collection, which is fully named by the gallery, I suspect because this information had already been published in full by Christie's on two occasions, in 2004 and in 2014. How-

⁵³ Watson, Todeschini 2007, 248-264.

⁵⁴ E.g. Brodie 2014.

⁵⁵ Tsirogiannis 2013, 7.

ever, Eisenberg's gallery website entry omitted both these Christie's auctions, related to the two Swingler objects (the krater and the hydria, see cases nos. 1 and 2 above), which passed twice through Eisenberg's gallery (the krater) and have no provenance before their first appearance in 'Royal-Athena galleries' in 1980, although Christie's refer to the gallery in full, in both sales. Indeed, in the Christie's catalogue of June 8, 2004, where the John Kluge collection was auctioned, Max Bernheimer, then 'International Specialist Head, Antiquities' at Christie's, specifically thanked Eisenberg, Vermeule and Bianchi who had contributed in previous exhibitions of Kluge's antiquities: "The authors of these *unpublished works* [emphasis added] have graciously shared their research for the present catalogue, for which Christie's is extremely grateful".⁵⁶

A 'reasonable', but legitimate, explanation for Eisenberg's exclusion of any reference to Christie's, might be that he thereby avoided directing potential purchasers to the hammer prices achieved in the 2004 auction (the krater was with Drawn from the 2014 auction, as mentioned above), to avoid their finding excessive Eisenberg's price in 2019 ('P. O. R.'). In the 2004 Christie's auction the krater (lot 320) was estimated at \$25,000 – 35,000 and was sold for \$38,240, while the hydria (lot 345) was estimated at \$15,000 – 20,000 but was sold for \$14,340. In 2019, the krater was offered for a very high price ('P. O. R.') and the hydria for \$65,000. Eisenberg does mention Sotheby's auctions that are at least 24 years old, and, in one of them, the price is not even available, as the object remained unsold (the Etruscan candelabrum figure, see case no. 7 above). However, as already explained (see case no. 6 above), when even a Sotheby's auction was too close to the subsequent offer of the same object by the 'Royal-Athena Galleries', the reference to this auction was also excluded from its 'provenance' information (if any), in order for price comparisons to be avoided. In any case, these issues demonstrate deliberately incomplete 'provenance' information by Eisenberg in his gallery's website and catalogues.

A legitimate, ethical and transparent antiquities market would have exhausted every possible means of discovering and publishing the most complete provenance information through the exercise of due diligence. However, even in 2020, almost two decades after it was published that the Italian (and Greek) authorities have in their possession tens of thousands of photographic proofs on illicit antiquities, the market still does not take even the most basic step in provenance research (let alone due diligence). A legitimate, ethical and transparent antiquities market and its clients would be sending, each time, a simple email with an attachment of the objects' images to be checked by the Italian (and Greek) authorities. Instead, for many years, they are publicly making the baseless argument that their due diligence is hampered by lack of access to the archives and that the archives should be publicly released,⁵⁷ something that is impossible for all sorts of legal reasons and for the safety of the yet unidentified antiquities depicted in them. Some of these reasons have been accepted, for years now, even by prominent clients of the market who have been found owning illicit antiquities identified from these archives.⁵⁸ The actual result is that in almost every major auction, in almost every private or state museum collection and in the most prominent antiquities galleries, illicit antiquities are continually being identified through reference to the confiscated archives. In

⁵⁶ Christie's 2004, 8.

⁵⁷ Gerlis 2015.

⁵⁸ E.g. Association of Art Museum Directors, in Gerlis 2015.

some cases, members of the antiquities market (e.g. Christie's) claimed that they "have in the past sent individual queries to the Italian Carabinieri but they have not responded. We are, of course, continuing actively to try to explore this route both with the Greek and Italian authorities".⁵⁹ A legitimate, ethical and transparent antiquities market would have published, in full, these queries, for the public to understand if there was a basis for the Carabinieri (or the Greek authorities) not to respond or to be blamed, as it is possible that these Christie's queries have been selectively incomplete.⁶⁰

The case of the sarcophagus relief, described in the Introduction above, demonstrates that there are instances in which the market has no need to access the confiscated archives, since it already possesses all the incriminating information, insisting to trade in illicit antiquities and not informing the authorities. A member of a legitimate, ethical and transparent antiquities market, whether an auction house or a dealer (or their clients, a museum or a private collector), would have published every piece of provenance-related information in their possession, without withholding them for personal (financial or other) benefit. In the case of the seven antiquities, identified from these same archives in 'Royal-Athena Galleries', Jerome Eisenberg especially, has no excuse at all, since, as has been demonstrated above, he has been repeatedly found over the last 15 years in possession of illicit antiquities depicted in these archives. Yet, until his retirement he continued to offer for sale such antiquities, without mentioning their full provenance and, apparently, without checking first with the Italian and/or Greek authorities.

It remains unknown whether the Italian (and Greek) authorities even monitored the gallery's website at any point during this last 13 months until Eisenberg's retirement. It appears that they have not acted, since at least two of the seven antiquities were in due course presented on the website of the gallery (in October 2019 and in March 2020) as 'SOLD'. Even if the Italian authorities did act, no information regarding the evidence used, the complete provenance of these antiquities and the identity and roles of all the individuals and companies involved in each case has been released. This silence about the evidence also holds for every past repatriation (the omission by the Italian authorities of crucial and valuable information on the Apulian Xenon kantharos is just one of the numerous examples). The publication of such detailed information by various American authorities⁶¹ is a notable exception and an example to be followed by every country's authorities. Therefore, either the Italian authorities have not acted at all, for which the reasons remain unknown, or they did act, but without releasing the information useful at least to academic researchers. This results in obstructing both academic research and the raising of public awareness about antiquities trafficking. The problem of the authorities keeping the evidence unpublished, even after the conclusion of the cases, has long been identified,⁶² but now all the unpublished knowledge they compile in this field and the negative impact this unjustified 'top secrecy' has for academic research becomes more evident. The publication of the evidence relevant in each case should not be left only to individual researchers working without any monetary or academic compensation and in their free time; it is mainly the duty of the authorities who are being paid by public taxes, and have

⁵⁹ Adam 2015.

⁶⁰ Tsirogiannis 2015b, 32.

⁶¹ E.g., I.C.E. 2012 or The Supreme Court of the State of New York 2017.

⁶² Brodie 2018, 722.

the responsibility to fully inform that public, or to explain the reason why information is withheld, especially regarding cases successfully concluded.

The role of the Press and further thoughts on the authorities

The real and complete provenance of the seven identified antiquities discussed in this study is important not primarily for their potential repatriation to Italy, but mainly for the opportunity to examine the way these objects ‘circulated’ for decades in the international antiquities market and the way that market still operates at the start of the 2020s, despite the existence of national legislation and international conventions against the trafficking of cultural property. Examining the provenance of just these seven objects, put together in the map above, brings together some of the main members of the market who have been involved in the past in trafficking numerous illicit antiquities, many of which were repatriated to their countries of origin and some of them published as illicit. The fact that in 2020 it is revealed that they continue to deal in objects that are, at the very least, unprovenanced, is proof that something is very wrong, despite efforts over at least 50 years to fight this problem.

For all the above reasons, I assumed that the international Press would have been very interested to report on the case of these identifications, as it has done in the past for fewer objects and with fewer members of the international antiquities market involved (see introduction). On the other hand, it is also true that the international Press has regularly turned down the publication of illicit antiquities cases I discovered,⁶³ as ‘not newsworthy’ or ‘a repetition of cases we presented before’, or even because of the ‘too low value’ with which the market was offering them. Even when they do publish a case, the Press seems continually to be missing the point about this research field, for, rather than presenting each of these identifications as one-offs, disconnected from the rest, the real emphasis should be on how and why the international antiquities market repeatedly offers unprovenanced and illicit antiquities depicted in the confiscated archives, without any actual penalty. However, in the case of these seven new identifications, the quality of the antiquities identified, their high value (at least \$200,000) and the number of the ‘reputable’ members of the market involved, were indicators of a potential interest by the Press. Due to a different (but related) repetition, that of various state authorities’ not adequately crediting my work and my colleagues’ work in previous cases (examples only were given in the introduction above), I was forced to come to the conclusion that, at least regarding this case, the various authorities should be notified at the same time as the public, since public notification is the main responsibility of any archaeologist. Hence, I attempted to send the case directly to the Press.

Therefore, I contacted three experienced journalists independently and sent them all the evidence on the seven antiquities. The first one was contacted in mid-October 2019, when the first six antiquities were identified. The journalist, however, declined to publish, due to personal reasons, which I totally respected, appreciating his prompt reply and honesty. The second journalist was contacted immediately afterwards and, at first, expressed a great interest and started working on a draft article. However, due to his own personal issues, he delayed for about three months, and later he completely stopped any contact, although he continued publishing on different cases, an indication that by then he had managed his personal reasons.

⁶³ The eventual repatriation of at least some of them proves their significance, e.g. see Tsirogiannis 2016.

By mid-March 2020, it was evident that this cooperation would not take place, verified in early June 2020, when he contacted me to help him with a completely different case (I did, regardless, but in the end he did not use any of the help I offered on this case, either). It is obvious that there will be no more contact from my side in the future.

Finally, in mid-March 2020 I contacted the third journalist who understood the importance of the case and proved that his immediate interest was genuine. It was then that I identified the seventh antiquity. However, the journalist was first puzzled and later frustrated when, for an unknown reason, not one of the editors of several big newspapers, from both sides of the Atlantic, even replied to his emails on the story, to the point that he started questioning his own writing skills (proven by previous publications to be of the highest quality). After exhausting every possibility, he notified me that he was left without any options. I myself also contacted a major UK newspaper that had in the past presented one of the cases I discovered, but I also received no answer.

Because of all this, the whole case ended up also becoming an unintentional experiment, that is, testing how long these antiquities would continue to be publicly on offer on the 'Royal-Athena Galleries' website, without the Italian authorities intervening or publishing anything about their possible intervention. What was at stake in this case was not the fate of the identified antiquities, since competent authorities could trace the complete trail of documentation and the objects themselves, even if all of them would be sold in due course. Rather, I was interested to see how much time it would take those claiming credit for my work to identify the same pieces, to take action and – most importantly – to publish the evidence and their activities to inform the public. However, as mentioned above (case nos. 3 and 4), only two of these antiquities were finally sold; the remaining five continued to appear on the website of Eisenberg's gallery until his retirement in late October 2020. Although the final announcement of the 'Royal-Athena galleries' referred to 'Hixenbaugh Ancient Art' for its 'extensive remaining inventory', by the end of November 2020 none of these five antiquities had appeared on the website of 'Hixenbaugh Ancient Art' (but by the beginning of December other 'Royal-Athena' antiquities had). In any case, the results of this unintentional experiment were quite revealing and disappointing regarding the role of the Press, which decides what is important and how to measure significance, and regarding the authorities, who have apparently not acted for more than 18 months, despite 'Royal-Athena Galleries' being an obvious target of monitoring. Even worse, if the authorities did act, they did it without notifying the public and academia about their actions and results, a point that should be investigated further by everyone interested.

Conclusions

From the evolution of this case of the seven identified antiquities over the last 13 months of 'Royal-Athena Galleries' operation, Eisenberg emerges as a kind of conjurer juggling objects and sales over time, making them appear and disappear at will. But he is symptomatic of a wider problem regarding the antiquities market's lack of due diligence and carelessness about the presentation of provenance, still in 2020. It is more urgent than ever for the basic principles of good faith and the published code of conduct to be honoured and enforced in the antiquities market.

The silence of all the editors in response to offers of this story cannot reasonably be explained. The high price of some of these antiquities and their collective monetary value should have answered some of the Press's misguided criteria for filtering what will be presented to the wider public, and what not. There is no doubt that this decision is the Press' own business, but, viewed objectively, the continuation of the antiquities trade in its current state benefits from the Press's treating poor practices as occasional events rather than a continuous phenomenon. In the same way, this study also shows how certain authorities' inactions or, at least, lack of publication of their actions affects public and academic awareness and knowledge.

However, no one should be surprised; even in 2020, despite the huge interest generated globally about the protection of (ancient) cultural property and despite the common use (knowledgeable or not) of the word 'fight' in relation to cultural trafficking (to the point that the word has lost its meaning, in this field), we still lack the basics. No university around the globe has a course solely dedicated to antiquities trafficking networks, their history, their members, and the way their roles have transformed over time. There is not a single academic Chair dedicated entirely to antiquities trafficking, in any academic institution, and despite pompous public statements, there is no real interest detectable by any university in creating such a position. Renowned academics, with decades of proven experience and actual results (Dr. Neil Brodie immediately comes to mind, but there are others), have never had such a long-term opportunity to educate, train and prepare students in this field, let alone to research in an uninterrupted way. This is not only a longstanding stain on the cultural and other authorities of countries in the continents affected, whether by looting or trading, but also a fatal omission, especially in recent years when the link between illicit antiquities and terrorism became undeniable.⁶⁴ Future archaeologists, museum curators, art experts and provenance researchers, among others, are kept uneducated in this field, although, at least once in their career, they are bound to be presented with an unprovenanced or, even worse, a profoundly illicit antiquity, and so have to make a professional, legal and ethical choice. This choice will define them as academics and professionals, but, more importantly, will indicate their moral standards as human beings.

Furthermore, in 2021, there is still not a single research centre, dedicated long-term to illicit antiquities research,⁶⁵ attracting the best and most skilful researchers from various related disciplines. Its researchers should enjoy professional security, without the fear of the funding running out, or be stopped based on the views of people and committees unrelated to this field.⁶⁶ Endowments for the creation of cultural institutions have proven that this is possible.⁶⁷ The problem is that potential benefactors are usually collectors of antiquities coming from dubious or illicit sources and, therefore, extremely unlikely to donate funds to support a research that, eventually may turn against their own collecting practices and reveal them, even if the researchers would ever accept such a donation, accompanied by such 'provenance'. The

⁶⁴ Hardy 2014; Bogdanos 2005.

⁶⁵ Tsirogiannis 2017b; Tsirogiannis in Sinigalia 2019.

⁶⁶ E.g. Brodie 2018, in which, having been the director of the University of Cambridge's 'Illicit Antiquities Research Centre', he reports on the history and the reasons for its closure.

⁶⁷ A bad, but functional, example is the Getty Museum and Center, see Waxman 2008, 333.

same, of course, stands for academic institutions, which often explain their actual lack of interest in such research.

Therefore, as we begin the third decade of the 21st century, we are still watching illicit antiquities parading through the 'reputable' market for high amounts of money, while a fraction of these sums, funded by a state, would have been enough to secure the sustainability of the highest-level research on a global scale in this field. At the same time, state authorities continue to celebrate the very occasional repatriations (occasional compared to the volume of unprovenanced antiquities that will never return to their rightful owners), missing the wider picture, that of fully understanding this ongoing crime, fully interpreting it and fully publishing their related results, before assisting all of us to actually fight it, together. The public remains uninformed and the new generation of professionals uneducated, while the Press filters and decides, in its own ways, what the public will be notified about in relation to this field. So many, in many different, but related, fields, do their best, intentionally or unintentionally, for the flow of money related to illicit antiquities to remain uninterrupted, as it seems that everyone benefits from the continuation of the problem, one way or another. Even UNESCO, half a century after its relevant 1970 Convention, while it celebrates the occasion, states that "The last five decades have seen an exponential increase of the illicit traffic of cultural property",⁶⁸ admitting, in reality, that its Convention was in practice completely ignored. For all these reasons and as long as these continue to exist, we will always experience this collective hypocrisy and have the (illicit) antiquities market we deserve. This market will continue, not only uninterrupted, like the life-span of the 'Royal–Athena Galleries', but also with the authorities of the affected states continuing to award medals to market members for their 'meaningful contribution' to our shared, trafficked culture.

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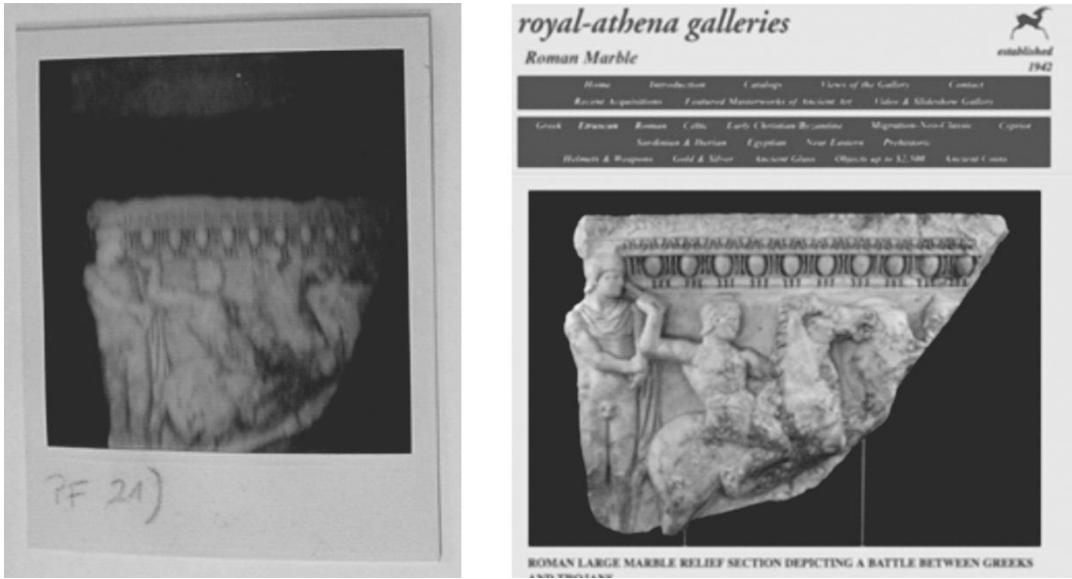
⁶⁸ UNESCO 2020.

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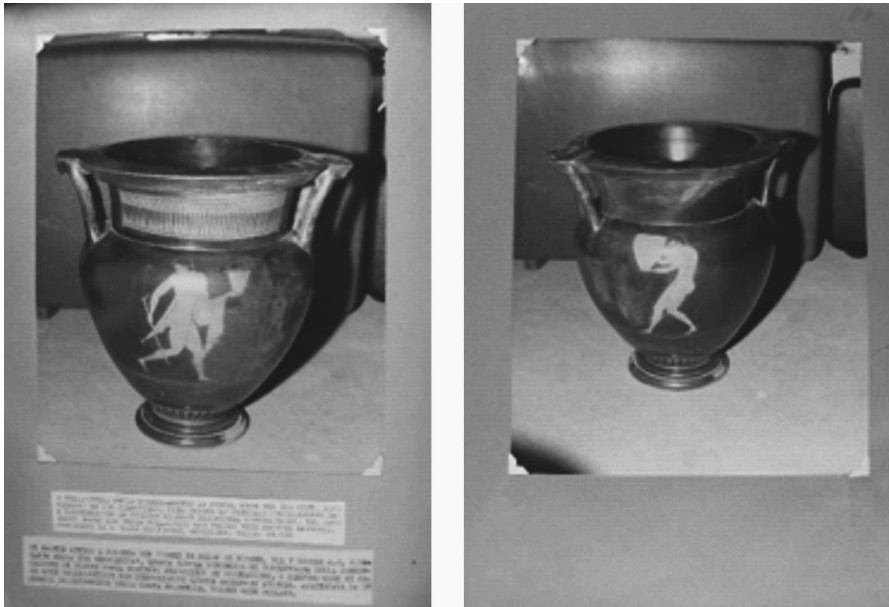
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FIGS. 1-2 – Left: the sarcophagus relief depicted in a Polaroid image from the confiscated Becchina archive; the note ‘PF 21’ at the lower right corner stands for ‘Port Franc, object no. 21’ (the Basel Free Port, location of one of Becchina’s warehouses, later raided by the Swiss and Italian authorities); Right: the sarcophagus relief on the website of the ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’ in New York, in early January 2017 (©USA Greek Reporter).



FIGS. 3-4 – Left: the Greek Attic red-figure Nolan amphora attributed to the Harrow Painter as it appeared for sale on the website of the ‘Royal-Athena Galleries’; Right: the same amphora depicted in a regular-print image from the confiscated Becchina archive; the amphora is photographed amateurishly, standing on a creased white cloth, encrusted all over and missing part of its rim.



FIGS. 5-6 – The two sides of the Attic red-figure column krater attributed to Myson. The krater is depicted on a carpet, behind an armchair. Dozens of regular-print images were in the archive confiscated from David Holland Swingler.



FIGS. 7-8 – The Apulian Gnathia hydria depicted in two regular-print images from the Swingler archive; left: an amateur's attempt to create a professional image, with the blue and green cloths as a background; Right: the same hydria standing on a Dexion-type shelf similar to the one discovered during the 1995 raid on Medici's warehouses at the Free Port of Geneva.



Fig. 9 – The Apulian Gnathia bottle, depicted unrestored and balancing on a chair, in a regular-print image from the Becchina archive.



FIG. 10 – The black-and-white image from the Becchina archive depicting the Apulian fish-plate and the handwritten note related to its sale.



FIG. 11 – Cropped detail of the Polaroid image from the Medici archive, depicting the Apulian Gnathia bowl (13.6.1989).



FIGS. 12-13 – Left: The Etruscan figure depicted on a carpet, still covered with soil and with a green patina, in a regular-print image from the Medici archive. Right: the same figure, depicted cleaned, polished and mounted, in a professional image from the Symes-Michaelides archive.

FIG. 14 – The Etruscan bronze figure, depicted in a detail of the (cropped) Polaroid image from the Medici archive.

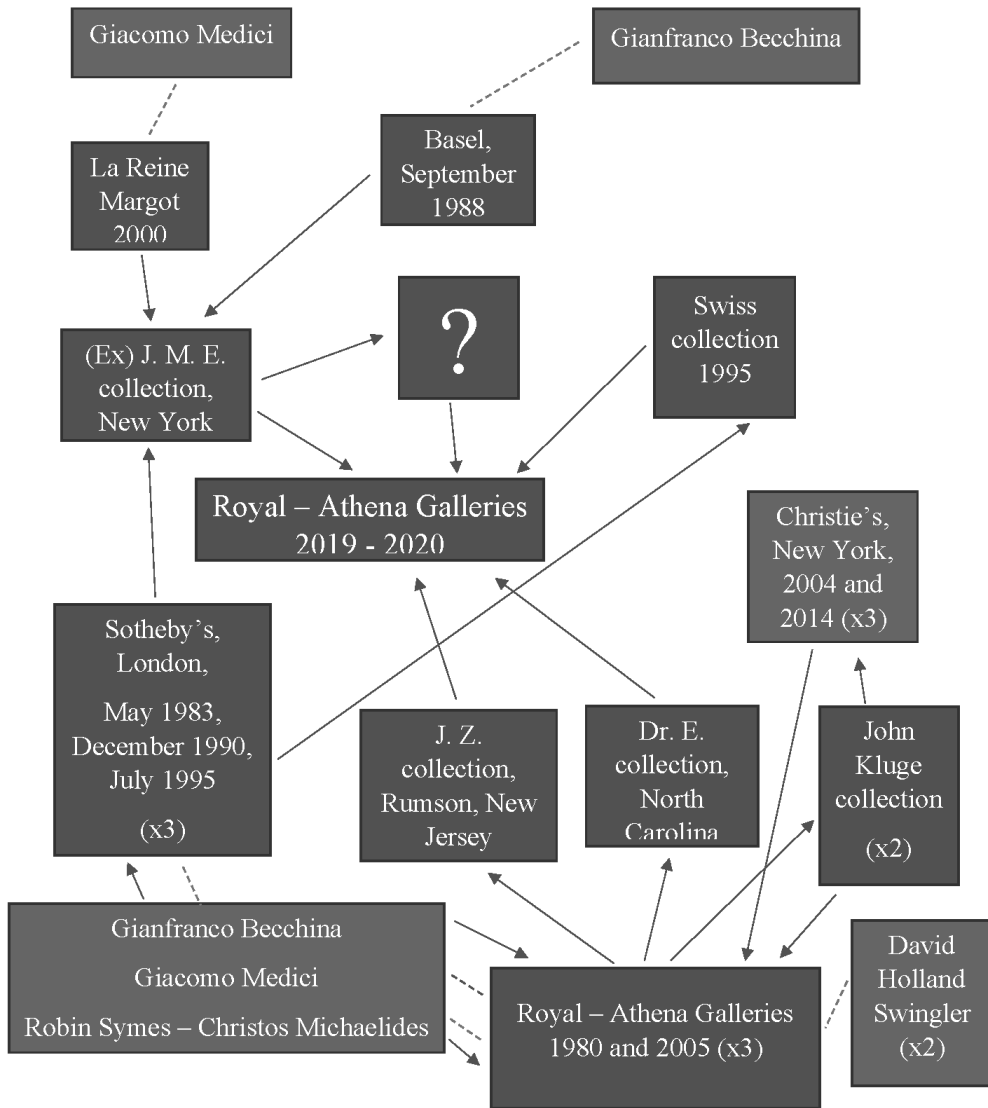


Diagram 1 – The movement of the seven antiquities identified in 'Royal-Athena Galleries' in 2019 and 2020.

