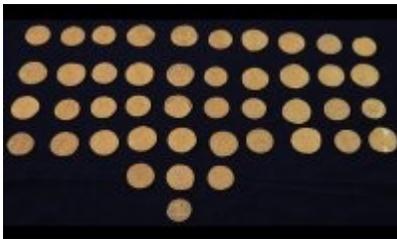


ISIL LEADER'S LOOT

On May 15, 2015, U.S. Special Operations Forces recovered a cache of hundreds of archaeological and historical objects and fragments during a raid in al-Amr (eastern Syria) to capture ISIL leader Abu Sayyaf. The cache represents significant primary evidence of looting at archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq, theft from regional museums, and the stockpiling of these spoils for likely sale on the international market. It also corroborates evidence of looting previously documented by the [Department of State](#) and the [American Schools of Oriental Research](#). All objects and fragments were turned over to officials at the Iraq National Museum on July 15 by the [U.S. Embassy in Baghdad](#).

The cache is comprised of an assortment of archaeological artifacts and fragments, historical objects, modern/contemporary items, and replica or faked antiquities. More than half the items are coins made of gold, silver, and bronze. There are also items of pottery, glass, ivory, stone, and leather including jewelry, figurines, bowls, and manuscripts. While some items were clearly property of Mosul Museum, all are now in the hands of Iraqi experts, who are working to determine the likely provenance of each object.

Coins of Gold, Silver, and Bronze



The majority of the objects and fragments in the cache are coins of various eras. There are bronze Roman provincial coins likely minted in Antioch-on-the-Orontes, Byzantine folloi, Umayyad silver dirhams, and gold dinars of later Islamic dynasties. Coins of all eras are reportedly targeted by looters wielding metal detectors in Syria and Iraq. Indiscriminant digging in search of coins destroys archaeological contexts that bear unique and irreplaceable residues of ancient civilizations ranging from grains of pollen to the architecture of entire buildings.

Bound Leather Antimension



One of the three manuscripts in the cache is a bound leather antimension, perhaps written in a form of Aramaic and depicting Christian imagery of Jesus' birth, life, and death. Antimensia are used in the celebration of a liturgical service, usually the Eucharist, and serve as the physical place upon which the offering is laid. This bound version, which remains to be dated definitively, was likely used by travelling clergymen to service smaller villages. The theft of this antimension has deprived a religious community of a central tool for the performance of a Christian rite.

Ivory Furniture Plaque



An ancient ivory plaque used to decorate thrones, chairs, or other royal furniture is a distinctive item in the cache. The plaque was excavated at the ancient Assyrian capital of Nimrud by a team from the British Museum in 1989, after which it was stored in the Mosul Museum (Iraq). The plaque, most likely dating to the 9th century B.C., is decorated with three registers in low relief of a procession of Assyrian officials and foreign tributaries who most likely come from northern Syria ([Curtis et al. 1993](#)). The plaque's presence in the Abu Sayyef cache provides concrete proof that ISIL not only destroyed ancient statues in the Mosul Museum galleries for public propaganda purposes, but also plundered the collections of the museum for likely financial gain.

Fakes and Forgeries

Some of the items are likely to be fakes or forgeries. Some of these may derive from the storerooms of Iraqi museums, which keep fakes seized by law enforcement. Whatever the origin of these particular items, it is common to see fakes mixed with caches of real looted archaeological material, and establishes that there is a market for these kinds of items of antiquity.

More photos may be found at <http://eca.state.gov/gallery/isil-leaders-loot-photo-gallery>. These photos may be used for publication and credited to the Department of State.