



September 30, 2016

The U.S. Cultural Property Advisory Committee  
Cultural Heritage Center  
SA-5, Fifth Floor  
Department of State  
Washington, DC 20522-0505

Dear Members of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee,

The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) wishes to express its very strong support for the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and the U.S.A. concerning the imposition of strict import restrictions on pre-Classical and Classical archaeological objects and Byzantine and post-Byzantine ecclesiastical and ritual ethnographic materials on the basis of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. In particular, ASOR wishes to stress the importance of including coins as well as post-Byzantine Ecclesiastical and Ritual Ethnological Material in the Designated List as implemented in 2006, 2007 and 2012. These items are among those most actively at risk and central to on-going illicit trade in Cypriot cultural heritage.

ASOR, founded in 1900 and currently located at Boston University, is a US-based international organization of archaeologists and historians whose mission is to initiate, encourage, and support research into, and public understanding of, the history and cultures of the Near East and wider Mediterranean with Cyprus one of our core foci and home to one of the affiliated American Schools of our organization: the Cyprus-American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI). Our membership of 1700 professional members and another 12,000 'Friends of ASOR' has a very strong interest in the long-term preservation, presentation, and safeguarding of the heritage of Cyprus. A number of ASOR members direct or lead university research projects in, or concerned, with Cyprus.

ASOR has been involved with the archaeology of Cyprus for over a century, with a focus on all periods of the island's history. Our organization has sadly witnessed the very real problems of cultural heritage destruction caused by the illegal export of archaeological objects from Cyprus. The loss of cultural heritage from Cyprus is a long-standing and acute problem. The island was sadly subject to very large-scale looting and foreign acquisition of its cultural heritage in the period up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and an extraordinary amount of its cultural heritage is today found in major museums and collections around the world (see <http://kyrioscharacter.eie.gr/en/scientific-texts/details/collections-of-cypriote-antiquities/collections-of-cypriote-antiquities-in-foreign-museums>). This includes, most notably, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, whose very founding was inextricably linked with the looting of thousands of objects from Cyprus by Luigi Palma di Cesnola (then American Consul in Cyprus and – after selling this material – first director of the Metropolitan Museum). There is a major US legacy obligation.

When we talk about illicit antiquities and the destruction of cultural heritage, Cyprus is sadly one of the well-known international case studies – with many other cases tragically joining from the eastern Mediterranean region. The problem is not only historic and did not end following the war of 1974. Indeed, it is only because of international pressure and rules restricting trade in illicit antiquities that a number of key Cypriot antiquities lost from private collections during the war are now being (i) returned to their legal owners, and (ii) in several cases then given to the Cyprus Museum (<http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/08/07/partial-return-looted-collection/>). Cyprus has an extraordinary archaeological and

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cultural heritage, and, as a small country with serious recent economic problems, it struggles to have the appropriate resources and infrastructure to cope fully with the scale of the task. Such problems and struggles highlight the need to try to better protect Cyprus' cultural heritage and, especially, to try to prevent the trafficking and trade of its cultural heritage. Instances or reports of looting and problems remain all too common, and the best means to restrict these is by denying a foreign market – something the MoU achieves in the USA – and especially when linked with increasingly better and tighter local protection, curation and enforcement in Cyprus (e.g. <http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/09/08/arrests-pending-paphos-antiquities-thefts/>; <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/05/17/the-treasure-debate/>).

The U.S.A. needs to lead international efforts to prevent this state of affairs from continuing, let alone deteriorating. The existing MOU was first signed in 2002, and amended in 2006 to include Byzantine period Ecclesiastical and Ritual Ethnographic Materials, renewed in 2007 to – importantly – include Cypriot coins (end 6<sup>th</sup> century BC to AD 235), and renewed in 2012 to include Ecclesiastical and Ritual Ethnological Materials representing the post-Byzantine period dating up to AD 1850. The latter is another important category of items often robbed and then sold as part of the international art market.

It is vital to maintain (if not extend) this protection of Cypriot cultural heritage. The political situation on Cyprus – a divided island with the north occupied by Turkey – makes it especially vulnerable to illicit removal and trade in cultural heritage (and especially from the occupied northern area as noted by the Cypriot government: [http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/da/da.nsf/DMLlooting\\_en/DMLlooting\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mcw.gov.cy/mcw/da/da.nsf/DMLlooting_en/DMLlooting_en?OpenDocument)). International rescue efforts are necessary.

The existing MOU prevents archaeological objects from categories described in the Designated List from entering the US unless they have an export permit issued by the Government of the Republic Cyprus, or documentation that they left Cyprus prior to the effective date of the restriction. Without question, the existing MOU is one of the most important acts which has helped to protect Cyprus' cultural heritage. As the complaints and lobbying of the coin lobby in the U.S.A. indicate, the existing MoU has had significant positive impact in restricting such illicit trade. As small and portable objects, coins are particularly vulnerable for looting and trafficking – but this trade actively damages cultural heritage (see e.g. <http://savingantiquities.org/why-coins-matter-trafficking-in-undocumented-and-illegally-exported-ancient-coins-in-the-north-american-marketplace/>). The existing MoU has been key to the energetic efforts of the government of Cyprus to prevent and combat the looting of its cultural heritage and the illicit trafficking of Cypriot antiquities to the United States – where there is unfortunately a large art market for such illicit antiquities. Preventing such trade in illicit antiquities should be both a legal and moral imperative for the USA, and we therefore urge extension of the existing MoU.

Yours sincerely,

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ASOR President

Sturt Manning  
Chair, ASOR Cultural Heritage Committee