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# Illustrated Guide to Commonly-Looted Libyan Antiquities





# Illustrated Guide

## to Commonly-Looted Libyan Antiquities

**Prepared by:**

The American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR)  
in cooperation with ASOR'S Libyan colleagues and partners

**Funded by:**

U.S. Embassy to Libya, External Office (LEO)



## Introduction:

This illustrated guide, created by The American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) with funding from the U.S. Embassy to Libya, is produced for security inspectors located on the air, land, and sea borders, such as customs members, tourist police, and all guards who may encounter attempts of antiquity theft. This booklet acts as a source for identifying these archaeological objects through detailed pictures. It also provides brief information useful towards stopping such thefts, in and out of Libya.

This guide contains images of a vast variety of items, dating from prehistory to the end of the Ottoman Period. It has been organized according to the type of the objects such as sculptures, pottery, coins, and others with a general account about their forms through different periods. The guide, however, does not discuss all types of artifacts because it is designed to focus on the kinds most trafficked, to help law enforcement authorities stop antiquity theft.

The data of this guide is primarily the work of Dr. Khalid Al-Haddar and Dr. Ramadan Al-Shaibani, and it was organized and described by Dr. Khaled Al-Haddar. ASOR's representatives in Libya, Dr. Ahmad Emrage and Mr. Talal Bariun, have contributed to this guide by reviewing and editing the images and information. The layout has been designed by Mr Aiman Almesallati.



# Statues

## Greek Statues:

Funerary Greek statues, made of limestone and marble, both with facial features and without (faceless statues). Some of these monuments have their faces fully or partially covered with a veil. A large quantity of these statues were found in Cyrene, Barca, Apollonia, and Ptolemais, dating from the sixth to the first centuries B.C.E. Their height varies from 25 to 100 cm.



## Non-Funerary Greek Statues:

Early period Greek statues of young women and men, made of limestone and marble. Similar sculptures have been found in Cyrene and Barca. The height varies from 90 to 150 cm. Among these is the statue of a Sphinx standing on a column base. One of the heads of these sculptures is about 19.5 cm long and belongs to a young man. The other is about 38 cm long and portrays Zeus.



## Roman Sculptures

### Roman Sculptures Freestanding Sculptures:

Freestanding sculptures are statues of humans or animals that can be viewed from all sides and are not attached to a wall or a structure. Statues of this kind were popular amongst the Greeks and Romans as they excelled in carving human sculptures and faces in different sizes, including human-sized, larger, or smaller. They also varied in the type of material, as





they preferred to use marble, sandstone, limestone, or others. Libyan archaeological sites attest an abundance of these statues, differing in material and size, and found all over the country from Cyrene to Leptis Magna. These statues usually picture Roman gods, heroes, and other important characters. This type of sculpting was common between the first and third centuries C.E.



**Funerary Roman Statues:** Busts depicting the person's face, with distinguished features, the shoulders, and the upper half of the chest. These statues, sculpted out of marble, limestone, and sandstone, are of both men and women of a variety of ages. During the Roman ages, they were placed in niches directed towards a person's grave. They were commonly used from the early first century to the fourth century C.E.. A large number of such sculptures were found in the cemeteries of Cyrenaica. They differ in shape and are only sculpted from the front leaving the back uncarved. Due to their small size, usually between 20 to 30 cm in height, they are frequent targets of smuggling.

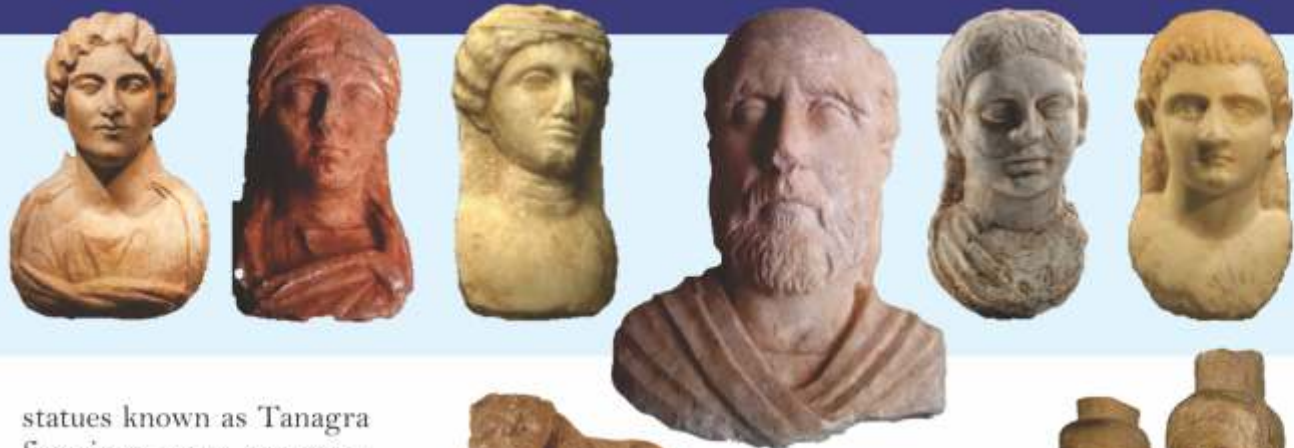


### Terracotta Statues:

Another type of smaller statue, made of clay that is then fired in a kiln. This certain type of statue was made in copious amounts in eastern Libya during the Hellenistic and early Roman Period. Some were imported during ancient times from elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and are usually found in temples and gravesites.

They are usually no larger than 30 cm in height, but larger versions have been found. These sculptures portray an array of people women, men, and children-as well as gods and animals. In the Hellenistic period, a type of these





statues known as Tanagra figurines were common, usually picturing young women in different positions.

#### **Punic Carvings:**

A small number of such items were found in Leptis Magna and Sabratha, including sculptures of priests with a cylindrical crown on the top of their heads, a small statue of Bes, and a statue of a lion.



## Reliefs

### Reliefs in Greek, Phoenician, and Roman Ages:

A technique that gives off the impression that the sculptured elements, attached to a panel of the same material, have been raised above the background plane. They are usually found on boards in temples, churches, and cemeteries in various parts of the pre-desert of Tripolitania such as those at Girza and other mausoleums around Beni Walid. This technique can also be found on graves from the Roman Punic Periods, the latter commonly depicted with carvings of the goddess Tanit.





Reliefs



# Pottery

## Pottery From Prehistoric Periods:

Libya has been known for pottery making since prehistoric times, with some of the most ancient finds including sherds of handmade jars and vessels in southern Libya. The vessels are decorated with different designs, and they are usually large. They were used for storage and cooking.



## Decorated Greek Pottery:

This certain type of pottery has been found in a multitude of sites in Cyrenaica, particularly the areas in and surrounding Tocra and Cyrene, as well as certain parts of Leptis Magna. This pottery type was mostly imported from Greece, specifically the cities of Athens, Corinth, and Laconia, in addition to islands such as Rhodes, and Chios Samos, during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. This type of pottery is differentiated from others by its rich ornamentation. Many such vessels have been discovered in Tocra, with designs from Corinth, Rhodes, and Chios. They are small to medium-sized.

Attic decorated pottery known as the Attic Black-Figure and Attic Red Figure was widely known from the sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E. It varied in size, including large Panathenaic amphoras, about 80 cm in height. These were used as prizes during sporting events in the honor of the goddess Athens, which is



decorated with various sports scenes in black drawings on a red background. Libyan museums contain dozens of them, but these vessels have been particularly prized by collectors and large numbers of them have been smuggled out of the country during the past 150 years.



Pottery

There is another type of Attic pottery decorated with red drawings on a black background known as Attic Red-Figure pottery. These are varied in terms of the shape and themes drawn on them. These vessels are normally range from 13 to 31 cm in height, although sometimes they reach up to 40 cm. Many such vessels have been found in Cyrenaica, and many examples remain in Libyan museums. They date to the fourth century B.C.E.



Other vessels are smaller in size, from 7 to 15 cm in height with various decorations. A few of them were made locally. These date to the fourth century B.C.E. More types include decorated pottery from the Hellenistic period, such as jars and jugs no larger than 20 cm in height.





Libya imported another type of pottery during this time that was usually glazed in a glossy black. Some from the Attic pottery dated back to between the sixth and third centuries B.C.E., whilst others attributed to Campania came from the period between the fourth and second centuries B.C.E. They came in assorted shapes with some having carved designs such as flowers on them. The pictured vessels are from the Attic ware between 5 and 35 cm tall dating back to the fourth century B.C.E. Some larger vessels reach up to 80 cm.



Pottery

**Polished Roman Pottery:**

This type of pottery was known for its variations in size and shape, and it dates from the first and third centuries C.E. One of its most popular variations is Eastern and Italian Terra Sigillata, characterized by its bright orange to brown color and carvings.

**Coarse Pottery:**

This type of pottery was mostly found in archaeological sites. It was locally made, and was intended for daily use in houses, temples, churches etc. Sizes range from smaller vessels used to store oils and perfumes, to larger "amphoras", used to store imported and exported goods, the latter reaching up to 100 cm in height. They rarely displayed carvings, other than the occasional stamps of Greek and Latin letters and symbols on the neck or handles and they usually have a pointed base.



Other types of coarse pottery include kitchen pots in different shapes and sizes, identified by their spherical shape and thick carved lines all around the outside. These date to the Hellenistic and Roman ages. In addition to that are jugs, bowls, and Hellenistic spindle-shaped perfume bottles. More variations are different types of spindle and Roman pear-shaped jugs from the Hellenistic and Roman ages, as well as censers and small hearths



Islamic pottery dates to the Fatimid Caliphate.





# Lamps

Pottery and metal lamps are generally considered to be the most popular form of lighting. There are numerous examples since they were in use from the end of the seventh century B.C.E. to the Ottoman period. It is worth noting that each era had its own lamps, which were made by wheel or molds. The Greek lamps were plain and sometimes painted with glossy black paint or simply made with coarse pottery. Some contained handles.

During the Roman period, many lamps were imported. They are distinguished by their numerous decorations, which showcase a variety of scenes on the lamp disc.





Furthermore, there are Byzantine lamps, most of which were locally manufactured. Most of them were shaped like pears and were decorated with various motifs, and are believed to date from the fourth century to the seventh century C.E.



Finally, there were models of Islamic lamps with green glazed paint.





## Ancient Coins

Coins have been in circulation in Libya since the sixth century B.C.E. It is of particular interest that the ancient coins were made from gold, silver, bronze, and copper. These are popularly collected and relatively easy to smuggle. Through the ages, Libyan coins were of various shapes and have different ornaments representing different periods of time. There is the Greek, which has an image depicting the silphium plant and the Hellenistic which depicts the deity of Libya, Zeus Amon, and other decorations and is characterized by the presence of a hole in it.



Punic coins were widely found in Tripolitania some of which were distinguished by the image of a horse and



Roman coins, most of which bear the images of the Roman emperors, are abundant.



So too are the Byzantine coins with Christian symbols and portraits of the emperors.





Along with the distinctive Islamic coins with Arabic phrases and Quranic verses that differ according to the period to which it belongs, there are the Ottoman coins that were widely used in Tripoli and Constantinople (Istanbul) bearing the signature of the Sultan. The coins are easy to identify, most of them are round, except for the Almohad coins, which were square. The coins are not heavy, the bronze coins sometimes covered in green rust when they have not been cleaned.



The coins vary in color and weight based on their materials.

## Other Artifacts

### Inscriptions and Manuscripts

Inscriptions in various languages are found widely throughout Libya and were commonly produced from the sixth century BC to the end of the Ottoman period. They appear in Libyan archaeological sites in numerous languages, such as Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Punic, Arabic, Ottoman, and Tifinagh and have often been produced in stone. Their material is diverse, including marble, sandstone, limestone, and even inscriptions formed by the tesserae of mosaics. The size of inscriptions varies, from small ones, easy to transport and smuggle, to medium ones, and large ones, difficult to smuggle.







Manuscripts in Arabic and Hebrew have become particular targets for smugglers given that they were written on paper and other materials and are generally easier to conceal.



Other Artifacts



### Jars Used for Human Ashes (Urns)

Jars like these are often found in Roman archaeological sites in western Libya, where cremation was common, and ashes were kept together with burnt bones in special jars stored in graves. Pots for storing ashes in cemeteries were found in eastern Libya, which were made of stone or bronze, as well as pottery jars. Sometimes inscriptions bear the names of the dead. They may be made of stone of any kind, such as marble or limestone, or they may be made of metals like bronze or from pottery.

### Glass, Ivory, and Bones

Glass, ivory, and bone artifacts have been frequently found at Libyan archeological sites. Some of the glass finds, especially the larger ones, were used to store the ashes of the deceased, whereas other bottles were used to preserve perfumes, essential oils, and others. All these finds date



back to the Roman period. Additionally, ivory and bone tools were used as awls and clothes clips. Sometimes ivory and bone carvings of plants and human motifs are also discovered.



### Metalworks

Throughout history, tools and metalwork have been used in a variety of ways. There are metal items, lamps, and statues, as well as metal tools such as scrapers and mirrors used by athletes as well as military helmets. In addition to jewelry, there are decorative ornaments made of gold, silver and bronze and date back to the earliest periods.





### Mosaic, Fresco, and Tile Panels

Many of the floors were decorated in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine eras with wonderful mosaics depicting different scenes. These scenes have occasionally been cut up and smuggled in the form of small decorative panels.

Examples include the walls of important buildings that were decorated with fresco or various decorative scenes:







ΗΙ ΕΥΚΑ



In addition, there are tile panels that were used to decorate the walls of Ottoman-period houses and mosques which are also potential targets:



Other Artifacts

## Rock Art and Tools

Many sites in Libya were known for their drawings and engravings on rocks of various scenes dating to prehistoric times. They were found in Acacus and Uweinat, and a few in other sites in eastern and western Libya. Part of these paintings have been known to be cut and then smuggled.

Stone tools are also frequently discovered at prehistoric sites. These tools come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, most being made of flint. Other tools include prehistoric mills made of stone for crushing and grinding grains.







## Fossils

These finds refer to trees and animals that were petrified. The most important of these are the diverse fossils found in the Sahabi area. In addition, the remains or bones of dinosaurs found in the Nalut area date back millions of years.





## Mummies

Not many mummies have found in Libya. The few that are known come mainly from the south and in the vicinity of Al Jaghbub. They are mummified corpses, both cloth-wrapped and unwrapped, and natural ingredients have prevented the body from decomposing.



## Architectural Elements

Architectural elements can be subjected to smuggling and theft. These elements contain decorations such as what is known as the frieze, parts of the cornice, and columns, and the most important of which are the decorated capitals. Such decoration is found widely at both archaeological sites as well as parts of historical and contemporary buildings found within Libyan cities. Here are some pictures of them:





Other Artifacts



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