

ASP Resolution Concerning the Illicit Trade in Papyri*

The American Society of Papyrologists (ASP) was founded over forty years ago “to assist international collaboration in the field of papyrology, and to contribute to the progress of this science by the organization of international congresses, by the publication or revision of works of reference, or of other subsidia essential to papyrology, and by any other means which are judged useful.”¹ In the years since, the Society has promoted and supported the cause of papyrology worldwide and especially in North America, not only through its publications and the International Congress of Papyrology, but also through its Summer Seminars and Annual Meeting; it has worked diligently towards the “educational purposes” for which it was organized.² Increasingly, the ASP has come to appreciate that this educational mission extends beyond papyrology in its narrowest sense (the decipherment and study of ancient texts written on papyrus, pottery, wood and other media) to include advocacy for the body of ancient material that is the *raison d'être* for the discipline, a development that has precedent, of course, in the custodial and curatorial roles that papyrologists have long performed. Thus the Society recognizes that papyri and other inscribed objects are part of the archaeological record and that their historical value is diminished significantly when they have been stripped from their original contexts in the course of illicit and undocumented excavations; and that the looting of archaeological sites destroys the original contexts of *all* forms of material culture and permanently diminishes our ability to reconstruct and understand the past. Since the trade in papyri and other ancient objects encourages such looting and, therefore, the destruction of the archaeological record, and because it often involves the removal and commercial exploitation of cultural heritage, the ASP resolves that:

* For the purposes of this document, the Society’s “membership” consists of its general, student, spouse, and life members.

¹ ASP Constitution I.1.

² See ASP Constitution I.2.

1) Effective 1 August 2007, its membership shall not participate *directly* in the buying or selling of papyri or other archaeological objects that have been excavated illegally or exported from their country of origin after 24 April 1972, the date upon which the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property entered into force.³ Members should consider any activity that is in violation of local or international antiquities law to be an instance of direct participation.⁴

2) Effective 1 August 2007, its membership shall not participate *indirectly* in the buying or selling of the papyri and objects described in item 1. The ASP acknowledges that indirect participation is a complicated matter with varying degrees of complicity; it therefore leaves the determination of appropriate behavior to the prudential judgment of its individual members.⁵ No action, however, that adds significantly to the commercial value of the papyri and objects described in item 1 should be considered remote (and therefore acceptable) cooperation.⁶ For example, ASP members should not authenticate illicit material for the benefit of antiquities dealers or other sellers. Moreover, the ASP declares that the publication, presentation, and/or exhibition of such material shall not occur under the Society's auspices (for example, in its *Bulletin* or at its Annual Meeting) unless the author,

³ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Canada became a signatory of the Convention on 28 March 1978; the United States, on 2 September 1983.

⁴ Of particular relevance for most papyrologists is Egyptian law 117 of 1983. An English translation of this law may be downloaded here:

unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000666/066629eo.pdf

⁵ Some examples of indirect participation: Buying “legal” objects from a dealer whom one knows to be engaged in illegal activity; accepting a contribution from a dealer known to be engaged in illegal activity.

⁶ The definition of “significant” is left to the conscience of the member.

speaker, or curator includes a frank and thorough discussion of the provenance of every item.⁷

In addition, the ASP states its earnest support for organizations that are lobbying international bodies, governments, corporations, and archaeologists to protect and preserve the archaeological record and working to ensure that archaeological field work is conducted at the highest standard possible; and it encourages its membership to promote these causes actively. It also urges the United States Senate to ratify the 1954 (Hague) Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict⁸ and its First Protocol, which addresses the illegal removal of objects from occupied territory.⁹

⁷ Enforcement of the publication/presentation restrictions is the responsibility of the editorial boards of *BASP* and the ASP monographs and the program committee, as applicable; in extraordinary matters (e.g., a special exhibit sponsored by the Society), the ASP Board (or its designate) has responsibility. The ASP recognizes that acquisition data are often imperfect or even nonexistent; for this reason, it considers a good faith effort to illuminate an object's provenance to be sufficiently thorough. If a party believes that serious harm will result from the disclosure of provenance, that party may petition (in writing) the appropriate editor-in-chief or committee chair for an exemption. Violations of the other components of this resolution will not result in sanctions.

⁸ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁹ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15391&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html