



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

April 30, 2004

Fact Sheet

RECENT ARTIFACT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATIONS BY U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE)

1) ICE AGENTS RECOVER THOUSANDS OF TREASURED IRAQI ARTIFACTS



Before hostilities began in Iraq, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deployed a team of agents to the Middle East at the request of the U.S. Central Command. Embedded with U.S. military units, the ICE agents entered Iraq in March/April 2003 to conduct a variety of operations. While their primary mission was to look for evidence of U.S. companies that may have supplied Iraq with weaponry, ICE agents played a critical role in the recovery of artifacts missing or looted from the Iraqi National Museum.

After reports of looting from Iraqi museums first surfaced, the ICE team launched an immediate art recovery effort with the U.S. military. ICE agents began working with curators at the Iraq National Museum to catalogue missing items. They also launched a campaign to prompt the return of items by advertising rewards and an amnesty for anyone voluntarily returning artifacts. As the campaign progressed, ICE developed information on the location of secret vaults in Iraq where artifacts had been stored before the war.

To date, these efforts have resulted in the recovery of roughly 1,000 missing artifacts and 39,500 manuscripts. Among the most significant archaeological recoveries by the ICE team in Iraq was the fabled "Treasure of Nimrud," a collection of more than 600 precious items dating back to the Assyrian civilization in 800 B.C. In June 2003, ICE agents located this treasure in a vault under the Central Bank of Iraq. ICE agents have also recovered a priceless vase from the 5th Century B.C. and a statue of an Assyrian king dating back to 900 B.C.

2) ICE RETURNS 14th CENTURY MANUSCRIPT TO VIENNA JEWISH COMMUNITY



In November 2003, ICE returned a 14th century Hebrew manuscript stolen by the Nazis during World War II to the Austrian Jewish community. ICE Assistant Secretary Michael J. Garcia presented the manuscript to Ms. Erika Jakobovits, Executive Director of the Jewish Community Organization of Vienna. The manuscript is one of the oldest versions of the Kabalistic text known as "Sepher Yetzirah" and is valued at approximately \$68,000.

The ICE investigation began in March 2002, when a newspaper article reported that the manuscript was to be sold at a New York auction house. The probe revealed that Aaron Stefansky, a U.S. citizen, had smuggled the manuscript into the U.S. after purchasing it from an antiquities dealer in Israel.

On June 10, 2002, New York ICE agents seized the manuscript after determining that it had been stolen by the Nazis from the Jewish community in Austria. The auction house agreed to retain custody of the manuscript pending the outcome of the investigation. In March 2003, Stefansky was arrested and pleaded guilty for his role in smuggling the manuscript for commercial purposes. Stefansky was later sentenced in the Southern District of New York.

3) ICE RETURNS 1,400-YEAR-OLD ARTIFACTS TO HONDURAS

In September 2003, ICE returned 279 smuggled Pre-Columbian artifacts to the government of Honduras in a repatriation ceremony at the Honduran Embassy in Washington, D.C. The Pre-Columbian artifacts, which included ornate figurines, bowls, and pottery made by the Mayan culture in Honduras between approximately 600 and 900 A.D., had been purchased in Honduras and illegally smuggled to the United States in 1998.

In 1998, Douglas Hall, 45, of Ohio, and Tulio Monterroso-Bonilla, 39, of Guatemala, traveled to Honduras where they purchased the artifacts for \$11,000, according to a federal indictment. The items were then shipped through Miami and falsely declared as having a value of \$37. They were later offered for sale at a shop in Ohio.

ICE agents launched an investigation which found that the articles had been smuggled. In June 2002, a federal grand jury in Ohio indicted Hall and Monterroso-Bonilla in connection with the smuggling effort. Hall was convicted in Oct. 2002. Monterroso-Bonilla pleaded guilty in August 2002.

4) ICE RETURNS HISTORIC PISTOL TO SWITZERLAND



In February 2004, ICE returned to Switzerland the oldest surviving example in the world of a prototype, self-loading 1989 Borchardt Luger pistol. The pistol, bearing serial number five, was stolen in 1996 from Switzerland's Waffenfabrik museum.

After months of investigation, ICE agents in Texas seized the rare pistol from an internationally known antique firearms collector in July 2003. Experts from a British auction house later determined that the 106-year old pistol was the one stolen from the Swiss museum in 1996 and determined that it was worth approximately \$720,000.

5) ICE AGENTS SEIZE STOLEN 16th CENTURY MEXICAN ALTARPIECE

In April 2004, ICE agents seized a stolen, 500-year-old Judeo-Christian altarpiece that was being offered for sale at a price of \$225,000 in an art consignment shop in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The ICE investigation determined that the altarpiece had been stolen in April 2001 from a convent in Puebla, Mexico. ICE is currently protecting the altarpiece and intends to return it to the people of Mexico. The ICE investigation continues.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, responsible for the enforcement of border, economic, infrastructure, and transportation security laws. ICE seeks to prevent acts of terrorism by targeting the people, money and materials that support terrorist and criminal activities.