

## Illicit trade of archaeological artefacts

The looting of sites and illegal trafficking of artefacts, which began in the nineteenth century, is a serious issue in the management of archaeological properties. Apart from the information lost, it also impoverishes communities and countries in terms of the symbols and memories of their identity.

At the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s, thefts of cultural objects, including archaeological findings, increased from museums and archaeological sites, particularly in Asia and Africa. These were then sold at international markets in Europe and America. Some of the objects were bought or eventually ended up at some internationally-known museums, such as the British Museum, the Louvre, the Smithsonian in America, and major museums in other European capitals. The international illegal trade in archaeological objects reached such alarming proportions that it was necessary to introduce a ban to curb the practice. Thus the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* was established. The Convention calls upon countries to:

- a. cooperate in preventing the illicit trade in cultural objects;
- b. cooperate in returning cultural properties taken illegally from other countries (restitution);
- c. safeguard their cultural properties.

Some governments, particularly in the developing world, have ratified the Convention, but many are yet to do so. Despite international efforts, many countries continue to lose valuable archaeological heritage objects.

## Archaeology resources as cultural landscapes

The practice of archaeological heritage management and conservation in the last decades has been oriented towards the safeguarding and protection of that which is irreplaceable and that which is threatened by loss, damage and misuse (Logan and Reeves, 2009). This is derived from the idea that any activity which disturbs the landscape threatens the archaeological record. Therefore, the rapid growth in many parts of the world resulting from modernization and infrastructural development becomes a major threat to the archaeological resources of the world. For example, the decision by the Egyptian Government to build the Aswan High Dam in the 1950s was going to lead to the destruction of some of the most important archaeological sites and monuments along the Nile. This triggered international protest as it would have resulted in the flooding of the treasures in Nubia. Faced with this threat, the governments of Egypt and Sudan requested UNESCO's assistance in 1959 and the organization agreed to launch