

October 20, 2000

Dr. J. Dennis O'Connor, Provost
Smithsonian Institution
SI Building
Washington, DC 20560-0010

Re: *The Smithsonian Magazine* Advertising the Sale of Antiquities

Dear Dr. O'Connor:

On behalf of all of the major national professional organizations representing archaeology in the United States—the Society for American Archaeology, the Archaeological Institute of America, the Society for Historical Archaeology, and the Archaeology Division of the American Anthropological Association—I am writing to object, in the strongest terms, to *The Smithsonian Magazine* advertizing the sale of antiquities. Because of our long-standing efforts to combat commercial trade in antiquities, we were appalled to see, in the magazine's August issue, Sadigh Gallery's full-page color ad (attached) that invites the reader to:

Own a piece of HISTORY. We specialize in authentic ancient artifacts and coins. Prehistoric, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Near Eastern, African, Oriental and Precolumbian at WHOLE SALE PRICES to the public. (p. 85)

We believe that the Smithsonian, as the United States National Museum, has important responsibilities to help preserve and protect the world's irreplaceable cultural heritage. The Smithsonian Institution's complicity in the sale of antiquities runs directly contrary to those goals.

It has long been clear that the commercial market for antiquities is the primary stimulus for the looting of archaeological sites world-wide. Much of the supply of archaeological materials for the market derives from the widespread looting that is, at an alarming rate, destroying archaeological sites throughout the world. In their efforts to acquire a few marketable pieces, looters destroy associated architecture, human burials, and other artifacts as well as environmental remains.

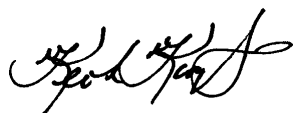
In contrast, archaeologists' ability to build a scientific understanding of the past is contingent on the systematic recovery of artifacts, architecture, and environmental materials and on their availability for scientific study. For more than 100 years Congress has acted to protect the world's cultural heritage through the enactment of laws (such as the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, and the 1906 Antiquities Act) and the ratification of international conventions (such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property).

A recent nationwide poll conducted by Harris Interactive found that 96% of the public feel that there should be laws protecting archaeological sites and 90% believe that laws should prevent the general public from importing artifacts from a country that does not want those artifacts exported (<http://www.saa.org/Education/publiced-poll.html>).

By running advertisements for antiquities, we believe that the Smithsonian Institution indirectly encourages looting and, consequently, the unmitigated loss of the irreplaceable archaeological record of humanity's past. We strongly urge that the Smithsonian immediately implement a policy that precludes *The Smithsonian Magazine* (or any other Smithsonian publication) from advertizing the sale of antiquities or items sacred to Native American groups (such as medicine bundles or katsina masks) and from running ads for any company or individual that trades in any of these items.

We would suggest that you consult with relevant curators at NMNH or NMAI. If you have any questions or if we can help, please feel free to contact me at the Society for American Archaeology.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith W. Kintigh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping tail.

Keith W. Kintigh
President

cc: Lawrence Small, Secretary of the Smithsonian
Richard West, Director, NMAI
Robert W. Fri, Director, NMNH
Don Moser, Editor, *Smithsonian Magazine*
Bruce Bernstein, NMAI Assistant Director for Cultural Resources
William Fitzhugh, NMNH Director, Department of Anthropology