

The Case of the Hobby Lobby Artefacts

Workshop 4, Activity 1

Activity Outline

This activity follows the real life case of the Hobby Lobby artefacts. Participants take on the role of investigators for the American **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**, which handles cases of art and antiquities crime, and transnational crime. This card based exercise is designed to help participants understand the role played by the different groups involved in this case, as well as the legislative complexities and ambiguities that accompanied the investigative process.

Duration: c. 1 hour

Participant Instructions

Split up into three groups of c.5 persons each. Using the cards supplied (see below), each group should choose one route of investigation to pursue – you will split up further later on in the activity, if you again choose different routes to investigate. But ensure that you stay in in groups of 2-3 to discuss the outcomes. The cards will provide hints to help you in your investigation.

During the course of this activity, participants are expected to touch upon the following discussion points:

- To understand the structure of the antiquities market and the different agents and interest groups involved;
- To assess the limitations of international legislation in controlling these activities;
- To consider the role of cultural heritage experts within this structure.

Note: Moderator should make sure that they print enough cards for everyone, according to the number of participants.

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Introduction

The border security agency has alerted you about a shipment they believe to contain smuggled antiquities: it consists of several crates that contain **c. 5,500 ancient artefacts**, including **450 clay tablets** bearing cuneiform inscriptions. They are intended to go to a company called **Hobby Lobby** that sells arts-and-crafts supplies, and their country of origin is listed as **“Turkey”**.

Your objective is to find out **how** these artefacts came to America, **where** they came from, and establish if they have been smuggled **illegally**, so they might be **repatriated** to their country of origin.

Initial Inspection

There are several ways to proceed now. Come together in groups of 4-5, and turn the relevant cards:

- 1) Hobby Lobby is owned by **Steve Green**, whose family also owns the charity **Green Foundation**. They have announced that they will open a **museum** later that year.
 - You could run a **background check** on Mr Green and his foundation. (**Card 1**)
- 2) The crates are marked **“hand made clay tiles (samples)”**, and they are addressed to several sub-companies of Hobby Lobby. As investigators, you know that such practice is used for **smuggling** cultural property so as not to attract the attention of customs agents.
 - You could ask at the **airport** where the flight that brought the crates in originated (**Card 2**).
- 3) The objects are apparently **ancient Near Eastern artefacts**.
 - You could bring in an **expert** on ancient Near Eastern studies to determine whether they are genuine, and to assess where such objects usually originate (**Card 3**).

Further investigation

After choosing their card, the groups proceed to choose the next card based on which line of investigation seems most promising to them. Continue this chain process through to its conclusion. Hopefully all groups and even individuals will have followed a diverse path.

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Front	Back
(1)	<p>The Greens have sought counsel with an antiquities law expert about a purchase of Near Eastern antiquities in 2010. They had found the artefacts for sale in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) You could interview the expert in antiquities law (take card 1.1).2) You could look into what the consultant showed to Mr Green at the UAE dealer's (take card 1.2).
(2)	<p>The flight originated in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), not Turkey. The sender of the crate was an art dealer in the Emirates. Do you want to look into this man's business?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Yes (take card 1.2)2) No (keep this card)
(3)	<p>The artefacts are most likely of Iraqi origin. Some of the cuneiform tablets are from an unidentified Sumerian city.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) You could do some research into what is known about this ancient city (take card 1.3).2) You could see what antiquities crime researchers say about cuneiform tablet collections that have recently surfaced on the market (take card 1.4).

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Front	Back
(1.1)	<p>The expert warned them not to buy the antiquities because they may be looted in Iraq. Import of Iraqi objects is illegal. Are you satisfied with this expertise?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Yes (keep this card)2) No: look into what antiquities crime researchers say about Iraqi objects on the market (keep this card and take card 1.4)
(1.2)	<p>The dealer in the UAE met with Mr Green together with another dealer from Israel. The paperwork of the Israeli dealer says that the tablets were inherited from his father. Are you satisfied?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Yes (keep this card)2) No: see if this story is true with Israeli colleagues (keep this card and take card 1.5).3) No: ask UAE colleagues to find out about the UAE dealer (keep this card and take card 1.6).
(1.3)	<p>The city that is named in the tablets must have been in Southern Iraq, near some of the sites that were looted badly during the war. Do you want to research further?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) No (keep this card)2) Yes: look into what antiquities crime researchers say about Southern Iraqi objects on the antiquities market (keep this card and take card 1.4)
(1.4)	<p>The import of Iraqi antiquities is explicitly banned in the US since 1991. Nevertheless, a lot of Iraqi artefacts have surfaced on the international art market since that time, and even more since 2003. Recently, a lot of these objects have been bought and sold by dealers and collectors in Gulf States such as the Emirates (keep this card).</p>

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<p>(1.5)</p>	<p>There is no evidence for the antiquities in question prior to 2010. The dealer's story may be made up. Israel has laws that regulate the export of their own cultural heritage, but no laws regarding the import and export of other countries' cultural property. Syria, Jordan and Lebanon have all been transit ports in major cases of antiquities smuggling in recent years (keep this card).</p>
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<p>(1.6)</p>	<p>You cannot find out more about the dealer in the Emirates. However, you find out that the Gulf States have recently become notorious for dealing in potentially looted cultural objects from across the Near East (keep this card and take card 1.4).</p>
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End of Game Discussion: do we have enough evidence?

Once all groups of participants have come to the end of their line of investigation (usually by getting a card that says “**keep this card**”), come together to discuss the results. Everyone will have collected several pieces of evidence now, but there should be variability in the routes taken.

Do you think you have enough to make a case against Hobby Lobby and to repatriate the looted artefacts?

A Happy Ending? Over 5.500 ancient artefacts repatriated to Iraq

This game is loosely based on a real case. The owners of the company Hobby Lobby started collecting antiquities in 2006, and opened the doors for their “Museum of the Bible” in 2017. Keep in mind that in our day, it is very hard to amass so many antiquities in such a short time without buying illicit artefacts – this is especially the case with Iraqi antiquities! The Green foundation was made to return these artefacts and pay a fine – but many antiquities, including some Iraqi ones, are still in their possession. They have not been charged with any criminal offence.

Ensure that participants understand that repatriating these artefacts cannot undo the damage that has been done to the archaeological record and to the communities living around the sites of their origin. We have all lost because a rich man felt his desires were more important than Iraq’s cultural heritage. To stop this injustice, we cannot count on the legal system. Heritage experts and law enforcement in many countries need to work together and develop better policies and practices.