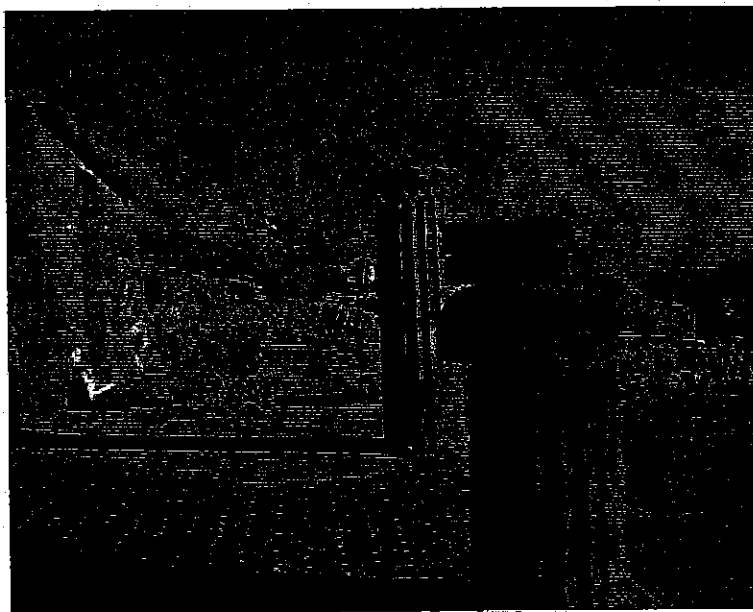


A REPORTER AT LARGE

HEAD FOUND ON FIFTH AVENUE

Investigators finally think they know who's been taking the treasures of ancient Sicily.

BY ALEXANDER STILLE



FROM the hill town of Aidone—about half a mile above sea level—you can see much of eastern Sicily. In the distance, almost at the sea, the snowcapped peak of Mt. Etna dominates the landscape, its volcanic crater smoking and flaring. Stretching out beneath it is more than a hundred square miles of rich, fertile farmland. Burnt-brown in the summer, the valley is a lush green in wintertime and explodes into a riot of flowers during the spring.

The dramatic beauty of this landscape inspired the Greek myth of the seasons: in these fields, by the Lake of Pergusa, the beautiful young Persephone was picking flowers when Hades, god of the Underworld, snatched her

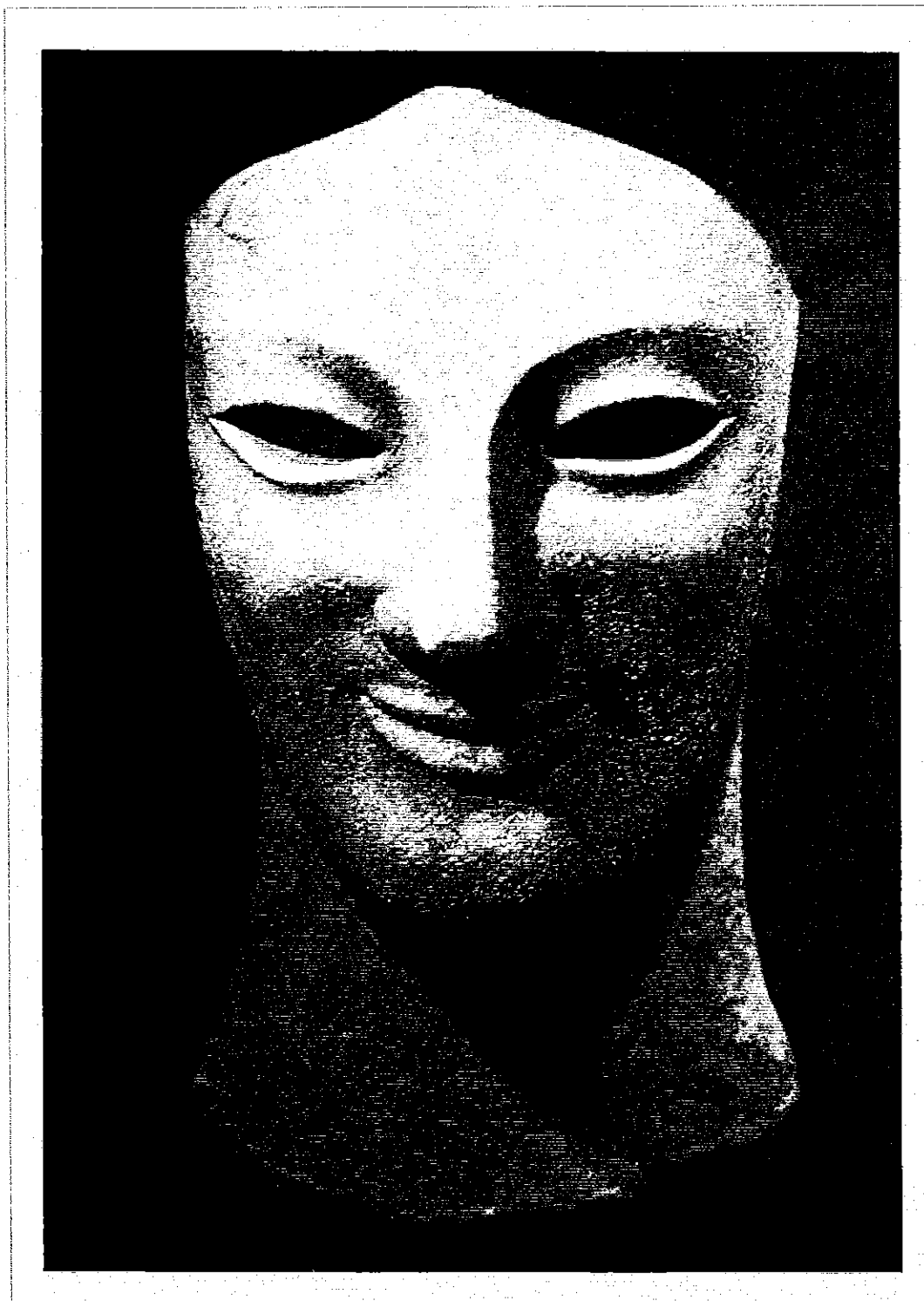
up and carried her off to the land of the dead. Persephone's mother, Demeter, grieved so prodigiously that the landscape withered into barrenness. Zeus intervened, and Hades agreed to let Persephone spend half of each year with her mother. Thus, with the return of Persephone each spring, Demeter, goddess of grain and plenty, would bring the world back to life.

The Greeks had colonized much of eastern Sicily by the sixth century B.C., only to be conquered by the Romans three centuries later. Just a couple of miles below Aidone lie the excavated ruins of Morgantina, one of the most spectacular yet least known ancient sites in Sicily. Once a thriving Greek city of ten thousand, Morgantina was part of

the Kingdom of Syracuse, whose port city was about eighty miles away, and which, along with Athens and Alexandria, was one of the great centers of Hellenic culture. Morgantina was one of the last of the Greek settlements in Sicily to fall to the Roman Army. As the soldiers approached, the Greeks buried their wealth: personal fortunes in the form of gold coins and jewelry; the sacred cups and bowls used in religious ceremonies; and the most precious statues from their shrines. Remarkably, these treasures remained buried for more than nineteen hundred years, because the city was "lost" during the Middle Ages. In those turbulent times, the residents of the valley withdrew to a nearby hilltop to build the fortified town of Aidone.

A sixth-century B.C. Greek sculpture that is believed to have been looted from the archeological site at Morgantina (above).

THIS PAGE: MASSIMO SBRAGLIA/CONTRASTO/ANZEIK; OPPOSITE: MORGANTINA ARCHIVE





Edman Wilson

relationship. The *tombaroli* would shadow the archeologists so as to learn where to dig, and news of some particularly successful "night digging" might guide the official excavators. The *tombaroli's* biggest finds were always the topic of local gossip, for the men who dug up an important piece might have to show it to several people to gauge its value and would be tempted to brag, especially after the artifact was safely out of the country. Moreover, the flourishing black market surely required some collusion or complicity on the part of the area's more cultivated and worldly citizens; otherwise, it's difficult to imagine how an important antiquity could have passed from a poor peasant in Aidone to a multimillionaire hedge-fund manager in Manhattan. Italian

and Morgantina reverted to farmland.

In the past few decades, however, Morgantina has become a rich trove for both archeologists and clandestine diggers known as *tombaroli* (tomb robbers). "You see all those holes?" an old *tombarolo* told me proudly, pointing to a landscape now as pockmarked as a honeycomb. "I made them." Moreover, some of the objects he dug up have found their way into foreign collections, despite Italy's strict laws against exporting ancient artifacts. Now, after years of inattention, local prosecutors are aggressively investigating whether some spectacular pieces in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and in the homes of prominent New York collectors were looted from this area. The claims for their restitution may have a profound effect on the international trade in antiquities.

Archeologists from Princeton began digging at Morgantina in 1955, after chance finds of ancient coins and artifacts indicated the presence of a Greek settlement of some kind. Scholars knew of the existence of Morgantina from literary sources, but they had not known its location. Gradually, out of the overgrown fields, an ancient Greek agora, or main square, began emerging—ringed by a grand polygonal stairway—containing shops, temples and houses

with mosaic floors, and also an elegant limestone theatre. Hundreds of coins stamped in the ancient city's mint proved that the site was indeed Morgantina. With its city plan well preserved, it sits surrounded by olive groves and cypress trees and rolling fields as far as the eye can see, giving one the feeling of a rural Greek city that has been only recently abandoned by its inhabitants.

Sicily's agricultural economy has been in decline since the Second World War, and in the nineteen-fifties the area around Aidone was so poor that many men would pass entire months in bed each winter, when no farmwork was available, in order to consume as few calories as possible. So it's hardly surprising that some villagers also began to work the fields, looking now for antiquities—after dark, and during the winter, when the scholars had returned to academe. For almost three decades, the official two-hundred-acre site was not even patrolled at night, and outside its boundaries lay another four hundred acres of important archeological territory—most of it in private hands and all of it entirely unsupervised.

Officially, of course, the looters and the scholars are fierce adversaries. But in a place as small and inbred as Aidone, where everyone knows everyone else's business, they also forged a symbiotic

relationship. authorities now believe that the link between the looters and the collectors was a flamboyant local connoisseur with a foot in each world.

ON the morning of December 5, 1998, about twenty police officers raided the home of Vincenzo Cammarata, in Enna, the capital of the province, about twenty miles from Aidone. The police were reported to have been so overwhelmed by the quantity of Greek and Roman artifacts in the house—cases of vases, marble statues, terra-cotta figurines, masks, sarcophagi, ancient arms, tools, and coins, numbering in the tens of thousands—that Cammarata was able to slip away and escape on his motorbike, but he turned himself in to the authorities the next day.

At the age of fifty-one, Cammarata is a tall, imposing man, with aquiline features, and yet he has a boyish, athletic side, zipping around town on his scooter like any local teen-ager. He has often passed himself off as a baron, although his family does not have a noble title. He is, however, a genuine scholar, adventurer, eccentric, and passionate collector of antiquities. "I am not a Sicilian. I am an ancient Greek. I have Greek blood in my veins!" he has told friends. Cammarata bought an eighteenth-century villa about ten miles from

THE NIGHT DIGGERS

Morgantina, overlooking the area's other great ancient site, the Roman imperial villa at Piazza Armerina, which has an acre of perfectly preserved mosaic floors. In the spirit of his imperial neighbors, he added to his own house a gallery of columns with original Roman capitals. Later, he bought a thirteenth-century castle nearby where friends said he intended to display a collection of medieval torture devices.

"He is the closest thing I have met to a Medici prince on the hoof," says R. Ross Holloway, a professor of archeology at Brown, who first met Cammarata during the seventies, at academic conferences on numismatics. "He had a very dramatic, aristocratic appearance, with raven-black hair," Holloway recalls. "He was a very sporty fellow—I heard he had been on the Italian water-polo team." But Cammarata cut a strange figure at international conferences: he would pull precious ancient coins from his briefcase to illustrate a point, while other scholars referred to pieces in museums. Collecting is generally frowned upon in numismatic circles, because it is believed to encourage looting. Ancient coins are crucial historical documents, minted to record the deification of an emperor or deliverance from a plague. They can give scholars important information about the commercial and political ties that held the ancient world together—unless, of course, they are hastily dug up and spirited away from the place where they were discovered. Moreover, Cammarata was rumored to sell as well as buy ancient coins, which is against Italian law. In fact, he was detained by the police at a conference in Switzerland in 1979 for selling fake ancient coins. (He was released after he returned the buyer's money.)

"Cammarata sort of supported the rumors that were going around about him," Holloway told me. "He tried hard to give you the impression that he knew more than he could tell—that he had not only knowledge but power." At a conference in 1983, Cammarata couldn't keep from bragging to Holloway. "You Americans didn't find everything at Mor-

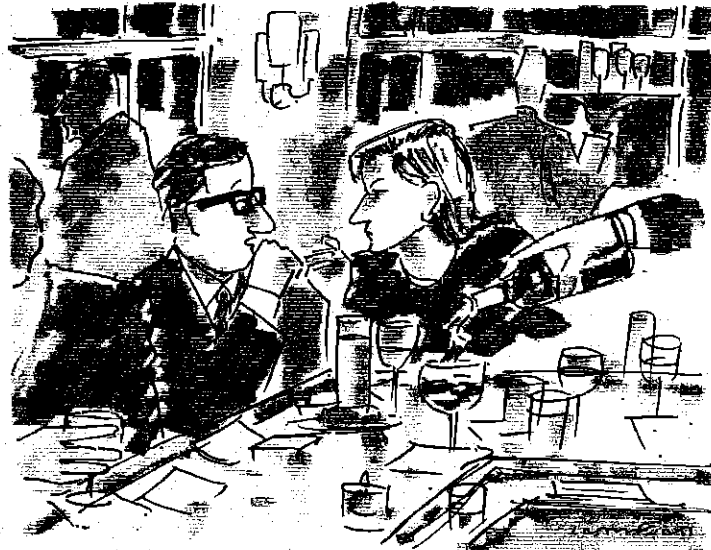
gantina," he said, and he went on to describe two extraordinary Archaic sculptures, consisting of heads with matching hands and feet, which had to have been looted from the site.

Far from keeping his collection under wraps, Cammarata proudly conducted tours for foreign dignitaries, judges, prosecutors, and members of parliament; he also loaned pieces to at least three Sicilian exhibitions. He had recently taken steps to register his antiquities with the local authorities and had begun making plans to create his own museum. Yet for many years no one seems to have questioned how a private individual with no stable profession was able to amass such a collection in a country where it is illegal to buy or sell any artifact that was dug up after 1909 (the year of Italy's first antiquities law). Cammarata maintains that he bought all his pieces from Italian collections that had been assembled before 1909.

The investigators who raided Cammarata's houses last year, however, claim that many of the objects they found had no documents to establish their provenance, and they suspect that Cammarata bought and sold looted pieces in order to finance his own prodigious collecting habit. A warrant authorizing his

arrest charged that he was the head of an antiquities-smuggling ring that included two Sicilian university professors, the owner of a major auction house, and two local businessmen—all of them prominent collectors. "From our investigations, we have discovered the existence of a genuine criminal organization dedicated to the recovery and trafficking of archeological objects, in which irreproachable members of the 'good' society of Catania and Enna are a part," prosecutors informed the court.

The other part of the conspiracy, of course, is the *tombaroli*. Snippets of wiretapped conversations which were quoted in court papers show that the accused were in contact with the night diggers at Morgantina and made frequent trips to view the diggers' finds. Moreover, Cammarata—alone among the defendants—was charged with maintaining ties to full-fledged gangsters. "The novelty of this investigation is the clear presence of the Mafia in the trafficking of antiquities," Luigi Lombardo, the investigating magistrate in the case, told me. Worldwide, the black-market trade in art is estimated to be worth between two billion and six billion dollars a year—the fourth-largest criminal enterprise, after drugs, arms, and money laundering. "This was too large a busi-



"I love you, Ilene. O.K.? Get over it!"

ness to go unnoticed and unexploited by Cosa Nostra," Lombardo said. "The Mafia has realized that, in fact, here in Sicily our greatest resource is our rich history and archeological past."

Cammarata could be the key to understanding how *tombaroli*, scholars, dealers, collectors, and mobsters have conspired to exploit this resource. So far, he has not cooperated with the investigation, and he remains in prison, awaiting trial. But in the weeks before his arrest, when he became aware that he was the target of an investigation, Cammarata was heard on a wiretapped call telling one of the other defendants that if the authorities didn't back off he would reveal "a dossier about all these things that will make Italy tremble."

THE Americans working at Morgantina have always been aware of the clandestine trade in artifacts. Malcolm Bell III, the director of the site, who teaches art history at the University of Virginia, first came to Morgantina as a Princeton graduate student in the nineteen-sixties. When he and his

wife visited the site in the winter of 1969, they noticed that somebody had cleared away a piece of hillside and uncovered what looked like the entrance to a tomb. The Bells ran to fetch the carabinieri, and returned with them to discover three local men standing in the open door of a tomb filled with about two hundred and fifty Greek vases and other artifacts. The leader of the *tombaroli*, Giuseppe Mascara, didn't move, as if he were awestruck by what he had found. "He had discovered what is still the largest chamber tomb at Morgantina. It took us the rest of the month to excavate it."

Mascara was arrested but was soon released under one of the Italian government's periodic amnesty decrees. The contents of the "Mascara tomb" were sent to the museum in Aidone, a two-story former Capuchin convent, which has room for only a tiny portion of the twenty thousand artifacts that have been unearthed at Morgantina since 1955. Most of them sit boxed in warehouses, and although several thousand tourists come each summer day to

see the mosaics at the Roman Piazza Armerina, only a trickle bother to make the short trip to Morgantina.

Since that first encounter, Mascara and Bell have coexisted uneasily, frequently spotting one another along the narrow streets of Aidone. Each is eager to know what the other knows, yet they avoid speaking. Mascara, a small, weather-beaten man of seventy with a scar across the bridge of his nose, is still bitter about losing what was perhaps his biggest find. Bell, a slightly built, bespectacled scholar from an old family in Savannah, Georgia, is a man of almost puritanical rectitude, who recoils from the murky world of the *tombaroli*. Nevertheless, he confessed to me that he had a grudging admiration for Mascara, who had become a skilled excavator before cheap, portable metal detectors became available, in the nineteen-seventies. "He has a good eye," Bell said.

When Bell was appointed to administer the Morgantina site, in 1980, looting was rampant, and his efforts to curb it provoked small but sinister acts of violence: the window of Bell's car was broken, the air was let out of his tires, an ancient vase on the site was smashed, and columns were knocked over. There were signs that the vandalism was an inside job, perpetrated, perhaps, by some of the site's own caretakers. Suspicion fell on one particular supervisor, who seemed to rule Morgantina like a feudal lord, demanding tributes of fresh ricotta from the men he hired as guards. The man was investigated but not charged; when he was transferred, however, the vandalism stopped.

Around this time, Bell also began to hear rumors of an exceptional discovery that the *tombaroli* had made a few years earlier—two life-size heads of marble, with corresponding hands and feet but no bodies. In certain parts of the Greek world, such as Sicily, where fine-quality stone was in short supply, artists would create or import what are called "acrolithic" statues, whose visible parts—head, feet, and hands—were made of stone, while the rest was made of wood and covered in drapery. The Morgantina heads had a distinctive look, which had impressed itself on the people who had seen them: the foreheads were almost triangular, with almond-shaped hollows for eyes and



"Pushing the envelope. How about you?"

THE ANTIQUITIES MAFIA

the strange, enigmatic smiles typical of certain Archaic Greek sculptures from the late sixth and early fifth century B.C.

Acting on these rumors, in 1979 the Italian government had ordered an excavation at the spot where the statues were said to have been found. Italian archeologists uncovered evidence of recent looting, the remains of what appeared to be a sanctuary to Persephone and Demeter, and terracotta fragments from a large-scale sculpture group, but no heads, hands, or feet. The following year, a London dealer named Robin Symes sold to one of New York's most prominent collectors two exceptional acrolithic sculptures after acquiring them in Switzerland. The figures are thought to represent Persephone and Demeter.

When Bell returned to Morgantina in the summer of 1981, he heard fresh rumors—these about *un servizio di argento*, or silver service. The group of beautifully crafted objects was said to include ladles and bowls, which explains why locals called it a "service." The same year, the Metropolitan Museum bought the first of two installments of a fifteen-piece set of Greek silver for \$2.7 million, which its curators described in a museum bulletin as "some of the finest Hellenistic silver known from Magna Graecia." This set, too, contained ladles and bowls, and also had a small receptacle for burning incense, which indicated that it had been used for religious purposes. One of the most extraordinary pieces was the lid of a small bowl: it had a delicately worked sculptural relief of Scylla, who, according to legend, was turned into a sea monster and took her revenge by attacking sailors off the eastern coast of Sicily. The Metropolitan's catalogue was vague about the silver's origins, explaining that it was "presumably found together a generation ago," and that it was produced either in "Taranto or in Eastern Sicily," in the second half of the third century B.C.

In 1984, the Met put the silver on display in a niche off the main lobby. When Bell first saw it, on a visit to the museum in 1987, he immediately suspected that it was the silver he had heard about at Morgantina. People who



S. GROSS

"Can I borrow those kittens for an hour? I want to freak out the people who had me spayed."

had seen the pieces there had been particularly struck by two small silver horns, which might have originally been attached to a leather helmet. The Met silver also contains two silver horns. "They were the key, because they are so unusual," Bell told me.

Bell wrote to the Met in 1987, stating his suspicions about the silver's origins. He also spoke to friends and colleagues about the rumors of two acrolithic sculptures. He soon heard that statues of that description were for sale.

EACH time Bell uncovered new evidence about possible looting at Morgantina, he presented it to Silvio Raffiotta, who was a prosecutor in Enna. Raffiotta had grown up in Aidone and his family has a farmhouse on the archeological site of Morgantina. Like many Sicilians in the area, he had a passion for antiquities, and he became Bell's most effective ally in the fight against looting, and also a good friend. The news that both the silver and the acroliths had been spotted in American collections prompted Raffiotta to launch the first comprehensive investigation of looting in the area of Aidone.

Raffiotta uncovered a network of more than fifty *tombatori* operating throughout southern Italy. At its center was Giuseppe Mascara, the man Bell and his wife had caught in 1969; in early 1988 he was arrested for antiquities trafficking. In an effort to reduce his sentence, he began to tell Raffiotta about some of the more important objects he had seen dug up at Morgantina. Among other treasures that he described in considerable detail were

both the acroliths and the Metropolitan silver.

A few months later, in the summer of 1988, the J. Paul Getty Museum unveiled a pair of remarkable acrolithic sculptures, as well as a statue of a Greek goddess, thought to represent Aphrodite, for which it had paid twenty million dollars. The sudden appearance of such remarkable pieces from twenty-five hundred years ago created an immediate sensation—and soon precipitated a scandal.

Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum, who had since become the editor of *Connoisseur*, published an exposé declaring that all three statues had been dug up illegally from Morgantina. Like Bell, Hoving had worked at Morgantina as a Princeton graduate student, and he had maintained close ties with the area. When he was the director of the Met, from 1967 to 1977, he hired men from Aidone as security guards, and they kept him abreast of the news from eastern Sicily. Although he was no longer director when the Met purchased the silver, in his account of his tenure at the museum, "Making the Mummies Dance," Hoving admits that he, too, subscribed to the traditional "don't ask, don't tell" policy on antiquities common to most American museums, and that he bought many undocumented pieces for the Met in what he now refers to as "the age of piracy." He began his crusade against looted art after he left the museum job and became more concerned with selling books and magazines than with building a collection.

Amid the brouhaha created by the *Connoisseur* article, the acroliths were

removed from the Getty gallery. The museum would say only that they had been returned to their owner, an anonymous private collector. But it was soon discovered that the acroliths belonged to Maurice Tempelsman, a wealthy New York businessman, who had been Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's companion for many years. Privately, some scholars chided the Getty for removing the pieces before researchers were able to study them. They have never been seen in public again, and only a few snapshots of the exhibit exist. Tempelsman has consistently refused to discuss the matter, but earlier this year his spokesman said, "In 1980, Mr. Tempelsman purchased these acroliths from Robin Symes. . . . He bought the sculptures from a reputable dealer and he is pretty convinced that they were acquired legitimately."

In 1993, Malcolm Bell made a request to the Metropolitan to examine the silver, but was repeatedly put off, even though it is standard practice for museums to make their collections available to scholars. Then, in 1996, the Italian government presented the Metropolitan

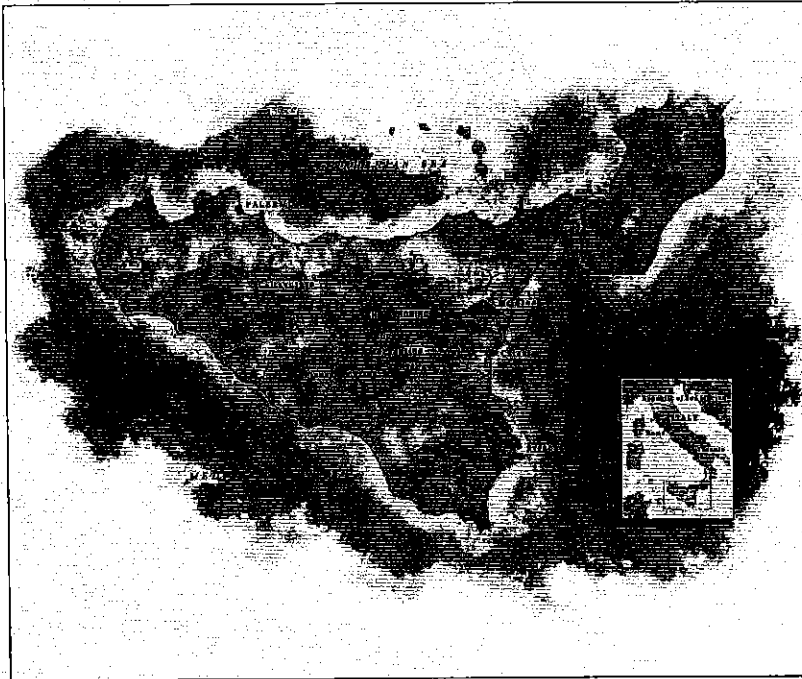
with the testimony that Raffiotta had taken from Mascara and other *tombatori*, which seemed to indicate that the silver had been looted from Morgantina. Ashton Hawkins, the Met's executive vice-president and general counsel, informed the Italians that the museum could not rely on the word of a convicted looter trying to reduce his sentence. He pointed out that the Met had included a picture of the silver in its 1984 museum bulletin, so Mascara might have seen it there. Hawkins also said that the Met had no reason to doubt the provenance of the pieces, which it acquired from the dealer Robert Hecht. Hecht said he bought the silver in

Switzerland, from a family of Lebanese antique dealers, who claimed to have owned it for more than twenty years.

Hecht, however, is hardly a man above all suspicion. During the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, he was tried on charges of smuggling antiquities, and declared *persona non grata* in both Italy and Turkey, though he was ultimately acquitted. In 1972, Hecht

is currently one of the centerpieces of the museum's new Greek galleries.

Indeed, almost all of the pieces in the Met's ancient-art rooms (and those in virtually all other American museums) are undocumented, bearing generic labels, such as "Attic 5th century" or "Magna Graecia 4th century"—a likely sign that they were not dug up in a legal excavation. The vast majority of the



sold Hoving, then the Met's director, the Euphronios krater, which is considered by some to be the most beautiful ancient Greek vase in the world. The museum proudly unveiled the piece later that year, but was quickly confronted with evidence that the piece had been looted from an Etruscan tomb in central Italy. Hecht claimed that he bought the krater in Switzerland from a Lebanese art dealer, who had owned it for many years—a story almost identical to the one he later told about the Greek silver. "It's like a sitcom rerun," Hoving says. He now believes that the Euphronios krater was smuggled out of Italy, although as director of the Met he adamantly refused to give up the vase. It

pieces that come into the American market pass through Switzerland, in part because Swiss law automatically grants legal title to a work of art if its present owner can demonstrate that it has been on Swiss soil for at least five years. Thus any piece that spends the requisite time cooling off in a Swiss vault (or somehow acquires backdated paperwork) can be sold in London or New York as coming "from a private collection in Europe."

As Raffiotta worked with Bell to build his case about the acroliths and the silver, he also solicited help from one of his oldest friends, Vincenzo Cammarata—the man now suspected

MICHAEL REAGAN

of controlling the smuggling of antiquities in the area. Raffiotta and Cammarata studied together at the University of Catania, and both are members of the small intellectual elite in this part of rural Sicily. To assist the investigation, Cammarata gave Raffiotta a sworn statement that elaborated on what he had told Ross Holloway and others years earlier: He admitted that in 1979

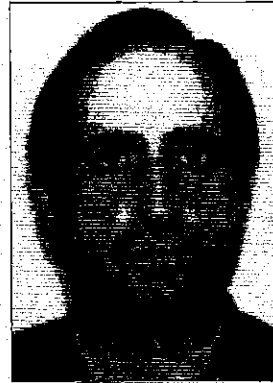
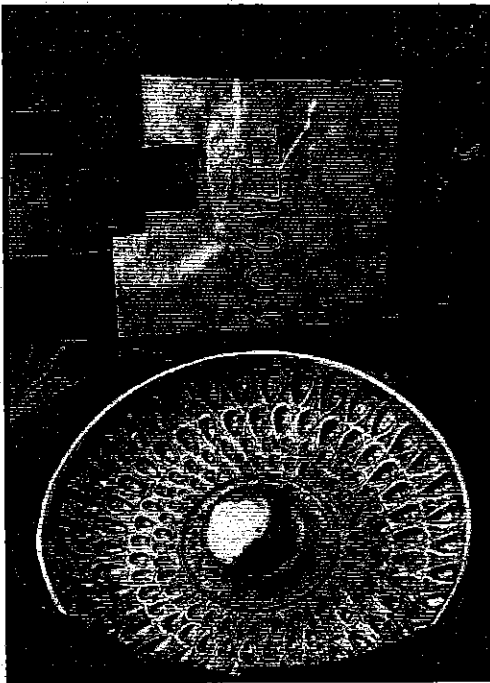
United States and clearly exposed the inner workings of the antiquities black market. It traced the progress of one spectacular object from rural Sicily to a drawing room in New York City, and showed how dealers, scholars, and curators were all involved in the transaction. An appeals-court ruling on the matter, which is expected soon, could permanently alter the way

marata, he said he had acquired the piece from another Sicilian collector, who maintained that it had been found by chance as workmen were digging up electric lines near an ancient Greek settlement. (Cammarata had no record of the sale, however, and the other dealer has since died.) Cammarata also admitted selling the golden phiale to a Swiss-based art dealer named William Veres,

through whom it reached Michael Steinhardt, a well-known New York hedge-fund manager. The Italian prosecutors then asked federal prosecutors in New York to help them find out exactly how the phiale had been imported into the United States.

The prosecutors discovered that Veres had contacted a New York dealer named Robert Haber, who had sold Steinhardt between four and six million dollars' worth of ancient art over the past two decades. The two dealers had travelled to Sicily to inspect the phiale and settled on a price of \$1.2 million. According to a subsequent ruling in federal court in New York, Haber then "took great effort to ensure that the phiale was not exported directly from Italy," by arranging to pick it up in Lugano, Switzerland—just over the Italian border—and carrying it home in his luggage. On United States customs forms, the piece was identified as coming from a private collection in Lausanne and being worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—false statements that would later allow customs agents to seize the bowl from Steinhardt's apartment, where it was prominently displayed on a grand piano.

Steinhardt challenged the seizure in court. But under the terms of a 1970 UNESCO treaty on antiquities smuggling, which the United States had signed, various countries had begun to pursue as stolen property any artifacts that had been exported illegally, and American courts have seemed to be increasingly



Vincenzo Cammarata, a flamboyant Sicilian antiquities expert, may be the link between the looters and the collectors. The police began to investigate him when they were told that he had been trying to sell a 24k.-gold libation bowl, which was traced to the collection of a New York hedge-fund manager.

a *tombarello* had brought two unusual acrolithic sculptures to his country villa and offered them for sale, and that they were identical to the statues he later saw in photographs of the Getty exhibit. Cammarata said he had turned down the chance to buy them, and Raffiotta apparently believed him. Certainly he made no move to add Cammarata to the list of suspects in his antiquities-smuggling investigation, because, he later explained, Cammarata's name never came up in the wiretaps he had done of the local *tombarelli*.

In 1994, though, Cammarata's name did surface in an unrelated case, in another part of Sicily—a case that eventually reached a courtroom in the

museums and collectors do business.

The investigation began when police in the small town of Termini Imerese began looking into the disappearance of objects from the local museum and stumbled upon photographs of a beautifully sculpted fourth-century Greek phiale, or libation bowl. Made from more than two pounds of 24k. gold, it was hammered into a pattern of acorns and beechnuts with a large gold knob, symbolizing the omphalos, or the mythic navel of the world, sticking up in the center. A suspect told police that Cammarata had owned the bowl and that he had got in touch with her in 1991 about finding an American buyer for it.

When investigators questioned Cam-

LEFT: WA BLOCK; RIGHT: FOTOCROMACHE IS/CARINIA

sympathetic to this argument. The federal district court Judge Barbara Jones ruled in November of 1997 that the phiale be returned to Italy.

This ruling, according to the Met's Ashton Hawkins, "in one fell swoop has taken an important step toward criminalizing the antiquities field." Steinhardt appealed, and the major trade associations that represent America's museums and art dealers filed legal briefs supporting his position. One of the few museums to side with the Italians was the Getty, whose budget for antiquities far outstrips that of any other museum in the world. "I find it incredible and extremely disturbing for the Museum Association to support the sale of a piece that was brought into this country with false information," Marion True, the curator of antiquities at the Getty, told me. She believes that museums must give up the practice of buying undocumented antiquities, and in 1995, the year the Steinhardt litigation began, the Getty announced that it would no longer buy any pieces that did not have a clear and convincing provenance. True acknowledged that, if applied universally, such a policy would bring the antiquities trade to a near-halt. But she said, "Museums have to change our mind-set. We have to change the idea that if we don't continue to collect we die."

True's stand, however, strikes many people in the museum field as a shrewdly timed bit of hypocrisy. The Getty has long been reviled as the worst offender in buying undocumented antiquities. In 1994, it put on a major exhibition of the collection of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman, which contained more than three hundred objects, virtually all of them without a known history. The following year, after the Getty had announced its new policy on undocumented antiquities, the Fleischmans donated most of their collection to the museum, which bought the rest of the pieces for an estimated forty million dollars. The Getty justified this acquisition under its new guidelines by saying that the artifacts had been "documented" in its own catalogue. (The museum also, under its usual procedures, sent photographs of the collection to foreign authorities who might have claims, a procedure more likely to detect stolen artifacts than looted ones.) Since then,

the Getty has quietly repatriated some of the hotter pieces, while taking a very public stand against looted art. This infuriated officials at the Met, who balked at showing the more suspect pieces in the Fleischman collection and then found themselves being lectured by True about museum ethics. Nevertheless, the Steinhardt case has forced the Met, and other major museums as well, to reconsider their position on undocumented pieces. The climate has begun to change and Italian authorities have begun to see some progress in their campaign to repatriate antiquities.

As a result of the information produced by U.S. investigators, a magistrate in Termini Imerese eventually charged Cammarata with illegally selling the Steinhardt phiale, and his trial on this charge has just begun. Far more serious charges against him, however, arose out of a smuggling-conspiracy investigation that began in 1996, when

police in Caltanissetta, the province adjoining Enna, arrested some thirty suspected Mafia figures. Several of them turned out to be *tombatori*, and they agreed to become state's witnesses. One of them, who worked around Aidone, told prosecutors that "all the archaeological pieces coming from the digs would be shown to Baron Cammarata, so that he could say whether he was interested in buying them or not."

The Catania prosecutors then placed under surveillance the telephones of Cammarata, two professors from the University of Catania, two other prominent Sicilian collectors, and a coin dealer from Rimini, in northern Italy. The taped conversations that have been made public offer little confirmation of the suspects' having had any contact with Mafiosi—they sound more like the minutes of a coin collectors' club. When they were arrested, nearly all the defendants were found to have thousands of ancient coins and artifacts, most of

TO SLEEP

Great comrade woman of existence, brava sleep!
 How many times I've come to get you
 And you weren't there!
 Now I have a woman friend who helps me find you
 But in those days
 When my life was lonely and illicit
 When it didn't seem to matter
 If I was up or not, or at what hour,
 Then sleep you were a tyrant
 And a woman that I followed
 From week to week from town to town
 Not stalking but walking
 In earnest pursuit of you, sleep,
 Until happily you passed out or I fell down.

Now that I think of you
 I feel fond. But what are you really?
 Are you some exiguous palm frond
 Capitulated by merriment back out of and into existence?
 Were you always the goblet from which a few inspired ones
 Drank that liqueur that offered them their sublimest poems?
 Will you offer them equally to me, sleep,
 Or have you already done so? Will you be more than fair? This
 morning I feel
 As the gondolier advances like a rope's continually pulled-at knot
 That you may be, and I think with gratitude
 Of what we together still might do.

—KENNETH KOCH

which had no documented provenance. Two of the defendants had metal detectors in their homes, and wiretaps recorded many phone calls about visiting *tombaroli* at Morgantina. One of the professors who were charged, Giacomo Manganaro, had also surfaced in the Steinhardt case: he had published an article in a scholarly journal authenticating the phiale before it was sold, and the sales contract stipulated that he would write a letter saying he had seen the phiale in Switzerland many years earlier. (He denies ever having written such a letter or agreeing to do so.) Another defendant, who was accused of providing false sales documents for looted artifacts, runs an auction house in the Republic of San Marino, a tiny independent state that functions as a kind of little Switzerland within Italy's borders. The surveillance also showed that Cammarata, Manganaro, and the other University of Catania professor met with "a trafficker in archeological materials who operates in Great Britain, yet to be identified, who was supposed to provide them with false receipts in order to lend 'apparent justification' of their receiving ancient artifacts from Cammarata."

Cammarata's role in the world of antiquities was so flamboyant and so widely known that the police in Catania wondered how it had escaped the notice of the local authorities. The superintendent of antiquities of Enna has been forced to step down and is under investigation. And Raffiotta himself is suspected of protecting his old friend. In fact, one of the Mafia witnesses claimed to have participated in a meeting with both Cammarata and Raffiotta in which they discussed the sale of looted artifacts. This testimony raised the possibility that the most public and diligent defender of archeological sites might be part of the antiquities-smuggling ring. But Malcolm Bell, among others, finds the accusations against Raffiotta absurd. "Silvio Raffiotta has done more than any other person to protect archeological sites in Sicily," he said.

Raffiotta believes that the charges made against him were retaliatory. His Mafia accuser is a convicted sex offender whom Raffiotta had arrested several years earlier. The prosecutor also damaged local interests by blocking completion of an estimated sixty-

million-dollar dam that would have flooded an ancient Roman site—a move that could have infuriated Mafia-controlled construction companies. "To brand me as a *tombarolo* is the least they can do," he said. Raffiotta has not been charged with any crime, and, in the torpid cauldron of provincial Sicilian life—where everyone is either a life-long friend or a mortal enemy—he could very well be the victim of some complex machination. "Nothing would surprise me—either way," said another prosecutor, who was working in another part of Sicily. "When I came here, my boss, the chief prosecutor, was accused of collusion with the Mafia and he was convicted."

As the looting investigation proceeds, there are signs that the local underworld may be trying to intimidate the authorities. Shortly after Cammarata's arrest, someone broke into the Roman villa at Piazza Armerina and threw paint on the mosaics, for the fourth time in the last few years. So far, the vandals have used removable paint, as if the intent were to show that they, and not the government, controlled the site and could violate it at will. Initially, police suspected a few disgruntled custodians, but after the fourth break-in they began to wonder whether a few men could repeatedly gain access to the well-guarded villa without the help of a larger conspiracy, involving what is known locally as the *mafia dei reperti*—"the mafia of archeological objects."

IN 1996, perhaps encouraged by their court victory in the Steinhardt case and by the Getty's return of several pieces, the Italian authorities asked Bell to excavate the section of Morgantina where police informants said that a silver service had been found. Bell had harbored suspicions about this area ever since the summer of 1982, when he saw a big, burly man working a bulldozer there: the land was in private hands at the time, but it bordered on the archeo-

logical area and so was subject to restrictions. "They are not supposed to use any earthmoving equipment there," Bell explained. "I asked him what he was doing, and he said, with a smile I didn't like, 'Preparing the ground for planting.'" In retrospect, Bell imagines that the man was filling in the holes made by *tombaroli*.

When Bell and his team began to dig, they found the walls of an ancient Greek house and in it all the telltale signs of looting. The stratigraphic layers had been turned upside down and mixed together. By last summer, the house had been completely excavated, revealing waist-high walls made of irregular pieces of tan limestone, a stone stairway that would have led to the second floor, and a courtyard and eight rooms with packed-dirt floors.

Bell was impressed by the thoroughness of the *tombaroli*'s work. They had dug all the way down to the floor in each room—a sign, perhaps, that they had found something extremely important at the outset. "After digging down to the floor, they obviously passed a metal detector across it," he said as he showed me around the site. Most of the floors were left intact, but Bell found two good-sized holes where the *tombaroli* had evidently chosen to dig deeper. On the floor of the house, he came upon a modern Italian coin dated 1978, which had probably fallen out of a *tombarolo*'s pocket as he crawled around the house. Clearly, the site was looted after that date, which accorded with rumors that Bell had heard about a silver service in 1980. The fact that there were two holes was also revealing, for the Metropolitan Museum silver had been purchased in two installments—one in 1981 and the other in 1982—and those dates suggested that the treasure may have been buried and discovered in two separate batches.

At the bottom of one of the holes, Bell found a second small coin that had eluded the *tombaroli*. It had been minted in Sicily between 216 and 212 B.C., which established the *terminus ante quem*—that is, the date before which the treasure found in the house was originally buried. This fitted perfectly with what is known about the area in the third century B.C. Morgantina at the time was part of the Kingdom of Syracuse, one of the great cities of the





"I hate getting all these Canadian coins, but I guess that's the price of living in Toronto."

Greek world, where Aeschylus produced some of his plays, where Plato came to create his ideal "Republic" on earth, and where the great mathematician Archimedes was slain by a Roman soldier during the sack of the city, in 212-211 B.C., supposedly as he was absorbed in working out a geometry problem in the dirt.

After the fall of Syracuse, many refugees fled to Morgantina, carrying their most precious possessions. Bell believes that the Met's beautifully crafted silver set was probably produced in Syracuse, which was renowned for its silversmiths. Some of the pieces are decorated with an architectural motif—a Doric entablature with an Ionic cornice—that was most commonly used at Syracuse.

At first, Bell was surprised to have found a dirt floor, rather than an elaborate mosaic pavement, in a house where such an important treasure was buried. Grand houses with mosaics can be found in the center of Morgantina, near the agora. But as Bell worked on the excavation the placement gradually began to make sense to him. "If you were hiding a treasure in a house with a mo-

saic floor, you would have to break open the pavement, leaving obvious signs of digging," he said. A treasure hidden beneath the dirt floor of a dark basement room far from the city center would stand a much better chance of eluding the Roman invaders—as proved to be the case.

"The owner of the house was probably a wealthy farmer, who used his basement for storing his goods," said Bell, who had found numerous large clay jars—some of them as much as five feet tall—for storing grain, oil, and wine. "We also know that he was a pious farmer." In fact, as Bell sifted through the rubble left by the *tombatori*, he found a terra-cotta altar very similar to the silver pieces at the Met. "The pieces are typologically almost identical," Bell said, meaning that they had the same unusual architectural motif. He believes that both sets were used in religious ceremonies. The terra-cotta version would have served as the household altar, whereas the silver ones would almost certainly have been dedicated to a city sanctuary. In fact, two of the pieces at the Metropolitan bear an in-

scription that says "Sacred to the gods." A second, hastily written inscription, a kind of graffiti, reads, "From the war."

The Metropolitan's official position, expressed in the bulletin that describes the silver treasure, is that, while it probably came from Sicily or southern Italy, its exact origin cannot be determined. In March of this year, however, the museum invited Bell to examine the silver. Last month, he spent a day studying the pieces to which he had dedicated so much time, and he will soon give his final report to the Italian government, which is expected to issue a new request for the return of the silver. Bell also met with the museum director, Philippe de Montebello, and learned that the Met is advocating a new openness regarding its collecting of antiquities.

EVEN though the antiquities investigations in Sicily and the United States are not yet concluded, evidently they have changed the modus operandi of museums as well as of private collectors. In February, the Getty returned to Italy an important Greek vase after evidence emerged that it had been looted from an Etruscan tomb. But any fear among American curators that foreign claims will multiply and empty their galleries is unfounded, insists General Conforti, the head of the division of the Italian police which is in charge of looted and stolen art. "We are pragmatists," he said. The Italians have no intention of going far back in time or making a large number of requests, for they know that doing so could provoke the United States into passing new laws to protect its museums. They are interested in a handful of important pieces that are closely tied to the cultural identity of a particular place or time.

Morgantina, especially, has the potential to be one of Sicily's great tourist attractions if some of its riches can be reassembled. This is perhaps the only hope for reviving the area's moribund economy, so, in 1994, students at the elementary school in Aidone wrote letters to Maurice Tempelman, asking him to return the acroliths. The Italians have now identified the Sicilian dealer

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who sold the acroliths to a fellow-Sicilian in Switzerland, who, in turn, sold them to Robin Symes. Last month, a spokesman for Tempelsman told the Italian government that his client was making a good-faith effort to evaluate new evidence about the acroliths.

But even the archeologists and scholars who vehemently condemn looting and support laws to stop it also admit that the Italian state does not always take good care of the antiquities it already owns. Many museums, particularly local ones like that at Aidone, can't afford to display most of their objects; as a result, artifacts are frequently stolen from storerooms or are left in fragments for decades, waiting to be reassembled. Bell and others believe that overseas exhibitions and long-term loans of ten or even twenty years would curb foreign museums' appetites for new pieces, and help the source country fund more legal excavations, more conservation, and more security. "One of the proposals is for travelling exhibitions that would visit more than one venue, and the Italians are looking at relaxing their restrictions on that," Bell said. Others go further, advocating a limited trade that would allow institutions to sell redundant pieces.

Nevertheless, a black market for antiquities will continue to flourish as long as private collectors covet these objects, and most scholars agree that looting must be controlled at the source. "The clandestine excavations are not scientific, and they destroy an enormous amount of data," said Maria Antonietta Rizzo, the superintendent of several major Etruscan sites. "To find a single object, entire buildings are destroyed and stratigraphic layers are turned upside down."

Ripped from their context and smuggled out of the country, with their origins camouflaged in order to make them salable, antiquities lose much of their meaning and value. It is true that the silver treasure gains greater visibility at the Metropoli-

tan Museum than it would have at a small provincial museum in Sicily. But in order to justify its acquisition the Met must maintain that it cannot determine where the silver came from, thereby reducing it to a generic artifact from somewhere in the Mediterranean. The silver vessels have become mere art objects—beautiful but mute—stripped of their history.

By contrast, on being placed back in their context, the acroliths and the silver are like bookends, telling the story of Morgantina itself. The enigmatic, smiling figures of Persephone and Demeter reveal the city's origins. Though Greeks settled on the Sicilian coast in the eighth century B.C., they did not push into the interior until nearly two hundred years later. "The acroliths are tremendously important artistic and historical documents of the Hellenization of Morgantina in the sixth century," Bell said. He added that they also confirm the fact that the worship of Persephone and Demeter was already a dominant religious cult in

eastern Sicily in the sixth century B.C., while the silver service, which contains a depiction of Demeter, shows that it remained so until Morgantina's final days. What's more, the silver tells the story of the city's desperate end. Bell believes that the silver treasure was taken from a public sanctuary and buried in the basement floor of the pious farmer. By adding the inscription "From the war," whoever buried it intended to leave a message for whoever might dig it up.

In light of the current debate over cultural property, this hasty inscription acquires a particular poignance and meaning: it seems to be a warning against looting itself. "I realized that these were inscriptions to protect the silver from abuse, intended to be read by someone who found them," Bell said. "There was this extraordinary possibility for listening to an ancient voice that was crying out at a moment of incredible difficulty, similar to what has happened in Bosnia or Kosovo today. None of this can be understood without the context." ♦



"If you want to buy this, I'm afraid I'm going to need to see some justification."