

PRESS RELEASE

Embassy of Iraq in the United States

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Iraq Accepts Repatriation of Five Precious Antiquities by Manhattan District Attorney's Office

NEW YORK (January 18, 2022)—Iraqi Ambassador to the United States Fareed Yasseen today accepted five historic stolen artifacts for repatriation to Iraq after they had been looted over the past 30 years.

At a ceremony also featuring Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg and Erik Rosenblatt, Acting Special Agent in Charge, New York, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, two items seized from Michael Steinhardt and three others from ongoing investigations were handed over. The Antiquities Trafficking Unit of the office of the Manhattan District Attorney was responsible for the efforts to recover the stolen antiquities, which collectively are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“I’m grateful to the Manhattan District Attorney and his Office for their ongoing and successful efforts to combat the smuggling of antiquities. In so doing, they have been able to repatriate these precious and historically significant antiquities to Iraq,” Ambassador Yasseen said. “These pieces are part of the heritage of the Iraqi people and so belong in Iraq, where they will be displayed in public museums to help the Iraqi people better understand and appreciate our own history and culture with this connection to the past. This is another very tangible example of the longstanding cooperation and friendship between the United States and Iraq.”

“Art is a window into the past, and particularly with pieces of this age, it’s often the only opportunity we have to study civilizations long-gone,” said District Attorney Bragg. “These relics shouldn’t be kept in the mansion of a billionaire, thousands of miles away from their homeland. They should be on display in a museum or university in their country of origin, where the people of that nation can view and appreciate the glimpse into the lives of their ancestors. I’m honored to help make that possible today for the people of Iraq and committed to

ensuring that stolen and looted antiquities trafficked in Manhattan are returned to their homelands.”

One antiquity seized from the Steinhardt Collection is an ivory plaque dating between 800 and 701 B.C.E., depicting a human-headed winged sphinx that once decorated the royal furniture from the period of King Sargon I (721-725 B.C.E.) in Nimrud. The ivory plaque is worth approximately \$450,000 and was looted in the 1990s in the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm. The piece first appeared on the international art market on November 2, 1994, and it was purchased by Steinhardt on September 10, 2010.

The second piece seized from the Steinhardt Collection is a \$200,000 gold bowl with a scalloped flower design that was looted from Nimrud, a city in Northern Iraq that had its height in the modern Assyrian Age (911-612 B.C.E.), before being trafficked by ISIS. The gold bowl turned up on the international art market on October 22, 2019, and Steinhardt purchased it on July 10, 2020.

The three other antiquities include a set of Mandaic scrolls worth \$8,500 and two pyxides, or cylindrical boxes with separate lids, that are worth \$15,000 apiece.

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