

# **Comments on the AAM Standards Regarding Archaeological Material and Ancient Art**

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1. **Context:** AAM members include roughly 2,000 museums, some of which collect archaeological material and ancient art as a primary element of their mission, and many others that hold incidental collections of such material or that have an archaeological or historical mission. Thus, any guidance that AAM as an umbrella organization offers to the field must be sufficiently generic to maintain consistency with the ethics standards and practices in disciplines beyond art and art history. The members of the task force tried wherever possible to frame these standards so that they would be in harmony with the guidance already developed by AAMD. The following comments compare language employed in the AAM and AAMD standards wherever there is a different approach taken.
2. **Provenance:** The AAM standards call for “rigorous” provenance research and recommend that objects for acquisition should be documented as being out of the probable country of modern discovery by the 1970 UNESCO Convention date. Objects exported after that date should be accompanied by documentation that they have been legally exported and legally imported.
3. **Existing Collections:** AAM’s standards address existing collections, a question not covered in the AAMD report. AAM recommends transparency in disclosing the known ownership history of objects and urges museums to conduct research on objects with incomplete or uncertain provenance.
4. **Claims:** Both AAM and AAMD recommend, but do not require, that museums deal “respectfully and diligently” (AAM) or “promptly and responsibly” (AAMD) in responding to claims by source countries or other parties with standing. AAMD emphasizes “right to ownership” while AAM takes a broader perspective: “whether based on ethical or legal considerations.”
5. **Licit Markets.** AAMD argues that licit markets for sale and export are deterrents against illicit excavation and trafficking. AAM’s statement does not speak to this question.
6. **Accountability and Transparency.** AAM urges that board members, as well as staff and volunteers, “be knowledgeable concerning the legal compliance requirements and ethical standards.” It also states that collection policies should be “publicly available,” including standards for provenance. These statements are not emphasized in the AAMD report.

7. **Initiatives by the Service Organizations.** Both AAM and AAMD express a commitment to disseminating the reports widely and to providing access to resources such as the export laws of source countries. AAM pledges to advocate for the funding of provenance research on existing collections. AAMD is assembling an on-line data base enabling museums to provide public access to information and images of objects proposed for acquisition.
  
8. **Enforcement.** Neither organization has a mechanism to enforce its guidance or to impose sanctions. Both are voluntary membership entities. AAM's accreditation program, which currently accredits 800 museums nationally, is both voluntary and peer-driven. While a museum's failure to adhere to ethical guidance from either AAMD or AAM regarding archaeological materials and ancient art may be cause for concern in an accreditation review, and could be a factor in the withdrawal of accredited status, any real enforcement mechanism remains in the legal rather than the ethical arena.