



The World Archaeological Congress

Please reply to:

Department of Archaeology
Flinders University
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide, SA. 5001.
AUSTRALIA

Congressman E. Clay Shaw
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives

29th August, 2005

Dear Congressman Shaw,

The World Archaeological Congress (WAC) urges you to support the inclusion of H.R. 915 Cultural Conservation of the Crossroads of Civilization Act (A bill to authorize the President to take certain actions to protect archaeological or ethnological materials of Afghanistan) in the Miscellaneous Tariffs bill that is presently before the House of Representatives.

The WAC strongly supports this initiative, which would provide legal means to prevent the importation into the United States of illegally removed Afghan antiquities and other cultural materials. Significant artifacts and works of art are currently being looted from archaeological sites in Afghanistan with a view to being sold ultimately to markets in Western Europe and the United States. With this legislation, the incentive to participate in this theft will be significantly minimized.

The World Archaeological Congress is an international organization, which represents professional archaeologists in tertiary institutions, museums, government agencies, and the private sector from more than 90 countries. It seeks to promote interest in the past in all countries, to encourage the development of regionally based histories and international academic interaction, and has a particular interest in:

- education about the past
- archaeology and indigenous peoples
- the ethics of archaeological enquiry
- the protection of sites and objects of the past
- the effect of archaeology on host communities

- the ownership, conservation and exploitation of the archaeological heritage
- the application of new technologies in archaeology and in archaeological communication
- the place of archaeology in a post-colonial world.

In the past, the U.S. government has exercised thoughtful responsibility for its own national heritage, knowing that it is irreplaceable, and has acknowledged the protective value of appropriate legislation.

The WAC believes that this proposed legislation is vital for the protection of the heritage of Afghanistan - a heritage that has played an important role in the world's historical and cultural development. Archaeological treasures have inherent value to cultural identity, not only to the Afghan people, but to the world community as well. In the last two decades looting in Afghanistan has been devastating to that country's cultural heritage. The current looting of archaeological sites destroys the historical, cultural, religious and scientific information that is derived through the careful, systematic excavation of sites. When this record is destroyed we are all the poorer for it.

The United States has undertaken a special relationship with Afghanistan, as they have previously done with Iraq. Concern for preservation of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan must be given equal consideration. It is crucial that the President be given this authority to prevent the import into the United States of looted cultural materials.

With the enactment of this legislation the United States will take another crucial step towards fulfilling its obligations to the Afghan people and our understanding of the world's and our own cultural heritage will be significantly enriched.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Claire Smith
President
World Archaeological Congress