

Publication standards concerning the conduct with artefacts of unknown origins

The German Archaeological Institute (DAI) is represented by numerous departments, branch offices and commissions both in Germany and abroad. It considers monuments, archaeological sites, and museums to be part of the cultural heritage of humanity and therefore worthy of protection. With regard to the protection of cultural property, the DAI is bound to national and EU regulations. The German Archaeological Institute is also committed to the legislatures of host countries as well as relevant international conventions on the protection of cultural property. The keystones of the DAI's actions have been formulated in a Joint Statement of Principle on the Protection of Archaeological Sites, Monuments, and Museums, which it signed in 2007¹.

These legal and ethical guidelines also govern the DAI's publishing practices. They therefore also concern the conduct regarding archaeological artefacts deriving from other than legal excavations.

The editors of all publishing organs within the DAI are therefore compelled, as from 14 November 1970, not to publish artefacts whose legal provenance has not been fully cleared, be they from private or public collections. Exceptions may be arranged with the editors, provided the aim is given to distinctly broach the issue of the loss of the archaeological context. Artefacts of unknown origin and previously presented elsewhere in exhibitions, catalogues, or other publications, may be included in DAI publications under the sole condition that they are clearly emphasised as such and discussed accordingly.

The date of 14 November 1970 makes reference to the resolution of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The resolution was adopted after a prolonged international debate in the recognition that loss of cultural property through theft, clandestine excavations, and illicit export of artefacts was a worldwide problem leading to significant loss of cultural property. It was acknowledged that only the respect of the own cultural heritage and that of all nations represented an enrichment to the cultural life of all peoples and an inspiration for mutual respect and appreciation among nations.

Editors of the publishing bodies of the German Archaeological Institute are aware that these constraints will neither curb the global problem of illegal excavations and the associated irreversible destruction of archaeological contexts, nor diminish the illicit trafficking of artefacts. This will further require a significant raise of awareness, a general change of attitude towards the handling of archaeological artefacts, and moreover, the implementation of adapted legal instruments. The publication guidelines of the DAI aims at increasing awareness and drawing attention to the immeasurable loss of knowledge induced by the damage to an artefact's archaeological find context.

The board of directors of the German Archaeological Institute unanimously adopted this policy at its meeting on 7 May 2012, thereby applying it to all publications under its authority. The recommendations were welcomed without exception by the executive committee of the German Archaeological Institute at its meeting on 11 May 2012.

¹ O. Dally, Unterzeichnung eines Joint Statement of the Principle on the Protection of Archaeological Sites, Monuments and Museums, AA 2007/2, 129–131.