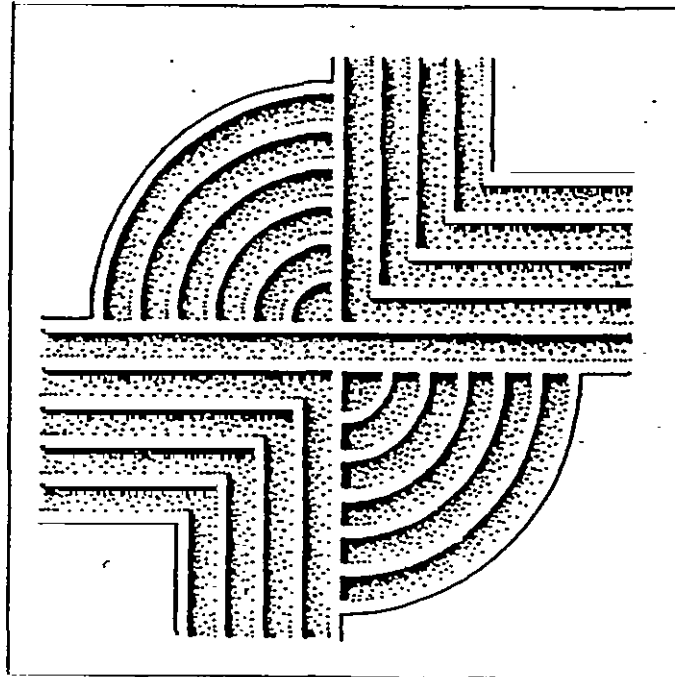


**POTHUNTING IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: A SURVEY  
APPROACH FOR COLLECTING AND STANDARDIZING  
SITE DESTRUCTION DATA FOR USE IN AN  
INTERNATIONAL DATA BASE**



**RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 72**

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POTHUNTING IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE:  
A SURVEY APPROACH FOR  
COLLECTING AND STANDARDIZING SITE DESTRUCTION DATA  
FOR USE IN AN INTERNATIONAL DATA BASE

Michael Trinkley, Ph.D.  
William Vartorella, Ph.D., C.B.C.

Chicora Research Contribution 72

Chicora Foundation, Inc.  
PO Box 8664 □ 861 Arbutus Drive  
Columbia, South Carolina 29202  
803/787-6910

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## ABSTRACT

Arsenals, galleries, and museums to which nothing is ever added take on a ghostly and funereal air. By closing our minds and limiting artistic orbits we fall into the bad habit of taking such collections to be complete; actually, we should be reminded by every new accession that art, like life, is neither finished nor stands still, but is infinite and ever in motion.

-- Goethe

Goethe's comments, misconstrued, might serve as justification of the philosophical position adopted by some museums, collectors, and, especially, pothunters intent upon ravaging the archaeological landscape in the name of "preserving" cultural heritage.

Looting, and the resulting illicit trade in antiquities, is big business - closely rivaling trafficking in illegal drugs. During the past two decades, an estimated billion dollars of illegally excavated ancient Greek and Roman antiquities have flowed virtually unimpeded through the smugglers' "pipelines." As early as 1980, an estimated 75% of the antiquities in the Italian market got there illegally. And, as interest in pre-Columbian artifacts intensifies, so does the threat to even the most remote sites scattered throughout the Americas.

The problem is that no systematic effort has been made to measure both the incidence of looting and its geometric progression worldwide. This paper develops a framework for a simple, effective survey approach which, when adapted regionally via the use of specialized question formats ("overlays"), can be used to monitor global looting. More important, the resulting data establish a benchmark and encourage discussion of broad-ranging legal and educational reforms.

## THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

It takes little effort, and virtually no field experience, to gather some approximation of the damages thought to be occurring from site vandalism and pothunting.

- Between 1985 and 1987 *reported* incidents of looting on National Park Service lands increased by 53%, from about 425 to over 650 (King 1991:85).
- A Congressional subcommittee estimates that between 50% and 90% of the *known* sites in the American Southwest have been looted - probably around 660,000 sites (Subcommittee on General Oversight and Investigation 1988).

- The Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates that looting has increased by 100% between 1980 and 1987 (Subcommittee on General Oversight and Investigation 1988).
- The September 1991 issue of **Lost Treasure**, "The Treasure Hunter's Guide to Adventure and Fortune," provides a four page article entitled, "South Carolina Treasures," listing potential sources of relics across the state.
- At one site alone in El Salvador, researchers counted over 5,000 holes and every known site in the vicinity has been plundered, with over 30,000 artifacts introduced into the marketplace (Herscher 1989:68).
- Between 1979 and 1981 an estimated 80 looters destroyed 32 tombs and excavated over 150 trenches at a single Mayan site (Adams 1986:447).
- The best estimates of the multi-billion dollar a year antiquities market suggests that the bulk of the materials come from 27 countries and find their way to six - the United States, the Vatican, the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, and Italy (Greenfield 1989:Map 1).
- There are over 265 major auction houses in the world engaged in the legal or quasi-legal distribution of cultural resources. Of these 178, or 67%, are found in four countries - Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and the United States. Germany alone has 77 (Greenfield 1989).

We could go on, but these few statistics and accounts provide a general backdrop for our discussions. Some have suggested that antiquities rival or even surpass the illicit drug trade (Stille 1988). While here in the Southeast we may see Civil War artifacts selling for as little as 25¢ (Keel 1991) to as much as \$10,000 (**Lost Treasures**, September 1991, p. 59), and Mogollon pots may sell for upwards of \$20,000, other items of cultural heritage will trade for five and six digit sums. **Simply put, the looting, buying, sale, and trading of our cultural heritage is big business.**

What none of these statistics, stories, or studies tell us, however, is exactly how big of a business, or what exactly the loss is to the public. Like body counts from Vietnam or estimates of the drug trade, the figures are hazy, inexact, or even downright misleading.

A part of the problem is that no one agency is responsible for tracking the worldwide antiquities market. In the United States no one agency has developed the mechanism to

understand and translate to the public the magnitude of our losses.

The reason for this lapse of quantifying zeal may be attributable to budgetary limits, or even to a tacit belief that more stringent quantification would provide little benefit for the labor involved. And certainly when the issue is elevated to a global perspective there are additional problems of politics, particularly when dishonest and corrupt public officials who engage in the illicit trade of their own countries' antiquities (Alexander 1990). There are also the issues, still unresolved, regarding the ethics and morality of professionals dealing with looters (Alexander 1990; see also Messenger 1989).<sup>1</sup>

## THE NEED

For those involved in the protection of our global cultural heritage to understand the problem, much less to control it, there needs to be a mechanism to track looting and associated site destruction. The National Park Service LOOT Clearinghouse is specifically designed to track the court actions resulting from looting incidents, not to track the incidents themselves.

We see four interrelated needs for developing a mechanism to track the loss of our cultural resources:

- it will serve as a tool in the public relations battle to develop additional legislation to prevent looting and to curb the traffic in items of cultural heritage,
- it will provide a reliable tool for evaluating progress using either educational or judicial tools to curb looting,
- it will provide reliable data with which to argue for increased funding for agencies responsible for cultural heritage protection, and
- it will allow us, as professionals, to better gauge the data base we have with which to work.

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion is not intended to deal with the broad ethical issues involved in site looting, on either a local or global scale. Other authors, such as Greenfield (1989) and Messenger (1989), provide very cogent discussions. International organizations, such as ICOM (International Council of Museums) have developed ethical principles regarding antiquities. The AAM (American Association of Museums) Code of Ethics for Museums, approved on May 18, 1991, does not simply prohibit the "illicit trade" of antiquities, but it also stipulates that all collecting be conducted "in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources," a much more inclusive statement prohibiting actions which might potentially encourage looting, or even be perceived as offering encouragement.

Chicora Foundation's position in the matter is simple: any activities which encourage, or which may be perceived as encouraging, the looting of our cultural heritage represent inappropriate behavior and should be avoided. This includes purchasing collections and utilizing looted collections for research.

Clearly, each of these feeds into the others so, for the moment, let's examine them collectively.

Whatever our ethical differences may be as professionals regarding issues such as the use of looted collections, we assume that all professionals denounce looting as both morally and ethically indefensible and as destructive of our finite cultural heritage. With this common ground in mind, two appropriate tools to curb looting are education and laws (King 1991).

When we, as professionals, visit legislators (as those of us with Chicora Foundation have been doing), the inevitable question is "Can you tell me exactly how bad the problem is right here in my state?" And with the data currently available, we can only speculate or speak from personal experience - neither of which is likely to win many arguments. Being able to say to a legislator that in his home district x number of sites have been looted and that throughout the state y number of sites have been damaged is much more powerful than offering personal experience or vague estimates.

As archaeologists most, if not all, of us have been trying to educate the public regarding the looting problem for years. Looting statistics suggest that we haven't been doing a very good job. Yet, we are looking at the issue not only using flawed data, but also from a gross perspective. Can we say that, for example, an intensive educational campaign in one localized area might not reduce looting? Frankly, we believe that education, especially the education of children in their formative years, between the ages of two and 14, has the greatest potential to discourage the "hobby collector" (McAllister 1991) and to curb looting in the Southeast. Yet without a good data base operating over several decades, there is no way to determine which way the fight to save our heritage is going. We may be spinning our educational wheels, getting nowhere; we may find out too late that our educational programs needed to be revamped entirely.

Related to this issue is funding. The perception is that to fight the extensive looting in both the Southeast and, increasingly, the Americas, requires more funding. Education, law enforcement, the lobbying for stricter protection - all seemingly need larger budgets. Yet we have few, if any, data to support such arguments.

And finally, when we evaluate the significance of a site, particularly sites which tend to be looted - Civil War camps, Mississippian mounds, and Early Archaic sites - we are frequently operating in a vacuum. We may have a vague idea of how many similar sites exist, but we have no idea how many have been looted or how badly. Having this information is essential if we are to "manage" our cultural resources.

### **The Survey Technique**

Archaeologists, as the result of specialization, tend to be very good at some things and not very good at others. We can manipulate edge angles and determine mean

occupation dates, but we have little experience in developing base-line data for subjects such as looting.

This became painfully evident during the preparation of this paper. We found occasional studies which provided exceptional data on looting behavior -- one example being the behavioral study by DesJean and Wilson (1990), another being the compilation of vandalism practices by Williams (1978). But, in general, survey methodology was crudely formulated, often unarticulated, rarely reported, and of little interpretive validity.

Clearly the technology exists for accurate, unbiased survey studies. Unfortunately, archaeologists, as scientists, are preoccupied with being able to quantify virtually everything within an appreciable degree of certainty. Surveys, even the best, can do little more than serve as indicators. The reasons are complex, but essentially boil down to trade-offs in terms of sacrificing precision or control or generalizability in favor of one or the other. In our survey the problem is further complicated when we ask researchers to give "best guesses," for example, on the amount of soil disturbed.

This is where we are taking an unusual position. We are prepared to sacrifice some accuracy as a trade-off for participation. If we construct and pretest an omnibus questionnaire - one with literally dozens of questions and hundreds of potential responses - we introduce three factors that are fatal to survey results: fatigue, response bias, and self-fulfilling prophecies.

People get tired of filling out lengthy surveys. First, there exists a learning curve of how to use the instrument. Difficult instruments have longer learning curves. Result? Initial data get skewed. Response categories become confused. Worse, after a number of uses, the respondent tends to "hit the highlights" and not answer every question. So much for precision.

Response bias is a murky issue. If you are looking for incidents of "rampant looting" an extremely detailed questionnaire will artificially help you find it. Erosion and animal activity take on new meaning when a person has too many blanks to fill and the inclination to fill them.

"Self-fulfilling prophecy" is much the same. Unless a survey is neutrally worded and properly pretested, error can insidiously be introduced with disastrous effects.

These points are, by design, overstated. If a survey researcher really wishes to confuse matters, he or she need only apply the most powerful statistics to a problem like looting, which, at best, is difficult to quantify.

The better, more sane approach is to create an instrument that is easy to use, easy to understand, simple to tabulate, and capable of providing good "rough-and-tumble" numbers that policy-makers can understand. Hopefully, such an instrument will also allow

us to make some timely conclusions about threats to cultural resources.

There are, then, many parameters for appropriate survey research, some statistical (such as the use of open-ended questions and redundancy for reducing dishonest answers). Our approach, however, has emphasized one very simple starting point: **it is essential that it have a high use rate.** This is an essential goal, at least in trend analysis, if the results of a looting questionnaire are to be representative. We are approaching this study from the perspective of trends rather than point-specific data because we believe that trend studies are not only more useful, but are going to be more predictive.

With this in mind, the survey must:

- be simple, straight-forward, easy to complete, and minimize the opportunity for narrative answers; and
- be broadly applicable to all cultural resources.

Failure to meet these two requirements will result in the use rate of the study failing to be adequate for accurate trend studies. As a consequence, we have developed a questionnaire that can be completed in under 10 minutes (the average is 5 minutes, especially if the looted site has been previously reported and the UTM coordinates are already known). The questions are almost entirely multiple choice and the questions are sufficiently broad that the questionnaire can be used anywhere in the United States.

The questionnaire is designed to collect data not only on the presence of looting, but the type of looting, the nature of the artifacts being looted, the extent of the looting and accompanying damage, the location of the site relative to access, and the response taken to the looting.

An important aspect of the study is that we are not asking land managers or archaeologists to guess at disturbance; we are asking them to complete this questionnaire whenever a looted site is found. We are avoiding issues of memory loss, rough "guesstimates" of looting on a park or forest, and issues of criminal liability and judicial review (which may take months). We are also avoiding issues such as the monetary costs of site stabilization or the value of the artifacts lost, both of which will result in ambiguous and largely insupportable statements. The primary question now becomes, how can this survey questionnaire be implemented.

Following a formal pretest (not described here for sake of brevity), the revised questionnaire ideally should become as ubiquitous as a site form. In the best possible scenario, it becomes *part* of the site form. That is, this form should ideally accompany site forms for newly identified sites, it should be completed for all revisited sites, and it should be used when a site is known to have suffered from looting.



The Southeast is an excellent area for pretesting the instrument and engaging in a pilot study. Human occupation can be traced back at least 12,000 years and archaeological sites include Paleo-Indian and Archaic camps, Woodland villages, burial and temple mounds, evidence of the earliest Spanish settlements in North America, large urban sites dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a variety of Civil War battlefields and camps, and a wealth of industrial sites. There is site looting for lithic specimens such as Hardaway and Dalton points, looting of privies in urban settings for unique bottles and ceramics, looting of Civil War sites for relics, and looting of Native American sites for burial remains and trade goods.

One possible scenario might be a consortial arrangement between various federal and state agencies - such as the National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, State Historic Preservation Offices, State Archaeologists - and Chicora Foundation. The various agencies would require submission of the form and then pass the information on to the Foundation. As a consortial arrangement, Chicora's responsibility would include not only the confidentiality of the records, but also providing periodic reports on data interpretation to the various agencies.

This survey, with only slight modification can also be used throughout the world to begin the same process of quantification and data interpretation. This type of project would be ideally suited to the World Monument Fund, ICOM, or similar international organizations.

Within five years, if the survey system were accepted, it would be possible to see general trends regarding site looting and its impact on our heritage. More importantly, we would possess useful data to begin an assessment of strategies for curbing these losses.

We began with Goethe railing against the static museum with its "ghostly and funereal air." Yet, in his **Italian Journey** he adopted a viewpoint that is resoundingly modern, if we apply it to the issue of looting: "For where works of art are rare, rarity itself is a value; it is only where they are common, as they are here, that one can learn their intrinsic worth".

It is this commonality, this availability of artifacts and heritage to us all, that makes looting a scourge and the preservation of the past so paramount.

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Michael Trinkley, Ph.D. is director of the public, non-profit Chicora Foundation, Inc. in Columbia, South Carolina. He has published and presented numerous professional articles on Southeastern archaeology, Native American repatriation, conservation/preservation issues, and museum topics. He has been involved in cultural heritage projects in the United States, Colombia, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Jordan.

William F. Vartorella, Ph.D., C.B.C. is a Senior Research Associate with Chicora Foundation and Vice-President of Craig and Vartorella International Marketing and Advertising, Inc., in Camden, South Carolina. He is the author of numerous articles about global business and survey research. He is also the creator of the SPHINX Grants Database, which is used to monitor annual funding worldwide for Near Eastern archaeology.



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PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

P.O. BOX 8664  
861 ARBUTUS DRIVE  
COLUMBIA, S.C. 29202  
803-787-6910

### INTERNATIONAL LOOTING INVENTORY ARCHAEOLOGY DATABASE (ILIAD) NORTH AMERICA

Your site has been looted by "pothunters."

By filling out and returning this brief survey, you help us verify and monitor the growth and magnitude of pothunting worldwide.

Your answers will be used for statistical purposes only.

The location of your site, its archaeological significance, and the names of you and your agency will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your help.

**Directions:** Fill in, or check the blank(s) which best describe your site and its condition.

- 1) Agency \_\_\_\_\_  
Project \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Country \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) State \_\_\_\_\_ Territory \_\_\_\_\_ Protectorate \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Site Number and/or Name \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) UTM: Zone \_\_\_\_\_ Easting \_\_\_\_\_ Northing \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ Tele. # (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Date of Incident Discovery \_\_\_\_\_ Date of This Report \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Site Ownership: \_\_\_\_\_ Federal \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal \_\_\_\_\_ Private \_\_\_\_\_



9) Approx. Age of Site: \_\_\_\_\_ Cultural Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

10) Type of Site:  Prehistoric/Pre-Columbian  Contact/Historic

Site Types:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ceramic scatter       | <input type="checkbox"/> adobe architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> earthwork (non-mound) | <input type="checkbox"/> bridge/road/trans. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> kill/butchering       | <input type="checkbox"/> cemetery           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lithic scatter        | <input type="checkbox"/> historic scatter   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mound                 | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial/mfgr.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pictograph            | <input type="checkbox"/> military           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> quarry site           | <input type="checkbox"/> plantation         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> rock shelter          | <input type="checkbox"/> quarry site        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shell midden/ring     | <input type="checkbox"/> standing structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> underwater            | <input type="checkbox"/> structural ruins   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> village               | <input type="checkbox"/> tabby architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other                 | <input type="checkbox"/> underwater         |
| (specify: _____)                               | <input type="checkbox"/> urban              |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> other              |
|  | (specify: _____)                            |

11) Site Size:

\_\_\_\_\_ meters/feet by \_\_\_\_\_ meters/feet OR \_\_\_\_\_ hectares/acres

For Rock Shelters: Opening Lengths of  1-20m  21-50m  >50m

12) Significance of Site: \_\_\_\_\_

13) Nature of Disturbance:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> "pot holes" (shovel dug)     | <input type="checkbox"/> "chalking" of rock art           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> probe holes                  | <input type="checkbox"/> casting/rubbing of artwork       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> metal detection              | <input type="checkbox"/> dredging (underwater)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removal of petroglyphs       | <input type="checkbox"/> surface collecting               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removal of human remains     | <input type="checkbox"/> shooting at structure/site       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> chipping of rock/tabby/brick | <input type="checkbox"/> breaking & entering              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excavations                  | <input type="checkbox"/> structural damage                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> rearrangement of resource    | <input type="checkbox"/> removal of architectural details |
| <input type="checkbox"/> graffiti                     | <input type="checkbox"/> arson                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify: _____)       |   |

14) Evidence of Disturbance:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> scatter of artifacts       | <input type="checkbox"/> refuse from looters (beer cans, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> holes or other human dist. | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify: _____)                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tire tracks                |  |

15) Amount of Disturbance:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Holes  
\_\_\_\_\_ Weight of Scattered Artifacts Recovered  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of Known Looting Instances at this Site

Estimate the total square footage disturbed using this rough guideline:

One metal detector "footprint" = 1 ft.<sup>2</sup>

One pothole "footprint" = 16 ft.<sup>2</sup>

This site has NEW disturbances of \_\_\_\_\_ < 10 ft.<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 1001-2000 ft.<sup>2</sup>  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10-500 ft.<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ >2000 ft.<sup>2</sup>  
\_\_\_\_\_ 501-1000 ft.<sup>2</sup>

16) Attach Locational Map for Reference (Use USGS & Mark Location)

Map Used: \_\_\_\_\_

17) Scope of Looting:

Last Time Site Observed:  Yesterday  Last Week  Last Month  
 Last Year  Longer/Unknown  New Site

Previous Reports of Damage Filed?  Yes  No  Don't Know

If Previous Report, Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To Whom Reported: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimate Increase in Damage Since Previous Report:

0-25% increase  26-50% increase  51-75% increase  
 76-100% increase  101-200% increase  >200% increase

18) Distance to Nearest Access Point and Type:

Less than 1 km./0.5 mi.  Hiking Trail(s)  
 1 km./0.5 mi. to 3 km./2 mi.  Horse/Jeep Trail(s)  
 More than 3 km./2 mi.  "Paved" Road  
 Navigable Waterway  
 Remote Area

19) Efforts Taken to "Stabilize" Site, After Discovery of Looting/Disturbance:

Looting Holes Backfilled  Area Fenced  
 Artifacts Collected for Curation  Roads/Access to Area Closed  
 Reinterment of Human Remains  Graffiti Removed  
 Recordation and Salvage  Other Stabilization: Describe:  
 Area Re-Sodded \_\_\_\_\_  
 Area Posted \_\_\_\_\_  
 Area Under Surveillance \_\_\_\_\_

20) Will Looting Be Reported?  Yes  No

If Yes: To Whom: \_\_\_\_\_

Will Drawings/Photographs be Included?  Yes  No  
Can Photocopies Be Provided to Chicora for ILIAD?  Yes  No

If Not Reported, Why? \_\_\_\_\_

21) Please Add Any Additional Comments:

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP! PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM TO:**

Dr. Michael Trinkley  
ILIAD PROJECT  
Chicora Foundation, Inc.  
PO Box 8664  
Columbia, SC 29202-8664 USA  
803/787-6910