

ARCH 355 | Who Owns the Past? Collectors, Museums, and the Ethics of Ownership Fall 2026

Course Instructor: Zoë Kontes
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Course Description

Who owns the Greek past? Where do the Parthenon Marbles belong and why? Where do Cycladic figurines come from, and why do we know so little about most of them? Is the Getty Kouros an authentic Greek statue? Can we use science to answer this question? If the Euphronios Krater was made in Greece, why is it in Italy (after more than thirty years in the US)? Is looting still happening in Greece? We will contemplate these and other questions in our discussion of the broad range of ethical dilemmas connected to Greek antiquities in the 21st century. We will focus on issues concerning the looting of ancient sites; ethical, political, and legal aspects of the international trade in art objects and antiquities; authenticity and forgery of ancient art and the scientific technologies applied in the analysis of ancient objects; the management of museums and repatriation of cultural property; conservation and preservation of cultural heritage; and the protection of cultural property in armed conflict. No previous knowledge of Greek art and archaeology is required.

Course Approach

This is a discussion course, and it is designed to be interactive. We will be grappling with fascinating but difficult issues, and we will learn by discussing these issues together. The course requires the full and active participation of every student. Each will be responsible for leading class discussion of an assigned reading with a fellow student, and arguing for a particular side in group class debates. These debates are where you will hone your skills of argumentation, improve your ability to critically analyze evidence, and demonstrate your informed knowledge of a topic with a firm basis in scholarly sources.

Learning Objectives

After taking this course, students will have a new perspective on Greek artifacts they encounter in museums, wherever they are in the world. We will learn to question what we see, what questions to ask, and how to look beyond what is written on an object's label. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) Understand the ethical, legal and political factors that are involved with the return of cultural property to Greece (e.g. the "Getty wreath" and the Parthenon marbles)
- 2) Discuss the impact of collectors and the international art market on Greek artifacts (e.g. the Cycladic figurines)
- 3) Consider the effect of forgeries on the antiquities market (e.g. the Minoan "Snake Goddesses")
- 4) Trace the modern histories of artifacts and sites and understand their roles in Greece's cultural heritage (e.g. preservation of popular tourist sites like Knossos)
- 5) Debate the fate of cultural property in armed conflict (e.g. Nazi looting in Greece)

Course Requirements

Components contributing to the final grade will be the following:

1) Active participation (not merely physical presence, but the expression of critical opinions and contribution to class dialogue) is essential to this class. Preparation is necessary in order to participate; all readings must be completed before each class session. You must read thoroughly and carefully, and take detailed notes that will allow you to make a significant and consistent contribution to class discussion. The quality, and not just the quantity, of your comments in class will be taken into consideration. Please note that weekly load of reading may vary depending on each week's subject matter, but you should expect at least 40-50 pages per week. Readings will be placed on Moodle as .pdf documents or links to websites and on reserve at the CYA library. Because much of the subject matter of this course is contemporary, readings may change during the semester based on current events.

2) In pairs, students will lead the class in a discussion of the reading once during the semester, either in the classroom or at a museum. Your goal is not to summarize the reading for your classmates, but to ask questions that will encourage them to discuss its main points.

3) We will have four in-class debates, which will be progressively more formal, culminating in our final debate in the last week of class. For each debate, you will be assigned a team, and you will work with that team to defend your assigned position on a particular topic. You will earn points for your team by citing correct, relevant information from the assigned readings, using your prepared notes. You must demonstrate an understanding of the material and a familiarity with the sources, which you have gained from careful reading and participation in class discussion.

Class Field Work

We will get to see firsthand many of the objects associated with our class discussions in museums and on sites including the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, the Museum of Cycladic Art, the Acropolis Museum, the Acropolis, and the Athenian Agora. You will have to get yourselves to the museums, and be prepared to stand and walk for much of the duration of the class visit. You must bring notebooks (analog or digital) and be prepared to share the space with other museum or site-goers. Large backpacks will have to be checked—if you want to bring your backpack be sure to arrive early to check it before class begins. If we are on site outside, come prepared for the weather.

Evaluation and Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Active participation and contribution (including attendance) 15%
Leading class discussion 10%
Preliminary debates (2) 20%
Midterm debate 25%
Final debate 30%

Course Attendance Policy

Due to the nature of the required course exercises, there are no make-ups. You must be present to lead course discussion, or participate in the debates, for instance. If you have an excused absence (see CYA Absence Policy below) during one of these events, you will be required to do an individual oral exam with the instructor. If you have not been excused, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

In general, absences (excused or unexcused) will affect your participation grade. In the case of three unexcused absences, your overall grade will fall by 5%. More than three unexcused absences may lead to being placed on academic probation, or receiving a failing grade in the course.

Proper attendance includes being on time for class; repeated lateness will affect your participation grade.

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, or reading notes during debates etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

Policy on Original Work

You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that are neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest to cite the source. Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) programs, such as ChatGPT, may not be used for any work or assignments required in this course. The use of generative AI programs defeats the critical thinking skills that are vital to achieving our learning outcomes.

CYA Regulations and Accommodations

Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so punctual attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal, **prior to the class** to be missed. Excused absences for non-illness exceptional circumstances require **prior approval** from the Academic Director, not the course instructor.

Academic Accommodations

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to the course instructor individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in this course.

Class Schedule

Class Day	Day/Date/Place (if applicable)	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Tues Sept 8 Classroom	Introduction to the course
2	Thurs Sept 10	Cultural Heritage: Knossos + the Values of the Past M. de la Torre (ed.), <i>The Conservation of Archaeological Sites in the Mediterranean Region</i> (Los Angeles 1997), 5-14 [The archaeological heritage in the Mediterranean region], 27-40 [Akrotiri on Thera], 41-50 [Reconstruction of ancient buildings], 51-59 [the presentation of archaeological sites], 93-125 [the Minoan palace at Knossos on Crete]
3	Tues Sept 15	Are You for Real? Forgeries and their Impact Case Study: Snake Goddesses at Knossos Review of Lapatin's <i>Mysteries of the Snake Goddess</i> Snake Goddesses, Fake Goddesses - Archaeology Magazine Archive https://www.namuseum.gr/en/hidden_museum/the-strange-story-of-a-cretan-kouros/
Sep 17-19 FS Crete (Depart late PM on 9/16 & return early AM on 9/20)		
4	Tues Sept 22	We've Lost Our Marbles Case study #1: Getty Kouros Bianchi, R. "Saga of the Getty Kouros," <i>Archaeology</i> 47 (May/June, 1994) 22-23 Elia, R. "A Corruption of the Record," <i>Archaeology</i> 47 (May/June, 1994) 24-25 Gladwell, M. "Introduction," <i>Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking</i> . (2005) Current kouros page on Getty website Further reading (optional): True, M. "A Kouros at the Getty Museum," <i>The Burlington Magazine</i> XCCIC (January, 1987) 3-11 <i>The Getty Kouros Colloquium</i> , Athens, 25-27 May, 1992, The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Nicholas P. Goulandris Foundation-Museum of Cycladic Art (Athens 1993)
5	Thurs Sept 24 National Archaeological Museum	The Magic of Science? S.V. Margolis, "Authenticating Ancient <i>Marble</i> Sculpture," <i>Scientific American</i> , 260 (1989) 104-110 J. Spier, "Blinded by Science: The Abuse of Science in the Detection of False Antiquities," <i>The Burlington Magazine</i> , Sept. 1990, pp. 623-631 Case study #2: Aegina and Bassae Pediments National Archaeological Museum Aegina National Archaeological Museum Bassae British Museum Bassae (take the virtual tour and read the wall labels) Telegraph 2001 Bassae Further reading (optional): N. Herz, "Greek and Roman White Marble Geology and Determination of Provenance," in O. Palagia, <i>Greek Sculpture: Function, Materials, and Techniques in the Archaic and Classical Periods</i> (Cambridge 2006) 280-306 (pdf)
6	Fri Sept 25	Pots and Pans Listen to: Looted Episode 5: Return to Sender

Case study#1: Euphronios Krater
 T. Hoving, "Super Art Gems of New York City: [‘The Hot Pot’ Parts I-VI](#)"
 Euphronios krater articles:
[NYT 2008](#)
[Chasing Aphrodite](#)
[Trafficking Culture](#)
 Further reading (optional):
 D. Kurtz and J.D. Beazley, *The Berlin Painter* (Oxford 1983)
 P. Rouet and L. Nash, *Approaches to the Study of Attic Vases: Beazley and Pottier* (Oxford 2002)
 V. Silver, *The Lost Chalice: The Epic Hunt for a Priceless Masterpiece* (New York 2009)

7	Tues Sept 29	<p>Hephaistos in the House Listen to: Looted Episode 3: Big Bronzes Case study: The Fano Athlete Trafficking Culture Sept 2012 ‘Power and Pathos’: Hellenistic Bronzes as Realism in the Flesh NYT Dec 2015 Italian Court Says the Getty’s Prized Ancient Bronze Should Be Seized - NYT Jun 2018 Debate #1 Further (optional) reading: ARCABlog: the Fano Athlete May 2024</p>
8	Thurs Oct 1 National Archaeological Museum	<p>Watch (28 min): On the trail of art forgers - The concealed side of the antiquities trade (link) The Stories Behind the National Archaeological Museum's most Spectacular Statues - Greece Is Looting Matters: Athens: Two Antiquities from the Shelby White Collection on Display Further (optional) reading: G. Koutsouflakis, <i>Bronzes from the Aegean Sea: A Reassessment of Old and New Finds</i>, 2015 (link)</p>
9	Tues Oct 6	<p>Who Owns Archaeological Sites? D. Voudouri, "Law and the Politics of the Past: Legal Protection of Cultural Heritage in Greece" <i>International Journal of Cultural Property</i> (2010) 17: 547–568. UNESCO’s World Heritage List at http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31</p>
10	Wed Oct 7	<p>The Peloponnese at Risk Case Study #1: Theft of the Corinth Museum, Klenia kouroi Corinth Museum Theft 1990 « Trafficking Culture Corinth Antiquities Returned - Archaeology Magazine Archive Corinth Loot Found Under Fresh Fish - Archaeology Magazine Archive http://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/museum/the-famous-kouroi-of-klenia/ Case Study #2: Aidonia Treasure Ancient Tombs Unearthed in Nemea, Greece Shed Light on Mycenaean Civilization - GreekReporter.com A land strewn with antiquities eKathimerini.com Aidonia Treasure – Greece and Ward Gallery ARTS/ARTIFACTS; Rare Gold Baubles: Small, Ancient And Radiant - The New York Times A Grecian Treasure: Back From the Grave? - Los Angeles Times Aidonia Treasure « Trafficking Culture https://www.ekathimerini.com/culture/260712/ancient-tenea-s-enduring-fascination/ Debate #2</p>
Oct 8-10 FS Peloponnese		
11	Tues Oct 13	<p>Mid-century modern looting Case study: Cycladic Figurines Listen: Looted Episode #2</p>

Tsirogiannis, C., Gill, D., & Chippindale, C. (2022). *The Forger's tale: An insider's account of corrupting the corpus of Cycladic figures*. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 29(3), 369-385. ([link](#))

Further reading (optional):

David W. J. Gill, & Chippindale, C. (1993). Material and Intellectual Consequences of Esteem for Cycladic Figures. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 97(4), 601-659.

12 Thurs Oct 15
Classroom

Collecting, Collectors, Collections

N. Brodie, "Congenial Bedfellows? The Academy and the Antiquities Trade" *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 27(4) (2011) 408-437

N. Brodie and C. Luke, "Conclusion: The Social and Cultural Contexts of Collecting," in *Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and the Antiquities Trade*, edited by Neil Brodie, Morag M. Kersel, Christina Luke and Kathryn Walker Tubb. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, (2006) 303-319

K. Fitz Gibbon, ed., "Part II: Collecting and the Trade" in *Who Owns the Past?*, (2005) 164-178, 182-199

Forum: "'The Good Collector': fabulous beast or endangered species?," *Public Archaeology* 1 (2000) 73-81

13 Tues Oct 20
Museum of
Cycladic Art

[From the Trenches - Pieces of a Bronze Age Puzzle - Archaeology Magazine Archive](#)

[Homecoming.Cycladic treasures on their return journey](#)

[Debate: Cycladic idol deal signals new chapter in heritage management | eKathimerini.com](#)

[Trove of stolen antiquities coming home from US | eKathimerini.com](#)

14 Thurs Oct 22

Midterm debate: Collectors vs. archaeologists

Thomas, Suzie and Bonnie L. Pitblado, "The Dangers of Conflating Responsible and Responsive Artifact Stewardship with Illicit and Illegal Collecting." *Antiquity* 94 (2020), 1060-67.

S. White, "A Collector's Odyssey," in *International Journal of Cultural Property*, vol. 7, (1998) 170-176

Vitelli & Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Archaeological Ethics*, 19-26.

[Christie's and Hedge-Fund Titan Move to Quash Turkey's Lawsuit Over 'Stargazer' Idol | artnet News](#)

[Looted Antiques Seized From Billionaire's Home, Prosecutors Say - The New York Times](#)

[Careful Collector No. 18 – Resetting the Collecting Narrative - Cultural Property News](#)

Oct 23-Nov 1 | Fall Break

15 Tues Nov 3

Museum Ethics at Home (Stin Ellada)

<https://newsbulletin247.com/entertainment/79798.html>

[Looting Matters: Collecting Antiquities from Crete: Exhibiting Antiquities from Crete](#)

Case study: The "Lady of Auxerre"

<https://mae.uoc.gr/>

<https://archive.archaeology.org/1001/topten/crete.html>

<https://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/eleutherna/>

<https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/statue-woman-known-lady-auxerre>

16 Thurs Nov 5

Museum Ethics Abroad

[Why US museums and the antiquities trade should work together - Apollo Magazine](#)

E. Marlowe, American Museums First? A Response to Gary Vikan, *West 86th St: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design, History, and American Culture*, May 12, 2017 ([link](#))

N.G. W. Curtis, "Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things." *Museum Management and Curatorship*. 21. 2006. 117-127.

17 Tues Nov 10

Conflict: WWII and Nazi Loot in Greece

[Occupiers in Greece](#)

[Chronicle of efforts](#)

[Return of stolen antiquities](#)

<https://nataliavogeikoff.com/2022/03/16/the-charioteer-of-delphi-in-the-clutches-of-ww-ii/>

Nov 11- 14 FS | Abroad

18	Tues Nov 17	<p>Who Owns the Past "Who Owns the Past" <i>Current Events</i> January 11, 2010 C. M. Cameron, "The destruction of the past: nonrenewable cultural resources," <i>Nonrenewable Resources</i> 3.1 (1994) 6-24 D. Frankel, "Who owns the past? Australian archaeologists have to face up to questions of ideology and ownership," <i>Australian Society</i> 3.9 (1984) 14-15 M. Lynott and A. Wylie, "Stewardship: the central principle of archaeological ethics," in Mark J. Lynott and Alison Wylie (eds.), <i>Ethics in American Archaeology</i> (2002), 35-39 F. Winter, "Who owns the past? Ethical dilemmas in contemporary archaeology," <i>The Explorers Journal</i> (Winter 1991) 128-33</p>
19	Thurs Nov 19	<p>No Bones About It Case study#1: Tombs at Vergina M. Andronikos, "The Royal Tomb at Vergina," in <i>The Search for Alexander</i>, Exhibition Catalogue (1980) 26-38 Archaeology 2000</p>
20	Tues Nov 24	<p>Case Study #2: The "Getty Wreath" Listen to <i>Looted Episode #1</i> (23 min)</p>
Nov 26-29 Thanksgiving Break		
21	Tues Dec 1 Acropolis	<p>All About Athens R. McNeal, "Archaeology and the destruction of the later Athenian acropolis," <i>Antiquity</i> 65 (1991) 49-63 Timeline of Interventions - YSMA Recent (2021) interventions: In Athens, new Acropolis renovations threaten to erase ancient history, expert says Brown University Restoration of the Acropolis: Changes exceed restoration brief And even more recent (Nov 2025): The Parthenon in Athens briefly shed its scaffolding. Here's a look at its restoration Greece's Parthenon Sheds Its Scaffolding for the First Time in 20 Years Recent (July 2023) issues: Acropolis Crowds to be Limited with Time Slots and E-Ticketing - GreekReporter.com Acropolis closes to protect tourists as Greece faces unprecedented heatwave (this also happened in 2024 and 2025) Art in America - At the Acropolis, Michael Rakowitz Makes a Bold Statement on the Origins of Civilization, Emily Watlington - Press - Green . Art . Gallery (Oct 2025)</p>
22	Thurs Dec 3 Acropolis Museum	<p>M. Lending, "Negotiating absence: Bernard Tschumi's new Acropolis Museum in Athens" <i>The Journal of Architecture</i>, 14(5) (2009) 567-589</p>
23	Tues Dec 8 Classroom	<p>Should They Stay or Should They Go? Final debate: The Parthenon Marbles K. Fitz Gibbon, "The Elgin marbles: a summary" in Kate Fitz Gibbon, ed. <i>Who Owns the Past?</i> (2005) 109-121. D. Wilson, "Return and restitution: a museum perspective," in I. McBryde (ed.), <i>Who Owns the Past?</i> (1985) 99-106. Two opposing opinions in <i>Biblical Archaeology</i> Losing the Parthenon Marbles: History, Passion, and Possession - Cultural Property News www.parthenonuk.com</p>

[The Parthenon Sculptures | British Museum](#)
[Why the Elgin Marbles Should Not be Returned to Greece ... Yet](#)
[The Parthenon Sculptures Should be Repatriated Immediately](#)
[British Museum in talks with Greece over return of Parthenon marbles](#)
[No plans to return Parthenon marbles to Greece, says Rishi Sunak](#)
<https://www.cnn.com/style/greek-parthenon-sculptures-painted-egyptian-blue-scn/index.html>

- 24** **Thurs Dec 10** **The Ones that Never Left**
Athenian Agora M. Kersel, "From the Ground to the Buyer: A Market Analysis of the Trade in Illegal Antiquities," in *Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and the Antiquities Trade*, edited by Neil Brodie, Morag M. Kersel, Christina Luke and Kathryn Walker Tubb. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, (2006) 188-205.
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Dec 14-17 | Final exams

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.