

# Pentagon Vandals and The Collectors' Council

by Anton Chaitkin

Following the invasion of Iraq, internationally organized criminal groups were allowed freely to loot Iraq's museums as U.S. military occupation troops stood by. Over 5,000 years of mankind's history and cultural heritage have been threatened; thousands of artifacts have disappeared. The green light for this looting may have been arranged at a series of pre-war meetings between the Defense Department and a group of wealthy collectors, the American Council for Cultural Policy (ACCP), lobbying for the decriminalization of private-ownership-by-theft.

The news that the ACCP had met with Pentagon officials in January 2003, brought an outcry from archeologists and others. The group had been publicly campaigning for relaxation of American anti-looting laws, and calling for a change in Iraq's antiquities-protection laws after a U.S. invasion and conquest. The ACCP responded that in conferring with government officials, it had only been seeking to help protect Iraq. In fact, at that particular Jan. 24 Pentagon meeting, individuals not affiliated with the stolen-art council urged the military to take measures to defend Iraq's national treasures.

But an eyewitness to that meeting, who is familiar with the fight over whether to protect or plunder antiquities, has told *EIR* of other, closed-door meetings of ACCP representatives with U.S. officials. The source reported that the pro-looting group's access to the inner sanctum of the Pentagon was arranged by William Luti, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Special Plans.

*EIR* for April 18, 2003 profiled William Luti as a "crazed" war fanatic running a special Pentagon intelligence unit created to feed information already discredited as false, to the President, to promote unjustified wars. Luti then figured in Seymour Hersh's exposé (*New Yorker*, May 12, 2003) of the self-defined "Cabal" in that very Defense Department unit, the Office of Special Plans. The Luti unit's intelligence doctrine is based on the blatantly evil teaching of the neo-conservatives' godfather, Leo Strauss, that an inner circle *must lie* to the public and the ruler, whom they control by their deceptive whispers. Indeed, Luti, the reported sponsor of the Council's high access in the Pentagon, was himself designated Deputy Undersecretary for Special Plans only after public mocking forced the closure of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's earlier Pentagon false-propaganda unit, the "Office of Strategic Influence." The job of wholesale lying and intelligence cooking was then assigned to Luti and his associates.

## Erasing 5,000 Years of Memory

London *Times* columnist Simon Jenkins wrote in the May 2 issue: "Beware of memory. For the time being, 2003 marks the fall of a hated tyrant. In years to come it may mean something else, the destruction of the greatest treasure from the oldest age of Western civilization. We know of the sacking of the Library at Alexandria . . . Who cares what caused it?"

"Until this week only soldiers and reporters had witnessed the devastation of the National Museum of Baghdad, the seventh-biggest in the world, and the burning of the National Library, containing some 5,000 of the earliest known manuscripts. . . . [W]e face the greatest heritage catastrophe since the Second World War. Though it is early days, two vast repositories of world history appear simply to have vanished. . . .

"[E]ven the Bolsheviks protected the Hermitage during the Russian Revolution. In the Second World War, armies were under specific orders to spare historic sites and museums, even at cost to themselves. Chartres was not shelled though it contained snipers. . . . [A] museum is not a warehouse. It is the custodian of the identity of a people. Robbing it is like seizing the crown jewels of a collective memory. It seeks to erase that memory."

Sharp global reaction to the barbarity in Iraq has now forced even U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft to acknowledge, at a May 6 Interpol meeting, the likelihood "that the looting and theft of the artifacts were perpetrated by organized criminal groups—criminals who knew precisely what they were looking for"; and to say that "Although the criminals . . . may have transported the objects beyond Iraq's borders, they have not escaped the reach of justice."

### War and Plunder, Beyond Iraq

This report begins an *EIR* probe of how the looting of Iraq is related to the global Clash of Civilizations strategy, and to the policy-makers promoting it.

The American Council for Cultural Policy has a boldly global ambition. The ACCP is operated out of the New York law office of its principal founder, Ashton Hawkins. Egypt and other nations' treasures are immediate targets. The *Art Newspaper* on Oct. 24, 2002, quoted Hawkins proposing that foreigners be allowed the "opportunity to acquire," for cash, ancient objects now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. "This would be a way of dispersing art in a legitimate way and

helping Egypt. It would reduce the demand for antiquities on the illicit market, and it would satisfy the hunger for this material," Hawkins declared.

As a leading attorney for those with "the hunger," Hawkins wrote in defense of "good faith purchasers of stolen art" (*Fordham Law Review*, October 1995). The treasurer for Hawkins' ACCP, William Pearlstein, is currently the attorney for Frederick Schultz, who was convicted in February 2003 of acquiring an ancient Egyptian statue head which had been painted over to disguise its immense value.

After the ACCP's Jan. 24, 2003 Pentagon meeting, treasurer Pearlstein was quoted in *Science* criticizing Iraq's laws as "retentionist," and said he wanted to see "some objects certified for export." The cited 2002 *Art Newspaper* report stressed that Hawkins founded ACCP as a global "counterweight to the 'retentionist' message put out by the archeologically rich 'source' countries."

The collectors of stolen art are, in fact, close to the political faction promoting the wars that would open new loot. In 1998, Ashton Hawkins convened a meeting with art thief Frederick Schultz (since imprisoned) and others for the purpose of backing pro-war Democratic Party power broker Michael Steinhardt's battle with the law. U.S. Customs police had seized from Steinhardt's home a golden bowl, supposedly an ancient artifact, which Steinhardt had illegally acquired in 1991 for \$1 million after it was smuggled out of Italy. Steinhardt's bowl was traded out by Sicilian Baron Vincenzo Cammarata, who was indicted for "Mafia association," named as the "brain" of a smuggling ring, and whose house was found packed with more precious objects than are in most museums. Steinhardt's dealer had falsified customs documents to cover up the export of the item from Italy, contrary to Italian law; Steinhardt agreed to the purchase on the condition that if the police found out he would get his money back.

Hawkins arranged for the Association of Art Museum Directors, whose attorney he was, to file a court brief on Steinhardt's behalf. Hawkins was also the counsel to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, to which Steinhardt has donated large sums and objects taken from the Mediterranean. Steinhardt and his wife are members of the Metropolitan's "Visiting Committee to the Department of Greek and Roman Art." Steinhardt's father fenced stolen goods for the Meyer Lansky syndicate, and some of the funds went to put Steinhardt through college and launched his career as a Wall Street hedge-fund manager and speculator. Steinhardt was for many years the principal financier and leader of the right-wing Democratic Leadership Council (associated with Sen. Joseph Lieberman), the chief agency within the party ranks for intimidating and silencing opponents of the Clash of Civilizations war policy. Steinhardt was recently in the Mideast with his investment partner, gangster Marc Rich, working to squelch the Israeli electoral opposition to Ariel Sharon.

Hawkins and Steinhardt lost in court, and Steinhardt had

to give up the bowl. But Steinhardt and his cronies are at the heart of the collectors' Council.

The massively wealthy Leon Levy, a leading activist within Hawkins' ACCP, died on April 7. Levy and his widow, Shelby White, have possessed what is possibly the world's largest private collection of antiquities. Notorious among their booty is the top half of the "Weary Herakles" statue. It was sculpted about 150 A.D., plundered by thieves near an excavation site in southern Turkey in 1980, smuggled across the border, and ultimately sold to Levy and White, who donated a half-share in the loot to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Levy and White contemptuously rebuffed Turkey's repeated attempts to retrieve the amputated artifact.

They had a powerful political protector: New York's late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, whose career they heavily funded. Moynihan proposed weakening U.S. import restrictions concerning looted archeological objects, and limiting what a court could consider as evidence that an object has been stolen. He also sponsored White's nomination to the Cultural Property Advisory Committee, an 11-member body appointed by the President, which reviews international questions of looted archeology. President Clinton's agreement to Moynihan's nominee set off protests from archeologists—Moynihan brazenly sought to replace scholarly experts with collectors, who peered hungrily at the chicken coop they were to guard.

Moynihan was himself the original mole within the Democratic Party for the Straussian fascists pushing the Clash of Civilizations warfare doctrine (see *EIR*, April 18, 2003).

Leon Levy's protégé, former student and former employee, billionaire investment manager Roger Hertog, is also a central player in this faction. An executive of Hertog's investment group, Kevin Brine, is a board member of the Hawkins ACCP. Another executive of Hertog's investment group, Paul Beirne, is a trustee of Hawkins' other archeological organization, the World Monuments Fund. Hertog is a long-time political and financial partner of gangster Michael Steinhardt; they are co-owners of the neo-conservative magazine *New Republic*, and recently, together with global rightist media baron Lord Conrad Black, they started up the neo-conservative *New York Sun* newspaper.

### **Archeologists Demand: 'Come Clean!'**

The danger to civilization posed by the vandals inside and outside the U.S. government has brought a spirited response. In an April 27 column ("Tracing Iraq's Lost Treasures") in the *Washington Post*, Jane Waldbaum, president of the Archeological Institute of America, and law professor Patty Gerstenblith, confronted the gangsterism. They named the "American Council for Cultural Policy, which includes prominent collectors of antiquities on its board of advisers, and [William Pearlstein's group] the National Association of Dealers in Ancient, Oriental and Primitive Art." They called on collectors to voluntarily go to the police and provide details

on how they came by their treasures. "Museum officials, dealers and private collectors who truly wish to contribute to the effort to locate and restore these looted items [should] make available to law enforcement agencies, images of the ancient Mesopotamian objects in their collections and inventories, as well as the documentation of the sources of these objects. This would be of enormous help to law enforcement efforts, because it would provide information on how objects move through the international market and thus would help authorities in tracing any taken out of Iraq."

ACCP co-founder and board member Arthur Houghton replied nervously in the *Post* on May 3, complaining that museums have not fully documented their own holdings, leaving "many treasures . . . at risk of looting by underpaid officials, museum staff or, as in Baghdad, the collapse of civil order." ACCP treasurer Pearlstein, interviewed May 7 by *EIR*, derided the Waldbaum/Gerstenblith proposal as "silly."

But momentum is gathering for a crackdown by civilized humanity against the arrogant vandalism that hit Iraq, and that now threatens a new planetary Dark Age.

### **Who Is the ACCP?**

The American Council for Cultural Policy's Board of Advisors, as of January 2003, included: Laurie Beckelman; Renée Belfer; Michael Botwinick; Kevin Brine; Judith Church; Ralph T. Coe; Lewis B. Cullman; Asher B. Edelman; Vincent P. Fay; Prof. Clive Foss; Prof. Walter Gilbert; Dr. Guido Goldman; Dr. David Greenberg; Paul Gunther; Ashton Hawkins; J. Tomilson Hill; Arthur Houghton; Peter David Joralemon; Jack Josephson; Jonathan Kagan; Michael Kan; Jay Kislack (Florida banker, heavy contributor to Republican Party and to "National PAC," pro-war Israeli influence agency); David S. Korzenik; Arielle Kozloff; John R. Lane; Leon Levy (deceased, April 2003); Prof. John Henry Merryman; Jan Mitchell; Prof. David Gordon Mitten; Richard E. Oldenburg (Chairman, Harvard University Board of Overseers); Andrew Oliver; Dr. Pratapaditya Pal; Meredith Palmer; William Pearlstein; Dr. Edmund Pillsbury; Dr. Sol Rabin; Lawrence Reger; Allen Rosenbaum; Robert Rosenkranz; Donald Rubin; David Rudenstine (Dean, Cardozo Law School, Yeshiva University); William Rudman; John Sare; Jill Spalding; Gerald G. Stiebel; Gary Vikan; Peter Weiss; Dr. Ute Wartenberg; Shelby White; Prof. Thomas S. Whitecloud II; Randall J. Willette; William D. Wixon; and Mitchell Wolfson, Jr.

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