

trajectory commercially. Furthermore, the road will be used to better promote several archaeological sites nearby in the context of the "Mundo Maya" tourism program. However, many archaeologists fear that the better access to archaeological sites might foster their looting and destruction.

### Smuggled artifacts returned to El Salvador

BERKELEY (Karen Olsen Bruhns). In early November of 2000 an alert US Customs agent at the San Francisco International Airport in California spotted two trunks air freighted from El Salvador whose contents, on the bill of lading, were listed as modern handicrafts. Upon opening the trunks the agent noted that the "handicrafts", virtually all of them ceramic vessels or figurines, bore a great resemblance to items pictured in the photo gallery of antiquities falling under import restrictions on the US State Department's WWW page dealing with the regulation of trade in cultural property (<http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/>). The agent alerted his supervisors and they shortly called Karen Olson Bruhns of San Francisco State University to tell them whether these were Precolumbian artifacts covered under the bilateral treaty the US has with El Salvador. They were. The shipment contained 42 pieces, mainly ceramic, including many of the polychrome types typical of the Salvadoran Late Classic period, such as Copador, Gualpopa, and Ulua wares (Fig. 1). Three of the pieces were modern fakes: a pseudo-Cotzumalhuapa figurative vase and two pieces of modern Peten Gloss Ware. A detailed, illustrated, digital inventory was made by Karen Olson Bruhns and Paul Amaroli, archaeologist with the Fundación Nacional de Arqueología de El Salvador (FUNDAR) for distribution on compact disk to Customs and government officials concerned with the case.

Instead of invoking the UNESCO Accord, with its clumsy, time-consuming, and often very expensive (to the country trying to recover its national heritage) procedures, another route of return for the artifacts was utilized. Because the shipment had never legally entered the US, having been stopped before entry, and since the US has a bilateral treaty with El Salvador which recognizes the country's claim to ultimate ownership of archaeological materials found within national territory, US Customs lawyers decided that the

shipment represented stolen property whose ownership was known. The pieces were sent to Washington, D. C. and, in early June 2001, they were repatriated to Salvadoran officials from the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y el Arte (CONCULTURA), the government branch charged with protection and administration of cultural property, including archaeological resources. These officials took the pieces back to the (as then unopened) David J. Guzmán National Museum amidst much local fanfare, including an exhibit at the official opening of the museum in October, 2001.

In November of 2001, the Fiscalía, the equivalent of the United States Attorney General's office, opened an investigation into the means through which the pieces came to leave the country, that is, who was involved in this crime. When they asked for documentation from CONCULTURA officials, the bills of lading from the shipment arrived at the Fiscalia with the names of the senders and the addresses of the shipment thoroughly blacked out. No one has claimed responsibility for this act, although it is common public knowledge that one of the shippers is in a close godparent relationship with a high CONCULTURA official, one who has oversight in matters of archaeological heritage (Segura 2002, Váldez 2002). The matter now seems stalled, although in late June 2002 US Customs apparently provided new copies of the bills of lading and scheduled a meeting between Fiscalia officials in charge of the case and the US Customs agent who directed the seizure. There also appears to be a general desire on the part of Fiscalía and of many Salvadorans to resolve the matter and to attempt to slow the bleeding of their archaeological heritage into the illicit antiquities markets of the First World.

This case, however, shows the power of the World Wide Web in the interception of smuggled artifacts and sets some precedents in terms of the speedy resolution of custody of artifacts which have been apprehended. Invoking international legislation is slow and often prohibitively expensive for underdeveloped countries. The conflict between code and common law legal systems also often impedes appropriate resolution of artifact smuggling cases. Quick identification of smuggled pieces because officials know what is prohibited via WWW sites and the utilizing stolen property legislation for the return of stolen cultural property may well be more efficient in seeing that cultural materials are returned in an expedient manner.

### References

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2002 No tengo nada que ocultar. In: *La Prensa Gráfica: Enfoques*, Año 4, No. 190, Domingo, 20 enero de 2002, p. 5C.
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### Calakmul declared World Heritage by the UNESCO

MEXICO CITY (Arqueología Mexicana). During the 26th session held by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee between June 24 and 29, 2002 the Mexican archaeological site of Calakmul was included in the list of World Heritage sites. Situated in the midst of an ecological reserve in the Mexican



Fig. 1. Smuggled artifacts from El Salvador in the hands of US Customs.