



Stolen Fragments: Black Markets, Bad Faith, and the Illicit Trade in Ancient Artefacts

Roberta Mazza

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Acclaimed scholar Roberta Mazza's thorough true crime investigation *Stolen Fragments* brings the underground papyrus manuscript trade to the fore of an oft-overlooked antiquities market.

In 2012, Mazza launched an investigation into Hobby Lobby president Steve Green to determine the provenance of his rare and ancient papyri. In the process, she uncovered a network of shady characters, including elusive and threatening eBay sellers and spurious forgers posing as collectors. This account of her in-depth search for the origins of biblical and historic artifacts is a pursuit of truth and a call for honesty in a surprisingly unscrupulous field.

In a few editorial asides, Mazza reveals her predilections, but the story of mishandled artifacts focuses more on exposition than opinion. Of course, Mazza reveals her voice in the transcribed chats between herself and a corrupt eBay seller, MixAntik, and her shock at the immorality of shady Christian dealers pops up from time to time. Still, the book remains focused on connecting the dots between the people involved in the manuscript underground. While the subject matter is quite specific and academic, Mazza also raises universal questions about capitalistic Christian-run institutions, including Hobby Lobby and the various museums and galleries willing to show bogus papyrus in order to garner attention. And in addition to exposing shady dealings in ancient artifacts, she seeks solutions to the illicit trade.

Roberta Mazza's investigation was, in and of itself, a stunning feat, comprising thousands of hours and bringing on risks, including physical threats, that would be enough to deter many other people. *Stolen Fragments* is a record of that work; it reveals industry secrets, draws attention to the importance of preserving human history, and speaks to the necessity of honesty.

NICK GARDNER (September / October 2024)

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