Hundreds of thousands of priceless artifacts in several Iraqi museums have been protected from the threat of theft and looting by marking them with SmartWater's unique invisible code.

**Unique invisible code**

Funded by the British Council, approximately 273,000 artifacts held in Iraqi museums have been protected using this new approach. Priceless objects can be traced back to the site they were stolen from, making it easier for law enforcement agencies to prove theft, thereby creating a powerful deterrent to would-be thieves and traffickers.
The artifacts include inorganic pieces from all periods of Iraq’s past; stone-age axes to Neolithic pots dating back to 7000 BC when the world’s first agricultural villages were being established. In 2003, and during the ISIS occupation of Mosul between 2014 and 2017, items like this were frequently looted from museums, later resurfacing on international antiquity markets.

**SmartWater forensic liquid**

SmartWater forensic liquid marks a unique chemical signature onto artifacts and other museum objects. The solution is invisible to the naked eye, detectable under UV black light and scientists only need to recover a speck of SmartWater to prove which location the artifact was stolen from, the date the solution was applied and by whom.

Collaborating with scientists at Reading University, SmartWater established that the forensic liquid causes no damage to stone, pottery, metal, or glass and can withstand intense heat, harsh solvents, and extreme environmental conditions for decades.

**Enhancing artifacts security in museums**

Professor Matthews, at Reading University, commented, “The items in the museum collections are priceless, with regards to the immense cultural value they offer to Iraq. This initiative effectively gives objects a chemical fingerprint, allowing them to be traced if they fall into the wrong hands.”

He adds, “Moreover, it provides law enforcement agencies with the necessary evidence to arrest and prosecute those found in illegal possession of artifacts.”
SmartWater forensic signature

Phil Cleary, Chief Executive Officer of The SmartWater Group, said, “The problem of theft of artifacts from museums, archeological and historic sites is growing. We’re delighted that we’ve been able to support this important initiative in Iraq.”

Phil adds, “Due to their SmartWater forensic signature, these important museum collections are now traceable and can be repatriated if stolen or trafficked. Forensic markers present a real risk to sellers and buyers of stolen artifacts.”

All the costs of R&D were funded by the SmartWater Foundation, the not for profit arm of The SmartWater Group, one of the world’s fastest growing risk management companies.
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