Before discussing my book, War and Cultural Heritage: Cyprus After the 1974 Turkish Invasion, I would like to say a few words about the film. While it provides a glimpse of the situation of churches and monasteries in the north, a comprehensive survey conducted by Greek and Turkish Cypriot architects and engineers reveals what has happened to religious buildings on both sides of the divided island.

After the Green Line barriers which divide north and south opened in April 2003, these professionals joined forces and documented the state of all 620 religious buildings. This involved visiting 505 Christian and 115 Muslim sites and posting photographs and descriptions on the website: www.cyprustemples.com.

The survey shows that a majority of mosques in the south are in fair to good repair while most churches and monasteries in the north are in a sorry state. They have been looted of icons and stripped of wall paintings and mosaics which were part of the fabric of the buildings. A number of these churches and monasteries are fine exemplars of Byzantine construction and art and were considered major world heritage sites because of their irreplaceable mosaics and frescoes.

Three of these have been mentioned in the film. The late 5th - early 6th century mosaic composition at the Virgin of Kanakaria church was considered finer than two other surviving mosaics at St. Catherine's convent in Sinai and at Ravenna in Italy. Five fragments of the Kanakaria mosaic have been returned to Cyprus.

The 13th century wall paintings at the tiny stone church near Lysi are uniquely beautiful examples of Byzantine art. They were looted, shipped to Munich, sold to the Menil Foundation of Texas and installed and installed in a chapel in Houston. They are set to be repatriated in 2012.

The 12th and 15th century frescoes at the Antiphonitis Monastery were of considerable historical and artistic importance. Segments cut from the depictions of the Last Judgment and the Tree of Jesse have been restored to Cyprus but the compositions as a whole have been destroyed. The mosaics and wall paintings were ruthlessly stripped from the churches by Romanian technicians trained by the mainland Turkish smuggler and dealer Aydin Dikmen. This process gutted the buildings which have been left to deteriorate since their treasures were taken.

While individual Turkish Cypriots have long been aware that the heritage of the island belongs to them as well as to Greek Cypriots and are trying to rescue it, the Turkish Cypriot and mainland Turkish authorities have done little to preserve Christian and archaeological sites. A belated effort has been made to repair and maintain major archaeological sites in order to attract tourism.

My book tells the story of what happened after the Turkish invasion. Ethnic cleansing - the expulsion of the Greek Cypriot majority - and pillage - theft of the island's rich cultural heritage
began as soon as Turkish soldiers stormed ashore on July 20th, 1974. I have identified three phases.

During the first, 158,000 Greek Cypriots fled while archaeological sites, museums, churches, monasteries, castles, libraries and private collections were robbed and vandalized, sometimes at random by rampaging soldiers, sometimes by professional art and antiquities thieves belonging to a well organized network on the island.

Looters who culled artifacts from archaeological sites not only diminished their value by 80 per cent by removing them from their historical and geographical context but also destroyed sites they plundered.

During the second phase, 2,000 of the remaining 4,000 Greek Cypriots were forced to leave as Turkish Cypriot smugglers systematically targeted specific treasures. These were shipped to the leading wholesaler of Cypriot loot, Aydin Dikmen in Munich.

Dikmen, who began his career in Turkey hawking illegal finds and forging artifacts became a ship-breaker and major player in hot art mafias.

During the third, ongoing phase 500 Greek Cypriots have clung to their homes in the Karpass Peninsula and looting has continued from unexplored sites. The cultural heritage of the north is also being depleted by illegal excavations, dissolution by neglect and destruction by developers.

Sixteen thousand icons, mosaics and frescoes and 60,000 ancient artifacts have been torn from their contexts, smuggled, hoarded by dealers, consigned for sale to auction houses, and sold to museums and private collectors. While looting generally accompanies warfare and unrest in countries with rich heritages, the case of Cyprus is particularly dramatic because it is confined to a small, well defined geographical area.

In the Turkish occupied north, both Christian and ancient sites have been mercilessly plundered and scholarly investigation has been disrupted. Meanwhile in the government-controlled south, sites have been largely preserved and scholars have been at work uncovering the distant past, pushing back the history of the island by 3,000 years.

In 1974, archaeologists spoke of Cyprus as having 9,000 years of history but scholarly exploration over the past three decades revealed that Cyprus has, at least, 12,000 years of history.

Scholarship in the north remains frozen while it moves forward in the south. Professor Edgar Peltenburg of Edinburgh University observed that the study of Cyprus' history has become "lopsided." While little excavation and study is being done in the north, archaeologists working in the south are making fresh discoveries all the time. Last summer we learnt that early settlers from Asia Minor not only introduced cattle and cultivated cereals but also kept cats as household pets; the Mediterranean's first wine was made in Cyprus 5,500 years ago, predating winemaking in Greece by 1,500 years; and perfume was manufactured and exported 4,000 years ago.
These historical tidbits represent phrases in the grand narrative of human development and civilization. Unless scholars continue to search out our past and build on this narrative, humankind as a whole is impoverished, the fabric of our historical narrative becomes filled with holes. We are diminished. Loss in one country or part of the world is a loss for global civilization.

Although tomb robbing is said to be the second oldest profession, looting is a crime against civilization, a crime against humanity.

There are now two quite different cultural zones on Cyprus: a wasteland in the north and a land of plenty in the south. For the first time in its long history, Cyprus is culturally divided as well as administered as two ethnic regions.

This is a very destructive development on an island which, in the view of Canadian scholar Jacques Dalibard, should be regarded as "one huge monument."

Dispatched to Cyprus by UNESCO in 1975-76 before concentrated looting began, Dalibard surveyed the situation and wrote a detailed study. But the report he presented to the world's heritage watchdog was suppressed and shelved.

Subsequent reports by the Council of Europe and a Turkish Cypriot team based in London received similar treatment. Throughout this period, Turkish Cypriot and Turkish journalists did their best to halt the looting by publicizing it.

Turkish Cypriot poet Mehmet Yasin and mainland Turkish journalist Ozgen Acar of Cumhurriyet, in particular, campaigned against pillage.

Cyprus is not the only victim of pillage. Cambodia, India, the Balkans, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and the countries of Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America have been subjected to looting. Thousands of artifacts are leaving Iraq on a daily basis. The current scale of theft there may surpass pillage taking place everywhere else.

As soon as US and British troops crossed into Iraq from Kuwait in March 2003, thieves went to work at known and unexcavated archaeological sites, stripping away entire episodes in the story of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, and destroying the relics of other cultures peoples that flourished in that ancient land.

I accompanied the UNESCO mission to Iraq in May 2003 to investigate the looting of the Iraq museum and have followed up on developments during subsequent visits. My findings are included in an introductory chapter in my book. There is also a preface written by Selma al-Radi, an Iraqi archaeologist who has excavated in Cyprus and Iraq and was a member of the UNESCO team.

There are three levels of operatives engaged in the illegal art trade: tomb robbers who harvest the crop, receivers or middle men, and customers. Tomb robbers and customers are many but middle
men - wholesalers and primary dealers - are few and are closely connected. The authorities and police forces and customers know who looters, dealers and buyers are but rarely take action against them. Sentences are light for those who are caught and tried.

But the police in some countries are becoming more active. Last month police raided a villa on the island of Schinousa and discovered a hoard of hundreds of antiquities believed to belong to a major dealer and ship owner, the late Christos Michaelides, who was based in London.

Istanbul, Munich, Zurich and London are hubs in the trade in stolen art and antiquities. Artifacts flow along routes used by drugs and arms smugglers. They often buy looted art to launder their profits from their other enterprises. Terrorist groups in Iraq are selling antiquities to finance their operations. The trade is said to be worth $5-6 billion a year.

But the climate of opinion is changing. The transformation seems to have begun in the late eighties, round the time the Indianapolis court decided to send the Kanakaria mosaics home to Cyprus. The presiding judge took the view that the dealer had no right to stolen property even though he claimed she had bought mosaics in "good faith."

Good faith is no longer considered good practice. Purchasers cannot continue to abide by the maxim, "Don't ask too many questions." Leading museums and collectors in the US are facing serious moral pressure and prosecution over hot artifacts in their collections. In February the Metropolitan Museum agreed to return to Italy a collection of silver from Sicily and a 1,500 year old krater - or urn for mixing wine with water - painted by Euphronios, the most famous artist of Greece's greatest creative period.

Egypt is claiming a funeral mask at the St. Louis museum, Peru Inca artifacts from Yale University, France fragments of Hebrew texts stolen from the National Library in Paris. Christie's auction house in London has removed from sale five beams stolen during renovations from the mosque at Cordoba in Spain. Italy has returned to Ethiopia a column looted in 1939, Japan a monument stolen from Korea. Marion True, formerly of the Getty Museum in California, has become the first curator to stand trial for acquiring stolen artifacts. She is accused by Italy of purchasing at least 42 stolen items from a dealer, Robert Hecht, who is also in the dock. Another 58 Italian artifacts are under investigation. Greece is claiming four.

While the "good faith" principle continues to determine the fate of looted artifacts in Continental Europe, developments in the US cannot be ignored.

European consumers of stolen art and antiquities are coming under fire from countries seeking pillaged patrimony. Cultural property is a non-renewal resource.

Archaeologists and historians learn a great deal about our development and history as long as sites are left undisturbed. Artifacts have voices which tell our story if they are left on site; in the homes of the wealthy and in museums, they are dumb objects sitting on shelves and languishing in glass cases.
Once they tell our story, they can be sent into the world and put on display.