



For Immediate Release



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THE ICON HUNTER

A Refugee's Quest to Reclaim Her Nation's Stolen Heritage

by Tasoula Hadjitofi with Kathy Barrett

On Sale: April 11, 2017

Praise for THE ICON HUNTER

"The Icon Hunter shares the riveting details of (Tasoula's) thirty-year journey. The message of the book touches the heart of Christian Orthodoxy, yet, at a time when the world is ravaged by conflict, it is universal: cultural heritage belongs to humanity, and there is an obligation to remain vigilant and active against the threat of cultural destruction, looting and illegal trafficking."

—Nicos Anastasiades, *The President of Cyprus*

"The Icon Hunter is not only a quest for justice but for spirituality as well. Tasoula Hadjitofi achieves both. She is truly brave and her work is a shining example to us all that a persevering woman is a force to reckon with. In the age of ISIS and the routine destruction of historic sites, art, and artifacts, Tasoula's work is timely and an inspiration for all who care to preserve the human legacy of art. I simply cannot wait for this story to be turned into a movie. As a book, it is impossible to put down."

—Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *New York Times* bestselling author of *"Infidel"* and *"Heretic"*



"A gripping memoir. As a former refugee, she reveals the despair and irreparable loss of losing not only a nation but also its cultural heritage. She exposes the "underworld of art traffickers" with intricate detail as she documents all the legal loopholes and battles that stand in the way of repatriating stolen artifacts. The book is a powerful and important chronicle of art trafficking and its impact on the lives of those torn apart by war, and Hadjitofi is a caring and exacting storyteller."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Hadjitofi's journey is endearing, and she brings the plight of the Cypriots into sharper focus. An intimate trek into the venal world of art looting and selling."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Throughout history, art smugglers, war profiteers, and terrorists have stolen countless icons, frescos, mosaics and cultural artifacts from vulnerable, war-torn countries – and continue to do so today in places like Syria and Iraq. One woman has made it her life's work to retrieve them.

In a powerful memoir, **Tasoula Hadjitofi**—refugee, Icon Hunter, and culture crime watcher—reveals her perilous journey from refugee to orchestrating "The Munich Case," one of the largest European art trafficking stings since WWII. **THE ICON HUNTER** (Pegasus Books; April 11, 2017; Hardcover; 400 pages) is the story of the pursuit of justice and Tasoula's riveting adventure into the underworld of art trafficking.

In 1974, Tasoula and her family were forced to flee their home after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Tasoula eventually settled in The Netherlands and became Honorary Consul to Cyprus. Approached by a notorious art dealer with information about stolen sacred artifacts looted during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, she

Pegasus Books

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spends the next ten years convincing the art dealer to inform on his former partner. Tasoula places everything on the line to repatriate her country's sacred treasures.

With the Bavarian police in place, the Cypriots on their way, seventy under-cover agents bust into the Munich apartment of a notorious Turkish smuggler to recover 5,000 ancient artifacts from Cyprus and around the world. The icons are not just masterpieces—they are artistic manifestations of faith and a gateway to the divine. Unaware of the treacherous lies in the shadow of her success and even as unspeakable personal tragedy strikes, she never gives up her search knowing the special place these antiquities hold in the hearts of Orthodox Christians.

Following the Munich case, Hadjitofi creates the non-profit organization, Walk of Truth, which works to locate sacred artifacts looted from conflict areas and restore the cultural identity of those countries to their people.

In her own words, “my gift to my country, Cyprus, my gift to 65 million refugees worldwide, my gift to every immigrant who struggles to integrate in a foreign country, my gift to every one of you who struggles with being a mother, wife, professional and all of you who live the principles of Human Rights.”

Inspiring and empowering, **THE ICON HUNTER** is a gripping story by a remarkable woman that will captivate readers, educate them on the importance of cultural artifacts, and inspire them to take action.

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More Praise for THE ICON HUNTER

“In a memoir that reads like a high-stakes mystery, Cypriot refugee Tasoula Hadjitofi struggles to find her rightful place in the world and to return the religious treasures of her homeland to theirs. Along the way, her compelling personal tale illustrates the devastating cultural, historic, spiritual and moral consequences of illegal art trafficking.”—**Nicholas Gage, author of *Eleni and Greek Fire***

“Tasoula was among those brutally displaced by the invasion of Cyprus while icons, frescoes, even mosaics were ripped from ancient churches and offered on the international art market. But she refused to be a victim. *The Icon Hunter* vividly brings to life all the passion, drama, and danger of the noble—and ultimately successful—quest of this heroine of cultural activism.” —**Gary Vikan, PhD, former director of the Walters Art Museum and author of *Sacred and Stolen***

“An explosive account. Tasoula's life is derailed during the Turkish military invasion of Cyprus, but years later her life comes full circle as she seeks justice for the hundreds of churches that were looted and destroyed in the occupied areas. Through Tasoula's efforts and passion, we learn the deeper meaning these artifacts hold for Orthodox Christians world-wide. *The Icon Hunter* is a timely story to be savored and treasured.” —**Priscilla Jana, author of *Fighting for Mandela***

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Tasoula's Ongoing and Resolved Restitution Cases

- *Royal Doors, Japan*
- *The Four Apostles of Antiphonitis church, Lobbying for changing laws in UK, Holland, USA.*
- *Archangel Michael, alternative restitution from a kind doctor in Holland.*
- *Head of the Archangel, alternative restitution from a kind collector in Greece.*
- *Virgin Mary, first civil case and then, alternative restitution by Greek Government intervention.*
- *John the Baptist, alternative restitution by a dealer in London.*
- *Munich Case, Sting operation, 5500 artifacts tracked down from all over the world, to-date Germany never released a comprehensive list of what was found and what was returned to whom.*

About Tasoula Hadjitofi



Tasoula Hadjitofi (1959) was born in Famagusta, Cyprus and spent the first fifteen years of her life there. Following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the outbreak of war in 1974, Tasoula and her family became refugees and relocated to Limassol where they rebuilt their lives. At the tender age of seventeen, Tasoula left her family and Cyprus to create a new future abroad eventually settling in the Netherlands.

In 1987, Ms. Hadjitofi was appointed Honorary Consul of Cyprus in The Netherlands. She was the youngest-ever Honorary Consul appointed by Cyprus and the first female. Because of the absence of a Cypriot Embassy in The Netherlands at the time, Tasoula's

activities as Honorary Consul covered all spheres, ranging from political, social, economic, cultural, and the media. In the course of her service as Honorary Consul, she accommodated the needs of many Cypriots, Greeks and Turks. These included securing facilities for medical treatment, addressing personal or family problems as well as providing assistance for integration, etc.

While holding this office, she was approached by an art dealer who was offering to sell the whereabouts of artifacts that were looted from her native Cyprus, during and after the war. This incident stirred her desire to see justice served and she devoted the next 27 years of her life tracking down leads from dealers, detectives and lawyers to recover the stolen cultural and religious heritage of her motherland. This initiative culminated in instigating and coordinating the 1997 "Munich Case," one of the largest art trafficking sting operations in European history since WWII. This resulted in the discovery of over 5000 artifacts hidden in double ceilings, double floors, and other apartments rented by Aydin Dikmen, a Turkish dealer living in Munich who was rumored to be a link between the looted Cypriot artifacts from the occupied area of Cyprus and the international market. To date, some of these artifacts have been returned to Cyprus but others remain in the custody of the Bavarian Police entrapped in legal procedures. Her service as Honorary Consul to Cyprus ceased in 1999, following the establishment of a Cyprus Embassy in The Netherlands.

Tasoula was nominated for European Woman of The Year for her efforts in combating art trafficking. Since 1988, Tasoula has traced and retrieved countless artifacts of significant historical and cultural value to her native Cyprus in addition to the more than five thousand artifacts that were uncovered in the Munich case from all around the world. Although Tasoula's work had its origins in Cyprus, her efforts extend national borders. With experience working on cases in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Holland, Greece and Cyprus she has unique insight into how to improve and unify global laws. Her work has required the cooperation of various governmental authorities, Europol, Interpol as well as German and Cypriot police forces.

On the 12th November 2007 Tasoula Georgiou-Hadjitofi was nominated as the Cypriot representative for the "Women of Europe 2008" Award at a ceremony in Nicosia organized by the International Association for the Promotion of Women of Europe (AIPFE)-Cyprus.

In 2012, she founded Walk Of Truth, a non-governmental organization whose mission is to raise awareness about the importance of protecting and preserving cultural heritage in conflict areas. Via Cultural Crime Watcher Worldwide and Walk of Truth, Tasoula engages every-person to take an active role in protecting cultural heritage and lobbies global lawmakers and leaders to do the same. Walk of Truth is currently working to repatriate looted artifacts for Syria.

Tasoula strives to preserve cultural heritage for future generations because she strongly believes that it is the only way to conserve cultural diversity in the world.

For more information visit:
www.tasoulahadjitofi.com
Twitter: @Hadjitofi
#TheIconHunter
#CulturalCrimeWatchers

Interview Topics for Tasoula Hadjitofi

Tasoula is an expert on the impact of war and cultural cleansing. From her personal and professional experience, Tasoula can offer unique insights about the present state of affairs of refugees, immigrants and displaced people as well as what we face in Syria and other places in contact with the unprecedented destruction and looting of cultural heritage that is taking place around the world.

Life as a refugee

Tasoula speaks from the unique prospective of how one goes from having their life torn apart by war to the challenges of assimilating into a new country as a refugee who doesn't know the language or the customs or the culture. What is the impact on refugees, displaced and immigrant people when they see their looted cultural heritage for sale in auction houses, with dealers and in museums?

Crisis of refugees today

Many of these refugees had hellish experiences witnessing their place of origin, often centers of ancient civilization, reduced to bombed-out shells. They have suffered the destruction not only of their homes and businesses, but of the monuments, places of worship and historic sites, which gave meaning to their lives and connected them with their forebears.

Destruction of cultural heritage

Tasoula has a keen insight into how the laws vary country by country concerning art trafficking and restitution and can shed light on the difficulties that exist in repatriating looted cultural heritage. Her experience working on the Lans Case in Holland, The Peg Goldberg vs. Church of Cyprus in America and the Munich Operation offers an insight into the legal complexities that exist in repatriating one's cultural heritage. Tasoula can speak to the difference between repatriating Nazi looted art vs. others.

It is a well-known fact that in all wars, the destruction of the enemy's cultural heritage is a way of demonstrating power and domination, a way of rewriting history and waging psychological warfare. For centuries, these types of extremist acts of violence have been accompanied by other crimes such as trading in arms and drugs.

Destroying cultural heritage is a way of distorting history, and it gives today's rulers the chance to present history to future generations in ways that serve present-day interests. That is why people so often deliberately set out to destroy religious monuments and archeological sites during conflicts and wars. Part of us, the evil part of us, tells us that destroying the cultural heritage of the enemy is destroying the soul of the people, the soul of a nation. We wipe out their past and hence we delete their presence.

Tasoula can speak to the threat of religious freedom and share her experience of witnessing her own culture being erased in the occupied area of Cyprus.

Her ongoing work

Tasoula, through her Walk of Truth NGO, is the only organization that engages the public to protect and preserve the world's cultural heritage. Tasoula can speak to the direct impact that destruction and looting of one's cultural heritage has on people, about her new program culture crime watchers, and her plan to utilize the 65 million displaced people in the world.

Because of the reputation of Walk of Truth and Tasoula's reputation, she receives confidential tips about looted art and acts of destruction. Many of the people who contact her are refugees who justify looting to feed their families during war. Tasoula engages them with alternative solutions.

ISIS

We read about ISIS every day, and debate the best way to tackle extremism and contemporary destruction. ISIS is a new phenomenon, but the systematic de-Christianization of the northern part of Cyprus has already

been going on for forty years. Extremists are targeting second generation immigrants amongst us with dual nationalities and split loyalties. Extremists divide us because they understand our failings and play our weakened moral compass. We need a unified approach, to engage each and every citizen, the diaspora working side by side with the authorities and every correct human being to eliminate extremist elements in our ethnic or religious groups. We will not mobilize a single Iraqi or a Syrian migrant if he witnesses pieces of his mosque or synagogue on sale in the antiquities market.

A Citizen of the World

Being a Greek Cypriot living in The Netherlands for the past twenty years, Tasoula is a characteristic example of a European citizen. She is multilingual and multicultural and has integrated into every European society she has lived in. Here she ruminates on immigration: “when drafting laws on immigration and integration, with respect to cultural identity we could imagine Europe being a beautiful mosaic. A piece of art where every little stone has its own color, its own brightness, shade, its own identity. The edges of every stone are no longer sharp as neighbors rub shoulders, symbolizing diversity. All together forming a beautiful mosaic.”

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