

Antiquities Trafficking and Terrorism: Where Cultural Wealth, Political Violence, and Criminal Networks Intersect

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The plunder of antiquities during and following a military conflict is by no means a recent phenomenon. The concept of “the spoils of war” has existed throughout the millennia, and until recently cultural property was considered an acceptable target of invading forces.¹ However, since the Cold War, the burgeoning multi-billion-dollar illicit trade in fine art and antiquities has provided a lucrative moneymaking venture for organized criminal enterprises. Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia have taken advantage of existing drug trafficking routes to transport stolen or looted antiquities that are easy to acquire, disguise as licit, and sell.²

Today, the topic of antiquities trafficking is gaining traction in international security discourse, as the high demand for religious, ethnic, and cultural artifacts has begun to attract the interest of terrorist groups. Penetrating regional illicit antiquities markets can give terrorists a twofold strategic advantage: (1) they can use profits from selling stolen antiquities to fund operations, support recruits, and acquire weapons; and (2) they may destroy or remove national treasures to achieve a type of “cultural cleansing” that undermines nationalism and the morale of local populations.³ Reports from both Iraq and Afghanistan indicate that Al Qaeda has already leveraged local security crises to deepen its associations with organized crime and raise funds by selling looted or otherwise illicitly obtained antiquities.

The difficulties associated with regulating the antiquities trade are well documented: a lack of record-keeping for transactions in both source and market nations,⁴ as well as the private nature of many of these transactions, obscures the legal status of the antiquities' sourcing and often results in an unverifiable ownership history.⁵ These regulatory difficulties, combined with the spread of conflicts into regions rich with ancient treasures and the rising market demand for artifacts from these same regions, make it highly likely that more terrorist groups will get involved in illicit antiquities trafficking. This will most likely occur in regions where three factors converge: (1) the antiquities present are in high demand on the licit market; (2) the region is experiencing some type of political conflict;⁶ and (3) some transnational criminal networks are already present.

The Genesis of the Illicit Antiquities Market: The High Rate of Return for an Easily Obtained Commodity

Since the end of the Cold War, international trade in illicitly obtained antiquities has burgeoned. Archeological expeditions, global security operations, and increasing globalization have brought to light the wealth of valuable antiquities in developing nations, spurring an interest in the art markets of developed nations in acquiring rare pre-Columbian, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Arab art.⁷ As a result, regions of political upheaval in Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia have become prime locations for the international market in cultural art and artifacts.⁸ Moreover, the proliferation of violent conflict in both the Horn of Africa and the Islamic Maghreb,⁹ combined with growing interest in African tribal art, will spur terrorist groups to enter the trade in those regions.

Antiquities trafficking is one of the newest moneymaking ventures for TCOs. Seeking to exploit the demand among affluent private collectors, they facilitate the illicit excavation, transport, and sale of antiquities.¹⁰ The activities of many TCOs already include trafficking in narcotics, humans, and weapons, as well as flora, fauna, and body parts.¹¹ Improved technologies, the rapid pace of globalization, and improved transportation allow TCOs to leverage their operational functionality and adapt existing resources, roles, processes, and routes to new commodities.¹² The illicit antiquities trade is one of the fastest growing and most attractive of the new activities, as items are often relatively easy to access, high market demand makes their sale lucrative, and regulation and detection are extremely difficult due to broad overlap with the licit antiquities sector.

Ease of Access

Due to their long and distinguished cultural legacies, many underdeveloped, economically weak countries are often rich in high-interest antiquities that have great value in the licit art market. Artifacts of the Middle East, for example, are highly valued for being representative of the genesis of the three modern monotheistic religions,¹³ and they also generate a wellspring of diverse emotions. In these nations, the opportunity for illicit sourcing and trafficking is also much greater, as they often lack the secure borders and effective security apparatus needed to safeguard cultural property.¹⁴ Many such regions are also plagued by political instability and corruption, which increases the practical difficulty of protecting cultural artifacts. For example, periods of armed conflict give looters the opportunity to raid unprotected archeological sites,

museums, and heritage sites with little chance of detection.¹⁵ Moreover, criminal organizations may find that a population experiencing violent conflict is willing to raid local sites as a way to earn money and support their families.

The increasing ease and speed of travel and communications have also opened up previously inaccessible regions of the world to TCOs. With the right technology and the help of civilians familiar with the area, archeological sites in jungles, deserts, and oceans can be exploited.

Technologically advanced machinery and more clandestine transportation networks have made the extraction and transfer of illicitly obtain materials vastly easier.¹⁶

A Lucrative Market

Estimates of the trade in illicit antiquities suggest a lucrative and fast-growing market that could realize significant profits. Although the clandestine nature of illicit trafficking prevents making an accurate assessment of its financial returns, specific aspects of the licit market can help gauge the profits of organized criminal networks. The licit trade in fine art and antiquities is valued at more than \$50 billion annually, whereas the illicit antiquities trade is estimated to be a \$4 billion enterprise;¹⁷ however, UNESCO suggests that the number may now be closer to \$6 billion.¹⁸

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, art crime follows only drugs and arms in the ranks of highest grossing criminal trades.

By definition, artifacts and antiquities are finite; that is, more cannot be produced to meet demand. As a result, their sale yields some of the highest returns of all trafficked commodities.¹⁹

In the 1980s, for example, authorities estimated the value of 300 artifacts of Peru's Moche civilization,²⁰ which were trafficked from the coast of Peru to art dealers in Southern California, at \$30 million—a number that rivaled the region's drug trade.²¹ The price of antiquities has increased tenfold over the past decade,²² and high demand has increased the incentive for TCOs to expand into ethnically desirable regions. Often benefiting from relatively easy access to high-demand artifacts and a network of impoverished locals willing to loot for pay, TCOs can supply affluent collectors with antiquities at a substantial profit.²³ High-profile cases of recovered stolen antiquities have noted a markup of 50 to 1,000 times the price paid to the excavator.

Difficulty of Detection

While many antiquities that appear on the art market are suspected of being illicitly trafficked, a persistent lack of transaction data, documentation, and regulation makes verification of an object's legal status (provenance) difficult if not impossible.²⁴ As a type of cultural property, antiquities fall within an unregulated class of internationally traded assets that requires no systematic or public record of the financial exchange between parties, and there are no official titles to transfer. Multi-million-dollar transactions thus can legally occur between individuals, corporations, and nations without the approval of authorities or the need to pay sales tax.²⁵

Antiquities themselves, unlike narcotics, are a legal commodity, and the trade of licit antiquities is also fully legal, even with an unverifiable ownership or sourcing history. Consequently, antiquities trafficking hinges on shifting an object's legal status from illicit to licit at some time during the transfer to the demand country.²⁶ Easily falsifiable documents make this transition

easy, which compounds the difficulty of identifying illegally sourced (black market) artifacts or determining whether they have been illegally exported.²⁷ The line between the licit objects and illicit objects is often indistinguishable,²⁸ creating a “grey” market that is especially attractive to organized crime.

The success of the illicit market for art and antiquities hinges on these close links between the licit and illicit sectors. The rule of law is often weak in developing countries, and law enforcement, customs, and other officials may in fact facilitate the illicit trade through bribes, providing false documents, and other corrupt practices. Attempts at regulation have met with vehement resistance from both source and market countries. Moreover, given the shifting, falsified, and vague legal status of these commodities, penalties for those caught trafficking are rarely punitive.

Given the clandestine nature of looting and trafficking, it is difficult to ascertain how pervasive it is and where profits tend to be directed. Nevertheless, numerous studies of area-specific looting paint a dismal picture of the extent of such activity. In Turkey, 90 percent of nearly 400 burial tombs inspected by scholars Roosevelt and Luke exhibited signs of looting;²⁹ an official from Turkey reported that, in 1997 alone, more than 500 looters had been arrested with upwards of 10,000 illicit cultural objects in their possession.³⁰ In 2012, Abdellah Salih, an employee of Morocco’s ministry of cultural affairs, estimated that 40 percent of ancient rock engravings and 10 percent of rock paintings in the region had been stolen or damaged by looters.³¹

The Nexus between Terrorism and Antiquities Trafficking: Existing Networks Facilitate a New Type of Illicit Trade

In the wake of the Cold War—the period when TCOs began seriously penetrating the antiquities trade—political insurgents and religious factions in many developing nations made the transition from freedom fighters to terrorists. Today, some of these terrorist groups are uniquely positioned to exploit the antiquities market and use the profits to advance their ideological goals or provide currency for weapons transactions.³² High-demand antiquities are most often sourced in underdeveloped countries where armed conflict or internal strife is common, and today it is not uncommon for a terrorist presence to coincide with political violence. Mali, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and Turkey are just some of the nations where high-value antiquities and active terrorist groups coexist.

Antiquities trafficking comprises many types of illicit acquisition, transfer, and sale, although terrorist activity most often focuses on (1) the illicit looting or excavation of archeological sites, museums, or other collections; (2) the subsequent illicit transfer of these objects; and, finally, (3) their sale.³³ The transnational trafficking networks that support this process rely on forging links between the local population in areas where antiquities have been discovered, the traffickers who violate national laws prohibiting their export, and the dealers who sell them at great profit to legal private collectors. In this way, antiquities trafficking is similar to other forms of illicit trade, including their operations, roles, exploitative effects, smuggling networks, and corrupt influences.³⁴ Moreover, an overlap of the illicit antiquities trade with the narcotics and money

laundering industries has been reported from Belize, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Thailand, and Turkey.³⁵

The opportunity to make extensive profits incentivizes cooperation between organized crime and terrorist groups, which is similar to the cooperation observed within narcotics, wildlife, and human trafficking networks.³⁶ Terrorist groups operating in nations with sought-after cultural property are well positioned to pursue the excavation of cultural artifacts, and then to leverage their organized crime associates' access to the international antiquities market. Some looters are organized and funded by highly organized networks, whereas others are simply impoverished locals who know they can sell stolen cultural artifacts. Farmers in Afghanistan, for example, have excavated relics and sold them to local criminal or terrorist groups, who then use existing smuggling routes to export the antiquities abroad, where they are given false provenance and sold, often on the open market to unsuspecting museums and collectors.³⁷

The Current Landscape: Political Violence and Antiquities Looting

Periods of armed conflict, political insurgency, or terrorist activity significantly increase the likelihood that criminal or terrorist groups will target cultural resources and exploit local needs to establish trafficking networks.³⁸ Political destabilization naturally increases the difficulty of protecting cultural property, as it distracts local security forces and enables terrorist groups to encourage the clandestine excavation and illicit export of national treasures.³⁹ Terrorists may excavate relics themselves or offer impoverished locals who have easy access to their own cultural heritage a living wage far beyond what they could earn in times of conflict.⁴⁰

Recurring conflicts in the Middle East and Southeast Asia have tested struggling nations' ability to protect their cultural heritage. In 2012, for example, Pakistani customs authorities found that six boxes destined for London, Frankfurt, and Dubai contained stolen antiquities.⁴¹ Labeled as "handicrafts of no commercial value" but estimated to be worth at least \$34 million, they included Gandhāran carvings, coins, metal weaponry, tiles, and gold jewelry likely plundered from museums and excavation sites in Afghanistan.⁴² A 2012 report by transnational crime expert Gretchen Peters adds that the Pakistani terrorist organization known as the Haqqani Network has diversified its moneymaking operations by taxing and collecting payments from all types of traffickers.⁴³ Haqqani commanders have been reported to collect protection money from traffickers moving artifacts looted from Afghanistan into Pakistan to ensure that they "avoid trouble on the road."⁴⁴ However, the most frequent and best documented instances of antiquities looting linked to contemporary terrorist groups has occurred in Iraq following both the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1991 and the U.S.-led military intervention in 2003, and in Syria, where the ongoing civil war has given opposition groups the opportunity to loot, excavate, and destroy.

Iraq

Despite a 1974 law prohibiting the export of Iraqi antiquities,⁴⁵ antiquities trafficking is perhaps most prolific in Iraq, facilitated by recurrent political violence and a strong criminal presence. Both TCOs and terrorist groups are reported to reap enormous gains from exploiting the country's cultural wealth. Under the dictatorial Saddam Hussein regime, Iraq had effectively become a criminal state, characterized by endemic corruption, criminal activity, and illicit

economies.⁴⁶ Antiquities were an early target of organized crime in Iraq; it is estimated that more than 4,000 objects were stolen from Iraqi museums during the Gulf War, the profits used to arm insurgent groups. When the 2003 invasion of Iraq dramatically increased interest in Middle Eastern antiquities, criminal networks in the country were well positioned to supply them and the organized criminal market flourished. In 2003 alone, Al Qaeda looted 10,000-15,000 Assyrian artifacts from the National Museum of Iraq and various archaeological sites, which were left unguarded due to the collapse of the government and the fall of Baghdad.⁴⁷

Authorities believe that looters are still removing a large quantity of archaeologically significant objects from sites throughout Iraq.⁴⁸ The sale of these stolen antiquities is widely suspected of helping to finance Iraqi extremist and terrorist groups. According to Colonel Matthew Bogdanos, who led an investigation into the looting of Iraq's National Museum, revenue from antiquities trafficking profits both Sunni insurgents such as Al Qaida in Iraq and Shiite militias.⁴⁹ His reports state that antiquities accompanied every weapons shipment seized from terrorists or insurgents,⁵⁰ and that Hezbollah had become involved in antiquities trafficking by 2005, taxing the movement of items from Iraq to the demand market via Lebanon.⁵¹ In 2005, a senior counterterrorism official confirmed earlier British reports about the link between antiquities trafficking and terrorism, stating that rings of professional criminals were organizing the illicit excavation and transport of Iraqi antiquities, funneling them out of the country along centuries-old smuggling routes, and selling them for cash or trading them for weapons.⁵² That same year, Donny George, then director of the National Museum of Iraq, agreed that the sale of these artifacts was helping insurgent groups buy “weapons and ammunition to use against Iraqi police

and American forces.”⁵³ Other researchers using classified intelligence documents posted by WikiLeaks have reported collusion between Iraqi insurgents and antiquities smugglers,⁵⁴ which has contributed to an underground antiquities trafficking economy that amounts to tens of millions of dollars.⁵⁵

Syria

The cradle of ancient cultures and religions, Syria is home to six UNESCO World Heritage sites, 25 cultural heritage museums, and other important cultural sites dating back an estimated 5,000 years. As noted above, the 2003 invasion of Iraq sparked an interest in Middle Eastern and Islamic antiquities, and since civil war erupted in Syria in early 2011, antiquities trafficking networks have exploded there as well. The sheer diversity of Syrian antiquities—which include Mesopotamian, Roman, and early Christian, Jewish, and Muslim artifacts—together with the rapid destruction of archeological sites has resulted in a higher demand for rare regional artifacts. Private collectors in high-demand countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, are reportedly following the situation closely, aware that a failing Syrian economy will facilitate the transfer of antiquities to both licit and illicit markets.⁵⁶

Reports emerging from Syria suggest that both the Sunni jihadist group the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL; alternatively translated as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS) and opposition fighters affiliated with the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army are exploiting Syria’s vast cultural wealth to support their operations. ISIL represents a 2013 merger between the anti-Assad Al-Nusra Front and an outgrowth of the original Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda,⁵⁷ which had already

engaged in antiquities trafficking to finance its earlier operations in Iraq. It is not surprising, therefore, that its new incarnation in Syria would pursue financing using the same model. In June 2014, foreign intelligence officials told *The Guardian* that ISIS was reaping profits in the millions of dollars through the sale of plundered antiquities from Al-Nabuk alone, an area in the Qalamoun Mountains west of Damascus.⁵⁸ At time of this writing in July 2014, concerns are high that ISIL will continue its plunder as it expands its territory into Iraq.

Fighters allied or affiliated with the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army, the primary opposition force in Syria, have also admitted to forming loose associations of “excavation teams” to fund the revolution.⁵⁹ Their specific aim is to loot archeological sites for gold, mosaics, statues, and other transportable artifacts that can be sold to buy weapons.⁶⁰ By 2014, all of Syria’s World Heritage sites had been affected by the war, and the absence of a functioning security apparatus leaves valuable archeological sites vulnerable to continued looting by rebels, “freedom fighters,” terrorist groups, and other armed groups. Reports from Syria suggest that a well-organized antiquities “mafia” from Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq has elevated the looting to an extreme: archeological experts are brought in to identify valuable sites, hundreds of locals are hired to strip the sites clean,⁶¹ and armed groups reportedly threaten the local populations to prevent interference.⁶² According to both rebels and Jordanian security sources, most of these artifacts are trafficked via the steady stream of Syrian refugees into Jordan.⁶³

Eradicating Cultural Property to Assert Supremacy

Looting and destroying antiquities, monuments, and other forms of cultural property may have a second political use as tools of ethnic and religious cleansing. The destruction of key symbolic artifacts has been a common side-effect of warfare for millennia, as invading forces destroyed monuments of cultural significance to “cleanse” a land of its cultural identity.⁶⁴ According to cultural security researcher Erik Nemeth, in recent years terrorist groups have begun to use this type of cultural cleansing or “cultural genocide” to erase the collective memory of the toppled regime or nation,⁶⁵ erode cultural identity, destroy cultural heritage, and ultimately demonstrate the supremacy of the new rulers.

Islamist terrorists in Syria, for example, have destroyed artifacts of earlier non-Muslim civilizations to demonstrate the primacy of Islam. According to some interpretations of the Qur’an, such civilizations represented the “society of unbelievers,” and the ruins of their cultural heritage are a sign of punishment for those who reject Allah’s truth.⁶⁶ Extreme Islamic iconoclasm has spurred ISIL to systematically destroy all non-Islamic treasures and monuments, and antiquities experts worry that ISIL’s control of some of the country’s most famous archeological sites will allow them to eradicate all traces of early Christian, Greek, and Roman civilizations.⁶⁷ The proliferation of destruction of antiquities from these pre-Islamic cultures parallels the Taliban’s destruction of the giant Buddhas in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan Valley as part of its campaign to gain religious supremacy.⁶⁸

Future Concerns: Political Conflict and Demand for African Tribal Art

Experts attempting to identify emerging illicit antiquities networks and areas vulnerable to looting would be well advised to study the current antiquities market and identify regions whose cultural artifacts are increasingly in demand.⁶⁹ They should focus primarily on regions that have an unstable political climate, as violent conflict may heighten the demand for regional antiquities, bolster market value, and increase trade. This in turn will increase the risk that terrorist groups, insurgents, and TCOs operating in the region will exploit the instability and unexcavated antiquities to their financial and political advantage.⁷⁰

A prime example of this is the steady rise in the market value of African tribal art since 2001, and the eager expansion of antiquities dealers into countries that lack legal protections or enforcement mechanisms. This raises concerns that African countries currently experiencing conflicts will attract looters, traffickers, and criminal networks. Since 2006, demand for African tribal art has surpassed that for antiquities of Roman, Byzantine, and Egyptian origin, and it is commanding the highest prices at auction. Annual sales of African tribal art increased from less than \$1 million in 2001 to more than \$15 million in 2009.⁷¹ Artifacts from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and Benin top the list,⁷² and it is likely that a similar level of demand will spread to neighboring countries with an established terrorist presence, including major art-producing countries in West Africa, such as Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cameroon, and Nigeria. Nigeria and Somalia are likely targets for antiquities trafficking networks in the near future, and regional terrorist groups may predicate their financing on Al Qaeda's model and exploit local antiquities, artifacts, and relics.

Nigeria

Some of the oldest African art traditions have their origins along the inland Niger Delta, where cultural monuments and antiquities mark ancient civilizations and trade routes. Unique terracotta sculptures and iron works from the Nok culture in particular, one of the first truly complex African societies,⁷³ are highly prized for representing the start of the African sculptural tradition. The hemorrhaging of Nigerian cultural relics is nothing new: brass heads, bronze artifacts, plaques, bells and rattles, masks, chests, and other types of moveable antiquities from the Benin Empire have been highly sought after by Western collectors since the fall of the Benin Monarch in 1897,⁷⁴ and by the 1970s the nation's cultural history was declared to be in crisis.⁷⁵ Although activists have since drawn more attention to unscrupulous practices by international dealers and collectors,⁷⁶ the Nigerian government continues to lack both the will and the ability to safeguard its cultural relics.⁷⁷ The recent explosion of interest in Nok artifacts by German collectors and allegedly unscrupulous digging practices by German archeologists may further incentivize local civilians to excavate sites on their own with the confidence that they can sell them for a high price.⁷⁸ According to culture-trafficking expert and archeological researcher Neil Brodie, Nigerian cultural sites are currently being looted daily, and the country's cultural artifacts comprise nearly half the objects on the International Council of Museums' list of African "cultural goods most affected by looting and theft."⁷⁹

Most Nigerian artifacts displayed in museums and collections abroad have found their way into foreign hands via international organized trafficking networks.⁸⁰ Local criminals and syndicates gain access to national museums or plunder historic sites for valuables that can be trafficked to

international intermediaries. The emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group is particularly worrisome, as the artifacts' high return could motivate the group to diversify its financing and penetrate the illicit antiquities market, as have Al Qaeda in Iraq and ISIL. While Boko Haram's stronghold is in the northern part of the country, it has proven its ability to mobilize and carry out operations throughout Nigeria. If Boko Haram continues to gain strength, it may mobilize its hundreds of impoverished followers to raid local sites, and then collaborate with established criminal trafficking networks to sell the artifacts. Boko Haram's growing ties with other terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, suggest that it may already have access to trafficking routes, which may increase the proliferation of antiquities looting in other countries with a rich cultural history, including Morocco, Mali, and Ghana.⁸¹

Boko Haram's strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law, may also inspire leaders to "culturally cleanse" areas of immovable pieces of cultural property.⁸² Other types of cultural cleansing—murder, repression, kidnapping—are recurring tactics of the group's march toward creating a fully Islamic state;⁸³ cleansing areas of non-Islamic monuments would also align with its objectives and activities.

Somalia

Some of the oldest traces of highly cultured civilizations can be found in Somalia, including Muslim sultanates, Bantu hunter-gatherer societies, and nomadic tribes such as the Somalis and Oromo. In the more than 30 years since the country collapsed into civil war, illicit digs have been commissioned to finance the operations of warlords and rebels alike, while dire poverty has

spurred local populations to excavate local sites on their own.⁸⁴ Most of the country's known cultural heritage sites are located in Somaliland, in the north of the country, where 5,000-year-old cave paintings lie alongside burial sites containing rare artifacts. Most of the reported illegal excavations also take place in Somaliland, as looters scour the sites for artifacts such as stone crosses, golden figurines, and large deposits of gemstones,⁸⁵ resulting in “one of the worst records of loss of archaeological remains in the Horn of Africa.”⁸⁶

Somalia's vast cultural history appears to be drawing greater interest from transnational criminal organizations. According to one local looter, illicit excavations are now bearing the mark of more sophisticated criminal operations that have capabilities beyond those of local groups: local residents are given locations to excavate, a daily wage, digging materials, and a commission on whatever they find—an invaluable opportunity for people in communities impoverished by decades of war. While there is not yet hard evidence that the Somali terrorist group Al-Shabaab is participating in these networks, there is a well-documented link between Al-Shabaab, transnational criminal organizations, and illicit trafficking in the region.

TCOs have long exploited Somalia's lack of central government, porous borders, and long, unguarded coastline to establish a well-developed and well-resourced distribution network for migrants, drugs, and wildlife.⁸⁷ A diverse array of actors—including non-state armed groups, gangs, and pirates—participate in this network, as Somalia is both a source point and an important transit point for these commodities.⁸⁸ Al-Shabaab reportedly participates in these illicit markets in the territories and ports it controls by taxing drugs and poached ivory commodities

destined for other continents.⁸⁹ Enjoying a permissive operating environment in the southern and central parts of the nation, an established transnational trafficking network, and access to large populations of unemployed, impoverished, and displaced civilians, Al-Shabaab has the same resources at its disposal for exploiting the vast wealth of antiquities as Al Qaeda in Iraq and ISIL.

Al-Shabaab's involvement in the wildlife trafficking network is especially noteworthy when assessing its potential for involvement in the illicit antiquities trade. Since being forced out of its strategic centers in Mogadishu and Kismayo, Al-Shabaab has become deeply reliant on the profits it reaps from illegal ivory—some groups estimate that it comprises 40 percent of its funding—and is actively seeking new avenues for financing.⁹⁰ Al-Shabaab reportedly interacts with a complex network of poachers, ex-soldiers, brokers, and informants to buy ivory poached in Kenya, and then sells it to traders in Somalia at a lucrative return.⁹¹ The easy access to ivory and the activities required to trade it are easily translated to antiquities and archeological relics obtained in Somalia and Somaliland, especially the group's proven ability to mobilize agents and partners in regions outside its direct control. It may be that, like ivory, the convenience and profit of illicit antiquities trafficking is too valuable to ignore.

Conclusions

The seriousness and magnitude of the illicit antiquities problem and the international security concerns to which it contributes highlight the shortcomings and limited practical impact of the 1970 UNESCO Convention,⁹² and the ineffectiveness of more contemporary national countermeasures. The convention in particular lacks applicability to non-state actors, including

terrorist groups, which suggests that without further regulation and reform terrorist groups will be able to continue to exploit priceless cultural property to their tactical advantage.⁹³ No government in the world is equipped to confront an illicit network comprised of a complex web of terrorist groups, TCOs, looters, traders, and middlemen, and this is especially true in conflict-prone regions. That said, real-world solutions are difficult to find, given the extensive and powerful demand for such items.

Bichler, Bush, and Malm propose taking action that breaks the flow of commodities through the illicit market by targeting the points at which the licit and illicit markets intersect.⁹⁴ They say that points of “interlock”—where an artifact’s status becomes legal—should be examined to expose weaknesses in the security networks and identify areas where policy and security can be enhanced. This can be done by a process called “scripting scenes,” whereby experts describe key events in the process from excavation to sale in detail, such as an object’s theft, concealment, disguise, marketing, or disposal. Once each “scene” is understood, experts can identify the types of professional roles required to carry out each event. This type of analysis could help to unravel how illicit market activity occurs, identify which roles are critical to the stability and resilience of antiquities trafficking networks, and, most importantly, identify crime-control intervention points.⁹⁵

Given the proliferation of antiquities trafficking networks throughout the Middle East, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and now very likely emerging in Africa, it is clear that the global regulation of the licit antiquities trade must be revised at a systemic level. The continued

accumulation of cultural artifacts without a determined source (unprovenanced)—which most often are looted or stolen objects⁹⁶—establishes an environment of permissiveness for illicit trafficking. Despite international and national efforts to restrict the trafficking of unprovenanced antiquities, high demand for certain archeological and ethnographic objects, coupled with a lack of punitive measures for buyers failing to enforce due diligence, encourages unscrupulous practices by collectors, traders, and museums.⁹⁷ It can be argued that this lax regulatory environment has established a system in which collectors support clandestine and illegal excavation by looters and forged financial ties between wealthy buyers in demand countries, organized crime, and terrorist groups.⁹⁸

Consequently, the fuzzy distinctions between licit and illicit antiquities should not render exploitative sellers and collectors immune from prosecution, and codified policies coordinated between national and international agencies must delineate crystal-clear legal processes for the transfer, sale, and record-keeping of antiquities. First and foremost, the indiscriminate acquisition of unprovenanced antiquities, by private collectors and museums alike, must be addressed with a legally enforceable acquisitions policy and distinct requirements for due diligence.⁹⁹ Current museum acquisitions practices come dangerously close to what Brodie terms “piracy” and lend support to continued illegal excavations and thefts.¹⁰⁰ Unsurprisingly, museums, collectors, and the antiquities market as a whole are vocally resistant to more stringent regulation, but the overwhelming consensus from academia should provide guidance for policymakers.

Effective international regulatory practices will target not only the collection of unprovenanced antiquities but also the looting practices. According to antiquities trafficking expert Dr. Blythe Bowman, most of the damage to archeological sites and artifacts occurs at the source end, as explosives and other violent methods are regularly used to uncover antiquities—and to frighten the local population.¹⁰¹ For developing nations overwhelmed by conflict, however, preserving their cultural heritage ranks far behind essential considerations of food security, violence, displacement, and water access. There is no question, though, that the looting of high-value antiquities supports sophisticated TCOs, and it is likely that more terrorist groups will penetrate the market as they realize the potentially huge return on highly accessible objects. Consequently, international policing agencies such as Interpol must rank antiquities trafficking alongside the trafficking of narcotics, humans, and arms as a critical criminal concern and impress the security connection on national, regional, and local governments. Special task forces established by these agencies can then collect scientific, quantifiable, and actionable information on the looting situation and help frustrate trafficking efforts at the source end.

¹ E. Nemeth, "Cultural Security: The Evolving Role of Art in International Security." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007): 19-42.

² E. Nemeth, "Security of Cultural Property: U.S. Engagement and Potential for Improvement." *E-Conservation Magazine* 23 (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.econservationline.com/content/view/1057>.

³ E. Nemeth, "Strategic Value of African Tribal Art: Auction Sales Trend as Cultural Intelligence." *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 2 (2012, April): 302-316.

⁴ Nemeth, "Strategic Value of African Tribal Art."

⁵ J. Dietzler, "On 'Organized Crime' in the Illicit Antiquities Trade: Moving Beyond the Definitional Debate." *Trends in Organized Crime* 15, no. 4 (2012, December). Retrieved from http://traffickingculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2013-Dietzler-On-organized-crime-in-the-illicit-antiquities-trade_moving-beyond-the-definitional-debate.pdf

⁶ Nemeth, "Strategic Value of African Tribal Art."

⁷ Nemeth, "Cultural Security."

⁸ Nemeth, "Strategic Value of African Tribal Art."

⁹ The Maghreb is usually defined as much or most of the region of Northwest Africa, west of Egypt.

¹⁰ A. Bligh, "Countering Illicit Traffic of Cultural Heritage in the Mediterranean Region." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 23 (2009, December):148-165.

¹¹ B. A. Bowman, "Transnational Crimes against Culture." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 24 (2008, August): 225-242.

¹² Bowman, "Transnational Crimes against Culture."

¹³ Bligh, "Countering Illicit Traffic."

¹⁴ Nemeth, "Cultural Security."

¹⁵ Bligh, Countering Illicit Traffic."

¹⁶ Bowman, "Transnational Crimes against Culture."

¹⁷ Nemeth, "Strategic Value of African Tribal Art," "Cultural Security."

¹⁸ UNESCO, "The Fight Against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects: Information Kit," March 2011, p. 3. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001916/191606e.pdf>.

- ¹⁹ Bligh, Countering Illicit Traffic”; G. Bichler, S. Bush, and A. Malm, “Bad Actors and Faulty Props: Unlocking Legal and Illicit Art Trade.” *Global Crime* 14, no. 4 (2013, August 15): 359-385.
- ²⁰ The Moche civilization flourished in northern Peru from about 100 AD to 800 AD.
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