

Chapter 6

Crime, corruption, and collateral damage

Large infrastructure projects as a threat to cultural heritage

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Introduction

The policing of organized crime involves the regular use of predictive methods, which go by a variety of names and orientations: Threat assessment, scenario planning, strategic risk assessment, and so on (Hamilton-Smith and Mackenzie, 2010). The prospective nature of these futurism tools has been fiercely criticized, with the predictive element of transnational organized crime policy being perceived by observers to have a tendency to overestimate emerging threats, raising levels of alarm without sufficient empirical justification (van Duyn and Vander Beken, 2009). With this in mind, we begin this chapter by explicitly noting that any projections of the impact of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative on the trafficking of cultural heritage objects are speculative. That said, we can make some sensible observations about the possible effects that OBOR may have on organized criminal involvement in the transnational trade in illicit antiquities.¹

Antiquities trafficking is a significant contemporary transnational crime problem and has increasingly begun to be seen as such by international policy developments. The issue of heritage destruction via the growing commodification of antiquities first gained international attention in the 1960s through critiques penned by archaeologists and anthropologists who observed that the colonial-era practice of bringing home cultural spoils from domineering exploits abroad had been subsumed by an increasingly organized cross-border criminal trade in cultural artifacts (e.g., Coggins, 1969, 1970). These antiquities, destructively stolen from temples and grave sites, exported in violation of local law, and trafficked to the world's centers of high art dealing, were being purchased by institutional and private collectors, often for staggering prices. This illicit trade was perceived of as undermining archaeological science and national sovereignty, and as challenging the ethos of a shared "cultural heritage of humankind" (Mackenzie and Yates, 2017a).

In 1970, UNESCO responded with an international treaty that, as of July 2019, has 137 States Parties including most antiquities source and market countries (UNESCO, 1970). The UNESCO convention is based in an underlying

philosophy of “protection and recovery”, in the sense that it provides mechanisms for increasing the protection of cultural objects *in situ* and for their repatriation to their country of origin in the event of theft. Punishment of traffickers, and in more general terms a criminal justice approach to the issue, was not a driving force behind the contemporary development of international law in this field (Bator, 1983), nor was criminalization addressed in the follow-up UNIDROIT Convention of 1995, which was similarly conceived as providing civil law mechanisms for the recovery of stolen cultural property (UNIDROIT, 1995).

For criminologists, the watershed in the international policy attitude to antiquities trafficking came with the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2000), which was premised on “travails” (policy discussion documents) that contained explicit consideration of antiquities trafficking, which was now labeled an “emerging form of crime” and became increasingly characterized thereafter as a type of organized crime (Mackenzie, 2011a, 2011b). Studies have shown that for many instances of cultural object trafficking, this is a fair characterization of the market-oriented theft of antiquities, the networks that move them across borders, the facilitators who support their insertion into global circuits of commerce, and the serious nature and consequences of these crimes that destroy archaeological and heritage sites in vulnerable countries, causing the irretrievable loss of the historical knowledge they hold (Alderman, 2012; Campbell, 2013; Mackenzie and Davis, 2014).

This chapter is based on empirical information gathered and analysis conducted through our research into antiquities trafficking, which is now quite extensive (e.g., see Mackenzie, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2015; Yates, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b; Yates et al., 2017; Mackenzie and Yates, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).² Through an analysis of the normal routines of this transnational criminal market that this research has revealed, we can see that there are clearly risk factors that OBOR will increase organized criminal opportunities in this field. We divide these criminal risks into three categories: (1) in which development threatens the physical integrity of cultural heritage sites (i.e., “source” risks); (2) in which improvements to transport infrastructure provide increased opportunities for the rapid movement of illicit commodities from source toward the marketplace (i.e., “transit” risks); and (3) which add to or further support the narratives available to market actors through which they rationalize, neutralize, or justify participation in the criminal trade of antiquities (i.e., “market” risks). In this chapter, we will consider these possible risks in turn.

Source risks

The significant earth movement involved in large infrastructure projects has the potential to be destructive to cultural heritage both above and below ground unless projects are carefully managed. Development of this sort is considered to be one of the primary threats to the preservation of archaeological sites. Such

sites can be difficult to identify without the aid of specialists, and they are often literally ‘in the way’ of development. Some commentators have described this kind of destructive potential as ‘ironic’, given that the infrastructure itself is often much needed and can bring significant benefits to countries, for example, in countries that are rich in natural resources that they want to expeditiously move out for trade. The irony observed here is the destruction of one “natural resource” (heritage) in the service of the trade in others (Remsen and Tedesco, 2015). Remsen and Tedesco considered the effects of infrastructure development on heritage sites in Afghanistan, and other commentators have noted similar issues elsewhere. In Mexico, for example, an archaeologist from Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, the federal bureau tasked with protection of heritage sites and objects, observed:

[The] reutilization of pre-Hispanic materials for the construction of houses or fences, the extraction of stones from ancient structures to produce lime, adobe and bricks, the lining of roads with debris, the levelling of land for the introduction of irrigation and mechanized agriculture, and digging to set the foundations of buildings were among the most common activities of this type. They were, and continue to be, a systematic and relatively uncontrolled form of destruction that today is possibly of greater magnitude than genuine looting, and cannot easily be dismissed. Only in the case of major construction projects such as dams, roads, large buildings in urban centres, and developments near declared zones does the Mexican government intervene directly, using its own archaeologists to conduct rescue operations.

(Nalda, 2002, pp. 214–215)

Perhaps the most notable contemporary debate about the destruction of archaeological sites through infrastructure development initiatives has been in relation to China’s Three Gorges Dam project, which between 1994 and 2009 constructed the world’s biggest hydroelectric dam in Hubei Province on the Yangtze River.

The Three Gorges Dam project forced more than 1.3 million people to relocate when more than 600 square kilometers of land was flooded in an initiative that was marketed as “allowing vessels up to 10,000 tons to travel 1,500 miles inland to Chongqing, opening up markets in the Yangtze watershed, where some 380 million people live”, and Chinese government officials also said the dam would “protect millions of people from Yangtze floodwaters and provide electricity to one of the country’s most underdeveloped regions” (Childs-Johnson et al., 1996). The flooded area was known to contain subsurface and standing tombs, temples, and other historical deposits – significant sites of human habitation dating back as far as the Paleolithic. The emergency excavations, termed “salvage archaeology”, that were organized to partially mitigate heritage loss due to submersion revealed traces of ancient cultures

that led archaeologists to consider the Yangtze River Valley a rival to the more northern Yellow River Valley, which had traditionally been considered the cradle of Chinese civilization (Childs-Johnson et al., 1996). As well as the submersion of the heritage sites on the lower parts of the valley, considerable destruction was caused above the prospective waterline as bulldozers worked to make new home sites for the displaced population; dynamiting to make way for subsidiary development both destroyed and exposed thousands of tombs and other sensitive cultural heritage contexts (Harrington, 1998).

Alongside the destruction of the archaeological record of the Yangtze River Valley came an associated challenge: looting. Local people reportedly trailed the bulldozers and actively dug for artifacts in cleared areas. Reports circulated of organized gangs establishing looting and trafficking operations in the region, and of antiquities dealers from elsewhere in China and Southeast Asia visiting to buy the artifacts being discovered (Eckholm, 1998). In May 1997, the police in Wushan County formed a special task force to address the problem, but overall the response from officials, archaeologists, and market actors was conflicted, with sentiment rife that if all was shortly to be submerged and lost forever, perhaps looting was excusable in such circumstances as a form of preservation; that perhaps the theft of heritage might be a necessary evil.

Some important heritage sites were moved or rebuilt as part of the dam project. The Shibaozhai or Stone Treasure Fortress, a Buddhist temple built by the Ming emperor Wan Li, was surrounded by fortifications to leave it protected from the floodwaters as an island and is now accessible by boat. The 1,700-year-old Zhang Fei Temple in the county town of Yunyang, built for a general of the same name during the Three Kingdoms period, was taken apart brick by brick and rebuilt upstream. For the most part, though, archaeological sites were left exposed to looting, and the social and economic circumstances surrounding the infrastructure project all pointed toward this outcome. Local farmers rehoused above the waterline had lost their land and their livelihood, so prospecting for the archaeological loot all around them made good economic sense.

Like many heritage-rich countries, archaeological looting is a crime in China, and export is banned without a license, which would not be forthcoming for significant items. These controls are notoriously hard to enforce, however, and studies of antiquities trafficking around the world show them to be routinely flouted. Government budgets established to reward locals for reporting and surrendering their finds could cover only a tiny fraction of the black market value of the treasures being unearthed. In 1998, the Director of Cultural Relics for Wushan County, Luo Zhihong, said that his “entire 1997 budget for protection was only about US\$3,600, while he had to offer that amount to entice local farmers to turn in even a single valuable relic they found” and as such “a lot of relics have been sold to private dealers” (Eckholm, 1998).

The most famously observed object to apparently emerge from the looting at the Three Gorges project was an extremely rare, five-foot-tall, completely

intact bronze yaoqian shu or “spirit tree”, a candelabra symbolizing “spirit” or “money” trees, from the Han Dynasty (206 bc–220 ad). The Fengjie Spirit Tree, as it came to be known, drew the attention of both the art world and the Chinese authorities when it was sold by Belgian art dealer Gisèle Croës at the 1998 International Asian Art Fair in New York for \$2.5 million. The buyer was collector Leon D. Black, a corporate entrepreneur and trustee of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The history of how the Spirit Tree left China is somewhat opaque, but it has been attributed by expert scholars as coming from a Han burial in Wushan County, Sichuan Province (Eckholm, 1998; Harrington, 1998).

According to one version of the story, archaeologists are said to have known about the site since 1995 when it was uncovered by a bulldozer working for the Yangtze Valley Development Corporation. It remained unexcavated due to a lack of archaeological funding, until “in October 1997, a Chinese newspaper reported that a team of looters . . . ransacked the tomb, reportedly selling the Spirit Tree to an unknown buyer for 200,000 yuan (\$25,000)” (Sullivan, 1998). The head looter was captured but later absconded from a Gansu Province jail “after bribing a warden with 500,000 yuan (\$62,500)” (Sullivan, 1998). The Chinese State Administration of Cultural Relics, however, was reported as being of the view that the tree sold in New York was more likely from a documented Zhao emperor’s tomb constructed during the Warring States Period (475–221 bc) in Jiangsu Province’s Xuzhou, which was known to have been looted (Tao, 1998). From the buyer’s perspective, the provenance was “a reputable Hong Kong dealer and the item came with all the proper papers” (Eckholm, 1998).

Years after the completion of the dam, audits into corruption during the project continue, with evidence emerging of a catalogue of crimes associated with the build, including issues around nepotism, embezzlement, diversion, and misuse of funds, including duplicate calculations and improper bidding procedures. Furthermore, the weight of evidence shows, and both archaeological and antiquities market commentators agree, that the Three Gorges Dam project resulted in a flood of illicit Chinese antiquities onto the national and international market. This increase in looting has been directly tied to archaeological site discovery due to significant earth movement associated with dam construction and subsidiary development.

Turning our gaze to contemporary development, the OBOR, with its strong emphasis on connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa, will involve road-building and other infrastructural creation on a massive scale. It will include digging and construction work along six land corridors involving around 60 different countries. The pathways of these transit corridors run through regions noted for their rich cultural heritage, much of which remains undiscovered and preserved underground: European states like Greece, Italy, and Turkey; MENA states like Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt; South Asian states like India and Pakistan; Southeast Asian states like Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, and

Thailand; and the “Silk Road” states of the steppes. The list of participating OBOR countries reads like a cultural property looter’s handbook, and the amount of prospective disruption to these states’ underground repositories of cultural heritage could be considerable. If the lessons of previous large infrastructure development projects are anything to go by, cultural heritage crimes will be a predictable effect of the initiative.

Transit risks

As well as affecting the sites where cultural objects of archaeological interest will be found, the OBOR initiative will provide transportation opportunities to the range of interested actors who thrive around international illicit commodity markets. These are the networks which connect local looters with local or regional dealers and on to the higher level brokers of the international art scene, eventually reaching an upper echelon of world dealers, collectors, museums, and auction houses, who turn them into the priceless “antiquities” which are fought over by competitive buyers. Antiquities can be large and cumbersome and their removal is facilitated by the ability to bring vehicles and machinery to looting sites. So we can ask: To what extent does the construction of new roads, in making the use of such equipment viable, elevate the risks of looting at cultural heritage sites? To answer this question, we can look to other cases where infrastructure development has had an impact on looting. The effects of increasing accessibility to remote, unpopulated, and archaeologically rich regions have been recorded in other locations, for example, in the Maya region of Central America.

In this heavily looted region, the remoteness of deep-jungle archaeological sites had an effect on both the protection and the destruction of heritage. With few or no roads, resources, or sites of habitation, it has been difficult for the governments of countries such as Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico to provide adequate protection for known Maya sites or to discover and secure unknown sites in advance of looters (Yates, 2015a, 2015b). That said, inaccessibility has served as a barrier to looting as well. Looting in some locations was limited by what could be removed from a site on mule-back well into the later parts of the 20th century.

Site-looting methods were developed to mitigate the jungle’s impenetrability. Take, for example, the elaborately carved, solid stone monuments called stela that were particularly valued on the international antiquities market. The largest of these monuments is 10.6 meters tall and weighs 65 tons, and many are in the 1.5 to 2.5 meter range – far too large to remove from the jungle. In response, looters at many sites “thinned” stela, using rock saws to remove a few inches of the sculptures’ carved surfaces or faces. They then further sawed the faces into smaller blocks for easier transport. A careful observer will note that the Maya stela in foreign museums are, as a result of the looting process, only a few inches thick and are reconstructed from these sawed blocks. The mutilated remains of the rest of the looted stela are left scattered at archaeological sites.

At many sites, the sheer size of Maya monuments prevented their looting, the jungle serving as a barrier against transporting these antiquities from remote locations. Major and marketable artworks have been uncovered by looters and left in place due to the impossibility of organizing removal. For example, in 2001 at the site of San Bartolo in a still-inaccessible portion of Guatemala's Péten Department, archaeologist William Saturno chanced upon one of the most compelling Maya mural sequences known to exist (Powell, 2002). He found the murals within a looters trench, exposed by illicit diggers but not extracted. Although Maya murals are extremely rare, and although Mesoamerican murals have commanded high prices on the international market, the San Bartolo sequence was left by looters who likely could not figure out a way to remove them without a road or heavy equipment. Instead, the looters continued past the mural (Powell, 2002), tunneling to find smaller, more portable antiquities that could be carried out.

Broadly speaking, and with some notable exceptions, contemporary looting of archaeological sites in the Maya region appears to be closely related to development, both legal development and otherwise. Sites that are more easily reached because of their proximity to roads, tracks, or settlements and sites that are located near exploitable jungle resources (e.g., hardwoods, the gum of the chicle tree) have experienced the heaviest looting over the years. Sites that are far from occupation or development or far from marketable jungle resources have, on a number of occasions, escaped the heaviest looting.

To explore the connection between accessibility, particularly road construction, and antiquities looting further, we will concentrate on one particular region of the Maya world: the jungle areas of the southern portion of the Mexican state of Campeche. This region skirts the border with Guatemala; it is extremely archaeologically rich and was once sparsely populated and inaccessible. In 1984, Mexico began the construction of Highway 186 between Villahermosa in Tabasco and Chetumal in Quintana Roo, straight through this portion of Campeche. Prior to that, access to many of the known archaeological sites in the region was via undeveloped tracks off the small road that predated the highway or, in some cases, approaching them from Guatemala to the south. For example, access to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Calakmul, among the largest of the large Maya metropolises, was via a 65 kilometer undeveloped track that, during the rainy season, might take three to four days to pass over (Fletcher, 2004).

Prior to road construction, the sites in this region were certainly looted; however, inaccessibility served as a limiting factor, preventing some forms of looting and forcing the development of artifact weight and size reduction techniques. At Calakmul and at nearby sites, stela were thinned in the looting process before transport out of the jungle as described earlier, leaving a trail of destroyed stela pieces at the site. In 1968, at a site 56 kilometers east of Calakmul called Placeres, looters and traffickers resorted to constructing an airstrip in the jungle and landed a small plane to remove a large Maya

temple facade, an operation that reportedly cost \$80,000 (Meyer, 1973, p. 22). One of the people involved in the Placeres looting claims to have also looted tombs at Calakmul at this time (personal communication, 2014), presumably because the plane provided a rare opportunity to remove artifacts from the region.

Though the looting that occurred at Maya sites in the 1960s and 1970s is more extensively described within academic literature, there is evidence that heavy looting of sites in the region occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. This was after Highway 186 brought a significant influx of people and increased accessibility to the region and when the establishment of Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve along the border with Campeche in 1990 caused an intensification of hardwood extraction in that part of the jungle. It appears that in the years just before and just after the creation of the reserve, wood extractors made one last large push to illegally remove valuable woods such as mahogany before further protections were put in place. Logging of this sort brought people deep into the jungle, put them in contact with vulnerable archaeological sites, and provided an extraction route out following the timber.

For example, the site of Uxul, 34 kilometers southwest of Calakmul, is thought to have been primarily looted in the 1980s and 1990s in association with a period of illicit hardwood extraction in the region that made the site more accessible (Grube et al., 2012). This period also corresponds to the construction of Highway 186, and the construction in 1993–1994 of a passable earth road leading from the highway to Calakmul, though it is unclear when exactly Uxul became accessible from this northern route. In contrast, the site of Oxpemul, recorded in 1934 and rediscovered by archaeologists in 2004, did not experience the “intense and merciless looting” of more accessible sites in the region (Benavides, 2005). “Covered by jungle for 70 years more” after its discovery, the site is located near neither occupation nor sites of hardwood or gum extraction (*ibid.*). It was protected by inaccessibility.

The site of Balamku offers an example of increased accessibility to a site providing opportunity for looting. Located a mere 3 kilometers north of Highway 186, and thus about the same distance from the road that predated the highway, the site went unnoticed by authorities until 1990, despite featuring several monumental temple groups. The looting of the site appears to correspond to the opening up of the area via the highway: The site was discovered by archaeologist Florentino García Cruz only after hearing reports of an unknown site being actively looted (Arnauld et al., 1998). While it cannot be determined if Balamku experienced looting before the construction of the highway, and it is likely it did, increased accessibility to the region appears to have been a factor in intensifying the looting to the point that the authorities were alerted.

The most recent reports of looting and site destruction in southern Campeche at the time of writing concern archaeological sites that are considered extremely accessible. In the late 2000s/early 2010s, Highway 186 was

converted into a multilane highway, greatly increasing the number of vehicles that pass through the region and bringing an influx of tourism to the more accessible sites along its path. The populations of the small towns along the route have increased as well, potentially putting pressure on archaeological sites that we might assume would be protected, and not just for the previously discussed looting of artifacts for the market. The looting of ancient stone monuments for road and other construction fill is a perennial problem in this region, and it is a problem that is limited to archaeological sites that are accessible by trucks and earth-movers.

In 2016, it was reported that a tomb was looted at the archaeological site of Xpujil (Yucatan Times, 2017), which is situated one kilometer west of the town of the same name and hosts full-time guards. The looters were also found to be using a three-ton truck to transport stone from the site back to the village, presumably for construction (Jorge Alberto Aguilar Montero, quoted in *Crónica de Campeche*, 2017). Perhaps more surprising, the large and significant site of Becán, a flagship tourist-friendly site located only 8 kilometers from the village of Xpujil, experienced two looting attempts in 2016. That year authorities also logged looting complaints at accessible regional sites such as Tigre Treste (at Calakmul) and Hormiguero, where sites were damaged specifically to gain stone for construction or road expansion, and cases of graffiti at Hormiguero and the site of Chicanná. In 2015, there were 14 looting or site destruction cases logged in Campeche, again at largely accessible sites (*Crónica de Campeche*, 2017).

These examples of looting at Maya sites provide a window into the relationship between antiquities looting, organized crime, and infrastructure development in terms of simple opportunity theory. Where road development results in a substantial increase in the ease of completing a crime script (Cornish, 1994), such as it does in the case of opening up previously relatively hard-to-access archaeological and temple sites, practically oriented crime theories like rational choice, routine activities, and opportunity predict an increase in the levels of the crime in question. For rational choice theory, this would be a matter of reducing the effort required to complete the crime (Clarke, 1992). For routine activities theory, it might be considered a matter of increasing the “suitability” of the target (Clarke and Felson, 1993). From the perspective of opportunity theory, we might expect that to the extent that “opportunity makes the thief” (Felson and Clarke, 1998), increased site access not only will grease the wheels of more dedicated organized criminals but also will generate looting by less committed individuals and groups who are tempted by the new possibilities that present themselves. So transit developments provide a backbone for trafficking crimes. This backbone supports serious organized criminals who may have committed the crimes anyway, although not with such ease or perhaps not in such volume, and it also supports and to an extent even generates the opportunistic crimes of locals and tourists as they pass by, and through, cultural heritage sites.

Market risks

Studies of the antiquities market have generally concurred with the findings and theoretical propositions of criminological studies of techniques of neutralization, especially those studies which have been particularly aimed at white-collar criminals. A picture has emerged of a market in which talk of issues of provenance (antiquities' ownership history) takes the form of narratives that construct the world in a way that justifies or excuses the purchase of illicit antiquities, or which put moral doubt around the black-and-white distinctions the law makes between legal and illegal goods.

So, for example, one of the classic tropes of the discourse of the antiquities market is the narrative of the "chance find". This is a story used by dealers and collectors from New York to Switzerland, from London to Bangkok, from Melbourne to Brussels, and many other hubs of world trade besides. The basic premise of this narrative is that the dealer currently holding a looted artifact may be on the wrong side of the law, but the law is unfair because they are actually performing a good service in taking this object on for sale. Rather than having been looted by deliberately exploitative thieves who set out in the relevant source country to find and remove ancient objects from temples and underground archaeological sites, the dealer asserts that the object in question was probably a "chance find". They speculate that it was turned up by a farmer plowing a field and assume that the failings of government in the source country are such that were the farmer to report this chance find to the relevant authorities, the field would be sequestered for further archaeological investigation, which may take months or even years. The farmer would receive no compensation for this and, unable to make a living, the family would starve. Knowing this, at the time of finding the artifact, the farmer would certainly be tempted to destroy it rather than reporting the find to the authorities. The only thing keeping them from smashing the object up, or perhaps melting it down if it is a precious metal and selling it for scrap, is the international art market, which places such a significant value on antiquities that the farmer will instead be led to sell it into the black market through a local dealer. In the "chance find" story, the trickle-down economics of illegal trade and informal economy delivers money down the chain to locals in need and "saves" antiquities from destruction, delivering them instead up the chain to people who will celebrate and care for them, preserving and displaying them for all to enjoy.

The "chance find" story does not always involve a farmer. In some versions, the farmer is replaced by road-builders, or real estate developers, who similarly "accidentally" uncover archaeologically relevant objects in the course of their day-to-day project work. As with the farmer, these contractors and business-people are projected to be reticent to involve the authorities and so might also be presumed by the market to be prospective clandestine destroyers or smelters of antiquities and, as the story has it, these are better off in the hands of a connoisseur.

These stories are clearly quite self-serving, and research has shown many of their key premises to be demonstrably wrong. The amounts of money trickling down to looters are paltry compared with the margins made by the international dealers who traffic the objects to market countries and insert them into the routines of the above-board art trade (Brodie, 1998). Most antiquities are buried deeper than the topsoil levels a plow would turn, though the deeper foundations involved in the infrastructure development story is more plausible here. State reactions to reporting archaeological discoveries are usually significantly more benign than the story portrays them, often involving simple registration of the object and thereafter allowing the landowner to keep it in trust or resulting in the purchase of the object for a museum. Disruption of agriculture due to archaeological excavation is unlikely in all but the most extreme circumstances: Most governments have limited funding for archaeology and prefer to leave as much as possible buried and thus preserved and stable. Some countries even have caretaker schemes that may pay a small annual sum to farmers for monitoring archaeological sites on their land for signs of looting.

Considering another neutralizing narrative trope, the propositions made by market actors about the global dissemination of objects and the benefits of making them widely available for the world to see as “the cultural heritage of all humanity” (Merryman, 2005; Cuno, 2008) have been questioned. The reality of this purported global dissemination is that most high-end antiquities go to private collections or to large museums, which in effect concentrates them in a few locations worldwide, and sometimes out of public view altogether. Fine objects rarely flow in the other direction, to publicly accessible locations in lower income countries. Not mentioned in the usual version of this story is the fact that dealers are making exorbitant personal profits through this act of “saving”, “preserving” and “sharing” artifacts for the betterment of human kind, which casts something of a shadow of egoism over the apparently altruistic service of world culture being performed. Still, there is enough of a ring of truth about the story to keep it circulating, and to put it on the right side of the line that divides incentivized self-deceit from outright lies.

The issue that arises when considering the OBOR initiative is whether in the context of all the infrastructure work, which will presumably uncover a significant number of antiquities that will undoubtedly end up on the market, the international dealing community is being presented with the components to construct more of these neutralizing “chance find” and “internationalization” stories to justify their artifact purchases. Indeed, all antiquities from OBOR countries that are on the market without a legal history may gain justification narratives related to this development, including those that were extracted and trafficked years before and in entirely unrelated circumstances. This is what appears to have happened in the previously discussed case of the Three Gorges Dam: Dealers offering Chinese antiquities without valid paperwork were, and still are, able to claim the piece likely came from the dam project and thus had been “salvaged”, even when there was no evidence to connect the piece to the development.

This issue of creating a neutralizing and false narrative in relation to the OBOR project will likely be compounded by the current and ongoing rise of China as a significant buying power in the global cultural heritage market. The direction of the flow of antiquities is turning away from a general movement westward, which has been a colonial and then post-colonial facet of collecting and the social construction of status and connoisseurship over the last several hundred years (Yates et al., 2017). Increasingly, competition in global antiquities collecting from China is threatening the old established world centers of the antiquities trade in New York, London, Paris, and Brussels. There is a growing collecting class in China, particularly for Chinese objects, which are acquired by the country's new wealth as financial investment and status symbol. This activity is linked to notions of repatriating the great artistic works of the country's past that had previously been spirited away across borders to be hoarded overseas. It is not only Chinese artifacts that Chinese collectors are interested in, however, and research has shown that the taste one acquires for building significant antiquities collections can often branch out to encompass many different cultural and artistic representations and histories (Mackenzie, 2005b). It is likely that infrastructure development within China that uncovers historical artifacts will find there is a ready internal market for these within the country, but it is also likely that artifacts discovered through this massive building initiative in other countries will experience an economic pull back to China where such significant wealth and collecting spirit is growing.

Conclusion

From an antiquities protection perspective, OBORization might be considered as a process of creative destruction: the creation of trade and infrastructure, the destruction of cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the destruction is likely to involve the permanent erasure of certain parts of the uncharted archaeological record and the further pollution of the international art market with these illicitly obtained and unlawfully exported objects. The market will justify its receipt of these objects as acts of saving threatened heritage, looking to the various meanings and importance of cultural heritage collection for people, organizations and states, as reasons to collect and deal.

The relationship between the illicit antiquities market and organized crime has been debated at some length in the literature (Mackenzie, 2011b), with questions being asked about whether the transnational antiquities market system is in itself an example of organized crime ("the market as criminal") versus whether it is one among many examples of highly profitable, weakly regulated transnational commodity markets which attract the attentions of "organized crime" who exploit the opportunities it presents while not necessarily characterizing the market as a whole ("criminals in the market"). In fact, although research into these questions continues, both versions of the argument seem to

be true at different points in the supply chain. One basic way of splitting the market up for criminological analysis would be as an organized crime system in the source and early-stage transit phases, followed by an interface with a white-collar crime system of receivers and dealers in the international marketplace. The established nature of that white-collar receiving system, which is well set up to avoid regulatory scrutiny with its private dealership norms and general routines of confidentiality and trust, is what will provide the standing incentive for organized crime to take an interest in the artifacts that large infrastructure projects uncover. This is especially the case when we consider the well-observed links between organized crime and the building and real estate professions, so that it is likely that networks capable of transporting illicit goods across borders to consumer markets will not be far away from the projects at the coalface of OBOR from the start. As a whole, we might reasonably fear that OBOR will not be good for cultural heritage protection in the countries where development is taking place.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, we will use the terms “antiquities” and “artifacts” to loosely refer to portable cultural heritage objects that are more than 150 years old; that originated at archaeological or heritage sites; and that are under some degree of protection against unauthorised excavation, sale, or export under the law of their country of origin. Note that the legal and social definition of the term varies by jurisdiction.
- 2 The authors have worked on this topic for nearly two decades and have conducted field research into the trafficking of antiquities throughout Europe, the United States, Central and South America, South and Southeast Asia, and Oceania; see: traffickingculture.org.

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