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1 The Looting and Trafficking of Syrian Antiquities Since 2011[1]

Neil Brodie

Introduction

Proceeds from antiquities trafficking have long been used to support armed violence in conflict zones (Hardy 2015a). In the early 1970s, North Vietnamese and Cambodian government troops engaged directly in the plunder and sale of Cambodian antiquities, joined in the late 1980s by the Khmer Rouge and other paramilitaries (Davis and Mackenzie 2015). In August 1981, members of a Lebanese Christian militia stole hundreds of antiquities from a storage facility at JBeil (ancient Byblos) (USA 2017a: 7). By 2018, 13 of the stolen pieces had been recovered from the possession of dealers and collectors in Europe and North America (Afeiche 2018). In 1990s Afghanistan, various militia groups were engaged in looting (Dupree 1996), and by 1998 the authorities in at least one Taliban-controlled province were exacting a 20 per cent tax on all antiquities sales (Dupree 1998). In Iraq, during the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, insurgency groups were reportedly involved in antiquities trading (Bogdanos 2005).

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Yet although it was known that antiquities trafficking could be used to finance terrorists, insurgents and other armed non-state actors (ANSAs), it was not generally recognized by the international community until the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 with its brutal and very public human rights violations. Before then, policy-makers were still very much focused upon the damage antiquities looting and trafficking causes to cultural heritage, not its financial support of armed violence. But the large (and probably exaggerated) sums of money ISIS was said to be extracting from antiquities trading in support of its campaign of terror were seen to threaten international security and caused widespread public concern. Political action followed, with new laws drafted to control antiquities trafficking specifically citing terrorist financing.

This chapter presents an evidence-based overview and synthesis of what is known about the looting and trafficking of Syrian antiquities since the onset of civil conflict in 2011 (Figure 1.1). There is a special emphasis on the involvement of terrorist and other ANSA groups, particularly the Salafist-jihadist groups ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) and its successor organization

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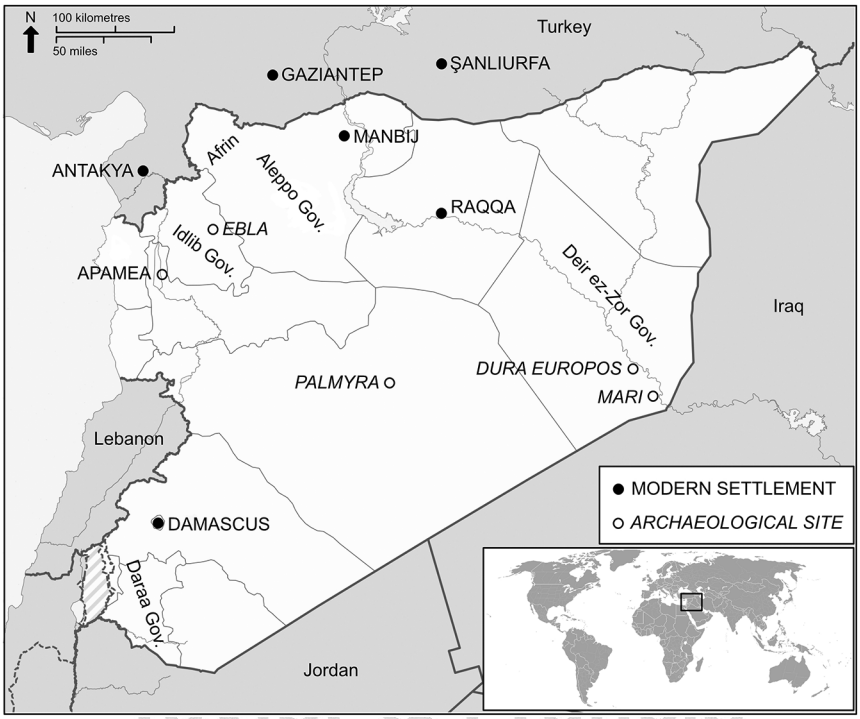

Figure 1.1 Map of Syria, showing places mentioned in the text

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Hayat Tahrir as-Sham (HTS)[2], and the potential profitability of the trade for such groups. The first section provides a necessarily brief introductory account of archaeological looting in Syria. The following two sections then describe the structure and operation of the antiquities trade, both generally and specifically for the case of Syria. The next two sections present a diachronic perspective on the trade, showing how over the past thirty years technological and political developments have increased its commercial reach and destructive potential, and radically altered the nature of material being traded. These observations are fundamental to the following four sections which consider the criminal organization of the antiquities trade, its financial structure and its likely profitability for terrorists and other ANSAs. In the final section, some thought is given to the problem of policy failure – why public policy has very obviously failed to suppress or obstruct antiquities trafficking out of Syria.

The Recent History of Looting in Syria

Syrian antiquities have been looted and trafficked since at least the 1980s, sometimes with the facilitation or active involvement of government officials,

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police, Mukhabarat or army personnel (Brodie 2015a: 323–326; Clark 2016; Moos 2020: 28). Official involvement or corruption grew worse when some government agents became involved in general organized crime after Syria's 1976 occupation of Lebanon, which secured for them control of Lebanese roads and ports and provided opportunities for extracting bribes and illegal taxes from smuggling and other illegal enterprises (Herbert 2014). Shabiha criminal gangs were also implicated (Al-Haj Salih 2015). Membership of the Shabiha is largely Alawite, and after 2011 it morphed into a pro-Assad militia (BBC 2012). The looting and trafficking continued through the 1990s and 2000s and prompted new Syrian legislation in 1999 (Abdulrahman 2001). Pre-2011 satellite imagery of archaeological sites documents widespread evidence of looting, sometimes on a large scale (Cunliffe 2012: 18–20; Casana and Panahipour 2014: 148, table 1). In 2017, 450 out of a sample of 2,641 archaeological sites (17 per cent) showed evidence of pre-March 2011 looting (Casana and Laugier 2017: 14, table 2). For the Hellenistic–Roman site of Dura Europos, for example, "hundreds or possibly thousands of looting holes" were counted on an image dating to 2007 (Casana and Panahipour 2014: 143).

Since the start of the conflict in Syria in March 2011, in one way or another all combatant factions have tolerated or participated in antiquities looting.[3] In 2012, the Syrian army or its Shabiha paramilitaries were reported to be engaged in looting at the Roman-period site of Palmyra (AFP 2012; Zablit 2012; AGI 2012; Barnard 2014), and by 2013 material looted from Palmyra had been recovered in Syria and Lebanon (Ali 2015: 49–53) while more was on sale in Lebanon and Turkey (Jaba and Arbuthnott 2013; Soguel 2014; Kadi 2015). The looting of the Hellenistic–Roman site of Apamea was reported as proceeding with the knowledge and connivance of local Syrian army commanders (ASOR 2014: 11–12; ASOR 2016a: 63; Harkin 2014). Through 2013, the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) reported hundreds of people digging at the Bronze Age site of Mari and at Dura Europos, where they were said to be employed by "mafia" from Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon (Cockburn 2014; DGAM 2014). Satellite imagery subsequently identified thousands of recently-dug looters' pits at Dura Europos (AAAS 2014: 5–9), though fewer at Mari (AAAS 2014: 19–21). Both sites are located in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, on territory that was at the time contested between different opposition groups, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA), JAN and ISIS. Further to the west in Idlib Governorate, looting was ongoing at the Bronze Age site of Ebla between 2012 and 2013 while it was under FSA control (AAAS 2014: 10–16; Kaercher et al. 2018), though there was some evidence of official intolerance (Chivers 2013).

But it has been the involvement in antiquities looting and trafficking of Salafist groups such as ISIS and JAN, designated terror groups by the United States (USA n.d.), which has focused international attention. ISIS emerged as a military force in 2013 when it began to occupy territory in northern Syria and western Iraq. In March 2013, it seized control of Raqqa,

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proclaiming the Syrian city to be its new "capital", where it plundered the museum and associated storehouses and started looting archaeological sites (Lamb 2014a). Then, in June 2014, it burst into media prominence with the rout of the Iraqi army at Mosul and the occupation of a major part of western Iraq. By the end of 2014, ISIS occupied large areas of Syria and Iraq, controlling a population of seven or eight million adult people (Burke 2017; CNN 2019). Mari fell under ISIS control in June 2014 and looting intensified thereafter with hundreds of looters' pits identified on satellite imagery (AAAS 2014: 19–21; Butterlin and Mura 2019: 211–213). By February 2015, when Dura Europos was firmly under the control of ISIS, looting was ongoing (DGAM 2015). Looting also continued at Palmyra which was occupied by ISIS in May 2015 and not finally liberated until March 2017 (Cuneo et al. 2016). From 2015 onwards, concerted military action by a range of oppositional forces slowly recovered ground from ISIS, with Mosul liberated in July 2017 and Raqqa in October 2017 (Burke 2017).

Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) was formed in 2012 and in January 2017 merged with four other Salafist groups to form Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (Ali 2020). HTS acted to consolidate its control over Idlib Governorate (which in early 2020 was still resisting Syrian government and Turkish offensives) and established the civil authority Salvation Government (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 41; Moos 2020: 5, 18). The Salvation Government was charged with protecting cultural heritage, but illegal excavations throughout Idlib continued (Nassar and Atieh 2020; Darke 2020; Moos 2020: 19–23) and increased at Ebla (Kaercher et al. 2018).

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With the defeat of ISIS, media attention wandered away from Syria and reports and investigations of archaeological looting have been harder to come by. In territories once more under government control it looks like business as usual with ongoing looting assisted by corrupt government officials and army personnel (Limoges et al. 2018). As well as in areas of HTS or government control, there have been reports of looting by opposition militias in the Afrin district of Aleppo Governorate, which has been under Turkish occupation since January 2018 (Abdulkareem 2020).

Satellite imagery allows quantitative evaluation of post-2011 archaeological site looting, providing information about chronological trends and the types of material targeted. By 2017, 355 out of a sample of 2,641 archaeological sites (13 per cent) showed evidence of post-March 2011 looting (Casana and Laugier 2017: 14, Table 2). Of those 355 sites, 276 exhibited a minor amount of damage, 52 a moderate amount of damage and 27 a severe amount of damage. There were looted sites in areas controlled by all combatant factions, including the Syrian army, with 50 per cent of looted sites in areas never occupied by ISIS, though some of the most severely looted sites were in areas that had been or were subject to ISIS control (Casana and Laugier 2017: 12). The most severe looting had been of Bronze Age sites (sources of cuneiform inscribed objects, cylinder seals, statuary, bronze objects and jewelry), and Roman and Late Roman (or Byzantine)

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sites (sources of mosaics, mortuary statuary, jewelry, glass and coins) (Casana and Laugier 2017: 26).

The Transnational Structure and Operation of the Antiquities Trade

The antiquities trade comprises three stages or markets: source, transit and destination (Mackenzie et al. 2020). Antiquities are stolen or looted in source countries (such as Syria), smuggled out and transported through one or more transit countries (such as Turkey and Lebanon), before arriving for sale on the destination market. Destination market countries such as the United States and others in Europe and Asia possess the cultural and commercial institutions necessary to support and validate antiquities collecting. The destination market is legal in that antiquities trading and collecting are not subject to any specific or targeted regulation, though it might still be illegal to trade in antiquities stolen from other countries or otherwise illegally imported. Antiquities circulating on the destination market may have arrived there by legal or illegal means, days, decades or even centuries ago. No matter how long they have been in circulation, antiquities are usually sold with only minimum indications of provenance (previous ownership history), so that it is difficult for a discriminating collector to separate stolen or otherwise illegally-traded antiquities from legitimate material. This mixing of black and white has caused the antiquities trade to be characterized as a "gray" trade, neither demonstrably legal nor illegal (Mackenzie and Yates 2016). Recently looted and smuggled antiquities (and fakes) can be "laundered" passing through the transit market for entry on to the destination market by the provision of legal export documents from transit countries, falsified customs declarations and invented accounts of provenance. As the boundaries of ancient cultures often spread across the borders of several modern countries and jurisdictions, it is difficult to pinpoint the country of origin for any one specific object, to establish the date of export from its country of origin or to determine whether the export was legal or not.

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There are several methods used by antiquities smugglers for evading customs inspections and securing entry into a destination market country (USA 2011, 2017b: 4–6). They include:

- False declaration of the value of a shipment (lower than market value).
- False declaration of the country of origin of a shipment (a transit rather than source country).
- Vague and misleading descriptions of a shipment's contents.
- Splitting a single large object into several smaller pieces for separate deliveries, allowing informal entry and later reassembly after receipt.
- Addressing a shipment to a third party, falsely stated to be the addressee or purchaser, for subsequent transfer to the actual purchaser.
- Failure to complete appropriate customs paperwork.

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- Concealing antiquities in shipments of similar, legitimate commercial goods.
- Addressing shipments to several different addresses for receipt by a single purchaser.

Military and diplomatic personnel are exempt from customs inspections and can carry material across borders. Contents descriptions matching categories in Chapters 68–70 (stone, ceramic and glass objects) and 97 (artworks and antiques) of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (Harm.TS) are often used to hide or disguise antiquities on entry documentation. It is difficult for an untrained eye to distinguish between similar-appearing ancient and modern products. In August 2015, for example, California dealer Mohamad Yassin Alcharihi imported a Byzantine mosaic, alleged by the FBI to have been exported illegally from Syria, along with 83 other objects, mainly pottery. The objects were described on the US Customs entry form as 82 pieces of "Ornamental Art Oth. Material" (Harm.TS 6913.90.500), valued at $1,808, with the mosaic described as "Ceramic, Unglazed Tiles, Hub" (Harm.TS 6907.10.000), valued at $391 (USA 2018). When interviewed, Alcharihi admitted paying $12,000 for the material and declaring a lower value to reduce customs duties. The practice of including stolen or looted antiquities in shipments of ostensibly similar legitimate material has been termed "piggybacking" (St Hilaire 2014). The practice must be more common than is occasionally revealed by customs seizures.

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Once inside a destination country, invented provenances ease the passage of looted and trafficked antiquities onto the open market. Invented provenances are intended to reassure a good faith or naïve collector that an object is on the market legally. They also provide a bad faith collector with plausible deniability of incriminating knowledge and thus limit any potential criminal liability. It is difficult to prove criminal intent on the part of any possessor of an antiquity that is stolen. During the 2016 FBI raid on Alcharihi's premises, for example, agents discovered a notarized statement of provenance signed by a neighbor and dated March 5, 2016, regarding a "mosaic carpet" (USA 2018: 7–8). It stated that in 2009 the neighbor had sold Alcharihi a rolled "mosaic carpet" that had been in her family's possession since the 1970s. The neighbor told the FBI that she had sold Alcharihi a carpet, but not a mosaic, and that Alcharihi had prepared the misleading statement she had subsequently signed.

The Trade Out of Syria

Looted antiquities pass from source countries to transit and ultimately destination countries through an often complex chain of dealers (middlemen or intermediaries) and smugglers (couriers or runners). The division of labour between dealers and smugglers makes sense logistically as the roles require different skill-sets and commercial networks, and it can also act to protect

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dealers from being caught in possession of stolen material. Sometimes, however, a single person can embody both roles (see Loughnane, Chapter 5, this volume). Once on the transit market, some of the trade is long distance, point-to-point, passing from one dealer in a transit country straight to another one active on the destination market. Other trade is down-the-line, transiting through the hands of several dealers or criminal groups before reaching the destination market. All means of transport are utilized, including automobiles, buses, cargo trucks, mail and courier services, personal luggage, and air and sea freight. Some smugglers are generalists, willing to carry a range of illegal commodities, including consumer products, cigarettes, pharmaceuticals and narcotics alongside antiquities (Baker and Anjar 2012; Mabillard 2013)[4], others specialize in antiquities (Limoges et al. 2018), while those who transport high-value goods such as weapons, will not want to compromise an expensive safe route for lower-value material like antiquities (Bajjaly 2013). It has been reported several times that refugees have been used to smuggle antiquities out of Syria (Stoughton 2015; Cox 2015; Parkinson *et al.* 2015; Faucon *et al.* 2017)[5].

Some of the transit trade is facilitated by ethnic and linguistic continuities across borders and more wide-ranging diasporas. Traditionally, smuggling across borders into Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq has been in the hands of Bedouin and Druze (Moos 2020: 32), and Kurdish groups in Syria are reported to be working with Kurds in Turkey and Germany (Clark 2016)[6]. The large-scale movement of Syrian refugees into Turkey must be considered under this heading too. Sometimes destination market dealing is a family business for ethnic minorities, passing down through more than one generation, but allowing continuing familial and commercial contacts with a dealer's county of origin. Back in the 1990s, for example, many of the Turkish dealers in Germany and the United States belonged to Syriac or Kurdish families from Mardin (Acar and Kaylan 1990). Language and family relationships between Syrian nationals resident in Syria and Turkey are reported to have enabled trade both out of Syria and onwards to Europe, and the role of wider diaspora communities remains to be investigated[7].

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The immediate transit routes out of Syria are through neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon, Turkey and, although less-well documented, Jordan. Lebanon has been a long-time conduit for Syrian antiquities, particularly during the period 1976 to 2005 when it was under Syrian occupation. Antiquities trading was legal in Lebanon until 1988 (Seif 2015: 66–67), and with the ancient cultural continuities between Syria and Lebanon it is easy to create fictitious sales histories for Syrian antiquities dating back to an invented Lebanese purchase sometime prior to 1988. From Lebanon, material passes to Europe or North America by sea or by air. The importance of Lebanon as a transit route diminished after the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, but it has not fallen into disuse. In one year, for example, 2013, there were several major seizures of material from Syria, including objects thought to be from Apamea and Palmyra, and a large quantity of fakes (Seif 2015: 71–75).

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In January 2013, Lebanese officials seized 18 Syrian mosaics crossing into Lebanon in a bus registered in Idlib Governorate (Seif 2015: 72; Bajjaly 2013). Looking at the conflict geography of the area, since 2011 the Syrian side of the Lebanese border has mainly been under the control of the Syrian government, particularly after Hezbollah occupied the border zone inside Syria in 2012 (Stoughton 2015; Moos 2020: 31). Thus it should be expected that since 2011 Lebanon has been the favoured route for material looted in areas of Syria subject to government control. Looters and dealers resident in opposition-controlled Idlib Governorate confirm that since 2011 access to Lebanon has become more difficult (Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 79).

Turkey, too, has been a major transit country since 2011, helped by the fact that overland routes from Turkey to Germany through the Balkans became available in the 1990s after the lapse there of Soviet control (Mladenov 2015; and see Cengiz, this volume, Chapter 4, for an in-depth discussion of the antiquities trade through Turkey, and Cengiz and Roth 2019 for an analysis of organized crime in Turkey). After 2011, routes out of Syria through Turkey were strengthened by Syrian dealers relocating over the border. As Lebanon was closing down to opposition groups, Turkey became correspondingly more important and most trade from areas controlled by ISIS and JAN looks to have passed through Turkey. Until 2015, the Turkish border was open to people and material moving in and out of Syria, possibly as deliberate Turkish policy to support opposition groups (including ISIS and other Salafists) fighting inside Syria[8]. Corrupt Turkish border guards and police are well reported (Giglio 2014)[9]. Several seizures of looted antiquities inside Turkey and at its borders have been noted by Turkish media (Topal 2015; Sabah 2016, 2018) and more are reported by Cengiz (Chapter 4). Outside Turkey, in March 2015, Bulgarian police seized 9,000 ancient coins, dozens of Roman statues and what looked to be Sumerian relief from Iraq in the district of Shumen in north-east Bulgaria. The Roman statues were thought to be from Turkey or another Middle Eastern country (Dikov 2015a, 2015b). Three people were arrested, including a Turk with Bulgarian citizenship. Not everything has been moving overland out of Turkey through the Balkans, with material transported by sea to Spain and Italy in the west and Russia and the Ukraine to the north. The Byzantine mosaic purchased by Alcharihi arrived at Long Beach, California after having been shipped by sea from Iskenderun in Turkey (USA 2018). In 2015, Turkey started strengthening border controls and constructing a barrier in some places (AP 2016; Arango and Schmitt 2015). On the Syrian side, Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) closed their section of border after June 2015 (Soguel 2015). The stronger border controls were reported to have dampened smuggling out of opposition-controlled areas (Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 82). The border situation since the 2018 Turkish invasion of Afrin is unclear, though it has probably increased opportunities for smuggling from areas under Turkish military occupation[10]. Cengiz discusses these developments in more detail (this volume, Chapter 4).

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Through the 1990s into the early 2000s, Jordan was an important transit route for Iraqi (and Jordanian) antiquities passing into Israel or being flown out of Amman to London (Brodie 2006: 214–216). Its continuing role as a transit state was confirmed by reports in 2013 that Syrian antiquities were being smuggled out of opposition-controlled areas into Jordan, often with refugees, either for transhipment elsewhere or for purchase by collectors in Amman (Luck 2013a, 2013b; Fisk 2013).

Beyond Syria's immediately neighboring countries, the tracks of the trade become harder to follow. Dubai and the United Arab Emirates maintain large free trade zones that facilitate the duty-free transhipment of material and it is assumed that Syrian antiquities might pass through there, though nothing has been confirmed. Thailand does not have an established record of being a transit country for Syrian or Middle Eastern antiquities, but there is evidence to suggest that it is assuming the role[11]. In March 2016, two pieces of relief from a church in the Syrian Euphrates Valley were seized at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, where they were in transit from Lebanon to Thailand. French customs thought the intended final destination was probably in the United States (Revenu 2016; Faucon et al. 2017). This seizure highlights the possible transit role of European countries. In Spain, too, in November 2019, Moroccan national and Alicante resident Nourdine Chikar was convicted of financial crimes relating to the supply of military uniforms to ISIS in Syria and also cultural property, though the exact nature of his involvement in trafficking antiquities has yet to be made public (Moreno 2019). He was using the hawala system to move money.

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The Changing Nature of the Antiquities Trade

The nature of the antiquities trade has changed considerably since 1990 as developing technologies, economic deregulation and political reconfigurations – post-Cold-War processes conventionally grouped together under the heading of "globalization" – have provided profitable new opportunities for conducting business. It is not clear that policies and actions aimed at diminishing the trade have adapted accordingly (Brodie 2017a).

Before the 2000s, antiquities were sold mainly by auction houses and specialized dealers operating out of brick-and-mortar establishments. It was common during this time to see unprovenanced mosaics and other antiquities offered for sale at auction described as Syrian, possibly recently looted, but they rarely attracted any action, attention or adverse comment, with one exception. Between 1991 and 1996, 86 pieces of Syrian Late Roman floor mosaic arrived in Montreal from Lebanon. Canadian customs agents recovered most of them and returned them to Syria, including five pieces that were intercepted at the border by US customs. But one piece was allegedly sold at auction by Sotheby's in New York and together with nine other pieces remains missing (Fossey 2015: 209). Auctions comprise the public face of the destination market, but at the same time there was a thriving private or

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invisible antiquities trade, with dealers selling directly to collectors. What if any Syrian antiquities were being traded invisibly cannot be assessed at the present time. It is assumed the nine mosaics that eluded the Montreal seizures entered private collections (Fossey 2015: 209). These mosaics are typical of the type of material being trafficked at the time – large, monetarily-valuable and culturally-significant pieces.

At the turn of the millennium, the nature of the antiquities trade was changing, partly because of political detente and trade deregulation at the end of the Cold War, but mainly because of the increasing availability of new technologies, particularly metal detectors and the Internet. By 2003, there was a maturing Internet antiquities market, with on-line dealers and auctioneers selling direct to the public. The Internet offers easier market access for a much larger number of customers than brick-and-mortar establishments, and antiquities sold on the Internet are generally of poorer quality and thus less valuable than those that have been traditionally traded. While there has been a move towards providing more provenance-related information in the catalogues of the major auction houses (Mackenzie et al. 2020: 64–69), the Internet remains a largely provenance-free sales platform (Brodie 2015b: 250–251).

The continuance of Internet sales into the 2010s confirms their profitability and shows that buyers generally have a relaxed attitude towards the extremely poor standards of provenance that prevail. The fact that customers are generally accepting of unprovenanced antiquities means that the Internet is ideally suited for selling looted and trafficked material and it also provides an uncritical environment for passing fakes. By 2016 there were large numbers of purportedly Syrian antiquities and coins of uncertain provenance for sale on the Internet (Brodie 2017b: 196–201; Wartenberg Kagan 2015; Topçuoğlu and Vorderstrasse 2019; this volume, Chapters 7 and 8). Whether they were fake or authentic, looted or legitimate, was usually hard if not impossible to decide.

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On into the 2010s, as the Internet market continued to grow in size, more developing technologies, particularly cellular smart phones and their associated digital communication and social media apps, further refashioned the trade (see Waddell and Hashemi, this volume, Chapter 8). Facebook, for example, has been widely adopted as a trading platform across source and transit market countries. The use of Facebook in Syria and neighboring countries for communicating about antiquities trading and for actual commerce increased markedly from 2016 onwards, and by 2019 Facebook was bedded in, with at least 95 Arabic-language predominantly closed groups (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 6). Five of the groups comprised more than 100,000 members (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 6). Close analysis of four Syria-based Facebook groups showed their active members to be concentrated regionally in and around Syria, though with some located in other countries around the world (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 27–37). HTS might also be using Facebook to advertise finds (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 43–44). Instagram is another popular

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social media platform for transacting antiquities, and YouTube too occasionally advertises material. Vetted membership Internet discussion forums are also used for establishing contact between buyers and sellers. Social media has accelerated "glocalization" of the source market (Robertson 2012), with users participating simultaneously in local and global networks of communication and commerce.

Social media apps such as Facebook and Instagram need to be publicly accessible if they are to attract customers. When secrecy is required, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram or other encrypted means of electronic messaging are used to arrange deals (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 8, 14; Moos 2020; Sargent et al. 2020: 54–63). On Facebook and Instagram, sometimes it is possible to see purchasing negotiations commence, but then not proceed, presumably continuing to a successful conclusion away from the site on private, more secure platforms. On May 16, 2015, US Special Forces raided the Syrian compound of Abu Sayyaf, head of the ISIS Diwan al Rikaz (Ministry of Natural Resources and Minerals, including its Antiquities Division), where they discovered images of stolen antiquities in the WhatsApp folder of his cell phone (Keller 2015).

With more people buying more material, particularly material that in the past would not have been considered worth trading, the expanding global coverage of the Internet and cellular communication technologies has extended the commercial reach of the antiquities market, augmenting the pre-existing brick-and-mortar trade to increase the volume of antiquities being looted and trafficked and to offer more opportunities for faking. This developing process of commercial persistence and diversification is symptomatic of illicit trades more generally, allowing them to "operate as if on steroids" (Shelley 2018: 2).

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Despite suggestions to the contrary, there is no evidence of antiquities having been traded in large quantities on the Darknet (Brodie et al. 2019: 108; Sargent et al. 2020: 44–49; Waddell and Hashemi, this volume, Chapter 8). There are several possible explanations for this general absence of material on the Darknet, besides the obvious one that it is very effectively hidden. Since the antiquities trade is a gray trade, as described earlier, rather than an overtly illegal one, on the destination market customers can easily buy material without any stigma of criminality, privately or on open sales platforms, whether they be brick-and-mortar or electronic. Potential customers might be scared off by the illegal and harder-to-find Darknet. Further down the trading chain, on the source and transit markets, social media and easily accessible secure messaging apps can reach a much wider audience than the Darknet as described in Chapter 8.

The Changing Nature of Traded Material

Despite the well-documented damage caused to archaeological sites by looting since the 2011 onset of fighting in Syria, there have been hardly any reports of large, valuable Syrian antiquities such as the "Montreal mosaics"

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entering the United States or Europe (McAndrew 2014; Bakare 2020). Several suspicious-looking pieces of Palmyran sculpture have been offered for sale, but with provenances claiming they moved out of Syria long before 2011, and it is hard to prove otherwise (Albertson 2016; Brodie 2017b: 196). To explain the apparent market absence of large (and valuable) objects, there have been unsubstantiated claims that material is being stockpiled regionally for sale in the future when limitation periods have expired and international attention has drifted elsewhere (CBS 2015; Myers and Kulish 2016; Moos 2020: 27; Brodie et al. 2019: 103; Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 82; Yoon 2015), or is entering regional collections in the Gulf or elsewhere (McAndrew 2014; AFP 2015; Yoon 2015). There have, for example, been allegations that private museums in neighbouring countries such as the newly established Nabu Museum in Lebanon and the Bible Lands Museum in Israel have been acquiring looted material (Sewell 2019; Press 2019). Investigation of regional collecting practices is urgently required. This conjectured pattern of regional demand and acquisition has been used by commercial lobbyists to argue for measures aimed at market interdiction and suppression at source rather than destination (CCP 2015, 2017; Macquisten 2017; McAndrew 2014).

But another reason for the seeming non-appearance in the United States and Europe of large Syrian antiquities is that the type of material being traded has changed, with coins and other small objects suitable for sale on the Internet achieving more commercial dominance as described in Chapters 7 and 8. Larger and more expensive objects are more difficult to transport, more readily recognizable, and thus less in demand. Although on the ground in Syria there are many reports of bulldozers or other heavy digging machines being used to open sites (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Baker and Anjar 2012; Chivers 2013; ASOR 2016b: 55), the widespread use of metal detectors to search for coins and other metal objects has been equally well documented (Harkin 2014; Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Brodie and Sabrine 2018; Cuneo and Danti 2019: 276). Metal detectors were developed in the 1970s, but the changing market conditions of the 2000s with an increasing demand for smaller antiquities have increasingly favoured their use while looting archaeological sites. More than 300 people were reported using metal detectors while digging at Dura Europos in early 2014 and selling their finds to dealers at the site (some of them at least arriving from neighboring countries – the international "mafia" noted previously) (DGAM 2014)[12]. Dealers were also said to be selling metal detectors to aspiring looters[13]. It is thought that the looting there was driven by the search for coins and jewelry (Daniels and Hansen 2015: 90–91). The ASOR CHI database suggests more generally that most material traded from Syria could be classed as "low and middle tier" (Cuneo and Danti 2019: 276). Many of the antiquities recovered from the possession of Abu Sayyaf were coins from Syria and Iraq, and there were electronic images of gold coins and jewelry on his computer (USA 2016). The trade on Facebook since 2015 has been dominated by coins and other small antiquities (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 37–38).

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Perhaps on the ground there is an expectation of more valuable finds. The Abu Sayyaf documents, for example, contain reference to a find of gold objects that was valued within Syria at between $120,000 to $200,000. If such large sums of money are changing hands inside Syria for found material, even if only occasionally, they would provide a powerful incentive for looters intent upon finding a valuable "treasure" to continue digging, even when the monetary value of objects actually found is comparatively disappointing. But even without buried treasure, the looting of large numbers of small, relatively low-value coins and antiquities would still in aggregate generate appreciable profits for anybody involved in their trade (Greenland et al. 2019).

Outside Syria, media reports from the border area of southern Turkey emphasize the trafficking of coins, jewelry and other small objects (Ruiz 2016). Between 2011 and the end of 2015, Turkish authorities seized 6,800 antiquities of possibly Syrian origin, the majority of them coins (Myers and Kulish 2016). By 2020, there had been more seizures and the number of coins would be larger still. In May 2017, for example, Turkish police at GAP Airport in Sanliurfa province seized 90 Hellenistic and Roman coins that had been smuggled out of Syria[14]. The Syrian suspect stated he had bought the coins from a local smuggler who had contacts with ISIS. In June 2017, two people were arrested in Aksaray province of Turkey, with 3,745 Byzantine coins and 408 other antiquities from Syria in their possession, bought from a Syrian smuggler in Hatay province[15]. In May 2018, Bulgarian customs intercepted a car carrying 11,037 coins and 141 other antiquities entering the country from Turkey. The coins may have originated in Turkey, Iraq or Syria (Dikov 2018). There is evidence of increased quantities of Syrian coins appearing for sale post-2011 in Europe and North America (Brodie 2017b: 196–201; Topçuoğlu and Vorderstrasse 2019; Wartenberg Kagan 2015; Wartenberg and Brederova, this volume, Chapter 8).

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The conflict in Syria has also been associated with an increase in antiquities faking as criminals moved to maximize supply (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Cockburn 2016). Provenance-free and distanced trading on the Internet and social media has made it easier to infiltrate fakes into commerce than was previously the case through face-to-face trading in the physical market. In 2015, the Syrian Director-General for Antiquities and Museums estimated that approximately 80 per cent of objects being seized internally were fake, compared to about 30 per cent at the start of the conflict (Cockburn 2016). The trade in fake Judaeo-Christian manuscripts through Turkey has been particularly remarked upon (Hardy 2018). Counterfeit antiquities are filtered into the genuine trade, increasing profitability for those involved. By 2019, it was claimed that genuine antiquities appearing on Facebook were rapidly being copied for sale (Moos 2020: 28).

Thus, it is likely that looting and trafficking from Syria post-2011 has preferentially targeted coins and smaller, lower-value antiquities and increasingly enabled the passing of fakes, a shift enabled by the widespread availability of the Internet, cellular communication technologies and metal

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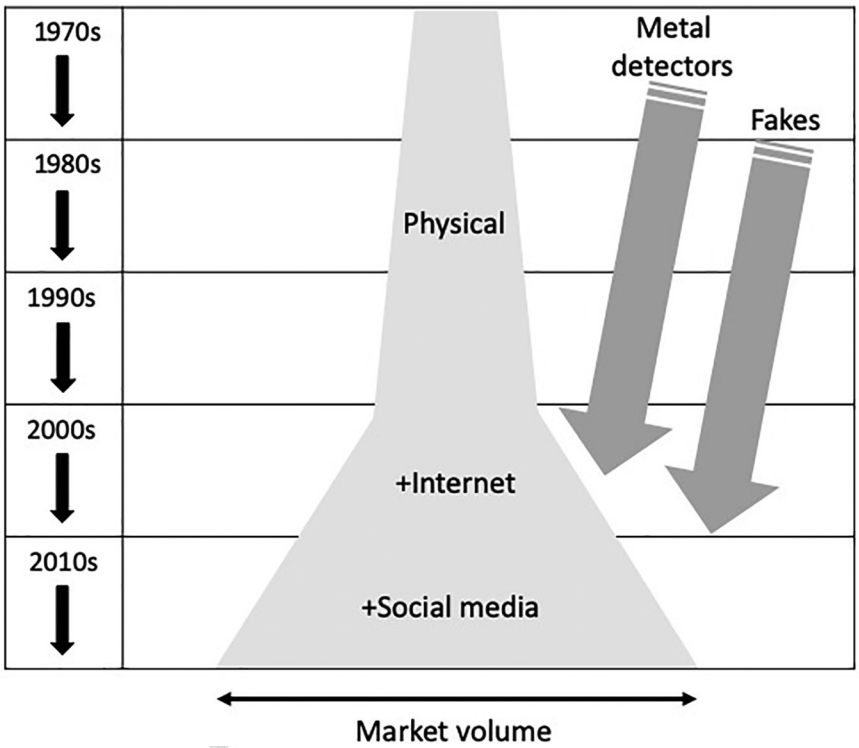

Figure 1.2 The changing shape of the antiquities trade since 1970, showing how Internet and social media trading have increased the importance of metal detectors and created more opportunities for marketing fakes.

detectors (Figure 1.2). Coins and other small antiquities can be easily concealed and transported out of Syria before being offered for sale on the Internet and delivered by mail or courier to customers on the destination market. Observations that law enforcement agencies in destination countries are not seeing any looted Syrian objects (McAndrew 2014; Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Bakare 2020) might simply mean that the agencies concerned are not looking for the right type of material. In 2015, for example, the French government asked dealers to watch out for mosaics, statues and bas-reliefs (Chazan 2015). By way of contrast, there are reports of small unprovenanced Syrian antiquities and coins on open sale in some London sales galleries (Shabi 2015), and although it is not possible to say without doubt that they were looted in Syria after 2011, it is simply wrong to say that they weren't.

The Criminal Organization and Operation of the Antiquities trade

On the source and transit markets, it is possible to conceptualize three separate though interacting and interdependent spheres of economic networking

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or organization, each with its own motivating rationale and means of mobilizing and allocating resources (Brodie and Sabrine 2018; Goodhand 2003, 2005: 202–209). First there is a "conflict economy", constructed and maintained with the aim of supporting armed violence in pursuit of a political objective. Second, there is a "criminal economy", the work of criminal entrepreneurs bent on profiting personally from opportunities created by conflict. Finally, there is a "coping economy", offering poor households and communities whose traditional livelihoods have been destroyed by conflict opportunities to engage in illegal activities as a means of ensuring their ongoing survival. This tripartite conceptualization is idealized, overly compartmentalized perhaps, and individual actors can certainly embody multiple roles, motivations and relationships, but it does offer a useful heuristic for thinking about how the antiquities trade out of Syria is organized, how it operates, and how it might best be tackled.

The reality of people looting archaeological sites during peacetime as a means of enhancing their wellbeing has been well-described in the archaeological literature as "subsistence digging" (Staley 1993; Brodie 2012: 244–247; Field et al. 2016) and the participation of Syrians in a wartime coping economy should not come as a surprise (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Limoges et al. 2018; Brodie and Sabrine 2018). By 2016, three million Syrians had lost their jobs to conflict, about 50 per cent of the labor force (Gobat and Kostial 2016: 7). Ultimately, however, the coping economy is dependent upon the criminal economy for expertise and disposal of looted material (Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 81). For antiquities trafficking, it is the organized criminal networks comprising the criminal economy that enable the trade out of Syria and through onto the destination market. Organized crime provides access to specialized services (e.g. money laundering and counterfeiting) and operational support (e.g. access to smuggling networks). Long-established criminal dealers in Syria and its immediately neighboring countries are essential for the ongoing functioning of the trade and by extension the coping and conflict economies (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015; Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 7; Cengiz, this volume, Chapter 4). They possess the expertise necessary to authenticate and value material, the out-of-country contacts necessary to arrange for ongoing trade and are generally trusted by other participants (Moos 2020: 11, 27–28). To a certain extent, they are the human glue holding the economies together. The criminal economy probably includes locally corrupt or criminal government agents or army personnel, with any proceeds benefiting them personally, and not necessarily implicating the Syrian government.

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The traditional, pre-2000, low-volume trade of large, expensive objects presupposes the participation of a limited number of criminals, perhaps acting in long-term cooperation, exercising a good degree of control over the organization and operation of trade, and with significant transport and storage capabilities. It would be vulnerable to targeted law enforcement aiming to disrupt trade by apprehending offenders. The new higher-volume trade of

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smaller objects such as coins instantiates the more general criminal move away from fixed hierarchies towards distributed and decentralized networks (Naím 2005: 7; Shelley 2015: 99) and is harder to tackle. It is most likely dispersed, involving a larger number of people, and more loosely organized with less onerous transport and storage requirements. It will be flexible and opportunistic and better able to survive the occasional removal of participating criminals.

Having said that, network analysis of Facebook group memberships shows a high degree of centrality and connectivity (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 16–19). If this communication network reflects a deeper illegal trading operation, the post-2000 trade might not be so distributed as is supposed[16]. In late 2018, open-source analysis of Facebook data was used to examine the activities of three coin dealers, one based in Canada, one in the United Kingdom and one in Germany[17]. The dealers were working together selling ancient coins on the open market in Europe and North America, including coins from Middle Eastern countries. The German had 4,993 Facebook friends. The Facebook pages of many of these friends in turn revealed information about their participation in antiquities looting and trafficking. From sample of 500 of these friends, 313 provided information about location. At least 131 were based in Arabic-speaking countries, including eight in Syria, 18 in Jordan and two in Lebanon. There were many more in Turkey. The Canadian dealer's Facebook friends were not accessible, but it was obvious from his timeline that he was often visiting Middle Eastern countries. The British dealer's friends were mainly located outside the Middle East and from his timeline at least he never visited there. What this analysis revealed was a small group of destination-market dealers with an extremely wide-ranging communication network penetrating deep into source and transit countries. Presumably it reached down into the regional Facebook groups revealed by Al-Azm and Paul (2019). Again, if this Facebook communication network reflected an underlying illegal trading operation, it would show how a small, tightly-organized group of destination-market dealers was obtaining material from a much less organized source market, though it would not necessarily imply a control hierarchy – perhaps more of an arrangement of interlocking trusted-partner trading relationships. A BBC investigation into the trade of ancient coins out of Gaza showed how the Canadian dealer was known there as a buyer or receiver (BBC 2020), perhaps highlighting once more the importance of reputation or trust for dealers in local source-market trading operations.

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The Financial Structure of the Antiquities Trade

Traditionally on the antiquities market, mark-ups of several hundred per cent between source and destination prices have not been unusual (Brodie 2014: 34–35). These mark-ups represent profit to be divided between the various dealers, smugglers and facilitators that constitute the trade, including

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payments through bribery, extortion or taxation necessary to allow its operation, together with fees paid to professional experts for activities related to marketing. In the Californian mosaic case previously described, for example, Alcharihi paid a dealer in Turkey $12,000 for a large mosaic, two smaller mosaics and 81 pottery vessels. Once the mosaic had arrived in the United States, he paid a US-based conservation company $40,000 to restore it, and after restoration independent appraisals suggested the mosaic to be worth between $70,000 and $200,000. The Alcharihi mosaic demonstrates the large mark-up in price expected on the destination market, including the added-value of expert restoration. To explore further, it was reported in 2015 that a Turkish dealer was in possession of a Syrian mosaic (presumably not the Alcharihi one) that had been smuggled across the border rolled up in a carpet. He said he had bought it for $21,000 from a dealer in Syria and hoped to sell it for $30,000 (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015). If that reported fifty-per-cent mark-up between Syria and Turkey was real and representative of the financial structure of the cross-border trade more generally, it would imply that the Alcharihi mosaic had been sold inside Syria for $8,000. If Alcharihi had managed to sell the piece for its appraised value of between $70,000 and $200,000, the mark-up between Syria and California would have ranged from several hundred up to a couple of thousand per cent. Exactly what would be expected from what is known from other sources about the general price structure of the antiquities trade.

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But for ancient coins and other small antiquities, the financial structure of the trade out of Syria since 2011 is not so clear cut. One digger in Daraa Governorate complained that for 20 gold Byzantine coins he had been paid only 10 per cent of the value in Amman (Moos 2020: 29), which seems normal, but generally the prices reported on-the-ground by journalists and other researchers seem very high when compared to those on the destination market (Brodie and Sabrine 2018: 82). It has been reported from Idlib Governorate in 2019, for example, that 42 pure (24 carat) gold coins were sold for $300,000 to the representative of a German dealer who subsequently resold them at auction in the Netherlands (Moos 2020 25). That would be an on-the-ground purchase price of just over $7,000 for each coin. In December 2019, on the Sixbid Internet coin auction aggregator site, Byzantine gold solidi dating to the second half of the first millennium AD of a type likely to be found in Syria, which are nearly pure gold (Morrison 2002), were selling for a few hundred US dollars each, about $400 on average. At the same time, Abbasid gold dinars were selling for about $100 less. So, if the reported on-the-ground prices are to be believed, the German dealer would have incurred a serious loss on his investment. Perhaps instead the prices on the ground have been misreported, and the German did in fact make a profit. But delving further back into the Sixbid sales archive, it is possible to find rare examples of both Byzantine solidi and Abbasid dinars selling for tens of thousands of US dollars each, up to as much as $100,000 in some cases. So, it is also possible that the German dealer was able to recognize and willing to

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pay a premium price for 40 rare coins with a high resale value and did in fact make a considerable profit. But staying with this rare coin scenario for a moment, if it is correct, it would be unusual and not generally representative of prices being paid on the ground – the prices paid for more common coin types would be much lower. It seems likely also that a significant number of previously rare coins being sold at auction on the destination market would be noticed, and perhaps even act to depress prices.

More contradictory information about prices is forthcoming from the investigation of an image of a Hellenistic-Roman gold ring discovered on Abu Sayyaf's computer hard drive, which revealed it to be part of an assemblage of 18 pieces of gold jewelry believed to have been sold in Deir ez-Zor Governorate for approximately $260,000 (USA 2017c). The ring, weighing 37 g, was subsequently smuggled into Turkey by a Syrian national, who is said to have sold it for $250,000 in early 2015. He later sold the remaining pieces of the assemblage. In early 2016, Turkish police in Gaziantep confiscated the ring. This price of $250,000 inside Turkey is difficult to reconcile with the prices of similar gold rings sold at auction in New York. In Ancient Jewelry sales, for example, held by Christie's New York in 2011 and 2012, prices for five materially-similar rings were in the thousands to tens-of-thousands of dollars' range. The highest-priced ring sold for $62,500 (Christie's 2011: lot 390). Nothing like the $250,000 sale price claimed for the Abu Sayyaf ring in Turkey.

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It is not certain how reliable these prices quoted inside Syria are; in fact, they seem distinctly unreliable. Dealers inside Syria and Turkey might be exaggerating prices for an expected sale, maybe as an opening gambit in a sales negotiation, or to bolster future prices. If dealers inside Syria or other countries are monitoring prices on the destination market in sales catalogues or on the Internet, they might be discounting or unaware of the hidden costs of restoration or other services such as shipping and storage and demanding unrealistic high prices for on-the-ground transactions. Perhaps it is simply that currency conversions are misleading. But when these high prices on-the-ground have been reported in the Arabic media they have incentivized further looting (Dandachi 2020: 136–137).

If the high prices reported for ancient coins and jewelry inside Syria are in fact generally correct, there are at least four possible explanations. First, the new modalities of trade, low-value objects transacted directly through social media, messaging apps or the Internet, might be diminishing price differentials between source and destination markets, primarily by eliminating the profitable role of intermediaries or brokers, and helped by better information obtained on-line about prices on the destination market. Second, the practice instituted by ISIS but also perhaps by other groups of requiring dealers from Turkey to travel into Syria to acquire material might have increased prices on the ground. Third, at the other end of the trade, perhaps higher prices in emerging though under-reported destination markets in the Gulf, Russia and East Asia are trickling down to the source market. Finally, the possibility of trade-based money laundering should not be excluded (TraCCC 2019).

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Financial evidence in the form of invoices, receipts etc. necessary to investigate the use of antiquities trading for money laundering is not generally available, but the fact that the trade is clandestine and transnational with an open end-market makes it an eminently suitable vehicle for such a purpose. The apparent monetary loss suffered by the German dealer on the sale of gold coins in the Netherlands, for example, would be explicable if the dealer was using the trade to launder dirty money. Syria is primarily a cash economy (ICSR 2018), and the dealer would have needed to pay (potentially dirty) cash on the ground, while presumably receiving (clean) payment after sale in the Netherlands by wire transfer or cheque. The monetary shortfall would have been the acceptable cost of laundering. Unfortunately, these possibilities of commercial reconfigurations and money laundering are all speculative. The pricing structure of the trade out of Syria remains obscure.

ANSA and Terrorist Profiting from the Antiquities Trade

The mechanisms by which ANSA groups operating a conflict economy profit from the trade scale qualitatively according to their combat capability, territorial control and political project (Naylor 2002: 45–52). Where groups are militarily weak and facing strong and determined state opposition, they engage in "predatory" activities such as theft, or in this case archaeological looting. Early on in the Syria conflict, several reports suggested that FSA and later JAN members were engaging in predatory activities by digging and selling antiquities to trade for money to fund weapons' purchases (Baker and Anjar 2012; Bajjaly 2013; van Tets 2013; RT 2014; Luck 2013b). As groups become stronger and able to exert territorial control they develop more systematic means of profiting from "parasitical" methods of extortion through ultimately to regularized "symbiotic" regimes of taxation. During the conflict, in areas remaining under government control, dealers were forced to pay off parasitical Shabiha groups (Baker and Anjar 2012), but it is in areas occupied by ISIS and HTS that true symbiotic systems of taxation were developed.

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Pseudo-state ANSA groups such as ISIS or HTS in occupation of territory and intending to achieve permanent control are concerned to achieve some semblance of civil legitimacy and order by maintaining provision of peacetime goods and services. To achieve this end, they will legalize or suppress criminal enterprises and raise money through taxation of legitimate economic activity. ISIS moved quickly to legitimize and control archaeological looting and trading through a permit system and to impose a 20 per cent "khums tax" on any proceeds (Al-Azm et al. 2014), establishing an office in the city of Manbij close to Turkish border to coordinate its antiquities activities (Al-Azm 2015). In effect, ISIS incorporated the pre-existing coping economy into its own system of governance and encouraged its newly acquired "citizenry" to participate in what it had decreed was to be a legal endeavour. To maximize tax revenue, it tried to ensure that sales of looted

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material were conducted within its jurisdiction (Al-Tamimi 2015). Thus it allowed ingress for non-affiliated dealers or smugglers (Faucon et al. 2017). In February 2016, a YPG unit seized ISIS documents including an official paper allowing safe passage for a Turkish dealer through ISIS held territory (RT 2016). Another tactic to secure revenue was for ISIS to buy objects itself at a 20 per cent (tax) discount and then arrange for ongoing sale (Faucon et al. 2017). ISIS also taxed material passing through its territory from other areas (Limoges et al. 2018).

From taxing the trade, ISIS moved quickly to exert control over looting and trafficking by instituting a permit system (Faucon et al. 2017). The 2015 raid on the Syrian compound of Abu Sayyaf by US Special Forces discovered documentary evidence of ISIS's antiquities operation, showing how it controlled the trade to extract maximum profit (Keller 2015). As well as issuing permits to individuals to excavate sites, ISIS took action to prevent unauthorized excavation. One memorandum dated September 13, 2014, prohibited people from excavating archaeological sites without prior permission, and prohibited unauthorized ISIS members from giving permission. Anybody violating these prohibitions would be subject to a penalty according to Sharia law.

ISIS might also have been defrauding its subjects. The Abu Sayyaf raid recovered the transcript of a judgment resolving a dispute over the value and ownership of some gold antiquities (USA 2016). The antiquities had been dug up by a group of women, who claimed to have refused an offer of $120,000 to $180,000 made by Syrian dealers from Idlib Governorate. After occupying their area of residence, ISIS subsequently offered them $70,000 (which, allowing for tax deducted in advance, would have been $87,500), hoping to sell the material to a Turkish dealer for $200,000 (thereby raising an extra $100,000 at the finders' expense).

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JAN was also using permits to control digging by at least 2015, a practice continued and developed by its successor organization HTS (Moos 2020: 15). By 2019, HTS was taxing all finds made on private land at 20 per cent, though confiscating material found on public land (Moos 2020: 14–15). Increasingly, however, HTS was coming to favour a permitting system, allowing people to dig but taking two-thirds of any sales proceeds (Moos 2020: 15, 18).

ANSAs are specialists in political violence. To obtain funding they must incorporate criminal expertise or co-opt or forge alliances with criminal groups. Increasingly, as ANSAs adopt criminal financing methods, and vice versa, hybrid organizations or cooperations of convenience emerge – the "crime–terror nexus" (Makarenko 2012; Ruggiero 2020) or "dirty entanglements" of crime, corruption and terrorism (Shelley 2015). ANSA and criminal groups might work together to market material, or individual actors might move between groups. For the antiquities trade, like any other, criminal dealers and smugglers are generally in business to make money, are not politically motivated, and are willing to trade material from any source (Giglio and Al-Awad 2015). Criminal groups have been reported in Turkey

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with Syrian and Turkish members of different political affiliations, including the Syrian government and former ISIS members[18]. One loose network of dealers inside Turkey has approximately 130 members, including 11 Syrians, with several members affiliated with ISIS and JAN[19]. Syrians in Hatay province active in antiquities trading are reported to have established front companies with Turkish bank accounts for transferring money abroad[20].

As ISIS has been pushed back, incoming groups have continued to profit from antiquities trading. Smugglers who in the past paid tax to ISIS now pay bribes to government forces, or taxes to other opposition groups, including the FSA and HTS (Limoges et al. 2018; Moos 2020: 29–30). It is becoming increasingly clear, if it was not clear already, that political boundaries are permeable and that criminal actors are changing allegiance when it is profitable, expedient, or necessary for them to do so[21]. Nevertheless, for a looter or smuggler, it is a fine line between a tax paid to ISIS or HTS or a bribe paid to a corrupt army officer or government official.

The facts that all armed factions have been profiting from looting and smuggling and that their areas of territorial control have fluctuated through time mean that it is not practical to pick apart discrete flows of antiquities that are differentially financing ANSA and non-ANSA (criminal) groups. By the time they are passing through the transit market, antiquities from different sources that have profited different groups will have become mixed together, fake and genuine, with trading histories suppressed and invented for passage onto the gray destination market.

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The Overall Monetary Value of ANSA and Terrorist Profiting

In 2014, media outlets began publishing estimates of the financial worth of antiquities trading to ISIS, with figures ranging from the millions to billions of US dollars annually. Most of these claims can be traced back to an ambiguously-worded statement attributed to an unnamed Iraqi "intelligence official" reported in the *Guardian* newspaper, which declared that in Syria ISIS "had taken $36m from al-Nabuk alone [an area in the Qalamoun mountains west of Damascus]. The antiquities there are up to 8,000 years old" (Chulov 2014). This figure of $36 million was never verified or corroborated and is at variance with what is known of the pricing structure of the trade, where, as already explained, most profits are made on the destination market, not at source. Nevertheless, the article was frequently referenced and exaggerated by subsequent claims of a multi-billion-dollar trafficking operation (Howard et al. 2014; Hall 2015; Grantham 2016; Faucon et al. 2017; Loveluck 2015; Moody 2014). Politicians began accepting these figures as fact (Jenrick 2015; Charbonneau 2016). In 2016, the US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security (HSC) published a report on ISIS funding which drew from media and other open-source documentation, stating that "At one point, U.S. officials judged that ISIS was probably reaping over $100 million a year from such illicit trading" (HSC 2016: 9).

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The evidence underpinning these political claims was never made available for critical scrutiny – if in fact it even existed. The HSC report, for example, simply referenced a newspaper article, which stated that "The total volume of illicit trade is impossible to accurately assess but is thought to have mushroomed to more than $100 million a year, according to U.S. officials" (Parkinson et al. 2015). The circularity is patent. Journalists and politicians quoting each other with no material reference open to independent verification as to its evidential reliability. Thus media reports that ISIS was making millions or even billions of dollars annually from the antiquities trade must be viewed with suspicion and perhaps even discounted (van Lit 2016; Brodie et al. 2019: 113–115). A calmer and more evidence-based assessment of ISIS profiting is much needed.

The documents seized during the Abu Sayyaf raid included a book of receipts, dated to between December 6, 2014, and March 26, 2015, recording $265,000 tax revenue made from antiquities sales. Extrapolating, it would suggest that ISIS was making approximately $880,000 annually. Only three of the receipts were published, and it has since been implied that some of the money recorded on the receipts might have been raised through sale of gold or other precious metals (Taub 2015), which has caused lobbyists for the antiquities trade to question the $265,000 figure (CCP 2017). More receipts have been published since then, however, with the English translations consistently reporting "relics" or "antiquities" (USA 2016). As previously described, the Abu Sayyaf documents also contain reference to a find of gold objects that was valued within Syria for between $120,000 and $180,000, with ISIS hoping to expropriate the material for below-value compensation and sell on, making $117,500 in the process.

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As already noted, some individual coins can be sold on the destination market for prices in the tens-of-thousands of US dollars' range, with some achieving prices in excess of $100,000. But most low-denomination and common coins sell for considerably less. As relatively low-value objects, these coins are easily discounted as major income generators. But coins are traded in large quantities and aggregate revenue might be substantial, as some hypothetical accounting can easily show. In June 2018, for example, one coin dealer in North America was offering for sale 63 Greek coins said to be from "Syria and Phoenicia", with a low price of $115, a high price of $6,000, a mean price of $571 and a total value of $39,994. If it is assumed that these coins had been sold in Syria for 10 per cent of their destination market value, in other words $3,999, and further assumed that ISIS levied a 20 per cent tax, then the coins would have provided tax revenue of $800. This calculation is not to suggest that the coins actually were traded from ISIS-held territory, it simply aims to assess their potential financial worth to the group. Hypothesizing further, it is informative to look at the 14,872 coins recovered in the three Bulgarian and Turkish seizures of 2017 and 2018 referenced previously. Again, assuming each coin was found in ISIS-held territory, with a destination market price of $571 and a price inside Syria of $5, then inside Syria the

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coins would have generated $74,360, which would have provided $14,872 of tax revenue for ISIS. That is a significant sum of money and certainly a worthwhile one for ISIS to collect. Even with a lower average destination market price of $100 and inside Syria a price of $1 each, ISIS would have collected $2,974. If prices inside Syria were actually higher, as previously discussed, the revenue for ISIS would likewise have been higher.

When interviewed, high-ranking ISIS operative Abdul Nasser Qardash (captured in 2020) made some confusing but not contradictory statements about the potential though not actual value of antiquities trafficking for the group (Al-Hashimi 2020):

> We did not need to grow hashish, cocaine, or Indian hemp. We had an obscene abundance of antiquities. We tried to transfer the relics to Europe to sell them, but we failed in four major attempts. This is especially true for Syrian relics, which are well known and documented as a world heritage. So we resorted to destroying them and punishing those who trade in them.
>
> But what I know is that there are four sources at least in eastern Syria that finance the organization: the proceeds of oil smuggling; arms and goods smuggling; ransom money from kidnapping of media personalities, journalists, members of humanitarian, human rights, and relief missions, and local officials; and proceeds from selling the bodies of dead and killed people – so-called selling the infidel's corpse which is viewed as war spoils. In addition, other sources include the spoils of raids and taxes on peasants, farmers, and merchants.

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These statements together seem to imply that while ISIS recognized the potential financial importance of antiquities trading it failed to exert any effective control, so that antiquities trading did not become a major source of income (though it is worth remembering the interviewer's warning that "Qardash's claims should be taken with a grain of salt").

From what is known from the Abu Sayyaf documents and some hypothetical accounting, an annual income for ISIS in the high hundreds-of-thousands of dollars' range would not be an outlandish estimate, perhaps even as much as a million or just over. But certainly nothing like the millions or billions of dollars reported in the media.

Long-term Policy Failure?

A long international history of ignoring the trafficking of Syrian antiquities, both legislatively and for law enforcement operationally, laid the groundwork for post-2011 looting (Brodie 2015a, 2017a). There was a healthy international trade in Syrian antiquities before 2011, with no serious or systematic attempts at disguising their origin. It was common to see Syria offered as country of origin in sales descriptions of objects that could have been found in Syria. Syria was even

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used in sales and customs descriptions to disguise the origins of material most likely from Iraq or another adjacent country. In 2001, for example, CBP agents at JFK International Airport reported the arrival from the United Kingdom of more than 100 Iraqi cylinder seals misdescribed as Syrian (Studevent-Hickman 2018: 208–211). On December 20, 2010, CBP agents at Detroit Metropolitan Airport stopped Michigan-based dealer Salem Alshdaifat while entering the United States from Jordan and seized Byzantine coins he was carrying. Alshdaifat claimed the coins were Syrian, but they were confiscated because he provided two different invoices at two different inspections – not because they were Syrian (St Hilaire 2011). In February 2000, New York dealer Hicham Aboutaam arrived at JFK International Airport with an Iranian silver vessel, which he misdescribed to customs as Syrian. He was allowed through but arrested afterwards in December 2003 when it became known that the vessel was in fact from Iran and its import had been illegal under the Iranian Transactions Regulations (Lufkin 2004).

Thus the evidence suggests that before 2011 the trade in Syrian objects was considered unproblematic by customs and dealers alike. The previously discussed mosaics seized in Montreal between 1991 and 1996 seem to have been the exception to the rule. There are examples of Syrian objects that were in transit or on the market before 2011, but not seized until after 2011. In April 2014, an inscribed Syrian stele offered for sale at London's Bonhams auction house was seized by the Metropolitan Police when evidence came to light that it had probably been looted in 1999 (Lamb 2014b). It had been offered at Christie's New York in 2000 but had failed to sell. Sometime between 2013 and 2016, three funerary reliefs from Palmyra were seized in the Geneva Freeport. They had arrived there in 2009 and 2010 from Qatar (AFP 2016). Thus, on the destination market, there was an open trade in Syrian antiquities in the decades leading up to 2011, but very little was done to stop it. Inside Turkey on the transit market, Antakya and Gaziantep have since 2011 emerged as a major hubs of the cross-border antiquities trade (Hunter 2015; and see Cengiz this volume, Chapter 4), in Gaziantep at least due in part to a well-established network of dealers and smugglers working with corrupt government officials and law enforcement officers (Sputnik 2016)[22]. The corrupting influence of these long-established collaborations of wealthy and politically influential dealers and smugglers (and collectors) has been reported in other countries in the region[23]. Protected as they were, no successful attempts were made before 2011 to extirpate their networks, and they have continued in operation. Thus many of the people criminally involved before 2011 were still active in 2011, inside Syria, but also outside Syria on the transit and destination markets. They constituted a skeletal yet experienced organizational structure that was available to encourage and support the rapid increase in looting and smuggling seen after 2011.

If the trade in Syrian antiquities was left generally unmolested before 2011, the changing nature of the trade during the early 2000s made it even harder to tackle after 2011. Coins and smaller antiquities were easier to move and

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harder to detect. The small amounts of money involved in individual transactions on the destination market diminishes the apparent seriousness of crimes and reduces the public interest requirement for committing adequate resources to their investigation and prosecution. Furthermore, because the seriousness of a crime determines the severity of sentencing, weak particularly non-custodial sentences pose little deterrent effect on destination-market dealers. Thus the trade in low-value coins and antiquities weakens both the case for and the effectiveness of targeted law enforcement. It is worth revisiting in this context observations that looted Syrian antiquities have not been appearing on the market in Europe or the United States (McAndrew 2014; Bakare 2020), while at the same time, as already described, Turkish law enforcement agencies have been seizing what by now must be tens of thousands of smuggled ancient coins and other antiquities. The contrast is stark. Perhaps Turkey is being so successful at interdicting the trade on its own territory that nothing is reaching the United States or Europe, though that seems unlikely, to say the least. The contrast most likely speaks instead to different priorities, competences and operational procedures, with Turkish agencies either better resourced and incentivized or better trained and experienced than their US and European counterparts for engaging with low-value antiquities trading.

It is difficult to prove criminal intent on the part of dealers or collectors on the destination market. The gray trade facilitates honest or dishonest defences of innocent purchase. As a result, while most seized antiquities are returned to their lawful owners, there is hardly ever an associated criminal investigation or conviction. This policy has been termed "seize and send" (St Hilaire 2016) or "recovery and return" (Brodie 2015a: 324–326). It can be justified by arguments that the return of an antiquity of great cultural worth to its dispossessed owner should not be jeopardized by the uncertain outcome of a criminal trial or that the confiscation of a valuable antiquity will deter future wrongdoing. But it is debateable to what extent the antiquities seized through customs and other law enforcement actions match such high cultural standards. Dealers and smugglers can accept the occasional loss of material through "seize and send" as a cost of doing business, and continue trading, thereby generating proceeds at source for terrorist groups to appropriate. ANSA and terrorist profiting from the looting and smuggling of antiquities out of Syria would have been much reduced if action had been taken against the trade before 2011, with the pre-existing criminal economy weakened through the energetic prosecution and deterrent sentencing of criminal dealers. By the time ISIS was extracting its hundreds-of-thousands of dollars, it was too late – the world was playing catch-up. Antiquities looting and trafficking will never be stopped while the dealers and smugglers responsible are left at large. It is a matter of some urgency that appropriate and effective countermeasures should be planned and implemented, focusing on eliminating trade (and terrorist financing) rather than recovering looted material.

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Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an evidence-based account of the looting and trafficking of Syrian antiquities since the onset of civil conflict in Syria in 2011. It should be apparent to any reader that reliable "evidence" is in short supply. Most information is derived from media reporting, which is sometimes good but often simply repetitive or at worst sensationalist. Sam Hardy (2015b) has warned about the dangers of relying too much upon "churnalism" in this context, though in the general absence of good quality research there is often no other option. Nevertheless, triangulation and redundancy of sources offer some reassurance about the general accuracy of information being reported, and overall the picture is clear. On-the-ground reporting and particularly satellite imagery have between them documented without doubt the severity of archaeological looting since 2011. The involvement of a broad constituency of civilian, criminal and political actors is also well established. It is unfortunate, however, that most media and scholarly attention has been focused upon the situation in Syria and its immediately neighboring countries, with very little paid to the destination market. There have, for example, been a large number of admittedly abbreviated interviews with source-market dealers and smugglers published, but almost none with dealers based in London, Paris or New York[24]. Arguably, this reporting imbalance has serious consequences as it creates the mistaken impression that the problem is purely a regional one affecting only Syria and its neighbors, and thus one that needs to be tackled regionally by any introduced policies or implemented actions. Causative demand on the destination market is left untouched and the problem persists. This under-reporting and under-investigation of the destination market is in urgent need of rectification.

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What evidence is available points to the commercial importance of ancient coins and other small antiquities. Money paid in the United States or Europe for such antiquities excavated in or traded through territory controlled by terrorists or ANSAs must "trickle down" to the ANSAs involved. But important questions remain unanswered, particularly those relating to the economics of the trade. How much is it worth, both globally and locally? Who profits, and by how much? The level of financial support looting and trafficking provides ANSAs remains unaccounted and many quoted figures seem hopelessly inflated or exaggerated. There is at present no reliable evidence to support claims that ISIS or any other ANSA might have been making millions or even billions of dollars annually from the trade, or that the trade might have been a major source of revenue. Nevertheless, the evidence that both ISIS and HTS have been profiting from the trade is incontrovertible, and the degree of profitability has certainly been high enough for both groups to exert command and control.

It is worth bearing in mind Peter Neumann's admonition about "small-dollar terrorism" when he talks about the low cost of violent terrorist attacks

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in Europe (ICSR 2018). The bottom line remains that it takes only $1,000 to buy a Kalashnikov (McCarthy 2017). It can be argued by some scholars and others that the monetary value of the trade is of no consequence as the damage caused can only be measured in terms of cultural or intellectual loss. For many politicians and members of the general public, however, concerned about terrorist financing and the threats posed by terrorism to the ongoing security of civil society, money is of fundamental importance and the financial questions are not going to go away any time soon. Trade-based money laundering has only been touched upon in this chapter, largely because evidence is lacking, but that is not to say that it doesn't exist. While ISIS seems to have depended largely upon exploiting human and natural resources in territory under its control, money laundering through transnational trade might be a significant source of income for other ANSAs or for criminals more generally. The challenge now is to devise robust methodologies for answering these financial questions. It is time to stop following the antiquities and to start following the money. That will not be easy, but highlighting the issue is at least a first step.

Notes

1 This chapter is based upon a report submitted as part of the US State Department funded project Countering Looting of Antiquities from Syria and Iraq (CLASI), conceived and delivered by the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) of George Mason University. It is based in part on original research conducted by the CLASI project via media, Internet, and social media monitoring, as well as interviews with knowledgeable "project informants" (PIs) living inside Turkey, Syria and Iraq.
2 There is not enough space in this chapter to deal adequately with the political and ideological configurations and reconfigurations of the many armed opposition groups and their constituent actors that have fought in Syria since 2011. Only the larger groups are considered.
3 By 2020, a lot of information about the looting of Syrian archaeological sites and museums had been assembled and made available on resources like the American Society of Overseas Research's Cultural Heritage Initiatives (ASOR CHI) database and the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology (APSA) report into Syrian museums (Ali 2020), though it remained largely undigested. This chapter is primarily concerned with trade, not looting, so no attempt has been made to produce a comprehensive, synthetic account of the chronology, extent or intensity of looting. Nevertheless, the general outlines are clear.
4 PIs 2, 9, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.
5 PIs 11, 12, 13.
6 PIs 1, 2, 4, 6, 8.
7 PIs 11, 12, 13.
8 PIs 3, 6, 8.
9 PIs 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 13, 18.
10 PIs 2, 4, 6, 9, 10.
11 PI 23.
12 PIs 14, 25.
13 PI 14.
14 PIs 4, 5, 7.

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15 PIs 3, 5.
16 In April 2020 Facebook announced a new policy as regards its use as a platform for trading antiquities, stating that it would remove content on Facebook and Instagram attempting to buy or sell antiquities (Mashberg 2020). How this policy plays out in practice remains to be seen. One worry is that by removing rather than deactivating content Facebook will be removing evidence of criminal activity and make it harder to investigate (Al-Azm and Paul 2019: 46).
17 This previously unpublished research was conducted by the author for a talk entitled "The Structure and Organisation of the Antiquities Trade: Results of Some Recent Research" presented at the November 2018 UNESCO meeting Fighting the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property.
18 PIs 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.
19 PIs 1, 6, 8.
20 PIs 3, 5, 8.
21 PIs 2, 3, 5, 7, 8.
22 PIs 1, 6, 8.
23 PIs 23, 24.
24 Though see the BBC interactive investigation into Hellenistic coins looted in Gaza (BBC 2020).

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