



In *IS and Cultural Genocide: Antiquities Trafficking in the Terrorist State*, the writing team of Retired Brigadier General Russell Howard, Marc Elliott, and Jonathan Prohov offer compelling research that reminds government and military officials of the moral, legal, and ethical dimensions of protecting cultural antiquities from looting and illegal trafficking. Internationally, states generally agree on the importance of protecting antiquities, art, and cultural property not only for their historical and artistic importance, but also because such property holds economic, political, and social value for nations and their peoples. Protection is in the common interest because items or sites are linked to the common heritage of mankind. The authors make the point that a principle of international law asserts that cultural or natural elements of humanity's common heritage should be protected from exploitation and held in trust for future generations. The conflicts in Afghanistan, and especially in Iraq and Syria, coupled with the rise of the Islamic State (IS), have brought renewed attention to the plight of cultural heritage in the Middle East and throughout the world.

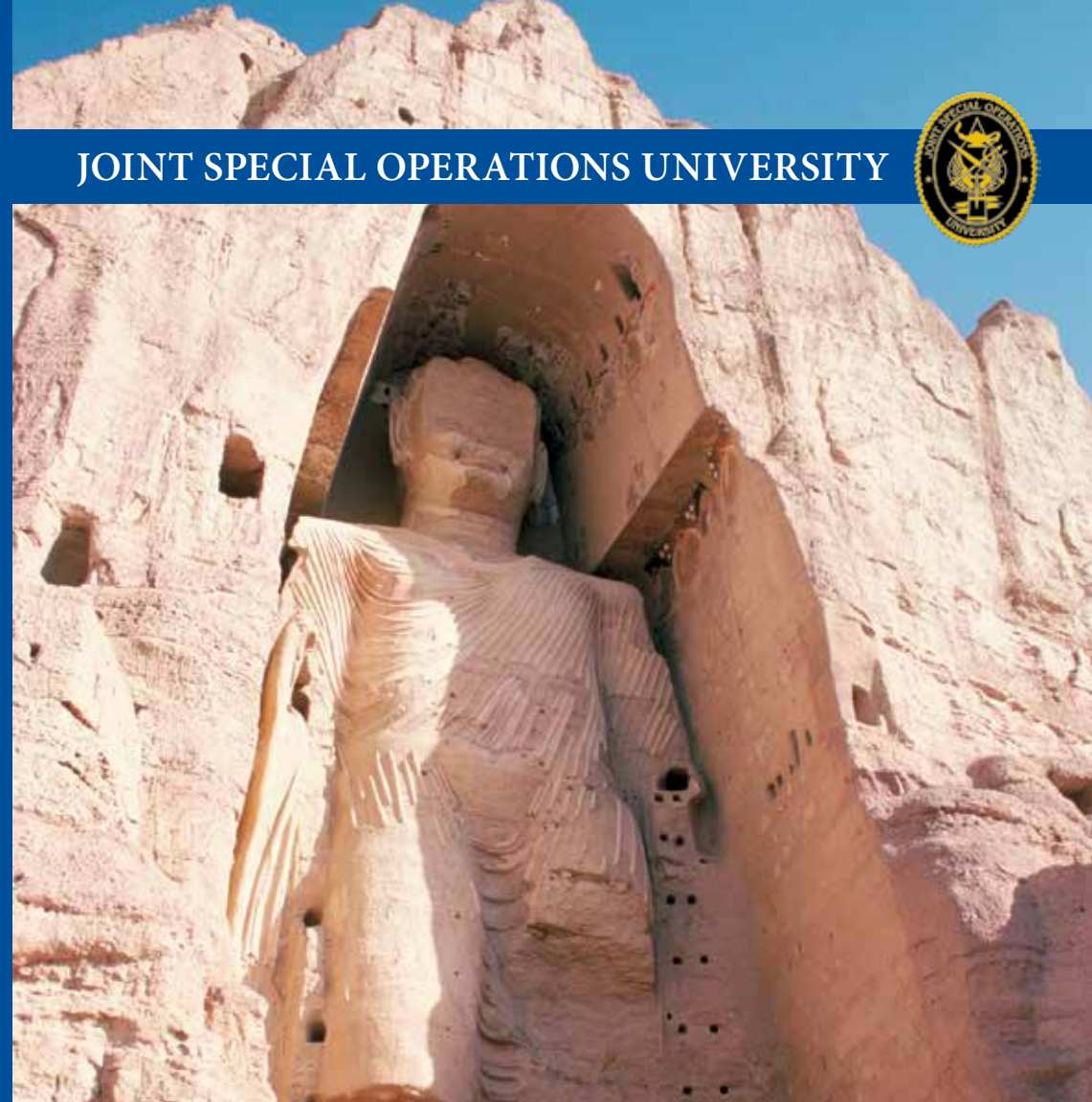
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**Russell D. Howard, Marc D. Elliott, and
Jonathan R. Prohov**

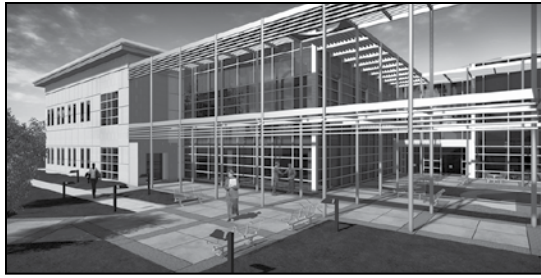
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IS and Cultural Genocide: Antiquities Trafficking

Howard, Elliott, and Prohov





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*IS and Cultural Genocide:
Antiquities Trafficking in the
Terrorist State*

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On the cover. The defaced 180-foot statue of Buddha, carved by monks in the cliffs in the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan, has since been destroyed by the Taliban. Photo by Newscom.

Back cover. ISIS militants smashed antiquities at a museum in Mosul, Iraq, in February 2015. The militants shoved statues off pedestals, and used hammers and drills to destroy what was left. During the destruction, a militant was quoted as saying, “These antiquities and idols behind me were from people in past centuries and were worshiped instead of God. When God Almighty orders us to destroy these statues, idols, and antiquities, we must do it, even if they’re worth billions of dollars.” Photo by Newscom.

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Foreword

In *IS and Cultural Genocide: Antiquities Trafficking in the Terrorist State*, the writing team of Retired Brigadier General Russell Howard, Marc Elliott, and Jonathan Prohov offer compelling research that reminds government and military officials of the moral, legal, and ethical dimensions of protecting cultural antiquities from looting and illegal trafficking. Internationally, states generally agree on the importance of protecting antiquities, art, and cultural property not only for their historical and artistic importance, but also because such property holds economic, political, and social value for nations and their peoples. Protection is in the common interest because items or sites are linked to the common heritage of mankind. The authors make the point that a principle of international law asserts that cultural or natural elements of humanity's common heritage should be protected from exploitation and held in trust for future generations.

Most military readers will recognize doctrinal and planning requirements concerning cultural sites and property. The conflicts in Afghanistan, and especially in Iraq and Syria, coupled with the rise of the Islamic State (IS), have brought renewed attention to the plight of cultural heritage in the Middle East and throughout the world. The authors describe trafficking and destruction of antiquities for dual purpose: to fund armed groups and organized crime, but also wanton destruction that fulfills the ideological goals of extremists. Without greater efforts to protect cultural heritage, the authors warn that the world will continue to suffer irreplaceable losses to the shared history of mankind.

The authors offer a rational outline of a theoretical supply chain that spans continents and class, legal and illegal actors, and involve a shadowy network of accomplices. The gray networks are ancient but remain successful because they adapt to the environment. There are three key points that make this study important to SOF:

1. The trafficking trade reveals some of the IS's operational infrastructure, linkages with partners and middlemen in loose and adaptive networks, and insight as to how the IS exploits and intimidates local civilian populations.

2. The study reveals the lengths to which the IS seeks to expunge the landscape of non-Muslim cultural artifacts including large and immovable sites. Financial gain appears secondary or immaterial compared to the opportunity for destruction to fuel propaganda to advance their ideological goal. In the short run, SOF will be a force of choice to mitigate the threat and positively influence partners to blunt the assault on antiquities.
3. Interagency and international collaboration is vital to halting what amounts to cultural genocide, through legal prosecution, economic sanctions, customs enforcement, and diplomatic as well as military means.

Readers should be mindful of the bravery of individuals, the local citizenry, who intervene to protect, defend, and preserve cultural heritage. The authors correctly acknowledge the private individuals and self-designated “Monuments Men” who place themselves at risk to preserve evidence of the common heritage of mankind. Finally, readers should take extra time to examine the comprehensive and practical recommendations at the conclusion. They are worthy of your careful consideration.

Francis X. Reidy
Interim Director, Center for Special Operations Studies and Research

About the Authors

Brigadier General (retired) Russ Howard is a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) and a senior advisor to Singapore's Home Team Academy. General Howard was founding director of the Jebson Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and head of the Department of Social Sciences at West Point, where he was also founding director of the Combating Terrorism Center.

General Howard's Army positions include chief of staff fellow at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, and commander of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Lewis, Washington. Other assignments include assistant to the Special Representative to the Secretary General during UN Operations in Somalia II, deputy chief of staff for I Corps, and chief of staff and deputy commander for the Combined Joint Task Force, Haiti/Haitian Advisory Group. He previously was commander of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and served as administrative assistant to Admiral Stansfield Turner and as a special assistant to the commander of U.S. Southern Command.

As a newly commissioned officer, Howard served as an "A" team commander in the 7th Special Forces Group from 1970 to 1972. He left the active component and served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1972 to 1980. During this period he served as an overseas manager of American International Underwriters, Melbourne, Australia, and China tour manager for Canadian Pacific Airlines. He was recalled to active duty in 1980 and served initially in Korea as an infantry company commander. Subsequent assignments included classified project officer, U.S. Army 1st Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, and operations officer and company commander, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa, Japan.

General Howard has a B.S. in industrial management from San Jose State University and a B.A. in Asian studies from the University of Maryland. He also has an M.A. in international management from the Monterey Institute



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Marc Elliott is a recent graduate of the Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies master's program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS). His research interests at MIIS included global terrorism issues, antiquities trafficking, and terrorism finance in general, as well as anti-money laundering and Bank Secrecy Act compliance. Marc is also an accomplished student of advanced Arabic language studies. His analytical skills include social network analysis, open source intelligence, and geospatial tools. Marc previously received an honors undergraduate degree in the history of the Muslim world. He currently works in the financial crimes compliance sector and focuses on combating terrorism finance.



Jonathan Prohov graduated with a master's degree in nonproliferation and terrorism studies, while studying Arabic at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at the College of William and Mary in 2012 where he double majored in International Relations and Middle East Studies. Before coming to Monterey, he worked as a Research Assistant in the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He is focusing on the Middle East as well as foreign fighters traveling to and from Syria and Iraq. He is currently working as researcher for the Monterey Terrorism Research & Education Program (MonTREP), focusing the trafficking of looted antiquities to fund the crisis in Syria and Iraq.

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Introduction

On 15 May 2015, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) conducted a raid in eastern Syria against Abu Sayyaf, a top finance official within the Islamic State (IS; also referred to as ISIS or ISIL) who is referred to as the organization's emir of oil and gas.¹ It was well known at the time that the IS was financing its activities by selling oil to illicit Turkish traders, through criminal rackets such as extortion, and, as several reports proposed but had not been able to prove, also by looting, trafficking, and selling valuable antiquities. The SOF raid confirmed the IS was not only engaged in the looting and trafficking of antiquities, but in the systematic destruction of cultural heritage sites in both Syria and Iraq, which they did primarily for ideological and propagandistic purposes.

During the May 2015 attack on his compound, Abu Sayyaf was killed and SOF operators recovered more than 500 valuable antiquities. After being examined by experts, many of the artifacts were repatriated to Iraq in July 2015.² In addition to proving the IS's exploitation of cultural heritage for profit, the results of the raid also suggest there will be future operations in which SOF will encounter looted and trafficked antiquities, and thus must be prepared to deal with this aspect of the IS's illicit revenue stream.

The purpose of this monograph is to put the security implications of the IS's trafficking and destruction of antiquities in Syria and Iraq into context for SOF. While it is unlikely that the illegal trade of Middle Eastern artifacts can be stopped completely, the authors argue that the current unprecedented expansion in looting and trafficking can be mitigated, and that SOF can play a key role. This monograph also emphasizes the cultural ramifications of trafficking in illicit antiquities and the destruction of historic sites. It covers the extent of the IS's trafficking in detail, and addresses the question of what must be done and by whom to at least reduce the supply and demand components of the problem.

The monograph begins by reporting on the general nature of the global illicit antiquities market, and then describes specifically how it operates in the Middle East. Next, it uses the case study method to examine the relevant history of illicit trafficking in Syria and Iraq, and to promote understanding of the existing systems the IS has so successfully exploited. The cases

highlight how the IS has institutionalized existing trafficking schemes to profit at all levels of operations, followed by a discussion of the organization's ideology as it relates to antiquities trafficking and the destruction of cultural heritage. The monograph concludes with an overview of general policy recommendations and offers specific suggestions on how SOF might become more involved in combatting the exploitation and destruction of cultural heritage.

The IS and Antiquities Trafficking

Policymakers and the media have been perplexed by the terrorist organization calling itself the IS since it conquered Mosul, Iraq, in June 2014. Among the many sensational IS actions that have captured global attention are its looting and trafficking of antiquities. Dramatic and sometimes absurdly worded headlines and assertions, such as those captioned here, have proliferated in the news:

- “Unesco terms Isis’s destruction of heritage sites ‘cultural cleansing.’”³
- “Isis attacks on ancient sites erasing history of humanity.”⁴
- “Abu Bakr al Baghdadi’s ISIS has amassed a kitty of over \$2 billion, thirty to fifty percent of which comes from the sale of artifacts stolen and vandalized from museums and archeological sites in Syria and Iraq.”⁵

Prior to the rise of the IS, there were numerous reports of illicit trafficking of valuable Syrian antiquities by several armed groups, which began with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. When the IS began dominating world headlines in the summer of 2014, it was featured in nearly all reports pertaining to antiquities trafficking in both Syria and Iraq, and to the destruction of cultural heritage sites, despite the fact that other militant groups were heavily involved in both looting and destruction.⁶ Skepticism and caution were prudent in the midst of sensationalized reporting on this and other topics.

However, as noted above, the valuable artifacts and declassified IS financial records seized in the Abu Sayyaf raid, as well as IS documents leaked to journalists, indicate the IS had integrated antiquities trafficking into its diverse financial portfolio and growing bureaucracy.⁷ For example, the IS *Diwan al-Rikaz* (Department of Precious Resources) oversees all antiquities looting and trafficking activities in both its Western and Eastern

governorates by directing the “research and investigation of known sites,” “exploration and identification of [new] sites,” the “excavation” of sites, and the “marketing” of looted artifacts.⁸ The seized documents prove that the IS has systematic measures in place to control and profit from all antiquities activity in its conquered territory. This includes issuing excavation licenses and imposing a 20 percent *khums* (Islamic war booty) tax on all final sales. The IS can strictly enforce these measures by imposing Sharia (Islamic law) penalties on anyone who excavates or sells antiquities without the proper license or fails to pay the required taxes.⁹ This enforcement extends not only to looters and traffickers who are under their control, but also to active IS members.¹⁰ A sample of tax receipts seized in the Abu Sayyaf raid indicates that the IS generated US\$265,000 in *khums* taxes from 11 transactions conducted between 6 December 2014 and 26 March 2015.¹¹ The U.S. government “assesses that [IS] has probably earned several million dollars from antiquities sales since mid-2014, but the precise amount is unknown.”¹² Taxing the sale of artifacts appears to be the primary way IS profits from antiquities, but other methods have been reported, such as direct sales to traffickers who move artifacts out of IS territory and into markets abroad.

The antiquities seized in the Abu Sayyaf raid most likely prove that the IS has merged its expertise in exploiting cultural heritage for profit with a complex and endemic criminal enterprise that specializes in trafficking antiquities throughout the Middle East.¹³ The raid evidence also demonstrates that, even as possible solutions to the IS’s exploitation of cultural heritage are being debated, existing SOF operations against the terrorist organization may well intersect with its involvement in the illicit antiquities trade. Therefore, it is critical that SOF be well-attuned to the nature of antiquities trafficking in the Middle East and in other parts of the globe where a dangerous nexus exists between organized crime groups and violent terrorist organizations, the IS in particular.

As the IS attempts to lay the foundation for a caliphate (Islamic state), it is incorporating lucrative illicit revenue streams into its economy, which naturally include the ancient regional tradition of antiquities trafficking. During the time the authors spent researching and writing this monograph, they concluded that the IS is not the only group involved in the illicit antiquities trade in Syria and Iraq, and that the IS has exploited cultural heritage sites for a second and perhaps more sinister reason: to systematically destroy entire archeological sites and large immovable artifacts for ideological reasons. The

intense looting and demolition of Syrian and Iraqi cultural heritage sites is a phenomenon that has already done tragic and irreversible damage to the region's rich culture and history. These conclusions were determined through a close examination of the literature on antiquities trafficking, especially in the Middle East, by tracking the latest developments in English and Arabic language sources that pertain to this topic, and by interviewing prominent scholars and journalists throughout the world who are actively involved in researching and documenting the trafficking of antiquities and destruction of cultural heritage sites. Perhaps the most concerning finding is that various terrorist organizations and their partners in organized crime have adopted new schemes to fund their ambitions, despite improved U.S. and global efforts to counter terrorist financing in recent years.

1. The Global Illicit Antiquities Trade and How It Supports Terrorism in the Middle East

Despite the recent focus on the IS and its antiquities looting activity, the illicit antiquities market is thriving well beyond Syria and Iraq, and certainly outside the Middle East. Artifacts from great ancient civilizations in India, Cambodia, China, Greece, Italy, and Peru, among many others, are also sought by wealthy buyers worldwide. To understand and act on the proliferation of looting and trafficking currently taking place in the Middle East, it is first important to understand the nature and scope of the global illicit antiquities trade, of which the Middle East is an integral part, from both the supply and demand perspectives. The existing scholarly literature and the lack of empirical data on the antiquities trade also must be understood to properly contextualize the characteristics of this global phenomenon.

An Overview of the Trade and the Market for Illicit Antiquities

A 2011 report titled “The Fight against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects: The 1970 Convention. Past and Future,” which commemorated the 40th anniversary of the 1970 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention, noted the “black market of antiquities and culture constitutes one of the most persistent illegal trades in the world,” with the costliest antiquities experiencing a “100-fold” increase in value from excavation to final sale.¹⁴ The obvious questions are what makes this trade so valuable and why is there such demand. Jessica Dietzler, a researcher at the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, explains that the illicit antiquities trade is “highly sophisticated and lucrative ... for profit/status-driven individuals, whether collectors, professional dealers, or other middlemen.”¹⁵ This high-end black market persists because antiquities are a finite commodity sought primarily by wealthy consumers, in contrast to weapons and narcotics, which are easily reproduced and typically purchased by the general population.¹⁶ Asif Efrat, a scholar of illicit markets and trafficking at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, claims that archeologists

believe the legal activities of museums and antiquities collectors are “intertwined” with a dark criminal underworld, where up to 90 percent of legally sold artifacts lack legitimate provenance (historical record) and are in fact items that were looted.¹⁷

It is difficult to describe precisely how the black market antiquities trade functions because it is a “macro level problem that happens on the micro level.”¹⁸ While many countries in Europe, the U.S., and even some Asian nations are the largest buyer markets for historical artifacts from many different cultures, the supply of these antiquities often comes from the thousands of looted tombs and temples, and from illicit diggings at archeological sites on nearly every continent. Moreover, because much of the antiquities trade is a ‘grey market’ phenomenon that often has shadowy connections to the black market in looted artifacts, a lack of empirical evidence prevents researchers from having a clear understanding of the trade and making more specific recommendations about how to curb it.¹⁹ Peter Campbell, archaeological director for the Albanian Center for Marine Research, argues that the discourse on the illicit antiquities trade is incomplete, primarily due to preconceived notions that antiquities trafficking is either a “gentlemen’s trade” or an abnormal network that does not involve organized crime.²⁰ However, the discourse has recently begun to acknowledge that organized crime is involved in the trade.²¹ According to Campbell, while these criminal networks are decentralized and informal, the illegal trading goes “from looter to collector, [and] everyone handling illicit antiquities is part of organized crime.”²² It is important to note that antiquities, particularly the more valuable items that already have been excavated, can also be stolen from museums, private collections, or storehouses during times of crisis (such as the looting of the National Museum of Iraq in 2003), which enables thieves to avoid the labor-intensive activity of looting.²³

The case that has yielded some of the most comprehensive evidence on an antiquities trafficking network is the Giacomo Medici case of the 1990s and early 2000s. The story about how Medici and his accomplices acted as the middlemen between bands of Italian *tombaroli* (tomb raiders) and major international antiquities dealers such as Robert Hecht, Robin Symes, and the Aboutaam brothers, among others (along with their wealthy clients), is detailed in the seminal book, *Chasing Aphrodite: The Hunt for Looted Antiquities at the World’s Richest Museum*, written by Jason Felch and Ralph Frammolino.²⁴ The work of these two authors, and of others who

have researched this case, shows how just one diffuse trafficking network can span continents and incorporate many different accomplices, including looters, smugglers, dealers, wealthy collectors, and even some of the world's most famous museums.²⁵

In 1995, Italian police uncovered a sheet of paper “with a diagram of key players in [the] antiquities trade out of Italy.”²⁶ This evidence, along with the later raid of Medici’s warehouse in the Geneva Free Ports (which contained many artifacts and his own archive about the artifacts’ sources and market destinations), revealed the international scope of his network. Medici’s artifacts were sold to collectors and museums “in Germany, Switzerland, France, Spain, Japan, [and] the Netherlands,” with the majority going to institutions in the United States, such as the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art “in New York City, Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, and smaller but significant museums in Cleveland, Tampa, Minneapolis, Princeton, San Antonio, and Fort Worth.”²⁷ Exploiting Switzerland’s lax trade laws and unwillingness to recognize the crime of looted and trafficked antiquities, Medici sold artifacts to dealers and major auction houses such as Sotheby’s. Over a span of 25 years, Medici sold some of the world’s most valuable and controversial antiquities—such as the Euphronios krater—to dealers, including Hecht, and museums such as the Met via an illicit transnational supply chain.²⁸ However, it is important to stress that Medici was only one important node in a much larger and decentralized network of many conspirators, all of whom were integral to the illicit antiquities trade in Italian and Greek antiquities.²⁹ The Medici case alone is revealing, but it is not the only example or the archetype of the global antiquities trade.

Recent scholarship on the illicit antiquities trade, which takes into account the Medici case and others from different regions, suggests that a four-stage network supply chain model broadly applies to the global trafficking of antiquities (five- and six-stage models have also been suggested).³⁰ Campbell asserts that this supply chain has an “underlying internal structure” that varies according to local factors such as economics, geography, laws, and cultural views on antiquities.³¹ In light of these complex factors, no fixed formula can explain every case, but the theoretical supply-chain model helps to explain some common characteristics of the trade. Campbell uses three case studies, in addition to the Medici case, to explain that the structures for trafficking antiquities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bulgaria are indicative of the larger global trade in illicit cultural property. The cases

also suggest both direct and indirect connections to organized crime and terrorism.³²

The first stage is the looting itself, which most often occurs in “politically conflicted and economically depressed regions” that have a significant archeological heritage.³³ Looters are often ‘subsistence diggers’ who earn very low wages (less than 1 percent of the profit from the eventual sale) and sell looted artifacts to middlemen.³⁴ The high unemployment rate in these areas (above 8 percent) is thought to create an economic climate that induces the poor residents to loot.³⁵ The second stage consists of early-stage middlemen or intermediaries, such as regional metropolitan dealers who specialize in the procurement and transit of illicit antiquities. These middlemen work with organized criminal networks to traffic the artifacts from source to transit countries.³⁶ The second stage offers the best opportunity to explore the involvement of traditional organized crime networks, according to Campbell.³⁷ The third stage is the facilitation, where a late-stage intermediary launders artifacts after transit and provides the export licenses and false provenance that bring the looted items to the legitimate global market.³⁸ The fourth stage is where artifacts enter the legal market via international antiquities brokers in the country of transit or arrive at their ultimate destination—in the hands of the collector.³⁹ Campbell also notes that the illicit antiquities trade has a networked structure, rather than the hierarchical character mistakenly suggested by incorrect reading of the evidence in the Medici case and further spurious application of that belief to the trade itself.⁴⁰ Moreover, Efrat and Campbell agree that profit margins and specialized knowledge increase at each stage, and that the later-stage network actors, such as traffickers and facilitators, earn the highest profits.⁴¹ UNESCO estimated in 2011 that “98 percent of the final market price of an [illicit artifact] remains in the pocket of *middlemen*.”⁴²

In their groundbreaking study on antiquities trafficking in Cambodia, Simon Mackenzie, a researcher of global trafficking in looted cultural objects at the University of Glasgow, and Tess Davis, executive director of the Antiquities Coalition, use unique ethnographies of antiquities traffickers to present a different four-stage model. Mackenzie and Davis favor a model that is more formal and hierarchical than Campbell’s.⁴³ In stage one of their model, a regional broker organizes looting at the source and delivers the artifacts to a regional trade hub. In stage two, organized criminal groups purchase artifacts from the broker at the trade hub and deliver them to a

Thai border city. In the third stage, a receiver takes delivery of the artifacts at the border and transports them to a major city. Finally, in stage four, an “internationally connected dealer” acts as the “Janus figure”—the culpable “interface between the licit and illicit trade.”⁴⁴ The authors argue that there are “surprisingly few” stages between the initial looting and final integration of the artifacts into the international market.⁴⁵ This model emphasizes a more institutionalized and hierarchical approach to antiquities trafficking by transnational criminal organizations, which may be applicable to trafficking cases well beyond Cambodia.

In Middle Eastern countries, “there are well-established networks” that specialize in looting and trading illicit antiquities, according to Amr Al Azm, a Syrian archeologist at Shawnee State University. For example, Al Azm describes certain small villages in Syria “near well-known archeological sites like Mari where clans and families specialize in the looting of archeological artifacts, and they have been doing this for generations.”⁴⁶ The historical nature of antiquities trafficking in Syria has provided the IS with abundant opportunities to exploit existing looting structures and distribution networks in the region. Generally speaking, scholars have described various ways the looting and trafficking of antiquities occurs in the Middle East, especially following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. There appears to be a basic trafficking structure in both Syria and Iraq, and both countries are examined in this monograph in subsequent case studies.

Al Azm explains the Syrian model, based on information gathered from his network of confidential informants.⁴⁷ In Syria, local buyers he describes as “small fish” buy antiquities directly from looters and, more recently, from extremist groups like the IS. Prospective buyers assess the items offered, which include bulk items from the Iron Age and items of higher value that date from the Roman and Hellenistic periods. Buyers then offer “spot prices” for the desired items, based on their perceived market value. According to Al Azm, local dealers and extremist groups have a thorough understanding of the value of different kinds of antiquities being offered throughout Syria. Once a price is agreed to, the buyer pays for the items in U.S. dollars and leaves with the artifacts. The first buyer then sells the artifacts to another dealer, who sells to another—the freshly looted items gradually rise in value as they change hands among local buyers.

The next phase occurs when valuable items are acquired by what Al Azm calls the “big fish”—antiquities dealers, primarily in Syria, who can afford to buy valuable artifacts and “sit on them” for a period of five to 20 years. These dealers wait patiently for the value of the artifacts to increase, and for a time when they can sell the items to transnational antiquities brokers without raising suspicion that they were looted. This means of avoiding suspicion is also not unique to the Syrian case and has been suggested in other contexts.⁴⁸ Before reaching “the markets in Europe or America where the real money is to be made,” the artifacts are sold repeatedly among complicit dealers to establish a paper trail that suggests a legitimate origin. However, says Al Azm, “the vast majority of goods, and in particular the valuable artifacts, you will never see them on the market,” as they are often sold on the black market to unscrupulous private collectors. While most of this activity takes place within Syria, Al Azm says that countries such as Lebanon and Turkey are important conduits for the trade because of their long, porous borders and their connections to the international antiquities markets in Europe and the United States.

According to Abdulamir al-Hamdani, director of the Antiquities Office in Iraq’s southern province of Dhi Qar from 2003 to 2010, the situation in Iraq suggests a general structure that closely resembles the four-stage models suggested earlier.⁴⁹ In the first stage, poor looters excavate archeological sites to earn survival money, as they lack other means of support. These subsistence diggers are motivated to loot because local collectors from nearby towns act as their benefactors, providing them transportation to and from sites, food and water, and daily pay for the unearthed artifacts. In the second stage, the local collectors acquire valuable antiquities from the excavators and sell them to traffickers in cities such as Baghdad and Najaf. In the third stage, traffickers smuggle the goods into neighboring countries such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. In the fourth stage, transnational antiquities traffickers purchase valuable artifacts in these transit countries and smuggle them through transshipment points in Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy, for example. The goods eventually reach destination markets in such cities as London and New York. Alternate routes could pass through Dubai or other Gulf countries to markets in the West and East Asia.

Al-Hamdani believes that potential buyers maintain contact with Middle Eastern dealers and traffickers via the Internet. This was suggested in a recent undercover investigation conducted by UK media outlet *The Independent*,

which describes how Syrian and Turkish dealers of Syrian and Iraqi antiquities minimize the risk of being caught with illicit artifacts by showing digital pictures to potential buyers. This aspect of the trade is run “‘like a business,’ [according to the dealers interviewed by *The Independent*], albeit one that’s replete with a network of diggers, smugglers and dealers. ‘Anything you want, we can get for you. Just look at the pictures and tell us what you like.’”⁵⁰

In fact, Dubai appears to be a key transshipment point for all types of illicit Middle Eastern antiquities.⁵¹ One well-connected antiquities dealer was caught in 2008 selling looted Iraqi antiquities, among others, “to dealers around the world.”⁵² In Operation Lost Treasure, special agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations, in cooperation with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Southern District of New York U.S. Attorney’s Office:

seized the limestone ... [head of Assyrian King Sargon II] on Aug. 13, 2008, after it was shipped to New York by a Dubai-based antiquities trading company owned by the antiques dealer. This investigation identified a broad transnational criminal organization dealing in illicit cultural property. Some of the network’s shipments were directly linked to major museums, galleries and art houses in New York. The investigation has resulted in one arrest, multiple seizures of antiquities ranging from Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan, and the return of many of artifacts. A repatriation ceremony with Afghanistan was held two years ago and future repatriations are anticipated.⁵³

In a civil forfeiture case, the Dubai-based company was identified as the Hassan Fazeli Trading Company.⁵⁴ Prosecutors in the case alleged that Hassan Fazeli intentionally misstated on its customs import form that the statue was Turkish in origin and worth only \$6,500, not its assessed value of \$1.2 million. In fact, falsely declaring and invoicing artifacts is a common way smugglers traffic artifacts into market countries and avoid the suspicion of customs officials. Rick St. Hilaire, an attorney specializing in cultural heritage issues, notes that a notice of forfeiture was sent to Hassan Fazeli as the “potential civil claimant,” but no reply was filed by “June 17, 2014, [and thus] the federal district court entered a default judgment, awarding the Assyrian sculpture to U.S. authorities with instructions that the head must be repatriated within 90 days ‘or as soon thereafter as conditions in Iraq permit.’”⁵⁵

The Fazeli case, as just one example, demonstrates that Dubai, well known for being a conduit for both licit and illicit trade, is also well integrated into a sophisticated trade in illicit antiquities.⁵⁶ The complexity mentioned in this case, coupled with the connections to cultural heritage institutions, further demonstrates the problematic nexus between the licit and illicit trade. Unfortunately, most illicit trafficking networks in the Middle East are not uncovered in elaborate and well-publicized busts like Operation Lost Treasure. This means that most significant artifacts presumably slip through the cracks and continue to provide funds for transnational organized crime and even terrorism.

Moreover, researchers such as Al Azm and Campbell note that the ongoing conflict in Syria, as well as the rise of the IS in Syria and Iraq, has dramatically altered the age-old Middle Eastern antiquities trade to fit the new social order brought about by recent events: “While looting and trafficking have been around for many years in the region, it has never really been as it is in the present moment. The strength of loosely formed trafficking networks is that they alter themselves to fit the current political landscape; thus, as governments, the economy, and law enforcement change, so do the networks.”⁵⁷

The Problem of Provenance in the Antiquities Trade

The issue of provenance is one of the greatest challenges facing archeologists, legitimate antiquities collectors, law enforcement, and policymakers as they confront the problem of illicit trade in antiquities. How does one know if the artifact they want to acquire was looted and trafficked? The ideal industry standard is to establish an item’s provenance—an official record that should include the item’s archeological origin, detailed documentation of ownership, how that ownership has been transferred (i.e., through private sales, brokers/auction houses, or inheritance/bequest), and where items have been collected and stored after changing ownership.⁵⁸ However, there are major problems with the system of provenance documentation. For example, there is no standardized procedure to verify or conduct due diligence, thus gaps in the chain of custody frequently make it difficult to get an accurate account of an item’s history.⁵⁹ According to Tom Keatinge, director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, “the standards of due diligence and checking the provenance of antiquities clearly varies wildly.”⁶⁰ In some cases, even the most trivial

evidence indicating origin or ownership such as photos, holiday cards, wills, and insurance records is better than nothing, because without any kind of substantive documentation it is safe to assume that an item has a shady or illicit origin.⁶¹ British archeologist Sam Hardy, author of the Conflict Antiquities blog, describes the procedural difficulties in tracing the provenance of historical artifacts:

It is very time-consuming to trace and check all of the sources for transactions that may have been conducted privately and long ago, which can make it very difficult for interested parties to do that on spec, let alone systematically. But that assumes that all of the paperwork has been preserved along with the object and presented to researchers. Even for objects that would have required licenses to be owned, sold, and exported, the possessors can simply say that the paperwork has been lost, and it can become extremely difficult to prove otherwise.⁶²

Traffickers and dealers of illicit antiquities intentionally exploit these gaps. They often lie about the history of a looted or stolen item to disguise its unlawful origin, usually by creating a false provenance. In countries across the Middle East, many items with historic value originated in polities and empires that long predate modern states with defined borders, and thus could easily come from a neighboring nation. An example of this is a type of coin commonly found in Syria, which, according to one veteran Syrian coin dealer, also can be found in “cities that minted coins in antiquity—Lyon, Antakya, Athens, Rome. “There is no proof it is coming from Syria.”⁶³

Al Azm explains there are two basic steps in creating false provenance for a looted item.⁶⁴ First, dealers remove physical evidence “that an item has been looted out of the ground,” such as the presence of soil, which would cast doubt on the claim that an item “has been in a [private] collection for 60 or 70 years.”⁶⁵ Surprisingly, unscrupulous dealers selling goods looted in conflict zones have ignored even this crucial step. For instance, in the documentary *Blood Antiques*, Belgian dealers are seen offering customers freshly looted artifacts from Afghanistan that still have dirt on them.⁶⁶ When confronted about this by the undercover filmmakers, the dealers find it hard to justify the dirty artifacts. The second most common way to falsify provenance is for dealers to establish a false paper trail for looted or stolen items, which can be done in a variety of ways. For example, a dealer can state that an

item comes from a family collection that existed before 1970 (the cutoff date established by the 1970 UNESCO Convention for artifacts acquired without provenance).⁶⁷ This is done to avoid additional scrutiny, as there is no easy way to verify the true origin of items held by a family for generations.

Establishing false provenance also can involve “straight forgery,” where a paper trail is invented and documents are crafted to “pass the eye test” with customs officials, who only want to see that a dossier or export license exists for an artifact. Customs agents are usually unwilling to conduct due diligence on an item’s provenance or documentation because they are more concerned with finding drugs or other prohibited imports.⁶⁸ Illicit antiquities brokers also sell goods back and forth to each other to establish a track record of “private contractual sales” as a way to obscure an item’s illegal origins.⁶⁹ This “circuitous route” of acquisition establishes a carefully manipulated chain of transactions, which reduces the buyer’s fears; antiquities collectors often know that an artifact has no legal origin but can claim plausible deniability if under scrutiny because of the seemingly legitimate sales records.⁷⁰ The international frameworks established to deal with the issue of provenance clearly need increased market transparency in order to streamline the process for stakeholders attempting to verify the legitimacy of historical artifacts.

The Nexus Between Antiquities Trafficking and Terrorism in the Middle East

Scholarly debate is ongoing about the convergence of activity between antiquities trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism.⁷¹ Like the rest of the illicit antiquities trade, it is difficult to analyze any evidential aspect of the convergence with terrorism because most open-source data is speculative. While comprehensive literature exists on the theft of cultural heritage in general, and also of subsistence diggers, the documentation that associates antiquities traffickers with terrorist groups is lacking—mostly due to the absence of hard evidence.⁷² U.S. Marine Colonel Matthew Bogdanos—the leading expert on the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad in 2003—believes that terrorists’ use of antiquities trafficking to fund their operations is “too recent a phenomenon” to be widely documented and well understood; moreover, “some of the investigations remain classified because of the connection to terrorists.”⁷³

In her 2014 book, *Dirty Entanglements*, Louise Shelley, founder and director of the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, takes a broad view of terrorist involvement in the illicit antiquities trade, describing it as only one component in a “convergence of illicit actors.”⁷⁴ Terrorists and criminal traffickers of all kinds of goods use antiquities as one among many streams of illicit revenue, including drug and commodity smuggling, counterfeiting, and the weapons trade. The illicit antiquities trade consists of “organized rings of professional criminals who hire poor rural people to dig for antiquities,” which are then smuggled out of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan along ancient trade routes, in exchange for cash or weaponry that directly supports terrorism and insurgencies.⁷⁵ Shelley emphasizes that corruption within governments, businesses, and cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries is an enabling factor that “integrates actors of both the legitimate and the illegitimate economy along with corrupt officials into a single network.”⁷⁶ The U.S. National Central Bureau of Interpol takes a position similar to Shelly’s, stating that “the criminal networks trafficking in the illicit sale of works of art and cultural property are often times the same circles that deal in illegal drugs, arms, and other transactions ... [and that] insurgent and terrorist groups fund their operations through the sale and trade of stolen works of art and cultural property.”⁷⁷ Former FBI Director Robert Mueller and other counterterrorism officials also have alluded to the connection between these antiquities trafficking groups and their ties to terrorists and insurgents.⁷⁸

The evidence suggests that terrorists have recently exploited the profitable nature of valuable antiquities in war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.⁷⁹ As government officials have become more efficient at targeting conventional methods of terrorist financing and following the trail of illicit transactions in general, terrorists have turned to alternative methods of financing that are more commonly associated with criminal activity.⁸⁰ This paradigm shift occurred because traditional revenue sources, such as state sponsorship, front charities, and legal (albeit terrorist-owned) investments, have declined under government pressure, in addition to the fact that terrorist organizations have become more decentralized and thus more responsible for funding their respective operations.⁸¹ By interacting with a wide array of actors—looters, dealers, collectors, and traffickers—terrorists and other armed groups exploit antiquities as one among many sources of illicit revenue to fund operations that contribute to further strife.⁸² While

antiquities trafficking is certainly not the main source of revenue for terrorist groups, it has become increasingly important for counterterrorism finance efforts to target these sources to deny terrorists the ability to exploit a diverse portfolio that further damages rich cultural heritage sites around the world.

The illicit antiquities trade clearly provides opportunities for organized criminal groups and terrorist organizations to exploit an existing and profitable revenue source. The supply-chain structures mentioned in this chapter show how members of mostly decentralized networks source and sell illicit artifacts throughout the world, both on the legitimate market and under the table in the black market, where artifacts can be stored for decades and laundered before surfacing in the legitimate market. Convenience explains how organizations such as the IS and other parties in the current Syrian and Iraqi conflicts can exploit antiquities and other resources. Moreover, countries such as Egypt have seen significant looting and trafficking of antiquities since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the chaos that ensued.⁸³ All of this paints a problematic picture of this grey market as facilitating the theft of some of the world's most unique cultural heritage items just to fill the collections of unscrupulous collectors and the coffers of greedy traffickers and Janus figures. To provide a further context for the networks and markets the IS has exploited, the next two chapters detail the modern history of antiquities trafficking in Syria and Iraq.

2. Case Study: Antiquities Looting in Iraq up to 2010

A History of Looting in Iraq

Like other parts of the Middle East, the looting of historic relics, and of antiquities in general, is nothing new in the Fertile Crescent, particularly in times of conflict. Iraq's many civilizations left behind a trove of artifacts buried beneath the sand, which looters can easily exploit. In fact, there is a saying in Iraq that "if you dig one meter, you will find antiquities—if you dig more, you will find oil."⁸⁴ Antiquities looting as we know it today began in Iraq in the 19th century, and the practice has continued to expand as a result of growing Western interest in the archeology of ancient Mesopotamia.⁸⁵ After the 1958 revolution in Iraq, antiquities looting became a crime punishable by fine or imprisonment.⁸⁶ Following the 1968 Ba'athist coup, Iraq's rich archeological heritage—derived from an area often referred to as the cradle of civilization—was integrated into the nationalist narrative to reinforce a unified Iraqi identity. After 1979, when Saddam Hussein assumed power, archeological sites were protected by the regime and looters were punished severely.⁸⁷

Until the first Gulf War in 1990, active state protection prevented large-scale looting.⁸⁸ However, the chaos after 1990 allowed the pillaging of 13 regional museums and significant looting of archeological sites in southern Iraq.⁸⁹ Lebanese archaeologist and journalist Joanne Farchakh-Bajjalay has extensively studied looting in southern Iraq. She argues that the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the UN and Western nations caused impoverishment among the tribes in the region, as they prevented farmers from selling their agricultural products to the government.⁹⁰ After the war, to compensate for the lack of income, these farmers turned to looting and began the "plundering of archaeological sites [as] a sort of revenge against the system."⁹¹ Farchakh-Bajjalay's 2007 analysis of looting in the context of Iraqi tribal dynamics offers insights into who the looters were and what motivated them. According to Farchakh-Bajjalay, the social institutions of a poor tribe in southern Iraq often are stronger than local government and law enforcement.⁹² These tribes also view Iraq's cultural heritage differently

than Westerners do: “We see in archaeological sites the heritage of mankind. Many Iraqi peasants see in them ‘fields full of pottery that you can dig up whenever you’re broke.’”⁹³

In the 1990s, the sanctions imposed on Iraq also created a widespread black market for buying and selling goods that ranged from basic commodities to antiquities. Many of these markets were controlled by the regime and its loyal Sunni proxy tribes, which often facilitated the illicit trade on behalf of the regime.⁹⁴ Former Iraqi Vice President Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri directed this statewide organized crime network, as he was an “expert smuggler” who knew how to operate “vertically integrated rackets.”⁹⁵ Al-Douri was also well known for organizing various aspects of the insurgency against the U.S. and is “believed to be the leader of the Baathist militant group the Naqshbandi Army, one of several groups said to have supported the Islamic State.”⁹⁶ Al-Douri’s aptitude for smuggling, intelligence gathering, and organizing an insurgency appears to have aided the rise of the IS organization and may have influenced the ways it benefits from the looting and trafficking of illicit antiquities.⁹⁷ A strong case can thus be made that the antiquities smuggling networks currently operating under the IS are similar to those of the 1990s, which similarly exploited cultural heritage for both profit and ideology. The difference between the exploitation by the IS and by Saddam Hussein’s regime is that the concept of preserving and venerating some of Iraq’s history was used to justify Hussein’s despotic rule when relevant, even if he benefited from his proxies’ sales of antiquities on the side. In the case of the IS, however, that history can either be looted to fund the group or destroyed in line with its extremist ideology.

It is thought that during the 1990s entire tribes specialized in the illicit trade of historical artifacts because it was a “good alternative” to smuggling black market oil, and because antiquities trafficking became more professional and systematized over time at the hands of “mafia-like gangs.”⁹⁸ International antiquities trafficking organizations are thought to have moved into the archeologically rich southern province of Dhi Qar in 1994, where they exploited both the province’s archeological sites and a large labor force of poor looters who lacked adequate social support from the Iraqi government.⁹⁹

Another factor that drove poor tribesmen to looting, particularly the Shia, was Saddam’s farcical effort to drain the country’s southern marshes after the first Gulf War, which desiccated the agricultural potential of the south. Looting thus became one of these tribes’ few other sources of income,

particularly once the looters discovered that the much-hated regime had a hypocritical attitude toward antiquities and was exploiting the history of the Fertile Crescent for its own nationalist ambitions.¹⁰⁰ Despite the state's active protection and endorsement of Iraqi cultural heritage, Saddam's regime showed little regard for archeology when it embarked on extravagant construction projects that served its interests throughout the country.¹⁰¹ The regime's association with Iraq's past helped looters justify their actions and "overcome the shame that would otherwise have been meted out to those involved in such an illegal activity."¹⁰²

From 1990 through 2003, Iraqi state funding for protecting archaeological sites dried up as a result of the UN-imposed sanctions, leaving many formerly protected sites under the authority of local tribal sheikhs who often were themselves involved in the illicit antiquities trade.¹⁰³ Saddam attempted a rapprochement with the tribes in the late 1990s by offering them autonomy and hiring local peasants to work with Iraqi archaeologists. Farchakh-Bajjal claims that this "stopped" looting in the late 1990s but that employing local peasants backfired after the 2003 invasion, when well-trained diggers became professional looters who "were ... paid extra money for digging the sites because they knew how to excavate without breaking the objects."¹⁰⁴

Post-2003 Disorder

Iraq descended into chaos following the American-led Coalition's invasion in March 2003. During the battle for Baghdad, which took place from 8 to 16 April, professional looters capitalized on the breakdown of central authority and pillaged the National Museum.¹⁰⁵ Three types of looters were involved in pillaging approximately 15,000 artifacts: professional thieves, random citizens, and museum employees.¹⁰⁶ While much has been written on the museum looting in both academia and in the press, Colonel Bogdanos' academic articles and 2005 book, *Thieves of Baghdad*, are the most authoritative accounts and analyses of the museum looting and subsequent efforts to recover the stolen artifacts.¹⁰⁷ Of the 15,000 stolen artifacts, more than 5,000 items have since been recovered. However, many priceless artifacts, including some of the most historically significant, have never been found.¹⁰⁸ Colonel Bogdanos emphasizes the level of expertise displayed by the looters, alleging that "professionals had come in just before the war—possibly through Jordan—waiting for the fog of war and the opportunity of a lifetime."¹⁰⁹

The potential for profit was a tempting motivation, says Colonel Bogdanos, who estimates that many small cuneiform cylinder seals are worth around \$250,000 each and thus “enable an insurgent to smuggle millions of dollars in his pocket.”¹¹⁰

The looters’ level of organization and their connection to organized crime are the most important takeaways from the looting of the National Museum and later pillaging of thousands of archeological sites. Phil Williams of the University of Pittsburgh, an expert on terrorist networks, distinguishes between the museum theft “and the [general] looting, theft, and trafficking of antiquities” that took place throughout Iraq after the initial invasion. He says that attention to the latter activity “has been largely neglected.”¹¹¹ Lawrence Rothfield, cofounder and former director of the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, argues that the U.S. military should have paid more attention to the looting and smuggling of antiquities because of the precedent of terrorists using stolen art and antiquities to finance their operations and arms acquisitions. He cites similar cases in Northern Ireland during “the troubles” and in Lebanon during that country’s civil war.¹¹²

However, according to Rothfield, illicit Iraqi antiquities networks are “not terribly well understood.” It appears that middlemen approach the diggers to purchase goods and then transfer them to smugglers and dealers, who traffic them abroad.¹¹³ Other sources describe a similar but unspecified criminal trafficking supply chain in Iraqi antiquities, in which poor peasants loot objects for low returns and professional smugglers use age-old smuggling routes to move the goods into Jordan, Syria, and likely Turkey, where they are sold for higher sums.¹¹⁴ Colonel Bogdanos named Beirut, Dubai, and Geneva as known destinations for the looted goods, where they are given false provenance and make their way onto the legitimate market.¹¹⁵ The Archaeological Institute of America has estimated that the trade in illegal Iraqi antiquities generated \$10 million to \$20 million annually in the years following the 2003 invasion.¹¹⁶ Rothfield believes this figure to be on the “low side,” given that the 5,000-year-old Guennol Lioness statue legally sold for \$57.2 million in 2007—“the highest price ever paid for a scripture or an antiquity [at that time].”¹¹⁷

Using Antiquities to Finance Terrorism During the Insurgency

Colonel Bogdanos asserts that antiquities trafficking is a significant element of terrorist financing, ranking only below kidnapping for ransom and extorting protection money from local Iraqis.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the ties between terrorism, insurgencies, and organized crime in trafficking antiquities appear to have increased after 2003, once insurgents discovered the lucrative potential in Iraq's antiquities. "In 2003, when pursuing leads to recover antiquities, we usually came across weapons and links to violent groups. Now, as security forces pursue leads for weapons and insurgents, they find antiquities."¹¹⁹ Colonel Bogdanos notes that terrorists' antiquities trafficking was "not that sophisticated" early in the war, but after 2004, the U.S. military "saw the use of antiquities in funding initially the [Sunni insurgents] and al-Qaida in Iraq, and [later] the Shiite militias."¹²⁰ Phil Williams concurs that antiquities, like drugs, are a convenient source of revenue and that "insurgents and terrorists [in need of] funding ... will use whatever source is available."¹²¹

Abdulmir al-Hamdani, director of the Antiquities Office in Iraq's southern province of Dhi Qar from 2003 to 2010, described the nexus between terrorism and antiquities trafficking in an interview with the authors.¹²² Al-Hamdani says that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Sunni insurgent group, known as Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad before becoming the al-Qaeda in Iraq franchise, was involved in antiquities trafficking in areas controlled by the group in southwestern Iraq in 2003. Al-Hamdani describes how, in 2004, Italian forces captured traffickers in Al Fajr with 80 stolen artifacts, which were placed in a police vehicle for transport to the National Museum. The vehicle never made it to Baghdad; it was attacked by terrorists in the Triangle of Death—a volatile area south of Baghdad with a mixed Sunni-Shia population that was, and still is, an active hub of insurgent activity. (A senior officer at the U.S. military headquarters in Baghdad described the Triangle in 2004 as "an area with a real mix of bad guys—thugs and criminals as well as terrorists ... The terrorists move in and out along ... lines that stretch in all directions").¹²³ The policemen transporting the stolen antiquities were murdered, and the artifacts seized by the terrorists. The antiquities looters and traffickers in southern Iraq were described by al-Hamdani as highly-organized and dangerous, as they were well-equipped with weapons and vehicles, and had a working relationship with the terrorist groups active in that area.

In the Shia areas of southern Iraq, some Shia radicals sanctioned looting on religious grounds, as long as funding could be generated directly for the Shia militias or indirectly in the form of taxes.¹²⁴ Fundamentalist Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr issued the al-Hawasim *fatwa* that permitted the general looting and retention of stolen property, provided that the 20 percent khums tax was paid to the “local Sadrist office.”¹²⁵ Broadly interpreted, the al-Hawasim fatwa justified the trafficking and sale of antiquities to generate revenue for al-Sadr’s Shia militia, the Mahdi Army.

Donny George Youkhanna, the late Iraqi archeologist and former director of the National Museum, stated that, in “Najaf, al-Sadr’s party was heard to tell worshippers that looting artifacts is ethical so long as the money goes for guns or building mosques.”¹²⁶ However, it is worth noting that the moderate and well-respected Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani said in his own fatwa that “the looting of archeological sites was not permitted and that all artifacts should be returned to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.”¹²⁷ Considering these statements from Shia extremists and the prolific looting that occurred in Shia-dominant southern Iraq after the 1991 and 2003 wars, it would not be surprising if antiquities looting was a profitable source of revenue for the violent Shia militias that frequently targeted Coalition forces.

In 2010, the independent Iraqi news agency Aswat al-Iraq reported the recovery of “seven antiquities and documents belong[ing] to what is called the Islamic State of Iraq armed group in Mosul,” which were discovered when Iraqi security forces raided a goldsmith’s store “after receiving information on financing armed groups.”¹²⁸ The Ninewa Operations Command unit of the Iraqi army arrested two wanted men and seized documents belonging to the Sunni terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)—the predecessor of the IS. The same agency reported in 2011 that “the dagger of the Mongol Ruler, Hulagu, was found with a gang, smuggling archaeological antiquities, trying to smuggle it outside Iraq.”¹²⁹

These statements made by counterterrorism officials, archaeologists, and journalists suggest that trafficking in Iraqi antiquities is done by a sophisticated network of organized criminal organizations that collude with various Iraqi terrorist groups. More worrisome, from a counterterrorism perspective, is that it is highly likely that antiquities trafficking supported terrorists and insurgents during the 2003–2011 campaigns against U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq. Unfortunately, this illicit activity has not ceased and it continues

to support the IS, which loots antiquities to fund its caliphate ambitions in Syria and Iraq.¹³⁰

In terms of lessons learned from this period, had intelligence professionals and SOF operatives been more aware of the intricacies of antiquities trafficking in the region, terrorists and criminals perhaps would have been unable to get an early foothold in Iraq and profit from plundering historic artifacts. Moreover, Coalition forces and their intelligence partners should have recognized the influx and organization of sophisticated antiquities traffickers both before and after the conflict started, as this possibly would have prepared Coalition forces to prevent the degree of destructive and systematic looting that occurred.

Writing in 2008, Rothfield speculated that “the future of Iraq’s past looks bleak indeed ... Out on the sites, prospects are even more dire [than for the National Museum]. Most will be ruined within the next decade, absent some effort by those with the wherewithal to stop the looting.”¹³¹ In an eerie statement of foreshadowing, Rothfield noted that future wars in the region—in Syria or Iran (where he presumed wars would be undertaken by the U.S.)—would put archaeological heritage at risk “once again—whatever the scenario.”¹³² Rothfield erred in predicting U.S. action against Iran, but he unfortunately was right about Syria, where the civil war continues to rage. Iraq joined the fray for the second time following the conquest of northern Iraq by the IS in the summer of 2014.

3. Case Study: Looting and Trafficking in Syria Since 2011

As Syria descended into civil war in 2011, the breakdown of civil society and the rampant lawlessness in most parts of the country had several unforeseen consequences. One of those consequences was the looting of Syria's 25 cultural museums and some of its estimated 10,000 archaeological sites. Although the antiquities looting was predicted early in the conflict, little was done to stop it.¹³³ As mentioned previously in this monograph, antiquities looting goes back centuries in Syria, with some clans and families specializing in the illicit trade for generations. According to Al Azm, "looting is much older than the immediate conflict. What the conflict does is create an environment, a vacuum, in which illicit activity can flourish and spin out of control."¹³⁴

A History of Antiquities Looting in Syria Pre-2011

Looting and trafficking occurred in Syria under the Assad family's rule, despite harsh laws that in extreme cases included execution.¹³⁵ During the 1980s and 1990s, some senior members of the Syrian military were involved in this illicit trade, according to Abdalrazzaq Moaz, Syria's former deputy minister of culture and former head of Syria's Directorate-General for Antiquities and Museums.¹³⁶ In fact, former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, father of current president Bashar al-Assad, was himself an avid collector of ancient coins, although collecting these coins was illegal. Hafez's brother, Rifaat, was also known for looting archaeological sites and, given his documented involvement in the illicit trafficking of other goods, he may well have trafficked antiquities.¹³⁷

Looting increased in Syria toward the end of the 1990s, perhaps because of global antiquities buyers' growing interest in the Middle East.¹³⁸ Bashar was personally strongly opposed to the looting and trafficking of Syria's cultural heritage and he tried to crack down on this trade when he assumed the presidency following his father's death in 2000.¹³⁹ It was already illegal to own or sell antiquities in Syria before Bashar took power, but he appeared determined to enforce these laws more than his father had. Bashar signaled

this early in his presidency when he publicly had a smuggled Syrian mosaic repatriated from Canada, despite having to spend more money on legal fees than the mosaic was worth monetarily.¹⁴⁰ Bashar also quietly transferred his father's coin collection to a Syrian museum, and when Lebanese president Emile Lahoud gave him a Phoenician artifact dating to the first century BCE as a gift, it too was given to a museum.¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, looting by senior officials continued. According to Syrian archaeologist Cheikhmous Ali, president of the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archeology, this occurred due to the fact that "in most cases these laws were never implemented because of bribes the looters give and the influence that some of them have ... There are principals in the government [who] are very powerful and highly influential and really so good at smuggling that they can never be convicted."¹⁴² One such individual was Ghazi Kanaan, Syria's interior minister from 2004 to 2005, and the head of Syria's security apparatus in Lebanon from 1982 until his death in 2005.¹⁴³ While in Beirut in the mid-2000s, Al Azm was introduced to a local businessman and antiquities collector. The man told Al Azm that he knew from personal experience that Kanaan was very involved in looting, selling, and buying antiquities. One day, the businessman reported, Kanaan called him and said, "We have three [army] trucks on the street filled with antiquities that were looted from Syria and were being smuggled through Lebanon. I've taken what I want for myself already. Get on the truck and help yourself. What's left we'll return to Syria."¹⁴⁴ Antiquities trafficking was a profitable venture not only for Syrian officials but also for Syrians who were not part of the Ba'ath Party's exclusive ranks prior to the current civil war; the activity gave "ambitious young men" the opportunity to make a "better living under a dictatorship."¹⁴⁵

Networks in Lebanon have "a long history of being a conduit for looted antiquities and artifacts because of its civil war [1975–1990] and because of its lax regulations. In fact Lebanon has been a major conduit for the smuggling of antiquities out of the region."¹⁴⁶ According to Abdalrazzaq Moaz, "sometimes the Lebanese arrest people with objects and send them back, but unlike in Syria, owning antiquities is not illegal in Lebanon."¹⁴⁷ Lebanese sources told Colonel Bogdanos, lead investigator of the 2003 looting of the National Museum of Iraq, that Hezbollah is involved in this illicit trade and even levies taxes on antiquities trafficked in Lebanon.¹⁴⁸ Lebanon continues to serve as a smuggling conduit today and its antiquities markets are flush with

freshly looted artifacts, which usually make their way from Syria to these markets through Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.¹⁴⁹ Since the Syrian crisis began, Lebanese police have seized more than 1,000 objects being smuggled across the border. Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Saad, head of Lebanon's Bureau of International Theft, reports that "much more objects are probably being successfully smuggled, as we only have 5 to 10 percent chance to intercept them, relying mainly on customs' searches and tips from our own informers."¹⁵⁰

Looting after 2011

On 11 July 2011, then Syrian Prime Minister Adel Safar wrote to government officials warning that "the country is threatened by armed criminal groups with hi-tech tools and specialized in the theft of manuscripts and antiquities, as well as the pillaging of museums."¹⁵¹ Safar recommended installing increased security measures, such as more secure doors, alarm systems, and surveillance cameras.¹⁵² At the time, archaeologists from the Syrian Heritage in Danger initiative found these suggestions rather odd, as no looting related to these armed criminal groups had yet occurred.¹⁵³ Safar's directive nonetheless fits the narrative the Assad regime promoted almost immediately after the uprising began: that foreign conspirators and terrorists were behind the protests against his regime, despite no evidence of this at the outset of the revolution.¹⁵⁴ Thus, some archaeologists speculated that officials in Bashar's regime would engage in the theft and sale of the country's cherished relics, just as they had during Hafez al-Assad's reign, as any such theft would be blamed only on anti-government conspirators.¹⁵⁵ In the same month the letter was sent, an Aramaic statuette was stolen from the Archaeological Museum of Hama and, with no sign of a break-in, it appeared to be an inside job; the whereabouts of the statuette are still unknown.¹⁵⁶

However, the current Assad government was spurred into action by the letter from Safar, and Assad initiated a number of efforts to protect Syria's cultural heritage. In 2011, the Assad regime launched a media campaign called "Syria My Homeland," which, among other measures, encouraged the local population to protect archaeological sites.¹⁵⁷ In 2012, Maamoun Abdulkarim, current head of Syria's Directorate-General for Antiquities and Museums, launched a more targeted campaign called the National Campaign to Rescue Syrian Antiquities, which uses phone messages and billboards to raise awareness about the need to protect antiquities.¹⁵⁸ Syria also launched

Save Syria's History, a more proactive national campaign that relies on volunteers to provide additional security for antiquities. It also is creating a digital archive of known cultural properties and their locations.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, these measures have had little effect in areas that are beyond the control of the Assad regime. Additionally, the Syrian regime has exploited cultural heritage much like Saddam Hussein's did. Much damage to Syria's cultural heritage, including looting and site destruction, has occurred as a result of regime military activity, such as defensive construction and destructive offenses. This will be covered in greater detail in chapter 5.

By 2012, Syrian opposition groups desperately needed money and arms, and they too turned to looting their own heritage to finance their campaign against the regime.¹⁶⁰ Soon thereafter, fighters supporting the Free Syrian Army developed an "association of diggers dedicated to finding antiquities in order to fund the revolution."¹⁶¹ A known smuggler by the name of Abu Khaled said that even "the regime is dealing with antiquities, because they are collapsing economically. They need cash money to pay the *shabiha* [hired thugs]."¹⁶² Indeed, "if you ask people from Syria, they would simply answer [that] everyone is trafficking antiquities. And, by the way, they have been doing this for decades, it just increased now dramatically, because of the political chaos."¹⁶³ Archeological sites were looted by all sides early in the conflict, particularly rich archeological sites such as Apamea. According to Al Azm, "the site was being looted by the regime and the opposition, and locals, all simultaneously as they were shooting at each other."¹⁶⁴

After more than four years of intense fighting and looting, Syria's rich cultural heritage "is being sold off en masse" to fund most of the armed groups actively vying for domination in the war-torn country.¹⁶⁵ At archeological sites throughout Syria, poor looters excavate daily with the permission of armed groups, unearthing ancient burial sites or buildings in the hope of finding valuable artifacts. However, these looters "can go for weeks without a payday, sweating 'for nothing,' in the sun," according to one man interviewed in a recent investigation of antiquities trafficking in Syria by Mike Giglio and Munzer al-Awad, correspondents for the media outlet BuzzFeed News. Looters told the correspondents that they sell what they discover at a low price to middlemen, who in turn sell them for higher prices: "We feel bad because we are stealing our history and selling it for a cheap price ... but we have become homeless and jobless, so we don't care."

The correspondents also spoke with Mark Altaweel, an archeologist at the University College London who has experience in Syria. Altaweel “was shocked by the professionalism” of the looters in Syria, describing their methodology as the kind used in a “proper excavation.”

The conflict also has had a negative impact on wealthy Syrian families in major cities. The Arabic daily newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported in July 2015 that the breakdown of Syrian society, as a result of the war, has caused many “noble and deep-rooted” Syrian families from Damascus and Aleppo to sell valuable heirlooms such as antique furniture, ancient manuscripts, and historic documents in order to meet their material needs. These items are reportedly being sold in large quantities at public auctions in Beirut.¹⁶⁶ It was reported recently from Lebanon that meat trucks from Syria were secretly carrying artifacts to stores in Lebanon that were acting as fronts on behalf of IS.¹⁶⁷

In addition to those in Lebanon, there are centuries-old smuggling routes across Turkey that also have facilitated antiquities trafficking.¹⁶⁸ British and German reporters have come across people in both southern Turkey and Lebanon who are eagerly trying to sell millions of dollars’ worth of Syrian artifacts, which they obtained from trafficking networks with ties to armed groups in Syria.¹⁶⁹ Many buyers are Syrian collectors who stockpile valuable antiquities within the country, while collectors from other Gulf States travel to Syria via southern Turkey to buy directly from dealers.¹⁷⁰ The Turkish cities of Antakya, Gaziantep, Mardin, and Urfa have been identified as hubs for selling antiquities looted from Syria’s numerous archaeological sites, including Apamea and Dura-Europos, where heavy looting has been confirmed.¹⁷¹ Some buyers allegedly come to Turkey from Western countries to purchase artifacts ranging from “\$100 for ... a Roman-era coin, and ... as high as \$100,000 for statues and rare manuscripts.”¹⁷² Some buyers from Western countries allegedly have forged direct relationships with antiquities dealers in southern Turkey and make frequent trips to the region, including one American “man of about 50 who visited a few times a year with a translator ... and ... pays a lot of money” for trafficked antiquities.¹⁷³

Cheikhmous Ali, who is documenting the looting and destruction of Syria’s cultural heritage, explains that those involved in archaeological looting throughout Syria have different specialties at four basic levels of sophistication:¹⁷⁴ (1) indiscriminate and random digging; (2) digging by thieves and specialists who focus on specific locations using sophisticated technology,

such as metal detectors; (3) systematic digging using archaeologists' methods; and (4) excavation with bulldozers and heavy machinery, which causes extensive damage and has destroyed dozens of sites.¹⁷⁵ The IS has engaged at all four levels and has been active at an even higher level—the purposeful destruction of the world's ancient cultural heritage for ideological and propagandist purposes. While numerous groups of Syrian 'Monuments Men' are courageously risking their lives to protect all kinds of cultural heritage and document the ongoing destruction of archaeological sites, no measures, no matter how well intentioned, will be entirely effective at preventing this kind of looting until the fighting stops and groups like the IS are defeated.¹⁷⁶

4. Digging In and Trafficking Out: Plundering the Fertile Crescent for Profit and Ideology¹⁷⁷

Islamic State Background

Despite policymakers' apparent surprise at the dramatic conquest of Mosul by the IS in June 2014, the IS did not emerge as abruptly as it appeared to in the initial media coverage. In fact, U.S. policymakers had been familiar with the organization for over a decade.¹⁷⁸ The IS is just the latest, albeit the most powerful, incarnation of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and while the group's name and leadership have changed over the past 15 years, its ideology and aspirations remain those of its Jordanian founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

In 1999, Zarqawi founded an organization called Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, but the organization did not gather any significant followers until the U.S.-led Coalition invaded Iraq in 2003. After the invasion, like-minded individuals and disenfranchised Sunnis gathered around Zarqawi in a savage insurgency against Coalition forces.¹⁷⁹ Eighteen months into the war, Zarqawi pledged his *bayah* (allegiance) to Osama bin Laden, but this new affiliation was more a "marriage of convenience" than submission to al-Qaeda's authority.¹⁸⁰ In fact, two letters were sent to Zarqawi from senior al-Qaeda leaders in 2005 telling him to "tone down the violence" because he "was alienating Sunnis and hurting the long-term goals of the global jihadist project." But even as they admonished him, al-Qaeda asked Zarqawi to send them money, as "many [of their financial] lines [had] been cut off."¹⁸¹

Zarqawi's brutal tactics and attacks on Coalition forces quickly made him enemy number one for the U.S.-led Coalition in Iraq. On 7 June 2006, Zarqawi was finally tracked down and killed by an airstrike.¹⁸² However, in October 2006, Zarqawi's followers swore bayah to yet another organization, the ISI, and its new leader, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. According to al-Qaeda and IS expert Aaron Zelin, "the creation of ISI pushed the group to focus on taking territory and governing in Iraq's Anbar province. The attempt ... was disastrous: in 2010, the leaders of ISI were killed in a joint raid conducted

by Iraqi forces with U.S. support, and it appeared that ISI was in its death throes.¹⁸³

In March 2011, protests against the Assad regime broke out in Syria, creating a fortuitous power vacuum for ISI. In the late summer of 2011, al-Baghdadi dispatched operatives to Syria to set up a new jihadist organization, and by April 2013, al-Baghdadi had relocated to Syria to more accurately reflect his organization's aspirations. Now operating in Syria as well as Iraq, al-Baghdadi changed the name of his organization to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). By June 2014, ISIS had conquered Mosul and large swaths of land in northern Iraq. Then, on the first day of Ramadan, the group declared the establishment of the Caliphate and renamed itself simply the Islamic State.¹⁸⁴

Financing the Islamic State

The IS has worked to become financially independent by “engaging in tremendously successful criminal activity enterprises.”¹⁸⁵ This has contributed to the group's increased wealth, and to the difficulty of cutting off its sources of revenue. The IS is not simply a name; the organization is truly attempting to govern conquered territory in accordance with its extreme ideology.¹⁸⁶ Governing, however, is expensive, and to fund this endeavor the IS has exploited the illicit antiquities market at an unprecedented level and established several other revenue streams.

By the time the IS conquered Mosul in June 2014, the terrorist organization was already involved in antiquities trafficking throughout Syria and Iraq.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, just about every faction in the Syrian conflict is actively looting and trafficking antiquities to help fund their activities, just as terrorists and insurgents have done previously in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁸⁸ Shortly after conquering Mosul, the IS robbed the city's central bank and took almost all of its cash; as a result it was declared the “world's richest terrorist group.”¹⁸⁹ The IS had already gained access to oil wells in Syria, and oil was its primary source of revenue for several months, bringing in as much as US\$1 million per day, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury.¹⁹⁰ However, the group's main source of revenue is its many criminal enterprises. The IS “steals livestock, sells foreign fighters' passports, taxes minorities and farmers and truckers, runs sophisticated extortion rackets, kidnaps civilians for ransom payments and much more.”¹⁹¹ There is a great deal of numerical speculation

about the income the IS has brought in from antiquities trafficking, but whereas terrorists are happy to pontificate on their goals and aspirations, they are not so forthcoming about their finances, much to the chagrin of cultural heritage researchers and policymakers.¹⁹²

Many of the goods looted by IS operatives never reach the legal market, due to the black market trade in illicit antiquities, and no one on the ground in Syria and Iraq has verifiable intelligence to say accurately how much the IS makes from looted antiquities.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, the organization's involvement in antiquities looting and trafficking is clear, based on the trove of antiquities seized during the May 2015 SOF raid on Abu Sayyaf (see Introduction) and on information from a leading IS finance official, as well as anecdotal evidence, documentation by citizen journalists and concerned activists, satellite imagery, and the similar involvement of IS predecessors al-Qaeda in Iraq and ISI.¹⁹⁴ Terrorists and traffickers are known to be opportunists and, given that the IS derives much of its income from various illicit activities, it would be surprising if the group were not involved in what is believed to be the world's third-largest illicit market, particularly in a region that is home to some of the world's oldest and most valuable antiquities.¹⁹⁵

IS Looting and Trafficking in Syria

As noted in the Syria and Iraq case studies, antiquities looting and trafficking is not a new phenomenon in either country. That said, the scale of looting in Syria since 2011 and in Iraq since the summer of 2014 is unprecedented because the current conflicts have created the chaotic conditions that allow for looting and trafficking to continue unabated.¹⁹⁶ Despite the paucity of hard evidence, an increase in looting appears to have occurred when the IS consolidated control in northern Syria and expanded into Iraq. In fact, while the majority of looting activity is thought to occur outside of IS control (because it occurs collectively in territory controlled by the other factions):

[IS] areas show a much higher rate of moderate and severe looting as a total percentage of looted sites than other parts of Syria. A staggering 42% of looted sites in ISIS-held areas is classified as severe or moderate looting, compared to 23% in Syrian regime areas, 14% in opposition-held areas, and only 9% in Kurdish areas.¹⁹⁷

In the Turkish province of Hatay, a smuggler known as Ugur told reporters from *The Wall Street Journal* that Islamist militants from groups like the IS now “understand how lucrative this stuff is so they exploit it with sophisticated networks.”¹⁹⁸ When television station France 24 investigated antiquities trafficking and interviewed Syrian traffickers in Gaziantep, Turkey, one trafficker asserted that the IS is “pulling the strings” on all of the antiquities-related activity under its control, and that no one can excavate without obtaining the proper licensing from IS officials.¹⁹⁹ In some cases, the IS appears to be “taking advantage of the pre-existing looting situation and institutionalizing the way they manage the illicit antiquities trade,” according to Al Azm.²⁰⁰ Based on information from his Syrian contacts, Al Azm explains that this shift toward institutionalization occurred in parts of Syria once the IS realized the potential profit in antiquities:

IS found local inhabitants looting and initially began to tax them. By the end of summer 2014, however, they were employing their own people, conducting their own excavations, and were bringing in their own equipment and resources—they would not be doing this unless there is a lot of profit at stake.²⁰¹

In some areas, rather than controlling the whole process, the IS instead appears to have put a formal tax on antiquities looting.²⁰² Eyewitnesses in Manbij, a Syrian town near Aleppo, note that the way the IS treats antiquities in areas under its control depends on the local emir, who determines whether specific antiquities are destroyed, sold, or protected.²⁰³ The emir offers local looters 700 Syrian pounds (US\$3.71) per day, thus fulfilling his role as a “responsible” governing agent and providing ample employment opportunities.²⁰⁴ After the looted antiquities are sold, the IS taxes them at rates estimated to range from 12.5 percent to the 20 percent Islamic khums tax, and as high as 50 percent for looted Islamic items.²⁰⁵ The Association for the Protection of Syrian Archeology posted on its website what appears to be an original IS digging license, which was obtained by the media department of a Syrian rebel group calling itself the Revolutionary Forces of Syria (RFS).²⁰⁶ The picture of the license is accompanied by the explanation that the IS stipulates different tax rates for looters based on their relationship with IS officials:

RFS Media Office correspondent got an [IS] license that is granted to excavators, and it is issued by what is called al-Rikaz Department which is involved in collecting antiquities and buried money. Young man (M.S.) from the town of al-Sayal, located near the [Mari] archaeological site in the eastern countryside of Deir ez-Zor, said “I got the license for free without having to share any of my excavation findings with [IS] since the man responsible for al-Rikaz is a relative of mine”. However, another man called (M.N.) said “I could not obtain the license until I stated that I would pay 60% of the money I gain from excavation works to the Rikaz Department.”²⁰⁷

A similar anecdote from Syrian smugglers in Turkey appeared in *The Independent*: “If we find jewelry or gold, [IS will] charge us 20 percent of the value and it’s official. Once you get permission you can tell everyone you’re going to the land and dig. You apply to [IS] to get permission to dig.”²⁰⁸ Taking this a step further, the IS reportedly opened a special office in Manbij to monitor looting activities, and it sometimes confiscates antiquities unearthed by locals and sells them to smugglers, one example being a Roman mosaic that the IS confiscated and sold to Turkish traffickers.²⁰⁹ In the eastern Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor, the archaeological sites of Mari and Dura-Europos have faced extensive looting, both before and after coming under IS control, according to recently analyzed geospatial imagery.²¹⁰ Willy Brugge-man, former deputy director of Europol, believes that pillaged Greco-Roman frescoes and masonry are among the most common antiquities stolen from the estimated 1,000 historical sites in Syria now controlled by the IS.²¹¹ *The Wall Street Journal* reports that it “reviewed cell phone photos of a Bronze Age votive bust, possibly 5,000 years old, looted from Islamic State-controlled [Syrian] territory, being touted for sale to private clients and potentially sold for around \$30,000.”²¹²

Neighboring countries also are serving as important transit hubs for antiquities trafficked from IS-held regions of Syria. As mentioned in the Syria case study, cities in southern Turkey, such as Antakya, Gaziantep, Mardin, and Urfa, are major hubs for illicit antiquities that enter the country via its porous borders.²¹³ Looted antiquities are also trafficked through Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley into the capital Beirut, which serves as an important epicenter for artifacts looted near Syrian cities such as Aleppo, as well as the IS capital city Raqqa.²¹⁴ One Syrian smuggler told a reporter from the BBC that the

IS sells some artifacts for as much as US\$1 million and that many of these artifacts are being trafficked to eager buyers in European countries such as Switzerland, Germany, and the UK, in addition to Arab Gulf countries Dubai and Qatar. Demand for illicit antiquities from Syria and Iraq also may be increasing in “places with booming luxury markets like China [and] Russia.”²¹⁵ Al Azm claims that “repeatable antiquities buyers” from Turkey and the Gulf countries frequently enter Syria through southern Turkey, and that the IS gives them safe passage to designated meeting locations and even to archeological sites where the IS either oversees or is directly involved in looting operations. From there, buyers offer ‘spot prices’ for goods presented to them, as mentioned in chapter 1. After completing these transactions, buyers return to Turkey to sell the artifacts to other dealers or directly to European buyers at a considerable profit.

IS Looting and Trafficking in Iraq

After conquering Mosul in June 2014, the IS seized tens of millions of dollars from local banks and also conveniently found itself controlling a few thousand of Iraq’s estimated 12,000 archaeological sites.²¹⁶ By mid-July, reports began to emerge of the IS looting such Iraqi cultural heritage sites as “the grand palace of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II at ... Nimrud,” where a “bas-relief that weighed more than 3 to 4 tons” was cut up and sold.²¹⁷ The director of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage, which is located in Erbil, states that international antiquities “mafias” are advising the IS which artifacts can be sold, in a method akin to the “antiques wanted” section found on Craigslist.²¹⁸

Since the U.S.-led Coalition attacked oil refineries under IS control—in Iraq on 8 August 2014, and in Syria on 23 September 2014—the IS has increased its antiquities trafficking to make up for the loss of oil revenues.²¹⁹ The IS “clearly is involved and profiting at every level, from extraction to final sale and exit from [its] territory.”²²⁰ According to Bruggeman, the IS is now seeking even greater control over its trafficking activities by establishing a direct, one-on-one relationship with buyers in the West.²²¹ While little information about the Iraqi trafficking networks is available, it is possible that some of the same Turkish cities are hubs for Iraqi artifacts as for those smuggled from Syria. The IS also could be tapping into Jordan’s illicit antiquities market via a southwestern route into that country.²²² According to

James McAndrew, a former senior special agent responsible for the Cultural Property, Art, and Antiquities Program of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, intelligence sources suggest that significant pieces leaving Iraq will go to buyers in the UAE, Iran, Syria, and other Gulf States.²²³

The Problem With Value Speculation

The ongoing chaos of war and the nature of the illicit antiquities trade make it impossible to calculate the amount the IS has earned from pillaging cultural heritage sites. The evidence thus far suggests that the IS treats each case of looting individually, and that it has procedures in place to ensure that it either controls or benefits from any looting and trafficking that occur in places under its control. Estimates of how much the IS earns from antiquities trafficking runs the gamut from a superficial amount to billions of dollars.²²⁴ The only official evidence to date that includes hard numbers came from the Abu Sayyaf raid in spring 2015 (see Introduction), which included antiquities sales tax receipts showing that the IS generated US\$265,000. The only other potential revenue figure for its antiquities dealing came from alleged IS accounting records that were seized by Iraqi intelligence near Mosul in June 2014, two weeks before the IS conquered the city.²²⁵ According to intelligence officials who analyzed the data, the IS derived US\$36 million from antiquities smuggling in the al-Nabuk region of Syria alone. British archeologist Sam Hardy, however, has seriously questioned the reliability of this claim.²²⁶ Al Azm also does not find the claim credible, arguing that the records reflect the looting of a “small provincial museum that I know, which contains copies of more valuable artifacts, tourist trinkets, and Bedouin rugs—there is no such thing as \$36 million dollars’ worth of antiquities there.”²²⁷

There is some skepticism as to whether the IS does in fact earn a significant amount from looted antiquities. A team of German journalists concluded an in-depth investigation of the organization’s financial records in December 2014, and one of them noted that, while looting is clearly going on in areas of Syria and Iraq under IS control, they did not uncover any hard evidence to suggest that antiquities are a significant revenue source for the IS.²²⁸ Abdalrazzaq Moaz, former head of Syria’s Directorate-General for Antiquities and Museums, argues that “archeology cannot be a significant source of revenue for IS and other parties because they rely on more substantial sources such as oil.”²²⁹ Moaz also says that many trafficked artifacts

in Syria are fakes, and that numerous archaeological sites assumed to have been excavated since the current conflict began had already been looted as far back as 2000.

In contrast, Michael Danti, an archaeologist working with the American Schools of Oriental Research's Syrian Heritage Initiative, speculates that antiquities trafficking is highly profitable for the IS and could be its second highest source of revenue in some regions.²³⁰ Iraqi archeologist Abdulmir al-Hamdani also believes it is possible that antiquities trafficking could be the second highest source of IS revenue in certain regions of Iraq, after oil.²³¹ Al-Hamdani reasons that looting and trafficking provide an easy revenue boon for groups such as the IS, considering the abundance of valuable antiquities lying beneath the sands at the numerous archeological sites under IS control. The types of antiquities that can be looted in Nineveh, Saladin, and Anbar provinces include desirable statues, coins, cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals, jewelry, and glassware.

Diplomatic sources have offered even more extreme speculation. Rajendra Abhyankar, the former Indian ambassador to Syria, Turkey, and the European Union, stated in the fall of 2014 that the IS derives 30 to 50 percent of an estimated US\$2 billion revenue from antiquities looting overall—some US\$600 million to US\$1 billion!²³² In spring 2015, Iraqi UN ambassador Mohammed Ali Al Hakim told media outlet the Middle East Eye that “Interpol gave [Iraq a revenue] number of \$100 million a year” for antiquities looted from archaeological sites and stolen from museums in both Syria and Iraq; however, Interpol does not appear to have made this claim and has not provided any data on IS antiquities revenue.²³³

Despite the range of speculation, the IS clearly profits from looting and trafficking antiquities; there is just no way of knowing exactly how much. Neil Brodie of the University of Glasgow calls any value statement attributed to illicit antiquities “absurd” because there is no way to verify the claims, especially if they come from parties with politicized agendas.²³⁴ Al Azm argues that, while the IS is clearly exploiting the illicit antiquities trade because of this profitability, no precise values can be placed on illicit antiquities looted or stolen under IS control unless they are “known pieces with a history of transactions”; this is especially true for previously undiscovered artifacts plundered from beneath the sand.²³⁵ Moreover, the possible value of different kinds of Iraqi and Syrian antiquities varies extensively:

from area to area, depending on the materials. If you are dealing with Roman-Hellenistic sites, they will produce higher values. If you are dealing with Bronze Age sites, it is much different because of the nature of the materials, such as pottery and cylinder seals scattered about here and there. That is why looters and traffickers go for bulk quantity over quality with Bronze Age sites, and why looters under IS control are, in many cases, bringing in bulldozers and heavy excavating equipment in order to excavate and sell lesser valued items in bulk.²³⁶

Concluding Remarks: The IS View of Antiquities

As the conflict wears on in Syria and Iraq, the people who live under IS rule will bear the worst of it. Like many other armies with imperial ambitions throughout history, the IS does not just attempt to establish control and impose its ideology; its financial model depends on controlling territory and people. Therefore, from a moral perspective, the need to free the Syrian and Iraqi people from this terrorist organization's oppressive rule is abundantly clear.

Although no evidence presented to date suggests that the IS has one overarching policy on looting and selling antiquities, the practice likely will continue to be an important revenue stream for the organization.²³⁷ An indication of the systemic nature of its involvement in this illicit activity is the “department of precious resources [*al-Rikaz*],” which grants licenses for digging; the need for such a department indicates that the income derived from this source is significant.²³⁸ Moreover, ancient cultural sites are prohibited under international law from being targeted by military forces, and thus as a source of revenue they are seemingly inexhaustible.

The IS is pillaging and destroying cultural heritage sites to support its mission for two main reasons: first, to bankroll a violent and totalitarian caliphate through a profitable illicit activity; and second, to erase the cultural identity of minority groups and ideologies that do not comply with its radical interpretation of Islam.²³⁹ Peter Campbell argues that the “IS is not only looting and selling culture to make a profit, they are also actively destroying culture in order to rewrite the historical narrative in Syria and Iraq—they are as happy to blow up a statue as they are to sell it, as long as it no longer remains in their presence.”²⁴⁰ In fact, it is possible that there is

ideological tension and disagreement between IS operatives over whether artifacts should be destroyed in the first place, defaced (literally) to remove anthropomorphic representations, or just sold as is for maximum profit. If true, this could indicate a greater ideological divergence within the organization than that regarding antiquities.

The IS clearly has destroyed some precious archeological sites, such as Nimrud in Iraq, and it has assumed control over ongoing looting operations at others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the IS demolishes ‘idolatrous’ sites after systematically looting the goods inside, thus allowing the group to both profit from selling the valuable artifacts and advance their brand through the media coverage of these cultural atrocities.²⁴¹ This model is no different from the way the IS loots the property of the minorities they evict or massacre, or how its militants rob the banks, businesses, and institutions they conquer.²⁴² In fact, one of the many reasons the IS is so dangerous is that it has been cut off from the formal financial system and thus must fill its coffers by any means necessary, including engaging in criminal activity.

The first definitive proof of IS involvement in antiquities trafficking was revealed after the SOF raid in May 2015 that killed Abu Sayyaf, the IS finance official known as the emir of oil and gas (see page 1).²⁴³ *USA Today* quoted an anonymous U.S. official who said that the IS “planned to sell” the 500 valuable antiquities uncovered in the raid, “rather than destroy them.” More importantly from an SOF perspective, this operation indicates not only that antiquities are an integral part of IS financial operations at its highest administrative levels but also that kinetic SOF counterterrorism operations can be used to weaken the organization’s financial strength. By eliminating or apprehending high-profile IS financial officials like Abu Sayyaf, SOF operations disrupt the IS’s ability to exploit the region’s cultural heritage.

However, antiquities are just one component of the organization’s diverse criminal financial portfolio. While the Fertile Crescent has faced severe looting and destruction throughout its history, it has never been threatened to the extent it is under IS control. With no end to this conflict in sight, the IS will continue to exploit this region’s endangered cultural heritage through its criminal rackets and violent rule. Moreover, as the IS continues to gain territory throughout the Middle East, it poses an immediate threat to the cultural heritage of countries outside Syria and Iraq, such as Libya, Yemen, and even Egypt.²⁴⁴ The IS is not the first terrorist organization to use antiquities to fund its operations and, sadly, it will not be the last. This

disturbing situation will continue until the IS can be severely weakened and eventually defeated—or until it has expropriated and destroyed all that remains of some of the world’s most ancient and valuable historical treasures. Until then, the international community must be vigilant in doing what it can to reduce demand for the illicit antiquities that fund all kinds of vile actors, from terrorist organizations like the IS to profit-driven transnational criminal groups.

5. Cultural Heritage as a Target and Victim of War

The looting and trafficking of antiquities poses a significant threat to the cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq, and, by funding terrorism, it contributes to the breakdown of security and civil society. The undisturbed treasures of sites yet to be unearthed in these historically rich countries are being obliterated by looting, causing irreplaceable losses in these archeological contexts. Trafficking of the looted treasures is funding nefarious terrorist groups and other organized criminal enterprises. Furthermore, no discussion of looting and trafficking in Syria and Iraq would be complete without describing the extensive and often willful destruction of historic artifacts, symbols, and architecture currently taking place in these two war-torn countries. This destruction, whether caused by the artillery shells and bullets of competing factions or the hammers and explosives of Islamist extremists, poses an overwhelming threat to Syria's and Iraq's cultural heritage.²⁴⁵

The destruction of cultural heritage is an age-old consequence of war and conflict. Recent examples include the targeting of cultural heritage sites during the Balkan wars of the 1990s; the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001; the 2006 bombing of the Shia al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq; the Islamist rebels' destruction of tombs and shrines in Mali in 2012; and, since 2012, the devastation of Syria's rich archeological history caught in the crossfire of civil war. Perhaps most abhorrent is the IS's current targeting of historic and cultural sites belonging to cultures and ideologies they oppose, as the IS often documents its destructive acts for the world to see in skillfully edited propaganda videos.²⁴⁶

The ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq have brought renewed attention to the debate over how to deal with the destruction of cultural heritage in times of war and conflict.²⁴⁷ As thousands of Syrians and Iraqis continue to lose their lives, the violence is also taking a considerable toll on cities and historic buildings that have existed for millennia and are an integral part of these communities' identity and urban fabric. Moreover, the targeted archeological sites are a testament to the diverse history and civilizations of the Middle East.²⁴⁸

This cultural heritage—the monumental architecture, archeological ruins, and priceless artifacts of exquisite artistry and craftsmanship—is immeasurably valuable. Richard Kurin, undersecretary for history, art, and culture at the Smithsonian Institution, explains that the value of cultural heritage lies in the fact that it:

embodies knowledge of particular times about architecture, engineering, design, social structure, economy, craftsmanship and religious beliefs ... But heritage is not only about the past ... It symbolizes how people think of themselves and others, including their predecessors and neighbors today. In that sense, cultural heritage teaches us about tolerance and respect for a diverse humanity. Saving heritage saves us from the foibles of arrogance, intolerance, prejudice toward and persecution of our fellow human beings.²⁴⁹

Therefore, it is imperative to understand and act to mitigate the current threat to the cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq to prevent further destruction and the risk that the world will lose the artifacts and other remains of this invaluable history forever. The international community must find ways to protect cultural heritage sites in the Middle East and throughout the world that are being threatened by armed conflict and criminal exploitation. Some possible solutions to protect cultural heritage in general and to deal with the IS phenomenon specifically were proposed by the Antiquities Coalition, Asia Society, and Middle East Institute in their 2016 report “#CultureUnderThreat Task Force: Recommendations for the U.S. Government.” The report’s proposals to protect cultural heritage sites include “executive action to ‘prioritize the protection of cultural property in military operations,’” Department of Defense (DOD) support for “‘no strike lists’ of cultural heritage sites ... during armed conflict,” the reconstitution of the “Monuments Men,” and additional training on “cultural property protection (CPP)” for military personnel, such as civil affairs and SOF.²⁵⁰ This chapter argues further that U.S. policymakers and SOF should go beyond the traditional strategy of ‘following the money’—in other words, the often effective strategy used to track financing sources and methods (including antiquities) in order to uncover terrorist networks’ means of support and how they execute operations. With regard to antiquities and cultural heritage, counterterrorism operations should not only undermine the terrorist groups’ financial exploitation of cultural heritage but also do more to challenge the ideology organizations

such as the IS who justify their eradication of history for profit and propaganda. Undermining this ideology will not only benefit the endangered cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq, it also will be a key component of efforts to counter the violent extremism that is costing so much in lives and property.

Under the Bombs and the Fog of War: The Destruction of Syrian Cultural Heritage

Syria's archeological sites and historic structures began to suffer almost immediately after the anti-government demonstrations in 2011 and the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict in 2012. The proliferation of looting activities began in early 2012, as the government lost control of historic sites throughout northern Syria. Meanwhile, in regime strongholds, Syrian forces sought shelter and built "trenches and hideouts, all while digging in areas that are considered historic and should be protected, such as Apamea and Tadmur [Palmyra]."²⁵¹ Regime forces built a road at the historic site of Qal'at al-Madiq and defensive fences and trenches "in many hills such as Tal Uthman, Tal Qarqoor, Qal'at Hums, [and] Qal'at Hamat."²⁵²

Since 2012, regime and opposition forces have been fighting throughout Syria, including intense battles at archaeological sites such as Bosra, Palmyra, Apamea, and other ancient settlements.²⁵³ Stephan Savage, an archeologist and geospatial analyst at Arizona State University, conducted a study that found the Syrian regime in particular, but also opposition forces, exploit these archeological sites because of their inherent tactical value.²⁵⁴ For instance, the hilltop citadel of Qal'at al-Madiq offered regime tanks the "vantage point ... to call down indirect fire on the lower town," which was held by the opposition. Other examples include the Syrian regime's use of the high ground at numerous other archeological sites to situate artillery formations and surface-to-air missile batteries.²⁵⁵ The intense fighting also has damaged historic sites such as the heavily fortified Crusader castle Krak de Chevaliers, which opposition forces occupied for two years before the regime forced their retreat in March 2014.²⁵⁶ Strategic archeological locations, valued since antiquity, remain militarily important today and are often the setting for gruesome battles.

Unfortunately, countless other sites throughout Syria have been severely damaged by repeated shelling from all parties in the conflict, ongoing regime airstrikes, and the construction of defensive positions.²⁵⁷ To date, five of six

Syrian UNESCO World Heritage sites have sustained heavy damage, with only the ancient city of Damascus, which is under regime control, escaping destruction.²⁵⁸ This grueling civil war has also been fought on the streets of Syria's ancient cities. Many shocking before-and-after images reveal the near-apocalyptic conditions in heavily-populated urban areas that contain many historic sites.²⁵⁹ For example, intense fighting between regime and opposition forces has killed scores of people in Aleppo and destroyed some of the city's most valuable historic buildings and quarters, such as the Umayyad Mosque, the Aleppo Souk, and the 13th-century Citadel.²⁶⁰ Similar destruction has occurred in Bosra, the old city of Homs, and Krak de Chevaliers, the result of "the systematic bombing and shelling committed by the Syrian military."²⁶¹

The Ideology of Destruction

The deliberate destruction of Syrian and Iraqi history by armed extremists such as the IS and Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) exacerbates the devastation wrought during more than three years of war, thus creating a crisis of epic proportion in an area that has long been known as historic artifacts or monuments because they liken it to *shirk* (idolatry), the principal sin in orthodox Islam.²⁶² The IS and JN believe that by destroying cultural heritage sites they are emulating the actions of the prophets Ibrahim (Abraham) and Muhammad, who destroyed the "false idols" their peoples worshipped so they would worship only God. Hadiths, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and passages from the *Qur'an* are cited in the IS online publication *Dabiq* as justification for this destruction. Archeological sites are described as the remains of civilizations that became "ruined nations" after being destroyed by God for violating the principles of *tawhid* (monotheism):²⁶³

Allah humiliated [the ruined nations] and left their dwellings on display to be seen by the generations that would come after them, not to gaze upon them with admiration, but to look at them with disgust and hatred, coupled with the fear of falling into *shirk* and being afflicted with the same punishment they had tasted.

The IS believes that *kuffar* (nonbelievers) from the West "unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations ... [in order] to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims of Iraq should embrace

and be proud of.”²⁶⁴ The IS believes that, by venerating the past, Muslims serve “a nationalist agenda that severely dilutes” their loyalty to God.²⁶⁵ IS extremists feel compelled to purge the perceived symbols of sin that stain their lands and tempt believers into what they consider shirk, just as other Islamic extremists have done in Mali and Afghanistan. Extremists like the IS and JN destroy not only the symbols of ruined nations but also any Islamic shrines, tombs of saints, or mosques that teach or symbolize what they consider the wrong interpretation of Islam.²⁶⁶ In fact, “most ... acts of destruction [by IS] have targeted Shia and Sufi religious sites” in order “to erase the physical evidence of ideas and history whose existence stands in opposition to their own ideology,” according to Christopher Jones, a doctoral candidate at Columbia University who specializes in ancient Near Eastern history.²⁶⁷

Despite IS claims of extreme piety, a sinister propaganda element also appears to be at play in its ideology. Eckart Frahm, a renowned scholar of Assyriology, argues that much of the destruction by the IS is politically motivated.²⁶⁸ Frahm elaborates on how cultural heritage has been “used by previous political leaders in Iraq [see chapter 3] to build some kind of national identity across religions, sects, and ethnic groups—something to which [IS] is strongly opposed.” The IS also “seeks to inflict pain on the West, which considers the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, for good reasons, as one of the roots of its own culture ... Many [IS] supporters operating in Iraq are foreigners from the West who are well aware of this.”²⁶⁹ A quick Google search for the destruction of cultural heritage by the IS, ISIL, or ISIS shows the topic has been widely covered by media outlets throughout the world, which may be fueling the organization’s motivation to destroy cultural heritage sites.²⁷⁰ The IS produces these highly-edited videos for shock value—they know they often will be front-page news and “boost the web traffic to their pornography of violence.”²⁷¹ As Frahm notes, the IS is very aware how much of the world values its cultural heritage, and the organization exploits this appreciation for history to gain media exposure. While Frahm may be downplaying the role of ideology in this destruction, it is clear that these propaganda videos both inflame the world’s anger against the IS and give the organization more opportunities to pontificate on its violent, intolerant ideology.

Their contempt for cultural heritage has led the IS and JN to demolish numerous shrines and historic sites throughout Syria and Iraq. This destruction is also part of their effort to conquer significant swaths of these

two countries and dominate the local inhabitants both physically and ideologically. In January 2015, JN published a communiqué stating its intention to impose Sharia (Islamic law) in Druze-Muslim areas of Aleppo, which included an order to demolish Druze *maqams* (shrines).²⁷² The announcement came after the 16 January demolition of the “Sufi Tomb of Sheikh Mohammed Nabhan and his family near the al-Keltawia Mosque (Madrasa al-Atabakiya) in the Bab al-Hadid area of the Old City of Aleppo” by JN and two other extremist groups, which acted in accordance with a “signed decree from the Head of the Aleppo Sharia Court and other offices dated January 15, 2015.”²⁷³

Social media posts and documentation by concerned citizens indicate that the IS also has destroyed numerous historic sites in Syria, including Sufi shrines, cemeteries, and ancient statues.²⁷⁴ The IS is thought to have bombed St. Mary’s Church in Tel Nasri in al-Hasakah province on Easter Sunday while fighting Assyrian and Kurdish militants.²⁷⁵ This bombing on one of Christianity’s holiest days demonstrates further that the IS is undertaking both a strategic military attack on its enemies and an ideological attack on the ancient Christian communities of the Middle East. Syria’s rich cultural heritage, which consists of ancient structures, countless archeological sites, and diverse religious communities, has suffered tremendously during the present conflict. This became especially acute when Islamist extremists like the IS and JN gained and held territory and began a systematic campaign to destroy ancient sites they deemed idolatrous.

Iraq: The Cradle of Civilizations in the Crosshairs

Iraq, the epicenter of the cradle of civilizations, has a storied millennia-long history as the crossroads of many different cultures, religions, and political entities. Because of Iraq’s geographic, political, and cultural prominence, it has endured extreme violence and the destruction of its cultural heritage throughout its history. Most notably, the Mongol invasion in the 13th century decimated Baghdad. The massive libraries of the knowledge-hungry Abbasid Caliphate were tossed into the Tigris, which ran black from the dissolving ink as Hulagu Khan’s forces sacked the rest of the city and looted its wealth.²⁷⁶ As noted in the Iraq case study (see chapter 2), Iraq’s cultural heritage has suffered from extensive looting of museums and archaeological sites, which occurred after both the 1991 and 2003 wars. Unfortunately, Iraq’s cultural

heritage once again faces the threat of destruction at the hand of vicious aggressors. Since the IS conquered northern Iraq in June 2014, it has waged a concerted campaign in the diverse ethno-religious mosaic that is northern Iraq against the heritage of any culture or belief it deems un-Islamic.

Once the IS took Mosul and began expanding throughout Nineveh Province, it did not waste any time before initiating this campaign against Iraq's cultural heritage.²⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch alleges that the IS displaced the Iraqi minority Shia Turkmen group from two villages outside of Mosul at the end of June 2014, and then methodically demolished their shrines and places of worship.²⁷⁸ According to *Al-Arabiya News*, the IS had demolished four Sufi shrines and six Shia mosques in Nineveh Province by the beginning of July 2014, in addition to vandalizing Christian churches in Mosul.²⁷⁹ By the end of July, that figure grew to 30 shrines and 15 Shia mosques, and culminated in the massive demolition of the mosque containing the tomb of the biblical and Qur'anic Prophet Jonah (Yunis). Other mosques containing tombs were destroyed around that time, including those of the prophets Daniel, George, and Seth.²⁸⁰ The IS continued its consolidation of northern Iraq throughout the fall of 2014, and its pillaging of cultural heritage sites. This included various Yazidi temples; the Shia mausoleum for the Uqaylid amir, Sharaf ad-Dawla Muslim in Samarra, which featured unique architectural characteristics; and the Christian Victory Convent of the Chaldean Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Mosul.²⁸¹

In the first half of 2015, the IS stepped up its rampage as it came under increased pressure from Coalition bombings and the Iraqi military, with its Shia militia allies.²⁸² Reports in January 2015 alleged that the IS sacked Mosul's central library and burned 100,000 books and manuscripts.²⁸³ Then came the 26 February publication of a video showing the group's shocking destruction of many authentic (and reproduction) sculptures from Roman and Assyrian periods in the Mosul Museum; the same video featured the ritualistic wrecking of the Akkadian winged bull statues flanking the Nergal Gate in old Nineveh.²⁸⁴ Other historic sites were targeted by the IS or sustained damage around the time the Mosul Museum video was published. The al-Khidr Sufi Mosque in Mosul was wholly demolished; the ninth-century Palace of Ashnas, near Samarra, may have sustained damage as the IS fought the Shia militia Kata'ib Hezbollah; and the St. George Catholic Monastery near Mosul was vandalized by IS militants as part of its ideological attack on Iraqi Christians.²⁸⁵

Sometime in March 2015, the IS ransacked the ancient Parthian city and UNESCO heritage site of Hatra. It published a video of the destruction in early April, which showed “Islamic State militants usi[ng] sledgehammers and assault rifles to destroy ancient artifacts.”²⁸⁶ While the whole site was not destroyed, as was initially speculated, many priceless statues were crushed in carefully choreographed and symbolic propaganda scenes. Unfortunately, the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud south of Mosul did not escape wholesale destruction. At some point between mid-March and early April, IS militants filmed their ceremonial destruction of statues and stone reliefs at Nimrud, which they did using sledgehammers, bulldozers, and power tools. The IS then rigged the site with improvised explosive devices and leveled the former Palace of Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II in a massive explosion.²⁸⁷

The Significance of Destruction

The recent destruction of cultural heritage sites, artifacts, and other antiquities in the Middle East shows that the irreplaceable landmarks of the Fertile Crescent and other of mankind’s earliest civilizations are at stake, due to the current climate of extreme violence and increasing sectarianism. While the cultural heritage crises in Syria and Iraq are dwarfed by the human suffering and wholesale destruction of society and its institutions, it is important that the world community take notice of what is occurring and do what it can to prevent this wanton obliteration of human history and culture.²⁸⁸ The destruction of cultural heritage sites in Syria and Iraq is just one aspect of the widespread humanitarian and security crises that need to be addressed both locally and internationally.²⁸⁹ The power vacuum brought about by civil strife in these countries has created a terrible humanitarian catastrophe—starvation, disease, and the breakdown of civil society and critical infrastructure. The unfortunate destruction of cultural heritage cannot be fully addressed until the humanitarian and security situations improve. Moreover, cultural heritage cannot be a unifying factor between disparate factions if the underlying political, social, and economic tensions that are driving these factions to wage war against each other are not resolved.

Through both military and ideological campaigns, Islamist extremist organizations such as the IS and JN are attempting to rewrite the historical narrative of Syria and Iraq. Extremists can literally create their purified world on a tangible level by conquering territory and erasing the remains

of cultures that recall past glories. Although most of the world is seemingly desensitized to the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in these regions and unwilling to intervene to stop the carnage, the IS's destruction of the region's rich cultural heritage has caused outrage and drummed up renewed calls for action against the organization.²⁹⁰ While it is unfortunate that more was not done to prevent the rise of the IS and the consequent atrocities, the group's call for all-out war against different peoples and cultures should convince the world of its true threat and thus motivate more actors to move to defeat it.

The symbolic violence displayed in the destruction of cultural heritage sites enables extremists such as the IS to advance the ultimate goal of terrorist organizations, which is to influence the perceptions and behaviors of a wide target audience.²⁹¹ By destroying these historic sites and releasing footage of the sacrilege in carefully choreographed videos, the IS is able to conduct an offensive in the information domain that extends far beyond the physical domains in which it operates, thereby triggering visceral and emotional responses throughout the world by those who fear for the safety of the Fertile Crescent's antiquities.²⁹² Radical Islamist ideology is the driving force behind the atrocities being carried out against people and cultural heritage, but some outsiders apparently do not believe that this ideology explains IS actions, despite the fact that it has repeatedly and explicitly justified atrocities by invoking this very belief.²⁹³ The attempt the IS is making to re-create history starting at 'year zero' by erasing archeological sites and ancient structures should convince any observer skeptical about the organization's true ideological motivation, and that it is deadly serious about what it says.²⁹⁴

At the time of this writing, following a year of IS occupation, hordes of IS militants who hoisted the black flags of jihad over the ancient and immensely valuable Syrian city of Palmyra have been driven out by the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies. In August 2015, satellite images confirmed that the IS had destroyed the highly-treasured Baal Shamin temple, an act UNESCO described as "a war crime."²⁹⁵ Other irreversible damage to Palmyra inflicted by the IS has been extensively documented by the American Schools of Oriental Research Syrian Heritage Initiative using geospatial tools and by analyzing reports on the ground.²⁹⁶ While no longer under IS control, Palmyra—already looted and damaged during years of fighting (including looting by regime forces)—is still in a vulnerable position. There has been ongoing fighting and damage to the site by Russian airstrikes, coupled with

renewed fears that the regime and its proxies, as well as local looters, could return and continue to inflict more damage on the site.

The unprecedented damage the IS has done to Palmyra and Syrian heritage was not the only act of violence against the ancient city. On 18 August 2015, in an even more gruesome demonstration of the IS's scorn for what the ancient city represents to humanity, the IS beheaded Khalid al-Asaad, the celebrated former Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums at Palmyra.²⁹⁷ The militants "hung his mutilated body on a column in a main square of the historic site because he apparently refused to reveal where valuable artifacts had been moved for safekeeping."²⁹⁸ The 83-year-old al-Asaad was a living symbol of what the IS seeks to obliterate—knowledge and respect for the region's history and its irreplaceable artifacts.

The international community has been correct in its concern for Palmyra and other valuable heritage sites and should do what it can to save what remains, but the rest of the world cannot convey to the people of Syria and Iraq that it cares more about historic stones than saving the lives of those the IS seeks to exploit and subjugate.²⁹⁹ Moreover, U.S. policymakers and military planners considering using SOF against the IS must recognize the importance of cultural heritage as part of a larger effort to restore peace and stability in both countries. Until and unless these goals are achieved, the international community will find it difficult to address the spread of this Dark Age ideology and save both the present generation and what remains of the past, or to prove to those vulnerable to extremist manipulation that there are far better alternatives to the destructive creed that drives the IS.

Despite the multitude of repugnant reports emerging from Syria and Iraq, there is some good news. First, the international community is appalled by the antiquities trafficking and destruction of historic sites by the IS and is beginning to view this as a palpable security threat that constitutes one front among many in the campaign against the terrorist organization.³⁰⁰ In an unprecedented international call to action, many experts attended a regional conference organized and hosted by the Antiquities Coalition and 10 Arab states, which was held in Cairo in May 2015. Their stated goal was "unifying regional and international efforts to combat the phenomena of looting and destroying antiquities by terrorist organizations."³⁰¹ The conference concluded by issuing the "Cairo Declaration, the first communiqué of its kind in historic preservation," which makes six concrete recommendations for action and commits the 10 states to initiate immediate "joint

efforts” against the ongoing assaults on cultural heritage.³⁰² While in Cairo, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova called for labeling the destruction of cultural heritage as a war crime because it is a “tactic of war to terrify populations, to finance criminal activities and to spread hatred.”³⁰³ While too much irreplaceable history has already been lost in Syria and Iraq, the conference shows a strengthened resolve to take action against the ongoing destruction, and to protect the increasingly threatened cultural heritage of countries such as Libya, Yemen, and Egypt.

Second, innovative initiatives continue to be undertaken to preserve cultural heritage sites in conflict zones. Threatened archeological sites throughout the Middle East and North Africa are being digitally mapped and recorded using the latest 3D technologies in order to coordinate efforts to protect them against future threats, or, as a last resort, to ‘preserve’ sites and large artifacts digitally so that, if their physical destruction cannot be prevented, as recent IS demolitions have demonstrated, a record will exist to guide reconstruction efforts.³⁰⁴ Among the people who have been risking their lives to protect cultural heritage under fire in Syria is a secretive group called the Committee for Shared Culture, which was formed to “track and restore looted artifacts” that the IS is selling to fund its operations.³⁰⁵

From both a practical and moral perspective, while designing and executing kinetic operations against the IS, SOF and civil affairs in particular should consider ways to counter and undermine extremist ideologies that call for both mass murder and the destruction of cultural heritage. SOF could take a leading role in these efforts by partnering with civil affairs in a modern re-creation of WWII’s Monuments Men (officially the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section), a special U.S. Army civil affairs unit that worked with cultural heritage experts to recover and protect treasures looted by the Nazis. The Monuments Men also helped to limit the destruction of historic areas by informing military planners of places to avoid when bombing Germany and Japan.³⁰⁶ Unfortunately, in spite of the success of the Monuments Men during WWII and the U.S. military’s large investment in these efforts, “the U.S. military allowed the capability [of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section] to dissipate in the years after the war ... and never revived [it] or any other cultural property program.”³⁰⁷ Following the end of WWII, “responsibility for cultural heritage protection was assigned to the Arts, Monuments, and Archives (AMA), now organized under the Army Reserve Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command.”³⁰⁸

The #CultureUnderThreat Task Force report rightly recommends that, as a first step, the DOD should “review” and “rejuvenate” the AMA to make it “relevant in today’s cultural crises in the Middle East.”³⁰⁹

If the Monuments Men program can be revived and used in the current Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, one follow-up option could be to insert a team of “Monuments Men into the field, perhaps protected by ... [SOF units], where they can secure key sites or ... bring relief to shattered towns.”³¹⁰ By using military support operations to win the hearts and minds of the local inhabitants who have suffered severely under IS control and witnessed the annihilation of their own property as well as their cultural heritage, such an effort would be one important part of a broader operation to degrade and defeat the IS.

Furthermore, according to Ronald T.P. Alcalá, a major in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps of the U.S. Army and Military Personnel Law Attorney, the U.S. military, in general, should avoid some of the mistakes made during the 2003 Iraq War with regard to cultural heritage. Alcalá notes three counterproductive military activities. First, there was a “general absence of cultural property specialists on the battlefield” during the conflict. Second, the occupation of ancient Iraqi heritage sites, such as Ur and Babylon, by U.S.-led Coalition forces were destructive. Finally, a total disregard for the sites’ archeological value did not win friends among the indigenous population.³¹¹ This stands in stark contrast to the efforts of the Monuments Men during WWII, and it contributes to the negative perception of U.S. forces while also setting an example that suggests cultural heritage is not valuable. As an alternative, Alcalá argues, “the creation of a corps of specialized cultural property officers ... could help ... [establish] a greater appreciation for works of artistic and cultural significance,” and these “cultural property officers could have a profound impact on U.S. forces before they ever set foot in a combat zone.”

Indeed, before SOF forces and their civil affairs partners can begin to protect cultural heritage through programs called for by Alcalá and others, they must gain a basic knowledge of the region’s antiquities and of the ideologies that drive the destruction of cultural heritage.³¹² Having this knowledge will enable the U.S. to challenge the destructive extremist ideological ‘narrative’ more effectively and to create their own narrative by communicating with the local population about the value of their cultural heritage, including the artifacts some of them are looting.³¹³ Establishing an alternative narrative of

why and how U.S. forces are countering the IS—in general and against its exploitation of cultural heritage—could also allow SOF to glean intelligence about antiquities trafficking and attempts to vandalize and destroy cultural heritage sites the locals might be aware of.

Other recent conflicts have already shown that, when valuable cultural heritage is threatened, members of vulnerable communities are galvanized and even willing to risk their lives to protect and preserve their cherished legacies. During the 2012 war in Mali, Timbuktu residents personally funded and conducted complex operations to smuggle endangered ancient scholarly manuscripts to safety and out of the reach of puritanical Islamist militants. In Afghanistan, key personnel of the national museum secretly hid 22,000 of the nation's most valuable objects and did not reveal the location even when threatened at gunpoint. During the Balkan Wars, inhabitants of Sarajevo risked their lives under shell and sniper fire to save books from the National Library, while others smuggled and preserved thousands of rare books and documents from other locations that would otherwise have been intentionally destroyed.³¹⁴ When inhabitants already suffering the effects of war incur further risks to protect their cultural heritage, it highlights the importance of their culture and history to their own modern identities.

The need to protect cultural property is beginning to receive the level of attention long called for by such documents as the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1970 UNESCO Convention.³¹⁵ Between summer 2014 and spring 2015, draft operational guidelines (yet to be adopted) were released by UNESCO in an initial effort to find language that will minimize disputes surrounding the interpretation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention and build international consensus on how finally to facilitate its implementation.³¹⁶ The framework of the recent Cairo Declaration, if realized, could encourage the Arab states to become far more proactive in taking action against this growing problem, both within their own countries and by mutual cooperation throughout the region. The recent attention and call to action against these cultural atrocities is a good start, but more concrete measures will need to build on this increased awareness of the plight of the world's cultural heritage in order to prevent or at least limit further destruction. Potential policy solutions are examined in the next and final chapter.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Countries and organizations around the world are beginning to implement a variety of measures in response to trafficking in illicit antiquities and the destruction of ancient historical sites in Syria and Iraq. Most recently, in the spring of 2016, the U.S. Congress passed the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, which restricts the import of Syrian cultural property. This bill, which was signed by President Obama on 9 May, calls on the executive branch to establish an “interagency coordinating committee to coordinate the efforts ... to protect and preserve international cultural property at risk from political instability, armed conflict, or natural or other disasters.”³¹⁷ In 2015, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 2199, a unanimous counter-IS financing resolution that bans all trade in antiquities from Syria and reaffirms the ban on trading Iraqi antiquities.³¹⁸ Importantly, once signed, the Protect and Preserve Act will “fulfill the United States’ obligations under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2199 of February 2015 to cut off terrorist financing to [IS], the Al-Nusrah Front, and al-Qaeda from antiquities, hostages, and oil.”³¹⁹ The European Union, which includes several important “market countries” where looted items are known to be purchased, has reacted similarly to the U.S. by putting stronger trade controls on all Syrian cultural property.³²⁰

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the FBI created an Art Crime Team to help other countries recover stolen art and antiquities, and has since collaborated with foreign police forces in numerous undercover sting operations that have helped recover artifacts worth millions of dollars.³²¹ The Homeland Security Investigations component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP), have taken active roles in investigating antiquities trafficking networks that benefit terrorists.³²² The U.S. government, often through ICE, has also been active in repatriating looted and stolen artifacts to their source countries.³²³ During two recent operations, *Lost Treasure* and *Mummy’s Curse*, ICE seized and repatriated antiquities from Iraq and Egypt that were being trafficked by organized criminal elements to prominent buyers in the U.S.³²⁴ The State Department is also

assisting the International Council of Museums with its “Emergency Red List of Syrian Cultural Objects at Risk,” which identifies cultural artifacts that might come from Syria and provides phone numbers and email addresses of people to contact if a suspected object turns up.³²⁵

In February 2013, UNESCO held a four-day regional conference in Amman, Jordan, to develop an action plan to protect Syrian cultural property and build neighboring countries’ capacity to crack down on the smuggling of illicit antiquities.³²⁶ Indeed, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have all recovered antiquities that were trafficked into their territory from Syria.³²⁷ However, most encouraging for the Arab world and the diplomatic community was the May 2015 Cairo Declaration, signed thus far by 10 Middle Eastern and North African countries that have agreed “to launch immediate joint efforts” to take on the looting and illicit trafficking of antiquities.³²⁸ The 2015 Cairo Conference that resulted in the Cairo Declaration will be followed up in the summer of 2016 with a ministerial-level conference in Jordan hosted by the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Task Force that was created by the Cairo Declaration.³²⁹

At the policymaking level, recent recommendations and conferences, both academic and diplomatic, have helped to strengthen the political will needed to address the trafficking and destruction of cultural heritage. Much collaboration and discussion among cultural heritage researchers and security policy specialists followed the 2015 Cairo Declaration and culminated in the aforementioned report “#CultureUnderThreat Task Force: Recommendations for the U.S. Government,” which was convened by the Antiquities Coalition, the Asia Society, and the Middle East Institute to build consensus on policy recommendations among various experts.³³⁰ The authors of this monograph, acting as members of and contributors to the Task Force, agree that the first-of-their-kind recommendations listed in the report are a crucial first step in proposing and implementing tangible solutions.

True to its title, the report focuses primarily on the United States and its various departments and agencies, but it also makes recommendations to the United Nations and the legal antiquities market. Numerous recommendations have been made to these different entities, but those most relevant for this monograph, which its authors consider feasible and necessary, are the following made to the U.S. Armed Forces and DOD, agencies and departments, and the executive branch, as well as the antiquities market:³³¹

- Implement training for active and reserve duty civil affairs in the general background in CPP, and for SOF about antiquities trafficking and the ideologies driving the exploitation of cultural heritage.
- Conduct a DOD review of the status of the Arts, Monuments, and Archives section with the hope of rejuvenating a Monuments Men-type effort.
- “The armed forces, through the Manpower and Personnel Directorate (J-1), should maintain a roster of active duty personnel with a demonstrated expertise in heritage-related fields, who can be quickly identified, tasked, and deployed to protect cultural property.”
- The DOD should review the “1954 Hague Convention’s Second Protocol” with the ultimate goal of ratification.
- Call on the U.S. president to “use his powers as Commander in Chief to instruct the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prioritize the protection of cultural property in military operations.”
- “U.S. law enforcement should shift its focus from seizure and repatriation of antiquities to the dismantling of criminal networks through criminal prosecution.”
- “The Department of Justice (DOJ) should appoint designated prosecutors to bring criminal cases against individuals and organizations involved in the illicit antiquities trade.”
- “The Internal Revenue Service should require proof of legal title and known ownership history before granting tax deductions for art and antiquities.”
- “U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) should work with the World Customs Organization (WCO) to join and further develop ARCHEO, a web based application that allows real time communication between government authorities and international experts to prevent antiquities trafficking.”
- “Art market players should pledge to be fully transparent in their dealings, making publicly available documentation of legal title and known ownership history for all antiquities.”
- “Museums that receive public funding should adopt a disclosure policy that follows the intent of the Freedom of Information Act.”
- “A relevant professional organization should establish a registry of antiquities dealers who are verified to abide by prescribed ethical codes and industry best practices.”

Other initiatives have brought other experts together with the hope of finding better methods for researching and collecting data on the antiquities trade. For instance, the authors of this monograph, working as researchers for the Monterey Terrorism Research and Education Program, hosted a professional conference attended by some of the world's leading experts on this issue to discuss ways to more accurately portray the global scale of the illicit antiquities trade and propose tangible policy solutions for the public and private sectors to address these phenomena. The conference, "Culture in the Crossfire: the Security and Policy Implications of the Trafficking and Destruction of Antiquities," took place on 4 March 2016, at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, California.³³² One primary outcome of the conference was consensus that, while some innovative research methodologies and technologies are already being employed effectively, more work needs to be done in both the public and private sectors to uncover additional data that will help researchers and policymakers fully understand the supply and demand sides of the illicit antiquities trade. As noted in chapter 1, while the illicit antiquities trade has been studied extensively from a qualitative perspective, solid empirical evidence is lacking from both the supply and demand sides, which unfortunately affects the way policy solutions are conceived and implemented.

The authors of this monograph believe that some crucial progress has been made in raising awareness of this issue, particularly with regard to the cultural crimes committed by the IS, and in the effort to gather more information about the illicit antiquities trade as a whole. However, many proposed solutions to the upsurge in looting and trafficking in the Middle East have been regionally focused. Indeed, tackling the issue of trafficked antiquities at the regional level is a positive and necessary step in the broader international effort to counter the IS and resolve the Syrian and Iraqi crises. However, a country- or region-specific effort to stop this practice is not enough. To be truly effective, this international effort will have to combat antiquities looting and trafficking across the globe, and it must address both supply and demand. Also noted in chapter 1 of this monograph is the fact that the illicit antiquities market is truly global, with source and market countries on nearly every continent. While recent efforts are so far encouraging, they fall well short of producing a global solution. Neil Brodie of the University of Glasgow describes the current efforts as a "fire brigade approach," meaning that the international community rushes to hotspots and conflict zones

such as Syria and Iraq only when there is a massive spike in looting and high-profile media coverage, and then puts countermeasures in place only in the immediate area of concern.³³³ For example, as the media and international community have been fixated on looting in Syria and Iraq, there has been a devastating increase in the looting of archaeological sites just across the border in Jordan.³³⁴ However, because the recent UNSC resolution and U.S. act apply only to Syria and Iraq, Jordanian antiquities are not given the same protection.

A global policy approach to combating antiquities trafficking has long been called for in such acts as the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1970 UNESCO Convention.³³⁵ However, these international legal frameworks have been criticized because they lack the strong enforcement mechanisms needed to protect cultural heritage effectively. The recent draft of the UNESCO Operational Guidelines to strengthen the 1970 UNESCO Convention provide a strong response to the recent cultural atrocities, and if the guidelines are adopted as hoped, they will build a more effective international legal framework—one that also can be enforced.³³⁶

These enforcement mechanisms must be implemented at all levels. Of the four stages of antiquities trafficking discussed earlier (see chapter 1), the third and fourth stages—the facilitating/laundering of a stolen artifact and its integration into the legitimate market—offer the best opportunity to curb the demand that currently is fueling the trade in looted antiquities and spurring the destruction of priceless cultural heritage sites. Ideally, SOF operations and other policy decisions would target the first and second stages of the illicit supply chain—the looting and initial trafficking—to curb the flow of stolen antiquities out of the source countries. However, SOF, and indeed the greater international community, will not be able to halt the trafficking of illicit antiquities without a much larger, legitimate, and effective law enforcement presence in these war-torn countries. Unfortunately, as of this writing, the struggle to stabilize the chaos in Syria and Iraq continues, with no apparent end in sight, which makes such an ideal approach simply unviable, beyond the effective but limited SOF operations that have used kinetic force to eliminate key IS financiers, like Abu Sayyaf. These operations certainly have been instrumental in degrading IS revenue sources, but they will not resolve the phenomenon that has its roots in the much larger illicit industry devoted to looting and trafficking in the region.

However, one advantage security practitioners such as SOF and intelligence analysts have in studying the IS's involvement in the illicit antiquities trade is that it could give them a better idea of how the organization operates overall. Yaya Fanusie—a former economic and counterterrorism analyst for the CIA—notes that:

law enforcement and intelligence officials should pay close attention to the antiquities trade emanating from Syria and Iraq, but not because they need to know precisely how much money [IS] brings in. What is important is that the trade itself reveals something about the Islamic State's operational infrastructure, its links with partners and middlemen, and how the group is exploiting the local civilian population. All of this is critical to understanding how the U.S. and its allies may defeat the group militarily, financially, and ideologically.³³⁷

Fanusie also notes that uncovering the illicit networks working with the IS, such as those involved with its “mini-bureaucracy” dedicated to controlling the antiquities trade (see Introduction), may in fact lead to the uncovering of other intelligence vital to U.S. interests. In this sense, studying the antiquities trade could lead to additional knowledge about how the organization supports itself, such as where and how IS affiliates launder money worldwide and traffic other resources in and out of its territory.

In addition to the unprecedented threat the IS poses to cultural heritage, the international community must also deal with the persistent illicit trade in cultural property that gives organizations such as the IS the incentive to supply freshly looted artifacts. The international community must begin targeting the two-faced “Janus figures”—the internationally connected antiquities dealers—who are the links “between the licit and illicit trade.”³³⁸ Specific “choke points” in the supply chain also need to be targeted, possibly by SOF in denied areas under the control of the IS or other terrorist organizations (as was the case with the Abu Sayyaf raid), and by relevant law enforcement authorities in transit countries and cities that are known hubs for the illicit antiquities trade. Just as countries in the Middle East regions have been called on to take a greater role in the anti-IS military coalition, they also must be more proactive in countering antiquities trafficking—particularly in the Gulf States. Those who facilitate and benefit from this illicit trade, such as the Janus figures and transnational traffickers, must also be targeted. Law enforcement agencies worldwide must also coordinate their efforts to deal

with this transnational threat more effectively. This should include targeting the large number of artifacts sold by illicit actors into private collections, as these objects can be laundered through artificial private sales for several years, if not decades, before they are integrated into the open market with obscured provenance.

Finally, given the ubiquity of looted antiquities currently on the market, willful blindness must no longer be tolerated in the acquisition of suspect artifacts by dealers, museums, auction houses, and private buyers. Halting this can only be achieved through a public-private initiative involving governments, museums, collectors, archaeologists, cultural heritage scholars, and any other parties that deal with antiquities.³³⁹ Improved compliance and enhanced due diligence measures to counter the current and unacceptable “optical due diligence” standard can reduce the availability of illicit antiquities in the public domain.³⁴⁰ If an individual or entity is found to have procured an illicit artifact without taking proper measures to ensure that it was acquired legally, they should be fined accordingly. This policy would be akin to the penalties banks are subject to for violating sanctions or money laundering. Buyers of antiquities who do not take measures to ensure that they are acquiring legal artifacts with authentic provenance are almost assuredly facilitating criminal activity, which may even include funding terrorism. If there is sufficient evidence that the purchase of an artifact funded terrorism or a violent organized crime group, the penalty should include the possibility of criminal charges.

Problems With Provenance

Confirming the provenance of objects sold on the legitimate market remains one of the thorniest aspects of the problem of looting and trafficking illicit antiquities. Even cultural heritage experts find it difficult to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate provenance documentation. Middlemen are often experts in establishing believable false provenance, such as claiming that an object was recently discovered in an old family collection. This is a convenient decoy, as a family collection is likely to date back to a time before a country passed laws to protect its antiquities, or before the 1970 UNESCO Convention cutoff date. In Syria, this means buyers and sellers of illicit antiquities will conveniently deal in artifacts that were collected just before the 2011 deadline set in the recent UNSC resolution and U.S. congressional bill. The

Berlin Museum has sought to overcome this by adopting a policy of “guilty until proven innocent.”³⁴¹ As a standardized provenance policy with enhanced due diligence is developed as part of a global enforcement framework, the Berlin Museum’s extraordinary provenance policy will be an important test case that should be closely monitored. Such a policy may be instrumental in minimizing the number of illicit antiquities sold in the antiquities market.

The Repatriation Debate

The longstanding debate over the repatriation of antiquities and the right of ownership of cultural objects has recently been reignited in the face of widespread conflict and destruction in the Middle East. Some with a direct interest in the subject, such as James Cuno, president and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust; Gary Vikan, former director of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore; and the Committee for Cultural Policy lobby group, are arguing that cultural heritage artifacts belong to all of humanity and that the lesser evil is to remove as many cultural artifacts from the conflict zone as possible. They also argue that the objects are safer outside the conflict zone and that there is a moral obligation to rescue them by any means necessary. This includes knowingly buying illicit objects on the black market.³⁴²

While this argument has strong appeal, its logic is hollow. Under international law, each state has a right to sovereignty, meaning that each country has a right to decide its own laws. Any cultural objects that are removed from a country illegally are subject to that country’s laws, as well as international law. Furthermore, international law expects looted or stolen antiquities to be repatriated to their source country following the emergence of evidence that they were illicitly acquired. Law enforcement agencies, particularly ICE and CBP in the U.S., have been effective in seizing and repatriating artifacts to their source countries, but this does not go far enough to stop the trade from source to market. Entities that knowingly purchase illicit artifacts are deliberately violating laws, even if they simply remain unaware of the artifact’s origin by turning a blind eye. There are seldom any criminal charges when objects are seized by law enforcement from museums, galleries, auction houses, or even private collections prior to repatriation. For the “antiquities industry,” these seizures could be seen as the cost of doing business.

Furthermore, as archaeologists and museum curators are well aware, once an artifact has been looted, it loses the valuable archaeological context

scholars rely on to understand the society and culture from which it came. Therefore, far from being “saved for humanity,” much of the archeological value of objects with dubious provenance is already lost, especially those being purchased on the black market. As an increasingly finite amount of antiquities are looted worldwide, all of humanity is losing the opportunity to learn about both our shared origins and distinct cultural histories because the pace of looting is far outrunning that of rigorous scientific inquiry and archeological documentation of cultural heritage sites.

By purchasing cultural objects that have been robbed of their cultural value, unscrupulous buyers are giving such objects artificial value that actually increases the incentive for looters and traffickers to continue their illegal acts, just as paying ransom to terrorists for kidnapping victims encourages them to take more hostages. The looters may be the ones physically stealing the objects, but those purchasing them are in effect robbing the world of its cultural history and fueling this illicit market. If antiquities buyers, museums in particular, are driven by a mission to educate and preserve these historic treasures, then engaging in such behavior is misguided at best. Nevertheless, the idea advanced by some—that knowingly buying antiquities on the black market to “save them” is a valid act—is in fact a criminal one that suggests these buyers may be driven by other motives.³⁴³

Final Remarks: Sustained Political Will

Efforts to curb the demand side of the illicit antiquities market will help crack down on this lucrative activity. However, until legitimate governments can tackle this issue from both the supply and demand sides, the surge of antiquities looting and trafficking taking place today in Syria, Iraq, and the rest of the world will not stop.

The authors have identified some key areas where new policies could be implemented or existing ones modified to help alleviate some of the demand side issues. As the need to address the illicit antiquities trade continues to gain political momentum, pressure on politicians to establish and maintain a global enforcement system must be maintained. The IS’s sale of antiquities to fund its operations and its campaign to destroy cultural heritage sites has pushed these issues into the public spotlight, but this window of public interest will not stay open indefinitely. As the conflicts in the Middle East wear on, interest may evaporate. However, unlike the public, antiquities collectors

are very patient when handling illicit artifacts; for example, objects looted during the 2003 invasion of Iraq are only now beginning to appear on the market, and still only in very small numbers.³⁴⁴ The fact that the current conflicts have no apparent end in sight means that establishing a system to protect cultural heritage sites and stop the illicit trade in antiquities is all the more urgent.

It is important to remember that, once new enforcement mechanisms are put in place, it will take time for them to become effective. For example, new and strict standards for compliance in banking were implemented shortly after the 9/11 attacks with the emergence of evidence implicating certain banks in criminal activity such as money laundering and sanctions evasion. However, the financial services industry has only implemented these measures in the past few years. Changing the culture of the antiquities trade will also take time, as implementing major changes and dealing with complex issues such as establishing provenance involves a learning curve. Therefore, it is critical that the leaders of key countries and institutions embrace these changes, as they will set the tone moving forward. With the growing awareness of the illicit antiquities trade, including among those entering and rising in careers in the cultural heritage field, it may well be that a generational shift will help to establish a standard of legitimacy that is considered not only a legal, but also an ethical imperative.

Finally, while comprehensive solutions are discussed and implemented in the effort to resolve this global problem, there is little doubt that SOF will be relied on increasingly to conduct dangerous missions intended to degrade and defeat terrorist organizations such as the IS. Because antiquities trafficking and the ideological destruction of cultural heritage has proven to be part of the IS's modus operandi, the authors of this monograph strongly encourage SOF and civil affairs operators to acquire a practical knowledge of the trafficking and destruction phenomena, which will enhance their efforts to prevent the IS and others from filling their coffers by selling illicit antiquities and from spreading their intolerant ideology by destroying cultural heritage. SOF can play a key role in saving the lives of thousands of innocent civilians by degrading the IS through kinetic counterterrorism operations, and it can also make a lasting contribution to the region's history by helping to preserve the treasured heritage of the cradle of civilization in Syria and Iraq. Where it is feasible to do so, SOF and civil affairs should deny the IS one of its key sources of revenue and most prominent means of spreading its ideology.↑

Appendix A: Acronym List

AMA	Arts, Monuments, and Archives
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CPP	cultural property protection
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JN	Jabhat al-Nusra
RFS	Revolutionary Forces of Syria
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNSC	UN Security Council
WCO	World Customs Organization

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- in *Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 2:23–61, available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub930.pdf>. Williams also discusses the Sunni tribes as traffickers and black market entrepreneurs who often colluded with the Saddam Hussein regime under sanctions, see 2: 26–27. Williams addresses the nexus between antiquities trafficking and organized crime in “Extortion and Other Criminal Activities,” in Williams, *Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents*, 5:174–176.
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