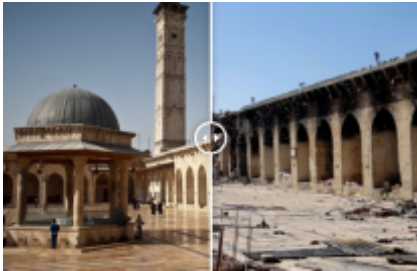


The Antiquities Coalition: Combatting #CultureUnderThreat By Deborah Lehr. News in Conservation, Issue 53, April 2016

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Since the breakdown in civil society that resulted from the Arab Spring, and with the rise of violent extremism, the world is facing the most significant and systematic destruction and looting of heritage in the modern era. The illicit trade in cultural goods is a multifaceted issue, cutting across national security, finances and economics, international law and heritage and conservation.

To combat this state of affairs, the world needs innovative solutions that bridge the gaps between these perspectives. We at the Antiquities Coalition aim to act as a binding force between diverse communities involved in the fight against crimes of culture, bringing together leaders and their expertise to drive informed, actionable, and collaborative solutions.

Since our founding in 2013, we have worked with public and private sector groups across the globe to empower communities and countries in crisis, expand the international community's understanding of patterns of cultural looting, and develop solutions to protect culture under threat. We believe that the fight against cultural crimes must be fought on several fronts. Our team deploys five primary tools: convening, collaboration, on-the-ground capacity building, technology-based information campaigns, and solutions-oriented research.

Convening and collaboration: fostering cross-border dialogue in the Middle East

The fight against looting and cultural crimes impacts stakeholders from the public and private sectors in countries across the world. Yet, the expertise and contributions of these actors too often remains isolated.

Our organisation unites a wide range of experts including archaeologists, business leaders, criminologists, lawyers, and specialists in money laundering, security, and terrorist financing and then connects them with key decision makers in the public and private sectors. We give these diverse groups a chance to learn from one another and help develop innovative solutions for safeguarding cultural heritage.

Collaboration between regional governments has been critical in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in order to create the necessary political will in this fight. We have convened government officials beyond just the antiquities or culture ministries to foster diplomatic cooperation and international dialogue to help individuals, organisations, and nations collaborate, strategise, and reach consensus during times of crisis. The first convening of these regional governments took place May 13-14, 2015 at the #CultureUnderThreat Cairo Conference, which was co-sponsored by the Antiquities Coalition, the Middle East Institute, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Ministers from ten MENA nations gathered in Cairo over two days and announced an action plan in the fight

against culture under threat.

That action plan, the Cairo Declaration, was the first communiqué of its kind in historic preservation. It commits the ten signatory countries to specific actions that will help protect and preserve their heritage, as well as raise awareness globally about the plight of conflict antiquities. The Cairo Declaration also called for the formation of a task force of regional leaders to address heritage threats. The MENA task force will convene for its first meeting in the summer of 2016 for working group sessions on active solutions at the second annual regional #CultureUnderThreat Conference. The 2016 conference will be expanded to include all members of the Arab League, and will again convene at the Ministerial level to ensure that the political will remains strong in this fight.

On September 24, 2015, the Antiquities Coalition organized a U.S.-based #CultureUnderThreat Forum in New York that brought together Foreign Ministers, former heads of state, Ambassadors, and senior government officials from around the world with leaders of arts institutions, archaeological associations, and experts in terrorism to address the looting and trafficking of antiquities, and halt a major source of funding for terrorism. Convened by the Asia Society, the Antiquities Coalition, UNESCO, and the Middle East Institute, the forum produced a “Call to Action” for the international community to join forces in a strategic effort to halt the trade in conflict antiquities and, in doing so, cut off potential sources of terrorist revenue. One of the outcomes of the New York Forum was the formation of the #CultureUnderThreat Task Force.

Capacity building: combatting cultural crimes on the ground

To stop the looting and destruction of cultural heritage at the source, communities and countries need a strong base of knowledge and tools to safeguard their cultural heritage and enforce rule of law. Given thin financial resources and ongoing threats to security, many governments in countries in conflict do not have sufficient capacity to protect their heritage. There are many excellent organisations and experts doing good work in this field, such as Amr Al Azm and Michael Danti with American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) Cultural Heritage Initiatives, and Katharyn Hanson with the University of Pennsylvania Cultural Heritage Center.

We try to address this gap by facilitating collaboration between experts, non-governmental organisations and governments to build on-the-ground capacity to drive solutions that combat looting.

One of the most effective ways to build capacity is through public-private partnerships. In March 2014, we finalized unprecedented public-private partnership between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the International Coalition to Protect Egyptian Antiquities (ICPEA) to support the Egyptian government’s efforts in the fight against cultural racketeering in Egypt. This public-private partnership is the first ever undertaken by the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities. It is the strongest effort yet to focus the power and ingenuity of academic, business, and cultural leaders and provides a vehicle for sharing best practices, resources, and information to fight cultural racketeering in Egypt. The partnership established a range of capacity-building measures, including the establishment of cultural property inventories, greater physical site protection, and small business initiatives for economic development.

One of the outcomes of this partnership was the announcement of the design and implementation of a museum registrar training programme so that Ministry staff can equip the next generation of Egyptians with the tools to secure their nation’s ancient cultural legacy, to be completed in partnership with American Research Centers in Egypt (ARCE) and Egypt’s Ministry of Antiquities. The partnership also calls for the creation of inventories, registries, and other databases, which serve as critical tools for safeguarding cultural objects; a complete catalogue of a country’s artifacts is a prerequisite for protecting them.

Databases can help collections immediately identify what is missing and put the authorities and market on the lookout. For example, in May 2015, U.S. Special Forces in Syria found a cache of Iraqi artifacts that had been stolen from the Mosul Museum. Experts were able to trace them back to the Museum using their registration numbers and return them safely to Iraq. Databases also ensure that illegal artifacts can be identified even once stolen and sold. The U.S. government stopped the auction of a 17th century Flemish

tapestry in 2014 after it was revealed to be on INTERPOL's "Most Wanted Works of Art" list. Similarly, databases help customs officials track, identify, and repatriate stolen objects.

This initiative will be critical for combatting the illicit trade in antiquities at acquisition sites, borders, and points of sale, as well as for repatriation efforts and legal prosecutions against traffickers.

Technology-Based Information Campaigns: Building Awareness

Tools for visually understanding the often complicated issues of the illicit antiquities trade and threats to cultural heritage serve as a vital resource in disseminating information. The Antiquities Coalition reaches outside of the heritage sector to co-ordinate with counterterrorism organisations, policy groups and heritage experts to develop visual resources on the trade as a means of raising awareness about cultural racketeering. In January 2016, the Antiquities Coalition published the #CultureUnderThreat Map to illustrate the widespread destruction of heritage in relation to known hot spots of terrorist' holdings on a regional basis. The interactive map

currently shows nearly 700 heritage sites throughout the 22 states of the Arab League, which can be filtered by type (areas under threat or control of militant groups; cultural heritage sites that have been attacked, targeted, or destroyed; museums and locations of UNESCO World Heritage sites). It reveals at least 240 heritage sites that have been deliberately targeted or destroyed by Daesh and other terrorist groups. These sites include artifacts from the ancient, Graeco-Roman, Islamic, and modern periods alike.

Infographics have also served as an important visual resource in the effort to raise awareness on the breadth of culture under threat and the criminal groups that can be funded by cultural racketeering. In 2015 the Antiquities Coalition partnered with counter-terrorism expert Malcolm Nance and the Terror Asymmetries Project (TAPSTRI) to illustrate the vast amount of weaponry that \$1 million (£710,000) in looted antiquities could fund. With the value of antiquities from the MENA region ranging from thousands to millions of dollars, the potential funding for violent extremists or a terror group like Daesh is insurmountable.

We have also gathered a series of images to pay tribute to cultural heritage lost to conflict and crime in the Middle East and North Africa since the 2011 Arab Spring. By illustrating the region's iconic monuments and sites then and now — before, during, and after this period of turmoil, terrorism, and outright war — we hope to convey the enormity of the ongoing crisis.

Solutions-oriented research

Cultural racketeering is a multi-billion dollar industry that funds organised crime, armed conflict, and terrorism. Post-revolution looting in Egypt contributed to more than \$3 billion (£2.1 billion) in losses by 2014 according to research conducted by TED-Prize winner and satellite expert Dr. Sarah Parcak. Her satellite analysis, confirmed by on-the-ground surveys at select sites, found that illicit digging at previously known archaeological sites had increased 500-1000% since the January 2011 revolution. But when compared to similar transnational crimes — from arms running, to drug smuggling, or even the illicit wildlife trade — there is much we still do not know. The Antiquities Coalition is working with leading experts, including the University of Chicago, to better quantify and qualify the illicit trade in cultural goods, in order to develop efficient, effective, and informed solutions for safeguarding our shared cultural heritage.

We released one of our most extensive efforts — a case study tracing looting in Egypt — in January 2016 conducted by Antiquities Coalition's chief of staff Katie Paul. The data used in this study was sourced from social or traditional media reports from activists, reporters, government sources, and archaeological experts.

Breaking down the individual reports of looting and trafficking into demographic data, site classifications, and illicit activities taxonomies on a month-by-month basis from 2011 to 2015 revealed clear and recurring patterns of heritage crime in the country. Studies of cyclical threats to cultural activity are critical for countries like Egypt that face the challenge of too many cultural crimes and too few resources to track and fight them. A better understanding of the typical patterns of attacks allows governments to anticipate looting and other cultures crimes based on instances of conflict and crisis in the country, helping them to calibrate their

response in the most effective and resource-efficient way possible.

We are currently working to apply and expand our research on patterns of heritage crime to other countries facing rapidly expanding cultural criminal activity and limited government resources. For example, our executive director Tess Davis is currently conducting a historical case study of illicit antiquities trafficking during the Cambodian Civil War, in the hopes of identifying patterns of heritage destruction that may have implications for other armed conflicts.

Following our ministerial summit in New York on September 24, the Antiquities Coalition and its forum partners launched the #CultureUnderThreat Task Force to develop and drive U.S.-focused solutions to cultural cleansing and racketeering during armed conflict. We are now working with a diverse group of experts — including leaders from the worlds of heritage, business, law, policy, security, and technology — on this initiative. The task force report will be published in April 2016.

The Bottom Line

Cultural crimes not only impact the heritage and conservation communities; they ravage the governments of source countries, contribute to the plight of communities in conflict areas, and threaten the very foundation of international security and peace.

Given the wide-ranging and devastating effects of campaigns of cultural racketeering and cleansing, international groups such as ours need to promote collaboration between involved parties from a range of backgrounds. There are no easy solutions to this crisis, but the stronger and more united our international response is, the more effective it will be.