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With A Contribution from **Brigadier General Roberto Riccardi**, The Commander of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage.

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Foreword

A contribution from
Brigadier General Roberto Riccardi
The Commander of the Carabinieri Command
for the Protection of Cultural Heritage

Looking at 2020 how can we avoid mentioning the pandemic? It has dictated life conditions as a tyrant. The Carabinieri continued its commitment by paying a high price. The virus has killed our operators from Emergency Teams, Operations Centers, and remote Commands. Officers in service of the people fell ill and died with the people they are sworn to serve. It is not over yet, we are in it and talking about something else, telling stories about the trafficking of Cultural Property and the way to counter it, may seem strange. But it is our way of honoring the Fallen ones: making sure we do not stop.

We have an atypical year behind us, difficult to compare to the previous ones. The places of culture were closed, the markets suspended. Criminal phenomena seemed to be stranded, but they have only slowed down, focusing on remote modalities like everything else. Our controls were pointed to virtual reality, that did not seem so virtual anymore, since so much happens there. Attention to online platforms has paid off, crimes have been committed in the shadow of the network.

Ennio Flaiano wrote: "Art is an investment of capital, culture is an alibi."¹ Those who see artifacts as a source of illicit profit have not surrendered to the emergency. The chains of clandestine excavations, thefts and counterfeits did not stop. Our figures clearly state this. Between investigations and lockdowns 2020 has been a year with highs and lows. On July the 14th, our commitment was greeted by the Italian Prime Minister, with other State officials.

It is difficult to find a more evocative setting than the Farnese Palace, the French Embassy. The occasion was the return of the "door of the Bataclan" to France, on its National Day. The Work of Art, a tribute by Banksy to the victims of Paris Terrorist Attacks, was placed at the secondary entrance of the theatre, from which many escaped from death. Stolen in Paris in January 2019, we recovered it with the

French Police and local Carabinieri in Abruzzo. Giving life back to those who lost it is impossible, but it was touching to restore at least one sign of memory to the people who were killed without reason.

Autumn saw the resumption of the infection. With the cold, deaths and hospitalizations increased. Christmas felt a little less like Christmas, but joy came at the Quirinale Palace, the House of the President of the Italian Republic. A bulky parcel was delivered there on Christmas Eve, wrapped in a red-blue cloth and decorated with tricolor cockades. On the wrapping, a greeting card signed by the Minister of Culture and the General Commander of the Carabinieri. Inside there was a precious object, which in the most beautiful holiday finally returned home.

It was the pendulum clock wanted by Pope Pius IX which for over a century, from 1854 to 1961, had marked the passage of history from the tower of the Quirinale Palace. Delivered to an institute, then stolen, we recovered it on December the 20th in Tuscany and took it back home. Among other things, the greetings to the President said: "There will never be a clock hand that will mark the time when we stop loving Italy." We can only reiterate the concept.

These are only some examples of the activities carried out by the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 2020, but they allow us to be optimistic for 2021, the year of the Italian presidency of the G20. Among the priorities of the Italian Presidency Culture has a special place. If indeed beauty will save the world, then protecting culture is an obligation for us all.

Today more than ever Cultural Heritage is menaced by many threats, from criminal activities to climate change, from natural disasters to anthropic events. Protecting culture means protecting our roots, remembering our past in order to shape a better future. Not every

damage can be avoided, neither every event predicted, but where we can do something, there we must do something, and this is specifically the case of crimes against cultural heritage. In this field a lot has been done in the last years, but there is an even longer road ahead of us, a road of international cooperation, of law harmonization, of exchange of information and of development of technology, in order to be a step ahead of the criminal organizations which profit from the illicit market of cultural property.

One day, hopefully, there will be no black market of art. One day, hopefully, every piece on sale in an auction will be traceable, studied and on sale because it can be sold, not because it cannot be proven elsewhere.

Until that day, we stay vigilant.



Figure 1. This year, cultural leaders gathered at the G20 Cultural Ministerial as part of a series of high-level events on the illicit trade of cultural objects. This illicit trade is not just a threat to our shared history or cultural heritage, but to the responsible market, human rights, local communities, national economies, and global security. Thankfully, increasingly, global leadership offers hope for the future.

Executive Summary

This year, the Group of Twenty (G20) meets in Italy against the backdrop of pandemic, as COVID-19 exacts a human and financial toll that is unprecedented in our lifetimes.

As the G20 considers how to coordinate a global recovery, it is important that it recognize the role cultural heritage plays as a proven driver of economic growth and sustainable development. Worldwide, before the public health crisis, the sector generated an estimated US\$250 billion in annual revenue and supported 29.5 million jobs.² Even with a recession in 2020, the art market alone reached at least \$50 billion, of which G20 Member States accounted for over 90 per cent.³

That multi-billion dollar value makes the art market not just an economic powerhouse, but an attractive target for bad actors, who seek to abuse its long tradition of discretion. Additionally, in many

jurisdictions, the sector is not yet subject to standard legal protections covering similar industries of risk and scale. Art is frequently referred to as the largest unregulated market in the world.

These persisting loopholes threaten governments and legitimate businesses alike by enabling corruption, money laundering, and terrorist financing. All of these threats can in turn be furthered by yet another crime that is now on the G20's radar: the illicit trade in cultural objects. The looting and trafficking of cultural objects, closely linked to armed conflict and violent extremism, is inflicting irreparable harm, on both our world heritage and the legitimate market.

Fortunately, under the Italian Presidency, the G20 has prioritized fighting back.

Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones: A Roadmap for the G20 to Combat the Illicit Trade in Cultural Objects provides evidence, recommendations, and other insights to support the G20 and its Member States. The Italian Republic is to be commended for adding this issue to the 2021 Rome Summit's agenda and creating a Culture Working Group, building on the foundation laid by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during its 2020 Presidency. We are hopeful that the Republic of Indonesia will pick up this mantle next year. Such leadership is critical to build and channel the political will to tackle a problem as old as the pyramids. Too often, public policy has treated the illicit trade in cultural objects as a white collar, victimless crime. But that is far from the truth.

A more troubling story emerges from a close look at the actual evidence—the histories that will never be written because looters reached sites before archaeologists, the profits made by criminals and terrorists, the consumers and businesses defrauded, and the losses suffered by communities or entire peoples. Some of these costs can be quantified. One can put a price on the resources a government must divert to secure a site. But, for others, they can only be described with one word: priceless.

Throughout this report, we seek to illustrate the threat posed by the illicit trade, supplemented by a case study in the appendix illustrating how terrorists, insurgents, and other armed groups have plundered ancient sites in war-torn Syria and then laundered cultural objects onto global marketplaces. Syria's continuing tragedy provides valuable lessons, both for other countries under threat, as well as for those who wish to help them preserve our shared past. These lessons have come at too great a human cost to ignore and fully inform the recommendations.

Syrian Case Study: Key Findings



After ten years of conflict, in some cases, illicit excavation may be decreasing, but not because the problem is getting better—rather it is because sites have been “looted out.”

Collections are also targets. A minimum of 40,635 objects have been recorded as missing from museums and other religious or cultural institutions since fighting erupted. That would be like emptying both the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay of every object on display.



Proceeds from a single site could equip an army. Based on archaeological material recovered in past scientific excavations, when the war broke out the archaeological sites of Dura Europos could have contained coins and other antiquities worth \$28.5 million dollars on the international market. Like Mari and Palmyra, Dura Europos has been under the control of various forces in recent years (including Daesh), with heavy pillage visible in satellite imagery.

Transnational criminals likely pocket the highest percentage of profits. For example, a looted coin identified on the local Syrian market, which later resurfaced on the international market, showed a markup of 184 per cent. While this is just one example, from what we know of the financial structure of the trade more generally, it is representative.



In 2021, press and social media reports, corroborated by our sources on the ground, warn that looting and illicit trade are continuing—or even expanding—in the COVID-19 pandemic.

International policy responses need to be not only local but global. A committed international governance, functional governments, and secure civil society are crucial for reducing looting and illicit trade.



This report also benefits from our decades of combined experience, interviews with outside experts and stakeholders, and extensive legal and scholarly study—including research on the G20's past successes tackling similar challenges. Wherever possible, we offer reliable statistics, as well as other quantitative assessments. We also document repeated instances of system failures, but just as importantly, of inspirational successes.

The G20 is uniquely positioned to coordinate a global campaign against the looting and illicit trade of cultural objects. The institution has an unrivaled platform, from which it is already confronting the world's most complex problems head on, including pandemics, climate change, and economic crises. Given its documented track record, we hope the G20 views our proposals as an opportunity to extend this leadership even further.

However, by focusing on the G20, we do not mean to suggest that it alone has responsibility for solving the problem. Everyone has a role to play: the United Nations and its institutions like UNESCO, other international intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, law enforcement, national and local actors, the art market, other businesses, and individual and institutional collectors. We must work together across borders and the public-private sector divide if we are to succeed.

Through this report, we propose nine specific recommendations for the G20 to consider, as it works to strengthen global policy against the illicit trade in cultural objects. These include concrete steps Member States could take on their own or in partnership with other governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and other allies. We firmly believe that coordinated action by the G20 will make a significant difference

in protecting our cultural heritage *and* the responsible art market from criminal misuse.

Given the stakes, we are calling for a fundamental and thorough reassessment of the problems caused by the illicit trade and for more determined actions, which are based on better information and collaboration. To be successful, any preventive actions must be global, because the trade is global. If they are not, a criminal network will simply move to a softer target. They must also be proactive, for as we are seeing today in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, by the time a conflict or other crisis erupts, it is often, if not always, too late. And they must not only rely on ministries of culture or the art world, but also on ministries of foreign affairs and interior; on the defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and research sectors; on the wider private sector, such as the financial, technology, and transportation industries; and on the local communities and partners on the front lines of this battle. We recommend:

Building Political Will: Building on the July 2021 Rome Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture, leaders could issue a strong statement in the 2021 Rome Summit communiqué that recognizes looting and illicit trade of cultural objects as serious crimes, prioritizes disrupting and dismantling criminal networks, and advances a long-term strategy to combat the illicit trade's root causes.

Drawing a Roadmap: The Culture Working Group could develop a long-term, sustainable Action Plan to support policy development, law enforcement actions, and private sector cooperation. It is important that this plan seeks to tackle the illicit trade from all angles: including at both the national and international levels, as well as in so-called "demand countries," "transit countries," and "countries of origin," the latter of which are often at war or enduring other crises. The expertise and resources available in the wider G20,

such as the Finance Track and other relevant Working Groups (i.e. those on corruption, trade, and investment), could be particularly helpful.

Identifying Challenges and Opportunities: To ensure that the G20 has the information needed to target its efforts most efficiently and effectively, the Culture Working Group could request that Member States complete accountability reports answering key questions. If completed before the 2022 Bali Summit, these surveys could be used to refine and strengthen the above-mentioned action plan, while guiding future activities.

Showcasing Best Practices: In addition to the accountability reports, the Culture Working Group could compile a compendium of best practices to learn from past successes—and failures. Ideally, such work could be conducted in collaboration with Member States, intergovernmental organizations, and law enforcement, as well as outside partners from academia, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

Filling Law and Policy Gaps: Through the development of both high-level and guiding principles, the Culture Working Group could explore how to fill gaps in the international legal and self-regulatory framework, both domestically and globally. The end goal should be a comprehensive, consistent, and harmonized system that addresses current needs, while anticipating how they may change in the future.

Strengthening Weak Links: Using the above-mentioned accountability reports, best practices, and principles, the Culture Working Group could request Member States to conduct national self-assessments.

The illicit trade in cultural objects is a crime first and foremost. It may be described as a failure of governance, law, diplomacy, civil society, and markets, but it is not a preservation failure. It cannot be solved by better archaeology, conservation, or restoration, but by strengthening law enforcement, international cooperation, and economic integrity.

These may be followed by the development of national implementation plans and—when needed—issuing country specific guidance.

Supporting Communities and Countries in Crisis: The G20 could channel global support for countries whose cultural heritage has suffered from looting and illicit trade, whether due to armed conflict, civil unrest, economic turmoil, or natural disaster. Possibilities could include on-the-ground interventions, training and other capacity building, as well as financial mobilization, not only through grants but also investment. The implementation of this support could rely in

particular on intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and civil society. We encourage the G20 to learn from successful examples that prioritize long-term and sustainable impacts over short-term and temporary gains.

Committing to Continuing Action: By hosting an annual, high-level convening, the G20 could provide an action forcing event for Member States to refine their roadmaps, report on progress, and bring in additional outside partners.

Understanding and Communicating the Problem: It is important for us to stress that this report is one step among others. Poor understanding equals poor policy. In order to reinforce international mobilization, either within or beyond the G20 framework, Member States could prioritize the establishment of one or more permanent, interdisciplinary research consortia to provide the reliable evidence necessary to support the needs of policymakers and the broader international community.

Why G20 Leadership is Needed

New Challenges and Opportunities

COVID-19 is presenting the \$50-billion dollar global art market with new challenges and opportunities. Lockdowns shuttered brick and mortar establishments, inflicted unprecedented losses and layoffs, and may force some businesses and museums to close their doors forever. Yet while much of the world ground to a halt, criminals continued to operate around the clock. With policing down and tourists staying home, looters took advantage of the shutdown to pillage ancient artifacts from archaeological ruins, while art thieves targeted masterpieces in museums. Smugglers tried to evade police by posing as medical workers and even coronavirus patients. Even before the pandemic, there had long been a global shift to online selling across all types of markets, legal and illegal alike. Now—with buyers just a click away, and moreover, a captive audience under lingering stay at home orders—archaeological watchdogs warn illegal sales on social media are skyrocketing.⁴

This is uncharted territory—in what is already the largest unregulated market in the world. In fact, the current situation is benefiting criminals at the expense of legitimate actors. As individuals and institutions dedicated to combating the looting and trafficking of antiquities, we commend the Italian Republic for its efforts to tackle the illicit trade through the G20, even as it works to resolve the public health crisis.

This background section seeks to introduce the many and current threats from the illicit trade—to the responsible market, human rights, local communities, national economies, and global security.



COVID-19 and Cultural Racketeering

- In Myanmar, the absence of tourists at the sacred ruins of Bagan made the temples a target for looters, with thieves stealing copper stupas, ancient coins, and jade jewelry in June. While Myanmar has since increased the amount of security at the site (Figure 2, above), Deputy Director of Bagan's Archaeological Department Myint Than put it bluntly: **"When there were tourists here, there were no burglaries."**
- In the Middle East, reports in Iraq indicated a "renewed wave" of site looting due to the economic crisis compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Al-Qadisiyah University Archaeologist and Assistant Professor Salah Hatem remarked, **"Unquestionably, the pandemic and the economic situation, which was worsened by the pandemic, caused a surge in looting activity in Iraq."**
- INTERPOL'S 2020 Assessing Crimes Against Cultural Property survey found that: **"Cultural property crime has continued unabated throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic and in some cases even surged to new heights."**

A Cause for Concern

The illicit trade in cultural objects is a cause of serious international concern. It is draining the cultural heritage of poorer communities and countries for the benefit of richer institutions and countries. It is weakening local identities, challenging national sovereignties, and diminishing archaeological and historical research. It is offering criminals profitable opportunities for theft, smuggling and fraud. It is cheating good faith purchasers and other consumers. Financial proceeds foster corruption and support terrorism and other forms of armed violence.

An Emerging Global Crisis

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property describes a wide range of objects as comprising “cultural property.” For many of these objects, there are long-established legitimate markets, and it is important to recognize that this report is concerned only with the illicit trade in cultural objects of archaeological, historical or religious significance. Many cultural objects of this type have been in circulation for decades or even centuries and can be traded legally. Unfortunately, many others have only recently been stolen destructively from archaeological sites, monuments, museums or other cultural and religious institutions, illegally exported from their countries of origin, and traded and laundered through a transnational series of commercial exchanges. On the open international market, in the past most cultural objects of this type were bought and sold with only minimal documentation of ownership history, or even no documentation at all. The result is that now it is challenging to distinguish between objects that are on the market legally or illegally, and all but impossible to make this

determination based on the physical piece itself, without additional research.

The trade is thus characterized as a “gray trade,” neither openly black nor openly white. The gray trade allows dishonest market actors to deny any knowledge of wrongdoing and avoid any stigma of association with criminal enterprise. Deniability is key to illicit trade. What is worse, the gray trade also means that honest actors struggle to discriminate between objects that are on the market legally and those that are not. The challenge for public policy is to improve market transparency in such a way as to encourage open and legitimate enterprise—while at the same time allowing law enforcement to be more effectively targeted at an identifiably illicit trade.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the illicit trade was considered serious enough for UNESCO to adopt its 1970 Convention. This convention introduced a set of normative principles and recommendations for practical actions aimed at controlling the trade. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen and Illegally Exported Cultural Objects similarly established norms in the private law sector.

But since then, and particularly during the first decades of the twenty-first century, the extent and volume of the illicit trade have grown like never before. Improved and quicker means of transport and communication have combined with economic deregulation to promote the unimpeded exchange of stolen and looted cultural objects. New markets in Asia and the Americas have grown up to complement the old-established ones in Europe and the United States.

A Changing Trade

**Pre -
1990**

The trade was a privileged affair, channelled through old-established auction houses and well-connected dealers in major cities.



**The
1990s**

The character of the trade changed in the 1990s with the development of internet trading.



**The
2010s**

The utilisation of cell phones and social media caused the trade to change and expand further.



Today

High-value trade continues, though often through private sales away from public view.



The character of the antiques trade has changed over time, from the pre-1990s to today.

The expansion of Internet trading since the late 1990s has in particular been remarkable, followed in the 2010s by the utilization of cell phones and social media. Before then, the trade was a privileged affair, channelled through old-established auction houses and well-connected dealers in world capitals.⁵

This high-value trade continues, though often through private sales away from public view. Invisible private sales have gained an increased market share in recent decades through the advent of art fairs, which gather together prestigious dealers and their customers for glamorous occasions of sales and socializing, and the increasing prevalence of private sales by auction houses.

But the Internet has “democratized” the market, making it easier and more financially viable to buy and sell smaller, less valuable objects than was previously the case. It has caused a shift in the nature and scale of the trade: the relatively low-volume trade of high-value objects common through much of the twentieth century has been augmented with a higher-volume trade of low-value objects. The new trade in small and portable objects involves a greater number of smaller traders than was previously the case and is more loosely organized.

The traded objects are easy to conceal and difficult to detect. The small amounts of money involved in individual Internet transactions diminish the apparent seriousness of crimes, often keeping below any value that would trigger regulatory reporting, yet in aggregate the profits might be appreciable. These low values and the greater amount of work involved to authenticate and track these objects create disincentives for law enforcement to pursue this part of the market.

The Size of the Trade

The problems posed by the illicit trade in cultural objects are well-known, but reliable statistics are elusive. There are serious problems of data availability and accessibility. Extremely large numbers of cultural objects are sold rapidly by Internet retailers and even using sampling methodologies or data-scraping it would require a major, multidisciplinary research effort to record them all. At the same time, an unknown number of high-value objects are sold invisibly through private transactions and the results are not available for statistical analysis.

For the art market generally, the European Fine Art Foundation (TEFAF) Art Market Report was long considered the industry standard for reporting statistics, but in 2018 TEFAF abandoned the enterprise because of data uncertainties producing discordant and misleading figures.⁶ The expert who authored it from 2008 to 2016 now writes the annual Art Basel Global Art Market Report. While we rely on this ourselves for estimating the value of the wider art market, there remains no breakdown for cultural property.

This means there is no accepted valuation on the size of the *legal* or *visible* trade in cultural objects or even any sector-wide agreement on what it contains—Classical art and antiquities? Chinese antique furniture? Islamic coins? Ancient fossils? Reproductions? Fakes? Indigenous cultural and sacred objects and burial goods? On top of this definitional challenge, for cultural objects across the board, because of the extreme difficulty in distinguishing legal or illegal objects without rigorous provenance research, separating out an illicit trade for quantification has been an impossible exercise thus far. The ability of the legal status of an object to change from illegal to legal (and sometimes from legal back to illegal) as the objects move through the market and across national borders and

The Visible Market

For 2020, the Art Basel Art Market Report estimated the value of the global art market to be **\$50.1 billion**, overall.

The 2016 TEFAF report valued the global art market at \$44 billion, of which 2.5 per cent was specifically “ancient art” (\$1.1 billion).

As shown in the below graphic, other recent reports have also attempted to quantify the antiquities trade, which all estimated roughly several hundred million U.S. dollars annually. However, these studies:

- focused exclusively on objects from the ancient Mediterranean and Near East
- did not distinguish between the legal and illegal trade, and
- relied wholly upon self-reporting or open-source data.

One report excluded Internet sales outright—the fastest growing market.



In 2013, from a survey of its members the International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art (IADAA) suggested the annual value of the licit global trade, excluding Internet sales, to be \$256 million at most.



In 2019, a report prepared for the European Commission sampled publicly-available sales data to estimate that within the European Union (then including the United Kingdom) from 140,000 to 700,000 antiquities were being sold annually for a total sales revenue of between \$72 million to \$356 million. A minimum of 298,379 ancient and medieval coins were being sold for a total sales revenue of more than \$63 million.



In 2020, the Rand Corporation estimated from open-source data that the “visible” trade should be valued at a few hundred million US dollars each year with the illicit trade accounting for not more than tens of millions of US dollars per year.

jurisdictions, as well as repeat sales of the same objects, adds to the challenge of quantification.

We realize that the lack of such statistics hampers the ability of policymakers and law enforcement to allocate resources and otherwise make informed decisions. In recent years, there have been three major attempts to quantify the monetary value of the antiquities trade, including by one of the authors of this report.⁷ All of these estimated the trade to be worth roughly several hundred million U.S. dollars annually. However, these studies (1) focused exclusively on objects from the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, in two cases excluding coins, (2) did not (and could not) distinguish between the legal and illegal trade, and (3) relied wholly upon self-reporting or open-source data. One report excluded Internet sales outright—widely agreed to be the fastest growing market. For these reasons, these numbers should be treated as the tip of the proverbial iceberg, and even if they are not, the monetary

value of the trade should not be equated with the cultural and historical value of the objects being traded.

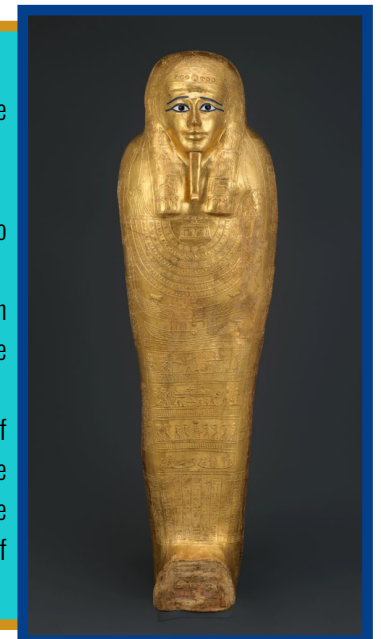
What really matters is documenting the damage caused—to history, human rights, local communities, and economic resources—and assessing the degree to which the illicit trade profits criminal actors at the expense of legitimate businesses.

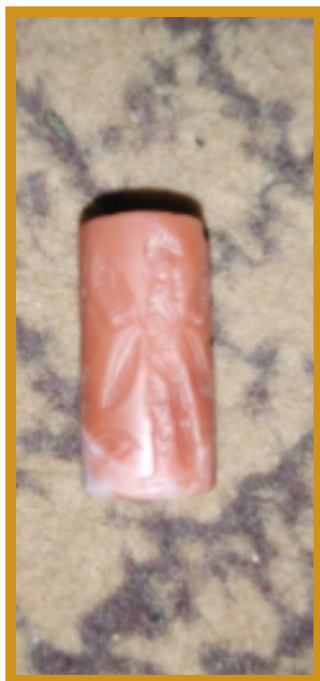
A small but highly damaging traffic demands more international action than a large, but mainly harmless one. And here, there are several good quality sources of information. The increasing availability of remote imagery obtained through satellites and drones allows quantitative assessments of damage caused to archaeological sites. Careful forensic work also allows damage assessments at museums and other institutions. Law enforcement statistics offer indicators of the scale of the illicit trade. Finally, court documents reveal much about the organization and operation of the trade.

The Invisible Market

Most available figures on the antiquities trade do not take into account the so-called “invisible market.” Why does this matter? It means major sales like these aren’t counted in statistics:

- **\$5 Million:** In 2004, the Cleveland Museum of Art reportedly paid Phoenix Ancient Art \$5 million for a fourth-century BC Greek bronze statue of Apollo despite its questionable provenance.
- **\$4.2 Million:** In 2017, New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art paid a Parisian dealer \$4.2 million for a first-century BC gilded coffin from Egypt. An investigation conducted by US law enforcement established that the coffin had been recently looted and illegally exported, and in September 2019, the Metropolitan returned the coffin to Egypt. (Figure 3, right).
- **\$107.6 Million:** Starting in 2012, US Homeland Security Investigation (HSI) launched a series of raids on the sales and storage facilities in New York of dealer Subhash Kapoor, seizing business documentation and 2,622 cultural objects with a total appraised value of \$107.6 million. Kapoor is known to have sold at least 17 pieces of Indian sculpture for a total \$11,889,500, with an average price of \$699,382 and an average annual revenue of \$1,188,950. He sold one of the objects, an eleventh-to-twelfth century AD bronze statue of Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Shiva Nataraja), in 2008 to the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) for \$5 million. He also sold an unknown number of other objects, including some from other Asian countries.





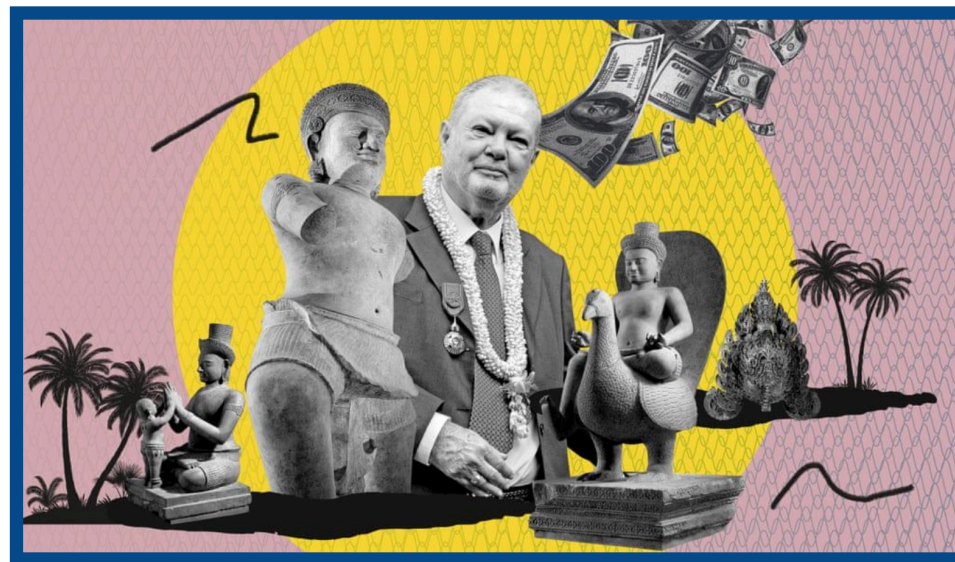
The new trade in small and portable objects involves a greater number of smaller traders than was previously the case and is more loosely organized. The traded objects are easy to conceal and difficult to detect. The small amounts of money involved in individual Internet transactions diminish the apparent seriousness of crimes, yet in aggregate the profits might be appreciable. These low values and the greater amount of work involved to authenticate and track these objects create disincentives for law enforcement to pursue this part of the market. The large numbers of objects traded increases theft and looting and cultural heritage suffers accordingly.

Pictured (Figure 4, left) is an example of a small, portable cylinder seal from Tell Ajaja, Syria.

Organized Crime

It is not unusual for people digging up or stealing cultural objects to receive 10 per cent or less of the final sales price on the international market,⁸ though with improving communication and transport diminishing the frictional effects of distance these price margins might be starting to narrow. Nevertheless, this mark-up in price between local and international markets represents profit to be divided between the various actors that constitute the trade.

A large part of the money is siphoned off by criminal intermediaries, attracted by the deniability and low-risk opportunities offered by an underground trade feeding an open market. Cultural objects are valuable commodities and can be exploited for financial crimes, including money laundering and tax fraud.



Antiquities Trafficking and Organized Crime: Douglas Latchford

In August 2020, Douglas Latchford (Figure 5, above) died while facing an indictment on account of the looting and theft of numerous invaluable Cambodian antiquities. Though the art community felt some closure following the repatriation of many of the looted objects, systemic issues propagating illicit art and antiquities trade continued unaddressed. However, the release of the Pandora Papers in October 2021 ushered in a frenzy of renewed interest in the Latchford case and the global scope of art crimes. The papers revealed a series of secret offshore companies and trusts, between which the sources of antiquities acquisitions were concealed. Among the complicit, museums and art dealers alike were found wanting. The auction house Spink and Sons was one of Latchford's primary partners in distributing stolen Cambodian sculptures and reliefs to museums around the United States. From the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to the Denver Art Museum in Colorado, objects with false or even absent provenance were accepted blindly. Museum leaders have had more than enough time to do the right thing. Instead, the crimes were met with deafening silence. Art crimes such as those enumerated in the Latchford case are deeply institutionalized and thus are abetted by all involved. Consequently, art crimes promulgate a variety of other organized and financial crimes.

Terrorist Financing

Terrorist and other armed groups have long profited from the illicit trade in cultural objects, including the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1980s, the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s, and Daesh (Islamic State) in Syria in the 2010s.⁹ The amounts of money the looting and trafficking provide terrorist groups remain unclear and many quoted figures seem inflated or exaggerated. Nevertheless, even though prices on local markets are lower than those on the international market, in local terms, the sums of money involved can still be significant.



Daesh invested resources to looting, demonstrating that they viewed profits were worth the effort (Figure 6, above).

Never-Ending Emergencies

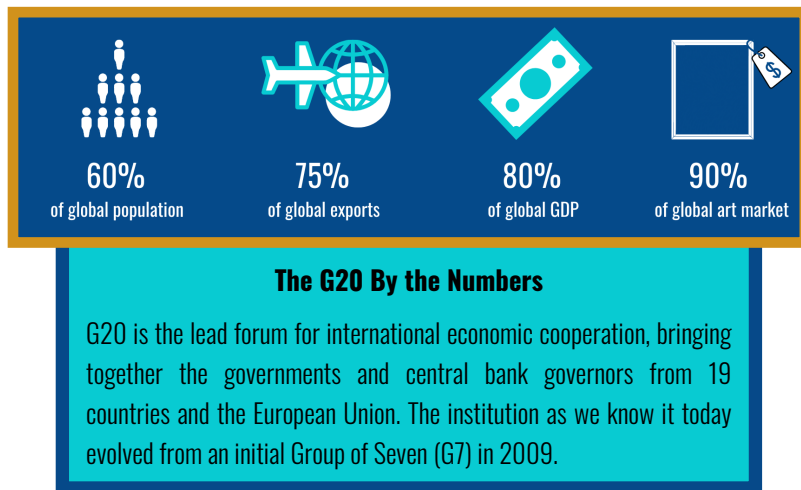
The illicit trade in cultural objects is a matter of supply and demand, fueled by the commercial appetite of the international market. Whenever public order is compromised or human livelihoods are threatened, unscrupulous or desperate actors are ready and able to empty archaeological sites, museums and other cultural institutions of their valuable cultural objects to meet this international demand. Looting and illicit trade feed upon any weakening of civil society caused by conflict, political instability, natural disasters, climate change, and latterly the COVID-19 pandemic. In such situations, the international community scrambles to implement some preventive or protective emergency actions, but usually they are implemented too late and are insufficient. What is worse, resources deployed in one emergency rarely prevent theft and illicit trade in future emergencies elsewhere, whatever and wherever they might be. International public policy should take a proactive stance aimed at eradicating illicit trade globally so that it can no longer feed off human tragedy and desperation.

Future Horizons

Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to foresee how the use of cell phones, secure messaging apps, and social media would radically transform the nature of the illicit trade in cultural objects. Looking forward over the next twenty years, it seems likely that cryptocurrencies will increasingly be used for enabling transactions, if they aren't already. But there will be other innovations that are unforeseeable at the present time. One thing is for certain—unless strong action is taken now to counter the illicit trade, it will continue to grow in size and sophistication and the damage it causes will grow correspondingly worse.

The G20 and Culture

The G20, and especially the Italian Presidency, which began on 1 December 2020, is to be commended for prioritizing people, the planet, and prosperity.



As part of that broader mission, Italy is bringing culture to the forefront, taking steps not only to combat the illicit trade in cultural objects, but also other threats facing cultural heritage such as climate change. The G20 is uniquely positioned to lead this campaign, using its unrivaled platform and proven leadership to effect real change as it has with other complex problems including pandemics, climate change, and economic crises.

This builds on progress under the 2020 Presidency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which marked the first time that culture was added to the G20 agenda. A cultural ministerial on the margins of

that year's Summit highlighted culture as a stimulant of economic growth worldwide.

At the joint meeting, Ministers discussed culture's ability to impact public policy in terms of health, sustainability, and economic stability, and recognized that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, culture proved a unifier in a time of global distress and suffering. In his closing remarks, the KSA's Minister of Culture, Prince Badr al-Saud, stated: "The onus is on us to preserve our shared heritage for future generations and to produce and disseminate culture in a sustainable manner."¹⁰ Following the 2020 KSA Summit, it became clear that the cultural sector demanded attention from the world's economic leaders.

The G20 Working Group on Culture

In response, Italy created the G20 Culture Working Group, in order "to bring the issue of Cultural Heritage preservation to the forefront of international attention, with particular focus on illicit trafficking, the linkages between culture and climate change, and the interactions between culture, education, and training."¹¹

In addition to holding four closed-door meetings of the working group, the G20 hosted a public webinar cycle throughout April which featured international leaders from government, law enforcement, and civil society.

These events led up to the Cultural Ministerial held at the Colosseum in Rome from 29–30 July 2021.¹² This high-level meeting resulted in the Rome Declaration, a joint document recognizing heritage's economic value and committing to its protection. This text provides a solid foundation for the G20's work moving forward in the years ahead.

Recommendations for the G20

As the preceding pages demonstrate, the G20 is uniquely positioned to coordinate international efforts to ensure our past is preserved for the future, not stolen, smuggled, and sold to finance crime, conflict, and terror. As individuals and institutions who share this mission, we have developed the following nine evidenced-based recommendations. While drafted to tackle the illicit trade in cultural objects, their successful implementation would combat a wide range of transnational crime preying upon cultural property, and in the process further the G20's broader goals of securing economic integrity and transparent markets.

This proposed roadmap draws from our case study of Syria (available in the appendix), consultations with those on the front lines of the fight against looting and trafficking, and numerous documented examples of successes—and failures—from around the world. It additionally builds upon the published literature, including the Antiquities Coalition's 2016 and 2020 independent task forces, which developed a comprehensive and holistic range of recommendations for the U.S. government to protect the art market from terrorist financing and money laundering, as well as a 2018 report to the U.S. State Department on the looting of Iraqi and Syrian antiquities, and a 2019 report on illicit trade through Europe for the European Commission.¹³

Our recommendations are meant to support the G20's admirable work in developing effective global policy, while highlighting the institution's significant "value-added," and complementing the efforts already being led by intergovernmental organizations (particularly UNESCO), national governments, and the private sector. They focus on concrete actions the G20 can take within its

own framework, informed by its many successes confronting problems of comparable complexity and scope. These specific steps go beyond simple calls for new laws or more capacity building, asking instead for both a fundamental and thorough reassessment of the problems caused by the illicit trade, and a more determined, sustained, and evidenced-based response.

We argue that the evidence calls for drastic realignment. There are countless signs that the current framework is failing—failing our cultural heritage, failing the communities and countries with the closest ties, failing their governments, failing law enforcement, and failing the legitimate art market. No single stakeholder group, to our knowledge, believes the status quo is working—except, perhaps, criminals. Such a stark assessment would daunt many of the world's institutions, but we hope the G20 will view it instead as an opportunity to extend its demonstrated leadership.

Finally, this report is not intended, nor does it aspire, to suggest a final policy. *Instead it puts forward steps that we think are necessary to foster the development of more effective policy.* In the context of the illicit trade in cultural objects, we believe effective policy is one that successfully disrupts and dismantles the criminal networks responsible. While we wholeheartedly support returning stolen property to its rightful owners, the illicit trade will be defeated through prosecutions, not seizures and forfeitures.

To be effective, policy must also be proactive, for by the time a conflict or other crisis erupts, it is often—if not always—too late. It must be sustainable, because whenever there is a demand for looted antiquities, thieves will find a supply. And it must be global, because if it is not, looters and traffickers will simply move to a softer target. The following recommendations are presented with those end goals in mind.



Building Political Will

Building on the July 2021 Rome Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture, leaders could issue a strong statement in the 2021 Rome Summit communiqué that recognizes looting and illicit trade of cultural objects as serious crimes, prioritizes disrupting and dismantling criminal networks, and advances a long-term strategy to combat the illicit trade's root causes.

Leadership at the highest levels is needed to make safeguarding cultural heritage an international priority. By demonstrating the political will to combat looting and trafficking from the top down, the G20 will lay the foundation for all its other work. One mechanism to create this momentum is the 2021 Rome Summit communiqué, to be signed by the heads of state or government of the nineteen Member States and the European Union in October.

This statement would be an opportunity to:

- recognize that the illicit trade is an entrenched, serious crime, which is not just a threat to history, but to the responsible market, human rights, local communities, national economies, and global security
- advance the need for a long-term strategy (rather than short-term responses)
- prioritize the disrupting and dismantling of criminal networks

- endorse best practices such as fostering a whole-of-government approach, closing global markets to illicitly traded objects, strengthening information sharing, raising awareness, and updating the legal and institutional framework
- guarantee adequate financial and other support
- stress that any solution should address root causes, and
- link cultural preservation with the G20's broader goals, including combating transnational crime, supporting inclusive and sustainable development, promoting market integrity, addressing climate change, and rebuilding economies in the wake of COVID-19.

To the G20's great credit, many of the above points were made in the Rome Declaration, which was unanimously adopted on July 30 in the Italian capital by G20 Ministers of Culture. This foundational document has set an inspirational tone for the institution's future work, both laying out fundamental principles that will guide it as well as high level calls for action. Reinforcing these statements in the Rome Summit communiqué will further raise the bar for—as well as give guidance to—Member States, working-level officials, and the private sector.

In addition to the 2021 Rome Declaration, another potential model for this text can be found in the provisions on wildlife trafficking of the G20 Leaders' Declaration from the 2017 Hamburg Summit.



Drawing a Roadmap

The Culture Working Group could develop a long-term, sustainable Action Plan to support policy development, law enforcement actions, and private sector cooperation. It is important that this plan seeks to tackle the illicit trade from all angles: including at both the national and international levels, as well as in so-called “demand countries,” “transit countries,” and “countries of origin,” the latter of which are often at war or enduring other crisis. The expertise and resources available in the wider G20, such as the Finance Track and other relevant Working Groups (i.e. those on corruption, trade, and investment), could be particularly helpful.

With the creation of the Culture Working Group, which is made up of representatives and experts from G20 members and guest countries, as well as the adoption of the 2021 Rome Declaration, there are now formal vehicles for developing and coordinating the efforts of Member States. Drafting and implementing an ambitious—but achievable—Action Plan will help it to realize their potential.

In narrowing down the many opportunities before the Culture Working Group, we encourage its leadership to focus on the G20’s “value-added,” make full use of knowledge and tools both within and beyond the institution, and fill gaps left by others.

In particular, in addition to the calls included in the Rome Declaration, it may be valuable for the Action Plan to explore how the Culture Working Group could tackle some of the below priorities, which have particularly challenged the international community to date:

- advancing the central collection of relevant statistics and other data
- investigating innovative means of increasing market transparency
- reevaluating the legal and institutional framework, while promoting additional self-regulation
- assessing global capacity-building needs, not just for customs, border patrol, and law enforcement, but also prosecutors, judges, and lawmakers
- strengthening cooperation with the private sector and broader international community
- raising awareness among decision makers in government and business
- encouraging adequate funding and other resources, and
- finding creative ways to work with non-state actors (perhaps through nongovernmental organizations and universities or other research institutions).

We were encouraged to see the Rome Declaration’s acknowledgment that “destruction and illicit trafficking of cultural property are serious crimes and a threat to international peace and security.”¹⁴ With that in mind, we urge the Culture Group, first and foremost, to work towards the end goal of disrupting and dismantling criminal networks. This is not an accomplishment that can be achieved overnight, so a long-term and sustainable strategy is crucial. So too is a “whole-of-G20” approach.

We recommend that the Action Plan examine ways to reinforce the work of the G20 Working Groups on Trade, Investment, and Corruption, as well as the Finance Track. It would also benefit from reaching beyond the G20 to outside allies, including inviting key countries and intergovernmental bodies to act as guests or observers. It is critical to integrate the G20's efforts with those of other institutions. As mentioned in the Rome Declaration, cultural organizations (particularly UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOM, ICOMOS) are key, as are INTERPOL, UNODC, and the WCO.

As the latter list suggests, the likelihood of any Action Plan's success will increase if the Culture Working Group can reach beyond the cultural ministries to ministries of foreign affairs and interior and the defense, intelligence, and law enforcement sectors. With that in mind, we suggest that it encourage Member States to assign day-to-day responsibility for this issue to a senior staff person within their governments. Ideally this would be to an individual who can easily coordinate not only with the Culture Working Group but across their government's own agencies and departments. For example, in the United States, recommending that the illicit trade be assigned to the portfolio of an existing director in the National Security Council would be appropriate.

In closing, it is important to view any Action Plan as a living document, requiring regular deliverables, reporting, and reassessments.



Identifying Challenges and Opportunities

To ensure that the G20 has the information needed to target its efforts most efficiently and effectively, the Culture Working Group could request that Member States complete

accountability reports answering key questions. If completed before the 2022 Bali Summit, these surveys could be used to refine and strengthen the above-mentioned action plan, while guiding future activities.

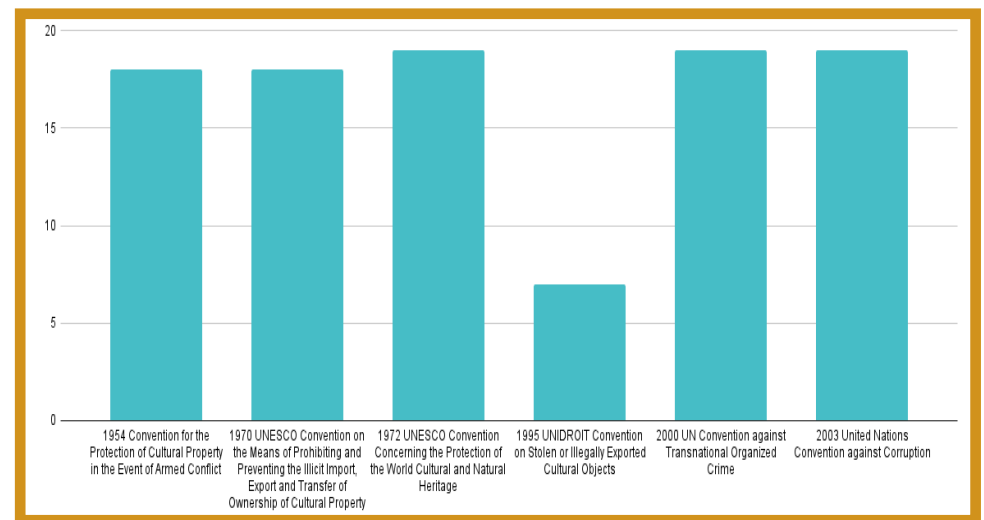
Accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date information will help G20 find its best "value-added." The Culture Working Group could serve as a clearinghouse for tracking the activities and statistics of Member States. Soliciting accountability reports would provide a baseline of data to help better understand the problem, guide the G20's future efforts, and determine an appropriate allocation of resources. In future years, these could be tailored to measure how Member States are meeting the specific objectives of the Culture Working Group, or country-specific guidance. However, since these have yet to be developed, it may initially be helpful to ask Member States:

- whether they have a national police squad dedicated to cultural property crime, and if so, what are its authority, jurisdiction, accomplishments, and top challenges
- whether they have their own national database of missing objects, whether it is linked to INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art Database, whether their government otherwise reports this information to INTERPOL, and if so, what are the relevant statistics
- whether they have an inter-agency task force or working group (like Italy's Inter-Ministerial Group or the U.S. Cultural Heritage Coordinating Committee) and if so, what is its composition, mandate, and activities

- whether they report data on their cultural property seizures to the World Customs Organization (WCO) for inclusion in its annual Illicit Trade Report and if so, what are these numbers
- whether they have a standardized collection template and separate code for law enforcement to report cases of looting or illicit trade domestically
- related to the above, whether they track funds generated from administrative, civil, and criminal penalties and forfeitures related to cultural property within their jurisdictions, and if so what are these statistics
- whether they consider art market actors and freeports as “non-banking financial institutions” or the equivalent (which would generally subject them to their anti-money laundering laws)
- whether, and if so how they have acceded to and implemented relevant international conventions (1970 UNESCO Convention, 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects).
- whether, and if so how they have implemented relevant United Nations Security Resolutions (1373, 1483, 2199, 2253, 2347, and 2368)
- whether, and if so how they “target” imports and exports of suspicious cultural property
- whether they have endorsed or implemented recognized best practices, and if not, why not

- whether they have a government or non-governmental registry of art dealers and if so what are the conditions for inclusion, and
- what they consider their top relevant successes and failures overall.

The answers to these questions would greatly assist the G20 in working to prepare the subsequent recommendations.



G20 Member Countries and International Conventions

As the above chart shows, of the 19 G20 Member countries, most have taken advantage of relevant international conventions to protect cultural property. However, one gap stands out. Only **7 of 19 G20 Member countries** have signed on to the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects.



Showcasing Best Practices

In addition to the accountability reports, the Culture Working Group could compile a compendium of best practices to learn from past successes—and failures. Ideally, such work could be conducted in collaboration with Member States, intergovernmental organizations, and law enforcement, as well as outside partners from academia, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

G20 Member States include global leaders in combating the looting and trafficking of cultural objects. They also span the full range of governments impacted by these crimes, including so-called “countries-of-origin,” “transit” states, and “demand” or “market” countries. They could thus have a wealth of institutional knowledge on what actions have succeeded against the illicit trade, and perhaps more importantly, what have not. Unfortunately, we have observed that there is often a great turnover of experts working on this issue within government, the military, and law enforcement. As a result, lessons must constantly be learned, then relearned. Institutional knowledge is never able to realize its full potential.

The Culture Working Group could do a great service by compiling a compendium of best practices showcasing accomplishments and warnings from the G20 Member States. The compendium should only include the evidence of real-world case studies, and not reports of implemented actions with no verifiable assessments of their material impact. This exercise could also be used as an occasion to acknowledge the hard-won triumphs of individuals and even entire governments. If conducted in collaboration with outside partners, it could also be an opportunity for outreach, including to those working to combat *other* forms of illicit trade (say that in wildlife), in order to learn from their expertise and experiences. It should also be

shared in support of improving law enforcement, finance, and businesses worldwide.

Best Practices: Specialized Police Forces

The remarkable work of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (Figure 7, below) showcases how effective specialized police forces can be in the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

Currently, 15 Member Countries of the G20 (including EU countries) have specialized police forces focused on the protection of cultural property.





Filling Law and Policy Gaps

Through the development of both high-level and guiding principles, the Culture Working Group could explore how to fill gaps in the legal and self-regulatory framework, both domestically and globally. The end goal should be a comprehensive, consistent, and harmonized system that addresses current needs, while anticipating how they may change in the future.

If a historic home were robbed in a major metropolitan city or on a country estate, no one would call upon the local preservation society to apprehend the criminals and prevent future thefts. Yet we wrongly expect archaeologists, conservators, and restorers to combat looting and trafficking. The illicit trade in cultural objects is not a preservation failure. It may accurately be described as a failure of governance, law, diplomacy, civil society, and markets, but first and foremost, it is a crime. It can only be solved by strengthening the legal framework, law enforcement, international cooperation, and economic integrity.

As one of the world's premier economic forums, the G20 is well positioned to take a lead role in reevaluating the legal and institutional framework, while promoting self-regulation in the private sector. Through the development of high-level and guiding principles—as it has done to great effect for combating corruption related to illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products—the G20 could explore what gaps exist and how best to fill them. These standards and guidelines should set a high bar for all stakeholders, but more importantly, fully support them in meeting it. Doing so will benefit both legitimate market actors and consumers, for until such rules are required, the businesses that follow them will inherently be at a disadvantage.

There is no need to “reinvent the wheel,” but rather, to build on the wealth of existing international law and best practices. Chief among these is the 1970 UNESCO Convention, which along with its lead agency, deserves our praise. Their impact cannot be overstated. However, the treaty's drafters could not have envisioned the Internet, online auction houses, instantaneous money transfers, social media, and global express shipping. Criminals have adapted to changes over the last fifty years; it is critical that law and policy do the same.

A more recent model is the Responsible Art Market (RAM) Initiative out of Geneva, which was “created by the art market, for the art market.” The RAM Initiative is working to raise awareness of threats to the legitimate market, as well as “to provide practical guidance on establishing and implementing responsible practices to address those risks.” As part of this mission, in 2017, it published “Guidelines on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing.” It followed in 2018 with the “Art Due Diligence Toolkit,” a series of best practices to assist businesses navigating increasingly complicated waters.

If pursuing high-level and guiding principles, the Culture Working Group should also be mindful to reinforce—not duplicate—these examples and the many other resources available from intergovernmental organizations, national governments, and the private sector. The before-mentioned accountability reports and compendium of best practices could help the G20 identify where it would make the most impact. While there are countless opportunities before it, we encourage the Culture Working Group to consider prioritizing the following challenges:

- bringing to bear the full weight of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC),

perhaps by adding a Protocol on the illicit trade in cultural objects

- whether through UNTOC or regional organizations such as EUROPOL and EUROJUST, strengthening international cooperation across legal jurisdictions, including through mutual legal assistance treaties (MLAT) or alternative information sharing, joint investigations, and extradition procedures
- protecting responsible actors in the art market, as well as ancillary services and institutions (like freeports), through anti-money laundering laws and regulations, and
- developing other mechanisms to reinforce legal markets and responsible trade practices—for example—promoting effective and verifiable self-regulation of online marketplaces and art fairs, or independent certifications, and failing that, proposing legislation

Increasing public-private partnerships, as well as dialogue *within* the private sector itself, for example between the art market and other relevant industries (financial, technology, transportation, etc).



Strengthening Weak Links

Using the above-mentioned accountability reports, best practices, and principles, the Culture Working Group could request Member States to conduct self-assessments. These may be followed by the development of national implementation plans and—when needed—issuing country specific guidance.

Once the G20 has determined its priorities, objectives, and commitments, the Culture Working Group is encouraged to conduct rigorous and regular self-assessments measuring whether and how Member States are implementing any recommendations. These could be similar to the above mentioned accountability reports. The end goal of this exercise should not be to “name and shame” governments that fall short, but rather to spot obstacles to implementation in order to provide needed support.

In some cases, to overcome said challenges, country-specific guidance may be needed.



Supporting Communities and Countries in Crisis

The G20 could channel global support for countries whose cultural heritage has suffered from looting and illicit trade, whether due to armed conflict, civil unrest, economic turmoil, or natural disaster. Possibilities could include on-the-ground interventions, training and other capacity building, as well as financial mobilization, not only through grants but also investment. The implementation of this support could rely in particular on intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and civil society. We encourage the G20 to learn from successful examples that prioritize long-term and sustainable impacts over short-term and temporary gains.

Looting and illicit trade feed upon any weakening of civil society caused by conflict, political instability, natural disasters, climate change, and latterly the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that the countries that have the most to lose—and are often the least to blame—are rarely those with the luxury of mounting a vigorous response. International public policy should take a proactive, vigilant

stance aimed at eradicating illicit trade globally. Proactive, because by the time a conflict or other crisis erupts, it is often—if not always—too late. Vigilant, for whenever there is a demand for looted antiquities, thieves will find a supply. And global, because if it is not, looters and traffickers will simply move to a softer target.

At the same time, the G20 and its Member States are encouraged to “think globally, while acting locally,” providing direct support to the communities on the front lines of this fight. On-the-ground initiatives, training and other capacity building, or financial mobilization could provide immediate protections while the international community addresses the root causes of the illicit trade. Such actions can be particularly effective if preventative, as well as in the post-conflict context, where there is a continuing great need, but also the security and stability needed for success.

A press release from the National Museum of Afghanistan warning the international community of risks facing the collection (Figure 8, below right).



National Museum of Afghanistan موزیم ملی افغانستان
August 15 · 🌐

Press release!

Unfortunately, today Kabul city had witnessed an unprecedented chaos; using the opportunity looters and smugglers in different part of the city have looted private and public properties.

However, the Museum Staff, Artifacts, and goods are safe yet, but continuation of this chaotic situation causes a huge concern about safety of Museum's Artifacts and goods for Museum Employees. Therefore, the National Museum of Afghanistan urges from security forces, International Community, Taliban, and other influential parties to pay attention to the safety and security of objects and do not let the opportunists to use this situation and cause for deterioration and smuggling the Objects and Goods of this institution.

Kabul

15 August, 2021

[#Save_the_National_Museum_of_Afghanistan](#)

[#cultural_heritages](#)

[#National_Identity](#)



Country in Crisis: Afghanistan

Since the Taliban's take-over in August 2021, looting incidents have been reported. Most alleged incidents have occurred in Bamiyan Province, home to the Hazaras, an ethnic minority targeted by the Taliban—as well as a wealth of Greco-Buddhist artifacts that are highly prized in the art and antiquities market. Episodes of looting have also been reported in Kabul, with the director of the National Museum of Afghanistan (Figure 9, above) stating that he remains worried for the fate of the museum amid the current climate of unrest.

The country's cultural heritage faces growing risks both at the hands of the Taliban and of those who seek to profit from the chaos currently unfolding. Moreover, the intentional destruction of cultural heritage is an atrocity crime under international law, as well as a warning sign of impending war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Supporting on-the ground efforts to preserve and protect cultural heritage and providing support to the heritage sector would go a long way in not only preventing looting and intentional destruction of cultural heritage, but also in preserving this heritage for future generations, reviving historic areas and traditional crafts, driving economic development, and ensuring access to this priceless cultural heritage worldwide.



Committing to Continuing Action

By hosting an annual, high-level convening, the G20 could provide an action forcing event for Member States to refine their roadmaps, report on progress, and bring in additional outside partners.

With the July Cultural Ministerial and 2021 Rome Summit, the G20 has taken important first steps to create and channel political will. However, it must now build on this momentum, support the Culture Working Group, and turn it into a successful and sustainable institution, while coordinating with allies within and beyond government. Organizing an annual convening would further these goals—first by requiring Member States to work on this issue throughout the year—and then by serving as both a “show of force” against the illicit trade before the public and press, as well as an opportunity to make progress behind-the-scenes through closed-

door meetings. A regular event would also hold Member States accountable for meeting their commitments, to each other and the wider international community, while providing them with the incentive and additional support they need to succeed.

Culture Ministers' Meeting

Rome, 29-30 July



2021 Cultural Ministerial

On July 29-30, the G20 hosted a Cultural Ministerial at the Colosseum in Rome (Figure 10 left, Figure 11 above) where Member States gathered to adopt the historic Rome Declaration, making progress towards the fight against the illicit trade in cultural objects.

An annual, high-level convening such as the one held this year could provide a forum for Member States to refine their roadmaps, report on progress, and bring in additional outside partners, while serving as a “show of force” against the illicit trade.



Understanding and Communicating the Problem

It is important for us to stress that this report is one step among others. Poor understanding equals poor policy. In order to reinforce international mobilization, either within or beyond the G20 framework, Member States could prioritize the establishment of one or more permanent, interdisciplinary research consortia to provide the reliable evidence necessary to support the needs of policymakers and the broader international community.

We have described what we see to be a series of problems and challenges in presently established policy and policy-making. The generally poor quality of available evidence in conjunction with a scarcity of relevant expertise constitutes a central obstruction. When evidence is needed to support policy-making, quite often it is simply not there, nor are researchers with the necessary expertise available to produce the evidence. We believe that the creation of one or more permanent, international, interdisciplinary research consortia or centres would overcome this obstruction. Such institutions could, and arguably should, be placed within existing universities or intergovernmental organizations. However, it is critical that alongside the usual lawyers, archaeologists and art historians, they would accommodate criminologists, economists, political scientists, and experts in subjects such as money laundering and regulation.

The research institutes or consortia would serve to consolidate expertise on this topic and would:

- conduct interdisciplinary and comparative research into the illicit trade in cultural objects and its regulation

- re-examine the international legal framework to determine improvements that are feasible
- develop sustainable strategies of collaboration and coordination between different groups of stakeholders (intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, law enforcement, civil society, private sector, etc)
- promote information gathering and exchange by developing institutional repositories, including sustainable databases and websites
- build capacity through teaching and training (including expert supervision and mentoring for postgraduate students), and
- develop ethically-justifiable and sustainable programmes of market monitoring and provenance research

Funding has already been made available by various public and private agencies to support some of these activities, but it is always short-term and when it expires the activities end and any built capacity dissipates. What funding is available should be used to support long-term, sustainable initiatives.



Figure 12. A view of the Colosseum in Rome, where the 2021 Cultural Ministerial took place. We applaud the Italian Presidency for organizing this historic event.

Next Steps

As this report makes clear, there are many immediate and concrete actions that can be taken to safeguard cultural heritage from looting and trafficking, while barring criminals from exploiting the \$50.1 billion worldwide art market. However, what is needed most is global political will, a long-term strategy, *and* a sustained commitment. The G20 is in a unique position to provide all three by complementing the critical work already being done on the national and international levels.

The G20 has already taken the most important first step. We commend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for first recognizing the seriousness of the issue at the 2020 Riyadh Summit. We likewise applaud the Italian Presidency for putting it on the agenda of the 2021 Rome Summit, organizing the July Cultural Ministerial, and creating the Culture Working Group. As Italy, Saudi Arabia, and other Member States build on this foundation and continue their work, we hope they will view these proposed recommendations as an opportunity to extend the G20's leadership even further. Whether

bad actors profit at the expense of legitimate businesses in the multi-billion art market now hinges on how the international community rises to the challenges before it. This includes governments, law enforcement, intergovernmental organizations, and—critically—responsible collectors, dealers, galleries, auction houses, and museums. We are optimistic that the G20 can and will help to bring these disparate players together.

In closing, we offer our thanks not only to the G20, but all who are prioritizing this issue. This report draws heavily from their work, including countless other individuals, institutions, and even entire governments and intergovernmental organizations. We are grateful to all who contributed officially or unofficially. Their assistance has been invaluable and any mistakes are ours and ours alone.

Syria: A Case Study

In addition to providing recommendations for the G20, the previous pages considered in outline how the illicit trade in cultural objects operates and the harms it causes. For a more in-depth understanding of the issues involved, it is necessary to examine the evidence of a single case study. It is regrettable to say, but because of the length of the ongoing conflict, Syria offers an informative example.

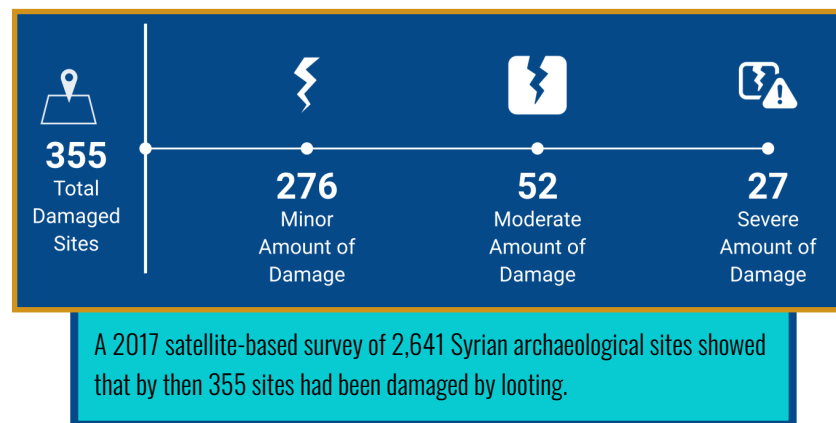
There is plenty of evidence available and time now for retrospective analysis in drawing globally applicable lessons. While new digital technologies have enabled more active illicit trade, satellite imagery and on-the-ground photography have transformed methods of damage assessment. Technologies are nothing without people, and these new technologies have been supported by the continuing dedication of expatriate Syrians and the bravery of Syrians reporting from within conflict zones—sometimes putting their lives at risk while doing so.

It is probably true to say that at the present time the looting and trade of cultural objects inside Syria is better described than for any other country in the world. There has been an active and damaging illicit trade in Syrian antiquities and other cultural objects since at least the 1980s, though before the onset of civil conflict in 2011 it did not attract very much international attention or action.

Once fighting had broken out in 2011, archaeological sites, museums, and other cultural institutions became easy targets for looters and thieves. The damage caused since then is immense:

- A minimum of 40,635 objects have been recorded as missing from museums and other religious and cultural institutions.¹⁵

- A 2017 satellite-based survey of 2,641 Syrian archaeological sites showed that by then 355 had been damaged by looting.¹⁶
- Of those 355 sites, 276 exhibited a minor amount of damage, 52 a moderate amount of damage, and 27 a severe amount of damage.¹⁷



As the conflict has dragged on through 2021, the looting and illicit trade have continued, and damage estimates continue to mount. During the period 2012 to 2014, *all* combatant factions were reported to be facilitating or tolerating looting and illicit trade. Syrian Arab Republic Army officers were suspected to be profiting from the looting of the archaeological sites of Apamea and Palmyra. Satellite imagery of Apamea shows how between July 2011 and April 2012 its previously undisturbed surface became covered by looters' pits.¹⁸ Further east on the Euphrates, while under the control of Free Syrian Army affiliates, the archaeological site of Dura Europos was transformed into an international marketplace. Hundreds of people were digging there and selling their finds to foreign dealers or their proxies who were waiting nearby in

attendance. Again, satellite imagery shows that by April 2014 the surface of the site had been obliterated by looting.¹⁹ To a large extent, the digging was conducted by people impoverished by the disintegrating economy or internal displacement, but the ongoing trade out of Syria and onto the international market was enabled by more sinister and profit-minded dealers and smugglers.

Dura Europos was scientifically excavated from 1928 to 1937. About 40 per cent of the site was uncovered, yielding 11,566 antiquities and 14,017 coins. In 2016, the potential value of the excavated antiquities on the international market was estimated to be about \$18 million.²⁰ The market value of the coins would have been less though still significant – perhaps \$1 million or more. Assuming that antiquities and coins were evenly distributed throughout the site, by 2011 there would have remained unexcavated \$27 million worth of antiquities and \$1.5 million worth of coins. Thus, during the conflict, the looting of the previously unexcavated objects could have generated millions of dollars of revenue on the international market and hundreds of thousands of dollars locally.



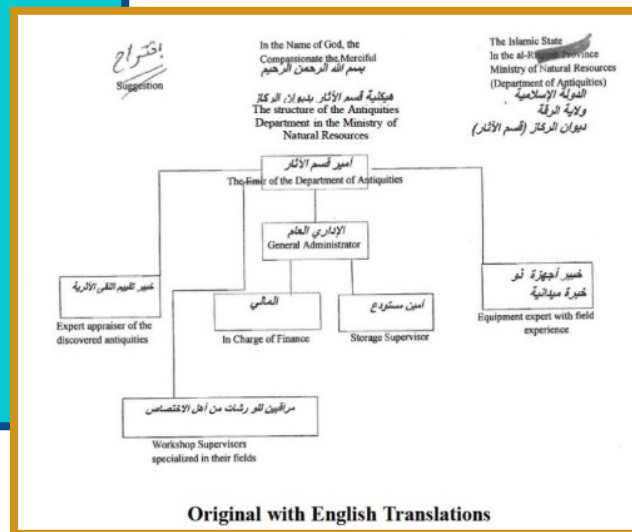
Photo of Tell Ajaja, a major Assyrian site in the modern-day northeastern Hasakeh province of Syria showing evidence of illegal excavation (Figure 13, above).

Two and a half years after the outbreak of hostilities, in September 2013, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) released its Emergency Red List of Syrian Cultural Objects at Risk.²¹ In December 2013, EU Council Regulation No 1332/2013 imposed limited trade controls on Syrian cultural objects.²² On March 1, 2014 UNESCO launched the Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage Project, supported for three years by \$2.46 million from the European Union.²³ It was not until February 2015, nearly four years after the onset of serious looting and illicit trade, that United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2199 placed limited trade controls on Syrian cultural objects.²⁴

In 2013, Daesh began to occupy territory in northeastern Syria and in March that year it seized control of Raqqa, proclaiming the Syrian city to be its new “capital.” By the end of 2014, Daesh occupied about 30 per cent of Syrian territory and major archaeological sites such as Palmyra, Mari, and Dura Europos had fallen under its control. It imposed a 20 per cent tax on illicit trade transactions and acted to regularize the trade by instituting a permit system for governing what was in effect authorized looting—and by partaking itself in the sale of looted objects.²⁵

In May 2015, US Special Forces raided the Syrian compound of Abu Sayyaf, the then head of the Diwan al Rikaz (Ministry of Natural Resources and Minerals, including its Antiquities Division), recovering looted antiquities and documentary evidence of Daesh’s antiquities operation, showing how it controlled the trade to extract maximum profit.²⁶ The documentation included a book of receipts, dated to between December 6, 2014, and March 26, 2015, recording \$265,000 tax revenue made from the sale of looted antiquities. Extrapolating from this one book of receipts, it would suggest that Daesh was making at least \$880,000 annually from the illicit trade in antiquities.

In the case of Abu Sayyaf it should be noted that his activities and those of Daesh demonstrated the organized and business oriented approach that was taken. Figure 14, right, shows a Daesh organizational chart featuring a labeled “Department of Antiquities.”



By 2011, international antiquities trading had been simplified and transformed by the widespread emergence of online sales platforms. Online trading made it commercially viable to sell smaller and less-valuable antiquities such as coins than had previously been the case—antiquities that are easier to transport and conceal. Although on the ground in Syria bulldozers or other heavy digging machines were sometimes being used to open sites, particularly under Daesh, metal detectors were widely used to search for coins and other metallic antiquities.²⁷ Many of the antiquities recovered from the possession of Abu Sayyaf were coins from Syria and Iraq, and there were electronic images of gold coins and jewelry on his computer.

In the case of Abu Sayyaf it should be noted that his activities and those of Daesh demonstrated the organized and business oriented approach that was taken. Daesh structured the trade as a controlled revenue stream, issuing permits and charging fees. It did not operate a haphazard business operation.

The unparalleled search for coins and other small antiquities magnified the damaging potential of the illicit trade many times over. The proliferating use of cell phones and their associated secure messaging and social media apps furthered virtual trading still further. US special forces discovered images of stolen antiquities in the WhatsApp folder of Abu Sayyaf’s cell phone. Facebook has been increasingly used in Syria and neighboring countries for communicating about antiquities trading and for actual commerce. By 2019 there were at least 95 Arabic-language predominantly closed groups, some with tens of thousands of members.²⁸ Ancient coins and smaller antiquities accounted for most of the trade.

Although remote sensing and more direct monitoring have exposed the extent of damage caused to Syrian cultural heritage by looting and illicit trade, very little research has been conducted into the international market for illicitly-traded Syrian objects. Documenting damage is important for demonstrating and delineating the problem of illicit trade, but it cannot by itself suggest ameliorating solutions. The development of targeted and effective policy solutions must be based on extensive research into the organization and operation of the trade, aimed at uncovering the nature and potential profitability of criminal and terrorist involvement and identifying novel strategies of market suppression, but that has not happened. One reason for this failure seems to be the humanitarian imperative to direct any available funding towards intervention actions in countries suffering the effects of illicit trade rather than towards what is conceived as more abstract research. Another reason is because the expertise of funded researchers (who are usually archaeologists) does not extend to include necessary competencies in such things as financial or criminological investigation, compounded by the lack of funding for researchers who do possess the appropriate competencies.

Aside from the Abu Sayyaf receipts, it has proved difficult to provide reliable assessments of the profitability of the trade inside Syria, though some indicators are available. While Raqqa city was under the control of Daesh, for example, looted Bronze Age cuneiform tablets are reported to have been sold for prices in the range \$20 to \$100 each.²⁹ These prices are similar to those reported from inside Iraq in the early 2000s. It is not known at the present time how many cuneiform tablets were looted in Syria, and from the precedent of Iraq it may be many years before they come to light. But Iraq also shows how large archives of cuneiform tablets numbering 1,000 tablets or more can be recovered from a single looted site and traded internationally. The revenue generated by the sale of such an archive would be significant. If a looted archive numbering 1,000 tablets had been sold in Raqqa for \$50,000, Daesh would have taken \$10,000 as tax.

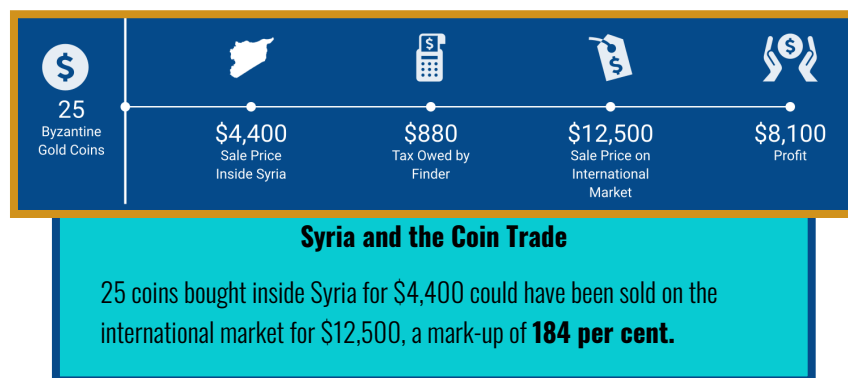
The Trade in Cuneiform Tablets

The Gilgamesh Tablet (Figure 16, below right) was seized in 2019 from the Museum of the Bible after entering the United States illegally and being sold by an international auction house to Hobby Lobby for the museum's collection. The tablet was repatriated to Iraq at a ceremony in 2021 (Figure 15, below left).

This followed the 2018 return of 3,800 ancient artifacts, including cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals, and clay bullae, to Iraq from the United States. These objects had also been smuggled into the United States in violation of federal law and shipped to Hobby Lobby stores.



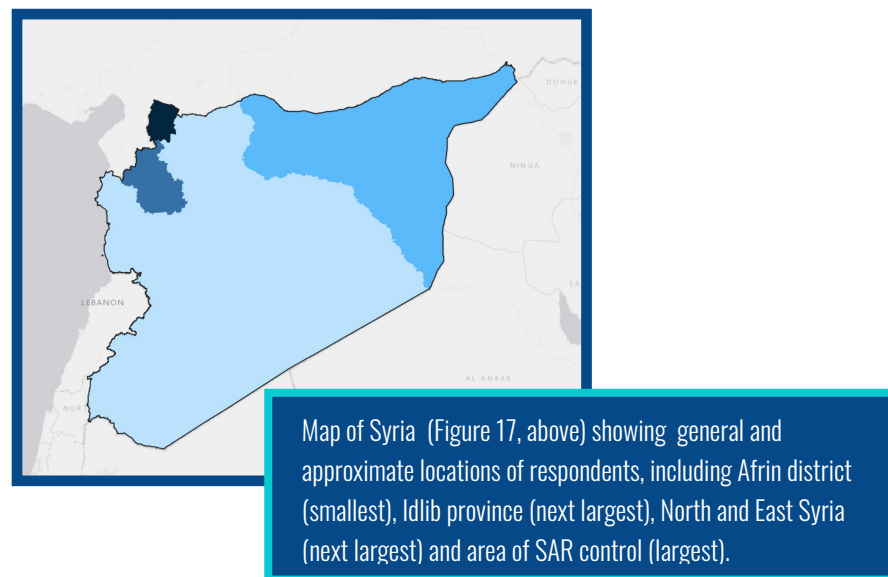
In 2020, it was reported that dealers on the ground in Idlib province would buy looted precious-metal coins for their intrinsic or bullion value.³⁰ The report illustrated 25 Byzantine gold coins that had been advertised on Telegram on November 21, 2018. Gold that day was trading for \$39 per gram, so inside Syria each coin could have been sold for approximately \$176, a total of \$4,400.



The Telegram account was used by members resident in territory controlled by the Salafist Hayat Tahrir as-Sham (HTS). HTS has imposed a 20 per cent tax on antiquities sales and was believed to be monitoring the Telegram account to ensure that tax was paid. Thus, the finder of the 25 gold coins would have needed to pay \$880 tax. The coins look to be seventh century in date, and at the time similar coins were selling on the international market for an average of \$496 each. In fact, one of the photographed coins looks to have been sold on the Catawiki online auction site for \$500.³¹ Thus, the 25 coins bought inside Syria for \$4,400 could have been sold on the international market for \$12,500, a mark-up of 184 per cent. The \$8,100 profit would have been divided between various criminal intermediaries and the dealers making final sales online through open web platforms.

To help assess the effectiveness of implemented countermeasures, for this report, nine archaeologists who have been resident in Syria throughout the conflict were asked for their opinions about when looting was at its worst and if and why they think it has lessened.

One respondent was resident in Afrin district, which has been occupied by Turkey since 2018. Four were resident in the area of northeastern Syria that since the defeat of Daesh in 2017 has been controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Three were resident in Idlib province, which is controlled by the Syrian Salvation Government with the support of HTS. Finally, one respondent was based in the area of Syria under Syrian Arab Republic government control.



Not surprisingly, they expressed mixed opinions, but there were also some consistencies in their reporting. Outside Afrin district, the dates provided for serious looting ranged from early 2011 to late

2018, though most centered around the period 2012–2016, which is broadly in line with what is known from satellite imagery and other monitoring. One respondent (based in Idlib province) reported that looting had declined because of the increasing difficulty of finding sites that have not already been looted and the high-cost of excavating antiquities once the more easily-accessible material has been removed. Another respondent (also based in Idlib province) reported that demand has weakened and that it is now harder to move looted objects across the Turkish border.

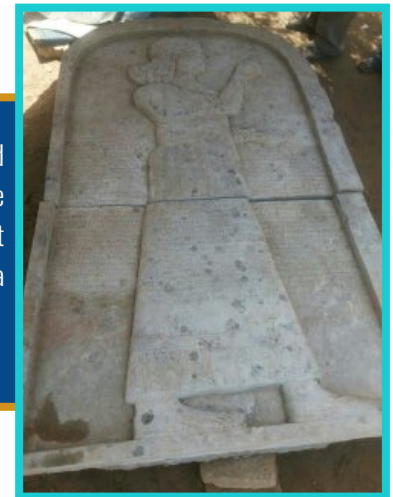
There was near unanimity, however, about the main reason for reduced looting, with seven out of the eight non-Afrin respondents quoting improved security. This is not surprising. Improving security and diminishing conflict are aspects of functional government, whatever its affiliation. General employment improves, reducing the financial incentive to loot, along with the possibility of outside investment to support professional and civil society initiatives aimed at diminishing illicit trade.

Three out of the eight non-Afrin respondents commented on the increased looting in Afrin. The Afrin respondent reported that bulldozers and mechanical diggers have replaced pickaxes and spades and that looters are quick to take advantage of sites turned over by aerial or artillery bombardment. The Afrin respondent's testimony confirms media reports of armed opposition militias looting archaeological sites under cover of the Turkish occupation.

Very little was done internationally to suppress the illicit trade in Syrian cultural objects before 2011. Attention was focused elsewhere on countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. The trade networks that developed then provided a skeletal organization that developed to support the rapid and massive increase in illicit trade after 2011. International actions implemented between 2013 to 2015 arrived

too late to prevent earlier looting and illicit trade and had little or no discernible effect on the looting and illicit trade that followed under Daesh, or since then. The most effective deterrent to looting and illicit trade has been—quite simply and obviously—peace, though achieving peace is something beyond the mandate or competence of international organizations charged with protecting cultural heritage. Nevertheless, it emphasizes that for maximum effect any policies and actions aimed at preventing illicit trade must be implemented globally prior to any conflict that might occur, wherever it might occur. The illicit trade is “always with us,” able to take advantage of any weakening of governance or civil society such as that seen in Syria since 2011. If effective action had been taken globally against the illicit trade in cultural objects prior to 2011, its consequences for Syria would not have been so damaging after 2011.

One respondent (based in Idlib province) reported that looting had declined because of the increasing difficulty of finding sites that have not already been looted. Figure 18, right, shows a looted object from Mari (Deir Ez-Zour Province).



Post-conflict, the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) which is the official government organization tasked with protecting cultural heritage, will need to work alongside Syrian NGOs and other civil society organizations and heritage authorities

in restoring peacetime protective measures aimed at preventing looting and illicit trade and promoting Syrian cultural heritage as a resource for reconstruction and reconciliation. Unfortunately, they face intimidating obstructions. They are hindered in their work by lack of international recognition and support. Many intergovernmental organizations are only mandated to work with the DGAM, which is itself restricted in operation to areas of Syrian Arab Republic government control. Across the country, there are problems of collaboration. The present political division of Syria into several autonomous governmental areas prevents coordinated action at a national level. Within a single area there is sometimes duplication of effort and an absence of cooperation as different organizations compete to attract scarce financing. Even when foreign funding is available, financial sanctions enacted against Syria by the international community make it difficult for the funding to reach the communities and organizations inside Syria where it is needed most.

Lessons Learned

Pre-conflict. Global prevention: International policy and actions need to focus globally on suppressing illicit trade, so that any conflict, wherever or whenever it occurs, will not be accompanied by widespread theft and looting of cultural objects.

Post-conflict. Local reconstruction: International policy and actions need to focus locally on restoring the professional capacity of official organizations and engaging civil society as part of the broader strategy of reinstating peacetime standards of cultural heritage protection and engagement.

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Figure 1: The G20 Cultural Ministerial in Rome. *Image courtesy of [g20.org](https://www.g20.org).*

Figure 2: Gaurds patrol a site in Myanmar targeted by looters during COVID-19. Image courtesy of [AFP](#).

Figure 3: The Gilded Coffin of Nedjemankh. Image courtesy of [Manhattan DA Office](#).

Figure 4: Cylinder seal from Tell Ajaja, Syria. Image courtesy of Heritage for Peace.

Figure 5: Notorious Antiquities Trafficker Douglas Latchford. Image courtesy of the [Guardian Design](#).

Figure 6: How Daesh Turns Illicit Digs Into Dollars. <https://theantiquitiescoalition.org/how-daesh-turns-illicit-digs-into-dollars/>.

Figure 7: A member of the Carabinieri Cultural Heritage Protection Command. Image courtesy of the [Italian Ministry of Culture](#).

Figure 8: A press release from the National Museum of Afghanistan. Image courtesy of Facebook.

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Figure 16: A close-up of the Gilgamesh tablet. Image courtesy of [ICE](#).

Figure 17: Map created using ArcGIS.

Figure 18: Looted object from Mari. Image courtesy of Heritage for Peace.

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³⁰ Olivier Moos, *Antiquities Trafficking in Syria* (Fribourg: Religioscope, 2020), https://www.religioscope.org/cahiers/2020_02_Moos_Antiquities_Syria.pdf.

³¹ Neil Brodie, Market of Mass Destruction blog, "Byzantine coins and the price of gold," last modified September 16, 2020, <https://marketmassdestruction.com/byzantine-coins-and-the-price-of-gold/>.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

About the Antiquities Coalition

To protect our shared heritage and global security, the Antiquities Coalition is leading the international campaign against cultural racketeering, the illicit trade in ancient art and artifacts. We champion better law and policy, foster diplomatic cooperation, and advance proven solutions with public and private partners worldwide. We are working toward a future when the past is preserved for the next generation, not looted, smuggled, and sold to finance crime, conflict, and terror.

theantiquitiescoalition.org

About Heritage for Peace

Heritage for Peace (Syria) is an NGO whose mission is to support heritage workers as they protect their collections, monuments and sites during armed conflict. As an international group of heritage workers we believe that cultural heritage, and the protection thereof, can be used as a common ground for dialogue and therefore as a tool to enhance peace. Currently our efforts are focused on Syria, where the ongoing conflict has damaged World Heritage sites, threatened museums, bombed libraries, and led to an epidemic of looting of cultural artefacts. Heritage for Peace is impartial in the conflict; our programs are focused on training heritage professionals and other interested parties to deal with the unique challenges of protecting cultural collections, monuments and sites during armed conflict, and on educating all military forces on their obligation to protect Syria's precious cultural heritage under international law.

<https://www.heritageforpeace.org/>