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## LAW, CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Is looting-to-order “just a myth”? Open-source analysis of theft-to-order of cultural property

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**Abstract:** Looting-to-order or theft-to-order of cultural assets has been widely dismissed as a myth. To test that, an open-source analysis of cases and testimony from law enforcement agents, perpetrators of cultural property crime and cultural heritage professionals was conducted. Web searches were conducted for reports that addressed looting, stealing or theft of cultural property on commission or to order; for material that discussed looters, robbers or thieves who had been contracted, employed, hired or paid to extract antiquities; and for academic publications that discussed “looting to order”, “theft to order” or any commodity “stolen to order”. Source-end employment/contracting that did not demonstrate a direct connection to market-end purchase and other cases that might have constituted “stealing to offer” were excluded, as were implicit and complicit orders that did not establish a contractual relationship. The analysis found historic and global evidence of commissioned theft of cultural property. It also found evidence that theft-to-order was a significant problem in some places and had served as a structure for conflict antiquities trading in Argentina, Cambodia and Syria. Since it is an exceptionally challenging form of an already difficult-to-police crime, the evidence of theft-to-order reinforces demands for increased market regulation through export and import licensing.

**Subjects:** Cybercrime; Heritage; Organized Crime; Technologies of Research

**Keywords:** conflict antiquities trade; cybercrime; illicit antiquities trade; open-source analysis; organized crime; property crime; theft-to-order

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samuel Andrew Hardy has researched the ethics, politics and law of cultural heritage labour in crisis and conflict. He now researches the trade in conflict antiquities, the destruction of cultural property and propaganda in Cyprus, Syria and elsewhere. He blogs his research on Conflict Antiquities: <https://conflictantiquities.wordpress.com>

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Theft-to-order is an established part of illicit trading in many commodities, but looting-to-order of cultural property has been widely dismissed as a myth. From Mexico to Iraq to China, I have found that hi-tech is now basic tech in antiquities crime, which eases market-end commissioning of theft. Cybercrime—direct, private, online trading, using WhatsApp and Bitcoin—eases international and intercontinental operations.

Systematically reviewing publicly-accessible information, I have found looting-to-order in 43 countries, which span South America, North America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia. Particularly importantly, regarding illicit trading that finances armed groups and repressive regimes, there is evidence of theft-to-order in the supply of conflict antiquities from Argentina, Syria and Cambodia.

## 1. Background

### 1.1. *The Dr. No myth*

Popular interest in criminal masterminds and obsessive art connoisseurs has been traced back to “the Dr. No myth” that was created in 1962, when a recently stolen masterpiece was depicted in the supervillain’s lair (Amore & Mashberg, 2011, p. 7). Yet the idea of a “mad millionaire” or “clandestine collector” was already being dismissed as the “most persistent and most appealing myth in art thievery” in 1968 (Buck, 1968, p. 20), and gentlemen thieves have been enduring characters in popular culture for far longer, featuring in such films as *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *The Missing Rembrandt* (1932) and *Raffles* (1930) and such novels as the last film’s source, *Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman* (1899).

Still, since Dr. No, ingenious art and antiquities heists have featured in blockbusters, B movies, TV series, toy sets, literature, comics and cartoons—*Topkapi* (1964), *the Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1965), *GI Joe* (1971), *MacGyver* (1989), *Hudson Hawk* (1991), *The Simpsons* (1994), *Entrapment* (1999), *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999, rewritten from the 1968 version to incorporate such art theft), *Art Heist* (2004), *White Collar* (2012), *LEGO* (2013), *Trance* (2013), *The Goldfinch* (2013), *Sesame Street* (2015) ...

In reality, police tend to recognize a range of criminal actors from opportunists and entrepreneurs to professionals and organizations (e.g. Nistri, 2011, pp. 185–187). The most common structure of the transnational illicit antiquities trade is that of a market supply chain or network of looters, intermediaries (who work as smugglers, handlers or connectors), dealers and collectors (cf. Brodie, Doole, & Watson, 2000; Campbell, 2013; Ferri, 2014; Mackenzie, 2002; Polk, 2009). Nonetheless, contested questions remain about alternative trade structures, such as theft-to-order. And they have significant contemporary relevance due to claims of supply of conflict antiquities—illicit antiquities that finance armed groups and repressive regimes—from Syria and Iraq through “looting to order” (Farmer, 2015).

Antiquities dealers’ insistence that “theft to order”, or indeed any other form of “big illicit business in freshly harvested antiquities”, is “mainly restricted to the pages of improbable detective novels” (Eisenberg, 2003, p. 2) might be dismissed, as they have an interest in dissociating their sector from serious crime, and antiquities trade lobbyists have been shown to present legal challenges to regulation that are “not based on evidence” (Elkins, 2015, p. 241). Yet academics, cultural property recovery consultants and international police services too have discussed the possibility of theft-to-order in terms of “masterpieces being “stolen to order” for criminal masterminds” (Eisenberg, 2003, p. 2) and understandably dismissed it on that basis.

For example, Clamen (1974), a civil servant at the Ministry of Culture in France who had special responsibility for technical and economic research into cultural property protection, observed that criminals and networks “very often” functioned “on an international scale” (p. 13), but made a point of dismissing any belief in “a powerful organization on an international scale” that stole “to order” for elite collectors (p. 12). He relayed that the police had “never” found proof of any such operation (Clamen, 1974, p. 12).

Like the Dutch police’s Art and Antiques Crime Unit (cf. Preston, 2013), the Founder and Chairman of the Art Loss Register, Julian Radcliffe, insisted that there was “not some criminal sitting in Switzerland with a wonderful collection on his wall”, “criminal masterminds [do] not get masterpieces stolen to order” (quoted and paraphrased by BBC News, 2004).

While the process of acquisition is unclear, it should be noted that there are everyday equivalents to the cinematic myth of connoisseur criminals. When the police raided “Don Tito” Beniamino Gioiello Zappia, who operated between the Bonanno family of New York, the Rizzuto family of Montreal and Cosa Nostra in Sicily, they found millions of dollars’ worth of art and antiquities

(National Post, 2010). When they raided Gioacchino Campolo, who worked for the Ndrangheta, they found more than a hundred artworks, including Dali's *Romeo and Juliet* (McKenna, 2013).

Los Angeles police detective William Martin dismissed the possibility of theft “to order for some mad collector who will hide the art in a castle”, because the buyer would not be able to either find the thief or display their collection (Goldman & Muchnic, 1990). Similarly, with regard to “major art heists”, museum security specialist Cremers (2007) said that a “reclusive collector” who could afford to commission thefts would be robbed or “blackmail[ed]” by their suppliers and would “never be able to show off” their collection.

Then a specialist in the illicit art trade for Interpol, Jean-Pierre Jouanny judged that theft-to-order “looks good in the movies—but does not happen in real life” (cited in BBC, 2004). Like former UK Art and Antiques Squad detective Dick Ellis (cf. *Montreal Gazette*, 2007), another Interpol specialist, Karl-Heinz Kind, stated that he had “never seen such a case”; it was “just a myth” (cited in Spiegler, 2004).

But what about the everyday illicit trade, not only away from truly fantastical masterminds, but also away from exceedingly rare masterpieces? In other words, what about the “vast majority” of cases? (Wittman & Weissmann, 2012) Here, open-source data are sampled and analyzed in order to test empirically whether or not there is significant evidence of looting-to-order and theft-to-order as a criminal structure in the illicit trade in cultural property.

### **1.2. An unknown quantity**

Research suggests that the trade structure is not a significant problem in some places. Criminologists have heard testimony that commissioned theft is one of the practices of art crime in Australia (Aarons, Chappell, & Polk, 1998, p. 6), but there is “little evidence” that it is a significant one (Polk, Aarons, Alder, & Chappell, 2000, p. 12). And a former Commander of the Carabinieri Headquarters for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, General Nistri (2011), judges that “theft ‘on commission’” is “very limited, niche type of crime” in Italy (p. 187). However, in general, there are such poor data that it is impossible to calculate the scale of any structure within the illicit antiquities trade, though it is averred that there is so little evidence of theft on commission that it cannot even be recognized as a niche crime.

Plus, private databases of stolen art are incomplete by nature; some states lack any database and keep only piecemeal records (cf. Soudijn & Tjihuis, 2003, p. 29); inconsistencies in national police record-keeping make it “unlikely that there will ever be any accurate statistics” (Interpol, n.d.); terms such as “antiquities” and “artworks” are used “interchangeably” by the art and antiquities trade (e.g. Mouloupoulos, 2000, p. 391, n. 1); private databases sometimes have information that police databases do not (Boasberg, 1994); and private databases sometimes withhold information in order “to extract a fee” from victims (Taylor & Manly, 2013, p. A1; see also Flynn, 2014). No number can include the uncataloged artefacts that are stolen from archaeological sites and stores. So the total scale of the illicit trade will be far larger than the documented scale.

Compounding the challenges to analysis, most crimes remain unsolved. Although it has been claimed that up to 90% of the most exceptional works of art are recovered after their theft (according to the Founder of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Art Crime Team, Robert Wittman, cited in Ibrahim, 2012), it has also been claimed that merely more than 20% of exceptional works of art are recovered within thirty years of their theft (according to the Founder and Chairman of the Art Loss Register, Julian Radcliffe, cited in BBC News, 2004). Perhaps just 15% (according to Julian Radcliffe, cited in Sooke, 2013), 10% (according to a past Manager of the Art Theft Program at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Lynne Chaffinch, cited in Spiegler, 2004) or “below 10 percent” of artworks in general are recovered (according to the present Manager of the Art Theft Program at the FBI, Bonnie Magness-Gardiner, cited in Rovzar, 2015). It has also been claimed by the FBI that about 10% of cases are solved (Braiker, 2005), though the Manager of its Art Theft Program has said that—in comparison with less than ten per cent recovery rate—it is “pretty rare” to solve cases (Bonnie

Magness-Gardiner, cited in Rovzar, 2015). Hence, these estimates are difficult to use in and of themselves, when “no-one knows how many” artworks are stolen in order to be able to calculate success rates (Naylor, 2008, p. 289), particularly so when an inordinate number of such estimates—sometimes contradictory ones—cluster around 10% (or the converse 90%).

Moreover, works of art are the least difficult kind of cultural property to trace and identify. In India, while there were around 3,000 reported thefts of antiquities in three years (1977–1979), “only ten cases were solved” (Greenfield, 1996, p. 208). Furthermore, in the investigation of an already low-risk crime, the most commonly exposed are the incompetent and powerless, and the most difficult to expose are “the illicit antiquities dealers”—and collectors—“who hire looters, request specific items, and pick sites to be pillaged” (Gruber, 2014, p. 225).

It should also be noted that collectors may also be dealers, or become dealers if there is a sufficiently tempting rise in market value (Naylor, 2008, p. 290), so something that was acquired for possession by order may be found when it is (being) sold and the structure of the original crime may be misidentified.

Thus, even if 10% of the United States’ reported art thefts *are* solved, and if only 0.33% of India’s reported antiquities thefts are solved, wherein most of the solved cases concern amateurish criminals who cannot access protection through corruption, commissioned thefts necessarily constitute an unknown quantity amongst the 90 or 99.67% of cases that remain unsolved.

As discussions of the mechanics of the illicit trade(s) in fine art and historic objects appear to be significantly influenced by debates over the mechanics of the illicit trade in artistic masterpieces, it should be borne in mind that: looted antiquities cannot *generally* be recognized in the same way as artistic masterpieces, so there is no similar obstacle to more public sale; looted antiquities cannot *generally* be “ransomed back” to the original owner, so ransom rarely exists as a business model; and the comparatively uncertain and labour-intensive nature of any looting enterprise very strongly suggests that illicit excavations are not conducted by ignorant opportunists who do not know buyers for what they have stolen, even if those buyers are merely source-end dealers. Hence, there are not the same theoretical obstacles to believing in the existence of commissioned looting of antiquities from archaeological sites and historic buildings and theft of antiquities from museums, galleries and collections that there are to believing in the existence of commissioned theft of artworks from museums, galleries and collections.

Furthermore, it should be noted that looting-to-order/theft-to-order has advantages as a business model. For example, it minimizes the time for which thieves possess illicit goods; it reduces the frequency with which thefts must be committed to achieve the same profit; and it reduces the number of criminals who may be turned by the police and potential witnesses to stages in the supply process.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Data collection

Previous analyses of the market, reflections by practitioners and reviews of art (crime) history have generally only been able to identify an insignificantly small number of cases. Lawyer and criminologist Tjihuis (2006) judged “the theft of works of art ordered by collectors” to be a myth with “no (or a rather small) empirical base” (p. 117, n. 83). A former UK Metropolitan Police Service detective for arts and antiques, Charles Hill, recognized that even “famous artworks are occasionally stolen on commission” (paraphrased by Caesar, 2013, p. MM28). No scientific basis for comparison can be established when estimates vary by orders of magnitude, but art crime historian Charney (2014) found that “perhaps two dozen such cases” of commissioned cultural property thefts had ever been “confirmed” (p. 194), whereas, depending on which legal review is consulted, either “tens of thousands” (Bloom, 2000, p. 283) or “hundreds of thousands” (Phelan, 2000, p. 660) of artworks are stolen every year (cf. Tucker, 2011, pp. 611–613).

Moreover, previous investigations into the phenomenon have been stymied by theoretical and technical obstacles to study. For instance, archaeologists' records have not been identified in criminologists' research. This is partly due to a wider problem, where criminal operations have been described inconsistently in popular, professional and academic literature. And sources—and the knowledge of the existence of sources—have been unobtainable, because they have not been in libraries, have not been online or have not been machine-readable. All such factors have combined to create an impression of a lack of evidence. Greatly broadening and deepening the evidence base, then, this research has systematically sampled and analyzed journalistic and professional as well as academic records, which was not possible when the consensus was being established or when the frequency of the crime was being assessed.

Initially, around 6 June 2014, focused Google searches were conducted for material that mentioned:

“loot \* order”,  
“looted \* order”,  
“looting \* order”,  
“order \* loot”,  
“order \* steal”,  
“order \* theft”,  
“ordered \* loot”,  
“ordered \* looting”,  
“ordered \* steal”,  
“ordered \* theft”,  
“steal \* order”,  
“stole \* order”,  
“stolen \* order”,  
“theft \* order” or  
“to order” and “antiquities”.

Reports and reviews that presented evidence of such activity and that rejected such interpretations of the evidence were collected. They included later articles that showed earlier articles to have presented mistaken conclusions, whereupon the mistaken articles were excluded. Selections were made to display the kinds of evidence that convinced investigators of the commission of looting or theft-to-order, as well as the geographical and chronological range of convincing cases of such crimes.

When it was not clear whether looting had been commissioned by collectors or dealers, committed by looters to supply a personal list of market-end clients or to offer to anyone, it was discounted. For example, Syrian rebel and looter-smuggler Abu Abd al-Tedmuri had made business contacts before the civil war through work in the local art trade, then participated in the looting of Palmyra when it was under the control of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), but it was only known that he had sold antiquities “directly [to] a private buyer in Germany” and to “foreign collectors and [local] merchants” in Turkey (Soguel, 2014), so his case was excluded.

The Old Summer Palace in Beijing was looted by British and French forces in 1860 and the Forbidden City there was looted by American, Austro-Hungarian, British and British colonial Indian, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Russian soldiers, diplomats, missionaries and others in 1900, wherein the Forbidden City was plundered so thoroughly that the British immediately sold a lot of their illicit assets through “daily auctions of looted goods” in their occupied territory (Silbey, 2012, p. 218). Between 2010 and 2015, the objects of those acts of plunder have been stolen from museums in Sweden, Norway, the UK and France; and, according to British art dealer Paul Harris, the robberies

are suspected to have been “ordered” (cited in Meyer, 2015, p. SR4); but the business arrangements behind the robberies are unknown, so those cases have been excluded too.

The author continued monitoring news for relevant information.

Subsequently, around 26 December 2014, focused Google searches were conducted for material that mentioned:

“contracted looter” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* looter” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted looters” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* looters” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted thief” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* thief” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“contracted \* tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed looter” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* looter” and “antiquities”,  
“employed looters” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* looters” and “antiquities”,  
“employed robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed thief” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* thief” and “antiquities”,  
“employed thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“employed grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“employed tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“employed \* tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired looter” and “antiquities”,

“hired \* looter” and “antiquities”,  
“hired looters” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* looters” and “antiquities”,  
“hired robber” and “antiquities”  
“hired \* robber” and “antiquities”,  
“hired robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired thief” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* thief” and “antiquities”,  
“hired thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“hired grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“hired grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“hired tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“hired \* tomb robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“paid looter” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* looter” and “antiquities”,  
“paid looters” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* looters” and “antiquities”,  
“paid robber” and “antiquities”  
“paid \* robber” and “antiquities”,  
“paid robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“paid thief” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* thief” and “antiquities”,  
“paid thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* thieves” and “antiquities”,  
“paid grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* grave robber” and “antiquities”,  
“paid grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* grave robbers” and “antiquities”,  
“paid tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“paid \* tomb robber” and “antiquities”,  
“paid tomb robbers” and “antiquities” or  
“paid \* tomb robbers” and “antiquities”.

On 11 January 2015, Google Scholar searches were conducted for academic publications that discussed:

“looting to order”,  
“theft to order” or  
any commodity “stolen to order”.

## 2.2. Data exclusion

While some of the resultant evidence was not English-language (e.g. Hollender, 2006, which used keywords in its English-language abstract), while such evidence provided native translations of key words and phrases (e.g. “Diebstahl auf Bestellung” for “theft to order” in German) and the author knew other-language translations as well (e.g. “vol sur commande”, “klopi kata paraggelia [κλοπή κατά παραγγελία]” and “sipariş üzerine hırsızlık” for “theft to order” in French, Greek and Turkish, respectively), and while some of the searches could easily have been repeated in some other languages, in order to produce a manageable and consistent sample, the foundational material was gathered through systematic searches for English-language material.

One of the obstacles to studying this phenomenon is the accurate but nonetheless generic use of “theft to order” to encompass orders from dealers as well as collectors. So, here, “theft to order” will refer to collector-directed robberies. For want of a better term, “predictive theft to order” will refer to dealer-directed robberies, where the dealer orders material that they believe they will be able to sell to one of a select clientele. For example, Chinese jade and porcelain were stolen from the Oriental Museum at Durham University for a dealer who had “already identified a potential market” (Durham Police Detective Superintendent Adrian Green, cited in ITV Central News, 2012).

As theft-to-order for a *collector* is distinct from theft-to-order for a *dealer*, so stealing-to-order for a dealer is distinct from “stealing-to-offer” to dealers (Sutton, Schneider, & Hetherington, 2001, p. 3), who may take the form of ostensibly legal commercial enterprises as well as obviously illegal fences.

Some looting of cemeteries and other archaeological sites in Egypt, for example, is managed by state-intertwined, internationally connected “land mafia[s]”, which occupy and mine sites (Hanna, 2014). And some is managed by “big m[e]n ... who send ... children to go dig” up sites, then buy “whatever they bring” back (Hanna, cited by Mashberg, 2014b). Nevertheless, while some of those land mafias may have “direct channels to middle men in [markets such as] the United States” (Hanna, paraphrased by Tompa, 2014), and while some of them will sell to collectors in Egypt (Trew, 2014), others will sell their finds to smuggler-dealers who will sell those finds on to dealers in the West (Trew, 2014). On the precautionary principle, they must be *assumed* to be operations that simply steal-to-offer to middlemen.

Just as commissions for thefts should not be presumed, source-end business structures should not be over-interpreted. While the big men’s child labourers are *technically* looting-to-order for dealers in Egypt, their arrangement *effectively* forms a single stage in the process—as does the direct employment of looters by local dealers, which is the most common arrangement in Belize (cf. Pendergast, 1991, p. 90), and which has also been attested in Belgium (Tijhuis, 2011, pp. 92–94)—and the dealers must be assumed to buy-to-offer to (other) middlemen. Since this study tested evidence for market-end direction of source-end crimes through extraction for either collectors or dealers who directly supply collectors, including *all* source-end employment/contracting of looters/thieves would have distorted the findings.

Thus, operations that might well have conducted theft-to-offer to intermediaries were excluded. Similarly, implicit or complicit orders—such as an antiquities dealer’s notification for thieves of thefts that “they could commit” (Clamen, 1974, p. 12) or an auction house’s “good news” for the community around the Ancient Tombs at Reshui in China, which led to looting by more than a thousand villagers (He, 2001, pp. 20–21)—were excluded.

More fundamentally, the sceptics are right to be sceptical because expert interpretations of unsolved crimes as commissioned thefts often turn out to be wrong. One incompetent armed robber got away with a suspected theft-to-order (Macaskill, 1999), only to be caught “when he booked a conference room at a hotel to sell the paintings” (BBC News, 2000). The 1955 theft of silver figurines from Brooklyn Museum—a “perfect crime” according to the New York Police Department—turned

out to be the acquisition of toys by 14-year-old boys (Amore & Mashberg, 2011, p. 10). The thief of millions of dollars' worth of old masters' paintings from Dulwich Picture Gallery was a local "unemployed ambulance driver with 10 previous convictions" for petty crime (Buck, 1968, p. 20; see also McLeave, 2003, p. 85).

Evidence can be difficult to interpret. In a seeming echo of the looting of the National Museum of Iraq in 2003, the much smaller Mallawi Museum in Egypt was much more comprehensively looted on 14 August 2013. While law enforcement officials and civilians were devoted to or distracted by clashes between police forces and Islamists over the expulsion of sit-in protests from Rabia al-Adawiya Square and Nahda Square, the museum was broken into by "armed Islamist groups" (Ali, 2013) and almost all of its artefacts were removed.

Whether they were conscientious locals who had temporarily rehoused the material before it could be pillaged, or opportunistic thieves who had realized the error of their ways (or at least their plans for the disposal of their hauls), most of the artefacts were soon recovered from local families (Ali, 2013; Hussein, 2014). While "hundreds of fine pieces ... ha[d] still not been recovered", including a more-than-three-thousand-year-old limestone figurine of a Daughter of the Pharaoh Akhenaten, it was suspected that they had been "stolen to order" (Spencer, 2013).

Yet now nearly all of the collection has been recovered (Mostafa, 2014), obviously including some of those fine pieces that had been thought to be targets of the order (cf. Shaw, 2013). Museums and other cultural facilities were attacked across the country (cf. Ali, 2013). And many valuable antiquities, which professionals could have extracted, were destroyed rather than looted "to express [the attackers'] opposition to the government" with which the antiquities were associated (Hanna, 2014). So, while the finest goods may have been stolen to order, that could not be assumed, and this case was from the evidence.

Furthermore, sources can be contradictory or confusing. Reports varied as to whether a theft of seven paintings from the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts had happened in 1983 and "some" of the paintings had been recovered in a "sack pulled from the Danube River" (Canellos, 1990), or whether it happened in 1983 and all of the paintings had been recovered before exported (Goldman & Muchnic, 1990), whereas it happened in 1984, just the frame of one painting had been dumped in the river, one painting had been buried and the other six paintings were eventually abandoned in a suitcase on the premises of a monastery in Greece (Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2012); nonetheless, the Italian gang had been "commissioned" by a Greek businessman for his private collection (Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2012).

*Estado de Sao Paulo* reported that a theft of paintings by Picasso and Portinari from the Sao Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) in Brazil was an attempt to extort money from the museum by ransoming its property (Phillips, 2008); yet, while stating that "an evil connoisseurs' black market" was "largely a myth", *the New York Times'* Kennedy (2008) noted that a suspect in this case had "told the authorities that the works were to be delivered to a collector in Saudi Arabia" (see also Caesar, 2013, p. MM28).

The theft of the Codex Calixtinus was suspected to be an "inside job" that had been "commissioned by an international art collector" (Kassam, 2015), but was the act of José Manuel Fernández Castiñeiras, a disgruntled *former* employee who was an obsessive thief with an "almost physiological need for treasure [una necesidad casi fisiológica por atesorar]" (Pontevedra, 2012).

This study excludes suspected cases and draws on solved cases, perpetrator testimony, eyewitness testimony, forensic evidence and analyses of such data by law enforcement agents, cultural heritage professionals and academics.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. South America

In Peru, looter-collector Enrico Poli “bought directly from looters ... sponsored looters” (Atwood, 2006, p. 47). According to investigative journalist Atwood (2006), alongside “perhaps fifty” other such operations in the Ica Valley alone (p. 240), “Gloria” manages “loose gangs of looters” (p. 239), who are paid for their finds, and occasionally supplies “specific requests” (p. 239), “advance orders” from collectors as far away as Europe (p. 240). In 1995, a textile mantle was “stolen to order” from the National Museum in Lima (Alva, 2001, p. 94). In Brazil, a suspect confessed that paintings by Picasso and Portinari had been stolen from the MASP for “a collector in Saudi Arabia” (Kennedy, 2008).

Archaeologist Schávelzon (2002, p. 234) stated that “an important proportion” of Argentina’s museum “thefts was made ‘to order’”. In 1980, art was “stolen to order” from the Buenos Aires National Museum of Fine Arts by one of the dictatorship’s paramilitary units (Schávelzon, 2002, p. 228); the junta licensed the theft as payment-in-kind for kidnappings and disappearances. In another case, FBI Inspector Margot Kennedy quoted an arrested Argentinian police officer: “I can take out of Argentina whatever painting you want, from whichever museum you fancy; we have an organization that works like a clock” (Schávelzon, 2002, p. 229).

#### 3.2. North America

##### 3.2.1. Central America

Some “collectors and dealers are very well known among the local looters” in Guatemala, whose activities they direct (Paredes, 2000). One armed gang stole antiquities from churches “on commission [por encargo]” (Melini, 2015).

Anthropological archaeologist Luke (2005) analyzed further evidence that “exposed” the existence of “an ‘order’ market” in Central American antiquities. After the publication of photographs of the royal graves at Copan in Honduras (Stuart, 1997), the site was looted (Agurcia Fasquelle, 1998) in a way that indicated collectors had effectively used *National Geographic* as a sales catalogue. Likewise, a hieroglyphic text and carving of a bound captive were extracted from one 1,300-year-old stela, and a single sceptre was extracted from another such stela, at Dos Pilas (Luke, 2005). Without perpetrators’ use of publicly accessible documents to identify the targets, the fact that these thefts were commissioned would have remained unknown.

##### 3.2.2. North America

In central Mexico, archaeologist Enrique Nalda (2002, p. 214) relayed elderly villagers’ testimony that they had previously been “hire[d]” to loot sites or had raided tombs when “someone ... had promised to buy what was found”.

In a case of abortive theft-to-order and failed predictive theft-to-order, around 1968, looters alerted their dealer Everett Rassiga (who has elsewhere been pseudonymised as “Henry Beta”) to the existence of a Maya stucco temple in Placeres. Rassiga presented photographs and offered to loot the façade for collector Josué Sáenz, but he declined. Then, a group of investors funded and oversaw its removal, and managed its illicit transport from Mexico to the United States, in expectation of its sale to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other buyers. However, the Met received internal objections and private warnings, so the material was returned to Mexico instead (Freidel, 2000; Meyer, 1973, pp. 22–26; Yates, 2014).

More recently, in remote eastern Mexico, “teams” have “camp[ed] for extended periods” around sites in order to loot them, “directed by” archaeologist-informed, armed and hi-tech-equipped smuggler-dealers who supply boutique collectors (Nalda, 2002, p. 217). More recently still, an American antiquities dealer has “paid” Tarahumara tribe members “to loot artifacts from burial

caves” in north-west Mexico, thence to sell them through an inconspicuous local gallery in the north-western United States (United States Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2012).

In a case that was contained within the United States, around 1975, a high-end antiques dealer in Arizona—who turned out to be immune from prosecution—hired two looters to strip the saleable assets from a Mimbres ruin in New Mexico (Fowler & Malinky, 2006, p. 9).

### 3.2.3. *Even intercontinental crime can be incompetent*

On the 8 of October 1974, a Renaissance painting of the Last Communion of Saint Jerome was stolen from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. “Junkies had stolen it on order” for businessmen in Greece, according to Philadelphia police detective Viola (1998a). Distrusting the commissioned thieves, the intercontinental masterminds exposed themselves by asking a newspaper why it had not reported the crime before the museum realized that it had happened (Viola, 1998b). Looking back on decades in law enforcement, through which he had become a police chief, Viola (1998a) judged that “[t]his type of theft [was] not uncommon”.

## 3.3. Europe

### 3.3.1. *Northern Europe*

A study of cultural heritage crime in the Nordic region processed questionnaires from 2,111 cultural heritage professionals and antiques trade participants, and 150 interviews with representatives of those groups as well as law enforcement officials and criminals, in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. One of their findings was that underwater treasure hunters who worked “on commission” or performed “other types of sponsored plundering” were few in number but significant in the harm that they caused (Korsell, Hedlund, Elwér, Vesterhav, & Heber, 2006, p. 38). A cultural property criminologist observed that some robberies of churches in northern Europe were commissioned by collectors of Christian art and antiques in Eastern Europe (Korsell et al., 2006, p. 84).

Throughout the study, commissioned theft was discussed as not *the* but still *a* standard practice. A convicted cultural property criminal judged that theft-to-order was “fairly common” (Korsell et al., 2006, p. 73). One police officer cited the example of an antiques dealer from South America who guided his hired hand and identified the “sculptures and [other] antiques” on location, before the commissioned thief stole the targets and prepared to ship them back home (Korsell et al., 2006, p. 64). A group of police officers detailed a case where a mastermind had researched and planned a string of hits on churches, then dispatched a team of thieves with “written and illustrated” instructions (Korsell et al., 2006, p. 64).

### 3.3.2. *Western Europe*

In France, “Spiderman” Vrejan T. stole a Léger painting from the Musée d’Art Moderne “to order” for antiques dealer Jean-Michel C. (Samuel, 2011), while in the UK, Peter Joseph Bellwood and Melvin Nelson Perry stole historic documents “to order for collectors across the world ... or dealers who [did] not ask too many questions” (Morris, 2003; see also Honigsbaum, 2003). In northern England, one very small-scale operation comprised the theft to order of a barometer from a local museum, by a shoplifter who had been convicted ninety times before, for £200, though it was worth £150,000 (*The Telegraph*, 2009), while a far larger “predictive” supply operation was conducted by a gang who stole cultural goods from private properties and sold them to personally identified collectors (Liptrot, 2013). In Northern Ireland, an armed gang tied and beat a retired vicar, then ransacked his home as an art expert directed their theft of millions of pounds’ worth of paintings via smartphone (*The Irish Daily Mirror*, 2012).

### 3.3.3. *Central Europe*

During the Cold War, historic manuscript thief Joachim Krüger produced catalogues of accessible material for potential buyers, then “work[ed] ‘to order’ [arbeitete ‘auf Bestellung]” (Hollender, 2006). At the end of the Cold War, Detective Chief Inspector Jürgen Wylenga observed that antiques

thieves in eastern Germany arranged dealer-buyers in the Netherlands, then stole “to order and deadline [auf Bestellung und Termin]” (cited in *Der Spiegel*, 1991).

In 1984, the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts was robbed by an Italian gang who had been “commissioned” by a Greek businessman to steal seven paintings for his private collection (Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2012). In recent years, a Hungarian gang—who “usually stole to order” (Europol, 2014)—extracted millions of Euros’ worth of maps from institutions in Belgium and France in Western Europe and Italy, Portugal and Spain in Southern Europe as well as Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Switzerland (Europol, 2014).

Police inspectors Marcin Goch and Mirosław Karpowicz have reported that cultural property burglars “often” perform “commissioned theft[s] (theft[s] to order)” in Poland (Goch & Karpowicz, 2011, p. 80). In 2009, from Sweden, current or former neo-Nazi Anders Högström directed the theft of Auschwitz death camp’s notorious sign, “Arbeit macht frei [work liberates]”; showing the low level of the gross crime, at least two of mastermind Högström’s five accomplices had previously done “odd jobs on his family estate” (Paterson, 2010).

#### 3.3.4. Southern Europe

During the civil war in Cyprus, one or more collectors “contract[ed] groups of looters” to mine specific archaeological sites for their private collections (Hadjisavvas, 2001, p. 135). But, based on data from the Carabinieri Headquarters for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale), “[t]heft to order” is one of the crimes that “characterize[s]” the illicit market for cultural property in Italy (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation, 2011, p. 15). In 1969, Cosa Nostra heroin processor-trafficker Francesco Marino Mannoia personally fulfilled the order for Caravaggio’s Nativity with Saint Peter and Saint Lawrence (Harris, 2009).

Carabinieri Marshal Sergio Banchellini revealed that looters in Puglia pillaged Greco-Roman archaeological sites “to order” and sold the desired finds through an intermediary to clients in Milan (paraphrased by Reuters, 2002). Despite the idea being used to ridicule the possibility of theft-to-order (e.g. BBC News, 2004), “some pieces were found on display in people’s homes, rather than being hidden away” as might be expected (paraphrased by Reuters, 2002).

Gianfranco Becchina “employ[ed] tomb robbers full-time and [bought] all they unearthed” (Watson & Todeschini, 2006, p. 292), then sold the antiquities to collectors and museums through Sotheby’s and Christie’s auction houses in the UK and Tosca Fujita’s and Noriyoshi Horiuchi’s dealerships in Japan.

#### 3.3.5. Eastern Europe

Russian Interior Ministry investigator Colonel Alexei Bykovtsev has explained that there are more than 40 gangs from the former Soviet Union, which “have escape and sale venues ready, and the thefts often come on order” (Shargorodsky, 1999; see also Russian Criminal Police Chief Vladimir Gordyenko, cited in BBC News, 2002). They have been specifically identified as working in Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Commonly, émigrés in market countries take and deliver orders, which are supplied by unemployed cultural heritage workers back home in source countries. Otherwise, they raid private collectors’ houses in the market countries (ANSA, 2012).

### 3.4. Asia

#### 3.4.1. West Asia (the Middle East)

In the mid-twentieth century, American antiquities dealer Arthur Upham Pope “commissioned thefts from Islamic shrines” in Iran (Muscarella, 2013, p. 849).

A Dutch defence advisor on cultural property protection, Kila (2010), has observed that antiquities looting in conflict zones is “often commissioned”—and “often” performed by armed groups (p. 97). According to the Director General of Antiquities and Heritage in Iraq, Muayad Damerji, under the regimented control of the Ba’athist regime and United Nations sanctions, the head of a statue in the palace of Dur-Sharrukhin at Khorsabad was “likely ... stolen ‘to order’” (paraphrased by the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre, Illicit Antiquities Research Centre, 1997, p. 23).

Likewise, there is evidence that, in the pillage following the United States-led invasion of 2003, an international gang raided both the National Museum in Baghdad and Mosul Museum (Mosul Museum director Bernadette Hanna-Metti and Mosul Museum curator Saba al-Omari, cited in Atwood, 2003), while looters targeted specific antiquities at Nimrud. Site director Muzahim Mahmud said that the looters “ignored everything else, went right to that frieze” of a winged man carrying a sponge and a holy plant, “and took it” (cited in Atwood, 2006, p. 7); Atwood (2006) judged it to be “customized looting”, the fulfilment of the “orders of a buyer” (p. 7).

These might have been looted to order for dealers, like the 18 statues that were intercepted in Jordan en route to a gallery in France (Doole, 2004, p. 13). Within weeks of the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad, US Customs had intercepted an illicit shipment of 669 of its artefacts to an antiquities dealer in New York (Hunt-Grubbe, 2008). But archaeologist-journalist Farchakh Bajjaly (2008) has interviewed participants in the illicit antiquities trade in Iraq and abroad and has reported that private collectors are “ordering specific objects for their collection[s]” (p. 136).

An Israeli rabbi “order[ed]” Torahs from a Palestinian gang, then sold them to religious communities, making at least tens of thousands of dollars’ profit (Senior, 2011). Though it did not say whether the contractors were collectors or dealers, according to the theft prevention unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority, three Israelis “hired” two Palestinians to conduct illicit excavations for precious metal antiquities (Eisenbud, 2014).

In territory that is predominantly held by the jihadist al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), a fighter-cum-looter, Ahmed, takes orders to loot over Skype (Anjarini, 2014). Yet another in the same territory, former fighter-cum-mafia protector Abdo, has testified that Western operators are being smuggled in and out of Syria by armed groups in order to conduct boutique looting-and-smuggling operations (Anjarini, 2014), the costs and risks of which would be prohibitive if the operators did not already have buyers or at the very least a select clientele amongst whom they would find buyers.

A commissary employee at the US Air Force (USAF) base at İncirlik in Turkey, Sezai Portakalçı, “hired ... looters”, then sold the prospectively looted antiquities to “collectors and galleries”, including to buyers in the US through a reserve USAF major (United States Customs Service, 2000). Reflecting on years of investigations, former Istanbul antiquities police chief, İsmail Şahin stated that, “[i]n many cases, specific orders c[a]me from Europe” (cited in Jones, 2012)—the collector put in an order with the dealer, the dealer put in an order with a gang, the antiquities were stolen and delivered.

### 3.4.2. South Asia

In India, Sanjivi Asokan “hired a group” to steal Hindu icons, sold them through his dealership, and conspired with Subhash Chanda Kapoor to sell them through his dealership in the United States (Srivathsan, 2013). The mastermind of a worldwide antiquities trafficking network, Subhash Kapoor himself “employed a gang of thieves” (Verma, 2014) and “order[ed] the theft[s]” of sculptures from temples for sale to the highest end of the antiquities market (Dingle, 2014), to “collectors and museums around the world” (Mashberg, 2014a), sometimes through his own gallery in the United States, the Art of the Past. The exposure of Kapoor’s empire—which trafficked antiquities from Afghanistan, Cambodia (in South-East Asia), India and Pakistan—involved an international investigation started by Australia-based bioarchaeologist Damien Huffer, carried on by United States-based journalist Jason Felch, India-based blogger Vijay Kumar, Australia-based journalist Michaela Boland and India-based

journalist R. Srivathsan. Illustrating the scale of this single illicit network, the police operation has already recovered more than a hundred million dollars' worth of antiquities (Huck, 2014).

#### 3.4.3. *South-East Asia*

In predictive looter/smuggler-dealer supply chains for Cambodian antiquities, photographs are “sent up the chain saying ‘we have stolen this, would you like to buy it’” and sometimes requests for the theft of certain types of things are sent down the chain (Mackenzie & Davis, 2014, p. 734). Again, it is an enormous business. When he was captured, after he had sold the most valuable pieces, Khmer Rouge Commander Ta Mok still had “more than 20 tons” of antiquities (Sheridan, 1999). And the army has taken up where the regime left off. Whole companies of soldiers plunder and deliver antiquities to order for dealers, from sites such as Banteay Chhmar (Mackenzie, 2005, p. 19; cited in Alder, Chappell, & Polk, 2009, p. 130; see also Doole, 1999, p. 6; Sheridan, 1999).

According to archaeologists who have both worked in both Cambodia and Thailand, at least some antiquities dealerships in Thailand have “catalogs” of architecture at Khmer temples in Cambodia “that can be removed (i.e. looted) to order” (Stark & Griffin, 2004, p. 127). Looting-to-order is “wide-spread”—not only dealers but also “collectors request the artifacts from known temples” or similar things from other sites (Lafont, 2004, p. 38). Potential buyers are informed that, to acquire “any piece that [is] currently in situ”, they simply need to provide a photograph of the piece, whereupon smuggler-dealers will “arrange for it to be looted and delivered ... within a month” (Mackenzie & Davis, 2014, p. 727).

One local sculpture trafficking syndicate “ordered ... theft[s]” of Buddhist statues from temples in Indonesia and supplied collectors, in a business where the looters alone were turning over at least tens of thousands of dollars for each theft (Suherdjoko, 2010).

#### 3.4.4. *East Asia*

In China, some illicit excavations are “commissioned in Hong Kong” (He, 2001, p. 24); while they may order by type or style, it is “normal” for buyers in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan or elsewhere to “place an order” at innocuous front enterprises for antiquities from China and Tibet (Suliang, 2002, p. 89). Collectors “order” museum pieces from catalogues of “photos—even faxes” and entrepreneurial smugglers steal and ship those commissioned pieces (WuDunn, 1992). In 1997, a collector-dealer in Anhui province contracted “people from several provinces” to loot the Mausoleums of the Kings of Zhao State in Hebei province (He, 2001, p. 21). Otherwise, organized crime groups have stolen statues, then sold them to a select clientele through “brochures” (Lo, 2009, p. 23). For example, “Billionaire Hou” Linshan’s hi-tech gang looted antiquities from China and smuggled them to “international collectors” (Platt, 1997).

Further afield, Mongolia’s police have foiled attempts to steal the ancient art of High Saint Zanabazar on “the order of Chinese buyers” (Sergelen, 2014).

### 3.5. *Africa*

#### 3.5.1. *North Africa*

In Egypt, armed gangs “often target specific objects” or sites (Hanna, paraphrased by St. Hilaire, 2014) and “operat[e] with instructions” from foreign paymasters (Ikram, cited by Tresilian, 2014). So at least some looting, for instance at Abu Sir Al-Malaq, is being “commissioned from outside” (Hanna, paraphrased by Tresilian, 2014).

#### 3.5.2. *West Africa*

In 1993, a “consortium of European dealers” employed “many hundreds” of subsistence diggers to strip-mine Nigerian archaeological sites (Bortolot, n.d.). In 1994, two traders “employ[ed]” two thousand diggers to “systematically loot the rest of the Nok culture” (Darling, 2000, p. 18).

In Mali, some “local antiquarian[s]” have “employed” looters (McIntosh, 1996, p. 55; see also Brent, 1996, p. 66). Otherwise, local dealers have hired “[w]hole villages and encampments of immigrant workers” to fulfil their predictive orders for clients who include collectors and museums in Europe and North America (Shyllon, 2011, p. 139).

### 3.5.3. *Southern Africa*

After repeated attempted robberies of a university museum in South Africa, CCTV recorded another attempt, where a team of thieves sought out an object of which they had an image (Benson & Fouché, 2014, p. 22).

## 4. Discussion

It is perhaps unusually difficult to gauge the existence or commonness of commissioned theft of cultural property, because some journalists and documentarians actively seek stories of “fabulously valuable golden treasures stolen to order for a shadowy art collector or drugs baron with the aid of corrupt ... museum curators” (Robson, 2004, p. 364). In-between the “exciting” extremes of myth-making and myth-busting, though, the less “newsworthy” cases concerning the everyday business of illicit antiquities are under-reported or unreported (Kisluk, 1999, p. 2; Korsell et al., 2006, p. 35).

Yet there is voluminous, uncontroversial documentation of theft-to-order of non-cultural goods, including vehicles such as ships and their cargoes (Bornick, 2005; Tiribelli, 2006), cars (Hignett, 2004, p. 75), motorcycles (Robinson, 1996, p. 368) and bicycles (Johnson, Sidebottom, & Thorpe, 2008, p. 6, 14); construction equipment (Mills, Skodbo, & Blyth, 2013, p. 28) and agricultural machinery (Jones & Phipps, 2012, p. 13); livestock (Rutherford, 2012), food products (Schelin, 2004, p. 183n14), wildlife (Naylor, 2002, p. 31), ivory (Naylor, 2005, p. 279) and fossils (Worton, 2005, p. 108); medical equipment (Hall, 2006); and, through cyber crime, commercial data and technological designs (Ablon, Libicki, & Golay, 2014, p. x, 11). While the proportion of thefts that are commissioned may vary from place to place and from commodity to commodity, and while the geographical shortness of the chain from source to market may increase that proportion, a survey of imprisoned burglars in Australia, who had targeted a range of commodities, found that 77% had committed thefts-to-order—31% “most of the time” and 46% “some of the time”—for a range of clients, including end-buyers as well as market-end dealers (Stevenson & Forsythe, 1998, p. 42).

And this research has amassed significant evidence of theft-to-order of cultural goods. Art-collecting Field Marshal President Idi Amin Dada Oumee, the kleptocratic dictator of Uganda (in East Africa) “who commissioned thefts ... through connections in France” (Conklin, 1994, p. 135), may be an exception in every sense. However, cultural heritage workers’ and criminologists’ mirror focus on debunking the public’s anti-heroes and anti-heroines may have distracted them from the existence of less fantastical forms of illicit handling, which led to under-presentation of the evidence, which duly compounded the problems that undermined previous investigations. Such crimes do happen.

As the one-off theft of an insignificant object from a local museum by a habitual—and habitually unsuccessful—criminal demonstrated, collectors and thieves can find each other. Collectors do not need to be the head of Globex Corporation to have the will and the wherewithal to put in an order for cultural objects. All they need is enough money to be able to “hire local populations” to loot and “buy’ local officials” to facilitate trafficking (Paredes, 2000). An antiquities dealer explained the psychology of a collector and one possible structure for the trade: “If a collector wants a particular piece, a collector wants a particular piece.” So, the collector will “employ ... a dealer” to find the piece they want, then the dealer or a chain of intermediaries will acquire and deliver it (Melbourne Dealer 2, cited by Mackenzie, 2005, p. 144).

Collectors can casually approach hobby divers to retrieve specific artefacts from specific shipwrecks in British waters (Sutherland, 2002, p. 165). They can travel to Turkey and make deals face-to-face or simply put in remote orders to looter-smugglers in Syria from their laptop or smartphone. Since boutique online trading exists, illicit antiquities handlers may also use the dark web or dark

networks to make deals, though it may be impractical and unnecessary to do anything more than use the private (and at least somewhat encrypted) communications and currencies that are now basic technology. It has been documented that all of the everyday participants in the trafficking of antiquities—from looters to intermediaries to buyers—use such media technologies (Giglio & al-Awad, 2015), even video themselves in the process of looting (Giglio, 2015), seemingly in order to demonstrate that they are selling genuine looted antiquities rather than forgeries. And it has been shown that standard antiquities dealerships, brick-and-mortar shops outside the market hot spots, handle transactions in crypto-currencies such as Bitcoin (Enigaldi, 2014).

Indeed, due to the extraordinary interest in the conflict in Syria and Iraq, it has also been documented that the Islamic State use WhatsApp (Parkinson, Albayrak, & Mavin, 2015), other—based on their location, probably Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Nusra Front)—paramilitaries use Skype (Anjarini, 2014), and the FSA use smartphones too (Soguel, 2014). As these armed groups employ these and other media technologies—such as Kik (Di Giovanni, McGrath Goodman, & Sharkov, 2014)—in their campaigns, these are undoubtedly mere instances of use of applications that are each used by all of the groups. So there are no theoretical or practical obstacles to the functioning of a market in which cultural property is looted to order.

In sum, it is impossible to estimate the value of the theft-to-order business, but individual operations can be worth millions of dollars, it definitely does exist as a strategy, and it has been used by different groups in different places over the course of at least 60 years. Contrary to the mythical construct, thefts can be commissioned by local collectors for hundreds of dollars, and are committed by everyone from petty thieves to armed groups. Only in terms of the countries from which cultural assets are stolen (as opposed to the countries from which the orders are made), it has been documented in Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Italy, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan. Notably, it has been demonstrated in Argentina, Cambodia and Syria that looting-to-order is a structure for conflict antiquities trading.

Evidencing the problems that have confounded study of the phenomenon, the analysis has also identified cases that would not otherwise have been identified as evidence of this illicit trade structure. The case from Cyprus, for example, was first reported in a popular newspaper (Hopkirk, 1971), then mentioned in an academic book (Hadjisavvas, 2001), a doctoral thesis (Hardy, 2011), a journal (Hardy, 2014a) and another academic book (Hardy, 2014b). But none of those publications used any permutation of “looting to order”, “theft to order”, “stolen to order” or “commissioned theft”. And the original report did not give any indication of the structure of the operation beyond the fact that the illicit excavation was “systematic” so, without a single aside thirty years after the crime, the case would never have been identified at all.

Professional exasperation at public fascination with extraordinary crimes is understandable, as is a disavowal of fantastical stereotypes of crime that have been fashioned by the news and entertainment industries. Sceptics are right that it would be uneconomical, if not impossible, to design property protection around this threat. Nonetheless, the evidence demonstrates that commissioned theft of cultural property is an unexceptional crime, through which illicit antiquities exceptionally inconspicuously enter the market, whereafter they can circulate ostensibly legally. This highlights the opacity of the market and the due limits to policing.

Thus, it reaffirms the judgement of the States Parties to the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation, 2015, p. 17, Chap. 8, para. 56–62), as well as

the judgement of the German federal government (e.g. culture minister Monika Grütters, cf. Jedicke, 2014), the German federal police (e.g. officer Sylvelie Karfeld, cf. Saoub, Kabisch, & Wolter, 2014) and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (e.g. president Hermann Parzinger, cf. Parzinger & Weigelt, 2014), that unlicensed export of cultural property, and import of unlicensed exports of cultural property, should be prohibited.

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