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Abstract

This chapter analyses open-source evidence, such as data from online forums and social networks, to advance understanding of the trafficking of cultural goods from South Asia, particularly Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. As the simplest identifier of *potential* participants in the illicit trade, it targets metal-detectorists and treasure-hunters.

It explores training in and methods of trafficking by individuals, networks and groups, including the trafficking of metal-detectors into territories by transnational detectorists, to enable extraction of cultural objects. Other insights include the exploitation of military structures for the trafficking of antiquities, by elements within military forces during international deployments. They also include the exploitation of international relations and their economic implications, as metal-detecting “tourists” from powerful countries have threatened international diplomatic incidents to (successfully) deter action by law enforcement agents in disadvantaged countries.

More commonly, local and transnational heritage crime is realised through exploitation of loopholes and grey areas in law. Usefully for law enforcement agents, some cultural property criminals discuss which laws can be circumvented and how and which laws are effective deterrents. Public knowledge of territories’ vulnerability also appears to facilitate antiquities fraud, wherein forgers use metal-detectors as false evidence that they have looted genuine antiquities, instead of manufactured fake objects. Thus, such research finds evidence that advances understanding of transnational antiquities trafficking and its policing.

Keywords

conflict antiquities trafficking; corruption; forgery; fraud; illicit antiquities trade; metal-detecting; online trafficking; transnational organised crime

Introduction

South Asia is a prestigious target for institutions and individuals who collect cultural property. And those buyers not only underwrite massive criminal markets, but also finance massive criminal enterprises. Antiquities trafficking boss Subhash Kapoor ran a 100,000,000 USD business empire, which spanned South Asia and South-East Asia and reached from India to the United States (Mashberg and Bearak, 2015: AR1).

As the simplest identifier of *potential* producers in the illicit trade, this chapter targets non-archaeologists who use metal-detectors to search for cultural objects (whether they identify, or are identified as, metal-detectorists or treasure-hunters). Obviously, citation of metal-detectorists does not imply any wrongdoing on their part. But, assuming illicit detectorists have the same interests and serve the same markets as licit detectorists, the activity of licit detectorists may help to understand the activities of illicit detectorists.

This chapter analyses open-source evidence to advance understanding of the trafficking of cultural goods in South Asia. While this region also encompasses Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal, this chapter concentrates on Afghanistan; India, including India-administered Jammu and Kashmir; Pakistan, including Pakistan-administered Azad-Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan; and Sri Lanka. It excludes China-administered Aksai-Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract in Kashmir.

Method

This study is part of a global review of open-source evidence on the hobby, business and/or crime of metal-detecting for cultural objects. Any such research is limited by three primary obstacles: first, the capacity of detectorists to manage activity online; second, the enthusiasm of detectorists to manage activity online; and third, the capacity of researchers to find evidence of online management and offline activity.

Capacity to manage activity online varies according to infrastructure and cost. Enthusiasm to manage activity online varies according to “detecting cultures” as well as legal risks. Theoretically, there might be more online activity where offline activity is criminalised yet detectorists are unpoliced, than where offline activity is legalised yet detectorists are unsociable. And capacity to find evidence of online organisation and offline activity varies according to the limits of language skill, machine translation and/or community terminology. It also varies according to the availability of automatically-generated online data from community activity, netnographic evidence of community activity and documentation by law enforcement agents, cultural heritage workers and others, such as journalists.

Markets

Nonetheless, as is observed by everyone from law enforcement agents in India (cf. Burke, 2015) to cultural property dealers in Nepal (cf. discussion under Buda, 2015), there is very little internal demand for cultural goods in local markets, as opposed to global markets. The large markets and high prices are abroad.

When cultural objects are intercepted during smuggling, major markets may be politely euphemised with characterisations such as ‘some Far Eastern country’ (e.g. Channa, 2015). And backward flows through restitution may be misleading indicators of outward flows through smuggling, as they reflect law, law enforcement capacity and public reporting standards in every jurisdiction from extraction to collection (Hardy, 2016: 3-4), particularly as cultural objects may be intercepted at points of trade or transit, instead of points of consumption.

Still, *typically*, sacred Buddhist and Hindu objects are consumed by non-Buddhist, non-Hindu markets for “exotica”. Cultural objects from India are consumed throughout the dominant Western markets, the growing Chinese market and the rising Middle Eastern

market (according to the head of the idol wing, additional director general of police, Prateep V Philip, cited by Burke, 2015). The United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and France are *some of* the markets that consume ‘large numbers’ of cultural objects from Pakistan (Khattak, 2015). Significant numbers of cultural objects that are exported from Bangladesh flow to France, Italy, Japan and South Korea (Blitz, 2012). And cultural objects from Nepal tend to flow to Europe and the United States (cf. Davis and Capron, 2015), though those goods may flow onwards to other markets, such as China (cf. Fanelli, 2015).

In South Asia, due to flows and markets – and perhaps particularly due to the linguistic legacy of British colonialism and imperialism – much instructive material is in English (or contains enough English for the source to be found, then translated).

Open-source analysis

In English, Google Scholar was searched for ‘antiquities’ and ‘looting’ plus ‘territory name’; Facebook, Google Scholar and Google Web were searched for “metal detecting” or “treasure hunting” plus ‘territory name’. In Bengali, Farsi/Dari, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Nepali, Pashto/Pakhto, Punjabi, Sinhala, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu, Facebook and (albeit cursorily) Google Web were searched for ‘metal’ and ‘detecting’ plus ‘territory name’, then ‘treasure’ and ‘hunting’ plus ‘territory name’. Searches on Google Web were augmented with ‘forum’, to exclude content on metal-detectors for security.

Evidence

While such searches almost exclusively found irrelevant results, they did find some relevant results, such as news reports that ‘treasure hunters [had been] arrested [nidhan horu koṭuveyi]’ in Sri Lanka (Live at 7 News, 2016). So, whether there were few relevant results or whether relevant results were obscured by more prominent irrelevant ones, the keywords were appropriate.

There was extremely little evidence in relation to Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal. Still, there was evidence of activity and the implication of more in the neglected territories. The Maldives, for example, attract at least a few metal-detecting tourists from around the world (e.g. Welsh John, 2014, who was based in the United Kingdom; Docekal, 2014, who was based in the United States). There, it is illegal to conduct unauthorised ‘research work on cultural or historical objects’ or otherwise to ‘damage[,] destroy or dismantle’ historically informative ‘objects and places that were used by the inhabitants of Maldives or foreigners’ (RoM, 1979). One Russia-based metal-detectorist explained that he had imported his detector to the Maldives by ‘transport[ing it] in parts, in different suitcases [provez po chastyam, v raznikh chemodanakh]’ (Serii Kopatel v Poiskakh Klada, 2016), which demonstrates remarkable dedication to finding keys and coins that have been lost by holidaymakers at the seaside.

Since such searches have been successful in identifying online communities of metal-detectorists/treasure-hunters in North America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and beyond (Hardy, 2017; forthcoming), it *seems* that such communities in South Asia are neither significantly large nor significantly active. Nevertheless, that is not a direct indication of offline activity, let alone any measure of the true scale of offline activity; it is only an indication of the scale of online social organisation of detecting, which thereby establishes a minimal level of offline activity.

At least in some places, “metal-detecting”, like “digging”, appears to be perceived as an action that is performed as part of an activity (“treasure-hunting”), rather than as an activity in itself. In Sri Lanka, for instance, metal-detector dealers are rigorously monitored, yet the country’s embassies have ‘no idea what metal detecting is’, give ‘no answer[,] yes or no’ (Alejandro, 2013). Hence, many reports did not itemise the tools, so it is not known whether the looters used detectors to find targets. Although, *technically*, then, it is also not known whether the looters used shovels to extract targets. Still, those sources were excluded as inconclusive. Despite the limitations of the identifiable sources, the evidence is still instructive in understanding who is doing what, where and how.

Afghanistan

Conflict antiquities trafficking

In the past thirty years, antiquities have been looted/stolen and/or traffickers have been racketeered by Soviets (Richardson, 2012); Communists, Mujahideen, the Northern Alliance, the Taliban (Dupree, 1998; McGirk, 1996; Peters, 2010: 36; SPACH, 2004; UKHC, 2003: Col. 1223-1224; USICE, 2013); warlords, Islamic Party militia and Haqqani insurgents (Campbell, 2013: 121).

Furthermore, al-Qaeda operative Mohamed Atta at least tried to sell looted antiquities from Afghanistan in Germany to subsidise his participation in the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (Ruiz, 2010). Thus, markets cannot excuse illicit purchase as “rescue” of cultural property from destruction, since it may finance more serious human rights violations (cf. Hardy, under review).

Metal-detecting/treasure-hunting

Although illicit excavators may skirt around the letter of the law, all ‘historical and cultural properties’ are ‘the property of the State’ (ISA, 2004: Art. 8). Unlicensed metal-detecting for cultural objects is an illegal activity, as ‘excavation for the discovery of historical and cultural properties’ may only be conducted by the Institute of Archaeology and licensed scientific institutions (ISA, 2004: Art. 34; see also ISA, 2004: Art. 35). Unlicensed trading, or other unlicensed transfer, of historical and cultural properties is also illegal (ISA, 2004: Art. 57; see also ISA, 2004: Art. 8).

Whether they use detectors or not, whether they are entrepreneurs or employees, some illicit excavations are mass endeavours, where ‘a few hundred’ villagers dig at once (according to Commander Bushire, cited by Stewart, 2005: 170) or ‘hundreds of workmen’ are put to work (according to a curator of Middle Eastern archaeology, St. John Simpson, cited by Wendle, 2013). Despite the scale of the plunder, very little revenue flows back to the source: ‘one or two American dollars [per object] – good money’ – for some (according to Commander Bushire, cited by Stewart, 2005: 171), one or two dollars per day for others. This keeps the illicit diggers in poverty and thus maintains the supply of illicit antiquities. One illicit digger, Ustaad Nasrullah, looted for at least forty years (Ferguson, 2009).

Detectors are acquired from a variety of sources. Seemingly from 1992 onwards (cf. Curtis, 2011: 59), looters used detectors, which had ‘originally [been] brought’ into Afghanistan ‘to detect Russian land mines’, to detect antiquities at the Greco-Bactrian city

of Ai Khanoum; it has since been looted to the point that it 'no longer exists' (Bopearachchi, 2006: 270). Demonstrating the organisation of the illicit trade, in 1993, all of the coins that had been excavated before the site was looted were then stolen from the National Museum in Kabul and, within 'days', sold through the bazaar in Peshawar, Pakistan, to private collectors (Bopearachchi, 2006: 267).

Around 2001-2002, one well-connected looter casually asked a foreign acquaintance who was interviewing a group about looting, 'do you think you could bring us a metal detector[,] next time you visit?' (Commander Bushire's son, Abdullah, cited by Stewart, 2005: 169). However, since then, the supply of metal-detectors appears to have become more organised. In 2016, the National Directorate of Security arrested looters and seized 'state of the art', 'treasure hunting equipment' that was 'able to identify [*sic* – capable of identifying] buried historic monuments and other precious earth materials' – in other words, metal-detectors – which had been imported from Iran (according to the Governor of Bamiyan Province, Mohammad Tahir Zahir, cited by Khaama Press, 2016).

Organised enterprises are importing metal-detectors from and exporting cultural objects through Iran and Pakistan (according to the Head of Culture and Information for Herat Province, Arya Rawoofian, and the Head of Culture and Information for Ghor Province, Ahmad Ehsan Ahmadyar, cited by TKG, 2016). Apparently, 'most' looting is conducted in Taliban-controlled territory (according to the Head of Culture and Information for Ghor Province, Fakhruddin Aryapoor, cited by TKG, 2016). The scale of looting increased between the 2000s and the 2010s (Stein, 2015: 188) and has continued to increase (TKG, 2016).

Despite the evidence of the use of detectors and the impunity of the users, there do not appear to be significant online communities of detectorists. Whether detectors are redeployed from mine clearance, bought indirectly through networks of acquaintances or bought directly in commerce, acquisition of metal-detectors, training in metal-detecting and trading in metal-detected cultural objects may remain primarily offline affairs (as only around 11.7 per cent of the population have access to the internet, cf. MMG, 2017). Otherwise, those activities may have leapfrogged to encrypted communications and private online trading via WhatsApp, Telegram and other such apps. Furthermore, Farsi/Dari-speaking detectorists may learn from or participate in Farsi-speaking online communities that primarily serve those in Iran; Uzbek-speaking and Turkmen-speaking detectorists may use Turkish-speaking online communities that primarily serve those in Turkey.

Still, there is some evidence of detecting in social media. In a Facebook group for detectorists around the world, posts presented photographic evidence of detecting near Jalal Abad (Khan, 2015; see also Bondi Treasure Hunter, 2016; Khan, 2016). Significantly, there is evidence of detecting that appears to be conducted completely outside the established and recognised, disorganised and organised, Afghan and Pakistani networks. Though some are deterred because there are 'too many unexploded mines everywhere' (s.c.shooter, 2013), U.S. Army personnel detect on their military bases (e.g. Shindand Airbase, see Tejaas, 2013a; they appear to have detected after military infrastructure work had removed a metre of soil, see Tejaas, 2013b). U.S. navy personnel detect on acquaintances' 'enclosed yards', in order to avoid 'Taliban [and] landmines' (chudman, 2009). U.S. Air Force personnel recommend 'anywhere near Bagram [airbase]' as 'money' (in other words, a payload detecting location), where detectorists could find antiquities from the period of Alexander the Great, while they found Greco-Bactrian Hellenistic antiquities, such as 'a coin from 210 years before Christ' (Kolby72, 2012). Airport workers have their detectors 'mail[ed]' to them and appear to detect there (Gunshin, 2012).

It has been observed that, by destabilising any and all authority, the U.S.-led invasion has 'freed up', rather than closed down, 'the antique smuggling market' (Stewart, 2005: 170). It has been observed that freight inspection is inadequate, as private freight is inspected by 'U.S. soldiers who are only looking for explosives, not antiquities' (according to a Field Coordinator for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Reza Mohammadi, cited by Wendle, 2013). And it has been noted that foreign diplomats use their immunity from inspection and prosecution to facilitate boutique smuggling (e.g. McGirk, 1996). It is less well-documented that the U.S.-led forces may supply that market, way beyond souvenirs and trophies. While treasure-hunting by metal-detectorists among foreign militaries may pale into insignificance in comparison with the nationwide problem, it is an aspect of the illicit trade, for which outside states bear a direct responsibility, which has been hiding in plain sight for years.

India

The structure and functioning of the illicit trade

Excavation may only be conducted by authorised officials or licensed professionals (Gol, 2010: Art. 21; Art. 22; see also ASI, 2011). It is illegal to engage in unlicensed sale (Gol, 1972: 5) or unauthorised export of antiquities (Gol, 1972: Art. 3; see also ASI, 2011).

Typically, thieves photograph targets (sometimes before theft, otherwise afterwards); local dealers and/or foreign collectors review the photos and agree deals; then, cultural objects are 'usually stolen to order' from sacred places and other sites (according to the head of the idol wing, additional director general of police, Prateep V Philip, cited by Burke, 2015). There is 'no [significant] internal demand' for these objects (ibid.). In order to acquire documentation to falsely legitimise transfer, replicas are produced and either certified for export then switched, or delivered for export then switched in collaboration with corrupt customs officials (Pachauri, 2002: 273).

There appear to be tight bottlenecks in supply lines. Vallaba Prakash and his son Aditya Prakash are suspected of having had 'a role in 80 [per cent] of idol theft cases in Tamil Nadu and also across India' (according to the Idol Wing of the Police, cited by Times News Network, 2017).

Metal-detecting/treasure-hunting

There is evidence of amateur(ish) detecting by local detectorists (e.g. sanjeebrosy, 2015, who detects on the lands of his property-letting family). However, 'hobby' detecting is 'still not very common for [a] poor developing nation like India' (according to India-based numismatics hobbyist and aspiring metal-detecting hobbyist Coinsforever, 2011a).

Estimated numbers of cultural property criminals do not appear to have been published, but there are some indications. For instance, it is suspected that there are around '200 treasure[-]hunt[ing] teams', who use 'sophisticated metal detectors' to loot archaeological sites, who are based in the district of Anantapur or based in the district of Karnataka and operating in Anantapur (according to the Department of Archaeology and Museums, cited by Benjamin, 2016) – so, within a community of around 4,000,000 residents.

Suggesting that there is little detecting tourism, a USA-based detectorist had not seen 'any talk of India in the forums' (Tador, 2012), when that international forum had around 40,747 members (TreasureNet, 2012). Nevertheless, it is done by detectorists, for example, from the United Kingdom (according to vurdā, 2013); France (according to LE.JAG, 2015); and Canada, the United States and Peru (who collaborated, cf. Kaushik, 2015). One USA-based, overland-travelling tourist planned to do 'alot [*sic* – a lot] of detecting' in India and 'north west' of it, seemingly Pakistan and other territories on the way to northern Europe (bigstemz, 2015). The USA-based intermittent foreign resident 'spen[t] three months [each year] on the beaches' (Wostro, 2014), in other words, beachcombing with a metal-detector.

One aspiring hobby detectorist, who wanted to detect 'basically coins', even though 'the laws [were] not user friendly', observed that 'for each and every law there [were] loopholes' (Coinsforever, 2011b). Another India-based numismatist stated that laws against trespassing on property or committing criminal damage were 'not very effective or a deterrent', but the law for state ownership of archaeological remains *was* a somewhat effective deterrent (asm, 2011). If police learned that metal-detectorists had 'not willingly' reported and delivered metal-detected cultural property to the authorities, they 'would be a hassle'; and, even if metal-detectorists did report and deliver finds, 'the amount of time, money and energy' that would be involved would be a deterrent in and of itself (asm, 2011).

One seemingly USA-based intermittent foreign resident argued that India was a 'very complicated' territory, which required an 'understand[ing]' that the question was 'never' if something was 'legal or not' but, rather, 'if they let you' do it or not; he advised '[k]eeping a low profile [was] key' (Wostro, 2014). Asked whether he sold his finds in India or exported them to the United States and what the gold export laws were (by CapeTownBeachBum, 2016), he did not reply.

Nepal

Illicit trafficking of cultural objects

It is illegal to conduct unauthorised 'excavations at the site of ancient monuments' (KoN, 1970: Art. 16), which encompass 'any' buildings or objects of 'historical, archeological or artistic importance' (KoN, 1970: Art. 2), or otherwise to destroy, damage or misappropriate 'any ancient monument or archeological object' (KoN, 1970: Art. 7). Furthermore, collecting, trading and/or export of cultural objects are prohibited, licensed or otherwise regulated activities (KoN, 1970: Art. 13).

Due to the international demand for sacred objects ('exotic' art, according to an antiquities dealer in the United States, cited by Sassoon, 1991), cultural property crime has historically manifested in theft from standing buildings more than looting of archaeological sites, with or without a detector. The market emerged in the 1950s, when 'local thugs and the mafia' stole sacred art (Kathmandu Post, 2014), then local elites and transnational foreign workers smuggled literal 'truck loads' (according to writer Thomas Bell, cited by Kunwar, 2015).

It is exceptionally difficult to document cultural goods in their original location, thus to assess the scale of criminal activity and to recover stolen goods, due to a common prohibition on photography of sacred objects (Sharma, 2015). Nonetheless, between 1964 (when art from Nepal was exhibited in the United States, cf. Pal, 1986: 7, cited by Brodie,

2006: 55) and the 1990s, during which time Western professional smugglers established themselves as intermittent foreign residents and supplanted other smugglers such as diplomats (Sassoon, 1991), perhaps 90 per cent of the country's 'rare idols' were stolen (according to art connoisseur Jürgen Schick, cited by Limbu, 2001). The remaining ones were less significant or less stealable; and the rate of theft had already decreased by the 1990s, because there was somewhat less demand and simply 'not much left to steal' (according to art connoisseur Jürgen Schick, cited by Limbu, 2001).

Metal-detecting/treasure-hunting

Since then, 'many' antiquities with 'accretions and dirt' have 'surfaced' on the market, where the evidence of their looting serves as evidence of their authenticity (Hawley, 2007: 230). Yet, on searching, there was extremely little evidence of concentrated online activity. The available evidence both demonstrates that there is online activity and appears to corroborate the impression that there is insignificant online social organisation of detecting.

Numerous coin collectors/traders, who seemingly could not find specialist online communities of knowledge and practice elsewhere, discussed offline and online market prices and sales strategies; advertised the available goods; and provided their full names, telephone numbers and/or e-mail addresses from their social media accounts under a YouTube video about ancient coins from Nepal (cf. discussion under Buda, 2015, who advised that cultural objects should be sold onto the 'international market via bidding sites' such as eBay). Again, online activity does not *necessarily* indicate offline activity, especially when only around 21.9 per cent of the population have access to the internet (MMG, 2017). Detectorists may have leapfrogged to private online trading, or they may simply engage in offline activity.

Pakistan

Organised cultural property crime

Sometimes, antiquities from Afghanistan are fraudulently documented and illicitly transported by elements within the government and the military in Pakistan (McGirk, 1996). They are also collected by the most senior elements of the government and the military there. Such pervasive connections and flows raise the question of where corruption ends and state crime begins.

More often, antiquities are smuggled and dealt by organised crime networks from Pakistan (Astill, 2003), which have significant influence over the activity of organisations in Afghanistan. They convinced the Taliban to remove and sell fragments of the Bamiyan Buddhas 'like pieces of the Berlin Wall' (according to then Director of the Bibliotheca Afghanica and its Afghanistan Museum in Exile, Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, cited by McGirk, 2002).

One gallery in Australia actively advertised 'rare historical artifacts', Afghan Gandharan Buddhist art that they had allegedly acquired when 'offered' in 'the days that followed' the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (cited by Huffer, 2010). The sale-purchase was advertised as an act of "preservation", a form of rescue-by-purchase. If the gallery had been

selling such pieces, knowingly or unknowingly, it might have produced a revenue stream for organised crime and terrorist financing.

These networks also deliver 'orders for specific antiquities' (Astill, 2003), so organised cultural property crime and conflict antiquities trafficking from Afghanistan through Pakistan encompass looting-to-order/theft-to-order. Bactrian and Kushan antiquities may be smuggled through Uzbekistan, then 'fenced to the "new Russian" mafia' in Russia (Lee, 2000). These channels include multi-commodity trafficking of antiquities, such as heroin-and-antiquities trafficking and antiquities-for-nuclear trafficking (McGirk, 1996).

In response to varying risks, the channels flow in both directions. Against the tide, 'millions of rupees' (thousands or tens of thousands of dollars) of antiquities were found in the baggage of a smuggler who was in the process of smuggling the objects from Pakistan to Afghanistan by land, on the overland route to European markets (Express Tribune, 2017).

Metal-detecting/treasure-hunting

The government owns all buried antiquities (GoP, 1992: Art. 13A). It is illegal to treat a religious site in any way that is inconsistent or inappropriate with regard to its status (GoP, 1992: Art. 17; Art. 18); to conduct any unlicensed 'excavation or exploration for archaeological purposes' or to 'unearth or make any digging in any land or site for taking out antiquities' (GoP, 1992: Art. 29); or otherwise to 'destroy, break, damage, alter, injure, deface or mutilate' antiquities (GoP, 1992: Art. 19). It is also illegal to engage in antiquities fraud (GoP, 1992: Art. 24), to engage in unlicensed dealing (GoP, 1992: Art. 25), to engage in unlicensed export (GoP, 1992: Art. 26), or otherwise to sell or remove antiquities 'to the detriment of Pakistan' (GoP, 1992: Art. 27).

Antiquities looting has been so intensive that some archaeological sites have been 'destroyed' (Dawn, 2008); they 'do not exist at all' anymore (according to schoolteacher and voluntary cultural heritage worker Osman Ulasyar, cited by Khattak, 2016). In general, organised or disorganised, smugglers are 'influential people' who collaborate with officials, while local labourers use 'dynamites [*sic* – dynamite] and metal detectors to find coins and antiquities' (Dawn, 2008). For instance, in Taxila, a 'gang' of 'influential treasure hunters' used detectors to extract cultural objects, then used tractors to flatten the land, which thereby obscured indicators of looting (Rana, 2013).

Sri Lanka

Conflict antiquities trafficking

During the war between the Sri Lanka Armed Forces (SLAF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), control of territory by the LTTE prevented looting of at least some archaeological sites by treasure-hunters (according to the Head of the Special Unit for Prevention of Destruction and Theft of Antiquities of the Department of Archaeology, Udeni Wickramasinghe, cited by Fiedler, 2015; see also Kariyakarawana, 2013). At the same time, some sacred objects were looted from temples, 'when people could not go there' (according to Hindu prelate Padmanadan Sharma, cited by Wijedasa, 2013).

Such thefts may have been acts of organised criminals, who may have paid a cut to whichever authorities (or elements within those authorities) were in control of the places at

the time, wherein the stolen goods would constitute conflict antiquities, as they profited the racketeering armed groups. Or, the thefts may have been acts of conflict antiquities traffickers.

It is known that the LTTE subsidised their activities with the profits from illicit antiquities. For example, a 'valuable Indian stone frieze' was confiscated by police in the UK before it could be auctioned by 'Sri Lankan terrorists' (according to MP Richard Allan, cf. UKHC, 2003: Col. 1224).

Since the end of the war, since the reduction in the risk of 'landmines and terrorists' (according to police spokesperson Ajith Rohana, cited by Kirinde, 2012), treasure-hunting has been increasing in scale, organisation and technological complexity in northern and eastern Sri Lanka (Kirinde, 2012; Wijedasa, 2013). It is now a revenue stream for at least 'several gangs' (Wijedasa, 2013). And it must be a significant revenue stream, as operations sometimes invest tens of thousands of dollars, employ tens of looters and run for months (according to the Officer-in-Charge of the Antiquities Protection Division of the Archaeology Department in Colombo, Inspector Rohana Chaminda, cited by Rothfield, 2013).

Metal-detecting/treasure-hunting

The state owns all 'undiscovered antiquities..., whether lying on or hidden beneath the surface of the ground or in any river or lake' (PDSRSL, 1956: Art. 2). It is illegal to 'excavate for the purpose of discovering antiquities' without a licence (PDSRSL, 1956: Art. 6), or otherwise to wilfully destroy, injure, deface or tamper with antiquities (PDSRSL, 1956: Art. 15B, as amended by PDSRSL, 1998: Art. 4).

Treasure-hunting appears to involve intermittent entrepreneurs as well as part-time and full-time professionals. One full-time public servant changed career and became a full-time treasure-hunting consultant, who 'hir[ed] out a modified mine detector to treasure hunters' (according to the Officer-in-Charge of the Special Task Force (STF) Camp at Mahabulankulama, Police Superintendent W. M. N. Wanigasekara, cited by Wickremasekara, 2012).

Organised or disorganised, many treasure-hunters are 'armed' (Kariyakarawana, 2013). The 'organised gangs' comprise one or more financiers, one kattadiya to provide spiritual protection, plus one or more locals to provide labour. They have long used 'backhoes' (machine excavators or earthmovers), but are "increasingly" using both 'modified and unmodified metal detectors' (in other words, adapted mine-detectors and specialist metal-detectors, cf. Sunday Times, 2013).

Discussion

Organised cultural property crime and conflict antiquities trafficking

Some of the illicit excavation, trafficking and dealing across the region is minor disorganised crime. Some of it is opportunistic. In Bangladesh, organised criminals followed Muslim nationalist violence against the Buddhist minority community and stole vulnerable cultural objects (Blitz, 2012). In Nepal, "amateurs", as well as 'antique dealers, in connivance with local thugs' exploited an earthquake to steal cultural objects (Millennium Post, 2015;

see also Wolfson, 2015); at least 8 people were arrested for theft and attempted illicit sale (Soondas, 2015).

Nonetheless, as demonstrated in India and Sri Lanka, and particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some persistent activity is the preserve of profit-driven organised criminals and politically-motivated armed groups. Hence, cultural property protection is often disincentivised and dangerous. For instance, in Afghanistan, not only do looters and smugglers make more money, but also law enforcement agents are 'murdered' in the line of duty (Astill, 2003). As evidenced in the investigation into one of the largest and farthest-reaching antiquities trafficking empires in the world, in India, antiquities trafficking is sometimes intertwined with drugs trafficking (PTI, 2017).

Corruption

While embezzlement and corruption are challenges everywhere, cultural property policing is hampered by embezzlement among cultural heritage professionals in Bangladesh (e.g. Daily Star, 2014), India (e.g. Ganjapure, 2017) and Pakistan (e.g. Tribal News Network, 2016). It is hampered by corruption among tourism workers, cultural heritage professionals, other public servants (who may provide permits for innocuous activities, such as quarrying, cf. Kirinde, 2012), law enforcement agents and/or security agents in India (e.g. Deccan Chronicle, 2017; Pachauri, 2002: 273), Nepal (e.g. Sassoon, 1991), Pakistan (e.g. Ashgar, 2017, where some organised crime groups are secreted throughout state structures, as museum workers, police officers and customs officials collaborate in criminal enterprises, cf. Tribal News Network, 2016) and Sri Lanka (e.g. Herath, 2016; Kuruneru, 2014; Pothmulla, 2013; Randeniya, 2013; Wijedasa, 2013, where they include politicians, cf. Sunday Times, 2013; Sunday Times, 2014).

On top of economic challenges and political problems, social conditions undermine efforts to preserve cultural property. Frankly, there is a 'lack of interest among locals to protect' cultural property in Afghanistan (according to the deputy spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Najibullah Danesh, cited by TKG, 2016). Government officials 'show little concern' for cultural property in India (according to a senior research scholar in global studies, Vishakha Desai, cited by Mashberg and Bearak, 2015: AR1). The 'vast majority in Muslim Pakistan... have no interest' in pre-Islamic history (Khattak, 2016), while the handling of non-Islamic cultural objects suggests at least a 'lack of concern' among public servants (Tunio, 2017). At least in Pakistan, cultural property criminals believe that they are 'performing a religious duty', 'earning... *Sawab* (blessings of God)', as well as money, 'by digging out the "remnants of infidels"' and thus committing (ethno)religious cleansing of the territory (Khattak, 2016).

Law and diplomacy

On top of everything else, source countries are vulnerable to political as well as economic exploitation. In an international forum discussion, a magistrate in Australia explained the 'hazzards [*sic* – hazards]' of metal-detecting tourism in Sri Lanka (metaldetective, 2011a).

He had consulted the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Canberra with regard to permission 'to take [his] machine into the country' (metaldetective, 2011a). The High Commissioner advised that it was legal to do so, as long as he paid a deposit that would be repaid when he took the machine out again. The magistrate also appears to have checked

the regulations on metal-detecting in Australia (metaldetective, 2006a; 2006b). However, there is no indication that he consulted the High Commissioner or anyone else about the legality of using a metal-detector on a known archaeological site or anywhere else in Sri Lanka.

Upon arrival, the magistrate had 'obtained permission from a [tour] guide', then proceeded to detect at an unnamed 'ancient site' near Colombo; evidently, it was a functioning temple, as there was at least one 'resident Monk' (metaldetective, 2011a). He was very quickly stopped by a 'very large man' who 'accused' him of 'being a Treasure Hunter' (metaldetective, 2011a). Later, he was questioned by the police and his car was searched; 'of course none [no treasure] was found', though that was presumably because he had been halted after 'about 5 minutes' (metaldetective, 2011a).

The magistrate did not sign a pre-written Sinhala-language statement, but did not state whether or not he signed a subsequent English-language translation. By then 'rather intolerant', the magistrate refused to relinquish his detector to the temple's monk and demanded contact with the Australian Consul in Colombo (metaldetective, 2011a).

When his 'friend and guide... advised' the police that the 'incident could be blown out of all proportions' if the magistrate contacted the consul, the police 'reluctantly allowed [them] to leave without further ado' (metaldetective, 2011a). The magistrate himself appears to indicate the nature of the "incident". As he concluded, 'they all wear valuable jewelry [*sic* – jewelry]', so even metal-detecting on the beach would produce 'astounding' finds, '[i]f they ever ma[d]e it legal' (metaldetective, 2011b).

False evidence of looting and potential evidence of fraud

The public knowledge of source countries' vulnerability and exploitation can itself be exploited. OKM Metal Detectors (2018) has been in business since 1998 and its Facebook page indicates that it has at least 27,864 fans around the world. It manufactures purported detecting devices such as "treasure-detectors", "cavity-detectors" and "long-range detectors". Their efficacy has been questioned (for example, in discussion under ishtar hunter, 2011). The devices have been outright ridiculed as "expensive sticks", "junk", "garbage", "fake" or a "scam" (for example, in discussion under Aziz, 2012; goverton, 2011; GrievousAngel, 2013; HeadsUp, 2013; Jeff30135, 2013; Karl, 2011; skeeterbait, 2012; Vox veritas, 2011).

The brand advertises in markets where economic insecurity and rich legends of ancient treasures coincide, such as Iran, Tunisia, China and Greece (cf. OKM Metal Detectors, 2017). Although, judging by the prices, it does not target the poorest members of those societies; it targets members of the middle classes who are susceptible to suggestions of rapid enrichment and upward social mobility.

Advertising its 'very discrete [*sic* – discreet]', Android smartphone-controlled, Rover UC (undercover) detector, which is supposedly used to uncover 'buried objects', OKM Metal Detectors (2014) introduced perhaps its 'oldest customer': a 'very successful', 85-year-old 'treasure hunter' in Afghanistan, who had found 'a lot of valuable treasures'. Supposedly, such a device was also being used by a detectorist in Syria (see Syofi, 2014).

OKM Metal Detectors (n.d.) published another alleged find with a questionable testimonial from Afghanistan. Supposedly, it was a 'golden statue', which had 'been found with [a] metal detector Rover Deluxe.... 4-5 meters under the ground', for which its alleged finder had allegedly refused 800,000 USD from a local dealer, because it might have been

'worth more than that'. Yet it does not resemble any published examples of the excavated rhytons (drinking vessels) that had inspired its style.

It does resemble the practice where forgers of antiquities and dealers of forged antiquities advertise "metal-detector finds", objects that have been "found metal-detecting" or "found with a metal-detector", in order to fabricate evidence of the authenticity of their objects. In the United Kingdom, for example, detectorist David Hutchings was convicted of fraud, for registering fake coins on the UK Detector Finds Database (UKDFD), then selling them as genuine antiquities (Brown, 2009).

In Sri Lanka, there are 'several gangs' who sell forgeries by pretending to be 'expert treasure hunters' (according to the Special Unit for Prevention of Destruction and Theft of Antiquities of the Department of Archaeology, cited by Kariyakarawana, 2013). Since unlicensed excavation and unlicensed trading are illegal in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, such activity is akin to advertising, "this cultural object is guaranteed to be authentic, because it is looted; here is the metal-detector to prove it".

Conclusion

Despite the sparsity of sources, the information that is available is instructive. Analysis of online forums and social networks has identified evidence of: illicit trafficking of cultural objects, by a range of actors from local entrepreneurs to armed forces on deployment overseas; the nature of the market across South Asia, as experienced participants train novice participants; the social organisation of the market, as participants manage their own activity online; and strategies to evade regulation and prevent policing. Thus, such open-source research appears to be a viable tool for advancing understanding and policing of transnational antiquities trafficking.

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