

Illicit Traffic in Cultural Property in Lebanon: A Diachronic Study

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Antiquities, particularly ancient works of art, belong to the country in which they were produced in the past. They form an integral part of the past of the inhabitants of that country, and hence are in reality communal property forming cultural roots for the present day inhabitants. Like natural resources, cultural heritage forms a non-renewable resource base, every bit that is lost, broken or sold is a fragment of past identity removed and hence an impoverishment of today's identity. If the loss is due to ignorance, it will be paid for by future generations whose cultural memory will have been wiped out (Seeden 1992a: 110).

The trafficking of cultural property is rooted in a ^{a well known} psycho-sociological ^{behavioral pattern} ~~movement,~~ ^{steered by the collector's addictive department} (Belk 1994: 317-326). It is intimately related to the social status of the different players in the operational mechanism at work (*chaîne opératoire*) that ranges from extraction to exhibition and involves three types of players. It is nurtured, in the lower social strata, by the need for money, enhanced by the popular myth revolving around treasure-hunting and ensuing opulence, while privileged classes seeking to enlarge their collections of antiquities are essentially driven by addiction (Subkowski 2006: 383-401). Middle-men or dealers are the second type of players. They profit from the above-mentioned dynamics and their 'hostages' in order to amass more money. They continuously incite the excavators who come from a modest background to hunt for more 'treasures', and then display their goods for the collectors's benefit – something of a Pavlovian lure. Then come the smugglers, who are usually related to diggers, and their job is to transport the excavated objects through the borders and get them to the local dealers.

Lebanon is laden with unspoilt archeological sites – a playground, in many ways, for looters and collectors, who depend on the middle men.

Historical, legal and administrative framework (~~Ottoman period – 1990~~)

Lebanon, like the Ancient Near East, was subjected to the trafficking of cultural objects as early as the Ottoman period. Encouraged as they were by the yearning of Western museums to enlarge their collections at the time, some people began to dig and exhume ancient artifacts in order to sell them to these museums. The examples of the Durighello family in Sidon and the Farah family in Tyre (both residing in South Lebanon) illustrate this best. A family of French diplomats, the Durighellos, used their position to dig and sell antiquities mainly to the Louvre museum from 1882 to 1906 (Fontan, E. 2004a: 192-201). The most important discovery made by the Durighello family in Saida was the *Mithraeum*, where many marble statues were excavated and sold to the Louvre. Since then, these statues occupy a prominent location in the galleries of the Louvre (Klat 2004: 180-187).

(Fig. 1)

The Farahs were Lebanese and resided in Tyre. They took to trafficking antiquities for the Louvre as their main professional activity. After the first explorations of the site of Umm el Amed by Ernest Renan during his mission to Phoenicia¹, France had to forsake its archeological missions. Clermont-Ganneau, a renowned archeologist at the time, relates that he had agreed with the Farah Family to continue onsite excavations and send him what they could find (Fontan 2004b: 51). They worked in secrecy, smuggling their finds at night in order to shipload them to Paris. In the records of the Louvre, the names of the different members of the Farah family, as antiquities sellers, were registered between 1890 and 1911. The family did not sell objects to the Oriental Antiquities Department only, but to the Greek and Roman antiquities departments as well (Fontan 2004b: 51).

The Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Aziz laid the foundations for the Istanbul Museum to be constructed in the Topkapi Palace exterior gardens in a mimetic gesture of the main empires of the West. His successor, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, continually sought antiques and ancient relics from all over the Ottoman empire in order to augment the collections of his imperial museum. It is in this context that Osman Hamdi Bey, the first curator of the Istanbul Museum, was sent to excavate the newly discovered tomb in Sidon in the spring of 1887 and retrieve the findings which included the famous Alexander sarcophagus – the jewel of the Istanbul museum today (Hamdi Bey and Reinach 1892).

(Fig. 2)

During the early French Mandate period, archaeological sites and discoveries were run by the army until 1920 with the establishment of the *Service des Antiquités*. The investigations were spearheaded by two main institutions, the Louvre and the *Académie Française des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres*. These institutions worked through the army regiments present in the Levant at the beginning. Afterwards, the activities were entirely run by archaeologists (Gelin 2002: 33-37).

As early as 1926, in an attempt to control the circulation of antiquities, the French mandate authorities in accordance with the Great Lebanon government issued Law no. 651 prohibiting the import of archaeological artifacts from Iraq and Palestine unless they have the proper certifications from the States of origin². This law was issued in a bilateral agreement between France and Great Britain in order to organize their respective territories and archaeological investigations in the region. Syria was not included at that time, because Lebanon and Syria had one custom entity as they were both under the French mandate authority. Since 1926, Lebanon applies Law no. 651, which is^{the} first law to regulate the traffic of antiquities in the region.

The Law on Antiquities R.L/166 issued in 1933 under the French mandate organized the commerce of antiquities and gave the antiquarians the right to sell and buy antiquities according to strict regulations³. As for Law no. 651, it was still applied in adjunction with the new issued law, which stipulates that all people intending to deal in the commerce of antiquities, have to get a permit from the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA). These permits must be renewed yearly. The issuing of permits for the antiquities market traders by the authorities of the DGA continued without interruption during the Lebanese war until the early 1980s. As for the transfer of property of cultural objects, mainly inventoried and classified antiquities belonging to the private collectors,

Law R.L. no. 166 envisage this possibility in Article no. 44. Nevertheless, the DGA has a pre-emptive right over these antiquities.

In 1988, after 13 years of civil war, and due to the lack of control over the Lebanese antiquity market, the Minister of Tourism issued Ministerial Decision no. 8 banning all kind of export of antiquities from the Lebanese territory⁴. The Preamble of the Decree makes clear that the decision was taken in response to the different security issues the country was facing at the time, i.e. illicit export, looting recorded during the civil war and the need to protect the national cultural heritage. This decision was followed the same year by another Ministerial Decision no. 14 aiming at the organization of the antiquity market inside Lebanon.

In the early aftermath of the civil war, the Minister of Tourism issued a new Ministerial Decision no. 8 of 27 February 1990, which combined the previous two decisions. The new decision not only prohibited all kind of export of archaeological objects from Lebanon but also banned the commerce of antiquities inside the country. This was done by discontinuing the release of antiquities trade permits by the DGA. However, freezing the antiquities trade led also to a collateral damage which is the loss of control by the authorities on the market itself. As a result, the illicit trade of national cultural objects altogether with trans-border illicit traffic have increased.

A few months later, Lebanon ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property by Law no. 21 voted at the Parliament on 30 October 1990. Since then, Lebanon is applying not only the previous Laws and decisions regarding the trade in antiquities, but also the 1970 UNESCO Convention, which was integrated into the National Laws on Cultural Properties⁵. Furthermore, the ratification of the Convention has enabled Lebanon to expand the span of protected types of material cultural objects which comprise archaeological objects, i.e. objects prior to 1700 AD as stipulated by Law R.L. no. 166, as well as all types of cultural properties dating from later periods.

The most recent law on cultural property (Law no. 37) was issued in 2008. However, this law does not include a section on antiquities trade *per say* since the articles of the 1933 Law R.L./166 are always applied. Nevertheless, it includes regulatory measures regarding the transfer of cultural properties and their import as a direct application of the 1970 UNESCO Convention⁶.

Importing cultural properties into Lebanon

Even if trading in and exporting of antiquities and cultural goods were banned since the late 1980s, importing these objects and goods through proper channels and procedures was never subject to any legal restriction. The law is very clear on this matter: any antiquities which are to be imported to Lebanon require legal export papers from the country of origin. The procedure is quite simple: the DGA inspects the objects to be imported at customs and delivers an official document allowing import, ~~if conditions conform to those stipulated in~~ Article no. 44 of Law R.L./166 ~~in~~ the case of ownership change. Nevertheless, according to Ministerial Decision no. 8, 27 February 1990, re-exporting the same goods will not be possible. Also, Law no. 37 of 2008 on cultural properties, Articles 17 and 18, prohibits import of classified cultural properties from a State with which Lebanon maintain diplomatic relations, without the consent of that State. If there is no consent (official documents), such properties are seized and returned to their original owner, provided that the requesting State: is applied in

- pay just compensation to an innocent purchaser or to the lawful owner,
- provide, at its expense, evidence and relevant documents supporting its request for recovery and return,
- bear all costs related to the return of cultural goods (freight, insurance and delivery).

Clandestine excavations and illicit traffick during the Lebanese civil war 1975 - 1990

During the Lebanese civil war, clandestine excavations and illicit traffick in archaeological objects spread due to the absence of general government control. This situation reached dramatic proportions in second half of the 1980s (Hakimian 1989). During this decade, clandestine digging spread to the most remote areas of the country (Seeden 1990: 142). The areas that underwent most of the clandestine activities during the civil war were The Beqaa, namely Baalbek and western Beqaa, and the South (Fadlallah 1992: 75).

People in the villages, especially those located nearby ongoing excavations, took advantage of the lack of government control and began illicit excavations on archeological site premises. Little by little, the excavations invaded the archaeological sites, which were pilfered using heavy machinery, *inter alia* excavators and bulldozers. This was the case of Kamid el Loz (ancient Kumidi) in western Beqaa, where archaeological excavations stopped prematurely in 1981 (Seeden 1991: 3-4).

Uncontrolled and unorganized constructions during the war also lead to archaeological discoveries that attracted clandestine excavators. Wherever a new construction site was initiated, especially in areas known to have potential archeological value, clandestine diggers would inspect the excavation for any potential hole in the ground that could lead to a tomb, or any structure that could reveal the presence of artifacts, especially mosaic floors, very prized by the collectors (Fadlallah 1992: 76). Once someone finds a tomb in a new area, frantic looters would sense its presence kilometers away. The next day, the entire area would be pitted and cratered by looters searching for other tombs and new material to be sold to the dealers.

The major sites affected by looting are burial sites from the Phoenician and classical periods. These tombs, ^{were} much prized for their valuable artefacts, which ^{are} ~~were~~ often well preserved. This means good prices upon sale. Also, early Christian and Byzantine churches and basilicas were tracked for their important and valuable mosaic floors. Clandestine excavations were not limited to the land, many were done underwater nearby historic cities known to have been major harbour cities during the Antiquity. The most looted maritime area is situated in front of Tyre's shore in southern Lebanon, where thousands of statues and *amphorae* were dug out from shipwrecks lying beneath the sea waters. Statues illegally extracted from the waters of Tyre are still on sale in fancy antiquarian boutiques in the UAE today.

Once extracted from clandestine excavations, looted artefacts would be collected by smugglers and dealers who pass them through borders in order to reach international markets, where they sell for tenfold the price allotted to diggers. The dealers have strong local and international connections, which eases their work and ensures the quick liquidation of their goods. Some of the dealers even opened their own antiquarian boutiques in many western countries, namely Geneva and New York. In this context, many cultural objects were destroyed due to improper methods used in clandestine digging. The remaining objects were exported out of the country. And along with it

comes the irrevocable loss of Lebanese heritage.

~~Administrative awareness actions in post-war period~~ **Administrative, legal and awareness actions in post-war period**

In order to face the degrading situation and the loss of the national cultural heritage due to theft and illegal trade, many workshops and awareness campaigns have been conducted since the ratification of the UNESCO 1970 Convention in 1990. Awareness campaigns and workshops brought locals and governmental agencies together, while others aimed to reach out to neighbouring Arab countries, also signatories of the Convention. Two regional workshops focused on the review of measures against the illicit trafficking of cultural property were held in Lebanon with the collaboration of the UNESCO regional office. The first was held in 2002, the second in 2009.

Following the first workshop, held in February 2002 in Beirut and gathering UNESCO-¹⁹⁷⁰ Convention affiliated Arab States, a recommendation by the Lebanese State Party representatives was issued to set up a national committee to fight against illicit trading of cultural objects. This Committee was to be composed of representatives of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture, including the Director General of Antiquities and the Director General of Culture, in addition to representatives from the Ministries of Justice, the Interior and Municipalities, of Foreign Affairs and of Finance. It aimed to monitor the matters related to the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods at a national and international level and to make administrative and legislative proposals to the competent authorities. Unfortunately, this decision was not implemented and the Committee was never formed.

Law application procedures and the 1970 UNESCO Convention

Today, the Ministry of Culture and the National Security Agencies (Police forces, General Security forces, customs, etc.) share the procedures for the application of the 1970 UNESCO Convention as well as the above mentioned laws. Subsequent to the seizure of illicitly trafficked cultural properties by the security agencies, the objects ^{are} were transferred to the Directorate General of Antiquities by direct order from the Attorney General or the General Prosecutor. Once the cultural properties are handed over by the security forces, the DGA follows the subsequent procedures:

1. Objects are inspected and their provenance is certified by both DGA and Police.
2. In case the objects are from Lebanon, the judge opens an inquiry and police investigations are carried out in order to locate the place from which the objects are illegally extracted in addition to an inquiry about the network of people involved in the illicit act.
3. In case the objects are foreign, the Directorate General of Antiquities transmits the list of the objects with explanatory documents and photographs to the competent authorities of the countries concerned through diplomatic channels.
4. A bilateral technical committee is formed between Lebanon and the provenance countries to finalize the certification of origin and to draw up the final list of objects to be repatriated.
5. Once all documents are completed, the repatriation is done according to diplomatic procedures between the two countries.

In applying these procedures, the Lebanese government seized and returned many stolen antiquities and illicit cultural objects sent through Lebanese territory to Syria and Iraq.

Sanctions and regulatory measures

According to 1933 Law R.L./166, illicit trafficking in antiquities or cultural properties is considered as a minor crime or a misdemeanor, but not a felony or a major crime. This consideration did not change with the newly established Law no. 37, issued in 2008. Both laws impose sanctions that range from one month to three years of imprisonment, in addition to a financial penalty. Antiquities are seized and donated to the National Museum as stipulated in Article 107 of the Law on Antiquities R.L./166 and Article 20 of Law no. 37 on Cultural Property.

Solutions found for private collections of cultural properties

Despite the decisions made as regards the ban on the trade in antiquities issued in 1990, many antiquities dealers continued their activity. Furthermore, the unrest and insecurity caused by the war prevented any inspections to put a stop to their activity, leading to government incapacity to control the illegal market trade. Consequently, neither legal actions nor any sanction have been taken against these dealers, resulting in an increase of the illicit trade of national cultural objects as well as trans-border illicit traffic.

In 1999, a huge campaign was raised by the General Prosecutor against these traders and some of their shops were closed by court decisions. This was only temporary as there were flaws in the procedures, i.e. the conditions for proper legal confiscation were not met during seizures. Consequently, the General Prosecutor withdrew his decision and no sanctions were taken against the traders. Yet, since that incident many shops were closed and the traders froze their collections that were inventoried by the DGA during the campaign.

During the campaign, many private owners of antiquities were called by the judge, and most of their publicly exhibited collections were seized but returned because of the same above-mentioned flaws. In addition, the court ruled the restitution of their 'properties' in accordance with Article no. 306 of the Civil Prosecutions Code, which states that: 'According to the general legal adjudication, the acquisition of a movable cultural object in good faith, and in an open transparent way, constitute a conclusive argument of ownership that cannot be refuted under any other evidence.'

In this regard, let us bear in mind that in 1995 the DGA sent a formal consultation request to the Legal Consultation Board at the Ministry of Justice, to enquire whether the acquisition of antiquities could be considered legal before the issuing date of the 1990 Ministerial Decision. The Board's answer was, likewise, based on Article no. 306 of the Civil Prosecutions Code. Furthermore, Article no. 306 was considered to be applicable for objects found in any private collection today. Notwithstanding, private owners of cultural objects were made to worry about official decision undermining their ownership after the General Prosecutor took that decision in 1999. Accordingly, many requests to the consecutive Ministers of Culture were raised in order to find adequate solutions for private collections.

Hence, in order to implement the 1970 UNESCO Convention as well as Law no. 37 on cultural objects issued in 2008, the Ministry of Culture was required to draw an inventory of all cultural objects present on the Lebanese territory. The Minister of Culture formed a consultation committee in 2014 to prepare a draft decree regarding this inventory. After having obtained formal approval from the Council of State, the decree presented to the Council of Ministers in 2015 was based on Article no. 306 of the Civil Prosecutions Code, and is conditioned by Article 7 Paragraph b(1) of the UNESCO 1970 Convention:

(b) (i) to prohibit the import of cultural property stolen from a museum or a religious or secular public monument or similar institution in another State Party to this Convention after the entry into force of this Convention for the States concerned, provided that such property is documented as appertaining to the inventory of that institution.

In order to apply this decree, the administration gives all private owners an 18-month period to provide a complete list of the cultural objects they hold, so that DGA experts may carry out an inspection and that these properties be included in national inventory of cultural properties stipulated in the 2008 Law no. 37. Thus, the Ministry of Culture has a consistent inventory of the movable cultural objects on Lebanese territory, and is able to better control the illicit market of cultural properties in the near future.

Syria and Iraq

Syria and Iraq are facing a situation similar to Lebanon during the civil war, if only at an inconceivable rate. Extremists know the value of cultural objects to both the people and the international community. They undertake their work of destruction to wipe out the memory of the many communities that still connect with this ancient past. The intention is to make the fundamental principles of the Western world fall apart, and weaken any society whose values rest upon the past and heritage.

The destruction is coupled with large-scale organized looting overseen by extremist Jihadist groups. Clandestine excavations and illicit traffic have now grown to uncontrollable dimensions during war time. The objects seized that are coming through Lebanese borders increased as the war escalated. According to the administrative files held by the DGA since 2012, there are more than 70 seizures done by the security forces for objects from both Syria and Iraq.

In order to put some figures and numbers to these findings and observations, let us consider the following data: In 2012, the DGA had three seizures from Iraq and 13 cases of seizures from Syria compared to less than 10 cases for both countries before the war. In 2013 the DGA had 13 seizures from Syria. In 2014 the DGA had one case of object seizure from Iraq and 20 seizures from Syria. ~~Since January~~ 2015 The DGA had 12 seizures from Syria.

From January to September

Yemen

Since the war has begun in Yemen, the Lebanese customs have seized one shipment leaving Lebanon through Beirut National Airport. The shipment consisted of two Yemenite stone objects. The first one is a sculpted stylized head (60cm x 26cm) and the second one is a square stone depicting a carved stylized face (31cm x 31cm). The two objects are still at the DGA premises waiting to go through official return and restitution procedures.

Selected Cases from Lebanon

Hereafter, a summary of an interesting case from the Lebanese civil war, related to illicit traffic and unconventional solutions. Then, some recent cases will be drawn where seizures were made by either police forces, the customs or the general security authorities and transferred to the DGA.

The Phoenician cemetery in Tyre (The Tophet)

In 1990, as the Lebanese civil war came to a close, clandestine excavations performed at the Palestinian refugees' camp of Al Bass in Tyre uncovered a Phoenician cemetery with cinerary urns and other pottery artifacts, in addition to funerary stone stelae bearing Phoenician inscriptions (Seeden 1992b: 39). The excavation that began inside the camp under the houses extended toward the Roman and Byzantine cemetery previously excavated by the Department of Antiquities and included in the World Heritage site of Tyre, South East of the camp (Salamé-Sarkis 1988). The discoveries were exhibited on the local market by the diggers at that time despite the newly issued Decision no. 8 of 21 November 1990, by the Minister of Tourism to ban the archaeological objects trade, ~~Decision.~~

Intrigued by this discovery, which echoed the Tophet discovered in Carthage, Pr. Helga Seeden from the archaeology department of the American University of Beirut went to Tyre to inquire about the excavated pottery on the local market. There, she saw part of the discoveries consisting of cinerary urns with cremated bones mixed with sand cemented inside the jars, as well as an impressive collection of Tyrian red slip ware amphoras and various jugs and funerary *stelae* bearing Phoenician inscriptions (Seeden 1992b: 43).

(Fig. 3)

In an attempt to prevent the material from reaching local and international mafia via the antique dealers, due to the absence of instruments enabling seizure of these objects, it was decided to raise funds to buy the items discovered in order to offer them to the DGA (Seeden 1992b: 43-46)*. Comparable actions were taken by other people during the war. Cinerary urns that came from the same location were exhibited later in the Beiteddine Museum thanks to Minister of Tourism, Walid Joumbat. I had the chance to catalogue and study this collection inside the Beiteddine Museum in 1994 as part of my MA thesis (Seif 1995).

Public lectures were given both in Beirut and Tyre in order to raise public awareness on the importance of these artifacts and the necessity to salvage that heritage. Many positive responses followed of these lectures. This encouraged Pr. Seeden's team to carry on. And so, the collection was eventually bought and handed over to the DGA during an official ceremony at the Rif Bank in Beirut, where it was exhibited in June 1991. According to Seeden, the exhibition drew nearly 2,500 visitors during the summer (Seeden 1992b: 46). Furthermore, the collection was studied and the different material published in Beirut, ~~and a publication edited~~ by the AUB History and Archaeology Department, in the special issue of the 125th anniversary of the AUB ~~was~~ launched in 1992 (Seeden 1992b: 39-89; Ward 1992; Sader 1992).

The case of the mosaics seized at the Eastern border, Al Masnaa customs.

In January 2013, during a routine check on the road from Damasus to Beirut in western Beiqa, 18 mosaics were detected on a bus by customs agents. The smugglers were on board and they made a deal with the driver to pass through the Syrian and Lebanese borders, wrought together in fabric and rolled up like carpets. The Attorney General ordered their arrest. The mosaics were inspected by a DGA archaeologist on-site upon official judicial request. These mosaics were later transferred to DGA warehouses.

with the mosaics

* The Rif Bank, and its Director, Dr. Willy Rellecke, offered the major contributions, The president of the Beirut International College, Mr. Edmun Tohme, Helen Sader and Helga Seeden joined in to raise the funds needed to complete the rescue action (Seeden, H., 1992 : p.46).

The police report stated that the mosaics originated from Syria. Furthermore, their North Syrian origin was determined from their type and the nature of the scenes depicted. Official request for an expertise on the **seized mosaics** was thus submitted to the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) in Damascus. Later on, the DGA received a team of DGAM mosaic experts, who identified the mosaics and ascertained their origin. ^{However,} The detailed examination of the mosaics ~~revealed, however,~~ revealed that some of them were fakes, and they were inserted within the lot in order to increase the number and get better prices. A committee from both countries was formed in order to prepare the repatriation of these mosaics. Then official restitution and repatriation occurred in early 2013. Two police cars escorted the truck transporting the mosaics from the DGA warehouse to the Lebanese eastern borders.

The fake manuscripts case

Two members of the Police force disguised as potential buyers arrested a dealer within Lebanese territory who was offering to sell old manuscripts, which he claimed were brought from a public library in Syria. These manuscripts had Ottoman certifications and Ottoman official papers indicating their nature (a Bible and a Qu'ran), marked with the official stamp of the last Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II. Once authorities had proceeded with the required arrests and seizure of objects, the manuscripts were transferred to the DGA who sent them for conservation and authentication to one of the most important paper conservation university labs in the country. Once a textual and paper expertise was carried, specialists declared that the manuscripts were fakes or counterfeit. These manuscripts are now held in the DGA's fake requisitions collection – a reference collection for any potential future use and comparison.

(Figs. 4-5)

The case of stolen objects from Apamea and Palmyra.

In May 2013, the DGA received an email from the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Protection Treaties Section Office, indicating that dealers from Beirut are proposing objects for sale from Palmyra on the European market. The information was sent directly to the Ministry of Interior's dedicated department, so that the proper procedures might be carried out. At the same time, the general security department was following an inquiry done by a journalist on illicit traffic of cultural objects from Syria. Information from both sides confirmed the location of the objects in the southern suburb of Beirut. After first inspection of the area by the general security forces, they located a shop which was a normal flea market shop selling traditional antiques and there were additional exhibited objects of archaeological nature.

Since the number of mixed items (archaeological and fake) exhibited was enormous, and since the security forces did not have experts to identify the real from the fake, a decision was taken to get an expert from the DGA with the Hit Team that is to seize the merchandise. The expert's mission is to identify the real objects that will be seized. In fact, the intervention of the security forces on the ground had to be quick, ~~since the objects seized had quickly been transferred to a truck.~~ Furthermore, the number of objects in the shop was huge and could not fit in one truck. Consequently, a selection process had to be made in order to seize and move the real objects at once before the situation escalated on the ground.

The Hit Team broke in at 5 p.m and discovered that the objects were in two different locations: in the flea market shop and in a sculpture workshop, where items were to be restored. This added more stress to the mission, as it had to use the previously decided amount of time for both locations. Consequently, the expert was put under high stress in order to perform his job as fast as he can. The only solution for the expert was to grab a piece of charcoal and mark with an X all the archaeological objects held by the shop, so that the team may seize them and get them on truck. As soon as the identification process was done, police and experts went to second location where 14 funerary Palmyra-type sculptures were identified and seized, corresponding to the Internet files sent. The archaeological objects not only came from Palmyra, but also from Apamea and the Homs region. Around 83 objects were found, ranging between architectural stone elements from the Roman period to the Byzantine and Islamic periods, together with stone ossuaries and a tomb door from the Byzantine period in addition to pottery from earlier periods, mainly the Bronze Age. After the seizure by the General Security Forces with experts from the DGA, the objects were then transferred to the DGA warehouse and kept there. A Lebanese-Syrian joint commission inspected the objects and ascertained their provenance. As a result, these objects were repatriated to Syria in October 2013.

(Fig. 6)

The Borj Hammoud case

On 24 October 2013, the DGA received a call from the police division specialized in international theft and cultural trafficking requesting, an expert to accompany them in a bust in Bourj Hammoud region in Beirut's eastern suburbs. Authorities put a shop suspected of illicitly trafficking archaeological objects under surveillance. That same afternoon, the expert accompanied the hit squad that broke into the shop. In the office, many archaeological artifacts mixed with new second-hand antiques and lots of fake replicas of original archaeological objects were spotted. Much to the squad's surprise, more was discovered in a warehouse situated in the shop's close vicinity, as the owner of a warehouse of around 250 square meters filled with fake and original objects stored together indiscriminately. The fakes were replicas of Assyrian wall reliefs as well as Roman, Mesopotamian and Persian style replicas. When asked for the date of the import, the owner said that he received the merchandise long time ago, for more than 15 years. The information was ascertained by the police interrogations of the people working at the shop. Consequently, the smugglers who passed the objects across the border were untraceable.

(Fig. 7)

At the warehouse, the police found the workshop in which many fragments of objects illicitly trafficked through the borders were stored and restored – detached pieces of figurines and pottery shards restored by completing the missing parts and retouching the objects in order to look as good as the originals. Many of these objects are found on international markets and in renowned auction houses and sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

How do these objects pass authenticity tests? The arrested shop owner's answer was straightforward. He said that if you send an Islamic *sgraffiato* plate to a lab for authenticity test, the only place they can remove slices from for the test is the base, since

this part is invisible and the sampling process in this region will not damage the object. Consequently, authentic *sgraffiato* bases ~~to~~ are bought, and a fake upper part of the plate is added. Collectors trust that these are authentic pieces, even after they send them to be tested in specialized labs. As for the stone objects, qualified artists are hired in order to copy the original objects in similar stone types. Those copies are then dipped in earth mixed with acids and animal dung for a certain period of time in order to get a good surface ware. Then they are tarnished using clay soils from the archaeological sites where the original objects were excavated⁷.

A large number of objects were seized and brought to the DGA warehouses. But since the objects were transited through the borders long time ago and because they have types that can be found in many sites spread over minimum three countries (Lebanon, Syria and Iraq) they were kept in the possession of the DGA. The replicas and fakes are added to a separate collection intended to be a study and training collection in the future for the new recruits at the DGA.

Conclusion

Illegal activities related to cultural heritage, be it either clandestine digging, illicit trafficking or production of fakes were and are still performed in many Near Eastern countries rich with an archaeological and cultural past. Furthermore, war led these activities to increase strongly, also causing them to spread to a larger territory. This was the case of Lebanon during the civil war, as is now the case of Iraq and Syria. Needless to say, what is happening in other neighbouring countries where the occupying States did not sign the 1970 UNESCO Convention and considers the history of the other as a dark times in the history of the newly formed state and consequently needs to be cleansed.

This intentional cleansing and the destruction of the tangible traces of a people's entire history is now taking large-scale proportions in Syria~~n~~ – at a rate that would have been inconceivable during the Lebanese war. In Syria and Iraq, the extremist jihadist terrorist groups are conducting systematic destruction of the cultural heritage of thousands of years of vivid cultural development. This is combined with illicit traffic of thousands of artifacts through organized networks and transnational mafia. The loss is irrevocable, as is the unnamable tragedy of the extermination of native minority populations.

Lebanon, through the application of the UNESCO ~~ratified conventions~~ , as well as the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council, is trying to stop as much as possible the illicit traffic in cultural properties at its borders and inside its territory⁸. Currently, the Directorate General of Antiquities holds cultural objects from Syria, Iraq and Yemen. DGA authorities are communicating with the relevant administrations in these countries in order to find the best way to save the ~~seized objects~~ and to return them to the competent authorities when time and conditions are appropriate. The seized objects include archaeological objects as well as objects of worship stolen from religious sites.

It should be noted that an important number of the objects seized on the market are fakes and counterfeits, as experts estimate that around 55% are fakes. This said, it is our conviction that, for each trafficker in illicit antiquities caught by the police and gone on trial, there are hundreds 'if not thousands' who escape justice. This is unfortunately a widespread phenomenon in many other countries (Palmer 1991: 33; Herscher 1987). The need for international collaboration efforts to face such a widespread epidemic is most urgent.

Notes

1 Ernest Renan published his mission likewise entitled *Mission de Phénicie* in 1864.

2 See Lebanese Juridical Collection no. 15, p. 15-22.

3 This law was written by Charles Viroilleaud, a French archaeologist who served as director of the *Service des Antiquités de Syrie* between 1920 and 1929. At the time, he wrote the text of the law on antiquities for both Syria and Lebanon.

4 The DGA was part of the Ministry of Tourism at that period. It became part of the Ministry of Culture in 1993.

5 When an international convention is ratified through a law voted in Parliament, the articles of the convention are then applied, as if they were part of the Lebanese legislation.

6 Lebanon has not yet joined the UNIDROIT Convention.

7 Many bags of soil were found at the workshop, tagged with names of the different Lebanese, Mesopotamian and North Syrian archaeological sites. Also, many exhibition catalogues and site reports and publications were seized with the merchandise. According to the shop owner, these were the catalogues where the selection of objects is made by the dealers in order to send the replicas to Europe and other western countries.

8 Lebanon ratified most of the UNESCO conventions dealing with the protection of the cultural heritage of the others as well as its national and world heritage assets. These conventions are the Hage convention with its first protocol of 1954, the 1970 convention on illicit trade and the 1972 Convention on the Protection of Cultural World heritage. Lebanon also applies all the UN Security Council resolutions namely the resolution no. 1483 and no. 2199.

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Fig. 1. The Mithraeum of Sidon statues at the Louvre today.



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Fig. 2. The presumed Alexander sarcophagus in the Istanbul Museum today.



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Fig. 3. Funerary *stelae* depicting Phoenician inscriptions.



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Fig. 4. Fake manuscript.



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Fig. 5. Fake certificate indicating the content of the manuscript.



Fig. 6. Artifacts stored at the DGA warehouse.



Fig.7. The fake Assyrian Wall reliefs.