THE ILLICIT TRADE OF ANTIQUITIES IN THE AEGEAN AREA

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Prologue

Eastern Mediterranean is a place with rich cultural heritage which include known and unknown archaeological sites scattered everywhere. Both theses archaeological sites, as it happens worldwide, are under attack by looters (Proulx 2013, 111). The previous years the world experienced extreme and brutal acts from ISIS/ISIL in Syria and Iraq. A series of murders, such as Khaled al-Asaad, kidnappings and demolitions of archaeological and religious sites like Palmyra and Nineveh revealed the great danger our societies are facing from such groups (Bauer 2015, 1). The situation showed that antiquities smuggling phenomenon has more consequences than it seemed at the past. Beside the loss of important scientific information about humanity’s past societies our society, with the destruction of the context (Renfrew and Bahn 2001, 567; Calvani 2008, 32; Bailey 1993, 5; Campbell 2013, 114-115; Brodie and Renfrew 2005, 349; Brodie et all 2000, 8-11; Herscher 1987, 213; Gill 2012, 37), is facing a series of parallel effects which are not only limited in the cultural level. There are also important consequences connected with the social life of a country. Profit coming from antiquities smuggling actions could easily be used for bribes of government officials, further engagement with looting and crime that eventually would undermine the social web of a country (Brodie et al all 2000, 11-17; Brodie and Contreras 2012, 9).

The research

Destabilization of Syria, Iraq and Libya, combined with the financial crisis in Greece raised the need to further investigate the phenomenon of illicit trade of antiquities in the Eastern Mediterranean countries. Greek Police Headquarters granted for the first time full access to the files of the Department of Smuggling of Antiquities (permit number 2565/15/528492)

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so that they can be analyzed within the framework of a research program of the University of Athens. 140 cases, out of total 199, were arrests and the remaining 59 cases were reliable denunciations. All the evidence was spread throughout the period 23.04.1999 until 31.03.2004. For the Data Analysis Access 2010 was used. For our research we considered the following laws: Greek Law about antiquities (Greek Law 3028/2008; Greek Law 3658/2008), Greek Law about guns (Greek Law 2168/1993), Greek Law about Drugs (Greek Law 4139/2013) and finally Greek Law about sensitive data information (Greek Law 2472/1997).

**Objective**

The primary target of this research is to elucidate the antiquities smuggling phenomenon as much as it could. There are still many crucial aspects around this devastating phenomenon that are almost unknown. Hence one of the first objectives of this research is to estimate the national financial damage caused by looting in Greece. For this purpose we searched the files for official estimations from National Museum of Athens on confiscated antiquities. The second aim is to determine the type of antiquities preferred by the involved persons in this illicit trade. Would they be small in size or big? Would they be objects from a specific cultural period of Greece, or would it be objects of a specific material, e.g. gold? The third important objective of this research is to determine the social profile of the involved persons. It is not easy to face an enemy without knowing his face. Fourth and last objective, but probably the most important, is to reveal any connections between antiquities smuggling and organized crime, terrorism and other illegal activities (Rodriguez 2008, 92; Calvani 2008, 33-34; Brodie et al 2000, 16).

**Hypotheses**

Taking into consideration older researches and publications around the illicit trade of antiquities at the beginning of our research we made some research hypotheses. International organizations like UNESCO and individual researchers have spoken about large financial profits around this particularly illicit trade. The amounts vary considerably starting from $ 150 million, going to $ 2, 2 billion, $ 3 billion or the enormous amount of $ 7, 8 billion (Campbell 2013, 114; Brodie et al 2000, 24; Calvani 2008, 30-32). Due to all these different amounts our first hypothesis was that the aggregate national financial damage caused by looting actions would be large.

Trying to elucidate if the smugglers have specific preferences (Reichel 2008, 68-74; Sakelliadis 2008, 35) in types (Stone 2008, 78) and sizes of antiquities we assumed that the types of antiquities would be small in size because it would be easy for such objects to move and to hide.

The social profile of those persons involved in antiquities smuggling cases seemed to be a trouble for the research. Some researchers argued that usually people from depressed economies and poor are involved (Brodie et al 2000, 13; Russell 2008, 29; Stone 2008, 65; Mackenzie 2005, 249). Others argued that reach people and people for the upper class are behind this phenomenon (Hamilakis 2009, 40-41; Brodie et al 2000, 17). Problems related to data collection (Campbell 2013, 120; Fisman and Wei 2009, 82; Calvani 2008, 29) seemed to be a fundamental barrier for such a research. Our purpose is to show for the first time data coming directly from real arrests. Thus we assumed as a research hypothesis that the social profile of the involved persons would be of a low social status. For example workers and farmers people of the lower layers of the society’s fabric.
Finally the most interesting part of this research and one of the main inspiration levers is trying to see any connections between antiquities smuggling and organized crimes. Since many scholars connected antiquities smuggling with organized networks we assumed that there must be a connection between antiquities smuggling and organized crime, terrorism and other illegal activities.

Results

National Financial Damage

An assiduous study of the files referring to antiquities’ smuggling cases gave some important results starting from the national financial damage Greece have had from this phenomenon. Every time there is an arrest about antiquities smuggling there is also a confiscation of artifacts. Those artifacts became objects of an official financial estimation from a team of National Museum of Athens. The team, consisting of archaeologists, is consulting international price rates and antiquities auctions in order to estimate the price of each one of the confiscated artifacts. Unfortunately through missing and incompletely files we managed to find 95 cases which they had been officially estimated. Since it is completely subjective to declare the amount as overpriced or undervalued we will state the absolute amount of the national financial damage estimation which on these cases reached the aggregate sum of 4.669.635, 7 €.

Types of objects

We, as we already stated above, assumed that the smugglers would have had some preferences in small objects and because of this we created two categories based on artifacts sizes. The first category would include big in size artifacts such as grave stones statues, architectural parts, statues etc. The second category would include small in size artifacts such as coins, vessels, small idols made by clay, copper or stone/marble, jewels, statues’ parts etc. The confiscated artifacts consisted of votive reliefs, vessels, grave stones, jewels, metallic objects such as spears, metallic vessels etc. and of course coins. 99% of the objects were small in size and only 1% was big in size. Even if we exclude coins from our small size category, again the vast number of confiscated objects is small in size -96, 5% small size, 3, 5% big size.

Social profile

One of the most important and basic aim of this research was to investigate the social profile of the involved persons in antiquities smuggling cases. This aspect could be the greatest tool in the hands of authorities fighting looting. On these 140 arrests cases that we investigated 237 individuals were arrested. It is a sufficient number. For this purpose of we created ten categories based in occupational proximity. Hence we had the following categories.

1. Businessmen: in this category we have incorporated occupations that generally were attributed as merchants and jewelers.
2. Freelancers. This category had a great variety of occupations such as drivers, hairdressers, bakers, car engineers, electricians, butchers, plumbers, economists, carpenters, baristas, pastry cooks, writers and sound technicians.
3. Private sector’s employees. Private employees in general, bank employees and security guards.
4. Public sector’s employees, such as public sector employees in general, doctors, policemen, university professors, customs clearers and teachers.
5. Agricultural activities such as farmers, cheese makers, small land owners, cattlemen, small animal industry owners.

6. Archaeology and fine arts: archaeologists, gallery owners, lithographers, musicians, musicians, conservators.

7. Constructions. In this category we incorporated people working around the constructions industry such as civil engineers, workers, construction company’s employees, excavation machine drivers, gaffers, smiths, real estate employees and builders.

8. Maritime activities such as sailors and fishermen.

9. We also had a sample of individuals with unknown occupation.

10. Other. This final category was made to include bizarre occupations that they could not come under the previous categories such as unemployed, house activities, students and retired pension holders. The results were these:

Businessmen: 49 individuals 20, 675%.
Construction sector: 33 individual 13, 924 %.
Other occupation: 30 individuals 12, 658%.
Freelancers: 28 individuals 11, 814%.
Agricultural sector: 21 individuals 8, 86%.
Archaeology and fine arts: 19 individuals 8, 016%.
Unknown: 18 individuals 7, 594%.
Public sector employees: 18 individuals 7, 594%.
Private employees: 16 individuals 6, 751%
Maritime occupations: 5 individuals 2, 11%.

Figure No 1. Graphic showing the occupations of the individuals arrested in cases about antiquities smuggling.

Organized crime, terrorism, further illegal actions.

At the beginning of the research one of the main targets was to prove a connection between antiquities smuggling, organized crime and terrorism. The following results were extracted by examining the cases. 37 cases have been characterized as organized crime out of the total 140 arrests.

Through the confiscated context in these cases we manage to reveal a further connection with organized crime. In 20 cases except antiquities, the confiscated context included illegal firearms. Most of the guns were military guns such as pistols, revolvers and Kalashnikovs.

In seven cases the confiscated context had antiquities and drugs and in five cases the confiscation showed antiquities plus fake documents such as fake passports and counterfeit money. Finally the research revealed no connection between antiquities smuggling and terrorism.

50, 73% of the cases had only looted antiquities
26, 42% of the cases characterized as organized crime
14, 28% of the cases had antiquities and illegal guns
5% of the cases had antiquities and illegal drugs
3, 57% of the cases had antiquities and fake documents

Conclusions

This research fulfilled some of its hypotheses though some other eluded. The sum of the national financial damage is an amount that with a rough estimation could be ten times
larger if the antiquities were sold in international auctions beside black market. Still 4 million euros is enough money into the hands of smugglers / criminals to finance further their illegal activities. The type of objects that usually are under threat is small in size (Brodie 2003, 16). The enormous diversity of objects dating from Neolithic Period to Ottoman Time including coins, grave stones, clay idols, stone vessels, clay vessels, architectural parts, religious images, statues, votive reliefs, jewels and many more shows that smugglers will not hesitate to steal everything.

The social profile of the involved person on antiquities smuggling is something that has to be concerned by all authorities dealing with antiquities smuggling. Businessmen are people –in most of the cases- with high educational level who have businesses and could easily launder money from such actions. But the most fearful fact is that ordinary people are also involved in antiquities smuggling. Women with house activities, students, policemen, university professors, kindergarteners, bakers, drivers, painters, hairdressers, archaeologists, conservators and a multitude of other occupations. This fact is making difficult for the authorities to try and stop looting. How is it possible the informants and police networks to be informed about a hairdresser or a student who have looted antiquities and trying to sell the objects in the black market?

As the facts showed, at least for Greece, there is no connection between antiquities smuggling and terrorism. Contrariwise there is a strong connection with organized crime and further illegal activities and crimes. Almost 50% -49, 27%- of the cases showed a connection with crime. Most of them were cases characterized as organized crime but as the confiscated context showed illegal guns –mostly military-, drugs, and fake papers also existed in it.

Antiquities smuggling is a devastating and destructive phenomenon. This phenomenon is a menace for our societies and authorities should fight it principally with the best weapon a society has and that is education. As the research continuous soon more results in a much bigger scale will reveal trends and information giving an even more accurate view about this shameless phenomenon.

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