

## Stolen Heritage

### Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Heritage in the EU and the MENA Region

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# Organised Crime in Trafficking of Cultural Goods in Turkey

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**Abstract** This research assesses who is involved in the trafficking of archaeological objects and fake antiquities from Turkey; how they are involved; and how they operate, both online and offline. It highlights the volume and visibility of indicators of illicit activity by suspects in online forums and social networks like Facebook and Instagram. With automatically-generated data, netnographic data and other open data, this research documents online social organisation of mass disorganised crime. It also documents corruption; transnational crime, organised crime and transnational organised crime; and financing of political violence from repression to terrorism and conflict.

**Keywords** Antiquities trafficking. Cyprus. Germany. Narcotics trafficking. Organised crime. Organised cultural property crime. Political violence. Turkey. United Kingdom.

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## 1 Introduction

Although there is evidence of trafficking of art, antiquities and/or forgeries alongside heroin, opium, cocaine, captagon, ecstasy, cannabis, firearms and/or counterfeit currency (cf. Hardy 2019b), it is piecemeal; it has not been subject to comprehensive documentation or sustained analysis. So, some “overall assessment[s] of transnational organized crime” cover trafficking of heroin, opium, cocaine, captagon, ecstasy and cannabis, trafficking of firearms, trafficking of vehicles, smuggling of migrants, trafficking of women and children, counterfeiting of currency and laundering of money, yet not trafficking of art and antiquities (e.g. Özgül 1999). They may even name figures in the trafficking of narcotics, such as Halil Havar, who have collaborated with figures in the trafficking of antiquities as well as narcotics, such as Mustafa Bayram (e.g. Özgül 1999), yet not acknowledge the existence of transnational organised cultural property crime (cf. Hardy 2020c, 225).

Still, there is no doubt about its existence in Turkey (see Akkuş, Efe 2015). Likewise, there is no doubt about its increasing internationalisation (see Hardy 2020c, for more evidence in Turkey and further evidence around the Eastern Mediterranean; see Hardy 2016, for comparable evidence in Eastern Europe). There are also online communities that identify as treasure-hunting cooperatives or otherwise operate as artefact-hunting collaborations, so its variety may be increasing as well. Some social networks may need to be reconceived as organised crime networks or even organised crime groups.

Furthermore, there are online communities with administrators and moderators who advertise the fact that they are violent political extremists [figs. 1-4]. Based on preliminary evidence from social networks, among other places, this intersection between cultural property crime and violent political extremism appears to extend from Turkey into Azerbaijan. For instance, one Turkey-based looter liked “Idealist [Ultrationalist] Thought [Ülkücü Düşünce]” [fig. 5], Turkey’s Nationalist Action Party (MHP) [fig. 6], other Turkish ultranationalist activism [fig. 7] and the “Grey Wolves of Azerbaijan [Azərbaycan Bozqurdları]” [fig. 8], who have fought for Azerbaijan in the war with Armenia over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh (see Armenian Bar Association 2021), as well as communities for “Treasure-Hunters and Buried Treasure-Hunters [Defineciler ve Hazineciler]”, “[Metal] Detector[ists] [Dedektör]” and antiquities dealers (see Hardy 2020b, for numerous other cases).

It is important, then, to understand how criminal organisations have been involved in cultural property crime; how organised cultural property crime has persisted; how Turkey-rooted criminal organisations have operated in countries such as Cyprus; how they have supplied markets through countries such as Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States; how they have been con-



**Figure 1** In 2017, TRTH01 displayed some of his weaponry

nected with other criminal activity and political violence in Turkey, Cyprus and Syria; and how their connections may reach as far afield as Mexico. All of these matters have implications for concerns as fundamental as security and the rule of law.

## 2 Method

This study is grounded in information from open sources, such as official reports, scientific studies, professional media, social media and social networks (cf. Lowenthal 1998). By tracing names and connections as they appear in openly-accessible documents, it outlines a microhistory of cultural property crime in and through Turkey. Using their self-published documents in social media and social networks as well, it reveals interconnections between criminal actors and political actors and identifies potential channels for illicit flows of cultural goods within illicit flows of other commodities such as narcotic substances.

Still, it is important to recognise that, while researchers check on other people's publicly-documented activity, other people check on researchers' publicly-documented activity, whether to exploit or to intimidate. It should also be noted that cultural property crime is naturally dangerous work, in which there are workplace hazards such as toxic gas and collapsing tunnels in unprofessional excavations (Acar 2019) and professional hazards such as murder by competitors (Acar,

**Figure 2** In 2019, TRTH01 shared a meme where a man in military camouflage made the sign of the ultranationalist Grey Wolves and declared, “There is only one God [and] his army is Turkish [Allah tektir, ordusu Türk'tür]”



Kaylan 1990). So, policing and investigation of looting and trafficking may be extremely dangerous work, too. For instance, gendarme Cengiz Darbaş (Doğan Haber Ajansı 2015) and police officer Mithat Erdal (Erbil 2017) were killed in the line of duty. Museum archaeologist Merhume Merve Kaçmış was driven to suicide when bullied to cover up for embezzlement by senior colleagues (Emen 2020).

This study does not publish any confidential data. Nonetheless, user-generated content has been anonymised to prevent inappropriate reuse. Users have been assigned an arbitrary code, which follows the publisher's location, activity and order in this text – like TRTH01 for the first-cited treasure-hunter in Turkey. Screenshots have been edited to obscure identifying material and to remove irrelevant material.

### 3 Protected Criminals and Connected Criminals

As commodity criminals have received “political protection” elsewhere (e.g. Mexico, cf. Pansters 2018, 317; 319; 324; see also Bulgaria, cf. Lazarova, Hristov 2007), some Smugglers of arms and drugs and perpetrators of other crimes have been “protected criminals [Korunan suçlular]” in Turkey (Radikal 2001). Indeed, organised crime has been so dominant, connections between organised criminals and state actors have been so deep, conflict financing through drug trafficking has been so significant in the war between the Turkish Armed Forces (Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (TSK)) and the Kurdish



**Figure 3** In 2015, TRTH02, who had personalised weaponry, shared a meme that commanded, “rather than making the [Islamist] Rabaa/Rabbi’ah [sign] and weeping for the Arabs, make the [ultranationalist] Grey Wolf [sign] and fight for the Turkmens [in Syria] [Rabia yapıp araplara ağlayacağınıza, Bozkurt yapip Türkmeneli için savaşın]”

tan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK)) that some organised crime has been characterised as state-organised crime (Bovenkerk, Yeşilgöz 2007, 15).

There are named examples of criminals who have served the state. For instance, Abdullah Çatlı was a notorious organised criminal and perpetrator of state crime; “Green [Yeşil]” Mahmut Yıldırım shifted between work as an intelligence agent for the National Intelligence Organisation (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MİT)) and Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele (JİTEM)) and work as an assassin; and “Albanian [Arnavut]” Sami Hoştan was a Turkish Mafia member and casino owner. Çatlı told Yıldırım that Hoştan “[did] heroin job[s], but [did them with] in the law [Eroin işi yapıyor ama kanunla yapıyor]”, as he “worked with the highest level of intelligence units [en üst düzey istihbarat birimleriyle çalış[tı]]” (according to Radikal 2001).

Turkish Mafia godfather Abuzer Uğurlu was “convicted of trading drugs for weapons” (Naylor 2004, 99). Uğurlu also worked for MİT “officially [resmi]” between 1974 and 1979 and unofficially (literally, “personally [kişisel]”) for even longer (according to a former director of counter-terrorism for MİT, Mehmet Eymür, cited by Milliyet 2001; see also Gingeras 2014, 227, 229). He also worked for Communist Bulgarian intelligence. Furthermore, he worked with the Communist Bulgarian state trafficking service, Kintex, and Turkish fascist paramilitary/terrorist Grey Wolves (Lee 1997).

Abuzer Uğurlu’s father, Hüseyin Uğurlu (also written as Husein Uğurlu, also known as Kurt Husein and Hamal Husein) was “suspected” of trafficking in drugs and arms between Turkey and Bulgaria as well (according to a letter from American diplomats to Italian judge Ilario Martella in 1983, cited by Lazarova, Hristov 2007). Indeed, “large quantities of sophisticated NATO weaponry... were smuggled from Western Europe to countries in the Middle East during the 1970s and early 1980s”, “often... in exchange for consign-

**Figure 4** In 2018, TRTH03, who did not display any weaponry, shared a meme that displayed a bullet, a pen and a memory stick and instructed, “there are different paths of struggle [Mücadelenin farklı yolları vardır]”, while praising “the People of Jihad [Cihad Ehli]”



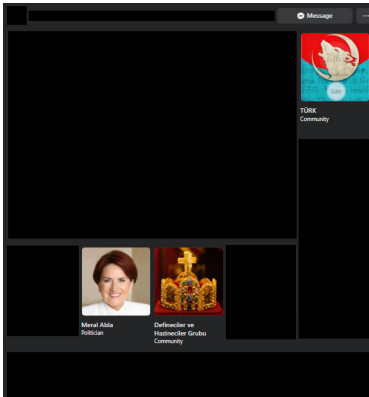
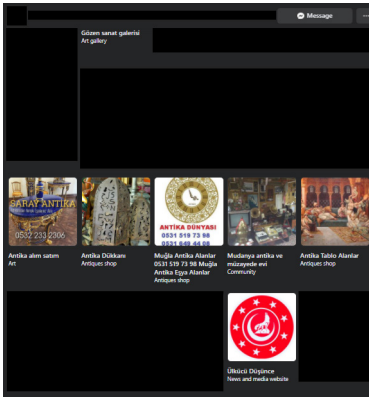
ments of heroin” from Turkey “through Bulgaria to northern Italy”, through Italian Mafia to elsewhere in Europe and the United States (according to Italian judge Carlo Palermo, cited by Lee 1997).

When the networks of these criminals are traced out, certain family names are recognised. For example, Faruk Telliğaoğlu trafficked arms with Abuzer Uğurlu (according to Mumcu [1981] 1994). Aydın Telliğaoğlu – or Aydın Telli, as the family also use Telli as an international form of their surname – was implicated in the “drug business [uyuşturucu iş[i]]” (according to Radikal 2001) and accused of participation in “provocative operations [provokatif operasyonlar]” (in other words, false flag operations, by Eymür, cited by Milliyet 2001). There were also network connections between Aydın Telli and Abuzer Uğurlu (according to Eymür, cited by Milliyet 2001; the connection may have been heroin smuggler and suspected assassin “Köylü” Abdurrahman Kıpçak, cf. Demir 1998).

Some traffickers of heroin have also been traffickers of antiquities, such as Aydın Dikmen (according to Jansen 2005, 21) and Nevzat Telliğaoğlu (according to Cumhuriyet 2012). Furthermore, certainly under Communism and seemingly into the post-socialist transition, Bulgaria’s “authorities never interfere[d]” in the activities of the antiquities mafia and were “probably well rewarded” for not interfering (according to “gang members”, interviewed by Acar, Kaylan 1990).

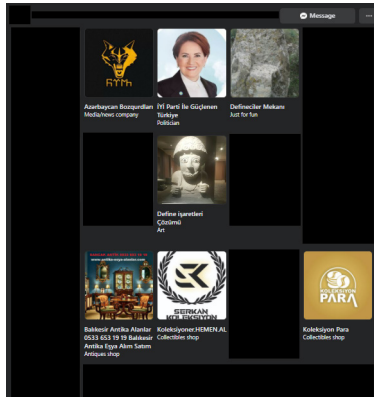
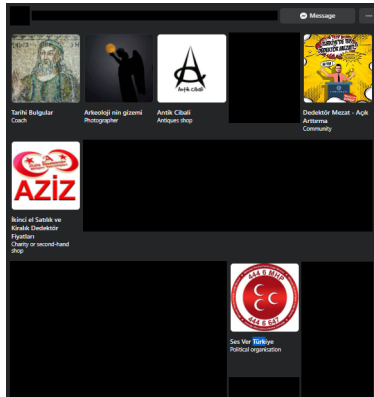
Separately yet notably, investigative journalists Özgen Acar and Melik Kaylan (1990) have specifically reported that Turkey maintains “dossiers” on serious cultural property criminals, but rarely acts on the information. By the late eighties, a private company of “retired military officers” was even conducting “aerial surveys of ancient sites” with military aircraft, then selling survey maps to antiquities smugglers (Acar, Kaylan 1990). Meanwhile, some police officers who have disrupted the smuggling business have been demoted and/or transferred out of positions of power (Acar, Kaylan 1988; 1990). This does not demonstrate that anyone under discussion is a protected criminal, but it does demonstrate the complexity and opacity of the situation in Turkey.





**Figure 5** By 2020, TRTH04 had expressed his belief in "Idealist [Ultrationalist] Thought [Ülkücü Düşünce]"

**Figure 7** By 2020, TRTH04 had expressed his support for other Turkish ultranationalist activism



**Figure 6** By 2020, TRTH04 had expressed his support for Turkey's Nationalist Action Party (MHP)

**Figure 8** By 2020, TRTH04 had expressed his support for the Turkish ultranationalist "Grey Wolves of Azerbaijan [Azərbaycan Bozqurdları]"

#### 4 The Family Business of Organised Cultural Property Crime

The pioneering work of investigative journalist Özgen Acar is the foundation of any historical or ethnographic understanding of organised cultural property crime that has been rooted in Turkey and Germany and has spanned Europe and North America. It can now be augmented with other journalistic investigations and legal investigations into cases over the past thirty years.

At least in the seventies and eighties, the Turkish Mafia comprised three regional groupings that encompassed 22 family-led, clan-like branches, whose activities encompassed the trafficking of antiquities as well as the trafficking of arms, narcotics, precious metals, minerals and other raw materials, plus fictitious export, false invoicing and black market debt collection, as well as gambling, prostitution and other aspects of entertainment (according to Cumhuriyet 1989b). Among the many families within the clan-like structures, three “controlled” antiquities trafficking (according to unnamed government officials, cited by Doxey 1996). The predominantly Syriac and Kurdish antiquities mafia were predominantly from Mardin, Turkey and in Munich, Germany. They constituted a “cartel”, which formed a “branch of the Turkish Mafia” (Acar, Kaylan 1988).

The son of a politician in Mardin, Mehmet Selim Telliağaoğlu (Hürriyet 2000b), now-retired “Blind” Edip Telliağaoğlu (or Edip Telli) was the “ringleader” (according to Acar, Kaylan 1988) or “kingpin” (according to Mazur 2005). He used violence and intimidation to control the activities of partners and the flows of commodities (according to Acar, Kaylan 1988). For instance, when his “protégé” smuggler Sami Güneri Güleler (or Sami Güleler) became a “defector” in partnership with Nihat Kolaşın, an assassin was dispatched to “eliminate” Güleler – or the rumour of a “hit” was spread to scare Güleler, who was duly “scared” into obedience (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990).

He was first arrested for antiquities trafficking in 1968 and later became a Munich-based antiquities dealer. His wife, Monika Kaufmann, was involved in dealing as well (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990; Cumhuriyet 1990) and he sometimes operated as Edip Kaufmann or Edip Telli-Kaufmann.

#### 1965

In 1965, the Karun Treasure or Lydian Hoard was looted from tombs in Güre. Then, Edip Telliağaoğlu, Nevzat Telliağaoğlu and Nizamettin Telliağaoğlu smuggled it from Turkey to Germany and Switzerland. Ali Bayırlar, Sökeli Ali, George Zakos (also known as Yorgo Zakos) and Muhammed Yegani (also transliterated as Muhammed Yoganah) were also involved in the trafficking (according to Edip Telli, cited by



Acar 1990a). At that time, Muhammed Yegani's accomplices included Aydın Dikmen (Acar 1990a). Nizamettin Telliağaoğlu also trafficked arms, cigarettes and other illicit commodities, until he was killed in a shoot-out with police in 1969 (Acar 1990a).

## 1966

In 1966, the Financial Police “conducted a raid on a house that belong[ed] to an individual named Fuat Üzülmöz, who trade[d] antiquities [antıkacılık yapan Fuat Üzülmöz adında bir şahsa ait olan eve baskın yapılmıştır]” (Türker 1966). They found “marble historic artefacts that [were] understood to have come out from underground, on which there was mud that was not even dry [toprak altından çıktığı anlaşılan ve üzerindeki çamurları dahi kurumamış, mermer tarihi eserler]” (Türker 1966). He attributed the antiquities to “a peasant in Antalya [Antalya’daki bir köylü]” (Türker 1966). Üzülmöz was the “top lieutenant” in the antiquities mafia (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990; see also Mazur 2006) and he, too, later became a Munich-based antiquities dealer.

## 1973

Selim Dere began handling antiquities in the fifties (Celator 1989, 6). Since then, he has repeatedly been linked to illicit antiquities (see Albertson 2020). In 1973, he was arrested for the trafficking of a “Sarcophagus of Hercules” from Perge, Turkey, alongside his cousin, Aziz Dere, and Fuat Üzülmöz’s father, Faraç Üzülmöz (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990; Hardy 2018a). In 1974, Selim Dere was convicted and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment in Turkey (see Albertson 2020).

## 1983

The mafia’s accomplices were notorious in their own right. Metin Özharat has been characterised as a “famous antiquities smuggler [ünlül antika kaçakçısı]” as well, perhaps “one of the five most important antiquities smugglers [en önemli beş büyük eski eser kaçakçısından biri]” in the country (according to Cumhuriyet 1991). Among other cases, in 1983, Metin Özharat and Nevzat Telli smuggled a garlanded marble sarcophagus to the United States (according to Başlangıç 1992).

Metin Özharat’s cousin, Tekin Özharat, had been involved in antiquities trafficking, too, until he was “murdered [during] the smuggling of a [nother] gold treasure [hoard] [Adıyaman’da bir altın defnesi kaçakçılığında öldürülmüştü]” in 1983 (Cumhuriyet 2012).

## 1984

In 1984, the Dekadrachm Hoard or Elmalı Hoard of 1,900 coins was looted by treasure-hunting technician İbrahim Sungur, alongside treasure-hunting hotel-owner İbrahim Başbuğ and village leader (muhtar) Ahmet Ali Şentürk, with Sungur's home-made, hand-built metal detector (Acar 2000; Norman 1993). Başbuğ was caught – and was represented in court by the head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), lawyer Deniz Baykal – but he paid a “bribe [rüşvet]” and was released (according to Acar 1988).

With “important [önemli]” assistance from Nihat Kolaşın and Grand Bazaar dealer Metin Özharat (according to Acar 2000), Edip Telliağaoğlu, Fuat Üzülmöz, Nevzat Telliağaoğlu and Fuat Aydınır “smuggled [kaçırıldı]” the Elmalı Hoard from Turkey to Switzerland and the United States (according to Sabah 2002; see also Hürriyet 2000a; 2000b). Fuat Aydınır was “arrested [tutuklanmıştır]” in 1989, while “arrest warrant[s] in absentia [gıyabi tutuklama kararı]” were issued for Edip Telliağaoğlu, Nevzat Telliağaoğlu and Fuat Üzülmöz, “who [had] fled abroad and marketed the treasure to auction companies and private collections in Europe and the USA [yurtdışına kaçan ve defineyi Avrupa ve ABD’nde müzayede firmalarına, özel koleksiyonlara pazarlayan]” (TCKBAMGM n.d.). The suspects exhausted the ten-year statute of limitations. At least in other cases, Fuat Aydınır’s nephew, Sait Aydınır, had occasionally been involved in illicit export, too (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990).

Metin Özharat escaped justice by getting tip-offs from “a mole in security [emniyetteki köstebeği]” to leave Turkey before any arrest and sending “‘bribe’ envoys [‘rüşvet’ elçileri]” to settle any outstanding problems (according to Cumhuriyet 1991). Metin Özharat’s wife, Birsen Özharat, was involved in handling as well (according to Cumhuriyet 1992) – and she was the sister-in-law of İbrahim Başbuğ.

## 1986

In 1986, (half-)“Blind Edip” Telli was detained in Italy in response to a Red Notice by Interpol on behalf of Turkey (Hürriyet 2000b), yet “somehow escaped [the] clutches [of the Italian police] [Her nasılsa elimizden kaçtı]” (Acar 1988). It is occasionally reported that Telli was “not arrested because he was a German citizen [Alman vatandaşı olduğu için tutuklanmadı]” (e.g. Hürriyet 2000b). However, it has also been suggested that Telli escaped “with the help of the Italian Mafia [İtalyan Mafiasının... yardımıyla]”, Cosa Nostra (according to Acar 2000).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that an arrest warrant was not issued by a prosecutor in Germany, because the prosecutor judged

Edip Telli to be a “respectable... German citizen [saygın... Alman vatandaşı]” (Acar 2000), who had “considerable business and family ties [saygın bir aile ve iş çevresi]” in Germany (according to the Turkish police, as paraphrased by Acar 1988; see also Acar, Kaylan 1988). Seemingly, an arrest warrant was not issued by a prosecutor in Turkey, either. The acquisition of dual Turkish-German citizenship has historically been impeded by the law in Germany and facilitated by the state in Turkey (cf. McFadden 2019) and Edip Telli had managed to acquire it. Yet, his “Turkish citizenship was revoked by a decision of the Council of Ministers in 1989, on the grounds that he ‘had become the national of another state without permission’ [‘izin almaksızın başka devletin uyruğuna girdiği’, gerekçesi ile 1989’da Bakanlar Kurulu kararı ile Türk vatandaşlığından çıkarılmıştı]” (according to Acar 2000). He, then, could not be either extradited or deported from Germany to Turkey. Meanwhile, “inexplicably”, Fuat Üzülmöz and Nevzat Telliğaoğlu were not indicted by a prosecutor in Turkey, even though they were in Turkey (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990).

## 1988

In 1988, Sait Aydın tried to smuggle a marble statue of Demeter out of Turkey for his uncle Fuat Aydın, but it was intercepted. He “fled to Canada”, but was “convicted in absentia” (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990).

## 1989

In 1989, 151 antiquities, which included jewellery, coins and ceramics and spanned prehistoric, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods, were seized from Sami Güneri Gülenen’s house, minibuses and warehouse in Istanbul, before they could be delivered to Edip Telliğaoğlu in Munich. Sami Güneri Gülenen, Nefise Bilge Rodop, Hayri Rodop and Hasan Sezmiş were “detained [gözaltına alındığını]” and another eight unnamed suspects were sought (according to Cumhuriyet 1989a).

## 1990

While journalist Özgen Acar (1990b) was investigating the mafia, he was warned that “it [would be] better if he [did] not write the things that he [was] going to write [yazacaklarını yazmasa iyi olur]” about Metin Özharat. At an auction in New York in 1990, Fuat Üzülmöz informed a journalist who had worked with Acar: “We are going to kill

him" (according to Mazur 2005). More recently, antiquities collector and private investigator Arthur Brand (2006) has also been pressured and "threatened", by unnamed persons, for his investigation of smuggling by the same cartel.

## 1991

In 1991, another 531 antiquities were smuggled out of Turkey. Duly, from 1994, Edip Telli was the subject of another arrest warrant in absentia. Eventually, he was caught in Switzerland and extradited to Turkey in 2000 (Şardan 2000).

## 1992

Nihat Kolaşın, who had been arrested as early as 1968 (Acar 1990c), has been characterised as an "antiquities smuggler [Eski eser kaçakçısı]" (by Acar 1998) and as a "famous smuggler [ünlü kaçakçı]" as well (by Acar, Ateşoğulları 2002, 104). In 1992, for instance, thieves stole marble statues from the archaeological storehouse for the ancient city of Stratonikeia in south-western Turkey. They were caught selling the stolen goods to Nihat Kolaşın in Istanbul. Seemingly, soon afterwards, both Nihat Kolaşın and his cousin Ali Kolaşın were "detained [yakalandığı]" (according to Kızık 1992).

## 1995

In 1995, a villager found the Karkamış Hoard of 3,000 coins. Then, one of his relatives, antiquities dealer Hikmet Gül, "smuggled [kaçıran]" the coins to Germany and marketed them with Fuat Üzülmöz (according to Hürriyet 2006). They were assisted by Selim Dere, who was, by then, a "well-known criminal" (according to Brand 2007; see also Brand 2006) and Antonio "Nino" Savoca, who was a senior member of an Italy-rooted trafficking network as well as a significant figure in the Turkey-rooted trafficking network (see Watson, Todeschini 2007).

## 2002

Aziz Telliğaoğlu was a notorious "international antiquities smuggler [uluslararası tarihi eser kaçakçısı]", who "[had] been detained many times for antiquities trafficking yet set free every time [Tarihi eser kaçakçılığından bir çok kez gözaltına alınmasına rağmen her defasında serbest kalan]" in Turkey, who had also managed a casino

in Azerbaijan (according to İhlas Haber Ajansı 2002). He was “caught in the act for the first time [ilk kez suçüstü yakalamayı]”, whereupon he “confessed for the first time [ilk kez suçunu itiraf ettiği]”, in 2002, after accomplices had been caught in the process of sending 542 pieces of cultural property on a cargo flight to Switzerland (according to İhlas Haber Ajansı 2002).

## 2010

In 2010, police seized 1,700 cultural objects from a “gang [çete]” or “international criminal organisation [uluslararası suç organizasyonu]” with at least thirty-five members in a complex organisational structure (Şimşek 2010; see also Bayer 2010; Sabah 2010; T24 2010). The gang had members from or in Turkey, Bulgaria and Germany. It smuggled antiquities from Turkey, sometimes through the United Arab Emirates, to countries such as Germany and the United States. It maintained a digital inventory with photographs and marketed at least some of its goods online (T24 2010).

Aziz Telliağaoğlu, Fuat Üzülmöz and Fuat Aydın were singled out as “famous antiquities traffickers [ünlü tarihi eser kaçakçıları]” (by T24 2010). The gang’s retired boss Edip Telliağaoğlu’s nephew, Aziz Telliağaoğlu, was “the organisation’s leader [Örgütün lideri]”, who organised the smuggling and sale abroad (according to Şimşek 2010). “Big” Fuat Üzülmöz was the “director and manager of Europe [Avrupa sorumlusu ve yöneticisi]”, who “[sold] antiquities from Turkey to auction houses [Türkiye’den gelen tarihi eserleri müzayede evlerine satıyor]” (according to Şimşek 2010). “Little” Fuat Aydın, who has been identified as “the son of a retired army colonel” (by Associated Press 1994, 09D; cf. Acar, Kaylan 1988), was the “number three man [Üç numaralı adam]”, who managed evaluation and purchase-sale in Turkey (according to Şimşek 2010). Other members included “one of the leading members of the [leading] family [ailesinin ileri gelenlerinden biri]”, Hüsnü Telliağaoğlu (according to Şimşek 2010), plus Ediz Telliağaoğlu and Alpay Telliağaoğlu (according to T24 2010).

The other suspects were İhsan Acar, Yücel Akkaya, Atilla Anakök, İbrahim Emre Aydın, Levent Bayır, Marsel Moiz Behmoaram, Ali Çabuk, Zeynel Çimen, Arif Doğangüneş, Mehmet Faruk Erdemir, Sami Güneri Gülenler, Kamer İşsever, Mustafa Karlanık, Mehmet Muhsin Karsu, Nihat Keleş, Zahir Keleş, Bilal Keleş, Murat Kılıç, Ömer Kurhan, Ayhan Külekçi, Mehmet Nevfel Mendi, Sezair Oktay, Harun Yadigar Savman, Hüseyin Taç, Ethem Topçu, Piotr Dmitrievich Vornikov, Murat Yetke, Ercan Yıldız, Bülent Yılmaz and Hüseyin Yılmaz (according to Sabah 2010). Although he was not charged, it was alleged that Atatürk Airport worker Alpaslan Kılıç had assisted in the illegal exportation of goods (according to Şimşek 2010). In the

nineties, Gülenler had claimed to be a ‘patriot’ who had turned from mafia trafficker to government informant (cf. Doxey 1996).

## 2013

In 2013, a set of 37 suspects, that was identified as an “organised crime network [Organize suç şebeke[si]]”, was suspected of trafficking antiquities and 12 of those “were taken to court [adliye sevk edildi]” (Bizim Yaka Kocaeli 2013). They included “famous antiquities dealer [ünlü antikacı]” (Bizim Yaka Kocaeli 2013) or “antiquities trafficker Fuat Aydın [Tarihi eser kaçakçısı Fuat Aydın]” (as reported by TGRT Haber 2013), plus the partially-anonymised “Aziz T.” and “Ercan Y.” (according to Bizim Yaka Kocaeli 2013).

## 2018

In 2018, a set of 30 suspects was accused of being an organised crime group (e.g. Aydın 2018). Eight were held on remand, four were put under house arrest, nine were prohibited from leaving the country, six were released pending trial and three evaded capture (Hardy, 2018b).

The organisation was complex and its communication was coded in ways that hinted at the structure, so treasure-hunters’ code names included “‘employee’ and ‘master’ [‘eleman’ ve ‘usta’]” (according to Toşunoğlu 2019; “usta” can be used to identify the master of a craft, as well as the master in a hierarchy). Reportedly, “it was determined that the leadership of the network had been headed by a smuggler by the name of Fuat Aydın, who had previously managed an antique shop in the Grand Bazaar [Şebekenin liderliğini geçmişte Kapalıçarşı’da antika dükkânı işleten Fuat Aydın isimli kaçakçının başını çektiği belirlendi]” in Istanbul (according to Milliyet 2018). Other critical positions were held by a retired police chief and a retired army colonel.

The “organisation’s leader [örgütün lideri]”, Aydın, was characterised as someone who “[had] played an active role in antiquities trafficking for many years [uzun yıllardan beri tarihi eser kaçakçılığında aktif rol oynadığı]” (Demir 2019). His “accomplices were people who had been acquaintances for a long time [suç ortaklarının uzun zamandan beri tanışıklığı bulunduğu kişiler olduğu]” (Demir 2019). In a 589-page indictment, Public Prosecutor Ahmet Gezin Çam has requested a sentence of 30-57 years’ imprisonment for Aydın, for “establishment of an organisation for the purpose of committing crimes [and] conducting unlicensed excavation with the intention of finding cultural assets [suç işlemek amacıyla örgüt kurmak, kültür varlıkları bulmak amacıyla izinsiz kazı yapmak]” (as quoted by Demir 2019).



2020

After Selim Dere had been released from prison in Turkey, he emigrated to the United States, where he founded first the West Side Jewelry shop then the Fortuna Fine Arts gallery (Albertson 2020). In 2020, Selim Dere's son, gallery owner Erdal Dere, and their "longtime associate", Faisal Khan, were indicted for committing identity theft and wire fraud, specifically for "defraud[ing] actual and potential buyers and brokers in connection with the offer and sale of antiquities, by using and causing to be used false provenance" (United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York 2020, Para. 10). They did this by misattributing antiquities to dead collectors. Dere was released on agreement of a bail bond of USD 500,000, which was secured with one of his properties, which was valued at USD 3,000,000 (according to Lee 2020).

## 5 The Boss of the President's Right-hand Man

### 5.1 Aydın Dikmen

Aydın Dikmen was perhaps first "arrested [tutuklanmış]" in relation to looting at Çatalhöyük and Hacılar in 1966 (Erbil 2008). When the police raided his home in Konya and seized 296 cultural objects on 18th October 1966, "they also seized 'some forged documents that related to the sale of ancient objects' ['eski eser satışına ilişkin bazı sahte belgeler' de ele geçiyordu]" (Acar 1989a).

Dikmen became notorious for smuggling antiquities and religious works of art such as icons and manuscripts from Turkey and Cyprus. Yet, he also smuggled heroin (Jansen 2005, 21) and forged antiquities and works of art (Acar 1989c; Mazur 2006; 2017; Representation of the Church of Cyprus to the European Union 2017). He trafficked everything from pre-Columbian pottery to fake Picassos (O'Connell-Schizas 2014). He had such strong connections with "senior officers in the Turkish army" that he was jokingly identified as the "official archaeologist [of] the occupying force" in northern Cyprus (van Rijn 1993, 27).

According to a social democratic politician in the governing coalition of the Turkish Cypriot administration, Ferdi Sabit Soyer (1997, 1780), by 1997, Dikmen had been "convicted of these crimes many times in Turkey [Türkiyede bir çok kez bu suçlardan dolayı mahkum edilen]". Contrarily, according to Dikmen's legal representative, Ercan Canımoğlu (2010), he had "not been convicted of antiquities smuggling either abroad or in his [home] country [ne yurtdışında ne ülkesinde Eski Eser Kaçakçılığı suçundan hüküm giymemiştir]". Technically, it may be true that he was never convicted of that specific offence.

For instance, in 1977, unattended suitcases with historic artefacts were found on a bus in Munich and traced to Firuz Aran and Muzaffer Karataş, who had been detained in Yugoslavia on their way from Turkey. Based on information from Interpol, antiquities dealers Atilla Önder and Yaşar Tekin were detained by police in Istanbul; and Önder and Tekin identified Dikmen as the owner of the antiquities. Yet, he (and his wife) “escaped the hands of the police [polisin elinden kaçmışlardır]” (Acar 1989a).

In 1982, when Aydın Dikmen was arrested for antiquities trafficking in northern Cyprus, he was quickly released. Allegedly, his wife, Konstantina Dikmen (also known as Coco Dikmen), had “deposited a large sum of money in the bank account of a judge” (as reported in Ortam, 10 June 1982, paraphrased by American judge James Noland 1989, 1389; see also Acar 1989b).

Bribery was not the only instrument that was used to pervert the course of justice. Also in 1982, when a supposedly secret government report by two Turkish Cypriot archaeologists named Hasan Harman as the perpetrator of the plunder of the Church of Ayios Euphemianos/Themonianos, one “got a death threat [then] his car was burned [olumle tehdit edildikten sonra arabasının yakıldığı]” (Acar 1989b, 1).

Later in the eighties, unidentified perpetrators engaged in “violent reprisal” against people who “assist[ed] Cyprus in recovering some antiquities”, “bomb[ing]” their residences (as observed by the director of the Department of Antiquities under Greek Cypriot administration, Vassos Karageorghis and relayed by Menil Foundation senior consultant Walter Hopps, then paraphrased by American judge James Noland 1989, 1391, when making a decision against collectors who had bought mosaics that had been stolen from the Church of Panayia Kanakaria in Cyprus by Dikmen’s gang).

In 1998, Dikmen’s reformed partner-in-crime, Michel van Rijn, “received death threats from unspecified sources” and refused to testify against him (Watson 1998, 17). Then, due to the statute of limitations, the period for prosecution timed out (Associated Press 2004).

Nonetheless, if nothing else, Dikmen had been convicted of tax evasion while trading antiquities in Germany (according to Musall 1997). Indeed, Aydın Dikmen was not able to get a permit for collecting of antiquities in Turkey, because he had *some* “criminal record for [illegal] trading of antiquities [Eski eser ticaretinden dolayı sabıkası]” (according to Erbil 2008). However, Konstantina Dikmen was able to get a permit, because she did not have a criminal record. So, in 2008, they imported the antiquities that remained in his possession to Turkey in her name, then donated those objects to the Science and Literature Museum at Selçuk University in Konya.

Dikmen’s gang stole, smuggled and trafficked works of art from at least fifty religious heritage sites and other cultural heritage institutions in the occupied territories of Cyprus, which belonged to the Or-

thodox Church of Cyprus, the Syriac Maronite Church and the Armenian Catholic Church. They included wall paintings from the Armenian Church in Nicosia, the Church of Panayia Pergaminiotissa in Akanthou, the Church of Ayios Yeorgios in Kalo Chorio Kapouti, the Church of Christos Antiphonitis near Kalograia, the Church of Ayia Solomoni in Koma tou Yialou, the Church of Ayios Euphemianos/Themonianos in Lysi and the Church of Panayia Apsidiotissa in Synchari; mosaics from the Church of Panayia Kanakaria in Lythrangomi; icons from the Church of Ayios Yeorgios in Kalo Chorio Kapouti, the Monastery of Ayios Chrysostomos in Koutsovendis, the Church of Ayia Paraskevi in Paleosofos, the Church of Archangelos Michail in Trikomo and Kyrenia Castle; icons, human remains and a bible from the Church of Ayios Mamas in Morphou; and a historic sword from Selimiye Mosque (Acar 1989b; Chotzakoglou 2012; O'Connell-Schizas 2014; Representation of the Church of Cyprus to the European Union 2017; Talât, 1989).

## 5.2 “Tremeşeli” Mehmet Ali İlkman

“International Boss [Uluslararası patron]” Dikmen’s “Local Boss [Yerel patron]” was “Tremeşeli” Mehmet Ali İlkman (according to Acar 1989b; see also Jansen 2005, 23). İlkman had been a paramilitary fighter in the Turkish (Cypriot) Resistance Organisation (Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (TMT)) during the intercommunal conflict, a parliamentary deputy in the Turkish Cypriot Assembly of the bicommunal republic, a paramilitary fighter in TMT during the civil war, then an agent of Turkey’s MİT through the civil war, through the international war and into the occupation (as testified by İlkman in an interview, republished by gurcan1 2007). He became a “well-known” antiquities trafficker (according to Yeni Düzen 2008), who was “impossible [olanaksız]” for the police to touch until 1989 (according to Acar 1989b, 13) and remained active towards his death in 2012 (e.g. Kıbrıs 2006; Yeni Düzen 2008).

It is difficult to disentangle the criminal, social and political sources of İlkman’s practical impunity, but it is impossible to deny his impunity. Rauf Denктаş was the leader of TMT when İlkman was “one of TMT’s leading names [TMT’nin önde gelen isimlerinden]” (TAK 2012). Then, Denктаş was the leader of the Turkish Cypriot administration when İlkman was both a MİT agent and Dikmen’s assistant in the “systematic” plunder of cultural property from northern Cyprus (Miller, Kinzer 1998). Indeed, İlkman was identified as Denктаş’s right-hand man (literally “Denктаş’s right arm [Denктаş’ın sağ kolu]”, according to investigative journalist Özgen Acar, cited by Talât 1989, 7865), as well as Dikmen’s local boss (Acar 1989b). Tellingly, Denктаş was also the leader when the already-notorious Dikmen was given citizenship by the Turkish Cypriot administration (KKTCİKÇB 1989, 581).

### 5.3 The Gang and Its Associates

The gang's "Director [Yönlendirici]" was "Bearded [Sakallı]" or "Antique Dealer [Antikacı]" Ahmet Kadir Dinç, who was released from police custody in return for the release of the wall paintings that had been stolen from the Church of Ayios Yeorgios. Its "Remover [Sökücü]" was Hasan Harman. And its "Lookout [Erkete]" was "Romantic [Romantik]" Mustafa Avcıbaşı, who was a retired police officer who had become a casino manager, who was briefly imprisoned for the theft of the wall paintings from the Church of Ayios Yeorgios (Acar 1989b).

Other notable associates included the Turkish Cypriot mayor of Morphou, İsfendiyar Rifat Açıksöz; a Turkish Cypriot commander in Nicosia, Necat Arifoğlu, who was the enabler/protector of Hasan Harman when he plundered the Armenian Catholic Church; Kemal Köse; Turkish Cypriot press officer Metin Mütin Münir; museum director Mehmet Rasih Savarona; Mücahit Uğraşlı; and multi-commodity smuggler Michel van Rijn (see Acar 1989b; O'Connell-Schizas 2014; Talât 1989; van Rijn 1993).

Yet another notable associate was businessman Asil Nadir, who was an "old friend" (Russell 1993) and "political ally" (Summers 2012) of Turkish Cypriot president Rauf Denktaş. Nadir was accused of interfering to protect Metin Münir from arrest for illegal possession of historic artefacts (Cyprus Mail 1989). Nadir's then-wife, Ayşegül Tecimer, later fled Turkey when she was put on trial for antiquities trafficking (Altın 2012).

## 6 The Father-in-law of the Godfather of Godfathers

### 6.1 Trafficking of Heroin in Alignment with the State

Between 1979 and 1997, a businessman and "well-known heroin chemist" who was the leader of the Menglan branch of the Ertoşi tribe, Mustafa Bayram, was arrested for or accused of the smuggling of kilograms of heroin on at least eight occasions and murder at least once (according to Economist 2001; see also Akçura 2001; Anadolu Ajansı 2001a; Anadolu Ajansı 2001b). His collaborators included Halil Havar, who was a "significant" figure in the global trade in illegal narcotics (according to Eşitti, Işık 2018, 700).

In 2001, he was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment (according to Economist 2001). However, having had positions in the Nationalist Democracy Party by the late eighties and in the Motherland Party in the early nineties, between 1996 and 2002, he was also a member of parliament and enjoyed parliamentary immunity (Hürriyet 2004). Once he had lost his immunity, in 2004, Musta-

fa Bayram and one of his sons, Hamit Bayram, were charged with heroin trafficking (according to Anadolu Ajansı 2004; the son's name was seemingly misprinted as Halit Bayram).

When Hamit Bayram was detained for drug smuggling, Mustafa Bayram led an armed assault on Van police station to free him. Yet Mustafa Bayram was detained then released and went into hiding, first near Urumiye in Iran, then in Edremit in Turkey (according to Radikal 2004). In 2005, when Mustafa Bayram was convicted of “establishment of a gang [and] drug dealing [Çete kurmak, uyuşturucu ticareti yapmak]” (among a group of nine), a charge of “armed revolt against the state [devlete karşı silahlı isyan]” was dismissed and his sentence was reduced, first from six to five years' imprisonment due to good behaviour, then from five to two years' imprisonment due to revisions to the Penal Code (CNN Türk 2005). Likewise, in 2007, when Hamit Bayram was convicted of drug trafficking, his sentence was reduced from seven to three years' imprisonment due to good behaviour (CNN Türk 2007).

In 2011, Mustafa Bayram, who had not been arrested before trial, was convicted in absentia and sentenced to 28 years' imprisonment for “establishment and direction of a criminal organisation [suç örgütü kurmak ve yönetmek]” of at least 18 members and for “conspiracy to rig bids [ihaleye fesat karıştırmak]” for public security contracts (Focus Haber 2011). Yet another of Mustafa Bayram's sons, Hişar Bayram, was among those who were acquitted (Aşan 2011). Seemingly, Mustafa Bayram went into hiding again, since, in 2017, he was caught and detained on the basis of a conviction for illegal possession of arms (Doğan Haber Ajansı 2017).

Reportedly, “the failure to arrest Mustafa Bayram, who had somehow not gone to prison [before then]... [was] a result of his relations with the AKP [şu ana kadar bir türlü cezaevine girmeyen Mustafa Bayram'ın yakalanmamasının AKP ile olan ilişkilerinden kaynaklandığı]” (as relayed by Evrensel 2012). Indeed, at least two of Mustafa Bayram's sons, Hecer Bayram and Şeref Bayram, have been politicians in the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). Hecer Bayram was arrested and removed from his position as Edremit municipality mayor “[for] establishment and direction of a criminal organisation with the intention of profit and [for] armed revolt [Çıkar amaçlı suç örgütü kurmak, yönetmek ve silahlı isyan çıkarmak]” (according to NTVMSNBC 2004). Later, Hecer Bayram and Kemal Bayram were convicted of murdering Mustafa Bayram's nephew, Ahmet Bayram (according to Doğan Haber Ajansı 2008).

## 6.2 Trafficking of Heroin in Opposition to the State

In the nineties, Mustafa Bayram's son-in-law, "Kurdish drug baron" Cumhuri Yakut, was reportedly the "top heroin exporter" from Turkey to the United Kingdom (according to Economist 2001; see also Eşitti, Işık 2018, 700). His operation sometimes sent shipments of hundreds of kilograms of heroin (according to Anadolu Agency 2013). Other family members include suspected heroin producer Adem Yakut and suspected heroin smuggler Neşet Yakut (according to Vatan 2012), plus suspected heroin smuggler İslam Yakut and suspected heroin dealer Kamuran Yakut (according to Taraf 2008).

Cumhuri Yakut was the "godfather of godfathers [babaların babası]" (as reported by Dünya Bülteni 2013; see also United Press International 2013) or "baron of barons [baronların baronu]" (as reported by Akşam 2013). He was also "linked" to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (according to Cihan News Agency 2013). Indeed, in 2008, the United States listed Cumhuri Yakut among "PKK entities and associates" and subjected him to trading sanctions for his "narcotics activity" (according to Hürriyet Daily News 2008). He was eventually arrested in 2013 (Doğan News Agency 2013).

Beyond the PKK, Cumhuri Yakut was "linked" to the "Susurluk gang" (according to Cihan News Agency 2013). That was a deep state network that committed politically-motivated organised crime. It was exposed when a convicted perpetrator of a notorious massacre who had supposedly been hiding from the state since 1978, Abdullah Çatlı, was in a traffic accident in 1996, alongside a police chief, Huseyin Kocadağ, a member of parliament who was also the leader of an anti-PKK militia, Sedat Bucak, and an assassin, Gonca Us. In fact, "among the controversies of Susurluk and the emerging connections, the name of [Yakut's father-in-law] Mustafa Bayram was often on the agenda [Susurluk tartışmaları ve ortaya çıkan ilişkiler içer[i]sinde de Mustafa Bayram'ın ismi sık sık gündeme gelmişti]", yet he "was not touched [dokunulmamıştı]" (according to Evrensel 2004b). Even the lone survivor of the car crash, Sedat Bucak, was only convicted in 2018, whereupon he was given a waived sentence of one year's imprisonment (according to CNN Türk 2018).

There has also been talk of "Van's Susurluk [Van'ın Susurluk'u]" (as reported by Evrensel 2004a), "Susurluk in Van [Van'daki Susurluk]" (as reported by Karaalioğlu 2004) or a "2<sup>nd</sup> Susurluk [2'nci Susurluk]" (as reported by Vatan 2004), in relation to Mustafa Bayram and Hamit Bayram. There was a "triangle [üçgen]" of tribes, politicians and the state (according to Karaalioğlu 2004). It was a "partnership [ortaklığı]" between Turkish state officials, Kurdish tribal groups and drug smuggling networks (according to Ekşi 2004). In other words, it was a gang in and around the state. In Van, "things [had] been conducted in completely the same way for years [işlerin yıllardır hep aynı yöntemlerle yürütüldüğü]" (according to Karaalioğlu 2004).



### 6.3 Trafficking of Cultural Goods by a Gang in and Around the State

Amidst all of this activity, in 1999, although he still enjoyed parliamentary immunity, Mustafa Bayram was accused of the attempted trafficking of a looted sculpture of Aphrodite or Venus for USD 1,000,000 (cf. Akçura 2001; Türkiye 1999). During the process, his intermediary, Ahmet Cevat Ağalar conspired with a police commissioner, Kadir Yılmaz, a police officer, Dursun Aygün, and a retired police officer, who was not named and who was in hiding from the police. Those three pretended to raid Ağalar's workplace, then stole the statue. Then, Bayram held Ağalar at gunpoint and forced him to sign a bill of USD 850,000 to cover the lost profit. At this point, the police – who had been monitoring the case since the statue was initially marketed – launched an operation and apprehended the suspects. Ahmet Cevat Ağalar, İhsan Çiftçi, Hasbi Ekinci and İbrahim Yavuz were arrested; Dursun Aygün, police officer Zekeriya Ayhan, Kadir Tuçkun and Kadir Yılmaz were released to await trial (according to Anadolu Ajansı 2001a; Atilla 2001).

In 2001, suspected traffickers of two fake Picassos included Mustafa Bayram's nephew, İhsan Demir, his bodyguard, Haydar Durak, and his driver, İsmail Zorlu, as well as another accomplice, Cumhur Ertekin (Atilla, Aytalar 2001; Morris 2001). Mustafa Bayram was “at the scene” of the sting operation, too, yet “escaped arrest” as he continued to enjoy parliamentary immunity (Morris 2001).

As evidenced by the long and wide-ranging activity of Mustafa Bayram and his associates, sometimes, even the flow of fake art merges with the flow of heroin. Sometimes, the proceeds of art crime benefit organised crime groups, paramilitary groups/terrorist organisations and deep state criminals. And Mustafa Bayram's case is not unique. In 2017, suspected traffickers of fake Picassos in Turkey included a serving police officer and a retired police chief (according to Hürriyet Daily News 2017). The details of their alleged operation have yet to be revealed.

## 7 Crime War in Mexico, Dirty War in Turkey and Proxy War in Syria

### 7.1 Intersections of Trafficking of Cultural Goods with Trafficking of Narcotic Substances

For a very long time, it has been reported that, across Latin America, the trade in cultural goods has long “thrived on the inflow of ‘narcodollars’” (Lee, 1985, 147). Art and antiquities have been trafficked as well as narcotics, while money from narcotics has been laundered through art and antiquities (Hardy 2019a, 389-92; Har-

dy 2020a, 163-6). In Mexico, Sinaloa Cartel boss “el Chapo” Joaquín Guzmán collected works of art, which included stolen works of art; Beltrán Leyva Cartel boss Héctor Beltrán Leyva dealt art as a cover for his drug operation; and Héctor Beltrán Leyva’s alleged financial accomplice, Germán Goyeneche Ortega, collected pre-Columbian antiquities (that had been made in the Americas before colonisation by Europeans) and other archaeological goods (Hardy 2020a, 165-6).

A similar intersection between trafficking of narcotic substances and trafficking of cultural goods is visible in the activities of violent political organisations in Turkey. It is difficult to determine whether the acts were committed specifically as fundraising for organisations or simply by criminals who were members of organisations – and to disambiguate those two when activists may fund their own participation in movements. Nonetheless, in Turkey, there are indications of trafficking of antiquities by members of movements that span ethnic and political spectrums. These include members of the (Kurdish autonomist) PKK (see Doğan Haber Ajansı 2006 on antiquities trafficking; see also Crabtree 2016, Roth, Sever 2007 and West Sands Advisory 2012 on narcotics trafficking), the (Islamist) Great Eastern Islamic Raiders’ Front (İslami Büyükdoğu Akıncılar Cephesi (İBDA-C); see Dinç 2006 on artefact theft; see also Aydın 2000 and Sabah 1998 on narcotics trafficking) and the (Turkish ultranationalist) Grey Wolves (see Yurttaş 2013 on antiquities trafficking; see also Bovenkerk, Yeşilgöz 2004, Lee 1997 and Nezan 1998 on narcotics trafficking).

## **7.2 Collaborations in Trafficking of Narcotic Substances Between Organisations that Also Profit from Trafficking of Cultural Goods**

For a long time, too, it has been reported that Mexican narcotraffickers such as the Sinaloa Cartel have established partnerships with Turkish narcotraffickers for the trafficking of narcotics, arms and people (for instance, by a professor of law and economics, Edgardo Buscaglia, cited by Diálogo 2011). Recently, a spree of videos that have been recorded by organisations’ members have been archived in social media by outside observers.

In one video, heavily-armed members of the Sinaloa Cartel greeted their Turkish partners-in-crime by playing a Turkish nationalist anthem (see @TurkishBlogger 2020). In another video, not-visibly-armed members of the Grey Wolves saluted the Sinaloa Cartel (see @LPueblo2 2020; see also Opinión 2020). In yet another (two-clip) video, first heavily-armed members of the Sinaloa Cartel saluted the Grey Wolves, then heavily-armed members of the Grey Wolves saluted the Sinaloa Cartel (see @yzbprice 2020). The Grey Wolves appeared

to be members of the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (TFSA), also known as the Syrian National Army (SNA), in Syria (according to @ONC3X 2020). In still another video, not-visibly-armed members of the Grey Wolves saluted the Sinaloa Cartel (see @ONC3X 2021b; some featured in the similar video of the previous year, cf. @LPueblo2 2020). In one more video, artillery-backed, heavily-armed members of a Turkmen jihadist faction of the TFSA/SNA in Syria greeted their Mexican partners-in-crime (see @ONC3X 2021a).

So, the Mexico-rooted Sinaloa Cartel and the Turkey-rooted Grey Wolves, both of which handle cultural goods as well as narcotic substances, are known to collaborate in the trafficking of narcotics. Altogether, the evidence from social media confirms not only the connection between participants in the crime war in Mexico and the dirty war in Turkey, but also a connection with participants in the proxy war in Syria. In doing so, this evidence may also shed new light on trafficking of antiquities from Syria to Turkey.

### 7.3 Conflict Antiquities Trafficking Between Syria and Turkey

Syrian Turkmen Heysem Topalca (who was also known as Ghassam Topalca, Haisam Toubalgeh, Haitam Topalca, Haitham Toubalgeh and Haytham Topalca, as well as Hytham Qassap – Hytham the Butcher) had been a professional smuggler of multiple commodities, from narcotics to industrial machinery (according to Taştekin 2021). Topalca became the leader of the jihadist al-Huwwa Billa Battalion (el Huva Billa Taburu) of the Turkmen Mountain Brigades (Türkmen Dağı Tugayları) in Bayırbucak in Syria and an agent of Turkey's MİT (according to Sendika 2016).

According to the Turkish Gendarmerie's report and a subsequent public prosecutor's indictment in 2014, Topalca trafficked arms from Turkey and delivered them to al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and trafficked antiquities from Syria and sold them to buyers in Turkey (cited by Hardy 2015, 336). Topalca had been indicted for smuggling Islamic State terrorist attackers from Syria into Turkey in 2014 and had been convicted of smuggling components of chemical weapons from Turkey to Syria in 2015, yet continued to operate freely in Turkey until he died in a "suspicious traffic accident" in 2021 (according to Güven 2021). This is an exceptionally concerning case, which echoes "Tremeşeli" Mehmet Ali İlkman's position, activity and impunity in Cyprus.

## 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Transnational Organised Crime by Any Definition

As “structured group[s] of three or more persons” who seek to gain material benefit by committing serious crimes and persist in doing so, these Turkey-focused and Cyprus-focused transnational gangs meet the international definition of transnational organised crime groups (see United Nations 2000, Art. 2). Furthermore, among hundreds of definitions of organised crime by law, by law enforcement agencies and by criminologists, dozens of definitions include a willingness to threaten or commit physical violence and the exploitation of corruption to escape policing (see von Lampe 2021).

Bribery of the judiciary and law enforcement agents and other corrupt relationships with law enforcement agents have featured throughout this study. Although the mafia “rarely” actually “resort[ed] to violence, even against informers” (according to self-professed smuggler-turned-informer Sami Güneri Güleler, paraphrased by Doxey 1996), threats and acts of violence against other criminals, private investigators, investigative journalists and cultural heritage workers have featured throughout this study as well. This reaffirms the nature of these organised crime groups.

This study has also documented that these organisations were poly-crime groups. The lynchpin of the gang in and around the Turkish state, Mustafa Bayram, the leader of the Turkish-Cypriot antiquities gang, Aydın Dikmen, a senior member of the Turkish antiquities mafia, Nevzat Telliağaoğlu and a senior member of the Turkish Mafia, Yaşar Musullulu, all handled both cultural goods and narcotic substances personally, as the groups did organisationally.

Other members, such as Dikmen’s accomplice Ahmet Kadir Dinç, switched commodities according to opportunities and risks. Dinç “got into the drug business [then] was convicted when he was caught [uyuşturucu işine giriyor ve... yakalandığında mahkum oluyordu]” in the act of smuggling by Customs and Excise in the United Kingdom (Acar 1989b, 13). It is a recurrent feature of this criminal business.

### 8.2 Trafficking of Narcotics with Antiquities from Turkey and Money-laundering of Drug Profits with Cultural Assets in the United Kingdom

Nevzat Telliağaoğlu is also known as Nevzat Telli, David Telliağaoğlu and David Telli. For a long time, he was a businessman, who was “generally... engaged in the antiquities trade [genellikle... antika ticareti ile uğraştığı]” in the United Kingdom and later convicted of and “imprisoned [cezaevinde yatmıştır]” for heroin smuggling in Germany

(Berkok 1990; see also Acar, Bessières 2001). At least at one point in the seventies, he was reportedly smuggling two tons of cannabis per month from Lebanon to Europe (Cumhuriyet 2012, 12). This seemingly spanned the early years of the Lebanese civil war, as he was only convicted and imprisoned in Germany in the eighties.

In 1996, “David Telli” was eventually sentenced to imprisonment for 22 years and a fine of around GBP 3,500,000 “for drug smuggling [uyuşturucu kaçakçılığı suçuyla]” in the United Kingdom (Haberler 2007). Later, Edip Telli, Edip Telli’s wife Monika Telli, Nevzat Telli and Fuat Üzülmüş, plus their accomplices, İhsan Acar, “Alaşehirli” Nihat Kolaşın and Metin Özharat were indicted for their involvement in the smuggling of a statue of Dionysus from Turkey to Switzerland (Hürriyet 2003). Ultimately, the statue was valued at around GBP 1,500,000; Nevzat Telli was judged to be its “beneficial owner” and forced to forfeit his asset; and it was returned to Turkey (Haberler 2007).

According to a local newspaper, “much” of Nevzat Telli’s millions of pounds in proceeds from heroin had been invested in “valuable ancient artefacts” (Gibbs 2007). At least sometimes, he appears to have smuggled antiquities “together [with] packets of heroin [birlikte eroin paketler[i]]” (Cumhuriyet 2012).

Intriguingly, in the light of other associations between the Turkish antiquities mafia and the Turkish-Cypriot antiquities gang, “David Telli” distributed his profits between unnamed receivers in Turkey and bank accounts in northern Cyprus, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States (according to Gibbs 2007). The massive money-laundering enterprise provoked an investigation into Turkish and Turkish Cypriot banks in the United Kingdom, which caused “the closure of the Cyprus Credit Bank” in 2000 (Travis 2013). That bank was owned by Salih Boyacı, who was convicted of financial crime and who is the father-in-law of Serdar Denktaş, who is the son of Rauf Denktaş, who was still the president (Bilge 2004).

### 8.3 The Pizza Connection(s)

It is well known that there was a “Pizza Connection” between Turkish organised crime and Italian organised crime, in the trafficking of narcotics, from Turkey through Italy to the United States. It is also well known that other commodities were handled in collaboration with other organisations. For instance, in the seventies, Turkish Mafia boss Yaşar Musullulu (or Yaşar Avni Musullulu, also known as “Yellow [Sarı]” Avni Karadurmuş and Atilla Öksüz) worked with Abuzer Uğurlu to smuggle arms from Bulgaria to Turkey for the Communist Bulgarian government’s front company Kintex (as testified by Musullulu, cited by Milliyet 1998).

However, at least two individuals at the Turkish end of the Pizza Connection, Yaşar Musullulu and Turkish Mafia associate Paul Waridel, are also known to have smuggled antiquities as well as heroin from Turkey to Italy (see Blumenthal 1989, 118-20; see also Ceschi 2019, 19-20 – table 1, who documented the existence and involvement of Italian organised crime in organised cultural property crime). Indeed, in 1969, Waridel was “sentenced to 13 months in prison [13 ay hapse mahkûm olmuştul]” for smuggling antiquities from Greece (according to Yalçın 2000).

Furthermore, the Turkey-rooted antiquities network and the Italy-rooted antiquities network were interwoven. Edip Telli, Fuat Üzülmmez, Aydın Dikmen and United States-born, Paris-based antiquities dealer Robert Emmanuel Hecht (also known as Robert Hecht or Bob Hecht) were characterised as “dear friends” (according to Yamaç 2006). Üzülmmez is an honorary “uncle” to Hecht’s daughter (according to Mazur 2005). In the seventies, a Roman marble statue of Vibia Sabina, which had been looted in Turkey, was viewed by later-convicted antiquities dealer Giacomo Medici, yet ultimately passed from Üzülmmez to Hecht to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (as documented by Tsirogiannis 2016).

At least with regard to antiquities from Italy, Hecht’s “major supplier” was Gianfranco Becchina (according to the Carabinieri, cited by UNODC 2011). Charges of mafia association through looting and trafficking of antiquities by Becchina have been dismissed, as the testimony of a (deceased) former drug dealer and repentant state informant, Rosario Spatola, had long been judged to be improbable (as noted by Albertson 2017) and the testimony of a former mafia footsoldier and repentant state informant, Vincenzo Calcara, has recently been judged to be “unreliable” (by Italian judge Antonella Consiglio, cited by Albertson 2018). However, at least two other former members and two other former associates from Cosa Nostra have implicated Becchina and at least three members and two associates of Cosa Nostra have been implicated in his associations (see Albertson 2017). Notably, Paul Waridel spent August 1977-August 1979 in prison in Italy with Rosario Spatola and his brother Vincenzo Spatola, through which they became friends and after which they remained friends (according to Yalçın 2000).

#### 8.4 Women’s Participation in Organised Cultural Property Crime

The publicly-accessible sources focused on men. Yet, some explicitly identified women and their activities (if not any potential position in a criminal organisation). Monika Kaufmann, whose husband was Turkish antiquities mafia boss Edip Telli, was involved in dealing (according to Acar, Kaylan 1990; Cumhuriyet 1990). Birsen Özharat, whose husband was Turkish antiquities mafia member Metin Özharat and



whose brother-in-law was Turkish antiquities mafia associate İbrahim Başbuğ, was involved in handling (according to Cumhuriyet 1992). Konstantina Dikmen, whose husband was Turkish-Cypriot antiquities gang boss Aydın Dikmen, was involved in bribery (as reported in Ortam, 10 June 1982, paraphrased by American judge James Noland 1989, 1389; see also Acar 1989b). And Aysegül Tecimer, whose then-husband was Turkish-Cypriot antiquities gang associate Asil Nadir, was involved in trafficking (according to Altın 2012). Seemingly, then, these women played significant roles in criminal activity. Typically, though, they had numerically small, structurally marginal, practically occasional positions in comparison to men and their activities. Still, this information offers a starting point for an interesting line of inquiry into cultural property crime.

## 8.5 Organised Crime and Political Violence

There was already piecemeal evidence of cultural property crime by the PKK, the Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front and the Grey Wolves. Preliminary social network analysis corroborates this. Some online communities of looters and traffickers have organisers [figs. 1-4] and other members [figs. 5-8] who are violent political extremists, from ultranationalists to Islamists. This establishes the need to analyse and monitor this criminal-political activity. It is particularly urgent, due to evidence of the deliberate targeting of the cultural property of minority communities by extremist criminals in dominant society (see also Hardy 2020b; Hardy 2020c, 219). In such cases, the looting or theft and illegal export of minority heritage functions as a material equivalent of the ethno-religious cleansing of community members.

## 8.6 The Rule of Lawlessness

Finally, manifestly, undermining of the rule of law has not been limited to the corrupting influence and violent intimidation of commodity criminals. "Tremeşeli" Mehmet Ali İlkman in Cyprus, Mustafa Bayram in Turkey and Heysem Topalca in Turkey and Turkey-backed paramilitary-controlled territory within Syria all enjoyed some form of politically-secured impunity. Inevitably, the impunity of those actors conferred impunity on their suppliers and buyers, to enable those systems of crime and violence to function.

Inevitably, too, states that offer security to some violent political actors also commit extrajudicial killings of others. Former MİT director Eymür testified in court that both Mustafa Bayram and Nevzat Telli had been on "the state's death list... the list of Kurdish business-

men who were to be killed [Devletin ölüm listesi.... Öldürülecek Kürt işadamları listesini]" for "being connected with PKK narcotics.... being businessmen who helped the PKK [PKK uyuşturucu bağlantılı.... PKK'ye yardım eden işadamları olduğunu]" (Uludağ 2015).

Notably, ultimately, they were not assassinated. And Turkey is notorious for politicised policing and disinformation, so their targeting does not confirm their guilt. In Bayram's case, his targeting appears to reaffirm other evidence of his activities. In Telli's case, the PKK is known to finance its activities through the racketeering extortion of a "revolutionary tax" or "voluntary contribution" from "businessmen" and "drug traffickers" from Turkey in the United Kingdom, Germany and elsewhere in Europe (Roth, Sever 2007, 910). So, his targeting is plausible and does raise questions about the potential flow of profits from illicit antiquities to the PKK.

The public histories of criminal organisations provide further evidence of intersections between cultural property crime and political violence. The second-in-command of the Turkish-Cypriot antiquities gang, "Tremeşeli" Mehmet Ali İlkman, was variously a politician in the Turkish Cypriot assembly, a fighter for a Turkish Cypriot paramilitary organisation and an agent for a Turkish intelligence organisation, who was the right-hand man of the Turkish Cypriot president. The lynchpin of the gang in and around the Turkish state, Mustafa Bayram, was a political actor and paramilitary financier as well as a violent criminal. This everyday reality must be recognised, monitored and combatted. That is a necessity for the maintenance of security and the rule of law everywhere from source to market. However, it will remain a practical impossibility, as long as states themselves undermine the rule of law.

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