



# Treasure-hunters ‘even from Sweden’, organised criminals and ‘lawless’ police in the Eastern Mediterranean: Online social organisation of looting and trafficking of antiquities from Turkey, Greece and Cyprus

*Cazadores de tesoros “incluso desde Suecia”, delincuentes organizados y policías “sin ley” en el Mediterráneo oriental: organización social de saqueo y tráfico de antigüedades en línea en Turquía, Grecia y Chipre*

There is too little empirical knowledge of looting and trafficking of cultural goods. There also remains doubt about the extent of organised cultural property crime. This study compiles open-source evidence – in the forms of automatically-generated data, netnographic data, market data and other empirical indicators – to try to assess who is involved, how they are involved and how they operate, both online and offline, in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus.

It documents transnational crime, organised crime and transnational organised crime, as well as criminal activity by law enforcement agents and political operatives. It highlights the scale, range and openness of the presentation of indicators of illicit activity by suspects in social networks, including Facebook and Instagram, plus the manipulation of data in those social networks. Ultimately, it demonstrates the need for cooperation of online platforms with civil society, and market countries with victimised countries, to support the rule of law and security.

**Keywords:** cultural property crime; illicit antiquities; online trafficking; transnational organised crime.

Existe escaso conocimiento empírico sobre el saqueo y el tráfico de bienes culturales. También hay dudas en lo relativo al alcance del crimen organizado en materia de estos bienes. Este estudio recoge evidencias de fuentes de código abierto —bajo la forma de datos generados automáticamente, datos netnográficos, datos sobre el mercado y otros indicadores empíricos— con el fin de indagar quién está involucrado, de qué manera lo está y cómo opera, tanto dentro como fuera de la red, en Turquía, Grecia y Chipre.

Se documenta el crimen transnacional, el crimen organizado y el crimen organizado transnacional, así como la actividad criminal por parte de autoridades y políticos. Se destaca la escala, amplitud y apertura de la presentación de los indicadores de actividades ilícitas por parte de los sospechosos en las redes sociales, incluyendo Facebook e Instagram, además de la manipulación de los datos en esas redes sociales. Finalmente, se demuestra la necesidad de la cooperación entre plataformas en línea y la sociedad civil, y entre los países mercado y los países víctima, para apoyar la aplicación de la ley y la seguridad.

**Palabras clave:** antigüedades ilícitas, tráfico en la red, crimen organizado internacional.

## Introduction

Legal metal-detecting and/or treasure-hunting for cultural objects, which can be the same activity under different names, cause cultural harm through the destruction of archaeological evidence (e.g. in France, Lecroere 2016: 182-184; 188-191; in Spain, Rodríguez Temiño, Yáñez and Ortiz Sánchez 2018: 145). Illegal metal-detecting and treasure-hunting also cause criminal damage and constitute a criminal economy. And criminals hide among hobbyists. Indeed, even so-called responsible hobbyists, 'detector users' who collaborate with heritage professionals, 'do not always behave as they should'; they 'easily cross the [thin] line between licit and illicit', to the point that the ostensibly licit and the demonstrably illicit 'may even overlap to some extent' (Deckers, Dobat, Ferguson, Heeren, Lewis and Thomas 2018: 325; see also Rodríguez Temiño, Yáñez and Ortiz Sánchez 2018: 146), as this study demonstrates.

While restrictive management strategies appear to be having positive effects in some territories (e.g. in Spain, Rodríguez Temiño, Yáñez and Ortiz Sánchez 2018: 147-147; 148-150) yet the problem appears to be worsening in others (e.g. in France, Brun and Triboulot 2017), societies around the world lack rudimentary information about the legal hobbies as well as the illegal enterprises of metal-detecting and/or treasure-hunting (see Thomas 2016: 141, on metal-detecting). This makes it difficult or impossible to determine the most effective forms of regulation, or even to test the effectiveness of different forms of regulation.

At the same time, as elsewhere in Europe (e.g. in Spain, Fer 2016; in Italy, Lucci 2013; in Bulgaria, Blgarska Nationalna Federatsiya po Metaldetekting 2010), so in the Eastern Mediterranean, metal-detectors and/or treasure-hunters are trying to restrain, reduce or remove regulation of their "hobbies" (e.g. in Cyprus, Browne 2015; in Greece, Kambas 2011; in Turkey, Kulaç and Tunç 2002). Likewise, dealers and collectors in market countries such as the United States are campaigning to prevent or minimise regulation of the trade in antiquities from source countries such as Cyprus. Some have characterised archaeologists who support regulation as "radicals," "extremists," "zealots," "jihadists," and "fascists" (as observed by Elkins 2008).

Still, it is known that there are many metal-detectors and that they are extracting many cultural objects in North America, Western Europe (Hardy 2017a; 2018); seemingly particularly, Eastern Europe (Hardy 2016); South Asia (Hardy 2019a); South-East Asia (Hardy 2020); and East Asia (Hardy 2019b). It is known, too, that there is widespread harm to heritage in South-Eastern Europe and South-West Asia. In Turkey, for instance, an archaeological survey found that perhaps 90 per cent of burial mounds had been somewhat looted by 2001 (cf. Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 186).

So, it is important to try to generate tentative, "least worst" estimates of the numbers of people who are engaging in treasure-hunting (which is a term that is used by participants as well as a generic term

that encompasses the specific act of metal-detecting) in key targets of global markets (where there are also established and growing internal markets), such as Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. It is also important to try to understand what is being done, how and why, in order to inform best practice in managing it. It is particularly important to try to document the functioning of the illicit trade and the consequences of the perpetuation of a grey market, in which licit dealers and collectors may inadvertently contribute to flows of revenue to illicit dealers, smugglers and looters/thieves, especially as they may include organised criminals and violent organisations.

## A note on privacy, persecution and politesse

All of the evidence that is used in this study has been gathered from open sources. The study also uses informative evidence from licit practitioners as well as illicit practitioners. So, the citation of a source does not necessarily imply any engagement in illicit activities by that source.

No online forums, nor "open" groups, "closed" groups (now, "private and visible" groups) or "secret" groups (now, "private and hidden" groups) within social networks have been joined. No data have been gathered for which people could have had a reasonable expectation of privacy. All netnographic data that have been used have been made public through their publication by their authors. Where automatically-generated data on the membership statistics of closed groups in social networks have been used, they have been identified in publicly-visible sources, such as search results and network suggestions that are automatically generated by the networks, and they naturally only relate to community statistics, not individuals' data.

There is a legitimate, public interest in processing these data for the purposes of research, to generate understanding of serious crime such as cultural property crime, as well as social practices, economic conditions and political struggles around the treatment and use of cultural property. Privately, law enforcement agents have stated that such *academic* evidence cannot be considered to be *forensic* evidence anyway (e.g. a military police officer with responsibility for cultural goods in Italy, 2018, personal communication, 10 May), so there is no risk of legitimate legal proceedings against a cited source, even if someone appears to incriminate themselves.

Publicly, Sibel (2016) found peer-to-peer learning and planning to destroy obstructive archaeological material in order to loot antiquities in an online forum for treasure-hunters in Turkey. She noted that she had 'informed every police department [she] could reach'. Yet, 'the link [was] still [t]here [on 17 June 2016, as it was still there on 27 March 2020], giving "safe" "logical" and "scientific" info for Turkish looters!' The police's inability to act corroborates the opinion of other law enforcement agents that, in the context of cultural property crime, the provision of advice on the commission of a crime is not a crime in itself, while a claim of an action is not evidence

of a crime. This situation explains the amount and detail of discussion online.

Ordinarily, then, social media sources might be cited like any other sources. After all, they may all be found with simple keyword searches and adequate time. In addition, citation itself performs a public task, as it counters any dismissal of evidence in communities who are prone to denialism and conspiracy-theorising. And where sources have conducted public campaigns, for instance by petitioning the government, they have been cited.

However, *legitimate* legal proceedings are not the only ones to which these sources may be subjected. There is evidence of the *malicious* detention, arrest and prosecution of (and issuance of international arrest warrants for) political dissidents by Turkey (e.g. Amnesty International 2019; Wandall, Suter and Ivan-Cucu 2019: 16-18; 36-40) and the production of propaganda about cultural property crime in Turkey (e.g. Hardy 2014a). So, where sources have discussed their own opinions and/or their own activities in self-published documents (outside public campaigns), their identities have been withheld. Since online forums and social networks may be explicitly political, their identities have been withheld, too.

Even then, (legal) "treasure-hunting" is a term that is used by participants and encompasses (legal) "metal-detecting". The boundaries between legal activity and illegal activity may be difficult to distinguish without forensic evidence. And the 'boundaries [sınırlarını]' between illegal treasure-hunting and illegal excavation are 'difficult to demarcate [sınırlarını ayırmak güçtür]', either on the theoretical basis of the intention to find treasure or antiquities (Özüşen and Beceren 2019: 609), or on the practical basis of profit from antiquities as an 'incentive [teşvik edici]' or as a 'livelihood [geçim sağlama[sı]]' (Özüşen and Beceren 2019: 615), particularly when a "treasure-hunter" may publicly reveal that they are at an archaeological site with a metal-detector (withheld source, 28 September 2019).

Since the processes may be the same in terms of cultural destructiveness, and the criminal participants may publicly identify and organise themselves as legal participants in a socially-acceptable activity, those boundaries may be meaningless. So, "treasure-hunting" and its related terms are typically used for the purpose of this discussion, though "metal-detecting" and its related terms are also used.

## Method

As part of broader research, keyword tests and spot checks were conducted between 2017 and 2019. For this study, data was gathered manually between April 2019 and September 2019, in pursuit of automatically-generated data, netnographic data, market data and other empirical indicators of the scale of activity, as well as any open-source evidence on the nature of activity. Due to differences of vocabulary and grammar, there were sometimes different numbers or forms of searches in Greek and Turkish. The memberships or fandoms of online forums and social networks were checked again on 30 September 2019.

Following productive searches in previous studies (cf. Hardy 2016; 2017a; 2018), Greek-language searches on Google Scholar included:

- antiquities+looting in Greek (αρχαιοκαπηλία, which is also semantically translated as antiquities trafficking, while it is literally translated as antiquities exploitation), for generic results; as well as
  - antiquities+metal+detector in Greek (αρχαιότητες+ανιχνευτής+μετάλλων); and
  - antiquities+looting+metal+detector in Greek (αρχαιοκαπηλία+ανιχνευτής+μετάλλων), for specific results.
- Turkish-language searches on Google Scholar included:
- treasure+hunting in Turkish (definecilik); as well as
  - antiquities+metal+detector in Turkish (tarihi+eser+metal+dedektör); and
  - treasure+hunting+metal+detector in Turkish (definecilik+metal+dedektör).
- Greek-language searches on Google Web included:
- variations on "thousand antiquities looters" ("000αρχαιοκάπηλοι", "000 \* αρχαιοκάπηλοι", "χιλιάδες αρχαιοκάπηλοι" and "χιλιάδες \* αρχαιοκάπηλοι");
  - variations on "thousand gold-hunters" ("000 χρυσοθήρες", "000 \* χρυσοθήρες", "χιλιάδες χρυσοθήρες" and "χιλιάδες \* χρυσοθήρες");
  - variations on "thousand treasure-hunters" ("000 κυνήγοι"+θησαυρών, "000 \* κυνήγοι"+θησαυρών, "χιλιάδες κυνήγοι"+θησαυρών and "χιλιάδες κυνήγοι"+θησαυρών);
  - variations on "thousand detectors" ("000 ανιχνευτές", "000 \* ανιχνευτές", "χιλιάδες ανιχνευτές" and "χιλιάδες \* ανιχνευτές");
  - variations on antiquities+looting+mechanical+digger in Greek (αρχαιοκαπηλία+μηχάνημα+εκσκαφής and λαθροανασκαφή+μηχάνημα+εκσκαφής);
  - metal+detecting+forum (φόρουμ+ανίχνευσης+μετάλλων);
  - treasure+hunting+forum (φόρουμ+κυνήγι+θησαυρών);
  - metal+detectors+sold (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+πωλούνται), which should also find results for metal+detectors+bought (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+αγοράζονται);
  - metal+detectors+Cyprus (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+Κύπρος);
  - metal+detectors+Greece (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+Ελλάδα);
  - antiquities+detector+caught (αρχαιότητες+ανιχνευτής+τραβήχτηκε);
  - antiquities+detector+detained (αρχαιότητες+ανιχνευτής+κρατήθηκε);
  - antiquities+detector+arrested (αρχαιότητες+ανιχνευτής+συνελήφθηκε);
  - metal+detectors+permits+statistics (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+άδεια+στατιστικά);
  - treasure+hunters+permits+statistics (κυνηγοί+θησαυρών+άδεια+στατιστικά);
  - metal+detectors+permits (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+άδεια) in .cy and .gr domains;
  - treasure+hunters+permits (κυνηγοί+θησαυρών+άδεια) in .cy and .gr domains;
  - metal+detector+statistics (ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων+στατιστικά) in .cy and .gr domains;
  - treasure+hunters+statistics (κυνηγοί+θησαυρών+στατιστικά) in .cy and .gr domains;

- variations on “how many metal-detectors” (“πόσοι ανιχνευτές”+μετάλλων and “πόσοι \* ανιχνευτές”+μετάλλων);
- variations on “how many gold-hunters” (“πόσοι χρυσοθήρες” and “πόσοι \* χρυσοθήρες”);
- variations on “how many treasure-hunters” (“πόσοι κυνηγοί”+θησαυρών and “πόσοι \* κυνηγοί”+θησαυρών);
- variations on “there are \* metal-detectors” (“υπάρχουν \* ανιχνευτές”+μετάλλων and “έχουν \* ανιχνευτές”+μετάλλων);
- variations on “there are \* gold-hunters” (“υπάρχουν \* χρυσοθήρες” and “έχουν \* χρυσοθήρες”);
- variations on “there are \* treasure-hunters” (“υπάρχουν \* κυνηγοί”+θησαυρών and “έχουν \* κυνηγούς”+θησαυρών);
- women+metal+detectorists (γυναίκες+ανιχνευτές+μετάλλων);
- women+treasure+hunters (γυναίκες+χρυσοθήρες); and
- women+treasure+hunters (γυναίκες+κυνηγοί+θησαυρών); plus, as part of a proof-of-concept study of potential evidence for multi-commodity trafficking,
- antiquities+narcotics (αρχαιότητες+ναρκωτικά). Turkish-language searches on Google Web included:
- variations on “thousand treasure-hunters” in Turkish (“000 defineci”, “000 \* defineci”, “bin defineci” and “bin \* defineci”);
- variations on “thousand detectors” in Turkish (“000 dedektör”, “000 \* dedektör”, “bin dedektör”, “bin \* dedektör”, “000 dedektörü”, “000 \* dedektörü”, “bin dedektörü” and “bin \* dedektörü”);
- variations on illegal+excavation+mechanical+digger (kaçak+kazı+ekskavatör, kaçak+kazı+iş+makinesi and kaçak+kazı+kepçe);
- variations on antiquities+mechanical+digger (tarihi+eser+ekskavatör, tarihi+eser+iş+makinesi and tarihi+eser+kepçe);
- metal+detecting+forum (metal+algılama+forum and dedektör+forum);
- treasure+hunting+forum (hazine+avı+forum, define+avcı+forum, defineci+forum, defincilik+forum);
- metal+detectors+sold (metal+dedektörleri+satıldı);
- metal+detectors+Turkey (metal+dedektörleri+Türkiye);
- antiquities+detector+caught (tarihi+eser+dedektör+yakalandı);
- antiquities+detector+detained (tarihi+eser+dedektör+gözetilene+alındı);
- antiquities+detector+arrested (tarihi+eser+dedektör+tutuklandı);
- variations on treasure+permit+statistics (define+izni+istatistikleri and hazine+izni+istatistikleri);
- treasure+dig+permit+statistics (define+kazısı+izni+istatistikleri);
- treasure+hunter+dig+statistics (defineci+kazısı+istatistikleri);
- licensed+treasure+hunter+dig+statistics (izinli+defineci+kazısı+istatistikleri);
- treasure+permit (define+izni) on gov.tr;
- detector+statistics (dedektör+istatistikleri) on gov.tr;
- variations on “how many treasure-hunters” (“kaç defineci” and “kaç \* defineci”);
- variations on “there are \* treasure-hunters” (“defineci var”, “defineci \* var”, “defineci vardır”, “defineci \* vardır”);
- women+treasure+hunters (kadınlar+definciler); and
- antiquities+narcotics (tarihi+eser+uyuşturucu and eski+eser+uyuşturucu). Greek-language searches for pages and groups on Facebook and accounts on Instagram included (variations on):
- metal+detectors (ανιχνευτες+μεταλλων);
- gold+hunters (χρυσοθήρες);
- treasure+hunters (κυνηγοί+θησαυρών); and
- coins (νομίσματα). Turkish-language searches for pages and groups on Facebook and accounts on Instagram included (variations on):
- treasure (define);
- treasure+hunter (defineci);
- detector (dedektör); and
- coin (sikke). Complementary English-language searches on Google Web included (variations on):
- antiquities+looting+Cyprus;
- antiquities+looting+Greece;
- antiquities+looting+Turkey;
- metal+detecting+Cyprus;
- metal+detecting+Greece;
- metal+detecting+Turkey;
- treasure+hunting+Cyprus;
- treasure+hunting+Greece;
- treasure+hunting+Turkey;
- metal+detectors+sold+Cyprus;
- metal+detectors+sold+Greece;
- metal+detectors+sold+Turkey;
- metal+detectors+permit+Cyprus;
- metal+detectors+permit+Greece;
- metal+detectors+permit+Turkey;
- treasure+hunting+permit+Cyprus;
- treasure+hunting+permit+Greece; and
- treasure+hunting+permit+Turkey. Complementary English-language searches on Facebook and Instagram included (variations on):
- metal+detecting+Cyprus;
- metal+detecting+Greece;
- metal+detecting+Turkey;
- treasure+hunting+Cyprus;
- treasure+hunting+Greece; and
- treasure+hunting+Turkey.

When relevant results identified potentially significant online communities, as when contemplation of the practical application of antiquities law was found on *PoliceNet.gr* (see discussion around sakis01 2014), those potential sources were explored with targeted searches, in case other relevant results had been miscategorised as duplicate results by Google algorithms or otherwise obscured by less informative sources with higher search engine rankings.

The open-source evidence base for Turkey may be severely compromised by its persistent persecution of Kurdish, other-minority and otherwise-nonconformist media (Committee to Protect Journalists 2012) and its mass closures of media outlets since the coup

attempt in 2016 (IMC TV 2016; indeed, that source was itself closed down soon after that report, according to BBC Türkçe 2016). Some sources were only available because they had been republished or archived elsewhere and others must have been lost entirely.

## Law(s) across the Eastern Mediterranean

The dates of foundational legislation and significant reforms range across the region and the nuances and technicalities of laws vary between countries. Regulations even vary within one of the countries, due to the conflict in Cyprus. Nevertheless, in all of the relevant territories, laws on antiquities have been in place since the nineteenth century; strictly-enforced laws have been in place since the twentieth century; and somehow-tightened regulation has been maintained in the twenty-first century.

Archaeological deposits belong to the state. Unlicensed excavation of archaeological sites is prohibited. And the act of metal-detecting or treasure-hunting — which has been used to skirt around the edge of the criminal intentionality of unlicensed excavation of archaeological deposits — is a licensed activity under the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot administrations in Cyprus (cf. Hardy 2014: 84-88), in Greece (cf. Kaliampetsos 2008; Nikolentzos, Voutsas and Koutsothanasis 2017: 360-361) and in Turkey (Özel 2010: 178-179; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü n.d.).

The laws are well-known, as they are distributed by metal-detectorists and treasure-hunters, as well as explained in simple language by the states (or administrations) in southern Cyprus (e.g. Ypourgeio Oikonomikon tis Kypriakis Dimokratias n.d.), in northern Cyprus (e.g. Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Meclisi n.d.), in Greece (e.g. Ypourgeio Politismou kai Athlitismou tis Ellinikis Dimokratias n.d.) and in Turkey (e.g. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü n.d.). So, metal-detectorists and treasure-hunters cannot convincingly plead *ignorance* of the law.

## Offline treasure-hunting practice

### *Tools of the trade*

As well as metal-detectors, treasure-hunters use skewers, augurs or probes; mattocks, pickaxes and hoes; spades, shovels and crowbars; and mechanical backhoes and bulldozers (Tulay 2007: 25; see also Özüşen and Beceren 2019: 615-616). They also use acid and fire (Sibel 2016) and explosives (Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 192; Sotiriou 2017b: 57 – figure 7).

Naturally, the internet has become a fundamental instrument, too. It enables treasure-hunters to identify “productive” sites, such as the mounds of settlements and tombs, for instance with Google Earth; to acquire detectors, explosives and other equipment ‘easily... at affordable price[s] [uygun fiyata... kolay]’; and to sell looted antiquities throughout the country and around the world, all of which has increased ‘individual and organised interest in the trafficking of cultural prop-

erty [kültür varlığı kaçakçılığına bireysel ve örgütlü ilgiyi]’ (Akkuş and Efe 2015: 414).

The rate of looting is increasing with regionalised or internationalised ‘websites that contain crime-promoting publications [suça teşvik edici yayınlar içeren internet sitelerinden]’ (Akkuş and Efe 2015: 413-414). They have contributed to the emergence of ‘a great number of professional smugglers [çok sayıda profesyonel kaçakçı]’ (Akkuş and Efe 2015: 414).

The prevalence of online trafficking, and the possibility of encrypted communications and transactions, have ‘made it more difficult to combat [mücadeleyi zorlaştırmaktadır]’ (Akkuş and Efe 2015: 423). Although this is true across the region and beyond, it is particularly noteworthy in Turkey, where websites and entire online platforms are regularly and persistently prohibited, yet metal-detectors are ‘often sold freely’ (Acar and Hürriyet Daily News 2018) and ‘bought on the internet’ (Xinhua 2018).

Furthermore, new technology is being applied all the time. Now, drones are being used to conduct aerial surveys for potential targets (Acar 2018). Yet treasure-hunters’ ‘greatest assistants [en büyük yardımcıları]’ remain ‘detectors [dedektörlerdir]’ (Tulay 2007: 25).

### *Belief and treasure*

Alongside archaeological remains of ancient civilisations and empirical methods of locating those remains such as metal-detecting, treasure-hunters often (try to) realise the myths and legends of buried or lost treasures of Ottoman Turkish pashas, occupying Nazi German officers (specifically including ‘the Jews’ gold [τον χρυσό των Εβραίων], cf. NonPaperNews 2015) and anti-Nazi guerrillas in Greece (Vogiatzoglou 2014); and the buried treasures of Greek bandits or ‘gang leaders [çete lider[ler]i]’ (Doğan Haber Ajansı 2019) and “Armenian” treasures or gold’ in Turkey (von Bieberstein 2017: 170).

There, the exploitation of the cultural assets of exterminated minorities is partly a strategy of oppressed minorities to cope with being ‘purposefully impoverished’ (von Bieberstein 2017: 174). So, they are driven to become complicit in the destruction of the evidence of the existence and persecution of other victimised communities.

Treasure-hunters also apply folkloric interpretations of human designs and natural features (cf. Şenesen 2016, in Turkey), including natural features that are misidentified as human designs. They are commonly superstitious as well and may consult or employ ‘exorcists/healers [üfürükçü[ler]]’ (Ateş 2019), ‘spiritualist[s] [cinci hoca]’ (Geçgin and Tatlıpınar 2011) or ‘mediums [μέντιουμ]’ (anonymous looter, cited by Christakopoulou 2018).

The distinction between hunters of modern treasure and hunters of ancient treasure is sometimes more rhetorical than practical. One team in Greece allegedly hunted ‘money [gold] that the guerrillas had hidden [λίρες που έκρυψαν οι αντάρτες]’; yet, later, at least ‘one went to jail for trafficking of antiquities and not only [that] [ένας μπήκε φυλακή για διακίνηση αρχαιοτήτων και όχι μόνο]’ (Pilatos 2018).

## ***Ideology and practicality***

Treasure-hunters may express a moral objection to the disturbance of any grave (as insisted by Hatun, cited by von Bieberstein 2017: 173) or demonstrate an identitarian objection to the disturbance of the grave of a fellow believer. Yet, a more prosaic explanation has been suggested to explain the comparatively rare targeting of burials of Muslims across the region. Quite simply, treasure-hunters 'seek objects that are of monetary value [parasal değeri olan nesnelere arayan]' (according to archaeologist Mehmet Özdoğan, cited by Ateş 2019); and, 'in Islam, [the dead are] interred in the earth with only a shroud [İslam dininde toprağa sadece kefeniyle gömülmesi]' (a conservator-restorer, cited by Ateş 2019).

## ***Looting of underwater cultural heritage***

Due to the peculiar nature of the activity and any intervention by law enforcement agencies, looting of underwater cultural heritage is inevitably under-policed and so under-reported. Consequently, the evidence in this study overwhelmingly relates to looting of underground cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, pillage of shipwrecks and other archaeological materials is a problem across the region, as exemplified by reports of cases that have been archived in an online forum for police in Greece (e.g. Gerafentis 2018; Panagiotidis 2019; Tsagkarakis 2017). Underwater archaeology is targeted with metal-detectors, too (cf. Papadimas and Flynn 2009).

There is evidence in internationally-oriented online forums that the strict imposition of the prohibition on metal-detecting is sometimes respected by some foreign visitors, such as soldiers from the United States in Greece in the 1980s. Yet, their discipline and disciplining may be truly exceptional and still limited, as one soldier simply engaged in underwater treasure-hunting *without* a metal-detector instead (withheld source, 23 May 2009).

## ***Online trafficking of fake objects***

There is also evidence of forgery, which is sometimes performed by looters, whose products are trafficked along with antiquities. A whole range of objects are faked in a whole range of materials and presented in online communities, where they are evaluated by the community (e.g. withheld source, 13 April 2019).

When one community member posed a statuette with a proof-of-life-style note, in an apparent offer for sale, an experienced online detectorist sighed (withheld source, 12 April 2019). 'If it were real, within 12 hours of the moment that you shared such a valuable work on the internet, all the organs of the state would be on top of you. If these things were as simple as you think... [Şayet gerçek olsa böylesine değerli bir eseri internette paylaştığın andan itibaren devletin tüm organları 12 saat içinde tepene binmiş olur. Bu işler düşündüğünüz kadar basit olsaydı...]'

There is a striking production of Judeo-Christian relics (e.g. withheld source, 15 April 2019). Though it may reflect nationalism as well as expertise, online treasure-hunters appear to demonstrate some knowl-

edge. When one person posted a video of a supposedly Jewish manuscript and asked for information, another replied 'unfortunately [a] fake production [from] Syria [Malesef sahte suriye yapimi]' (withheld source, 14 February 2018).

## ***Looting-to-order***

With regard to modes of operation, there is some evidence of historic and persistent looting-to-order in the region (e.g. in Cyprus, cf. Hardy 2015: 12). For example, in Turkey, urban 'collectors/dealers' 'instruct' villagers 'to dig' for money; finds are conferred to the contractor; if nothing is found, they are obliged to 'continue digging elsewhere, anywhere', until something is (Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 195).

## ***Cultural property criminality***

### ***National citizens***

In Greece, participation in trafficking spans people in independent business, in the construction industry, out of everyday employment (such as those who are unemployed, people with family responsibilities instead of paid work, pensioners and students), in freelance employment, in the agriculture industry, in cultural industries, in public employment, in private employment and in maritime occupations (Sotiriou 2017a: 342). In Turkey, participation in looting 'seem[ingly]' excludes the small, educated middle class (von Bieberstein 2017: 174). However, that may be a false impression that is produced by the practicalities and politics of policing. Otherwise, it spans 'political affiliation, income and ethnicity' and skews towards those who endure financial insecurity (von Bieberstein 2017: 174).

Though the effects of chronic insecurity and acute crisis are difficult to document empirically, societal crises have been woven into the personal rhetoric of treasure-hunters. They declare that it would be possible for the treasures of Ali Pasha 'to... pay off the debt of Greece [να... ξεχρεώσουν την Ελλάδα]' (according to Greek-Australian treasure-hunter Vangelis Dimos, cited by Press Time 2016) or for them 'to find a hoard that would cover all of Turkey's debts [Türkiye'nin tüm borçlarını karşılayacak bir hazine bul[mak]]' (local treasure-hunter A. Rıza Ayaz, cited by İhlas Haber Ajansı 2014).

Although it can be difficult or impossible to confirm whether the cultural objects are possessed for collection or trade and whether the other commodities are possessed for use or trade, there is evidence of handling of many firearms alongside cultural objects (e.g. in Greece, cf. Agence France-Presse 2014) and handling of assault rifles alongside cultural objects and metal-detectors (e.g. in Cyprus, Cyprus Mail 2014; in Greece, Vima 2010).

Even at this very lowest level, there are concerning features to activity. One 'lawless [kanunsuz]' police officer in northern Cyprus, with accomplices in trafficking from Turkey, was caught with cannabis and arms as well as antiquities and a metal-detector (Haberci 2019). And some suspects are believed to be involved in a far wider range of crimes (and territories). One,

who was arrested for handling of antiquities, cannabis and cocaine in northern Cyprus (cf. Orakçioğlu 2018), was a fugitive from a conviction for tax evasion in the United Kingdom (cf. Vamık 2018).

### **Foreign residents and visiting tourists**

Across the region, not only national citizens, but also foreign residents (in Cyprus, e.g. withheld source, 30 May 2016; withheld source, 31 May 2016; in Greece, e.g. withheld source, 12 August 2010) and visiting tourists (e.g. for Cyprus, Hardy 2014: 85-86; for Greece, Hull Daily Mail 2010; Kouzoukas 2014; Souliotis 2006; Willoughby 2017; withheld source, 9 June 2009; for Turkey, withheld source, 7 February 2011) engage in online social organisation and illegal metal-detecting. While the details are beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that the entire range of criminals include women as well as men (Hardy 2019d).

With regard to Greece alone, the country is targeted by 'foreign detectorists, even from Sweden [ξένοι εξερευνητές ακόμα και από τη Σουηδία]' (Souliotis 2006). As demonstrated by metal-detectorists from the United Kingdom (e.g. withheld source, 26 August 2015) and potential tourists everywhere from the United States (e.g. withheld source, 24 May 2009) to the Netherlands (e.g. withheld source, 14 July 2006) to South Africa (e.g. withheld source, 7 February 2017), treasure-hunters use international, English-language online forums to seek advice on productive sites, metal-detecting equipment (in Greece, e.g. withheld source, 7 August 2008) and metal-detecting laws (in Greece, e.g. withheld source, 5 June 2007).

In Cyprus, one police officer from Turkey who had been caught with 170 kilograms of cannabis in Turkey, had retired to Cyprus then been caught with an ancient statue on the island (Demir 2016). There, activity also includes something akin to cross-border crime across the Green Line (which is not a national border, as the Turkish Cypriot administration is not an internationally-recognised state). Treasure-hunters may live under one community's administration and metal-detect in the territory under the other community's administration (withheld source, 30 May 2016a; 30 May 2016b; 31 May 2016), thereby exploiting the extraordinarily intensified challenges to policing of what would otherwise be characterised as transborder crime or transnational crime.

### **Claims, statistics and online social organisation in Cyprus**

#### **Claims**

According to Achilleas (who is licensed, yet also detects, collects and sells antiquities illicitly, cf. Mackay 2008), there are around 250 licit detectorists and around 2,500 illicit detectorists (cited by Browne, 2015). He has rare access to people on both sides of the law, so his expert opinion cannot simply be dismissed. And even gang violence over control of antiquities trafficking can go unreported (cf. O'Connell-Schizas 2014), so under-documentation and under-reporting of non-violent, low-end illicit trade should be expected.

Yet, the estimate of illicit detectorists is immediately unreliable, due to the lack of any evidence; the ubiquitous, unscientific "ten per cent" relationship between it and the number of licit detectorists; and the vested interest of the source in giving the impression that detecting cannot be managed through restrictive or prohibitive regulation. So, it must be discounted.

### **Statistics and online social organisation**

As there are bilingual and trilingual groups for the licit trade in cultural objects in Cyprus (withheld sources, 30 September 2019), so there will be multilingual communities for the illicit trade. Likewise, as there are (albeit, structurally, tiny) visible transnational (indeed, transcontinental) networks for metal-detecting within the region (e.g. withheld source, 30 September 2019), so there will be invisible ones.

However, problematically for analysis, Greek Cypriot detectorists may participate in functionally transnational Greek-language communities; Turkish Cypriot detectorists may participate in functionally transnational Turkish-language communities; some from each community may participate in functionally transnational communities in both Greek and Turkish; and practically all Cypriot detectorists may participate in international communities in English, where they will also find foreign residents and intermittent visitors such as tourists.

Cyprus also has extremely close-knit communities, in which even the use of pseudonyms may be a matter of politeness rather than effectiveness in anonymising people like Achilleas. So, in the end, comparatively few detectorists may participate in specifically Cypriot communities or identifiably Cypriot sections of English-language, Greek-language or Turkish-language communities.

For instance, various pages and groups for metal-detectorists in Cyprus (including a page and a group for the same detector-manufacturer) had fandoms or memberships that ranged from 20 to 151 (withheld sources, 30 September 2019). The largest community for the entire island, then, only had 60.40 per cent of the number of *licensed* detectorists in *southern* Cyprus. So, it is prudent to exclude Cyprus from statistical analysis.

### **Claims, statistics and online social organisation in Greece**

#### **Claims**

Claims for the number of treasure-hunters range from 'thousands [χιλιάδες]' of 'hobbyists [χομπίστες]' (according to detectorist Theofilos Chatziioannidis, cited by Ritzaleou 2015; see also press estimates, e.g. Kouzoukas 2014), to 'tens of thousands [δεκάδες χιλιάδες]' (according to Souliotis 2006, in light of interviews with treasure-hunters, detector-dealers and police officers), 'not calculated [to be] more than 500,000 [δεν υπολογίζονται... πάνω από 500.000]' (NonPaperNews 2015), 'between 400,000 and 600,000 [400 με 600 χιλιάδες]' (Pilatos 2018) and 'at least 3 million' (according to metal-detectorist Theofilos Chatziioannidis, cited by Chrysopoulos 2015).

## Statistics and online social organisation

Some sources appeared to suggest that, before the reform of licensing, between 50 (Vradelis 2011) and 300 (Kirbaki 2011) permits were issued to metal-detectorists per year. Official statistics indicated that 1,474 permits were issued in 2010; 528 in 2011; 844 in 2012, when management of licensing was reformed; 343 in 2013; and 334 in 2014 (according to the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Greece, cited by Nikolentzos, Voutsas and Koutsathanasis 2017: 362 – fig. 11).

However, based on the sales of metal-detectors, whatever the number of licit detectorists is, it may be far exceeded by the number of illicit detectorists. Until the early 2000s, around 2,000 metal-detectors were estimated to be sold per year (Souliotis 2006). At least since the mid-2000s, more than 3,000 detectors have been sold per year (Tsinganis 2007; Vogiatzoglou 2014).

A compilation of surveys of detectorists — who were based primarily in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada — very tentatively suggested the consumption of 0.32 detectors per detectorist per year (Hardy 2018: 15). On the basis of this rate of consumption, this rate of sales would imply a detecting population of around 9,375. However, Greece lacks a comparable system of permissive regulation and a comparable culture of performative detecting, where the display of equipment may be a point of comparison and competition like the display of finds. Greece also endures relative poverty and insecurity. So, this potential consumption rate may be inapplicable high and, therefore, the estimate of the detecting population may be unrepresentatively low.

There were numerous online communities for Greece. The largest identified online forum technically identified as gold-hunters, yet discussed metal-detecting and the interpretation of signs of treasure; it had 4,286 members (withheld source, 30 September 2019). The large social network on Instagram was for metal-detectorists; it had 8,693 followers (withheld source, 30 September 2019). The largest social network on Facebook — and the largest online community for Greece — was for metal-detectorists; it had 16,002 fans (withheld sources, 30 September 2019).

Web architecture of online community	Population of online community
Facebook	16,002
Instagram	8,693
Forum	4,286

Table 1. Largest Facebook community, Instagram community and online forum for treasure-hunters for Greece, in order of size; see discussion for evidence of manipulation of statistics.

## Claims, statistics and online social organisation in Turkey

### Claims

Claims range from the vague to the very calculated. The vaguest ones have been ignored. By the beginning

of the 1990s and unchanged until the end of the 2000s, whether they were amateurs or professionals, it was estimated that there were at least 100,000 licensed treasure-hunters (Acar and Kozak 1991: 23; Aşık 1996: 15; Acar, cited by Bizim Antalya 2009). Yet, even if those statistics were accurate then, they might not be relevant now. Over the eleven years between 2008 and 2018, there were only 1,185 licensed treasure hunts (according to Ertuğrul 2015; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü 2019b), in all of which, nothing was found (according to Ertuğrul 2015; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü n.d.).

Since then, there have been estimated to be between '1,000,000 [1 milyon]' (archaeologist Tolga Tek 2005) and '2,000,000 [2 milyon]' detectors in Turkey (Tek, cited by Yeni Mesaj 2006; see also withheld source, 27 July 2017, where the estimate has been recalled in detectorist discourse). However, it is understood that those estimations were impressions that were based on the ubiquity of metal-detectors, not necessarily on official or commercial records.

Apparently retired metal-detectorist, practising detector-manufacturer and president of the Anatolian Treasure Hunters' Training and Research Association, Uğur Kulaç has variously claimed that '[he] alone [has] 500,000 customers [Sadece benim 500 bin müşterim var]' and that there are 'more than 4,000,000 [4 milyondan fazla]' (cited by Erken 2010) or '5,000,000 [5 milyon]' metal-detectorists in total (interviewed in Kulaç and Tunç 2002). Perhaps revealing the underlying logic of his estimates, he has rhetorically questioned, 'how do you get these people under control [Bu insanları nasıl kontrol altına alırsınız]?' (Kulaç and Tunç 2002).

A forum administrator echoes Kulaç in asserting that there are 'more than 4,000,000 [4 milyonu aşkın]' who 'neither are ashamed nor will be ashamed [ne utanmamış ne de utanacaktır]' (withheld source, 30 June 2019). Deploying techniques of moral neutralisation, he highlights embezzlement by archaeologists; he avers that 'the ones who ought to be ashamed are those who smuggle the works that are in our museums and sell them abroad [esas utanması gereken müzelerimizdeki eserleri kaçırıp yurt dışına satanlardır]' (withheld source, 30 June 2019).

In triumphalist tribalist tones, the General Director of Publishing for *Treasure Magazine* (*Define Dergisi*), Hasan Çakır (interviewed by Ocak 2019), asserts: 'If there are 50,000 archaeologists [50 bin arkeolog varsa]' — which, inevitably, there are not — 'there are also 7-8,000,000 treasure hunters. We estimate this figure from social media users, comments, etc. [7-8 milyon da defineci var. Bu rakamı sosyal medya kullanıcılarından, yorumlardan filan tahmin ediyoruz.]'

One social media user asserted that there were 'at least 10,000,000 [en az 10.000.000]' (withheld source, 29 June 2015). It has even been claimed that 'nearly 15,000,000 people get their bread from this work [Bu işten 15 milyona yakın insan ekmek yiyor]' (according to the director of the central branch of Nokta Engineering Detector Technologies, Arif Karaca, paraphrased by HaberAktüel 2007).

Furthermore, in Turkey, even some statistics must be regarded as claims. At least in the mid-2000s, it

was claimed that around 25,000 detectors were sold per year. However, this was claimed by a dealer in devices that resembled fraudulent “long-range locators” and equally fraudulent high-tech dowsing rods as well as ordinary metal-detectors (withheld source, 23 August 2007; in this case, the source has been withheld to enable direct discussion of their commercial services). At the same time, it was claimed that ‘sales of 40,000 detectors in 2000, increased to 100,000 in 2004 [and] 200,000 in 2006 [2000’de 40 bin olan dedektör satışı, 2004’te 100 bine, 2006’da 200 bine yükseldi]’ (seemingly according to a detector-manufacturer, paraphrased by HaberAktüel 2007).

More reasonably as well as more recently, it has been claimed that ‘around 10,000 treasure-detectors are sold every year [her yıl 10 bin civarında define dedektörü satılıyor]’ (seemingly according to one or more detector-dealers, paraphrased by Tahmaz and Karaçam 2019). However, this statistic is inherently suspect, due to the history of claims like this.

Again, *if* this statistic was accurate, on the basis of the tentative estimate of a consumption rate of 0.32 detectors per detectorist per year (Hardy 2018: 15), this would suggest perhaps around 31,250 detectorists in Turkey. Yet, like Greece, Turkey lacks a comparable system of permissive regulation and a comparable culture of performative detecting, and it endures even greater relative poverty and insecurity. So, the apparent rate of consumption could be inapplicable high and the estimated number of detectorists could be unrepresentatively low. This analysis would appear to be corroborated by automatically-generated data from online communities.

### Statistics and online social organisation

Automatically-generated data:

Online metal-detectorists are very self-aware with regard to their online social organisation (e.g. withheld source, 11 January 2019). ‘Since long ago, we have said that there are 4,000,000 treasure-hunters in Turkey... If it is like this, we will say that there are nearly 4,000,000 treasure sites... [W]e have opened, operated, then abandoned many treasure sites. We abandoned some of them without ever operating them. [Biz eskiden beri türkiyede 4 milyon defineci var deriz... böyle giderse yakında 4 milyon define sitesi var diyeceğiz... bizde çok define sitesi açtık, işlettik sonra bıraktık. bazılarını hiç işletmeden bıraktık.]’

Alongside numerous online forums, there were countless pages, open groups and closed groups in Turkey, including pages that identified as groups or cooperatives. This reaffirms that there is no effective or significant distinction in terms of the web architecture of the social structures. The communities identified as treasure-hunters, tomb-robbers or metal-detectorists and occasionally indicated a particular interest in cultures such as the Lydian Kingdom, the Hittite Empire and the Ottoman Empire. They ranged from one member to 153,519 (withheld sources, 30 September 2019).

With regard to automatically-generated data, sometimes, online communities were difficult to categorise

— and so to include or exclude. This was true for all of the largest communities, all of which were on Facebook, all of which had been founded *since* 2015 and all of which focused on treasure-hunting (and, sometimes, archaeology). One had 83,820 members; another had 92,585; yet another had 100,436 members; still another had 119,822 members; and one more had 153,519 members (withheld sources, 30 September 2019).

With regard to the largest online communities that were specifically for metal-detectorists, all had been founded *since* 2013 and all had been founded by or for brands. One Facebook page for a detector-dealer had 14,064 fans; one Instagram account for a detector-manufacturer had 18,391 followers; one Facebook page for a detector-dealer had 20,659 fans; one Facebook group for a detector-manufacturer had 24,956 members; one Facebook page for a detector-dealer had 58,402 fans; and one Facebook group for a detector-manufacturer had 59,652 members (withheld sources, 30 September 2019).

With regard to the largest identified online forums, all had been founded *by* 2012 and all focused on treasure-hunting. One had 13,786 members; another had 13,668; yet another had 17,641; still another had 22,920; and one more had 37,659 (withheld sources, 30 September 2019). Some had grown significantly between 2016 and 2019, which demonstrates that online forums are still attracting participants, even if many are existing treasure-hunters who are already participants in other online communities, rather than emerging treasure-hunters who are new participants.

Web architecture of online community	Population of online community
Facebook	153,519
Forum	37,659
Instagram	18,391

Table 2. Largest Facebook community, Instagram community and online forum for treasure-hunters for Turkey, in order of size; see discussion for evidence of manipulation of statistics.

Online social organisation:

With regard to online communities of treasure-hunters, metal-detecting was probably their primary method of treasure-hunting. And treasure-hunting by other methods, from random digging of dowsed “find-spots” to explosive obliteration of targeted structures, might or will do equal or greater cultural harm. While the third-largest social network was concerned with archaeology and history as well as treasure-hunting and cultural property policing, it offered consultancy and equipment (withheld source, n.d.); shared adverts by detector-dealers (withheld source, 19 April 2019); and shared contacts’ photographs of questionable activity (withheld source, 12 April 2019), in that case in Poland or Ukraine (withheld source, 21 April 2019).

When the same group shared news of the detention of unspecified officials and gendarmerie officers who were caught in the act of illegal excavation with industrial machinery, one member queried why those suspects were involved: ‘Was the state’s money insufficient? [devletin parası yetmemişmi[?]]’ (with-

held source, 18 April 2019). When challenging the self-censorship of that group, playing on the name of the political party that was involved, another member averred (withheld source, 17 April 2019): 'Those who you said were the most senior [unspecified] party managers were [Justice and Development] party managers. Do not be afraid to say [so]. Report without fear. Whichever party it is, let it be. Justice is for everyone. [Üst düzey parti yöneticisi dediginiz ak parti yöneticileri. Söylemekten korkmayın. Korkusuz haber yapın. Hangi partili olursa olsun. Adalet herkes için var.]' Yet another member averred: 'this business has no party[;] those who have covered their arse, dig; let those who have not covered their arse, not get into this business [bu işin partisi yok götüne güvenen kazmayı vurur götüne güvenmeyen bu işe girmesin]' (withheld source, 17 April 2019).

The largest group was concerned with archaeology as well as treasure-hunting. For instance, a law enforcement agent posted photographic evidence of an emptied tomb (withheld source, 4 October 2019). Yet, within the space of one week, other members sought advice on, or rental or sale-purchase of, equipment; posted photographs of potential targets and asked 'if anything [would] come out of these graves [bu mezarlardan bişey çıkar mı]' (withheld source, 3 October 2019); asked for advice, as '[they] need[ed] to break a concrete floor, but [also] need[ed] not to disturb the surroundings [beton bir zemin kırılması gerekiyor fakat çevreyi rahatsız edilmemesi lazım]' (withheld source, 2 October 2019); posted day-time photographs of archaeological sites with their metal-detector in view (withheld source, 28 September 2019); posted night-time photographs of cultural objects and observed that 'treasure-hunters find treasure [Defineyi definciler bulur]' (withheld source, 1 October 2019); and asked for identifications of objects that they had, for instance, 'found in a graveyard [bir mezarlıkta buldum]' (withheld source, 4 October 2019).

When one member of the largest treasure-hunting group posted a photograph of a mound and asked if it was a burial, another told him to 'blow it up, go and [you] tell [us] [patlat gitsin diyorsun]' (withheld source, 29 September 2019). Yet another warned him that 'the gendarmerie is continuously on patrol on this route [jandarma sürekli devriye halinde bu güzergahta]' (withheld source, 29 September 2019). So, while these communities may be difficult to categorise, they are important to recognise.

Furthermore, regardless of the automatically-generated data, there is manifestly a massive amount of illicit activity. Alice von Bieberstein (2017: 175), who conducted an ethnography with treasure-hunters in Turkey, 'never met nor heard of anyone' who actually had a licence. While some were intercepted in transit from other countries through Turkey and some were fake, over the six years between 2012 and 2017, more than 373,001 cultural objects were seized by law enforcement agencies (according to Türkiye Büyük Milli Meclisi 2019: 47 — tables 1 and 2, which appeared to compile complete statistics from the police, incomplete statistics from the gendarmerie and no statistics from customs). Someone extracted

the seized antiquities, and the unknown number that were not intercepted, from somewhere.

One company in Turkey, which specialises in treasure-hunting pyrotechnics, advertises the possibility to expose treasure by using dynamite to 10,342 fans on Facebook and 4,125 followers on Instagram (withheld sources, 30 September 2019). It has even run an advertising campaign to "buy three, get one free" (e.g. on Facebook, withheld source, 5 November 2018; 3 March 2019).

## Corruption and organised crime

### *Organised crime*

There remains doubt about the existence, let alone extent, of organised cultural property crime (see summary of doubts in Hardy 2019e: 388-389). Yet, as observed in Turkey, criminal organisations traffic antiquities because of 'the high value of cultural assets and the ease of finding buyers in the countries of Europe [Kültür varlıklarının maddi değerlerinin yüksek olması ve Avrupa ülkelerinde kolay alıcı bulması]' (Akkuş and Efe 2015: 413). While definitions of organised crime may vary and details of criminal activity may not enable their categorisation with any certainty, definitions cohere around the idea of a durable structure (with or without permanent members or positions) that works to commit serious crime for material gain (Lydakakis 2013) and details of various cases indicate or demonstrate the participation of organised criminals in cultural property crime across the region.

For example, in Cyprus, notorious Turkish smuggler Aydın Dikmen directed 'one of the most systematic art looting operations' of the late twentieth century (according to police in Germany, paraphrased by Miller and Kinzer 1998); his equally notorious Turkish Cypriot accomplice, "Tremeşeli" Mehmet Ali İlkman, 'was caught with [a] detector [Dedektörle yakalandığı]' (Acar 1989b: 13).

At the lowest level in Greece, there are profit-sharing teams of armed treasure-hunters with bosses and/or financiers. 'The hunters have sworn an oath to share their treasures fairly, but the one who finances the operation takes the most... Most investors are doctors and lawyers [Οι κληνηγοί έχουν δώσει όρκο να μοιραστούν δίκαια τους θησαυρούς, αλλά εκείνος που χρηματοδοτεί την επιχείρηση παίρνει τα περισσότερα... Οι περισσότεροι επενδυτές είναι γιατροί και δικηγόροι]' (Christakopoulou 2018).

However, the Hellenic Police have long recognised that 'many looters were members of criminal networks that also trafficked in guns and narcotics' (paraphrased by Romeo 2015). Metal-detectors are used by teams or 'gang[s]' that span generations (e.g. Kathimerini 2018) and nationwide organised crime groups (e.g. Mindova 2012; Vima 2016).

At the lowest level in Turkey, there are cooperatives of treasure-hunters (withheld source, 30 September 2019), though the durability and structuredness of teams that typically form within such cooperative communities might often not meet the definition of organised crime. However, there too, metal-detectors are used by organised crime networks and organised

crime groups (e.g. Aydın, 2018, where an organised crime group included at least one notorious mafioso). There are many cases of handling of assault rifles alongside cultural objects (e.g. Arslantaş 2009; CNN Türk 2017; Doğan Haber Ajansı 2007; Doğan Haber Ajansı 2017; Mardin Life 2019), some of which also involve narcotics.

## **Corruption**

As before (in Turkey, e.g. Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 192-193), so now, some trafficking networks, organised crime networks and organised crime groups involve serving and/or retired law enforcement agents, governmental officials and/or political agents. In one case in Turkey, the former and current leaders of a local branch of an opposition party were arrested among 14 who were suspected of handling antiquities, narcotics and arms (İhlas Haber Ajansı 2018). In another case in Turkey, the suspected members of a criminal organisation included an officer of the governing party in the provincial administration of the capital city Ankara, a businessman who provided services to parliament in Ankara, the director of the Anti-Smuggling and Organised Crime Department of the Turkish National Police for the province of Ankara and a colonel of the Gendarmerie who served in the Communications, Electronics and Information Systems Directorate (Ak Bakış 2019).

## **Transnational crime and transnational organised crime**

### ***Regionalisation/internationalisation of online social organisation***

Naturally, in an international market, there are international operators; there is evidence of transnational organisation (e.g. transnational organised crime across Turkey and Cyprus, Miller and Kinzer 1998). In Greece, offline, treasure-hunters 'are known to each other and have even built networks with colleagues in Albania and Bulgaria [μεταξύ τους γνωρίζονται και έχουν στήσει μάλιστα και δίκτυο με συναδέλφους τους σε Αλβανία και Βουλγαρία]' (according to metal-detecting treasure-hunter Theofilos Chatziioannidis, cited by Athinaiko Praktoreio Eidiseon 2015).

Online, it can be difficult to delineate the cultural diversity and/or social complexity of treasure-hunting. For instance, one treasure-hunter, who was active on a range of social media and had 389 followers on Instagram (on 30 September 2019), used a Turkish phone number, yet an Azeri/Azerbaijani spelling of his name.

Still, regionalisation/internationalisation was evident through a range of online communities. One account on Instagram, which had 1,243 followers, appeared to market to Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and Iran as well as Turkey (withheld source, 30 September 2019). Another, which had 2,486 followers (source withheld, 30 September 2019), bought coins from South-West Asia; it advertised cultural objects with Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, English, Greek, Persian and Turkish keywords. In the third-largest identified social network in Turkey,

one Turkish-speaking, Arabic-speaking member asked, 'is there [is it possible to get] delivery to me inside Syria [هل ايروس لخاد يلا لي ضوت دجوي له]' (withheld source in a withheld location, 22 April 2019).

There were also online communities that demonstrated increasing regionalisation/internationalisation through their structure or self-description. They were typically bilingual or trilingual — Turkish, Arabic and/or English — while at least one also used French. For instance, one page, which had 58,305 fans (on 30 September 2019), was an Arabic-language page for a Turkish-origin detector-manufacturer, which posted photographs of cultural objects of questionable origin (e.g. withheld source, 17 February 2019). Then, a fan asked if the company had an agent in Sudan and the administrator replied that they had send a friendship request from their personal account (withheld source, 5 April 2019).

That Facebook page also administered two public groups. One was concerned with metal-detectors and treasures, yet it was originally registered as a community of people from Syria in Turkey; it had 14,306 members (withheld source, 30 September 2019). The other (more recent one) was associated with a detector manufacturer in Turkey yet served the market across Africa and had 364 members (withheld source, 30 September 2019; it had numerous members across South America, North America, Europe and Asia as well as Africa, yet appeared to primarily comprise members in Turkey and North Africa plus Arabic-speaking West Asia; it also served the market for mineral-prospecting as well as treasure-hunting).

Other examples of trilingual (Arabic, Turkish and English) communities include one detector dealer, which had 13,260 fans (withheld source, 20 September 2019), and another, which had 8,127 fans (withheld source, 30 September 2019). This was also evident in the activity on Instagram of individual detectorists in Turkey and abroad, such as one who engaged with the Turkish-language community who organise around #definecilik as well as the German-language community who organise around #schatzsuche, while they engaged in treasure-hunting in Germany and Mexico; and another who engaged with the Turkish-language community who organise around #define and #metaldedektör as well as the English-language community who organise around #treasurehunting and #metaldetecting, while they engaged in treasure-hunting in Turkey and Sweden.

### ***Transnational organised crime***

Beyond the evidence of transnational online social organisation, transnational crime and national organised crime that serves the international antiquities market, there is specific evidence of transnational organised crime. In Greece, cases included at least two criminal organisations, with at least 23 members in total with Greek and Albanian nationality; they were suspected of trafficking cannabis, cocaine, methamphetamine and (other) synthetic drugs, as well as looting and trafficking antiquities (e-thessalia 2017).

In Turkey, cases included one 'criminal organisation [suç örgütü]', with at least 16 members with

Turkish and Bulgarian nationality, plus at least two associates of unspecified nationality in France; they were engaged in the 'international smuggling of historical artefacts [uluslararası tarihî eser kaçakçılığı]' (Holoğlu 2017). Objects that were seized from the six suspects in Turkey included '4 moulds that are used in the making of coins and 4 detectors [4 adet sikke yapımında kullanılan kalıp ve 4 adet dedektör]' (Holoğlu 2017), so this organised crime group were both looting antiquities with metal-detectors and forging metal antiquities.

## Discussion of implementation of law(s) across the Eastern Mediterranean

### *Detecting tourism/transnational looting: 'Shy bairns get nowt'*

While there is no evidence that he found or sought archaeological objects, one tourist from the United Kingdom took his handheld pinpointing-detector for underwater detecting in Cyprus, then adapted it to function as a makeshift swinging detector for beach-combing. He was warned that metal-detecting had been 'heavily restricted' then 'banned' and metal-detectors 'were reportedly confiscated at the point of entry' if they were intercepted by customs (withheld source, 15 May 2018); there were 'regular arrests' of anyone who was caught 'detecting without a permit' for both the detector and its use 'on the 3 or 4 authorised beaches' (withheld source, 15 May 2018) or detecting in unauthorised locations.

The tourist explained that he had permission from the manager of the hotel next to the beach where he detected, though the manager was not authorised to give permission. Due to the warnings, he checked with the manager, who 'made a phone call to his brother[-]in[-]law' who worked for the Department of Antiquities, who advised that, 'as long as [you're] not looking for old stuff... they don't care' (anonymous official, paraphrased by withheld source, 18 May 2018).

Use of a swinging detector to look for modern losses could still 'be seen as intent' to look for archaeological objects, but use of a pinpointing detector was supposedly legal (at least away from protected sites), as it was supposedly 'not a search device' (anonymous official, paraphrased by withheld source, 18 May 2018). The law actually prohibits the unlicensed (or otherwise unpermitted) possession and/or use of any 'devices' that 'locate one or more kinds of metal on land, subsoil, sea-bed or bottom of rivers, lakes, swamps, or in constructions' (according to an official translation by the Republic of Cyprus Office of the Law Commissioner 2013). The tourist concluded that 'shy children get nothing [Shy bairns get nowt]' (withheld source, 18 May 2018).

### *A matter of interpretation*

In Greece, police officers themselves debate the status and the applicability of the law. One concluded that the situation '[would] be judged by the overall circumstances [θα κριθεί από τις συνολικές περιστάσεις]' (sakis01 2014):

If, for example, the check happens in or near the archaeological site and the suspect has in their possession a detector and digging equipment, then it is exceedingly probable that they have excavated or are going to excavate. If, however, the check happens in [Athens neighbourhood] Patisia, for example, and only the detector is found in their vehicle, then its use does not ensue (nor is it probable), in which case there is no infringement. [Αν, πχ, ο έλεγχος λάβει χώρα πλησίον ή εντός αρχαιολογικού χώρου και ο ύποπτος έχει στην κατοχή του τον ανιχνευτή και σκαπτικά εργαλεία, τότε σφόδρα πιθανολογείται ότι προέβη ή πρόκειται να προβεί σε ανασκαφή. Αν όμως ο έλεγχος λάβει χώρα στα Πατήσια, πχ, και βρεθεί μόνο ο ανιχνευτής εντός του οχήματος, τότε δεν προκύπτει (ούτε καν πιθανολογείται) η χρήση του, οπότε δεν υπάρχει παράβαση.]

Concerningly, it appears possible for anyone to join that forum, to push an even more limited interpretation and so to make such difficult decisions even more difficult.

### *A matter of application*

Meanwhile, in Turkey, since 2008, 'it has been a crime, too, to search for treasure without permission [izinsiz define araştırmak da suç]' (according to detector-dealer Mahmut Geçgin, interviewed in Geçgin and Tatlıpınar 2011). So, 'like detector firms say, the statement that "to seek is free, to dig is forbidden" has lost its meaning [detektör firmalarının söylediği gibi "Aramak serbest, kazmak yasak" sözü artık anlamını yitirdi]' (according to detector-dealer Mahmut Geçgin, interviewed in Geçgin and Tatlıpınar 2011).

Indeed, detectorists suspect that 'the state... causes these detector incidents deliberately... [because] it gets the customs duty from the imported detector [;] it gets the tax from the producer [;] in the end, then, the state is the most profitable side in this business[;] it gains tax [Devlet... bu dedektör olayını kasıtlı yapıyor... İthal dedektörden gümrük vergisi alır. Üretenden vergi alır. Sonuçta öylede böylede devlet bu işte en kazançlı çıkan taraf. Vergiyi kazanıyor]' from detectors (withheld source, 27 July 2017), then it confiscates the taxed detectors from the illicit users.

Treasure-hunters are also conscious of political economy. After all, treasure-hunting is one among many, sometimes more destructive, human-made problems that afflict cultural heritage. Other problems include 'infrastructure and superstructure projects of capital accumulation [sermaye birikiminin alt yapı, üst yapı projeleri]' (Arkeologlar Derneği İstanbul Şubesi 2019: viii), which are perhaps more extreme and so more visible in Turkey than elsewhere in the region, 'dams, construction, agriculture, mining, natural conditions, [and] war [baraj, yapılaşma, tarım, madencilik, doğal şartlar, savaş]' (Özüşen and Beceren 2019: 608). Such factors may coincide or be confused. Over the second half of the twentieth century, there was a 'mound massacre [höyük soykırımı]' across the Ceyhan Plain, 'which looked like agricultural activities, but was a destruction that originated in treasure-hunting [tarımsal

faaliyetlermiş gibi görünen fakat defincilik kaynaklı bir tahribat]' (Demir, Dinç and Girginer 2006: 196). Indeed, farming may be used to destroy evidence of looting.

So, treasure-hunters are acutely aware of the differences in the state's treatment of looters as opposed to other perpetrators of harm to the material remains of their society's past (or societies' pasts). They observe that, 'when a pauper does it, [the state] attack[s] like they are catching a terrorist.... [yet] there are no graves in Turkey that have not been opened for the work of the Housing Development Administration [to be able to continue] [fakir yaparken teröris[t] yakalar gibi saldırıyorlar.... toki çalışması diye turkiyede açmadıkları mezar kalmadı]' (withheld source, 18 April 2019). This situation can only erode their perception of harm and sense of responsibility.

### ***Risky business***

Treasure-hunting is a risky activity. In Greece, between 1988 and 2007, more than 30 people lost their lives while trying to find antiquities (Tsinganias 2007). In Turkey, too, people are known to die by misadventure, such as by being poisoned by gas in tunnels (Erken 2010). Beyond such "workplace hazards", it has long been a dangerous activity for hobbyists and criminals and a dangerous activity to confront for cultural heritage workers and law enforcement agents.

For instance, in Cyprus, in 1982, two Turkish Cypriot archaeologists submitted a supposedly secret report to the Department of Antiquities and Museums under Turkish Cypriot administration, where they identified thieves of works of art from churches and smugglers who sold that art on the international market (Acar 1989a: 1; see also Acar 1989b: 13). The events were 'covered up [hasır altı edildiği]' and one of the archaeologists received death threats (Acar 1989a: 1; see also Acar 1989b: 13). In 2007, Greek Cypriot undercover agent Stephanos Stephanou was arrested in a Turkish Cypriot police raid on antiquities traffickers; he died in custody, from a heart attack that was induced by a beating (Hardy 2014b: 94). In 2014, two antiquities looters were injured in a gunfight between 'rival gangs' (O'Connell-Schizas 2014).

Likewise, in Turkey (according to archaeologist George Hanfmann, cited by Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 192; 189), at the latest by 1967, there had been a gunfight between a looter and a smuggler; already by 1972, civil society had been reduced to querying, 'why should I want a hole in my head?' In 2001, a looter threatened to kill the guards who had caught him (Roosevelt and Luke 2006: 194). In 2012, a treasure-hunter assassinated police officer Mithat Erdal when he investigated a network of antiquities traffickers who — he suspected — included his superior officers (Erbil 2017). In 2015, a looter pushed Specialised Sergeant Cengiz Darbaş off a cliff when his gendarmerie patrol unit conducted an operation against a team of tomb-robbers (DNA 2015). And all of these cases, across the region, are mere examples.

### **Discussion of statistics, particularly manipulation of automatically-generated data**

Whether they are implausible claims about history and objects by treasure-hunters, or implausible claims about seizures by cultural heritage professionals and law enforcement agents, 'lie[s,] falsehood[s and] exaggerated figures [yalan — yanlış, abartılı rakamlar]' (Acar 2018) are regularly relayed as facts. This (mis) information flows from criminals, archaeologists or police/customs (and sometimes through all three) to media, to the public and so to active and potential treasure-hunters in the country and around the world (e.g. withheld source, 3 January 2018, who shared an English-language version of a Turkish-language report of the supposed seizure of the bronze seal of Prophet-King Solomon). Thereby, it not only undermines empirical knowledge about the problem, but also reinforces some of the incentives that worsen the problem. This study has secured albeit tentative empirical evidence with which to begin to analyse the problem.

### ***The potential and limitations of digital data, netnographic data, market data and other empirical indicators***

Apparently, in the Greek crisis that emerged during the international crisis of 2008-2009 and was compounded by austerity from 2010, the numbers of both applications for detector permits and incidents of looting increased (Romeo 2015). Seemingly, cultural property crime has continued to increase (Antonogiannako 2019). However, if measured from the year of the reform of licensing, demonstrable attempts at illicit excavation fell by 19.01 per cent, from 121 in 2012 to 98 in 2014 and demonstrable attempts at listed sites only rose by 5.17 per cent, from 58 to 61. Meanwhile, if measured from the year before the reform, demonstrable attempts only fell by 7.55 per cent, from 106 in 2011 to 98 in 2014 and demonstrable attempts at listed sites rose by 52.50 per cent, from 40 to 61 (according to data from the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Greece, cited by Nikolentzos, Voutsas and Koutsathanasis 2017: 355 – fig. 2). Ultimately, forensic documentation of illicit excavation and illicit trafficking may be so difficult that, sometimes, variations in statistics are uninformative.

### ***Tentative, least-worst estimates of numbers of treasure-hunters***

In a survey of an online forum where the treasure-hunters were primarily based in the United States, webmaster Marc (2004, with results from 31 July 2016) found that only 93.42 per cent of online detectorists were active detectorists. On the basis of the 16,002 fans in the largest online community in Greece, then, it might be inferred that there are at least 14,949 active detectorists among a population of 10,727,668 (World Bank n.d.) or 1 in 718.

On the basis of the 59,652 members in the largest online community for metal-detectorists in Turkey, it might be inferred that there are at least 55,727 active metal-detectorists among a population of 82,319,724 (World Bank n.d.) or 1 in 1,477. Since there were already 100,000 at least ten and up to thirty years ago, on the basis of the 153,519 members in the largest online community for treasure-hunters, it might plausibly be inferred that there are at least 143,417 active treasure-hunters or 1 in 574.

The wealth of other evidence demonstrates that there is intensive extraction of cultural assets in the region. However, the automatically-generated data may be problematic.

### ***Active management of online participation by treasure-hunters***

There is a certain — reasonable — assumption that 'the proportion of forum members that no longer actively participate in the hobby is not a constant, but tends to accumulate over the years' (Deckers, Dobat, Ferguson, Heeren, Lewis and Thomas 2018: 326), as people stop making the effort to engage in offline activity, yet do not make the effort to disengage from the potential opportunity of online activity. This assumption recognises a certain reality — it is almost truistic — and automatically-generated data are difficult to use.

Yet, the Facebook fandom of the largest social network for metal-detectorists in South-East Asia *shrank* by 3.04 per cent between 6 February 2018 and 1 August 2019 (Hardy 2020). There are examples of this phenomenon across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, as well as across the various platforms of online forums and social networks.

With regard to Turkey, during the period of study, the multilingual regional fandom on Facebook of one detector-dealer across West Asia and North Africa *shrank* by 0.28 per cent, from 364,739 on 24 April 2019 to 363,700 on 30 September 2019, while the Turkish-language national fandom *shrank* by 0.66 per cent, from 58,792 on 24 April 2019 to 58,405 on 30 September 2019. One Arabic, Turkish and English-language fandom for a detector-dealer on Facebook *shrank* by 0.89 per cent, from 8,200 on 25 April 2019 to 8,127 on 30 September 2019. One Arabic-language community for metal-detectorists and other handlers of cultural objects on Facebook *shrank* by 1.03 per cent, from 14,455 on 25 April 2019 to 14,306 on 30 September 2019. Another Arabic-language community for metal-detectorists on Facebook *shrank* by 1.29 per cent, from 59,068 on 25 April 2019 to 58,305 on 30 September 2019.

One group of metal-detectorists *shrank* by 1.70 per cent, from 60,682 on 25 April 2019 to 59,652 on 30 September 2019. One cooperative for treasure-hunters on Facebook *shrank* by 2.48 per cent, from 161 on 24 April 2019 to 157 fans on 30 September 2019. The fandom of one manufacturer of treasure-hunting pyrotechnics on Instagram *shrank* by 5.13 per cent, from 4,348 on 4 May 2019 to 4,125 followers on 30 September 2019. The fandom of a magazine

for treasure-hunters on Instagram *shrank* by 9.74 per cent, from 8,461 on 3 May 2019 to 7,637 on 30 September 2019.

With regard to Greece, the fandom of one detector-dealer on Instagram *shrank* by 14.30 per cent, from 10,143 on 27 April 2019 to 8,693 followers on 30 September 2019. Over the course of its existence since 3 February 2010, one online forum had had 2,890 members, yet only 2,368 remained on 30 September 2019. In other words, 18.06 per cent of its community had actively left rather than passively remained as inactive members, had been expelled by the administrators as inactive accounts or had been expelled by the administrators as irredeemable rule-breakers. Likewise, fake accounts may be deleted by online platforms such as Facebook.

Notably, if unsurprisingly, even during the days over which online communities were initially identified and recorded, the sizes of certain social networks decreased as well as increased. All of these examples demonstrate the active management of online participation by metal-detectorists. While there will be some inactivity, whether it is temporary or permanent, this evidence affirms that the numbers are not mere accumulations of anyone who has ever shown interest — active, inactive, retired or dead. So, natural evidence of online activity can prudently yet cautiously be assumed to bear a meaningful correlation with offline activity.

### ***Overactive management of online communities by administrators and activists***

Nonetheless, automatically-generated data for some online communities may be unreliable, due to the systematic insertion of fake accounts, as has been demonstrated in Ukraine (cf. Hardy 2017b). Though no comparable evidence was immediately identifiable for Greek-language communities, this study has documented at least the risk of such manipulation for online communities in Turkey.

There are blog posts that offer keywords such as 'treasure-hunting [definecilik]' (tolgaderler1 2016a) and 'coin [sikke]' (tolgaderler1 2016b) to people who are trying to 'buy followers [takipçi satın al]', or keywords such as 'treasure-hunter [Defineci]' to people who are trying to 'buy real followers [gerçek takipçi satın al]' (gerçek takipçi satın al 2016), on Instagram. There are direct offers to detecting-related accounts of fake followers from bot farms (cf. conversation under withheld source, 24 April 2019, which grew by an average of 2.44 followers per day over 151 days, from 99 on 2 May 2019 to 467 on 30 September 2019, so it seemingly did not invest in fake followers). And, obviously, administrators and activists do not need an advert for their particular keywords to find a supplier of bots with which to manipulate data.

Obviously, too, differences in interests may influence the findability and popularity and, therefore, the growth rates of online communities; regional communities of treasure-hunters may grow larger and faster than national communities of metal-detectorists; burgeoning communities — particularly

communities that are simultaneously becoming more complex, more transnational, whether that is by design or by accident — may grow or appear to have grown larger and faster than established ones that are reaching or have reached their peak. Meanwhile, in this case, variations in growth rates and points of change in growth rates may be obscured by the minimal data points. So, manipulation of data may be difficult to identify.

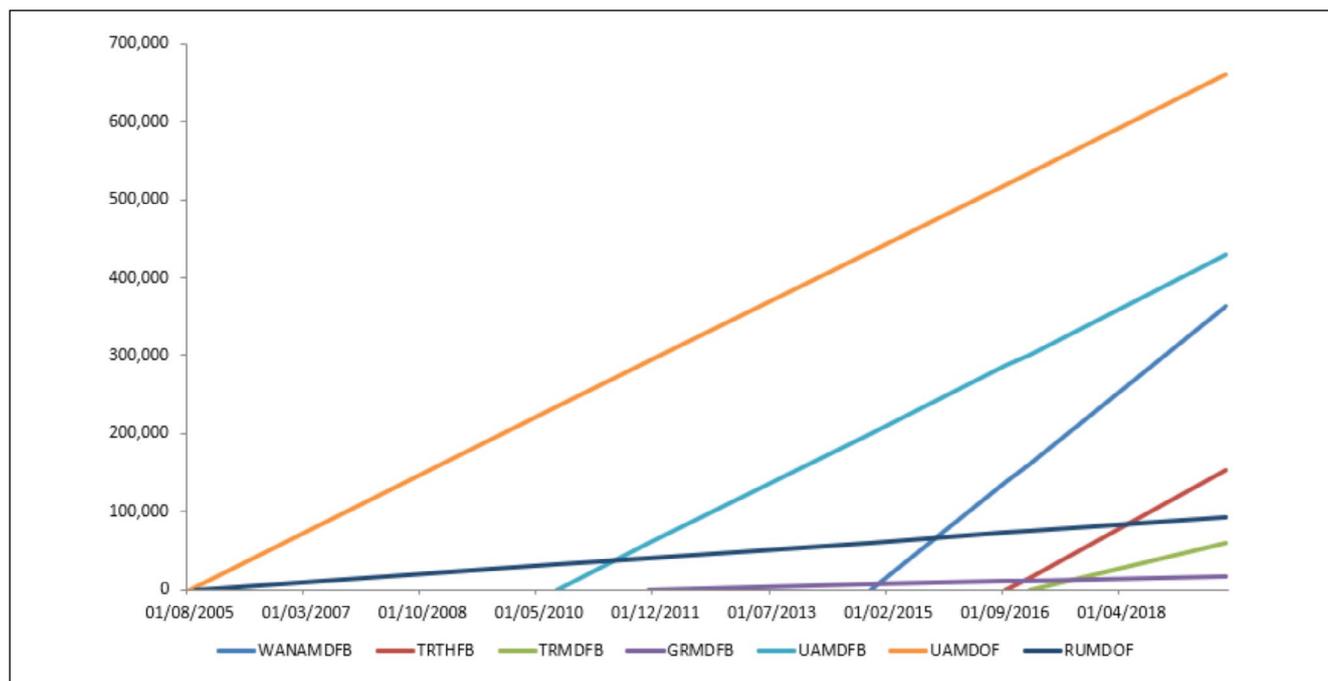
Still, the long-term growth rate of the detector-dealer for West Asia and North Africa was 204.10 fans per day (between 13 November 2014, when it was founded, and 30 September 2019). The long-term growth rate of the largest community for treasure-hunters in Turkey was 138.93 members per day (between 20 September 2016, when it was founded, and 30 September 2019). The long-term growth rate of the largest community for metal-detectorists in Turkey was 59.77 members per day (between 5 January 2017, when it was founded, and 30 September 2019).

With regard to Eastern Europe, the average long-term growth rates of two congregations of the largest online community that exhibited signs of *artificial* growth (cf. Hardy 2017b) were 127.95 fans per day (between 8 August 2005, when one was founded, and 30 September 2019) and 128.48 members per day (between 11 August 2010, when the other was founded, and 30 September 2019). There, the highest *natural* long-term growth rate of a large online community had been 18.40 members per day (between 9 February 2006, soon after it was founded, and 7 October 2016, cf. Hardy 2017b: 9 – table 8); and its subsequent growth rate had been higher, at 22.82 members per day (between 7 October 2016 and 16 September 2017, cf. Hardy 2017b: 8 – table 5), so it obviously had not reached its peak; its overall growth rate was 17.97 members per day (between 5 September 2005, when it was founded, and 30 September 2019).

The long-term growth rate of the largest community for metal-detectorists in Greece was 5.56 fans per day (between 14 November 2011, when it was founded, and 30 September 2019). So, the statistics for Turkey and the Middle East may be authentic. They may reflect the crises within the country and across the region and their consequences in terms of the increase in trafficking, plus the increase in the complexity and transnationalism of trafficking. They may simply indicate that there is a wider range of natural growth rates. Nonetheless, in light of comparisons within and outside the region, the statistics are suspect. At least currently, the automatically-generated data are too insecure to be used.

Online community	Growth rate in members per day
Facebook in West Asia and North Africa (WANAMDFB)	204.10
One on Facebook for Turkey (TRTHFB)	138.93
Facebook for Ukraine – demonstrably manipulated (UAMDFB)	128.48
Online forum for Ukraine – demonstrably manipulated (UAMDOF)	127.95
Another on Facebook for Turkey (TRMDFB)	59.77
Online forum for Russia (RUMDOF)	17.97
Facebook for Greece (GRMDFB)	5.56

Table 3. Supposed growth rates of large online communities for treasure-hunters in the Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, in order of rate of growth.



Graph 1. Supposed growth rates of online communities for treasure-hunters in the Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe.

## Discussion of online social organisation

### *Politics of treasure-hunters*

There were tantalising glimpses of the politics of treasure-hunters. In Turkey, one decried how, 'after [the coup attempt on] 15 July [2016], the father resigned from the association or the foundation that [had been] established by the son... society look[ed] with suspicion upon any organisation [15 Temmuz'dan sonra; baba, oğulun kurduğu dernek ya da vakıftan bile istifa etti... toplum herhangi bir oluşuma şüphe ile bakıyor]' (withheld source, 2 January 2019).

Murat Kurt was the administrator of four social media groups for treasure-hunters. Kurt was detained in a raid on a group who were suspected of '[illegal] excavation of a temple and trafficking of antiquities [tapınak kazısı ile tarihi eser kaçakçılığı]', where other suspects had '3 kilos and 800 grams of dynamite-derivative explosives [3 kilo 800 gram dinamit türevinden patlayıcı]' (Karamanca 2018). So this case, again, highlights the blurriness of the distinction between hunters of treasures and hunters of antiquities.

At least one page, which had 4,801 fans (withheld source, 30 September 2019), honoured the founder and leader of the secularist republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in its profile image. The image was based on a republican coin and allegedly designed by Kurt; it was posted when the page was founded, just before the first anniversary of the coup attempt against the Islamist government (withheld sources, 11 July 2017). Just after the first anniversary, it posted an animated video of the image and declared that it was 'time to move', 'time to act' or 'time for action [Hareket zamanı]' (withheld source, 17 July 2017).

In opposition to the removal by Islamists of the prefix of 'Republic of Turkey [Türkiye Cumhuriyeti]' from the names of state institutions, it has been inserted by Republicans as a prefix to their own names. The same page honoured "T.C. Murat Kurt" in its cover image, after his detention (withheld source, 23 April 2019). Across a range of platforms, several metal-detectorists and/or treasure-hunters had "T.C." in their social media profiles (withheld sources, n.d.).

And politics may also be exploited. The criminal organisation that involved senior provincial government officials and senior law enforcement agents pretended to be 'on a secret mission [gizli bir görev]' as they dug with heavy machinery and transported their finds in articulated lorries (T24 2019). They specified that '[they were] searching for the buried gold of the Gülenist Terrorist Organisation [FETÖ'nün gömülü altınlarını arıyoruz]', as the government officially designates the movement that is associated with the faction that launched the attempted coup; 'there [had been] a decision to confiscate [it] [el koyma kararı var]' T24 2019).

### *'They think we are stupid and don't understand that they have an agenda'*

Metal-detectorists and/or treasure-hunters campaign against restrictive regulation in Cyprus (e.g. Kypriaki Etaireia Metallikis Anichnevsis 2012), in Greece (e.g. Kambas 2011) and in Turkey (e.g. Cansever 2017; Geçgin

2016; Kulaç 2019; N A 2017a; 2017b). However, even if it is part of the logic of their argument, their own testimony may undermine their campaigns. In Greece, one of the organisers of the European Congress of Gold-Hunters reeled through various presentations of community practice in one statement: 'we are not doing something illegal [δεν κάνουμε κάτι παράνομο]'; 'most of the time we go through all the necessary procedures to get licenses [τις περισσότερες φορές κάνουμε όλες τις απαραίτητες διαδικασίες προκειμένου να βγάλουμε άδειες]'; 'we have all dug illegally [όλοι μας έχουμε σκάψει παράνομα]', because the state creates difficulties in order 'to delay us and eventually to discourage us [να μας καθυστερήσουν και τελικά να μας αποθαρρύνουν]' (according to metal-detecting treasure-hunter Theofilos Chatziioannidis, cited by NonPaperNews 2015; similar arguments are made by metal-detectorists in Cyprus, cf. Browne 2015, and in Turkey, cf. Kulaç and Tunç 2002).

Pseudonymous Achilleas, who detects not only legally with a permit from the Republic of Cyprus but also illegally, argues that detectorists extract cultural objects from 'remote areas' illegally because they are not allowed to extract cultural objects from 'land' legally (cited by Browne 2015). As observed by archaeologists, 'they think we are stupid and don't understand that they have an agenda'; you 'only have to look on the Internet' to see the international market for ancient coins from Cyprus (according to archaeologist Despo Pilides, Curator of Antiquities at the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus, cited by Browne 2015).

Achilleas has claimed that he has 'never taken artefacts from archaeological sites' (cited by Browne 2015). Yet he has also declared that he 'keep[s] or give[s as gifts]' less valuable cultural objects, such as '[b]elt buckles, lead shot, nails and pottery'; otherwise, he 'sell[s] whatever [he] find[s]... and they all go out of the country', including some individual 'item[s]' that he has sold for €26,000 (CY£15,000, cited by Mackay 2008). Furthermore, he has explained that full-time illicit detectorists can 'easily make a very good living', as long as they 'know something about the island's history and about the history of coins to make the most of that sort of time investment' (cited by Mackay 2008). This suggests that he does target "productive" archaeological sites.

On one trip, Achilleas 'quickly' extracted '[an] ancient belt buckle...[,] coins, an iron nail, a copper sewing needle, lead shot balls, a Byzantium [*sic* – Byzantine] coin, a copper cross, a lead weight and an arrow head' from a field (according to a journalist's anonymous friend, cited by Mackay 2008). He then showed off a 'less accessible... mass of recently unearthed tombs', which had been subjected to often 'extremely lucrative' looting (according to a journalist's anonymous friend, cited by Mackay 2008).

Echoing apparently retired Turkish detectorist Uğur Kulaç (cf. Kulaç and Tunç 2002), active Greek Cypriot detectorist Achilleas recognises that 'many [antiquities] are leaving on the black market' and argues that there 'should be an amnesty for private dealers so the artefacts would stay' in the country of origin (cited by Browne 2015). In fact, there

have already been at least two amnesties, in 1973 and 1996 (Paraskevaides 2007; 2008; see also Hardy 2014: 88-89). The 1996 amnesty occurred eight years into Achilleas's "hobby" (cf. Browne 2015). Either he concealed his collection *and* continued to excavate, collect and sell antiquities illegally; or he legalised his collection *then* continued to excavate, collect and sell antiquities illegally.

Evidently, he continued (and continues) to conceal his collection. One interviewer reported that he was unable to view any of the collection, as Achilleas was 'forced to hide his finds' (Mackay 2008). Yet he continues to supposedly sincerely campaign for an(other) opportunity for illicit excavators, dealers and collectors to legalise their cultural assets. While persistently characterising the activity as a 'hobby' (cited by Mackay 2008; Browne 2015), Achilleas actually wants his illicit trade to be a legal business, wherein the state would finance the licensing and authentication of any find, then the detectorists and the landowners would 'benefit from the proceeds of any sale' (paraphrased by Mackay 2008), for which the price would be even higher than it is already, due to the commodities' legalised, authenticated nature.

In Turkey, metal-detectorists are particularly organised (e.g. Anadolu Definecilere Eğitim ve Araştırma Derneği 2019), campaigning for 'treasure-hunters to be given responsibility for the safeguarding of historical protected areas [tarihi SİT alanlarının korunmasında definecilere sorumluluk verilsin]' (Geçgin and Tatlıpınar 2011). They complain that they are being subjected 'to a lynching campaign [linç kampanyası]' (detector dealer Uğur Kulaç, cited in Özgür Kocaeli 2018).

Meanwhile, heritage activists are organising in opposition (e.g. Arkeolojinin Gizemi 2019), campaigning for archaeological employment and public archaeology to educate and engage community and society in protection and management of sites for cultural tourism (Ateşoğulları and Alyanak 2019). There are also other efforts by civil society. For instance, heritage professionals (e.g. saratprojesi 2018) have reached out to the community who organise around the hashtagged keyword treasure-hunting (#definecilik) and encouraged them to restrict themselves to *licensed* treasure-hunting (#izinlidefinecilik). Students of communication, public relations and advertising have run a public relations campaign (Metropol Uşak 2019), which has been organised around heritage trafficking (#miraskaçakçılığı) and antiquities trafficking (#tarihieserkaçakçılığı) as well as treasure-hunting (#definecilik). The situation is such a significant problem that, echoing the protests where 'young archaeologists rebelled [genç arkeologlar ayaklandı]' against the crisis of the profession before the Gezi uprising (Erbil 2013), 'archaeologists [have] revolted [arkeologlar isyan etti]' against this crisis for the profession (Uzun 2019).

### ***Other factors in commitment to activity***

Naturally, there are a range of varyingly significant, sometimes mutually-influencing factors in commitment to activity. These include sporadic factors that may not be able to be addressed, but should be acknowledged, such as mental health. For instance, according

to an experienced treasure-hunter in Turkey who educates novices online, they must choose partners or team members carefully, because some 'can be taken under control by djinns [cinler tarafından çok rahat kontrol altına alınabilir]' (withheld source, 30 June 2019). Supposedly due to possession by these spirits, 'incidents like the cutting, garrotting, murdering of a friend are events that we see very often in the history of treasure-hunting [arkadaşını kesme boğazlama öldürme gibi hadiseler definecilik tarihinde çok sık gördüğümüz olaylardır]' (e.g. withheld source, 30 June 2019).

Although the symptoms of those treasure-hunters are interpreted within a fundamentally religious context, and although many such incidents are inevitably driven by greed and similarly inexcusable motives, even the terminology indicates that some such incidents are underpinned by untreated medical conditions. Those spirits can induce 'anxiety... great weakness, fatigue and lack of comfort... stress, depression, melancholia... despair and pessimism [and] panic attacks [kaygıya... halsizlik, yorgunluk, takatsızlık... strese, depresyona, melankoliye... ümitsizliğe ve karamsarlığa, panik atağa]' (withheld source, 30 June 2019).

Indeed, there is burgeoning documentation of the potential health benefits of community archaeology (e.g. Evans 2018; Everill, Bennett and Burnell 2019; Winterton 2014), collective metal-detecting (e.g. Dobat, Oruc Wood, Søndergaard Jensen, Schmidt and Dobat 2019) and solitary metal-detecting (e.g. Rogers and Haer 2019) for serving personnel, veterans (SPV) and civilians who have mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression. While it is anecdotal, this testimony appears to reaffirm that, for some people, whether they are successful or not, this activity may function as self-management of mental health problems. This may also explain their particular resistance to moderating that activity.

## **Conclusion on the complexification of trafficking and the need for cooperation**

Cyprus, Greece and Turkey have struggled to develop their economies and advance their democracies, including by consolidating the rule of law. Moreover, Cyprus and Turkey are conflict zones. In Cyprus in particular, where governance is split between two uncooperative administrations, where criminals can exploit law enforcement agencies' non-cooperation (Hardy 2014: 93-94), where some criminal networks in the Turkish-occupied areas are connected with nationalist networks within Turkish state structures (Hardy 2014: 91-92; 2015b: 335-336) and where it is difficult or impossible for the occupied Turkish Cypriot administration to access international support for policing of cultural property crime (Hardy 2014: 94-95), the effectiveness of regulation cannot be judged as a matter of cultural policy alone. Furthermore, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey have functioning licensing systems for licit metal-detecting; yet, at least in Greece and Turkey, it appears that the overwhelming majority of metal-detectorists operate illicitly.

As documented in a proof-of-concept study of open-source evidence in relation to multi-commodity trafficking or polytrafficking of at least 'two' (cf. Griffiths and Bromley 2009: 17n80) or at least 'several' commodities (cf. Dicorrado Andreoni and Greene 2007: 2; definitions vary), there is evidence of *some* intersection between antiquities and narcotics (Hardy 2019c). As documented in this study, there is further corroboration of *some* intersection between antiquities and arms, plus among antiquities, narcotics and arms. So, this study supports the (not merely rhetorical, but practical) confrontation of antiquities crime as serious crime by Turkey, Greece, Cyprus and other concerned states.

Particularly in light of the evidence of increasing regionalisation/internationalisation of networks and groups, this study supports existing cooperation between Greece and Turkey (e.g. Hürriyet Daily News 2012); demonstrates the potential for further cooperation among Turkey, Greece and Cyprus; and demonstrates the need for cooperation of the states that have large antiquities markets with the states of the region. For instance, the United States of America has import restrictions on archaeological objects from Cyprus and Greece, yet not Turkey, even though Turkey appears to face by far the greatest challenges in terms of destruction of archaeological heritage and involvement of organised crime.

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the maintenance of the agreements with Cyprus and Greece, where they are essential and appear to be effective, and the establishment of an agreement with Turkey, where one is desperately needed. Furthermore, big tech companies such as Facebook (and Facebook-owned Instagram) must regulate the activity that is realised through their social networks and cooperate with civil society as it tries to combat online trafficking.

All of this is true beyond the region, around the world. The successes of Operation Pandora I, which was led by Spain and Cyprus, Operation Pandora II, which was led by Spain, and Operation Pandora III, which was principally led by Spain while its online trafficking operation was led by the Netherlands, all of which were supported by Europol, Interpol, the WCO and UNESCO, as well as Operation Athena, which was led by the WCO and supported by Interpol, demonstrate the potential for even broader international cooperation. Overall, they led to the arrest of at least 187 suspects and the seizure of more than 60,000 cultural objects; and the operations by police services in Europe recovered cultural goods from South America, North Africa and West Asia, as well as from within the continent (cf. Europol 2017; 2018; 2019). International action is essential — and international cooperation is not simply beneficial but 'crucial' (Hufnagel 2019: 90).

As emphasised by the politics and politicisation of cultural property crime in Turkey, the problem is beyond one of heritage crime or serious crime; it is a matter of security. Indeed, there is intelligence that suggests conflict antiquities trafficking, at least in the form of self-financing by members of internationally-active, violent political organisations, including the Kurdish autonomist PKK (e.g. Doğan

Haber Ajansı 2006; 2012; SuperHaber 2018) and the Turkish ultranationalist Grey Wolves (e.g. Çarboğa and Şendil 2007; Cihan haber Ajansı 2010; Yurttaş 2013, in which final case, the high court affirmed forensic evidence of financing of the organisation). Turkey, in particular, is committing resources — and its law enforcement agents and cultural heritage professionals are risking their lives — to constrain a problem that will not be brought under control until the markets that drive it are themselves brought under control.

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