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TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4" – "*ISIS: LOOTING FOR TERROR*"

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REPORTER:	Simon Cox
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“FILE ON 4”

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ACTUALITY IN LEBANON, CAR HORNS

COX: Tonight I'm in Lebanon, one of the main centres for looted antiquities from Syria, and I'll be investigating this illicit trade and whether it's being used to fund terrorist organisations, like Islamic State.

MOHAMMED [VIA INTERPRETER]: ISIS are the one from day one, they the one who under control of this business and they the one who stole most of the antiquities and artefacts.

MUSIC

COX: Lebanon is not the final destination, the big money to be made is in Europe. And in File on 4 tonight, we investigate the trade and reveal how some of this looted Syrian treasure is finding its way to the UK.

RAPLEY: We know there's a problem, we can see the reports from locally, we've seen aerial photographs, we've seen holes in the ground. We know that material is coming out, we know that material will be either here or on its way here or for sale here.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY IN CAR

COX: So this is the beginning of my journey in Lebanon. I'm in downtown Beirut and we're heading to Geitawi and we're going to meet a smuggler who has come up from the border with Syria, and he has been involved with smuggling looted antiquities, I think, as well as other things, and he's going to talk to us, but he's really nervous. You know him, don't you, Michael? You've met him before.

MICHAEL: Yeah, he moves pretty much everything. They're pretty spooked right now just because the Government's been cracking down quite a bit on this, and anyone who has antiquities at this point is pretty much being accused of being in league with ISIS, so it's not just the charge of trafficking antiquities, it's also terrorism charges.

COX: Our fixer, Michael, had arranged the rendezvous at an apartment in a smart block in central Beirut.

ACTUALITY AT APARTMENT

COX: Hi, how are you doing? Good to see you. I think we're just inside here, so you want to follow me? I assume the smuggler is the garrulous middle aged man who first shakes my hand, but it's his young companion in skinny jeans, bomber jacket and black suede shoes who I am here to meet. We are calling him Mohammed. He is 21, originally from Damascus, but now he's based in the Bekaa Valley on the border between Syria and Lebanon, from where he has smuggled looted antiquities.

MOHAMMED [VIA INTERPRETER]: There's three friends in Aleppo we used to deal with. These people used to move from Aleppo all the way to this part of the world here and the border. They pay a taxi driver to sneak it into this country. We received a lot of items actually, but we tried our best to get the smallest items with most value, so we tried to concentrate on earrings, rings, small statues, carved stone heads, things like that. We tried to concentrate on light and high value artefacts.

COX: What kind of sums are we talking about, that you could make?

MOHAMMED [VIA INTERPRETER]: Some people sold pieces worth \$500,000. Some people sold pieces worth \$1million. Less, more, a lot of money involved.

COX: Mohammed's smuggling route began in Northern Syria. Parts of it are under the control of rebel groups, but much of it is now run by the jihadist Islamic State. They call it Daesh here, a far more negative term in Arabic than IS. Mohammed says these jihadists exert a tight control on the trade.

MOHAMMED [VIA INTERPRETER]: Actually ISIS are the one from day one, they are the one who are under control of this business and they the one who stole most of the antiquities and artefacts from museums around the countries and in Alappo especially, Alappo museums. I know for a fact these militants, they have connections overseas and they already make the connections overseas and they talked ahead of time and they shipped it overseas, using their connection abroad, but there's a lot of these militants who stole other artefacts who are still hiding it in the country still.

COX: Do you know if things are still being looted in Eastern Syria and brought across the border?

MOHAMMED [VIA INTERPRETER]: Actually yes, these things are still happening right now. I know for a fact, I want you to understand, everything they steal in Syria they cannot sell in Syria because ... there's a war over there, it's going crazy. The fact is they are still stealing the oil, they steal diesel fuel, they steal the artefacts, all this subject for exportation, especially in Raqqa.

COX: We have no way of independently verifying his story, but he had come through trusted sources who are well connected in the murky world of smuggling.

MUSIC

COX: Mohammed is just the first link in a complicated jigsaw, fitting together different bits of evidence to try and establish whether Islamic State is directly involved in looting antiquities and making money from it. If these illicit goods are being brought in from Syria, could I find any in Beirut?

ACTUALITY IN CITY

COX: So we've seen the first part of the trade, which is clearly the smugglers, but what about the next link, the dealers who are either selling it here or moving it on to buyers in Europe? I've been to Basta, which is the main antiques area here, but all the goods were way too modern – maybe only a couple of hundred years old. But one of the guys there told me about a couple of shops in another part of Beirut. We're about ten minutes away. We're just coming up to one of them, and he told me they sell what they call archaeology – you know, things that may be two or three thousand years old. So I'm going to go in there and I'm going to see what kind of things he might offer me, so here goes.

ACTUALITY IN SHOP

COX: That mosaic stuff, is it genuine? Like the actual tile, you know

It was a pretty unremarkable shop - there were some archaeological items. The owner told us some were fakes but others were real, and I was interested whether he could get us anything ancient of exceptional quality.

So it hasn't taken long before I've been offered looted antiquities. Talking to the owner in there and after not very long he said he could get me what he called museum quality things like mosaics, glassware. It would cost thousands upon thousands potentially, and he said clearly they had things that were illegal, they weren't allowed to be taken out of the country, but that's... not only could he sell to me, but he could also get them transported back to the UK. He's given me his card and he said if I'm serious and I've got the money, we could make a deal.

ACTUALITY IN POLICE STATION

COX: So I'm just inside one of the main police stations and I'm going to see Colonel Nicholas Saad. He is head of the team who deals with antiquities crime here and he's also going to show me some of the items they've seized, I think about two hundred items they've seized in the past couple of years from Syria. Are they real?

SAAD: They are real.

COX: Right. Do you know where these are from, which ...?

SAAD: From Syria.

COX: Which part? Do you know?

SAAD: We don't know, but we think it's from Raqqa or those places.

COX: Really?

Inside his office, he shows me photos of huge smuggled Roman busts that his team had seized. Casually dressed in a faded leather jacket, t-shirt and jeans and clutching a set of worry beads, Colonel Saad looks like the star of an Arabic cop show rather than the head of the Bureau of International Thefts.

ACTUALITY ON STAIRS

COX: He takes me up on to the roof of the station for a panoramic view of the city and the mountains to the east. Out in the distance is the border with Syria, where over a million refugees have made their way into Lebanon. He explains how this traffic is one of the main ways being used to smuggle antiquities into the country.

SAAD: We have a lot of people that are coming from Syria to Lebanon. They are refugees, they come in big numbers, they come with what they have bring with their homes. These gangs, they put these things between the things of these refugees.

SAAD cont: And we have a lot of un-legal borders between Lebanon and Syria. There is too much unofficial borders.

COX: Have you noticed there's a lot more coming out of there since the war?

SAAD: Yes, a lot more, and especially from the Islamic parts, Raqqa ... is the Islamic State.

COX: Is it the majority of the material you've seized is from the Islamic State parts?

SAAD: Yes.

COX: Although there are plenty of rich people in Lebanon, this isn't the final destination. In order to make serious money, the smugglers send the goods out of the country

SAAD: Lebanon is a transit station between Syria and Europe, it's one of the doors that goes to Europe. It pass the archaeological things stolen from Syria, it passes through Lebanon, through Lebanon to go to Europe. The people working in smuggling archaeological things between Syria, Lebanon and Lebanon, Europe, they are the lowest level of gang men. The real money is made in Europe. And the other amount of money is made by the gangs in Syria.

COX: Do you know which countries it will be going to in Europe?

SAAD: Where there are rich people, it will go there. There is a lot of rich people living in the UK, it will go to the UK.

MUSIC

COX: I will definitely pursue this when I return to the UK, but first I wanted to see some of the hundreds of ancient artefacts seized by Colonel Saad's team in the Lebanese police. Maybe these could provide more clues about the trade in Syria.

ACTUALITY IN BASEMENT

COX: So where are we going now? Where is this?

SEIF: This is the lab where we put the seized objects in preparation for sending it back to the origins, to the countries of origin. Okay, so, I just want to show you mainly some examples of what we seize ...

COX: Beirut's National Museum is the pride of the city, indeed the nation. Inside are treasures from the cradle of civilization. But hidden away from the public are the treasures waiting to be returned to Syria. Dr Assaad Seif is an archaeologist and head of excavations at the Directorate General of Antiquities in Beirut.

SEIF: The archaeological objects we have seized already, they are mixed objects between stone objects, some artefacts, some small objects and some pottery. I mean, clandestine excavations were going on a long time ago, even before the war, but because of the war they had more facility to shift them over the border to Lebanon, and when the police seize those objects, we get them. We got lots of them.

COX: Were those items coming from museums or were they excavations?

SEIF: Mainly excavations more than museums. Palmyra, for example, they were stolen from the warehouses of the excavation. This is where the smugglers are hitting. They know that the warehouses of the archaeological sites and excavations have important artefacts, so they hit there and they know they are not listed or they are not catalogued yet. So they think that it could be easier for them to sell them or to do whatever with them. From the objects we have seized already, we had objects that were proposed on the market, on the local market for like \$200,000 but we know that a dozen of them can go up to \$1 million on the international market.

COX: These artefacts, in his care, come from across Syria and it's thought all sides in the conflict have taken part in looting. But crucially the majority of the seized items are from the areas that IS controls - cities like Raqqa.

EXTRACT FROM VIDEO

COX: While in Beirut we received an intriguing video from a contact in the Middle East, which he said was filmed just outside Raqqa.

EXTRACT FROM VIDEO

COX: It shows an old limestone well lit by torch with a series of other chambers running deeper into the ground. The narrator says they have discovered some ancient jars which have already been removed. He explains how he has seen markings on the walls that indicate there are tombs here and that they should excavate. We sent this to an archaeologist who knows the area. He said there were recent tool marks on the walls and there is limestone in Raqqa, but it's impossible to say for certain exactly where this video is from.

MUSIC

COX: So what do we know about items looted from Raqqa? I had been told the best source of information was from Syria's Directorate of Antiquities, run by Dr Maamoun Abdulkarim. I spoke to him from his office in Damascus, as what sounded like fighter jets periodically raced overhead.

ABDULKARIM: We know Raqqa is under the control of the ISIS since many times. We have about more one thousand objects stolen from the Museum of Raqqa. The problem of the ISIS, it's not just innocent excavation, it's also destruction. They destroyed a lot of things. We are living now in middle age.

COX: Are ISIS making money from that, do you think?

ABDULKARIM: I am sure organisation like ISIS attack all things just for the money.

COX: But how much money is Islamic State making from this? One tantalising glimpse came last year when an IS commander was shot dead by Iraqi forces. They found a series of USB sticks at his home containing detailed information about the group's finances. One Iraqi intelligence official, told the Guardian newspaper, that IS had made £24 million from looted antiquities in just one part of Syria, but no one has been able to verify this.

MENEGAZZI: We have heard a lot of numbers, we have also heard that ISIS is financing their fighting with the selling of culture objects.

COX: Cristina Menegazzi is from The United Nations cultural organisation, UNESCO in Lebanon. It is spending millions of pounds trying to protect Syria's museums from looting. She says in such a chaotic war-torn country, it is difficult to put a figure on how much is being made from the trade.

MENEGAZZI: We checked with people on the field in Syria, we checked information with people outside Syria, we have checked information with Interpol, with Customs, with everybody, and everybody says the same thing: we do not have statistics yet; we do not have figures; precise numbers. We just can say we have found an amount of money in the Lebanese border that has been resituated to Syria, we have found some objects in the Turkish borders but we know that all the objects that came out already from the country, we will not see them on the market already. We will see them probably in five years, ten years, twenty years or even more. So the important thing is to block the selling of those objects. This is a more important thing.

MUSIC

ACTUALITY ON STREET

COX: It's not just here in Lebanon that looted antiquities are being traded. One of the really big routes is into Turkey, and I've managed to make contact with a guy who is a go-between the smugglers, who are often coming from ISIS controlled areas, and dealers in Turkey. I'm just going to give him a call via Skype and he said he's going to talk to me about the trade, but also he's got hold of some items that have been smuggled out and that are going into Turkey that he's going to show me.

ACTUALITY OF SKYPE CALL

AHMED: This is statues from Raqqa City.

COX: You know the coins, there on the front right. Could we have a look at one of those? Are they coins or stones?
On his webcam, he shows me an array of statues of animals and human figures, glasses, vases and coins, all spread out on a blanket laid on the floor next to him. He handles each piece gently, as he's had to pay a sizeable bond to the smugglers to get this material. He said it was to show potential buyers. So does he know where these items came from?

AHMED: They come from the east area of Syria, like there's Raqqa city. All these areas are controlled by ISIS.

COX: So what kinds of goods are coming across from Raqqa?

AHMED: The best one is the stone and the statues, and the second one is the most important, is the gold.

COX: And what kind of value is it, the gold? How much will it be selling for?

AHMED: It starts from \$100 until \$1.5 million to \$2 million.

COX: Have you seen that amount of gold coming through?

AHMED: Yes, I have seen a piece that's been sold for \$1.1million.

COX: So further confirmation then that looted goods are coming from IS controlled towns like Raqqa. But does he know whether IS controls the trade?

AHMED: The person who need to excavate should take permission from ISIS, and ISIS have people like inspectors.

COX: When they have found those goods and they want to sell them, do ISIS take a percentage of it or how does that work?

AHMED: Yes, they 20% as tax.

COX: Do you have any idea how much they are making?

AHMED: I can tell you that there is tons of gold. You know there is a network of traders who is dealing with this work. There is Syrians living in Europe, like Syrians living in the UK, Syrians living in Netherlands, and those guys have a network in Turkey and Europe and they are smuggling the materials to Europe by the cars. It is very easy to hide this stuff in the car – it's very small and very valuable.

ACTUALITY ON CORNICHE

COX: I've come down to the corniche just as the sun is setting in the evening. There's a fisherman just putting out his nets in front of me, and in the distance is the port. There's a big container ship actually just slowly making its way out. And what the police told us was that there wasn't really a market for stolen antiquities in Lebanon, but the way the smugglers made money was that they would put them onto boats and then send them to mainland Europe to places like Turkey and Cyprus, and they would then be moved on to dealers in some of the big antiquities centres in places like London.

BRAND: Lebanon has always been an important centre for the trade in looting antiquities, and I have been there several times and it really is amazing.

COX: Arthur Brand knows the illicit art market well. He's an investigator based near Amsterdam who finds and retrieves stolen artefacts and understands the links between the trade in Europe and Lebanon.

BRAND: The illicit trade is run as a professional business with offices and business cards. But you can buy antiquities from Lebanon, but also from countries like Syria, Iraq and Egypt. Most of the smugglers that I know are based in London. I would say 60%, and yesterday I called one of my informers, he is an antiquities smuggler, and he was in Beirut, so I don't think he was there for holiday trip.

COX: What are the big markets for where they would go to?

BRAND: In the illicit art ware, they are primarily based in the USA, the UK, Germany, France, and there, people have been collecting antiquities for ages. And lately a new group has entered the market, collectors from the Middle East with an abundance of oil dollars, so those are more or less the main end stations of these looted antiquities.

ACTUALITY IN LONDON

COX: So how much of the material from Syria is reaching London - one of the centres of the global antiquities market? Well, the simple answer is we don't know, so I've decided to go on a recce to some antique shops and markets in the capital to see if we can spot anything, and I'm waiting to meet my guide. He is David Gill, Professor of Archaeological Heritage at University Campus Suffolk.

David – hello, Simon. Pleased to meet you.

GILL: Pleased to meet you.

COX: So you're going to be my guide, aren't you?

GILL: I am. We're going to see what's on offer.

COX: Are you expecting very much?

GILL: I'm expecting a small amount of material, because people are sensitive to the present situation. But who knows? Let's go and have a look.

COX: Okay.

So David, we've just come out of a few shops we've been looking in. You looked quite excited, I have to say. I mean, there were clearly some things there that looked like they could well be Syrian.

GILL: Absolutely. For example, we saw just rows almost of late Roman glass, Byzantine glass sitting there, complete, so something that's survived 1,500 years, still with sort of earth deposits on, is curious and it raises questions. It looks as if it comes from the eastern part of the Roman Empire, so Syria would be a very plausible place. The mud suggesting it's relatively fresh out of the ground. I would imagine if someone had this in their private collection they would have cleaned it. I suspect these are things relatively fresh out of the ground.

COX: There were a lot of coins, weren't there? You seemed to be very taken with those.

GILL: Whole batches of coins, really interesting. You could actually read the inscriptions quite clearly on them. They're coming from the Seleucid Empire, so the successor to Alexander the Great. They're coming in that great swathe from what is now sort of Lebanon, Syria.

COX: One of the guys in there, in the shops, he actually said, we were looking at a beautiful piece of glasswork, and he said, 'That's from Syria.'

GILL: He did - I was absolutely astonished.

MUSIC

COX: This was just a snapshot, but the results were surprising. Of course, even if any of these items were looted, it may well have been years before the current conflict. But a few days after this, Ahmed, the go-between based in Turkey, sent me photos of the smuggled artefacts that he had shown me on his webcam. I wanted an expert opinion, so I sent them to David Gill to see what he made of them.

ACTUALITY WITH PHOTOGRAPHS

GILL: And so I'll just get the photographs up.

COX: So you've got them in front of you now?

GILL: Yep.

COX: Okay, good, good.

GILL: There were one or two objects that looked as if you could pick them off the shelf of a tourist stall anywhere in the Middle East, so were obviously quite contemporary, but there are a couple of pieces like the Roman glass in there, that did look genuine, and certainly the sort of thing that I would expect to be found in Eastern Turkey, Syria, that sort of region.

COX: And those pieces that you thought were more interesting, things like the glassware, were they similar to those ones that we'd looked at when we were going round in London?

GILL: Yes, it was really uncanny in that they were exactly the sort of thing we were seeing in several of the sort of gallery spaces that we visited. The coins were really quite exciting. I had a look at one of them and you could immediately see it was a Seleucid coin, so coming exactly from that region of Syria. A batch of coins or a hoard of coins like that are going to be very, very valuable. I mean, they're worth their weight in gold.

COX: I know this is putting you on the spot a bit, but any idea how much those coins would go for?

GILL: I haven't costed that, but I would have thought we're probably talking of tens of thousands of dollars for a hoard of that size. I mean, it may be more. We're certainly talking serious money.

COX: So I had found genuine looted artefacts were being smuggled out of Syria. I don't know where this batch went, but I had been told there was someone in the antiquities market in London who had evidence that other smuggled Syrian goods were being offered for sale here. Chris Marinello runs Art Recovery International, which identifies and oversees the return of stolen cultural artefacts. He told me the story of a dealer he was helping who had run into trouble.

MARINELLO: A particular individual came to me, had a problem, ended up being sued over this stolen work of art – a 19th century painting. And in the course of negotiations, as part of his plea to keep the police off his back, he opened up a book and said, 'Look, I know where all these pieces are.' He was looking for a way to get out, and showing us where other works of art, or looted works of art, were part of that.

COX: When you were looking through those books, you could clearly see some that would have come from Syria?

MARINELLO: Oh, sure. It's getting here. There's a market here. Some of the top antiquities dealers in the world are here and the top collectors are here.

COX: The first time he said this, I almost missed it, that the Metropolitan Police had been shown pictures of two Syrian looted stone works that were being offered for sale in the UK. The police didn't want to talk about this or anything to do with looted Syrian artefacts. So I turned instead to someone well connected to them.

ACTUALITY IN MUSEUM

RAPLEY: So we're in the Asian Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Full of different objects really from very small, transportable, high value items through to large stone pieces and monumental pieces.

COX: And do you get to walk round here much having a look at these?

RAPLEY: Not as much as I'd like to

COX: For almost a decade, Vernon Rapley, ran the Art and Antiquities squad at Scotland Yard. He is still surrounded by ancient treasures in his current role as Director of Security at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. He still regularly liaises with his old squad. And although there haven't been any arrests or prosecutions for selling looted Syrian antiquities in the UK, he says I shouldn't read too much into that.

RAPLEY: The police in this area have a little bit of a different job to do. There is a real benefit to them in seizing material, investigating the material, and very often being able to repatriate that material, but being unable to bring a criminal prosecution. And a lot of that will be going on without you or I knowing, because I'm quite confident that there has been seizures of material like this, but it's not something that will lead to a criminal prosecution and therefore to publicity. We know there's a problem, we can see the reports from locally, we've seen aerial photographs, we've seen holes in the ground, we know that material is coming out, we know that material will be either here or on its way here or for sale here.

COX: How important is London in this illicit trade?

RAPLEY: I think it played quite a significant part in Afghani and Iraqi and therefore I strongly suspect Syrian trade, because as its key point within the market, it's a great place for us to, in the UK to trade with other market countries like America and Australia. I'm quite confident that Syrian material is already over here and that it will continue to come over here whilst there is a market for it.

COX: So he is confident Syrian artefacts are here and more are on their way, but how is it being sold? Art recovery investigator, Arthur Brand, says there is a dirty secret that the art world doesn't want to admit.

BRAND: In the world of crime, one should always follow the money. Many antiquities dealers will deny that they know any smugglers at all, but the relationship between them is, of course, obvious. And I do not want to say that all dealers are involved, because there are of course a lot of good dealers, very respected dealers. They need each other - the dealer needs supply and the smuggler needs money. There have been so many examples of dealers in the United Kingdom auction houses who were caught with selling looted antiquities. Once an art smuggler took me to one of these auction houses with a very big Greek face and he put it there on a table telling that it was already a hundred years in a collection of his great grandfather. When he moved the face, there was a lot of sand on the table. And the expert of the auction house just put the sand away and they just kept on talking and I was seeing that and I thought, oh my God, how can this be in a collection for over a hundred years when the desert sand is in front of us?

COX: But it had been looted, it wasn't legal?

BRAND: Of course it was looted, because if you have a piece in a collection for over a hundred years, there was no desert sand on it. That's obvious.

COX: The auction house just effectively turned a blind eye?

BRAND: Oh yes, it was just business as usual. There was so much money to be made.

MUSIC

COX: Whilst there is no indication that any auction houses have sold artefacts looted during the current conflict, what are they doing to ensure where items have come from and where the money is going to?

KEATING: Standards are generally self-imposed and some are operating standards which sound very familiar to someone like myself, who comes from a bank, others don't sound good at all.

COX: Tom Keating is Director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at RUSI, the Royal United Services Institute. He has been in touch with auction houses to find out what measures they have in place to check for money laundering and terrorist financing.

KEATING: There appears to be a lack of coordination, a lack of uniform standards and, bluntly, a lack of regulation. And ultimately it is regulation which raises standards.

COX: Were you surprised at some of the responses you got from auction houses?

KEATING: I have been surprised. I think it's worth bearing in mind that, for example, in the finance industry, it was really 9/11 which triggered this focus on terrorist financing, and to my mind there are many people in the antiquities dealing market that are still operating in a pre 9/11 mentality, and that frankly isn't acceptable in an era where terrorists are taking advantage of any and all financing channels, including the antiquities market.

COX: Some of the big auction houses like Christies have been working with the UN cultural organisation, UNESCO, to make sure thorough checks are carried out on the history of any Syrian artefacts. There is a growing realisation in the UK that more must be done to ensure they aren't sold here, either on the legal or the black market. Last week the Commons debated this, when the Government said it was worried about IS making money from the trade.

EXTRACT FROM COMMONS DEBATE

LIDDINGTON: The Government is also concerned that the smuggling of historic artefacts is being used by terrorist organisations, including ISIL, to raise revenue.

LIDDINGTON cont... ISIL is the most abhorrent, brutal terrorist organisation that the world has seen, certainly in modern times.

COX: This debate was called by the Conservative MP, Robert Jenrik, a former director of Christie's auction house, who says smugglers are exploiting a weakness in the system.

JENRIK: The law enforcement, not just in this country, but in other European countries and the United States, is hopelessly inadequate. I've had a number of cases that have come to me where a work of art has been brought to a major auction house. They've done their due diligence, it's believed to have been looted, in some cases they've got pretty strong evidence, they've presented it to the police – in one case in this country and another in the Netherlands – and the police just haven't been able to investigate it, because they don't have the resources. The current art and antiquities squad, which is the only dedicated resource in this country, is three people. These are good people, they are very dedicated, they care about what they're doing, but they're not even resourced to deal with domestic art crime, let alone trying to take on international crime, terrorism and what appears to be the biggest looting that we have seen since the end of the Second World War.

COX: What should they be doing?

JENRIK: Given that the UK is the second largest art market destination in the world, we do have a responsibility to be perceived as the most ethical and legitimate place to buy and sell works of art. And I think you have to respond by trying to beef up that art and antiquities squad, to bring in experts in counter-terrorism and organised crime and trying to make the courts appreciate that there's something big at stake here. It's about the destruction of culture, it's about terrorism and so when individuals are brought to justice, the penalties match the crime.

COX: The Metropolitan Police say although there are only a handful of detectives in the antiquities unit, they work extensively with foreign police forces, collate and disseminate a significant amount of intelligence, and last year started 192 investigations. It's impossible to stop the looting from Syria, but the United Nations wants to make it much, much harder to sell any stolen goods from there. Last week the UN Security

COX cont... Council banned all trade in looted Syrian antiquities. Vernon Rapley, the former head of the Metropolitan Police's Art and Antiquities Unit, says this measure may help, but there also has to be a significant change in attitudes.

RAPLEY: We, museums in particular, would like to start to emphasise to the public the dangers of the trade, the damage it's causing to the people in these countries, the long term effects and the difficulty they'll have in recovering from these incidents by losing their cultural heritage, and to start to make the trade in this country in illicit antiquities from other countries socially repugnant and unacceptable, so that we don't have interior decorators looking for these things to decorate people's houses from, but it becomes as unacceptable as, say, fur was made unacceptable in the past.

MUSIC

COX: We have no idea how much has been looted from Syria. The smuggler we spoke to in Beirut, Mohammed, had grimly stated huge amounts had already been dug up from the ground. We found there is compelling evidence linking the trade to Islamic State, and Tom Keating, terrorism finance expert from the think tank RUSI, says whatever measures are taken, IS will continue to take part in the trade as long as it can make money from it.

KEATING: We live in an environment where terrorist organisations, as Bin Laden said, 'look for the cracks in the financial system', and as it currently stands, the art dealer community and one or two other industries for sure, are cracks and money, like water, looks for those cracks and they for sure are being exploited.

SIGNATURE TUNE