# 5 Faked biographies

## The remake of antiquities and their sale on the art market

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### Introduction: from theft to sale

**Scenario 1**

At 2 a.m. on 10 December 2013, thieves broke into a huge "multimillion dollar stupa" (*Cambodia Daily*, 13 December 2013) which had a marble staircase in the hills of Oudong, the old royal capital of Cambodia; they stole the golden urn said to contain the ashes of Buddha and several statues that were placed on the top of the sacred building. The ashes had been brought by the late King Norodom Sihanouk from Sri Lanka to Cambodia in 1957 on the occasion of the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha's death. In 2002, King Sihanouk led a grand ceremony in which the relics were moved to the stupa complex in the Oudong hills, where memorial sites of the royal family and other Cambodian heroes are located. The relics were a sacred treasure "giving prosperity, happiness and power to our beloved Cambodia", as Prince Norodom Ranariddh, President of the Supreme Council of the King said in a statement (*Phnom Penh Post*, 18 December 2013). Though guards were on duty that night, the theft remained unnoticed with apparently no traces of the break-in, except the broken lock. As it turned out, the guards in charge earned such a small amount of money (about US$42 per month) and apparently were even irregularly paid (if at all) that they did not take the job as seriously as required, and had to look for other means to make a living. Since the guards had not been on duty, several of them and later another man indicted as a thief were arrested.[1] In contrast to other thefts of cultural property in Cambodia, this heist set the Buddhist monks, the important intellectual and moral elite in Cambodia, in motion. The *Cambodia Daily* reported that a hundred monks had gathered on Oudong mountain on 16 December 16 and prayed that the thieves return the relics. Moreover:

> A separate group of about 200 monks besieged an annual conference of senior Buddhist clergy on Tuesday at Chaktomuk Conference Hall, angrily calling for senior monks to urge Prime Minister Hun Sen to ensure the national treasures are recovered. The protesting monks held a banner that proclaimed in large letters, "Because of corruption, the relics were stolen". . . .
>
> (*Cambodia Daily*, 19 December 2013)

The same newspaper quoted the Venerable But Buntenh, head of the Independent Monks' Network for Social Justice, who said that

> . . . ultimately, it was the failure of the government to support the men guarding the stupa that was to blame for the lost relics. "When I say corruption caused this, it is because these people [the guards] don't get their salaries and don't have money to live on because of corruption."
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> "The government has requested the board of monks stay quiet, because the government is working on this," said Venerable Khim Sorn, the Phnom Penh municipal director of monks. He assuaged the protesters by promising that a letter on behalf of the monks would be sent to the government.
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> (*Phnom Penh Post*, 18 December 2013)

**Scenario 2**

In an elegant antiquities shop in the O.P. Place Shopping Centre, Bangkok, Khmer stone statues dating back to Angkor time and beyond were stylishly displayed and discretely illuminated by spotlights when we revisited it in November 2013. Some of them were marked with a red dot. The gallery owner explained that he had recently sold these statues and they were ready for shipping. Thus, they were no longer for sale. When asked whether the purchase of such a statue by an art collector and taking it to a European country or the United States would create problems, he pointed out that he would of course provide all the necessary documents for the artefacts. He added that it has become almost impossible to sell undocumented Khmer antiquities on the international art market.

The first scenario is atypical, in so far as the moral and intellectual elite – the monks – publicly intervened by spelling out the problem of corruption and the lack of serious investigation by the government. Stolen or looted artefacts are usually moved out of the country, often overland, to Thailand, by middlemen. Before the objects reappear on the art market, as the second scenario shows, they become "neutralised", that is, exempted from their stigma of being the result of a criminal act. Instead, such artefacts are furnished with documents of a "clean" biography that allow their lawful export and free circulation on the art market.[2]

These two examples illustrate the way in which precious objects disappear from their sacred context (here, through theft). The first example is an exceptionally "spectacular" theft, while it seems to be almost a daily occurrence that Buddha statues (and other sacred objects) are stolen from Buddhist monasteries (see, for example, *Cambodia Daily*, 3 January 2014) and through covered tracks, enter the international art market. The second example illustrates how, after a period of transformation, such artefacts may re-emerge as artwork on the public stage, that is, in art galleries. The diverse manipulating and twisting of artefacts'

biographies in order to make them comply with the regulations and demands of the art market is the main issue of this chapter.[3] Cambodia has suffered thousands of thefts and lootings of its cultural heritage, Khmer art, especially over the last forty years (see Part I of this volume). Artefacts with a particular history and meaning have been ripped out of their socio-cultural contexts of local communities by thieves or looters. Most of the stolen or plundered artefacts simply "disappeared", while the culprits, let alone the networks behind the front men, remained mostly unidentified – for various reasons, not least due to corruption on almost all levels of state administration.

We begin by briefly discussing the concepts of provenience and provenance, which are crucial on today's art market: a Khmer antiquity can seldom be openly sold today without proofs of provenience and provenance. We briefly elaborate on the different forms of value (sacred, monetary) associated with such artefacts, the constitution of value, and the way in which the value of an artefact may be increased when it reaches the art market. In the second part of this chapter, we deal with the manipulation of artefacts' biographies: the manufacture of high-quality replicas of Khmer stone sculptures for export, and the way they are provided with new identities, namely those of authentic or original artefacts (see also Brodie et al. 2000:17–18) and are then exported to Thailand.

## Provenience and provenance

The concept of provenance is crucial both in legal discourses and in the arena of the international art market and its main actors, as the statement of the art dealer in the second scenario above illustrated. Provenance is normally used to complement the notion of provenience; both are closely interrelated. The latter term designates the find spot of the (archaeological) object, or its last cultural context in the case of ethnographic artefacts when a collector acquired it *in situ*. Provenance is used to denote the collection history of the object, the chain of ownership, from the time it was first "discovered" or "collected". However, we would like to point out that it is the story or representation of changing ownership that is summed up under provenance. In other words, provenance, as rendered in such stories, starts with the provenience of an artefact and usually consists of a complete series of transfers of ownership (Mackenzie 2005, Joyce 2012, Higonnet 2012). Both terms imply a number of presuppositions. Provenience assumes that the original find spot or the first act of purchase of an artwork from a living community who used it is the zero-point of an art object's life history. Provenience also assumes that the socio-cultural context from which it was acquired was the "original" or "authentic" one. Provenience suggests the birth of the artefact, where, in fact, it is only the birth of a potential commodity for the art market. Provenience, therefore, signifies a particular method of acquisition at a certain location. Seen from a broader perspective, as suggested by Appadurai (1992) and Kopytoff (1992), an object's life or cultural biography starts at the moment it is manufactured and continues by being used by different people and probably in different settings until it is "discovered" by archaeologists or bought by ethnographers, collectors or

*Figure 5.1* Many original and faked antiquities from South East Asia, often displayed side by side, are sold in Bangkok art galleries (here, a faked Khmer torso). The elegant Khmer statues are in very strong demand. Photo: Jörg Hauser, 2013.

colonial officials. Hence, provenience and provenance highlight particular sequences in the life history of an object while eclipsing others.

Both terms – provenience and provenance – are embedded in the mechanisms of the capitalistic art market and the flow of cultural property from "source countries", via "market countries", to "destination countries"; the former are mostly countries of the South or developing countries (and former colonies), the latter industrialised countries in the North (see Merryman 1986). The direction of the flow of artefacts follows the power relations between the developing countries and the rich countries. On the way, they become subjected to particular "regimes of value", as Higonnet (2012:206), borrowing from Appadurai (1992), called it, a regime of value largely governed by the economy of the art market. This regime of value mostly differs from those in which such artefacts had been previously

embedded. Provenance, or rather the testimony of a flawless history of ownership, largely determines the fate of an artefact. As the art dealer in Scenario 2 emphasised, it has become almost impossible to sell an antiquity without documents of provenance. Conversely, an art collector is prepared to pay more for a well-documented artefact – and the price may even rise when more renowned names of individuals or institutions are listed in the genealogy of ownership. If the genealogy of provenance contains trusted names, such as well-known museums, these are taken as warrantors also of a truthful provenience, authenticity, or originality of the object. This warranty dissipates all fears of "fakes". Conversely, the issue of provenance collapses – and with it also the provenience – if the object is identified as a fake. As a consequence, the object loses its value.

With regard to provenance, one of the strategies some collectors apply to increase the value of their pieces is to offer it to a renowned museum as a loan free of charge. If a museum accepts such an offer, an artefact even of suspicious provenance (whether looted/stolen or faked) gains reputation, prestige and commercial value since the museum's name or the curator's knowledge are taken as a testimony of blamelessness. A photograph in a catalogue of the loan exhibited in such a museum reinforces the credibility.

The provenance given as "from an old Thai collection" suggests authority, namely a long-standing connoisseurship and decade-long passion, appreciation and expertise of the previous owner. This provenance also brings in the time factor and advocates that the artefact had been acquired long before any ethical or legal norms about acquiring ("collecting") officially came into being. In short: such a phrasing purports that the artefact is "innocent". Time (or rather the discourse about time), therefore, makes these antiquities licit (Mackenzie 2005:4).

The artefact's origin "from an old Thai collection" was repeatedly given by several art dealers in Bangkok. When we asked them why the owner was selling the artefacts, we always received almost the same answer: "Because the owner is now old and his children are not interested in art pieces; they want to have the money." A long list of previous ownerships achieves the same: it suggests that the object had been more or less freely circulated long before any regulation restricted purchase and sale. The time factor has an impact on the value of the object. In the case we investigated, the certificate of the allegedly previous owner of the torso turned out to be faked as well. The identity of an individual had been abused for this purpose.

The issue of provenance has become crucial in the world of the art dealers. The famous cases of auction houses that put unprovenanced items or objects of doubtful origin on sale (such as Christie's or Sotheby's; see also Chapter 3 by Hauser-Schäublin on the Koh Ker statues), were subsequently sued, and finally, had to return the artwork to the source country without compensation haunts all dealers. The quest for provenance and the increasing screening of objects for sale has led to a scarcity in the supply of certified artefacts – while at the same time increasing their commercial value. The art dealer in Scenario 2 even reinforced this scarcity by marking a number of artefacts on display with a red dot. He hereby wanted to communicate that there was a great demand for his artefacts and any

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**Date:** 12 February 2013
**Name:**
**Company:**
**Address:**

**Our ref:** S00070143

Thailand

**We have now carried out a search of the Art Loss Register's database for the following item:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ITEM:** | TORSO UMA BAPHUON |
| **CIVILIZATION:** | CAMBODIA - BAPHUON PERIOD |
| **MEDIUM:** | HARD GREY SANDSTONE |
| **DIMENSIONS:** | Height: 66 cm, Width: 18 cm, Depth: 10 cm |
| **PROVENANCE PROVIDED:** | FROM PRIVATE COLLECTION SINCE 1968. I NEED TO PURCHASE FOR MY OWN COLLECTION |

We certify that this item has not, to the best of our knowledge, been registered as stolen or missing on our database of stolen and missing art nor has a claimant reported this work to us as a loss between 1933 and 1945. It should, however, be noted that:

1) Not every loss or theft is reported to us, but the database includes Interpol and other Police losses which have been circulated.
2) The database does not contain information on illegally exported artefacts unless they have been reported to us as stolen.
3) The database does not contain information on illegally excavated artefacts unless they have been reported to us as stolen.
4) The ALR does not have details of all works of art confiscated, looted or subjected to a forced seizure or forced sale between 1933 and 1945.

It is also important for you to note that this Certificate is no indication of authenticity of the item. We do not guarantee the provenance of any item against which we have made a search. Your search with The Art Loss Register demonstrates due diligence but may not excuse you undertaking further research or providing further information where known. Should we become aware of any abuse of this Certificate we may find it necessary to take action. This is not an export licence.

Julian Radcliffe

**Julian Radcliffe OBE**
Director, The Art Loss Register

*Figure 5.2* The certification of tribal art or antiquities has become an important instrument of art dealers to "prove" authenticity or provenance. The Art Loss Register (ALR), however, does not testify authenticity or provenance but only that the artefact described has not been registered as stolen (see the clarifying information on the certificate and its limitations at the bottom). In the present case, the torso turned out to be a fake.

potential purchaser should not wait too long if they really wanted to own one of the remaining exhibits.

## Artefacts and different constitutions of value

It is indeed evident, as Simmel has already pointed out (and as Appadurai took as the starting point for his considerations on the value of a thing; 1992), that the value does not lie in the object as such, but in the judgement about it (Simmel 1900). With regard to the arena of the art market, the most important actors are the auction houses, the dealers, the experts (especially academics and their research as well as museums), and the well-funded consumers/collectors. Brodie pointed out how scholars often serve as the henchmen of art collectors when they research private collections, which often include unprovenanced objects, and publish their findings in the art collectors' catalogues (Brodie 2011). Such cooperation produces a cultural regime of authentication in which expertise and evaluation (including taste) are the main factors (Appadurai 1992:46); the result is a regime of value in which the experts' knowledge substantially increases the commercial value of such pieces when they are later resold at auction.[4] The judgement of these actors about provenience and provenance is crucial.

The first scenario with which we began our chapter illustrates a different composition of values. For the Buddhist monks, the urn's contents – the ashes of the founder of their religion – constituted the substantial value of the artefact. The provenience of the relics, Sri Lanka (or rather Ceylon), one of the centres of Theravada Buddhism, and the occasion at which the king of Cambodia received these relics, the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha, also augment the value of the reliquary and its contents.[5] The urn with the ashes is regarded as "a national treasure" which symbolises the well-being of the nation; as the president of the King's Supreme Council formulated it: "giving prosperity, happiness and power to our beloved Cambodia". In fact, the theft hit all three of Cambodia's supreme authorities – "nation, religion, king" – as spelled out in the motto of the kingdom. Thus, it is the spiritual and idealistic value as an inalienable part of Cambodia's national identity that the urn and its contents represent.

As a "national treasure" and a symbol of Cambodia's spiritual power, the relics display some similarities with the Emerald Buddha that was once located in the Cambodian royal capital of Angkor but was stolen and thus was also subject to an act of theft. When the Thais captured Angkor in 1492, they took the sacred statue with them as war booty. Today, it is sited in a special temple in the precincts of the royal palace in Bangkok where it is regarded as "the palladium of Thai society" that "watches over the Thai nation" (Roeder 1999).

There may be many motives for stealing relics. However, as Appadurai (by referring to Geary's work on the trade in relics in medieval Europe) noted, theft and gift were the preferred modes of transfer since the relics stolen or donated had already evidenced their power and were, therefore, more valuable than relics of unknown provenance or with ruptures in the artefacts' histories (1992:23–4). Theft or gift implies not only the carrying-off of the material object, but also of the knowledge – the knowledge that the artefact is a relic – that accompanies it.

In the case of the urn stolen from Oudong, the theft was apparently carried out for rather profane reasons. In fact, immediately after the theft, several guards were detained, and two months later a peasant was arrested. The latter confessed that he had stolen the urn for its monetary value. The urn that was retrieved in the course of the police investigation was acknowledged by the monks as "authentic". It is unknown whether photographs of this reliquary existed prior to its theft. Pictures of the urn were published in the newspapers only after its confiscation.[6] The Kandal Provincial Court sentenced the farmer and four guards to seven years in prison and US$2,000 in compensation in August 2015 (*Phnom Penh Post*, 28 August 2015).[7] Thus, at least officially, this case seems to have been solved or rather closed, unless the convicts file an appeal.

## The remake of Khmer antiquities and their "birthplace"

Apart from cultural goods, which are stolen from their original, mostly ritual, context and illicitly sold on the art market, there exists another category of artefacts with similar whitewashed provenance. An increasing number of objects on the art market have been provided with a biography which they have never lived: replicas. Therefore, we will now turn to the manufacture of replicas of Khmer antiquities, in particular, stone statues, and the way in which they are provided with new "old" identities. We will, consequently, discuss who the producers of these artefacts are and why they make them, the techniques they apply to provide their products with an ancient-looking patina, and the way in which they are sold and transported to other parts of Cambodia or exported.

As has already been explained by Tasdelen (in Chapter 2), Cambodia's regulations are strict and, if applied properly and consistently, they would considerably restrict the illicit trafficking of Khmer antiquities.

Regarding Scenario 2 at the beginning of this chapter, we want to state that not all Khmer stone statues on sale in antiquities shops in Bangkok, River City and O.P. Place Shopping Centre are sold as originals or authentic pieces. Some of the antiquity sellers clearly admit that the stone statues on display are replicas. Accordingly, the prices were much lower than the prices demanded for "originals". Apart from these art dealers, there are others who assert that they exclusively sell "authentic" pieces. The prices they ask for these objects are definitely higher. However, we hasten to add that the price is not a criterion which allows the would-be purchaser to decide whether the statue is an original or a replica (or a creatively modified copy).

We visited a number of workshops (in the provinces of Phnom Penh, Battambang, Sisophon and Siem Reap), where some sculptors manufacture excellent stone statues designed after antique Khmer sculptures, the latter mostly dating back to the pre-Angkorian (sixth–ninth centuries) or Angkor period (ninth–fourteenth centuries). All the workshops possessed a licence issued by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, which allows them to produce stone statues designed after old Khmer art; such a licence must be renewed annually.[8]

Most of the workshops were small, sometimes consisting of only a single craftsman, but usually of five to ten people. One workshop in Siem Reap was rather large, with more than twenty people working there. This workshop produces all kinds of artefacts in stone, bronze and other metals. The workshop owner is a well-known artist who also produces modern sculptures; he sells many of his products, modern as well as remakes, in his art shop; he is the only one who runs a shop. The sites of production were, in all cases, part of the living area of the workshop owner and consisted of home industries rather than factories. The degree of the division of labour in the manufacturing process is low. In most workshops, a craftsman creates a statue from the beginning to the end. In one workshop, the owner and master craftsman corrects statues one of his employees has made if necessary. Only one workshop – actually the most ambitious one, that destroys a replica even if it only slightly deviates from the original antiquity – has workers trained for special tasks, such as drawing the outline of the statue on the

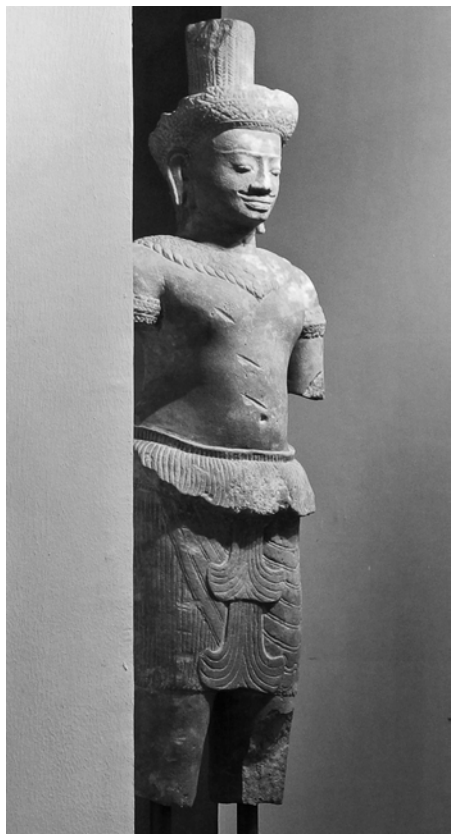

*Figure 5.3* Faked antique Khmer statues often display mechanical "damage" said to originate from a hoe used to excavate the artefact. Photo: Jörg Hauser, 2013.

still undressed stone or the rough profiling of the stone. One craftsman chisels the body in more detail; one has a special talent for producing ornamented garments, another faces and yet another is extremely gifted in smoothing the surface of the stone (polishing). No workshop we visited specialised in only one art style; instead, they copied statues of different periods.

Often several members (all men) of a (extended) family were engaged in the workshop by actively participating in the production. It was interesting, especially in these cases, to see how the products varied in refinement according to the different skills of the sculptors. The members of a workshop usually shared their judgement about the quality of the products. Sometimes the head of such a workshop was already the second generation of sculptors, having taken over the workshop and learned the handicraft from the father or uncle. If external assistants were needed, the workshop hired gifted trainees rather than fully trained craftsmen. These trainees are instructed by the owner or master craftsmen so that they learn from scratch the craft and the way it is carried out in that particular workshop. One of the major fears the owners have, especially those of successful workshops, is that one of their trained and gifted sculptors would leave his premises and start a business on his own, thereby becoming a business rival.

There were different ways in which the leaders of these workshops became sculptors and, more precisely, specialists in producing replicas. Apart from long-standing family businesses – one sculptor told us that the replica business had already started in the second half of the 1950s – some sculptors had learned how to chisel stone in larger workshops, where mostly modern sculptures and decorative vessels were produced. The craftsman added that it was (and still is) very difficult to sell modern works of art. The only customers who order new sculptures, also made following some traditional models, are Buddhist monasteries and sometimes hotels. Moreover, he soon learned that most of the well-funded private customers were not interested in the new creations he had produced, but in "old" statues. Although he had liked the creativity of his profession, he decided to comply with the wishes of the clients in order to make a living for his family. One craftsman had learned the profession in a NGO-sponsored workshop in Pursat Province, where young people are trained in the art of stone processing (mainly marble) to make a living. Another one worked as a trainee in a stone sculpture workshop in another province. When he had learned the skills, he returned home and started his own business with the financial support of family members. One elderly sculptor told us that he had formerly spent some time in a refugee camp on the Thai border during the Khmer Rouge period. While there, he and other young men were taught how to chisel stone by older sculptors. Some expats working for the UN or NGOs in or near the camp liked the statues they made after antique models; subsequently, they (as well as Thai people) bought some pieces to take home, and encouraged the sculptors to continue their work. Some even gave them photographs as models. Another sculptor had worked in a private stone workshop in Thailand for a Thai art dealer. He produced replicas of old Khmer art. However, he decided to return home and to start his own business because he was poorly paid.

There is no single method in which a sculptor produces stone statues and makes them look antique, but many individual variations. The owners of the workshops commission the stone for the statues either in the Malai Mountains, Banteay Meanchey Province (granite), or in the ranges of Preah Vihear Province (limestone). They collect the rocks themselves and transport them to their workshops.[9] Many sculptors work with both materials; they have realised that, generally, the price paid for a statue made of granite, which is a very hard material, is better

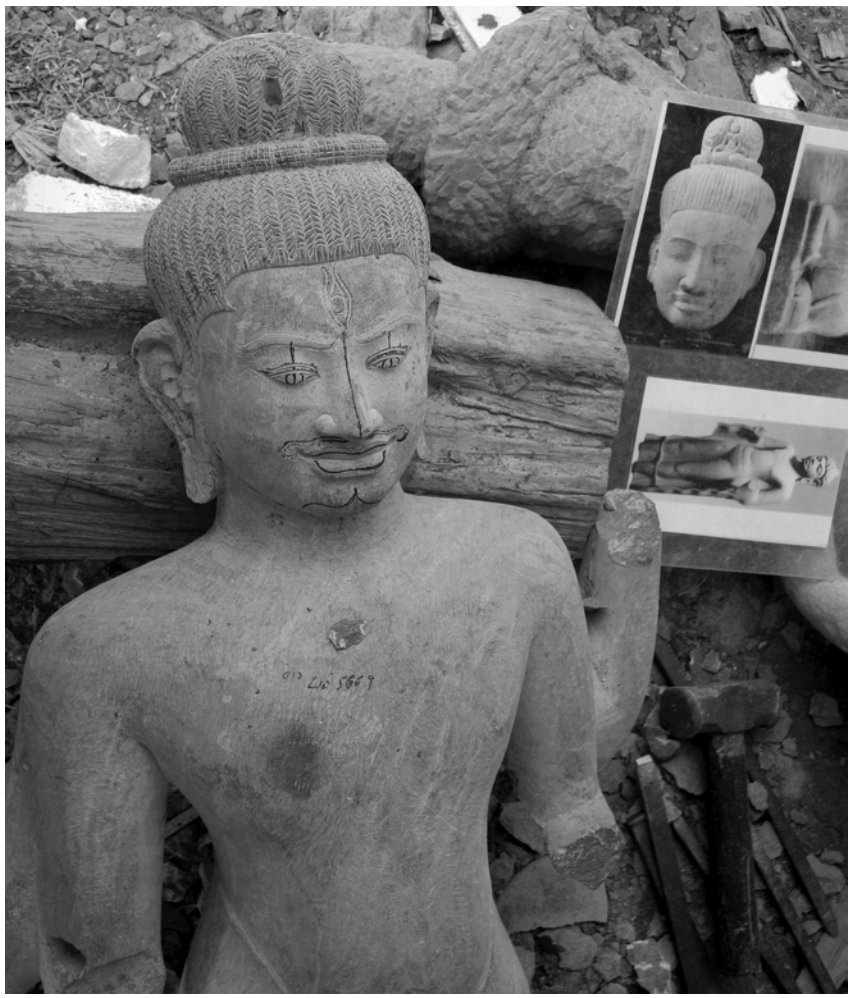

*Figure 5.4* The stone carvers mostly produce statues copied from pictures of antiquities in art books. During the carving process, the sculptors use only a few auxiliary devices, except for drafting the features onto the stone. Photo: Jörg Hauser, 2013.

than that paid for one made of limestone. Several of the craftsmen were not aware (or perhaps it simply did not matter to them) of what kind of stone was used to make the model antiquity. One distinct exception was the workshop owner with the meticulously made statues: he carefully selects the material, since he is well

*Figure 5.5* The stone carvers sometimes provide a statue with a part that was missing from the original. However, often the opposite happens: parts of limbs are cut off at the request of the customers. Photo: Jörg Hauser, 2013. See also Plate 8 in the colour plate section.

aware of the different qualities and origins of the stones and the types that had been used for particular antique Khmer statues. He spares no effort in procuring the proper stone corresponding to the model he is going to copy.

Almost all craftsmen said that they sculpture statues at their own discretion, as well as on demand from some customers. All of them use photographs of antique Khmer statues published in catalogues and art books as sources. We saw photographs not only from the catalogues of the Musée Guimet in Paris and other museums in the workshops, but also several other glossy books with illustrations of famous private Khmer collections. They serve as pattern books for the customers from which they choose and order a replica. Some workshop owners visit exhibitions, such as in the National Museum in Phnom Penh, and take photographs of the statues there. They need at least four photographs, front, both sides and back view and, of course, the exact measurements to make a good replica; the latter information is usually given in the texts accompanying the photographs in catalogues. If only a front view is available, some artists try to reconstruct the back. Since these sculptors are all experienced and have also made many types of statues from the same period, their creations are not too far from the original model; but they still differ. Some art collectors are quite aware of these deviations, which also serve as an indicator that the piece is a replica. None of the sculptors has used a three-dimensional simulation for determining and outlining the shape of the statue to be copied more easily on the yet undressed stone. Their imagination and spatial sense is admirable, especially the way in which they translate a two-dimensional picture into a fully three-dimensional statue.

Differences among the workshop owners exist with regard to copying originals. Some feel free to change the scale of the sculptures by either making the replica smaller or larger. Others prefer to stick to scale. However, it is the customer who makes the final decision, especially if it is a production made on demand. The manufacture of a 1.5-metre-high stone sculpture made of granite, one master sculpture explained, takes about two months to complete. If the material is limestone, it takes two weeks less. However, the owner of the workshop that produces the best replicas said that it takes about six months to craft a statue. The careful and meticulous work he and his workmen carry out, therefore, requires much more time than in other workshops.

## A forceful twist in the biography: replicas turned into antiquities

One of the most important steps after having completed the chiselling of the statue and polishing its surface consists of the ageing process. The goal of these series of processes consists of providing the artefact with traces of ageing and/or a patina that cannot be distinguished from those of an antiquity. Thus, the materiality of the object is changed – though not yet the knowledge of history that is told about it. The material change of the object lays the basis for a faked identity that is

later added to the artefact by the art dealer. Some of the sculptors have an excellent command not only of chiselling a statue, but also of working its surface so that parts of the topmost layer come off. Many antiquities show these traces of surface weathering. They sometimes look as if the skin of the figure had peeled off. Thus, some of the ageing consists of elaborate mechanical methods carried out by the sculptor. The most drastic changes applied to the finished statues are carried out at the request of the customers. The sculptors often produce complete anthropomorphic statues with head, body and limbs. We saw finely chiselled limbs lying around on the ground in the workshops several times, sometimes only a hand holding an attribute of Vishnu, once even a beautifully carved head. The owners explained that these parts had been cut off at the request of the trader because he insisted on getting "antique" statues with clear traces of age. Thus, a trader instructs the sculptor which parts should be excised. Thereby, a complete statue is turned into a torso. Apparently, the sculptors do this without hesitation. They explain that they make the statues for sale and, therefore, comply with the demands of the purchaser; they say they do it without any regrets or emotions.[10] The patina of an "antiquity" is crucial for many art collectors and they will always check it when they want to buy an artefact in an art gallery. However, even experts say that it is, in many cases, impossible to decide whether a patina is the result of centuries-long ageing or of a condensed artificial process. The safest way to ascertain the patina is to take a sample and have it analysed by specialised stone conservators or to make an incision into the stone. An artificially achieved patina can sometimes be identified by a more or less clear-cut fringe or stripe, since the artificially added patina differs markedly from the inner body of the stone.

Although there is almost no contact between the owners of workshops who specialise in the remaking of antiquities, each of them applies similar techniques for ageing the artefacts. Those workshop owners who had taken over their business from their father or uncle already had some knowledge about these techniques. Others told us that they had experimented over several months to find out the best way of achieving a patina that looked antique. The series of techniques applied to the crafted statue in one workshop consisted – to give an example – firstly, of sandblasting. Then, the artefact is painted (with black and red layers); the colours will enter the slightly porous surface. The statues are left to dry and later flamed off. The next step consists of boiling the statue in water with some iron pieces in it. Subsequently, it is put into a water hole containing pieces of rusty iron; the statue remains there for about two months. In a further step, the artefact is also buried in a sand-bed containing pieces of iron.

When we visited a small workshop where the owner is the only craftsman, he began to dig in the ground just in front of his shelter. After a couple of minutes, the face of a stone sculpture appeared. He did not continue to disinter the work, but just wanted to show that he buries a sculpture in the ground, sometimes for more than a year. He, as well as others, also uses an acid bath for the sculpture, though this seems to be a delicate process that may harm the stone and leave traces that cannot be effaced. The owner of the workshop that produces the best statues also

uses acids. He could not tell what kind of acid it is, since his Thai customers bring the chemicals with them. He also buries the stone sculpture in the ground mixed with pieces of iron; he leaves it there for a period of six to twelve months.

None of the sculptors had a clear idea of what finally happens to their products after they have sold them. They do not seem to worry about it, probably also due to the fact that they regard their products as commodities from which they can make a living, some more and some less. It would, therefore, be wrong to talk of these sculptors producing "fakes", because they clearly sell their products as replicas and never pretend that these are authentic antiquities. It is the middlemen and, later, the owners of art galleries who turn the replicas into fakes – by faking the object's biography, the story that accompanies the artefact. The workshop owners also do not worry about the identity of their customers and their business. The customers, therefore, remain shadowy and we purposely did not ask many questions about this clientele. Most of the workshops we visited had customers who were from Thailand or Cambodians exporting the artefacts across the Thai border. There was only one stone workshop whose products are primarily destined for sale within Cambodia, in an art shop in Siem Reap (Angkor) or the Russian Market in Phnom Penh. The prices for the newly made antiquities vary; the prices are negotiated between the workshop owner and the purchaser. Since there seem to be quite a number of traders around – including Europeans and, more recently, also dealers from "Arab" countries – the work-

*Figure 5.6* A number of mechanical and chemical processes are implemented to turn a modern stone artefact into an antiquity. Photo: Jörg Hauser, 2013. See also Plate 9 in the colour plate section.

shops still have some room for negotiation and are not dependent on a single trader and their offer.[11] A producer will get US$1,000 for an antique-looking stone statue made from limestone, about 1.50 metres high and of good quality; the price will rise to US$1,500 for granite sculptures. The owner of the best-quality workshop, who invests much more time (about six months) producing an artefact, gets about US$4,500 a piece. Such a statue is sold for about US$45,000-50,000 in an art shop in Bangkok. We also saw 2-metre-tall stone statues in Bangkok which were on sale for US$130,000–150,000 in an art shop in Bangkok. Thus, the prices seem to increase roughly ten-fold between the sale of the artefact at the workshop and an art gallery in Bangkok. In between, however, lies the crucial *rite de passage* in which a remade "antiquity" is transformed into an antiquity, provided with a faked identity and evidenced by a certificate of its provenance.

## "Two ways of exporting artefacts"

As briefly mentioned previously, the trade in antiquities or artefacts which look antique in Cambodia is legally restricted and especially so their export. Apart from the production licence of the workshops (and this implies, conversely, that they are registered), further permits are required to move the artefacts from the site of production to an art shop in another province or for export.[12] All export permits are issued by the Ministry for Culture and Fine Arts in the capital of Phnom Penh. Only tourists may ask for an export licence in Siem Reap; this takes about two weeks before the artefact can be shipped.[13]

The certificate for transporting the replica of a Khmer antiquity within the country contains the description of the artefact, the material used and all measurements (including its weight). It states the name of the workshop and its address, the name of the owner/producer of the artefact and the date of production. The application for such a permit (at the Department of Culture and Fine Arts of the province where the workshop is located) must be accompanied by a photograph of the object, a copy of the ID of the applicant (owner of the workshop) and an affirmation about the truthfulness of the details given about the artefact. This certificate is signed by two authorities (the Department of Cultural Heritage and the Department of Culture and Fine Arts). This certificate accompanies the artefact to the art shop in another province and must be shown to the relevant authorities by the art dealer in the case of a check. This document also facilitates the export, or rather the acquisition of an export permit for the newly made antiquity, in case a tourist buys it and wants to take it home. The application for an export permit and the corresponding licence follow a similar pattern. However, an expert from the technical staff of the Department of Archaeology of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in Phnom Penh is required to acknowledge that the artefact for export is not an antiquity. Obtaining an export permit entails some fees, which must be paid to the Ministry of Finance. The fees are relatively small and depend primarily on the material of the artefact to be exported and on its height. The fees for a stone sculpture of 1.5 metre height, for example, amount to 50,000 riels (about US$12).

The permit must accompany the artefact and needs to be shown at Customs. One workshop owner told us that sometimes an investigation by state authorities takes place if they are sceptical that the artefact to be exported is really newly made. They then visit the workshop to carry out a check. It is for this reason that the workshop owners set aside the parts of the sculptures they had been asked to cut off by the trader. These excised limbs then serve as "proofs".

Thus, the procedure for exporting new antiquities is clearly regulated. However, to obtain such permits and take them to the different offices, not least of all Customs, takes a long time and is complicated. The figure of only a hundred export permits granted annually to tourists in Siem Reap suggests something different, namely that many of them just buy such artefacts, put them into their luggage and fly away. However, professional traders engaged in illicit trafficking of antiquities take another route. The companion, Mr Soki (pseudonym), whom one of the authors (B. H.-S.) had hired to accompany her as a translator to different workshops in Siem Reap Province (and who turned out to be a plain-clothes policeman who also worked on secret and mostly illegal missions as ordered by his superiors) had already stated in their first conversation: "There are two ways of exporting artefacts, the official one with permits, and a second one by passing money under the table." By and by, he told her bits of the story about the complex and far-reaching networks in which owners of art galleries, art traders (often acting as middlemen) and state officials up to the level of the government are involved. We will try to reconfigure these bits in order to illustrate why the regulations are inefficient.

Mr Soki is embroiled in this network, too, but only as a minor actor, though he was quite proud of the knowledge he has about these illegal missions and the high state officials with whom he comes into contact. He took B. H.-S. to a rather large workshop (twenty stone sculptors working there) which produces the best remakes of Khmer antiquities, and whose owner – the only one we met on our trip – did not want to be photographed. The remade Khmer antiquities from his workshop are exported without export licences. Mr Soki, who is very familiar with the region and its manifold potential, was instructed by officials to accompany a Thai trader, who actually lives in Cambodia and also runs other businesses, and a European owner of art galleries in Bangkok to that workshop a few years ago. As a result of that meeting, these people agreed upon the reproduction of antiquities, the payment and how the statues would be picked up and transported overland to Thailand.

The Thai trader regularly provides the workshop with the chemicals used for ageing the stone statues. This middleman and the European art dealer usually select pieces out of catalogues or deliver photographs of sculptures which they want to be reproduced as replicas. This workshop has the privilege (or rather takes it) to commission the original raw material – stone for the statues from Kulen Mountain, where the quarries of Angkor were located – though access to these quarries is forbidden for non-authorised people. The workshop owner is always paid in cash for the statues by the Thai trader, who apparently buys a number of statues (up to twenty pieces) in one deal. These statues are then transported by truck to the Thai

border. Some distance before the border, the truck is joined by a military convoy which escorts the truck on military side roads across the border. The border control knows what is going on, but since money is involved, they keep quiet.

We may wonder why such huge logistics are set up for the export of replicas. A legal export would be relatively easy and without any problems, since permits are available. We can only speculate what happens backstage. We have hints that some original statues in some museums outside the capital are being replaced by replicas, while the originals are probably exported and placed onto the international art market. Perhaps sculptures (and other cultural property) found in the many looting activities of yet undocumented sites in Cambodia are among them as well. In fact, such a risky effort only makes sense if original Khmer sculptures are among the freight carried across the Thai border.

## Conclusion

All the remade (as well as original) Khmer artefacts transported across the border (and here we focused only on the Thai/Cambodian border) receive a new identity as soon as they surface in those art shops in Bangkok that assert that they only sell originals. The certificates of the factual provenance and provenience (recently made in workshops in Cambodia) "disappear" and their original biographies are wiped out. Instead, the art dealers provide them with a new biography, that is, a couple of certificates, as briefly mentioned in Scenario 2 at the beginning of this chapter. Three different types of documents, the art dealer said, are needed to certify the legality of the artefacts and, consequently, of ownership. He emphasised that each statue he sells will be accompanied by these certificates. These documents are 1) proof that the object is not listed on Interpol's Databank of Stolen Works of Art,[14] 2) evidence that it is not listed in the Art Loss Register, London,[15] and 3) a certificate that testifies the object's provenance from an "old Thai collection"; this document will be accompanied by 4) a letter signed by Thai authorities stating that the artefact can be exported from Thailand. Provided with all these documents, the purchasing art collector becomes the legal owner of the artefact and the artefact, now released as a commodity, can be freely moved on the art market.

These documents ascertain a completely new identity, a faked identity, consisting of a biography through which the replicas have never lived. The model and the replica share the characteristics of the art style (pre-Angkorian, Angkorian, or any other) and, in some cases, also the same material. However, before the replicas were provided with a faked identity, their life histories differed substantially. The twisted biography turns legally and illegally exported objects, replicas, and unlawfully exported, original artefacts which are the result of looting and theft into whitewashed commodities with a clean passport of provenance so that they can be freely moved – sold and bought – on the international art market. As the monks already pointed out in Scenario 1 concerning the theft of Buddha's reliquary from the stupa in Oudong, and as other chapters of this volume have shown, most of this illicit trafficking of cultural property is facilitated through

the corruption of those whose duty it is, and who have the means, to protect their national treasures. Yet, in many cases, personal profit seems to go before national interests. Under such conditions, regulations will only help a little (see Chapter 2).

## Notes

1 According to the police, they discovered the urn under the culprit's bed. The man, described as a beggar or small-scale farmer (depending on the source), was charged with the theft and with having melted down as many as ten golden statues stolen from Oudong. Even the advisor to King Norodom Sihamoni, Son Soubert, commented sceptically on this arrest: "It's strange that all the relics end up with a poor man" (*Phnom Penh Post*, 7 February 2014; *Phnom Penh Post*, 10 February 2014; *Cambodia Daily*, 15 February 2014).

2 For the technique of neutralisation that art dealers perform to disclaim wrongdoing, see Mackenzie 2005:203–5; 2011.

3 The authors made two trips together through Cambodia in 2013 (led by Sophorn Kim) to have a look at looted or damaged archaeological and historical sites (Khmer period), on the one hand, and to learn more about the remaking of Khmer antiquities (mostly stone statues) and how they are transformed from a recent product into an old work of art, on the other.

4 A good example is the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva and the many lavish publications with contributions of academic experts including museum curators. Parts of the Barbier-Mueller collection were later sold in auctions.

5 Buddha's ashes are believed to have been divided into eight parts and were divided among Buddha's disciples (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 December 2013). Conflicting versions about Buddha's relics seem to exist; while some histories mention "ashes", others speak of "bones". With regard to the provenance of the relics in Ceylon and why they came to that place in terms of ("Western") history, the following excerpt of a report may serve as an explanation: a small number of bones of the historical Buddha were unearthed in 1892 in southern India which were later, in 1898, presented to the king of Siam (Thailand) as the only reigning Buddhist sovereign. He distributed these relics between the Buddhists of Siam, Burma, Ceylon and Japan (Mukherjee 2013:54). We cannot enter the discussion on the exchange or even trade in relics here. For Europe and the trade in relics in medieval times, see Geary 1992.

6 Earlier investigations carried out by one of the authors on thefts of sacralia kept in Hindu temples in Bali showed that in one case, some of the most sacred daggers (*keris*) were wrapped in a bundle. The senior men in charge had never dared to open the bundle and look at the sacred objects. When this bundle was stolen and the men reported the theft to the police, they were unable to give any description. Therefore, they had not the slightest chance of ever getting back their heirlooms. In another case, the religious leaders of the village, from where thousand-year-old inscribed sacred copper-plates had been stolen, managed to get the heirlooms back before they left the country. The first thing they did before they reintegrated the copper plates into their ritual contexts was to take photographs – as documentation – of each copper plate (see Hauser-Schäublin 2012).

7 The verdict was accompanied by "cries of desperation" from the convicts' relatives, all of them being among the poorest of Cambodia (*Phnom Penh Post*, 28 August 2015).

8 One of the authors of this chapter, Sophorn Kim, is in charge of the Heritage Department, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in Battambang Province and is also responsible for issuing licences. Therefore, he knew most of the workshop owners personally. Only Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, and not Sophorn Kim, visited the workshops in Siem Reap Province.

9 A licence from the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy is required for collecting stone. Most of the workshop owners avoid making an application since administrative processes are complicated and take a long time (and often "speeding-up money" is requested).

10 We tried to inquire to what extent the sculptors are attached to the works of art they produce. One of the questions was whether they made some statues for themselves, perhaps to display them or place them beside the altars of worship they all have in their houses. We could not find any who had made artefacts for personal use or pleasure. By contrast, the altars did not bear any traces of artwork. None of them kept a statue for himself because he considered it a particularly personal work. The sculptors were rather surprised when we asked them about the authorship of their work and whether they ever thought of signing their artworks. All remade antiquities, whether legally sold in Cambodia or in Bangkok, were "no name" products, as one of our interlocutors phrased it.

11 We never had the opportunity to watch traders and the way they negotiate, as we were able to make only brief visits to the workshops.

12 The Head of the Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in Siem Reap estimated that about 90 per cent of the workshops in Siem Reap Province are registered and, therefore, cooperate with the ministry.

13 The Ministry for Culture and Fine Arts in Siem Reap issues about a hundred export permits a year.

14 Interpol cooperates closely with UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) with regard to stolen cultural property; see http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Works-of-art/Works-of-art. For Interpol's role in the fight against the illicit trafficking in cultural property, see Kind 2011.

15 The Art Loss Register (ALR) is said to be the biggest databank of lost and stolen works of art. It was founded by auction houses, such as Sotheby's and Christie's, in cooperation with associations of art dealers and insurance companies. The ALR also offers the opportunity to have an uncontested artefact registered which then serves as a testimony of legal ownership; see The Art Loss Register (2014).

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