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Requesting country: ISRAEL

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MODUS OPERANDI

Type(s) of offence:	Sale of Fake Antique Jewish Books
Date of the offence	2007 - Present
Place of offence:	
Country of offence:	Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Europe
Circumstances of offence:	<p>In 2007 an Israeli citizen was caught by the Israeli Customs Authority while attempting to smuggle from Jordan to Israel fake antiquities: "books" made of lead, imprinted with Jewish motifs and written in a mix of ancient Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters. Since then, the internet has been flooded by similar objects and other types of "Jewish" books, and there have been additional smuggling attempts. These fake objects are also for sale in the Jordanian market, where such books are offered for sale to tourists.</p> <p>The Antiquities Theft Prevention Unit (ATPU) of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) noticed a massive increase of the phenomena since the beginning of the civil war in Syria. During the last five years, the ATPU has been dealing with, at least, one book offer each week. Most of the books' background stories talks claim that it was found in Syria under synagogue remains or in a secret cave in an unknown archaeological site. Many times, the owners of the books also state that the items were already smuggled out of Syria to either Jordan or Turkey by Syrian refugees - to make it sound more available. During the last year the ATPU were notified by members of Jewish communities in Europe who were offered to purchase such books.</p>

Description of modus operandi: Object/device/concealment method/procedure.

Since 2007, and more often since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, the Antiquities Theft Prevention Unit (ATPU) of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), received hundreds of offers from Syrian, Jordanian, Turkish and Israeli nationals to buy these lead-made books and other fake books of various types. The books are made of lead, paper, parchment or another material. They are all imprinted with Jewish motifs, mostly copied from known ancient Jewish coin motifs: Menorahs (6-branched candelabrum), palm trees and branches, Shofar (ram's horn), and also with a Star of David (which became a Jewish symbol only around the 18th century AD). The lead-made books are also imprinted with text: In the lead books the text is in gibberish, written in a mix of ancient Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters with no actual meaning. In the paper and parchment books the texts are written only with Hebrew letters - usually modern letters, with some actual words but with no logical sentences and or syntax. Most of the books are heavily decorated, many times with gold-like Jewish motifs to increase their attraction.

After the first successful interception of the smuggled lead book, the IAA approached several experts in order to examine the book's authenticity.

All the lab tests pointed out that the lead is ancient - dated to 11th-13th century AD, and that the raw material came from lead mines in Sardinia. Yet, palaeographic examination of the letters and texts showed that the books are fakes. Moreover, there is no known parallel object which has been found in scientific archaeological excavation. The conclusion of this examination was that the lead was looted from an ancient building's roof tiles or pipes, then melted down and remade as a "Jewish" ancient book. At times, in order to increase the credibility of a book, it is offered with some authentic low quality and low value ancient coins which were allegedly found with the book.

A copy of the IAA/ATPU's scientific report is available upon request to NCB Jerusalem.



Recommended Precautionary Action: We strongly recommend that you circulate this Notice to all the enforcement bodies in your country, especially to the specialized art crime unit or similar; customs authorities; immigration authorities. We also recommend that you warn potential buyers of such items:

Art and antique dealers, collectors and the Jewish communities in your countries.

Points of contact: INTERPOL Jerusalem
INTERPOL General Secretariat, Command and Coordination Centre

E-mail: INTERPOL Jerusalem
interpol@police.gov.il (Internet)
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Recommended precautionary action:

It is strongly recommended that you circulate this purple notice to your country's law enforcement bodies to alert them about this modus operandi and to allow them to take whatever preventive and precautionary measures they deem necessary. All recipients are strongly encouraged to share data, and provide any investigative information relating to this modus operandi.

NCB Reference: 19-0160-821/TM
