

The influx of Chinese workers into Ethiopia is encouraging production of illegal ivory trinkets

Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin

Ivory cigarette holders, as seen here, are popular with the Chinese, as is ivory jewellery, such as these small Ethiopian cross pendants and necklaces, as they can be easily smuggled out of Ethiopia. There are small hippo and warthog tusk carvings behind—all new—in the *merkato*.



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Elephants in Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan are under threat by the growing numbers of Chinese people coming to work in Ethiopia who want to buy cheap ivory chopsticks and jewellery to take home. Although a crack-down on the sale of ivory items in 2005 removed ivory from the shop shelves, our survey in early 2008 showed that, in the absence of frequent monitoring, the number of ivory items has increased again.

The first time we counted ivory items in Addis Ababa's curio shops was in 1999—a total of 9,996 were on display in 54 outlets, which was the fourth largest number for a city in Africa at the time (following Abidjan, Harare and Cairo). Media pressure reduced this ivory trade considerably. A TRAFFIC survey in 2004, however, counted 3,557 items on display. Both TRAFFIC and CITES Secretariat

staff gave assistance and training to the Ethiopian government who, in early 2005, sent 262 officials to 66 retail outlets, resulting in the confiscation of 500 kilogrammes of ivory and other wildlife products, and criminal charges were made. Shortly afterwards, only 78 ivory items were seen on display for sale.

In January 2008, with the support of Care for the Wild International, we found ivory in 44 retail outlets. We counted 1,433 ivory items on display, nearly all in the Churchill Road area and the famous market called the *Merkato*. Although most of the souvenir shops do not display ivory, and the majority of the ivory items are small and often not very noticeable, the large number of ivory objects, especially new pieces for the Chinese market, was alarming. We counted a further 706 new ivo-

ry items in brown paper bags and from a drawer, while there were items in other bags we were unable to count. Of the total number of items (2,152), 1,790 were made after the 1990 CITES ban. Nearly all were Ethiopian-carved. We learned that there are about six ivory craftsmen still working in Addis Ababa, down from 10-20 in 1999.

The older items, made before 1990, are usually easily recognizable as they are the larger more carefully carved pieces, especially of human figures, crafted when the trade was legal and it was not necessary to hide ivory in luggage for export. There are still many large, thick old bangles, creamy orange in colour due to age, that southwestern Ethiopians used to wear. Single old bangles sell today for about US\$165 each; they are often joined together in a set of up to four bangles. We also saw whole

carved tusks for sale, but these are rarely made nowadays.

The recently-made items are nearly all mass-produced, with certain styles of identical jewellery for sale in the different shops. Bangles cost US\$15 and necklaces US\$33 on average; there were also earrings, pendants and rings. We counted 149 pairs of new ivory chopsticks that were selling for an average of US\$16. This contrasts sharply to the high prices in China: in 2004, in Guangzhou, a pair of ivory chopsticks cost US\$139. It is therefore understandable that the Chinese are tempted to buy Ethiopian-made chopsticks and that they are being carved to meet a growing demand as more Chinese workers come to the country. We counted 144 cigarette holders that were offered for only US\$4 each and 70 signature stamps for around US\$18, depending on thickness. These are also popular with the Chinese and again are far less expensive than in China. New brown paper bags filled with newly-made chopsticks, cigarette holders, signature stamps and jewellery suggest the turnover for these items is the greatest. There were also displayed recently-made figurines such as

of ivory. We saw one recently-carved 35-cm tusk and two 20-cm tusk tips carved into busts from Central/West Africa, but these were unusual.

Small items sell most frequently nowadays, as they are relatively easy to smuggle out of the country. We were told that it was best to simply wear jewellery and it would not be noticed, or to put items in one's suitcase, not in hand luggage as Customs officials can spot ivory items on security scanners and that officials search hand luggage more frequently than baggage in the hold. No vendors offered any help to get permits for export, as they said it was easy to take ivory items out of the country.

Tusks from southwest Ethiopia continue to supply the ivory craftsmen in Addis Ababa, and there has also been poaching of the tiny remnant elephant population in the north of the country. Tusks from these poached elephants, however, are not enough to meet the demand, and tusks are coming in from Sudan and Kenya illegally. In Kenya, elephants are poached for this market around Mt Kenya, Marsabit,

the 1990s, but from 1999 to 2008 they tripled. A small 2-kg tusk sells today for 1,000 bir/kg and a larger 5-kg tusk for 1,200 bir/kg (US\$110/kg and US\$132/kg respectively). This clearly illustrates an increase in demand.

Not only elephant tusks are in demand in Addis Ababa. Craftsmen are carving pig and hippo teeth as well, usually making small figurines out of them, recognizable in the shops by their curled tooth-like appearance. Hippos are on CITES Appendix II, but if elephant tusks, which are on Appendix I, can be smuggled in from neighbouring countries, so can hippo teeth. Trade in these wildlife products needs to be monitored and kept in check.

Very few Ethiopians are interested in buying ivory items in Addis Ababa. The buyers are mainly foreigners who are visiting the country as tourists or for work, usually businessmen, diplomats, conference attendees and Chinese labourers. In 2001 there were perhaps 100 Chinese people working in Ethiopia, but by 2006 there were over 3,500—and the number is rising. Based on findings from past surveys and on ivory seizures, the Chinese are known to be the main

Left: These ivory chopsticks, Ethiopian comb, Ethiopian hand-cross, figurine and bangles were all carved recently in Addis Ababa, while the ivory bust would have been smuggled in from Central/West Africa. Right: The *merkato*, a colourful market popular with tourists in northwestern Addis Ababa, is crammed with artefacts and handcrafts, including newly-made ivory items openly on display.



small flat 10-cm ones (US\$51 each), Ethiopian combs (US\$43 each), Ethiopian hand-crosses and masks. The most expensive items were 17 busts, which cost US\$168 each on average; these were made from heavy chunks (cross-sections)

the Mathews Range and Maralal. Traders in Isiolo and Nanyuki paid, in late 2007, Ksh 2,000 (US\$31) per kilogramme for tusks that then went via Mandera and Moyale into Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa prices for tusks remained roughly stable in


buyers of ivory and other wildlife products all over Africa.

We met the Chinese Defence Attaché, who had been in Addis Ababa for three years, and he was well aware of the problem of Chinese buying ivory items. He

said that the Chinese Ambassador in Ethiopia tells Chinese company managers to inform their workers not to buy ivory items, as they are illegal and they will be caught at the airport and be prosecuted. There are, he said, acceptable good quality hardwoods in China that can be used for signature stamps, and that wooden chopsticks are available in China. He said, however, it would be hard to stop all the Chinese from buying ivory in Ethiopia. With the large and growing number of Chinese coming into the country, this is an increasing threat that must be addressed. It is a warning to Kenya.

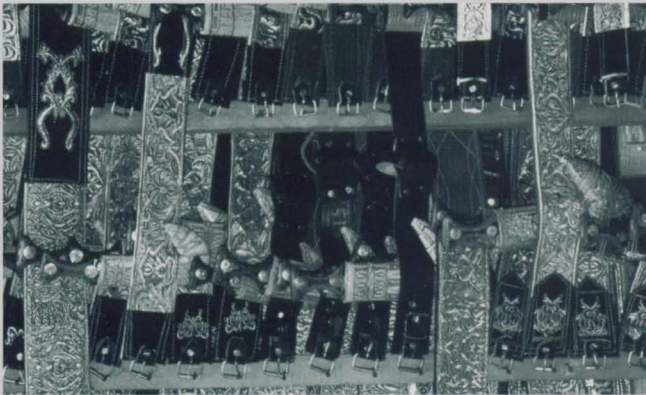
Chinese workers should stop trading in endangered wildlife

products in Ethiopia. The government needs to legislate larger fines and more stringent penalties against smuggling and illegal internal trade. These laws need to be widely publicized, such as at the airport in Addis Ababa, where large warning signs could be placed. Company managers need to speak more frequently to their Chinese workers against buying ivory. The most urgent action needed is a clampdown, once again, on ivory items displayed for sale in Addis Ababa's curio shops. Shopkeepers must be made to realise that they are not allowed to sell recently-made ivory items. TRAFFIC should assist again on this clampdown; they also need

to help the government establish a strategy to monitor the curio shops regularly and frequently, in order to prevent a further buildup of ivory items. This is the only effective way to cut down on the ivory trade and thus reduce poaching pressure on the few surviving Ethiopian elephants. This in turn will help to reduce the smuggling of tusks from elephants poached in neighbouring countries, such as Kenya. The issues of law enforcement must be addressed not only in Ethiopia, but in Kenya and Sudan. Ethiopia can be an example of how wildlife trade controls can work, but it is important for the Ethiopian government to act as soon as possible. 

Cutting edge findings on a traditional knife

Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin



Has the culture of wearing jambiyas been re-adopted in former South Yemen since their becoming legal to wear after unification of North and South Yemen in 1990?

Jambiyas made before the 1967-1990 Marxist ban in the south were the smaller Bedu-style jambiya, as opposed to the large-handled jambiya of the towns and cities in the north. Were the southerners wearing Bedu jambiyas again or choosing to emulate the northerners with the larger Sanaa-made ones? We had not visited this region since 1993, and reports varied regarding jambiya wearing.

So, in early 2008, we returned to Aden and Mukalla on the coast

and visited the main towns of the Wadi Hadramut region in the interior desert: Sayun, Shibam and Tarim. Compared to 15 years ago, the number of outlets selling jambiyas had increased to 48 in the five towns surveyed, with 1,712 jambiyas on display for sale. There were 15 outlets selling jambiyas in Aden and Mukalla compared to just two on our last visit. There was an increase in outlets also in Wadi Hadramut. As well as Sayun that is famous for its silver shops and where old Bedu daggers are still for sale, 16 outlets have opened in Shibam, now that it has become a world heritage site attracting more visitors.

The comforting facts are that the main buyers for these jambiyas are foreign tourists and that most of the jambiyas have come from Sanaa. Trade is not re-opening in the south. Although southerners are copying northerners in many ways, adhering more strictly now to Islam with women once again veiled, and with a much greater capitalist influence, they do not like jambiyas, looking down on northerners for wearing a dangerous weapon. They say

they would feel ashamed to be seen wearing one. Even northern Yemenis who come to work in southern towns mostly do not wear jambiyas when they see so few. We saw just a handful of Yemenis wearing them in the towns we visited. Nearly all were northerners, but we saw one or two Bedu from al-Bayda province wearing the smaller handled jambiya in some towns. There are a few shops selling mostly northern jambiyas to those who may need one for a party or a present, and children's jambiyas of the northern style were for sale, often available in military shops where northerners go to buy uniforms. A sprinkling of Bedu ones were for sale, the best quality being in silver sheaths found in Sayun where we also saw two old rhino horn handled Bedu jambiyas. Fortunately, these were the exception, not the rule.

It is reassuring that while northern Yemen's demand for jambiyas rises with the growing population, demand in the south is negligible. In time and with better education, the northerners will emulate the southerners, but is there enough time for the rhino whose horn is still the most favoured in Yemen?