

Case Study: Specialized structures: Romania's judiciary specialized structures for protection of Cultural Heritage

Archaeological “poaching” on the sites classified as historical monuments, some on the UNESCO list of monuments of the world's cultural heritage, is a frequent crime in Romania. Such acts were performed by specialized criminal groups; using state-of-the-art detection equipment, sport utility vehicles, radio communications, watchdogs and even guns. The looted archaeological objects are then sold to certain collectors and ‘investors’ from the country and EU. Such groups are also in contact with international networks of traffickers from Romania, Serbia, Germany, Italy – among other countries –, which illegally remove the looted cultural goods from Romania and place them onto the black market, through illegal transactions to certain collectors from EU States or from the USA. On December 17, 2014, the High Court of Cassation and Justice of Romania sentenced 11 defendants for criminal association and aggravated theft of cultural property, to sentences cumulating 45 years of imprisonment¹. The court found, *inter alia*, that between May 2000 and May 2001, the defendants who were associated in a criminal group carried out detections and unauthorized excavations in the archaeological site *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, classified as a UNESCO monument. The criminal group stole two hoards containing 15 spiraling gold bracelets (about 15 Kg), which they illegally exported and sold in auction houses in the EU and the US.

The investigations carried out in the European judicial space from 2005 to 2015 resulted in the recovery, through international assistance requests, of 13 wanted Dacian bracelets (12.663 Kg), pertaining to 4 different hoards, from New York, Zurich, Paris, Munich, Hunedoara – Romania². A series of other hoards stolen from the Romanian sites during the same period were internationally pursued by INTERPOL:

- hoard of 1000-3000 Koson gold coins stolen in 1993-2004 from the archeological spot “Dealul Bodii”; hoard of 5.000 and 6.000 roman coins denarii stolen in 2001-2004 from the same spot; 1200 Koson gold coins stolen in 2007 from the archeological spot *Dealul Muncelului* of which 1.024 coins were recovered in Orăștie, Romania, UK, Belgium, Germany etc. and deposited at the Romanian National History Museum;
- hoard consisting of 3600 Lysimach, Pharnakes II and Asander gold coins stolen in August 1998 from the archeological spot *Șesu Căprăreței*, of which 34 pieces were recovered in London (UK), Romania, Germany;
- hoard consisting of 2300 Koson silver coins, stolen in 2004 from the archeological spot “Dealul Bodii” of which 252 pieces were identified in Vienna, London, Munich, Chicago recovered and deposited at the Romanian National Museum of History;
- hoard of 7-8 iron shields stolen in 2002 from the Dacian fortress from Piatra Roșie, of which 2 were recovered in New York and deposited at the Romanian National Museum of History;
- 2 bronze *tabulae* containing the laws of the *municipium Troesmis* stolen in 2002 from the archeological site of this fortress, recovered to an auction house in London UK and repatriated to Romania etc.

A major focus of interest for poachers are the sites of Dacian citadels and of Roman military camps from the area of the Orăștie Mountains, located in the counties of Hunedoara and Alba, and those from other counties together with Greek citadels such as Tulcea, Constanța, Caraș-Severin etc. Such sites have often been targeted by *teams of poachers* who engaged in unauthorized detections and diggings and stole thousands of objects. Thieves are particularly interested in monetary treasures, jewelry, funeral artifacts, guns and military equipment (swords, helmets, shields, clasps etc.).