

5. THE ANTIQUITIES TRADE – DEALERS, TRAFFICKERS, AND CONNOISSEURS

In contrast to the strictly illicit and rigorously prosecuted drug business, the antiquities²⁷⁸ market involves a **wide spectrum** of activities from clandestine excavations and looting through legal sales at auction houses and antique shops to displays at established museums or private collections. In many cases, irrespective of their origin, antiquities can be supplied with false provenance documents and sold at auctions as though legally acquired. Sometimes the end owners do not even have to go that far—a 1999 study of British archaeologists Christopher Chippendale and David Gill demonstrated that a bulky 75% of the artifacts in the sample of large private museum collections surveyed are unprovenanced.²⁷⁹ State museums of international repute are no exception. The Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York claims that most of the antique artifacts imported in America in the last decade or so have been trafficked in violation of source countries' laws.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ For the purposes of this paper the commonly known term *antiquities* has been used throughout to signify moveable cultural property, such as artifacts from the past or old coins, which are the main objects of black trade, in alternation with the legal term *monument of culture* taken from Bulgarian heritage legislation (with its variables *movable monument of culture* and *immovable monument of culture*). The Law on Monuments of Culture and Museums defines the latter term as "any movable and immovable authentic material evidence of human presence or activity which possesses scientific and/or cultural value and is of public significance." Objects of high value belong to the category of national cultural assets or treasures. The more awkward *cultural and historical property* is still in official use at certain Bulgarian institutions (for instance, the Ministry of Interior), but is becoming obsolete. The term *monument of culture* is a local coinage that differs from internationally recognized terminology. For instance, the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (14 November 1970) adopts the term *cultural property* and defines it as "property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science and which belongs to the following categories: (a) rare collections and specimens of fauna, flora, minerals and anatomy, and objects of palaeontological interest; (b) property relating to history, including the history of science and technology and military and social history, to the life of national leaders, thinkers, scientists and artist and to events of national importance; (c) products of archaeological excavations (including regular and clandestine) or of archaeological discoveries; (d) elements of artistic or historical monuments or archaeological sites which have been dismembered; (e) antiquities more than one hundred years old, such as inscriptions, coins and engraved seals; (f) objects of ethnological interest".

²⁷⁹ There are countries such as Germany where any artifact can easily be registered with no requirement to state its source, while the certificate received would commonly read "provenance unknown". Thus, prosecution is possible only if the artifact was stolen from an already legal collection and its previous owner filed a lawsuit.

²⁸⁰ *Archeology*, May/June 1993, p.17.

Alerted by the increasing challenges to historical heritage preservation faced by a number of nations, in the second half of the twentieth century the international community undertook the first round of measures against the trafficking of movable monuments of culture. Europe and the wider world, however, are creating a continuing market demand for cultural property that foments its trans-border traffic to the present day.

Heritage legislation in the EU is far from harmonized and even the underlying approach to cultural property protection differs from state to state. The regulation of the market of illicit antiquities can be addressed through a variety of solutions, sometimes complete opposites, precisely because it ravel legal, quasi-legal and purely criminal aspects. The major regulation patterns known are the **conservative** (or South European) and the **liberal** (or North European).²⁸¹ The **first approach** is exemplified by the Greek Law 3028/2002 on the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General. The **second type** of regulation can be found in its purest form in the Netherlands, known for its liberal heritage legislation and a large variety of public–private partnerships in this field. The main points where the **two models differ concern ownership, the rules governing domestic trade and export of antiquities and the powers of the state** to regulate that trade. Irrespective of the chosen model, however, in all EU member states there are private organizations in the field of culture, private museums, auction houses that can sell antiquities freely, as well as a long history of antiquities trade and private art collections.²⁸² Due to its past affiliation to the communist bloc, however, Bulgaria’s private business with cultural goods has remained poor, depleting even further with the dissolution of the communist state.

The scope of this paper allows for a brief analysis of only some aspects of the illegal acquisition, trade, collecting and trans-border trafficking of antiquities and the ways they interact with the semi-legal and purely legal cultural objects market at home and abroad.

5.1. DOMESTIC TRADE IN ANTIQUITIES

Prior to 1989 Bulgaria’s communist regime policed looters²⁸³ and controlled the export of antiquities rather uncompromisingly. Private collectors who were not affiliated to high party officials were openly repressed, as in the case of the renowned gold coin collector Zhelyazko “the Emperor” Kolev. The Law on Monuments of Culture and Museums (LMCM) issued back in 1969 defined the cultural objects market actors as: government agencies, private collectors and local state-owned museums, which remained the case until the democratic changes took place. As the communist state with the institutional structure that bound it fell apart, looting, trade and smuggling of antiquities in Bulgaria entered their golden age.

²⁸¹ For further details see Chobanov, T., “Analysis of Foreign Cultural Heritage Legislation and Practices” in: *Comparative Study of the National Cultural Heritage Legislation in Bulgaria and Some EU Member States*, Sofia, 2006, p.45.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Looters of the old type were treasure seekers who dug up in deserted areas known by word of mouth to cache treasure-troves underground. They rarely approached and damaged archaeological monuments.

Looting and Lowest-Level Antiquities Distribution

Driven by the lax law enforcement and the mass poverty that struck the population with the social and economic crisis the number of treasure hunters and plundered sites in the early 1990s drastically increased. Initially chaotic, archaeological pillaging grew structured and specialized in terms of the loot targeted and the activities performed, gradually forming a hierarchy of participation. Looters, middlemen and smugglers practically had free rein, going about their business unpunished throughout the late 1990s as well. **Two factors** contributed to the flourishing of illicit archaeological effort and trading in movable monuments of culture.

Box 6. The Archar case

One major archaeological site that has been drawing treasure hunters for many years is the Roman settlement Ratsiaria whose remnants are located in close proximity to the village of Archar in Dimovo municipality. Local looters are assaulting the place as a matter of routine. In 2006 alone the police caught the perpetrators—individuals, or whole looting gangs—of fifteen forays to the site. Prompt police investigations led to convictions in seven of the cases, while the rest have not yet been finalized.

Source: Information from the National Police Service of 25 January 2007.

Society and the authorities tend to be **lenient to such offenses**, which generally remain underreported, as looting and trading in antiquities do not cause direct damages to the individual. Furthermore, several **striking archaeological findings** at the start of the new millennium spurred excessive enterprise among looters. Newly unearthed sites were swarmed and pilfered even as archaeologists and historians were trying to conduct proper explorations.

Mol experts claim that looters have so far combed the better portion of the cultural layer (estimates mention some 80%), part of which consists of immovable monuments—mainly Thracian hills, tombs and other sites dating back from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Estimates about active looters range between 100,000 to 250,000.²⁸⁴ Despite the striking figure most of these people are either amateur treasure hunters, or incidental finders. The **professionals among them** do not exceed several thousands. In the late 1990s the latter were becoming much better equipped and regularly used fine-tuned metal detectors (capable of registering the type of metal that lies buried several meters underground and provide 3D images of the buried artefacts) and more advanced excavation technology (such as bulldozers, tractors and navies).

The criminal groups that deal with field exploration and illicit excavations are highly mobile. They are most active in summer, making excavations in arable lands and forests. Sometimes they purchase fields in close location to archaeological sites and deep-dig the soil without any precaution. Alternatively, the land is leased or the would-be agrarians are paid to plough it, while their true intention

²⁸⁴ Interview with representative of the Cultural and Historical Property Contraband Section at the NSCOC.

is to search for loot with metal detectors.²⁸⁵ Apart from looting, which is normally prosecuted as a crime, there are other activities, such as **construction** in areas bordering on or within territories protected by heritage legislation, whose **ruinous effect on cultural sites** shouldn't be underestimated.

Considering their scale and price, local experts have called the domestic market of illicit antiquities "small trafficking" in contrast to cultural property export to other, market nations which is "big trafficking".²⁸⁶ **Domestic trade in cultural items** should be set apart from criminal trans-border trafficking as in most cases the former belongs to the gray, rather than the black market. On the domestic market further transactions are made between private collectors trading coins or other artifacts with each other. The primary market chain involving local finders, local dealers and local collectors feeds into the domestic exchange of coins or other collectibles. Another market that in recent years has flourished enough to become a self-supporting business for some people is the **manufacture and sale of fake antiquities**. Reportedly, a number of clandestine mints are operating in Bulgaria mainly to supply the US coin market. Counterfeiting found or pillaged ancient coins before selling them is also common practice among local looters and dealers.²⁸⁷

Initially the **internal market of antiquities** is supplied through a local network of looters and dealers to satisfy the demand for artifacts and coins of thousands of numismatists across the country.²⁸⁸ Such high domestic demand indicates the existence of many illicit private collections, some of them so rich that they rival museum deposits. Antiquities can also be found in collections owned by private banks.

Experts claim that artifacts are purchased and sold several times before reaching private home collections or trans-border dealers. Large-scale traffickers are several dozens.²⁸⁹ Some of them are already permanently based abroad as antique shop owners. They are so connected as to be able to produce particular coin types and artifacts on demand in the market country by directing a robbery or looting mission at the right place in the source country. Mid-scale dealers operate by regions, selecting the artifacts supplied by local finders and offering the most valuable ones to their bosses.

Foreign nationals (mostly **Germans and Greeks**) are also increasingly involved in this business and further play the role of middlemen in illicit export. Greeks specialize in supplying Bulgarian Orthodox church-plate to foreign markets, which may explain the growing number of church and monastery burglaries committed locally. The demand from foreign states and the number of non-local dealers

²⁸⁵ Report of the Crime Counteraction, Public Order Maintenance and Prevention Chief Directorate (CCPOMPCD) of the National Police Service, 25 January 2007, p.2.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Ministry of Culture experts, January 18, 2007.

²⁸⁷ The story of six looters was recently reported in the Bulgarian media. The gang had been digging up antiquities from ancient hills, tombs and caves and selling them together with the replicas they were producing, *Plovdiv21.com*, August 10, 2006, <<http://www.plovdiv24.com/news/18384.html>>

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ By expert estimates of the NSCOC.

operating in Bulgaria is expected to increase when much of the border control (at internal borders) is stripped after the country joins the EU.

Before antiquities reach the end market they pass through a process of filtering in three stages. The first filtering is done when looters and their immediate dealers offer cheap, largely affordable items, such as coins or artifacts of no special value. Second-tier regional dealers then engage in repeat filtering to offer rich private collectors (bosses) the highest-value or unique objects for prices reaching 100,000 leva per item or coin. The informal monthly tenders held in the city of Veliko Tarnovo are a succinct illustration of the process – first filtering is done at a collectors’ meeting held every first Saturday of the month, succeeded by a second filtering at a more exclusive meeting of dealers and collectors on the following day and a third filtering by the top collectors known as bosses.

At the core of Bulgaria’s internal antiquities market is a **network of legal numismatic exchanges** (at which officially no buying and selling goes on) held at various times of the year in several cities. The aforementioned meeting at the Poltava disco club in Veliko Tarnovo hosted by the local coin collectors’ society is the most prominent example. It is a must for the coin and stamp collectors, antique dealers and various other collectors from all over the country. In other cities, such as the capital Sofia, Plovdiv and Montana antiquities are usually traded in numismatic clubs and more rarely at antique outlets or through face-to-face encounters between purchaser and seller.

Table 16. Overview of the antiquities market

Stages	Activities	Actors	Legality	Market type	
I	looting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – looting gang leaders – looting gangs – occasional looters (finders) 	criminal	black	National
II	acting as middleman/ dealer; maintaining private collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – small dealers – regional dealers – large dealers/ collectors 	sales qualified as criminal, purchases de facto legal	gray	
III	trans-border trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – traffickers – border officials – large international dealers 	criminal	black	International
IV	market state sale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – international dealers/market state collectors 	legal	white (legal)	

The Veliko Tarnovo club meetings accommodates both legal transactions between collectors purchasing artifacts which are not strictly definable as “monuments of

culture” and illicit bargains with real antiquities. In isolated cases looters themselves come to put their finds for sale. It is more common to come across dealers offering large stocks of coins and artifacts as well as collectors with individual objects and old coins. Purchasers also come in two distinguishable groups—the private collector and the middleman or dealer commissioned by rich clients or bosses to supply them with antiquities of greater value and/or amount. It is commonly believed that the most valuable items are traded in privacy, safely remote from the numismatic exchanges. There is a growing trend to strike any **fairly costly antiquity deals** outside those legal exchanges, not least provoked by law-enforcement clamp-downs such as the police operation disrupting the Veliko Tarnovo exchange on December 2, 2006. Such aggressive enforcement seems to erode the possibility to monitor the trade of antiquities.

In recent years cultural artifact dealers have been using the internet increasingly to market various antiquities and coins with much greater ease. Detailed descriptions and photographs of such objects are offered on specialized commercial web pages. Ministry of Interior agencies have also tracked **online bids for coins** of Bulgarian provenance at numismatic sites.²⁹⁰ Some of the old coins pilfered in a notorious recent burglary of the Veliko Tarnovo city museum were also put on offer in such online auctions. E-commerce is also the preferred method of dealing forged antiquities.

Police data about recorded antiquities-related offences sheds some light on how widespread looting is in Bulgaria:²⁹¹

Table 17. Cultural property crimes

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Recorded crimes involving cultural and historical property	368	349	298	280	224	204	206

Source: National Police Service

The 2006 clear-up rate for these crimes was 30.1%, that is 61 cases solved and 76 perpetrators, most of whom Bulgarian nationals, arrested.²⁹²

Another resource of cultural item supplies for both Bulgaria and the major market states are the **local museums**. Throughout the transition years there were persistent reports of burgled museums. On a number of occasions individual museum exhibits were found missing or having been substituted with less valuable objects (similar old coins in particular can have a hundred-fold difference in price depending on how well preserved they are), or fake items. A prosecution office

²⁹⁰ Report by the Crime Counteraction, Public Order Maintenance and Prevention Chief Directorate (CCPOMP CD) of the National Police Service, 25 January 2007, p. 3

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, pp.3-4.

²⁹² *Ibid*.

inquiry in the fall of 2006 established that exhibits were missing in the archaeological museums of two major Bulgarian cities – Varna and Burgas. Museum thefts raise serious concerns as they involve qualified museum staff whose supposed mission and duty is to help preserve the national heritage and because of that they are even more blameworthy than the common treasure hunter.

Most Bulgarian museums have **poor recording practices** of the artifacts in stock. The general lack of accountability, in particular of museum directors, further aggravates the situation. The Supreme Prosecution of Cassation has confirmed that the major museums in Bulgaria have not had an inventory of their core funds made for the last fifteen years which suggests that the responsible state bodies have completely neglected their duties. The majority of museums do not observe the international standard for describing art, antiques and antiquities with photographs and exact descriptions of each object (the so called Object ID). In Bulgarian museums objects are often loosely described in general terms, which makes it impossible for them to be tracked, positively identified and restored. The dire state of museum documentation dooms to failure any efforts to trace stolen coins or other items transferred abroad.

Other property often illicitly traded in and marketed abroad (chiefly in Greece) are old Orthodox icons and church-plate items.²⁹³ As such objects are property of the Bulgarian Holy Synod, however, enforcement agencies are not in a position to take full stock of this type of national cultural heritage. Customs officers do not normally intervene in the trans-border movement of icons either, as they have no staff qualified to make assessment requiring such subtle expertise.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, as foreign demand is rather modest, **icons are trafficked out much more rarely** than they are traded to collectors within the country.

To make their anti-looting and anti-trafficking efforts seem more effective enforcement **agencies announce lavish values of the illicitly acquired cultural objects** they capture. This trend combines with popular beliefs that the antiquities are purchased at much higher prices in market countries than at home. Since the best developed antiquities market both in Bulgaria and abroad is that of Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins,²⁹⁵ a closer comparative look at their prices at auctions may reveal a different picture. The coin market has the following **distinguishable characteristics**:

1. The fairly **low price** of most coins makes them accessible for mass purchase as individual coins are minted in large amounts and the tradition of coin collecting has long been established. Price, however, hardly diminishes their historical and aesthetic value.
2. Coin trade is **firmly internationalized** due to the cross-fertilization of historical and political developments, commercial relations and the dense cultural layering characteristic of the processes that led to the formation of the contemporary nation state.

²⁹³ Prosecution officials have described staggering cases of medieval frescos being removed from church walls to be trafficked out of the country.

²⁹⁴ Interview with a customs official.

²⁹⁵ There is practically no international demand for Thracian coins.

3. The price of the same type of coins can **differ widely** as prominent private collectors and leading museums set particularly high demands on the quality of the items they would agree to purchase.
4. **Serious devaluations** are frequently observed, in particular after abundant archaeological finds (treasures) which can cause the price of coins once extremely costly due to their rarity to crash.
5. The **original location** where the coins were struck and circulated plays an important role in their grading. Only a small portion of local coins are not affected by the high price differential between home and international market. Thus, a well preserved medieval coin minted by a Bulgarian tsar is, generally, more profitably traded in Bulgaria than it would be in any other country.
6. The growing **market saturation** with the major specimen in the three main ancient coin groups and the slight chances for discovering and appraising so far unknown coin types has caused a decline in coin prices worldwide. Despite the diversification of trade channels (e.g. over the internet), this trend will be generally aggravated except for coins graded "extremely fine" where prices are expected to remain stable or to be tilted slightly higher by the cheapening of lower-grade coins.
7. Price ranges depend fairly strongly on **national and regional economic factors**. The same type of ancient coins in comparable condition could be more expensive (but in some cases also cheaper) in EU countries and almost always so in the US than in Bulgaria or, say, in Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, etc. This shows that local income levels can affect coin prices similarly to mass commodities.²⁹⁶

Building on these established trends as well as on empirical data the following inferences can be drawn concerning coin **pricing at the domestic and foreign market** and the ways it affects both illicit trade within Bulgaria and trans-border coin trafficking.

- There is a clear-cut **difference in coin prices** in Bulgaria and in other market countries primarily resulting from the disparities in purchasing power. This fact, however, does not necessarily abet encroachments on cultural heritage and illicit coin exportation;
- Coins found during clandestine excavations are sought primarily by local private collectors and/or are of fairly low quality. The absolute or relative price such finds may reach within the country are often higher than any possible foreign auction prices if they were to be trafficked out of Bulgaria;
- It is safe to suppose that purchasing coins abroad and importing them in Bulgaria to satisfy demand from local collectors could sometimes bring good profits;

²⁹⁶ Pachev, P., *Peculiarities of the Pricing of Ancient Coins Compared to Other Heritage Items*, pp. 2-3.

- If local coin dealers aim to make extensive use of the high price differentials at home and abroad in order to strike sizeable profits, they must be ready and willing to **risk breaking all existing export controls**. The only target market financially worthwhile, however, would be that of the US due to its very size and purchasing power unrivalled by any other industrialized state.
- The cultural property business has numerous specifics, such as mutual confidence and confidentiality between the trading parties that may take years to build, finding purchasers who would willingly engage in an illicit transaction or country-specific hurdles such as buyers suspecting they might be sold fake antiquities "made in Bulgaria". Therefore it is a trade plied by few informed participants.²⁹⁷

5.2. TRANS-BORDER ANTIQUITIES TRAFFICKING

Channel Operators and Mules

The volume of illicit antiquities export as well as its history and trends are not recorded with any consistency nor are sufficient hard data available. Certain figures provided by the customs agency could help draw a rough profile of the market states to which Bulgarian antiquities are exported, the actors physically involved in their transportation and the number and types of trafficked antiquities. The table below contains data on the attempts at illicit export prevented by border officers:

Table 18. Antiquities seized at Bulgarian borders

Year	Number of border seizures	Number of antique objects seized
2003	17	1,799
2004	12	517
2005	16	4,435
2006	15	6,220 plus 66 kilos of coins and artifacts

Source: Bulgarian Customs Agency

The main actors in antiquity smuggling are identified as follows:

- The so called **mules** known from drug-smuggling are paid to perform the physical transfer of antiquities often unaware of what is being transported or of its exact value, but agreeing to carry the goods across the border, sometimes in their private cars, for a certain fee.

²⁹⁷ Pachev, ... pp. 2-3

- **Channel operators** run trafficking lines, hiring couriers and bribing border and customs officials as necessary. This role is often played by local antiquity dealers who thus go international, entering in contact with foreign dealers or collectors. Sometimes human trafficking routes and their operators are used to smuggle out cultural objects.
- **International dealers** are traders or collectors, most often Bulgarian born, but living and conducting business from Western Europe or the US (roughly between 30 and 50 individuals). Some of them are former law-enforcement officers or have relatives serving in the security sector, thus having access to insider information about the dealing in antiquities and their smuggling routes. Apart from managing the financial side, i.e. the international bank transfers for purchased artifacts and the payments for transportation, they have to bring the antiquities to auction houses in the market countries or sell them through their own antique shops.

Box 7. The case of Angel Filchev: dates and figures

On April 1, 1994 preliminary criminal proceedings were started against Angel Borisov—brother of Nikola Filchev, later to become Bulgaria’s Prosecutor General—and several other persons in relation to possible contraband with old coins and other cultural goods. Three years later, on December 22, 1997 he was charged with contraband of antiquities and the offense was described by the lead investigator of the case as particularly grave. On May 13, 1998 Angel Borisov was arrested at the Kalotina border check point in relation to the same investigation. He was detained in pre-trial custody, but eight days later, on March 21, 1998 the Sofia prosecutor Kiril Ivanov suspended the custodial measure without giving due reasons. Straight after his release the defendant left Bulgaria unhindered.

On March 23, 1999 the authorities at Frankfurt airport intercepted an attempt to export parcels with ancient coins whose sender and receiver were identical—Angel Borisov. The Bavarian customs authorities started a probe into the matter to find out that „previously, eight similar parcels had been freighted through Germany to the US” with a total weight of „over 1000 kilograms of antique coins and burial objects”. The person who had shipped the packages on behalf of Angel Borisov did not in the least try to hide the fact that he was acting on behalf of the Prosecutor General’s brother.

Upon request of the Bulgarian Supreme Prosecution Office of Cassation all the documents concerning the case, in which coins and antiquities whose estimated value was 3,136,112 levs had been trafficked, were sent to them. No further information about the case has been publicized after that except a statement by the Prosecution Office that the inquiry into Angel Borisov’s case was still underway and that they had evidence that a company owned by him was selling antique coins online.

The online news agency Mediapool announced that the name of Angel Borisov, who has been living in Florida for several years already, was found under an internet offer selling coins, supposedly part of those stolen in the notorious Veliko Tarnovo museum robbery.

Mediapool.bg. Bulgaria Looks for Its Illegally Exported Antiquities in Various Countries. Filchev's Brother Still under Probes, 21 March 2007

In recent years increasing attempts are made to use the door-to-door delivery services offered either by Bulgarian Posts or courier companies. In 2005 alone, 108 attempted postal deliveries of antiquities or old coins concealed in parcels were intercepted. Most of them were addressed to recipients in Western Europe

and the US and the senders had tried to conceal the items either in tin-foil, or carbon paper wrappings.²⁹⁸

Box 8. The London dish from Pazardzhik

The widely reported case of a unique Byzantine plate on sale at Christie's in the fall of 2006 illustrated how difficult it is to return cultural property once it has been illicitly exported out of the source country. Despite the efforts of Bulgarian Prosecutor General and Culture Minister to stop the tender, the auction was held, but fortunately there was no one to offer the minimum price of £300,000. Bulgarian authorities claimed that the dish was an object of extremely high artistic value and that it was one of the 13 Byzantine plates found near Bulgaria's town of Pazardzhik in 1999. This set of dishes was the second find in the same area after 1903, when the so called Pazardzhik treasure was discovered. Unfortunately, Naiden Blangev, who found the second part of the treasure, does not possess the necessary photographic evidence to support Bulgaria's claims.

Christie's, on the other hand, claim that the London plate is part of the 13 or 14 dishes originally found in 1903. Later on, 11 of those were bought by the British carpet merchant A. Barry. In 2003, nine of the dishes were purchased by the private Greek Benaki Museum, whereas the London dish was sold a couple of times before reaching its present owner Sir Claude Hankes Drielsma, Chairman of the Windsor Leadership Trust. Dating the plate to 1903 means that the item would be beyond the scope of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

24 Chasa, 4 April 2007

Market States for Bulgarian-Found Antiquities

The main market countries to which antiquities are smuggled out from Bulgaria are **Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the UK, the Netherlands, and overseas to the US and Canada.**²⁹⁹ Bulgarian cultural objects are mostly directed to antique shops in Munich, Vienna, Geneva and other major cities in Western Europe where they are sold to private collectors or exhibited at the famous London salerooms where some of them are auctioned off to US purchasers purportedly as part of Western European heritage. These export routes are not merely demand driven, but also preferred because of simplified procedures with respect to antiquities with Bulgarian provenance. Until recently Germany, for instance, did not set any import requirements other than clearing customs and paying a fixed fee, thus asking no further questions about origin or ownership. Similarly they were easily legalized for exhibition at antique outlets and auctioneering inside the country.

Attempts at illicit export are concentrated at particular border points in their transit to those major export destinations. Most antiquity smuggling is registered at Kalotina, followed by Vrashka Chuka and Bregovo crossing points. At Kalotina antiquities were caught 23 times in 2003, five times both in 2004 and 2005, and three times in 2006.³⁰⁰ In addition, smuggling plots were foiled at Varna and Plovdiv airports in 2006 when four attempts to freight antiquities on passenger planes to Western European cities were made.

²⁹⁸ CCPOMPCD Report, 25 January 2007, p. 3.

²⁹⁹ CCPOMPCD Report, 25 January 2007, p.2.

³⁰⁰ Information by the Bulgarian Customs Agency about cultural property export violations.

The largest scale customs haul of antiquities so far was seized at Vrashka Chuka in the fall of 2006. A number of cardboard boxes were found in a truck cab containing 4,484 antique coins, 54 arrowheads, 27 antique appliqués, 57 rings, 12 agricultural tools, 14 artifacts made of horn, 2 lead seals, and 375 other antique articles, amounting to a striking total of 5,040 objects. A few days later another sizeable catch was made on a train crossing through Kalotina—antiquities and old coins wrapped in 24 juice and milk cartons, weighing 66 kilograms.

Usually, Bulgarian nationals are involved in the transfer of antiquities in cars or buses. In 2003–2004 for instance, 60% of export control violations were perpetrated by Bulgarians (43 individuals), while in seven cases the offender was unknown, as the items were found in postal or express packages, in such parts of buses where anyone could have cached them, or had been dumped in the surrounding area where they were subsequently found by customs officers. Cases of illegal antiquities export far outnumber illicit import—in 2003–2004 there were 78 prevented exports against 11 caught imports. Although smaller in scale, the import of artifacts into Bulgaria testifies to the existence of sustained local collector demand.

As Bulgaria joined the EU, rigorous discretionary checks at internal borders were removed. This is expected to channel illicit antiquities export to new destinations and pose the need for selective intelligence-led checks which will be made possible only if coordination between enforcement bodies and other state institutions on international trafficking routes and cases is significantly improved.

5.3. REGULATING THE MARKET IN ANTIQUITIES

In recent decades **regulations affecting the market of illicit antiquities** both across states (export prohibitions) and domestically (measures curbing the supply, e.g. looting and museum theft) **have been tightening**. The first international legislative instrument enacted with that aim was the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*. The Convention tries to establish common rules for tackling cultural property claims across national boundaries. Eighty six states had ratified the Convention by 1996, including an important market country such as France who did that recently, although the UK has not yet ratified it.

Other relevant global regulatory instruments are: the *Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972), *European Convention for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage* (1992), the Council of Europe *Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage in Europe* (1985), the 1995 UNIDROIT³⁰¹ *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects*, and the 1986 Code of Ethics for Museums of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). ICOM introduces strict rules governing the acquisition and transfer of collections and the personal responsibility of museum employees involved in their preservation. In 1994 Interpol Secretary General, too, signed an appeal to governments to take action against increasing illicit transfer. For the purpose of

³⁰¹ International Institute for the Unification of Private Law.

protecting cultural objects that can be classified as "national treasures" Council Directive 93/7/EEC of 15 March 1993 on the *Return of Cultural Objects Unlawfully Removed from the Territory of a Member State* is effective in the EU.

Some states such as Germany have started in recent years to implement harsher import regulations for antiquities, and even British import controls, formerly among the most liberal, are becoming stricter. Traditional source states from Southern Europe such as Greece and Italy have greatly improved the coordination of their anti-trafficking efforts with Central European state, e.g. Switzerland. A model approach towards settling antiquities disputes and tackling their trafficking is the pact signed by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Italian government, in which the Met agreed to return twenty-one artifacts³⁰² in its collection that Italy claims were looted from archaeological sites within its borders. In exchange for the artifacts, Italy has lent the Met prestigious objects from Italian collections. Italy is now pressing the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles for the restitution of a statue of Aphrodite.³⁰³

5.4. ADOPTING EUROPEAN STANDARDS TO REGULATE THE MOVEMENT OF ANTIQUITIES

Bulgaria has signed a number of international legal instruments for the protection of cultural monuments³⁰⁴ and after the EU accession all legislation concerning culture protection is automatically to be applied in the country, most prominently Council Regulation 3911/92/EEC of 9 December 1992 on the export of cultural goods and Commission Regulation 752/93/EEC laying down provisions for the implementation of Council Regulation 3711/92/EEC. Notably, Regulation 3911/92/EEC allows each Member State to introduce additional national measures to protect its cultural heritage.

In 2004 a special Annex was added to the *Law on Monuments of Culture and Museums* (repealing the former Art. 33) to regulate permanent and temporary export of movable cultural property. This Annex contains a list of the range of items that can be defined as cultural goods in full compliance to Regulation 3911/92/EEC,³⁰⁵ whereas the three types of license already in use that must be attached to the customs declaration of exported cultural goods are pertinent to those prescribed in Regulation 752/93/EEC.³⁰⁶

³⁰² For further details on the case, see: Watson, P., and C. Todeschini, *The Medici Conspiracy. The Illicit Journey of Looted Antiquities—From Italy's Tomb Raiders to the World's Greatest Museums*, New York, Public Affairs, 2006.

³⁰³ At the same time, the museum's former curator of antiquities, Marion True, is on trial in Rome on charges of illicit antiquities trafficking (*PND Philanthropy News Digest*, 24 February 2006).

³⁰⁴ Among them are: *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, *Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, *CoE European Cultural Convention*, *Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage in Europe*, Europe Agreement, establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Bulgaria, of the other part.

³⁰⁵ See *Mitnicheska Hronika* No.5 (2006), p.10.

³⁰⁶ In line with the provisions of the law and the *Ordinance on Regular and Temporary Export of Movable Cultural Property* the customs bodies must ensure that the following documents are attached to the export customs declaration:

Trans-border movement of monuments of culture is made possible by EU legislation which sanctions legal export for antiquities that do not qualify as national treasures for which a certificate must be issued. Thus, moveable cultural property can be exported (temporarily) if it belongs to a collection legitimized under current legislative provisions.

Box 9. EU antiquities transfer related legislation

The following three types of export licenses are associated with the transfer of cultural objects from one Member State to another:

Standard license

- This license is issued for temporary or permanent export of separate cultural objects or a number of cultural objects in a single consignment.
- In order for a single export license to be issued for several cultural goods, the competent authorities must assess whether the goods are of the same category, part of the same consignment to the same export destination, and when the export is temporary the exporting party must be obliged to return the goods to the issuing Member State in the same consignment as exported. If those criteria are not met, separate licenses are issued for the individual cultural goods.
- When cultural goods are to be displayed at an exhibition or fair a license for temporary export is issued.
- The period of validity of the license cannot exceed twelve months from the date of issue.

Specific open license

- This license covers repeated temporary export of a specific cultural good (e.g. a musical instrument) which is liable to be temporarily exported from the Community on a regular basis for use and/or exhibition in a third country. The cultural good must be owned by, or be in the legitimate possession of, the particular person or organization that uses and/or exhibits the good.
- The person or organization concerned should offer all the guarantees considered necessary for the good to be returned in good condition to the Community.
- A license may not be valid for a period that exceeds 24 months.

General open license

- This license covers repeated temporary export of a cultural good which is liable to be temporarily exported from the Community on a regular basis for use and/or exhibition in a third country.
- The goods must form part of the permanent collection of a museum or other institution.
- In the case of an application for temporary exportation, it must be specified which particular cultural goods shall remain outside the Community's borders in the following 24 months.
- The license may be used to cover any combination of goods in the permanent collection at any one occasion of temporary export. It can be used to cover a series of different combinations of goods either consecutively or concurrently.
- A license may only be issued if the authorities are convinced that the institution offers all the guarantees considered necessary for the good to be returned in good condition to the Community.
- The period of validity of the license cannot exceed 24 months from the date of issue.

- for the cultural goods listed in the Annex to Art. c33a of LMCM—standard license, specific open license or general open license issued by the head of the Museums, Galleries and Fine Arts Directorate (MGFID) at the Ministry of Culture;
- for movable cultural objects classified as national treasures—temporary export license endorsed by the minister of culture;
- for cultural objects which are not covered in the Annex to Art. 33a of the Law and are not classified as national treasures—certificate issued by the Director for Museums, Galleries and Fine Arts.

Legal temporary export makes it possible to share the Bulgarian cultural heritage with other European countries and in cooperation with various foreign cultural institutes to display it abroad. Such export is also an extra source of funding for Bulgarian museums. In 2005–2006 a variety of museum collections were displayed in Western Europe and the US or exponents were transported there for restoration and conservation under the conditions for temporary export of movable cultural objects which the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture assessed as the most valuable. In 2005 alone, 535 temporary export licenses were issued, while in the period January through October of 2006 their number was 296 and was expected to reach 796 by the end of the year. The figures indicate that this type of export has grown 1.5 times compared to earlier periods.³⁰⁷

Local collectors, however, have voiced their criticism of the practice of **displaying prime national treasures in foreign museums** for extended periods as being **less than worthwhile** considering the fairly small revenue such exhibitions bring to local museums, especially against the background of general Western rates. The much needed promotion of Bulgarian heritage abroad must be balanced off by sufficiently long exhibits at home in order to sustain tourist interest and foster the tourism industry.

Box 10. "The Grandeur of Bulgaria": notes on a scandal

In January 2007, ancient Bulgarian artifacts from the private collection of Mr. Vassil Bozhkov were offered for display at the European Parliament within an exhibition under the title "The Grandeur of Bulgaria" to mark Bulgaria's entry into the EU. Many Bulgarian parliamentarians in Brussels boycotted the event and tried to win support from other MPs to stop the exhibit as shameful to the institution. The scandal was widely covered in the Bulgarian media which criticized it as the first attempt to legalize the private collection of Mr. Bozhkov, supposedly the richest Bulgarian, much of whose money comes from the gambling industry. National History Museum Director Bozhidar Dimitrov reported that Bozhkov had produced provenance documents for his exhibits showing that nearly half of the objects had been bought from foreign owners and the remainder had belonged to Bulgarian collectors.

The event brought into focus the intimate ties between the Thracia Foundation, set up by Bozhkov and the archaeological community in Bulgaria, especially as certain prominent figures such as art history Professor Ivan Marazov, and the world-famous Bulgarian painter Svetlin Rusev were among the organizers. Forty artifacts were shown out of the registered 132-item collection which Bozhkov is planning to make the core of a private museum he reportedly intends to open in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Prosecution Office has started an inquiry into the legality of the exhibited objects, although it had initially authorized its export to Brussels. Some Bulgarian collectors have voiced concerns that political squabbles over Bozhkov's business activities may affect negatively the legalization of all private collections suitable for public display. The Ministry of Culture was also reproved for sanctioning the collection as a launch emblem of Bulgaria's EU membership.

³⁰⁷ See *Mitnicheska Hronika*, No.5 (2006), p.11.

5.5. REGULATING THE PROTECTION AND MOVEMENT OF ANTIQUITIES

Legislation regulating matters of antiquity ownership and trade in Bulgaria is a paradoxical mix of the **conservative and liberal approaches**. The 1969 Law on the Monuments of Culture and Museums was inherited from the communist era and despite its numerous amendments attempting to modernize it, it is still dominated by the logic of state ownership over cultural property.³⁰⁸ LMCM does not explicitly ban private ownership of antiquities, but it does in no way regulate the respective market relations, either. There is a well established collector network while numismatic clubs can be found in nearly any city in Bulgaria. Coin collectors in particular are supported through invitations to participate in joint exhibits with state museums. The legal status of private collectors and their collections, however, remains vague and thus vulnerable to improper political influence.

Halfway through this decade, though, the issue most debated in relation to curbing criminal antiquity trading had become that of **making allegedly illicit private collections legal**.³⁰⁹ Affected by mounting public criticism, on 28 January 2005 the Ministry of Culture adopted its Ordinance No.1 on the Rating of Registered Movable Monuments of Culture Property of Legal and Natural Persons promulgated in the Bulgarian State Gazette on 8 February 2005.³¹⁰ Its main aim is to set the terms for private collection registration which will make privately-owned antiquities legal and available for public exhibitions. The Ordinance requires any legal entity or individual in possession of cultural property to complete and submit a registration form at the closest regional or specialized state museum, but defines no fixed term for the registration. The registration papers deposited so far show that collectors tend to avoid suspicions about the legality of antiquities by declaring that they have bought the items at overseas auction houses or antique stores. Only very few private collections have been registered so far, among them the notorious lots of Vasil Bozhkov and Dimitar Ivanov.

There are a number of **arguments against the feasibility** and effectiveness of the Ordinance as it is written.³¹¹ First, there is little trust among collectors towards law

³⁰⁸ It defines monuments of culture as belonging to the nation, while legal ownership can be the state's, municipal, or of legal and natural persons. Items, discovered in archaeological excavations, automatically become state-owned (Art.16, Par.1 of LMCM), but legal experts claim it is more accurate to define it as so called "private state property" as excavated monuments of culture are liable to appropriation and become property of legal entities or persons. Any other monuments of culture that have been buried underground, walled in or concealed in another manner, so that their owner could in no way be established, also become private state property straight after discovery. These objects are the so called treasures in relation to which there is no consistent state policy and treasure finders are in no way encouraged by the state to turn in their finds. Krasimir Manev, a legal expert, claims that "the Law on Property and the Law on Monuments of Culture and Museums contain conflicting provisions on this subject, and in reality treasure finders are sometimes not even financially compensated. This strongly discourages them from turning in or registering with the local museum any such items they might hold ... and in this way cultural property crime is encouraged". See *Mitnicheska Hronika*, No.5 (2006), p. 15).

³⁰⁹ Estimates about the number of those collections vary—from 1,000 large collections to 30,000 small-scale owners of several artifacts or coins (See Lazarova, B. and N. Alexandrova, "Exactly how many collectors are there in Bulgaria?", *Darik News*, 17 January 2007). The larger part of the collector community are members of the Association of Numismatic Societies in Bulgaria in which over 120 numismatic clubs are signed up.

³¹⁰ State Gazette 13/2005.

³¹¹ Interviews with prominent coin collectors, December 2006 – January 2007.

enforcement bodies and museum staff. During the interviews, carried out for the purpose of this paper, it was made clear that the prescribed system of registration by commissions made up of local museum employees was not found trustworthy, as it did not provide safeguards against the theft of valuable coins which could be replaced with cheaper lower-grade versions by museum workers.³¹² Next, cultural object owners are required to pay for the photographs that must be appended to every single coin/artifact as well as a registration fee and an expert appraisal fee (for grading by the commission), which collectors consider a redundant financial burden. Last, but not least, collectors argue that legalization is worthwhile only for the owners of antiquities other than coins, such as statues and artifacts, but it is unfeasible for coin collections given the great turnover of items.³¹³

The pervasive unwillingness of collectors to go legal seems to be rooted in the very channels of acquiring their collections (as no amnesty is planned for objects illicitly acquired in the past³¹⁴) combined with the rather **fuzzy prospects of properly regulating such trade** in the foreseeable future. Even in the case of registration the lack of documents of legal provenance (much more likely when the antiquities were acquired in Bulgaria, rather than abroad) and the fact that no regulations are in place to provide for the future enrichment of the collections would further discourage most collectors already divided between the benefits of the legal and the black market.

The interviews with stakeholders—policy makers, collectors, museum employees, and archaeologists—have demonstrated that the convergence of their disparate interests is highly unlikely due to the lack of dialogue between government, civil society and the media. This runs the risk of law makers focusing on **drafting strict penal measures without seeking any input from the collector community**. Such an approach would lead to some easily imaginable measures and trends—clamping down on currently legal cultural object exchanges as the one in Veliko Tarnovo, an increase of contraband between Bulgaria and EU countries as border control is being relaxed, and promoting some collectors while using legal harassment against others. This would make it easy for each round of incumbents in office to try to affect the market of antiquities for their own benefit.

To encourage registration of private collections which begun rather tentatively in 2005, stakeholders must be involved in an effective dialogue leading to a consensus on cultural property issues. Prior to voting a new law on cultural monuments, **government institutions and civil society should launch a wide debate** on the regulation of cultural objects movement and protection.³¹⁵ One important

³¹² Some collectors have voiced their suspicions that past burglaries of private coin collections have been committed with the involvement of corrupt police officers or other enforcement officials.

³¹³ Arguments such as this have been in circulation for a long time in the debate over the liberalization of the coin market in Bulgaria.

³¹⁴ Illicit ancient artifact collections can still be prosecuted as misdemeanors as the offense of “concealing stolen objects” has a statutory limitation of 10 years. In this way the collector could avoid harsher sanctions by merely declaring a period of ownership longer than 10 years.

³¹⁵ On 21 February 2007 the Sofia-based Red House Center for Culture and Debate hosted the first major public event devoted to the philosophy and principles of the future law on cultural heritage that is currently in preparation. The debate highlighted the disagreements between policy-makers, administrators, experts, private collectors, and journalists and the acute need to make civil society involved in debating legislation a regular practice.

issue, carefully evaded so far, is whether an amnesty for all illegal or quasi-legal collections acquired in an earlier period should be introduced.

On the other hand, the poor regulatory framework may be a logical consequence of the negligible cultural heritage protection efforts of the government itself, at least compared to the strong pressure by corrupt officials and culture experts, antiquity traffickers, dealers and grassroots looters interested in keeping the current chaos and their own impunity.

The government's indecision in tackling domestic antiquities trade and their smuggling abroad is exemplified by poor inter-agency coordination – the Ministry of Interior, local authorities, the Ministry of Culture, archaeological institutes (one major institute is part of the Bulgarian Academy of Science), and the investigation and prosecution services. The laxity of measures against illicit antique dealing from the late 1990s to the present day contrasts sharply with peaking enforcement efforts against other syndicate crime branches. During this period the prosecution failed to pursue any charges against encroachments on cultural monuments, thus debilitating the efforts of Mol enforcement agencies and other institutions dealing with the heritage. Contrary to all logic, in 1999 the anti-trafficking department for cultural property at the then National Service (now Chief Directorate) for Combating Organized Crime (NSCOC) was closed down. Prosecution and police officials have called this a major mistake that not only makes life easy for criminals, but also gives full scope to corrupt local level Mol officers. The above-mentioned department was re-established in 2006 and although a unit with similar functions had operated at the national police, it had had to start from scratch having received no prior information, experience or methodological guidance to fight looters and traffickers. Meanwhile the network of informers, whose role in detecting illicit domestic trade and trans-border trafficking is central, was irreversibly lost.

Inertia and neglect are not the only factors to throttle effective enforcement. Widespread corruption among local middle-ranking law-enforcement officers who earn personal gains on the black cultural property market also has an adverse effect. Experts have outlined **three major forms of corrupt relationships between police officers and antique dealers/looters**: 1) policemen are bribed to cover looters and deter police investigation; 2) officers of higher rank become directly involved in illicit antiquities trading, and 3) officers that must prevent and fight cultural property violations become collectors.³¹⁶ In addition, the grading of cultural objects held by looters, dealers or collectors is itself often done by would-be experts whose only training is a two-week course delivered by the Privatization Agency on a regular basis that can hardly have equipped them with the knowledge they need to possess about cultural goods. Despite their determination to get looters or persons in illicit hold of antiquities convicted, law-enforcement and investigative bodies are often hampered by either incompetent or intentionally falsified expert assessments presented at the trial phase.

³¹⁶ In 2003, the head of Cultural Property Department at the National Police Col. Georgi Getov was discharged. According to media reports he had operated one of the main antiquity smuggling channels in Bulgaria in partnership with a number of prosecutors, NSCOC officers, local archaeological museum directors and other officials who had served as a supply link between looters and the implicated department head. *Maritsa Dnes* daily, 7 May 2003.

Box 11. The prosecution vs. the mafia

In 2006, the Bulgarian Supreme Prosecution Office of Cassation (SPOC) undertook a sequence of high-profile steps to tackle violations on cultural property. The newly elected Prosecutor General, Mr. Boris Velchev, established an inter-agency consultation group made up of prosecutors and experts from various ministries that would undertake a thorough analysis of the current cultural property violations control system and attempt to formulate an effective strategy to counteract such violations in the future. The SPOC has also formed a separate unit to target museum thefts and looting offences. So far prosecutor warrants have been issued by virtue of which 480 cultural sites must be specially safeguarded. A review of all related cases has been made and 11 prosecutor case termination writs have been cancelled. It was found that 14 of all cultural property violation cases tried since 2001 have ended in convictions. The number of actions brought against looters and cultural items traffickers in recent years exceeds 200 cases annually.

The complex mixture of relations—criminal, quasi-legal and legal—between the actors on the cultural property market poses the need for a sophisticated regulatory framework that would ensure due protection of the national cultural heritage, while lifting some of the unwarranted restraints on private collecting to put it in line with the common European practice. Reconciling the wide spectrum of public and private interests would highly increase the efficiency of any mechanism targeting the black market of antiquities or their contraband trafficking out of the country.

Box 12. The proposals of collectors³¹⁷

- The new law on the monuments of culture under preparation should be consulted with the equal participation of an expert group nominated by and representing the Association of Numismatic Societies.
- Cultural objects kept in both public and private collections should be treated equally by law, including a great number of items found among the private belongings of individuals inherited from past generations.
- The ownership rights of citizens over cultural objects they possess should be guaranteed by law and a new, more precise policy on their grading should be adopted. A balanced policy should also be drawn to facilitate the purchase of antiquities held by individual citizens as well as cultural objects exchange or trading at specialized legal venues, such as shops and auction houses.
- An official cultural objects classification system should be introduced requiring the mandatory registration on a special list of items classified as protected world and national cultural heritage, while all other monuments would be regarded as movable cultural property suitable for mass distribution that can be bought and sold freely.
- State support to the association of private collectors and the exhibit of private collections within Bulgaria should be renewed. This would boost tourism, investment, and the cultural development of regions throughout Bulgaria.

³¹⁷ These are the core proposals drawn by Mr. Stavri Toplaov, who heads the expert group with the Association of Numismatic Societies which were presented and debated at the February 21, 2007 Red House event together with several other recommendations.

Public cultural heritage strategies as well as concrete policies must be designed while keeping in mind the fact that this market functions like communicating vessels. Restrictions or a ban over legal domestic trade in antiquities, for instance, would push black market prices down which in turn would fuel outbound smuggling. The latter could result in the loss of numerous collections to the Bulgarian public. Conversely, generous liberalization unaccompanied by strict prosecution of looting would cause clandestine excavations to spawn and would inflict lasting damages on archaeological sites.

Several measures could be recommended to help avoid these risks:

- **Modernize the legislation that governs heritage protection and keeps the black market of antiquities in check** by adopting a new Law on the Monuments of Culture and Museums adequate to present-day realities and by incorporating relevant texts in the Criminal Code. The Law should provide for the currently unregulated issues such as the rights of ownership, use, and inheritance; the purchase, sale and transfer of antiquities; concessions of immovable cultural property; subtler differentiation between national cultural heritage monuments and utilitarian articles, as the latter are in greatest demand by collectors. The new criminal provisions need to impose stricter penalties for violations involving cultural items.
- Step up law enforcement and criminal prosecution in cases of clandestine excavation and cultural sites vandalism, also by prohibiting the use of metal detectors, in order **to curb looting**. Financial rewards for accidentally found articles and a mechanism for public museums to buy cultural items at attractive prices would also rein in looting appetites.
- Improve **international coordination** to prevent the sale of contraband antiquities from Bulgaria at auction houses in Western Europe. This would probably **deter attempts to traffic local cultural goods across the Bulgarian border**.
- Launch a catalog of cultural objects from museum funds as required by current international standards and tighten museum security measures to **reduce museum thefts and illicit coin substitutions** and enable the return of illegally exported antiquities to Bulgaria.
- **Provide options to legalize currently quasi-legal domestic transactions with cultural goods** not least by delimiting the role of all market actors in the law.

Effective up-to-date regulation will necessarily involve leaving behind the dominant culture of isolation among the institutions whose task it is to tackle looting and the illicit dealing and transfer of antiquities. To establish a sound mechanism for protecting cultural monuments the competent authorities would have to engage in coordinated efforts at several levels:

- among the agencies of particular ministries, such as the police and the Chief Directorate for Combating Organized Crime which should engage in consistent information exchange and coordinated action;
- among the various ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance (in particular, the Customs Agency) and the Ministry of Interior, whose work would gain immensely from a commonly maintained and accessible data base and the collating of relevant information;
- between central government and local authorities; the Ministry of Culture in particular should demonstrate greater commitment to the government of regional museums and seek the cooperation of town mayors and the management of municipal museums.
- between the MoI and the Prosecutor General's Office; a series of joint actions against monument looting and antiquities trafficking carried out in 2006 demonstrated the good effects of such coordination;
- public-private partnership involving the relevant institutions, the local authorities, the Bulgarian Orthodox synod and other religious councils, non-governmental organizations and the media, with the primary aim of increasing civil society participation in the debate on cultural heritage market policy and practice.

