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The F Words: Frauds, Forgeries, and Fakes in Antiquities Smuggling and the Role of Organized Crime

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Abstract: The phenomenon of antiquities smuggling is a complicated issue. The lack of official data makes it difficult to do an integrated analysis of the problem. The aim of this article is to present an accurate view of antiquities smuggling in the recent past. After gaining official permission from the Greek police, we examined 246 official arrests made by the Greek Department against Antiquities Smuggling (Athens Office) that occurred between 1999 and 2009. First and foremost, our results revealed that many arrests showed instances of fake antiquities. Moreover, it seems that there is a connection between organized crime and antiquities forgery. In addition, people with higher status are more often involved in antiquities forgery. With respect to the stolen objects, coins were by far the most preferred objects when it comes to forgery, and forgers are also using mostly bronze when it comes to these forgeries. Antiquity looting seems to have many hidden aspects, and the varied natured of antiquities smuggling requires the cooperation of a range of competent authorities and an in-depth investigation of the data, which should be based on the principles of the scientific method.

Keywords: looting, antiquity smuggling, organized crime, fake antiquities, art forgery

INTRODUCTION

The world's cultural heritage is up against a series of devastating circumstances. Natural phenomena, extensive agricultural activities,[1] and, above all, looting[2]

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[1]Renfrew and Bahn 2001.

[2]Blake 2000, 63.

are destroying cultural heritage of significant importance.[3] This devastation has many consequences. The greatest of all is the loss of ancient artifacts by which researchers may interpret the working of ancient societies.[4] Beside these consequences, many researchers have pointed out the connection of smuggling with the rise of organized crime. The involvement of criminal networks in antiquities looting is the most dangerous consequence, by far, of the smuggling phenomenon. Many researchers have devoted much energy and thought to this subject. However, comparatively little effort has been put into the study of forgeries, although the smuggling of antiquities also includes fakes and forgeries.[5] Individuals and museums in the Western world are hungry for ancient artifacts,[6] especially from countries with a long and rich cultural heritage.[7] This appetite provides a great opportunity and motivation for people and networks, in these source countries, to devote time and money to creating fake objects, which eventually are sold abroad. This article presents the results of an integrated study on forgeries as part of major-scale research project on the illicit trade of antiquities in Greece.

HISTORY OF FAKES

Fake archaeological objects have a long history.[8] There are many stories and cases centered on fake antiquities and fraudulent sales. In some cases, the deceived were famous museums[9] and, in other cases, people, even ones with good archaeological experience.[10] Forgeries were used as the fundamental element for the construction of the distorted perception of the world on matters to do with ancient religion.[11] The rising demand for the export of artifacts, mostly from countries with a rich cultural heritage, both by individual buyers and/or museums, also affects the manufacturing of fakes. So large was the demand for Cycladic figures[12] in the late twentieth century[13] that now a vast number of them are without provenience,[14] and, in the majority of cases, they are probably fakes. Often, perhaps more in the past, museum curators and, more generally even now, individual buyers do not care about matters of provenience, and, eventually, this apathy encourages the mass creation of forgeries.[15]

[3]Brodie and Renfrew 2005, 343–44, 349.
[4]Renfrew 2008, 295–98.
[5]Tiverios 2014.
[6]Meyer 2005, 93.
[7]Proulx 2013, 111.
[8]Craddock 2009.
[9]Butcher and Gill 1993, 383–89.
[10]Brodie and Kersel 2102, 112–13.
[11]German 2012, 57–63.
[12]Gill and Chippindale 1993, 603–05.
[13]Proulx 2013, 112.
[14]Renfrew and Bahn 2001.
[15]Mackenzie 2005, 254.

RESEARCH

Archaeologists and researchers have pointed out the problems that impede a comprehensive review of the antiquities-smuggling phenomenon. The problem usually relates to available data of quality.[16] After gaining a special permit from the Greek police headquarters (Permit no. 2565/15/528492) and taking account of the Greek Law on Sensitive Personal Data Information,[17] a vast number of files from the Department against Antiquities Smuggling of the Greek Police (Athens office) were examined. The main aim was to make a broad study of the smuggling phenomenon with respect to forgeries. Work was conducted using the definitions set out in the Greek Law 3028/2002 on Antiquities,[18] with the later Law 3658/2008 on Measures for the Protection of Cultural Objects classifying forgery as a crime,[19] although not a particularly serious one, it would seem, and setting out the penalties for those caught trying to sell fake artifacts as originals. Article 10 of Law 3658/2008 declares a two-year prison sentence for those who import, export, hold casts, copy fakes and try to pass them off for sale as genuine. The authorities rely on these two laws to arrest smugglers and people who have made the forgeries.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study reviewed 246 arrests in Greece spread between the years 1999 and 2009. All of these arrests and confiscations presented a great opportunity to study a number of important details surrounding the manufacturing of fake antiquities and the phenomenon in general as well. For a more sensitive understanding, two different categories, based on the confiscated context, were created. The first category refers to cases where the confiscated material included genuine antiquities that had been looted, alongside forgeries.[20] The second category refers to cases where only fakes/forgeries were concerned. In these latter cases, the authorities had to deal not with the looters but, rather, with the people trying to sell the fake objects as originals.

RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research was first to examine how frequently fake antiquities appeared in these 246 arrests, noting the frequency of the appearance of only fake antiquities and then of fake antiquities alongside genuine antiquities. In addition, the goal was to examine the types of antiquities that were usually copied and to which period they belonged, the involvement of organized crime in these activities, and, finally, the social profile of all of the arrested people.

[16]Campbell 2013, 114–15, 120.
[17]Greek Law 2472/1997 on Sensitive Data Information.
[18]Greek Law 3028/2002 on the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage.
[19]Greek Law 3658/2008 on Law on Measures for the Protection of Cultural Objects.
[20]Gill 2015, 73–80.

RESULTS

In summary, 36 of the 246 arrests showed instances of fake antiquities. In 29 of these cases, smugglers had also looted or stolen genuine artifacts—smuggled out from archaeological sites—with the purpose of selling them. In the remaining seven cases, the arrested people had only fake artifacts and were intending to sell them as genuine. For the accurate reckoning of all of the objects, five categories were devised. The first category concerns fake coins, the second marble heads of statues, the third vessels made of clay and/or metals. The fourth category includes jewelry of precious metals such as silver, gold, and bronze and, finally, the fifth concerns idols made of clay, stone/marble, or bronze. The confiscated fake artifacts are outlined in Table 1.

The cases/arrests were an excellent opportunity to study in depth the situation with respect to fake antiquities. Not only was it possible to make a comprehensive list of the types of antiquities usually produced to defraud potential buyers, but it was also possible to go beyond this list because the official files contained crucial details about the phenomenon. In 29 of the 36 arrests, the looters had genuine antiquities, which had been illegally extracted from archaeological sites, plus fake antiquities. Thus, 80.55 percent of all of the cases combined fake antiquities with genuine ones. The remaining seven cases had only fake antiquities, which equals 19.45 percent. A more detailed breakdown of the objects and categories that were encountered during our research is shown in Table 2.

Of the seized forgeries, there were 6,209 coins, 152 idols, eight vessels, seven marble heads of statues, and, finally, only two pieces of jewelry, equalling a total of 6,378 objects.

FROM WHAT PERIOD OF ANTIQUITY ARE ITEMS MOST OFTEN COPIED?

When forgers and smugglers tried to copy and/or present artifacts to potential buyers, they often relate them to some period or other of the ancient world. Of the total 6,378 objects involved, 3,913 of them (mostly coins) did not match the period to which they belonged. Therefore, these items were excluded from the following account about the types of objects based in a particular ancient period. In total, 1,433 objects were imitations of objects related to the Classical period (58.13 percent); 972 objects were objects related to the Hellenistic period (39.43 percent); 45 objects were related to the Roman period (1.82 percent), and five to the Byzantine period (0.32 percent). Five objects were imitations vaguely related to somewhere between the Neolithic and late Bronze Age (0.20 percent), and, finally, there was just one object that was a New Hittite imitation (0.040 percent).

WHAT OBJECTS WERE OFTEN COPIED?

Obviously coins are by far the preferred object when it comes to forgery. In total, 6,209 coins were confiscated during the arrests: of which 1,291 were Classical

Table 1. Cases, objects, and indications of organized crime actions

Number	Case number	Fake objects	Genuine objects	Indications of organized crime
1	1949	Coins: 1 silver Roman coin; 1 silver Classical coin	Yes	
2	1982	Coins: 2 bronze Byzantine; 1 bronze idol Roman; 1 bronze idol Classical; 1 stone idol LBA	Yes	Yes; 2 arrested persons; more participants; indications of money laundering through business structures
3	1999	500 silver Hellenistic coins; 470 bronze Classical coins	Yes	Yes; 1 arrested; more participants who provided him with ancient coins from all over Greece, plus business structures for money laundering and casts for copying coins.
4	2000	724 bronze Classical coins; 381 silver Hellenistic coins	Yes	Yes; 1 arrested; more participants who provided him with ancient coins from all over Greece, plus business structure for money laundering and casts for copying coins.
5	2016	1 bronze idol LBA	Yes	
6	2022	82 bronze Classical coins	Yes	
7	2027	5 bronze Hellenistic coins	No	
8	2071	1 silver classical coin; 41 bronze Hellenistic coins	Yes	Yes; 1 arrested; more participants who provided him with ancient coins from all over Greece, plus business structure for money laundering plus casts for copying coins.
9	2070	14 silver Roman coins; 5 silver Hellenistic coins	Yes	Yes; 1 arrested; more participants who provided him with ancient coins from all over Greece, plus business structure for money laundering plus casts for copying coins.
10	2063	5 bronze vessels	No	

Continued

Table 1. continued

Number	Case number	Fake objects	Genuine objects	Indications of organized crime
11	2058	1 marble head of a statue, Classical period	Yes	Yes; many participants; use of special craftsman for making forgeries, use of public sector employee.
12	2051	1 bronze idol Classical period	No	
13	2087	1 marble head of a statue, Classical period	Yes	Yes
14	2095	72 bronze idols, Classical period; 36 marble idols, Classical period; 23 clay idols Classical period; 2 marble idols MBA	Yes	
15	2098	1 bronze ring byzantine	Yes	Yes; 3 arrested; allocation of duties among the members
16	2110	1 silver coin, classical period	Yes	
17	2111	16 silver coins, Hellenistic period; 2 bronze coins, Hellenistic period	Yes	
18	2150	2 bronze coins, Roman period	Yes	
19	2115	1 marble head of a statue	No	
20	2116	23 bronze coins, Roman period	Yes	
21	2177	4 bronze coins, Hellenistic period	Yes	
22	2179	1 bronze idol, Classical period	No	
23	2181	1 marble idol, Classical period; 4 stone/marble heads of statues, Roman period	Yes	Yes; looting of archaeological site; allocation of duties among the members; transnational criminal activities; connections with other groups in Albania; 6 arrested
24	2207	2 clay idols, Classical period	Yes	

Continued

Table 1. continued

Number	Case number	Fake objects	Genuine objects	Indications of organized crime
25	2208	1 silver coin, Classical period; 2 golden coins, Classical period	No	
26	2210	1 bronze idol, New Hittite period	No	Yes; transnational criminal activities; connections with Republic of Syria; other members there and in Greek prison
27	2205	1 silver coin, Classical period	Yes	Yes; 3 arrested; allocation of duties among the members; involvement of a public sector employee
28	2304	2 golden vessels, Byzantine period/1 golden wreath, Byzantine period	Yes	Yes; looting of archaeological site; 2 arrested; more participants; specialized craftsman's work for the creation of the forgeries
29	2341	4 bronze coins, Classical period; 2 bronze coins, Byzantine period	Yes	
30	2328	3,907 bronze coins, various periods	Yes	Yes; 2 arrested; looting of archaeological sites; special casts (1,294) for the creation of fake coins; more participants
31	2368	2 bronze coins, Classical period; 1 marble idol, Neolithic period	Yes	Yes; 2 arrested; more participants; other person with special knowledge for the creation of the forgeries
32	2359	2 bronze coins, Classical period	Yes	
33	2406	5 clay idols, Hellenistic period; 1 clay vessel	Yes	
34	1906	1 bronze idol, Classical period	Yes	
35	1859	2 clay idols, Classical period	Yes	
36	1865	6 gold coins, Hellenistic period; 7 silver coins, Hellenistic period	Yes	

Table 2. Five different categories of objects and the total number of confiscated items

Category	Coins	Category	Idols	Category	Vessels	Category	Marble heads	Category	Jewelry
Classical Bronze	1,284	Classical Clay	27	Unrecorded Bronze	5	Classical	2	Byzantine Bronze	1
Classical Silver	5	Classical Bronze	76	Byzantine Gold	2	Roman	4	Byzantine Gold	1
Classical Gold	2	Classical Marble	37	Unrecorded Clay	1	Unrecorded	1		
Hellenistic Bronze	57	Hellenistic Clay	5						
Hellenistic Silver	904	Roman Bronze	1						
Hellenistic Gold	6	Neolithic to LBA Bronze	1						
Various unrecorded Bronze	3,907	Neolithic to LBA Marble/Stone	4						
Roman Bronze	25	New Hittite Bronze	1						
Roman Silver	15								
Byzantine Bronze	4								

imitations (1,284 bronze, five silver, and two golden); 967 coins were Hellenistic imitations (904 silver, 57 bronze, and 6 golden); 45 coins were Roman copies (25 bronze, 15 silver), and, finally, only four bronze coins (made of bronze) were Byzantine imitations. In addition, 3,907 bronze coins had no further description assigned to them. Idols, made both of marble/stone and/or bronze were the second most common object to be involved in fraudulent activity. In total, out of the 152 idols, 140 were Classical imitations (27 made of clay, 76 made of bronze, and 37 made of marble); five idols were Hellenistic imitations made of clay, and another five were imitations belonging anywhere between the Neolithic period to the Late Bronze Age (one made of bronze, four made of stone/marble). Finally, there existed one bronze Roman imitation and one bronze imitation of the New Hittite period. Out of the eight metal vessels, five were made of bronze with no further description about the period they were imitating, and two were from the Byzantine period and made of gold. There also existed one vessel made of clay, with no further description as to its chronology. Fake marble heads of statues do occur. Of the seven that were retrieved, two were Classical imitations, four were Roman, and one had no further description. For jewelry, which was the least common category for smugglers/forgers, just one pair of items was represented: one was from the Byzantine period, made of bronze, and one was from the Byzantine period, made of gold.

MATERIALS OF THE FAKE OBJECTS

The materials that the forgers used in their efforts to create fake antiquities can be broken down as follows: 5,362 objects were made of bronze; 924 objects of silver; 48 objects of marble/stone; 33 objects of clay, and, finally, 11 objects were made of gold (see Table 3).

PREFERENCES

Even if it is extremely difficult to point to the preferences in antiquities smuggling in general, besides the preference for the small size of the objects,[21] it seems easy

Table 3. Materials used for forgeries.

Material	Total number of objects	Percentage
Bronze	5,362	84.07
Silver	924	14.48
Marble/Stone	48	0.75
Clay	33	0.52
Gold	11	0.17

[21]Sotiriou 2018, 21–2.

enough to spot one special and preferred ancient artifact, namely coins. The Classical period is often seen as the golden period for ancient Greek culture, and, thus, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the fake coins were trying to imitate coins from this particular era. It seems that it is relatively easy or safe for forgers, in their efforts for profit, to copy ancient Greek coins of this period—thus, all told, the vast majority of the fakes were from the Classical period.[22] Moreover, it is the bronze Classical coins that are most often targeted since the ancient city-states all over the Mediterranean minted excellent coins of this material. Since the Hellenistic period was one of great wealth, thanks to the spoils looted from the Persian east by Alexander the Great, the successor kingdoms minted excellent golden and silver coins for their citizens, and, thus, forgers have tried to create more Hellenistic coins made of silver than any other material. Roman and Byzantine coins were too few to reveal what, if any, patterns of choice were operating in this category. Most of these confiscations were made at major tourist destinations, such as Santorini and Delphi; every year, thousands of tourists visit these archaeological sites, and it can be safely assumed that the fake coins were intended to be sold to tourists (see Table 4).

ORGANIZED CRIME

Further analysis, based on the details of these official files, was conducted into the role played by organized crime in these transactions. A thorough examination showed that in at least 13 cases out of 36 (36.11 percent), the crimes had all of the essential details to be characterized as "organized," according to European[23] and Greek law.[24] In many cases, the authorities were unable to arrest all of the participants, and, hence, these crimes were not officially labeled as being organized in the court hearings. A closer examination of the arrest files, however, revealed crucial details, and, thus, here at least they may be termed organized crime cases. These crucial details included the existence of a team for illegal purposes, the allocation of duties among the members, the involvement/corruption of the public sector,

Table 4. Confiscated fake coins in total numbers

Material	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Classical period	1,284	5	2
Hellenistic period	57	904	6
Roman period	25	15	
Byzantine period	4		

Notes: The numbers probably reveal the preferences for particular coins from specific ancient periods.

[22]Dyson 2012, 52.
[23]Calvani 2008, 33–34.
[24]Greek Penal Code 187.

Table 5. Cases with serious indications of organized crime involvement

Case number	Organized crime involvement
1982	2 arrested; other participants
1998	4 forgers
2058	Many participants; public sector corruption; allocation of duties among them; 1 arrested
2095	Small workshop for fakes; big network of participants with allocation of duties; 1 arrested
2098	Allocation of duties; 3 arrested.
2011	2 arrested; 2 more participants; small workshop for fake ancient coins, plus looting
2179	Many participants; different locations in Greece; allocation of duties among them
2182	Looting of ancient sites; connections with other criminal groups in Albania; allocation of duties
2316	Workshop for fake antiquities; many participants; allocation of duties among them
1865	1 arrested; many participants; workshop for fake antiquities
2368	2 arrested; 2 more participants; allocation of duties among them; illegal guns
1906	2 arrested; 1 more participant; allocation of duties among them
1900	1 arrested; 2 more participants; allocation of duties among them

three or more persons participating as a team, profit from the illegal actions, and so on (see Table 5).[25]

SOCIAL PROFILE OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ANTIQUITIES FORGERY

The social profile of the people involved in cases of antiquities forgery was something that, from the very start of this research, excited interest and was one of the main goals of the project since a better understanding was deemed vital. An integrated piece of recent research has already proven the involvement of people with a higher status in antiquities looting activity,[26] so the social profile of the arrested people in cases that involved forgeries was a natural extension and so was subjected to a similar scrutiny. For better understanding this aspect of the research, 10 categories were determined based on occupation:

- business, including businessmen in general, merchants, and jewelers;
- freelance work, including a great variety of occupations such as drivers, hairdressers, bakers, car engineers, electricians, butchers, plumbers, economists, carpenters, coffeemakers, pastry cooks, writers, and sound technicians;
- private sector, including private employees in general, bank employees, and guards;
- public sector, including public sector employees in general, doctors, policemen, university professors, customs clearers, and kindergarten teachers;

[25]Greek Law 3691/2008 on Criminal Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing and Other Provisions.
[26]Sotiriou 2018, 24.

- agricultural sector, such as farmers, cheese makers, small land owners, cattlemen, and small animal industrial workers;
- archaeology and fine art sector, including archaeologists, gallery owners, lithographers, musicians, sculptors, musicians, and conservationists;
- construction sector, including people working in the construction industry, such as civil engineers, workers, construction company employees, excavation machine drivers, gaffers, smiths, real estate employees, and builders;
- maritime activities, such as sailors and fishermen;
- individuals with unknown occupations; and
- other, which included out of the ordinary occupations that did not readily fit the previous categories such as the unemployed, housekeepers, students, and retirees.

It is clear from these findings that there has been a greater involvement of businesspeople and people with a higher status, and probably money and resources, in the forgery of antiquities. However, aside from businessmen, it is quite clear, and, to that extent, interesting, that people from all ranks of society are likely to be involved. People such as students, policemen, doctors, construction workers, real estate agents, public sector employees, freelancers, and so on are all participating in forgery and its promotion. The diversity of the involved people makes the prevention and detection of the phenomenon difficult since the authorities must potentially confront every member of society (see Table 6)!

CONCLUSION

In a financial world of many disturbances, risks, and uncertainties, the antiquities and archaeological artifacts market is a relatively low risk business in terms of investment for *bona fide* buyers and responsible museums.[27] But hundreds of numismatic sites all over the world are selling thousands of ancient coins every year, smuggled out of many countries.[28] Individual buyers are willing to pay great

Table 6. Profession's categories and the total number of arrested persons in each category

Category	Number
Businessmen	9
Construction sector	9
Private sector	9
Other	7
Public sector	4
Agricultural activities	3
Freelancers	2

[27]Gibson 2008, 13.
[28]Elkins 2012, 92.

amounts for such antique objects. The tremendous number of fake objects involved in this one study—6,343—of which the vast majority were coins, highlights that this problem is significant and also has some intrinsic financial magnitude, which would benefit from further investigation. The high percentage of the cases that involved genuine antiquities (80.55 percent) alongside fake ones reveals that it is a profitable action that is attractive to both organized crime members (36.11 percent) and single individuals from all over the social web. Genuine antiquities are the bait for potential buyers, while the fake antiquities provide the real profit for their forgers. The sheer number of fakes is sufficient, if not fully identified, to obscure and distort scientific research on antiquities. Misleading results, as has happened in the past, may be the outcome. In particular, this "coin fever" is responsible for the vast number of fake coins, which this examination makes abundantly plain. Small in size, not so easily identified as fakes by potential buyers, and easy to transport without correct permission from the authorities, coins make the ideal objects to operate in. It is not surprising then that they total 6,209 pieces in the research. By compiling and assessing all of these different aspects from the police files, a unique opportunity to correlate and examine them emerged, shedding some light onto the various aspects of the forging and smuggling phenomenon. The significantly small (or insignificant) penalty for forgery is responsible, in the researchers' opinion, for the large-scale involvement of people from all levels of society. While the forgery of antiquities seems harmless compared to the looting and smuggling of antiquities, the profits accruing from such actions is sufficient to attract gangs and organized crime members and, in this way, can destabilize any society.

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