

THE LEGENDS ABOUT THE HIDDEN TREASURE, THE REASONS FOR DESTRUCTION OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MACEDONIA

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Keywords: archeology, cultural treasure, artifacts, illegal excavators of cultural artifacts, smuggling cultural artifacts, law on cultural heritage.

Abstract: Every nation has its own cultural heritage and is obliged to take care of it from both legal and moral viewpoint. Artifacts are a proof of the existence and of the activities of a nation, hence the interest in their commercialization, usurpation or destruction. Groups and individuals from different social backgrounds have participated in it. Nowadays artifacts from Macedonia are being sold to many renowned museums and other artifact collectors. One part of them is presented as cultural heritage of countries other than Macedonia, in order to conceal the truth about their origin. The inadequate attitude of the authorities in charge, the lack of ideas, of appropriate professionals, projects, the need to change and amend the law on cultural heritage, the building of a national strategy, are the basic drawbacks which generate the continuous destruction of the Macedonian national heritage. Opposed to them are the comprehensive and practical solutions guaranteeing scientific processing of the drawbacks, the prevention of smuggling of artifacts and the illegal excavation thereof, but it seems that the wish to realize them lacks in the global administration besides the offers to put these ideas into practice. Time shall witness in whose interest it all goes.

Introduction

The cultural treasure is the root of a nation or of a civilization. The cultural heritage of certain nations is nowadays usurped and presented unrealistically. It is like a granddaughter pretending to be older than her grandmother and the existence of the grandmother bothers the granddaughter, and the reasons therefore is the fact that the granddaughter has usurped the property of her grandmother and is now afraid from the truth. This is what is happening with the Macedonian culture and history, which is to a high degree intertwined with other Balkan cultures and traditions. It is necessary to separate the truth from the lies, truth can create bonds among nations once and for all, it is necessary to condemn the bad and to praise the good in order to achieve peace among nations. Culture which links and upgrades the peoples has confirmed its role and existence.

It is a pity that what reigns today are lies and a couple of remained legends which may be close to the truth.

Legends referring to hidden treasures have always received great deal of attention, and it can be noticed that such legends abound on locations where wars were fought. Such is the territory of Macedonia and the Balkan in general. Nowadays, when people are faced with economic crises legends are becoming ever more important and the field activities with such purposes ever more frequent. It is a fact that civilizations have existed in these areas leaving an abundance of cultural heritage of which the locations and value have not yet been discovered. The Stone art is of great importance to a nation reflecting its roots and culture. This art is the point where the illegal excavations begin. Scripts referring thereto have been identified, written in diverse languages from prehistoric times until today. If they are properly taken care of, they shall remain in the archives or in private property. But some careless individuals and illegal treasure excavators destroy these scripts thinking that the scripts point only to hidden treasures. They think that if they can not find the certain hidden treasure themselves the secret about must remain with them. About 95% of treasure seekers share such an opinion. According to the data from field inspections and the surveyed citizens, scripts and other objects of stone art have been evidenced as destroyed which has seriously affected Macedonian culture. Figures from antiquity, which could not be taken away because they were fixed on a rock are destroyed. A large part of them have been taken out of the country some of the treasure seekers have commercialized their prey for a certain amount of money, some have received some symbolic

amount, but there is a large number of them who have not received anything in return, or the stolen artifacts were discovered and the criminals were caught by the police. Some renowned individuals or state officials (policemen, military or other authorities) can be found in many of such criminal groups. A large number of police interventions aimed at the elimination of such illegal groups very often achieve only insignificant results because they include police authorities who timely inform the illegal gold seekers and do not organize adequate and professional police interventions. The starting points of the illegal excavators are the old churches and monasteries, taps, springs, specific stones and trees, inscriptions etc. The most frequent scripts are in Bulgaria and they are forged according to old maps and then sold for a certain financial benefit. They coincide with the respective location and there had really been some treasures hidden by the Turks or the Macedonian freedom fighters on some locations, but those treasures were already taken out almost entirely. Only insignificant remaining of the preciously hidden treasures remained on some locations. Such remaining includes empty clay jars etc., which intrigue and incite some people into the idea that some hidden gold can be excavated so the illegal treasure seeking is worthwhile.

Material and methods

The research process included 150 informants who have taken part in illegal excavations and quests, 30 informants were inspectors and authorities responsible for the preservation of the cultural heritage, about 50 locations where there have been some illegal excavations as well as potential locations for future illegal excavations were inspected, 15 locations where important cultural stone art heritage have been destroyed were visited. The destruction was of different scale, starting from minor loss to the destruction of whole churches and monasteries. Such was the case of the destruction of the church in the village of Leshok and the one in the village of Matejche which happened from religious reasons during the conflict in 2001, but there were also some holes dug inside those religious buildings, which reflects quests for treasure. Proof of this are the several legends circulating beforehand related to some vast treasure hidden in those churches.

Those legends have most often been invented by the local people resulting in the fact that such locations have turned into targets of quest for hidden treasure which led to their complete destruction. In one case which happened in the village of Crnilishte, Prilep area, where people thought that some treasure was hid underneath their own old house. Some devices confirmed it but some did not, depending on the level of technology used in the quest. But what is important is that the inhabitants of the house disturbed its static balance and that the house is no more of any use and the quest for treasure has proved to be completely in vain.

The illegal archeological excavations have been frequent since the antiquity period and until modern times. According to the analyses, the excavations performed on one third of the territory are illegal, one third of the territory has been excavated on legal basis whereas the remaining one third of the territory that has not been researched yet.

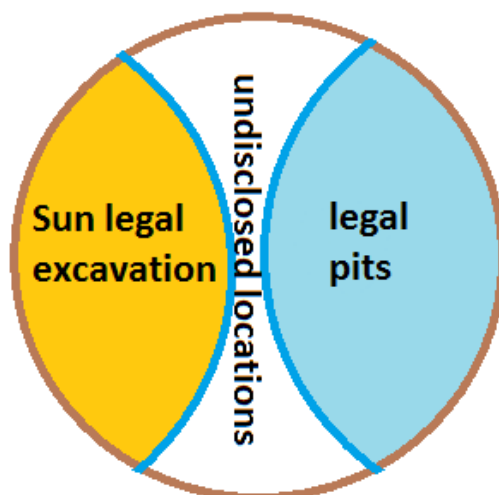


Fig. 1. The relation between the legal and illegal archeological excavations in Macedonia

Scripts

The most frequent scripts originate from Bulgaria and they circulate among of the groups of illegal treasure seekers. One of them is about the mill of Emin the Ashkali and it goes like this:
The mill of Emin the Ashkali

You can reach the mill only on foot. There are seven steps leading to it. The first step is of one half of a millstone. The water on the mill is captured in a carved stone trough through which the water pours into the mill. There is a stone inside the water, and the water flows around the stone. A pair of Turkish scales and a vase engraved in the stone. Beside it there are 18 French gold pieces, and in the vicinity there is a stone as big as a half of a haystack. You follow the water and you will come to a waterfall 58 feet high, its water flows into the blue whirlpool. There are trouts in the whirlpool. Two pistols are engraved in the second fountain... further down there are three tombs..., opposite of them there are aspens and an old vineyard, and there are two tombs on the bare hill. Over the mill there is a stone looking like a chariot from Gabrovo etc...

The enclosed cross

This cross is within a ring. There is a hen with one chick engraved on the meadow, it is in a small cave which is located on a curve. One small watermill can be seen from the cave. In the vicinity there is another small cave smothered with black. A plain can be seen from it. Next to the plain there is a dry ditch. There is an autochthonous stone bearing a sign of a carriage and an inscription saying that it is the carriage of Martin the Priest. Opposite of the watermill there is an eagle's nest closed with bricks. There are two intertwined snakes next to the pathway to the mill. One of the snakes has a cross sign on its tail, the other has no tail at all. You can see a Turkish village from there. In the mill, inside the water, there is a plate in the bottom. There is... There is... left... where people through the garbage, there is... The basket of the watermill has been left on purpose, in its vicinity we left money. Near to the engraved bear there is room for 16 buckets.... There is 110 meters' distance to the bear, and 90 meters from the doe to the stone table. The place where there is the engraved ship is called Kurut dere (wolves' ditch). The three angles of a stone, which is as tall as a man and a half, have been cut off and three golden coins have been placed as a sign. There is a man on the ship, and on the sheet there is something on the hanging scale. Opposite of it there is a stone with a cross. Meters eastward from him, there arekilograms of golden coins etc. etc.

Such scripts with exactly determined names of the locations as well as with stated quantities of treasure, varying from some kilograms until a couple of tons of gold circulate among the population in Macedonia and the Balkans. One can freely estimate that every second adult person in Macedonia has encountered illegal excavators and talked with them on this subject or has directly participated in excavations. Most frequently the scripts include data about the quantity of the hidden gold which varies from one half to several tons. Hence the question: if this is all true and if Macedonia possessed all those quantities of gold, why it has not been invested in weapons and armies, so that Macedonia could be liberated from the Ottoman occupation earlier than it did?

Methodology of evasion of sanctions in illegal excavations.

The most frequent excavations aiming at the discovery of some hidden treasure take part together with some local inhabitant who knows well both the local area and the population. Once the location has been found, the excavations take part at night, or more rarely by day on some strong pretext. In some cases, construction machines are used in the excavations, and the works are monitored by even a local authority. No care is taken about the national cultural heritage in such excavations. All which is dug out, but is not gold, silver or some valuable statue, is destroyed immediately and, if some valuable artifact is found it is immediately offered for sale out of Macedonia. Rumors are still going about a Macedonian artifact purchasing location in Thessaloniki.

Ravishers and destroyers of the Macedonian cultural heritage

The territory of Macedonia is one of the widest archeological location in the world which regions are so intertwined that there is no single square meter of the soil which is not of some archeological importance. Therefore, it is expected that objects of archeological value appear in any geological activity. Nowadays, thanks to modern technology and the data of the world's greatest museums, it is not difficult to discover new archeologically rich locations especially if some of them are located in a small space (treasury or tomb).

Having detected such an important location, the activities aiming at the excavation and transportation start immediately. Interest in such excavations date from the times of the Roman Empire, and their perpetrators were especially invaders of the respective area. The most frequent ravishers of the Macedonian cultural heritage are the following:

- All invaders of Macedonia;
- The Yugoslav People's Army and the secret police of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,
- The peace forces which were in Macedonia before, during and after the conflict in 2001,
- High present and ex officials in Macedonia,
- Ex and present military and police force individuals,
- Some foreign attaches;
- Some local administrations;

- Around 40% of the citizens 5-10% of whom are actively dealing with it;
- National and international companies under the motto of some exploitation project manage to safely perform illegal activities in the destruction of the cultural heritage, carrying it out of the country etc.

Reason, drawbacks and the necessary actions of the state to solve this problem which is not only of national, but also of international interests

Reasons for this phenomenon

There are two main reasons: the personal and fast acquisition of riches, destruction and usurpation of historic and other cultural heritage from nationalistic and other motives.

Drawbacks

There are several factors for the occurrence of the drawbacks, such as:

- Improper sanctions;
- Improper legal, physical and technical protection,
- Improper personnel managing the Ministry sectors, museums etc.,
- Lack of a proper strategy for protection of the cultural treasure including experienced experts,
- The lack of a satisfactory rewarding system
- Cultural education of the population

The following conclusions (presented on Fig. 1 and 2) can be drawn from this analysis:

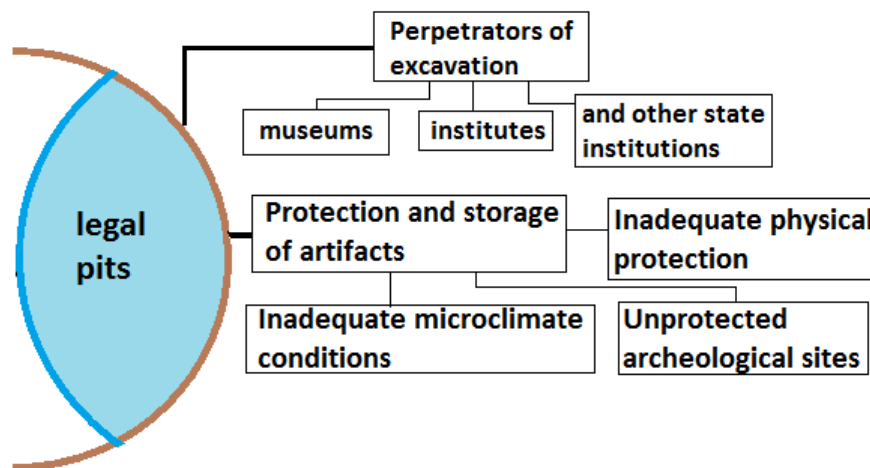


Fig. 1. The fate of the illegally unearthed artefacts

Analysis of Fig. 1:

This Figure represents the institutions which perform legal excavations on archeological localities, which are organized adequately and with the proper expertise involved. The keeping and the storage of the artifacts requires special knowledge and application of appropriate techniques in view of provided the proper microclimatic environment in which the said artifacts will be kept. It is a known fact that certain unearthed objects can deteriorate when they are excavated and come in contact with daylight, different temperature and humidity of the air. This happens upon unearthing of scripts which, as some experience shows, can turn into ashes after they have been excavated. This indicates to special conditions which must be provided for some artifacts in order to protect them. The most frequent necessary conditions are: air humidity, temperature, light, certain chemical substances necessary for each type of material. These conditions must be specified by specialists and supported by technique. Each improper activity involving artifacts can destroy them.

The physical protection of the artifacts is of extreme importance. We nowadays witness fires in monasteries and churches which harbour important artifacts and icons which perish in the fire. Also there ever more frequent ravishing of monasteries and churches which, if not sufficiently protected, are an easy target for the thieves. Thefts are possible from museums as well, by breaking in and replacing the original artifact by its copy, whereas the genuine object is sold outside Macedonia. Some of such burglaries are organized even by the employees of the museums. Depending on the similarity of the copy with its original, the faking or the theft can be detected by expertise and technical support.

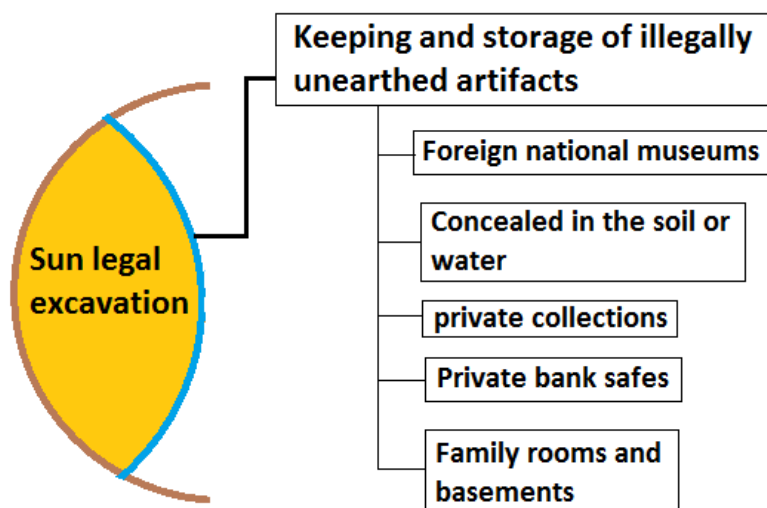


Fig. 2. The fate of the illegally excavated artifacts

Figure 2 represents the fate of the artefacts from illegal excavations demonstrating their final destinations. These researches indicate continuous destruction of the cultural treasures of Macedonia, either with full awareness or due to absence of appropriate intention to protect them. This phenomenon is strongly opposed to the truth about the cultural heritage not only of Macedonia but of humanity as well.

Danger menacing the excavators and the seekers for hidden antiquity treasures

It is a known fact that in the times of ancient Macedonia diverse methods and techniques were used which are unknown in our times. The knowledge acquired from the written documents, legends and the alleged witnesses it is considered that the ancient underground tombs, shelters and treasures are protected by very strong and unusual traps and mechanisms, poisons, poisonous micro fungi, hypnosis etc., and they activate and kill the intruders. Such effect can function infinitely and with unlimited power. These legends can be included in the forthcoming research projects which shall yield additional results.

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