

# THE RECOVERED

# COLLEC TION

Europol's contribution  
to the fight against  
cultural goods crime



# How Europol supports the fight against cultural goods crime

*Archaeological looting, art theft, art forgery and illegal export of cultural goods protected by law are some of the most common forms of cultural goods crime conducted by cross-border organised criminal groups.*

As the EU's law enforcement agency, Europol supports the Member States in their fight against cultural goods crime through the experienced specialists and analysts based in the European Serious and Organised Crime Centre. They provide operational coordination and analysis support to investigating officers in the Member States. Europol's role in facilitating police cooperation is crucial, as networks behind this crime are quick at exploiting opportunities offered by the globalised market. Besides, due to their transnational nature, they are resilient to investigations carried out on a national level.

In the period between 2017 and 2021, operations supported by Europol resulted in the recovery of around 213 700 cultural goods and the arrest of 418 individuals involved in this crime.

Europol also plays a key role in the EMPACT OPC framework, co-leading all the Operational Actions dedicated to the fight against cultural property crime. A key pillar of this is Operation Pandora, an annual EMPACT Action that Europol has been supporting since 2016. Operation Pandora focuses on the illicit trade of cultural goods online, working in close cooperation with experts. In addition to operational support, Europol also works with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders in a multi-disciplinary perspective to establish a joint strategic approach. For example, Europol is a member of EU CULTNET, the informal network of law enforcement authorities and experts competent in the field of cultural goods. This network, set up by the EU Council in 2012, aims at strengthening the coordination between all relevant stakeholders (including non-law enforcement actors) in order to develop a coordinated common strategy.

The support provided by Europol has led to successful international operations such as Operation Taras, Achei, Demetra and Sogno di bimba.



OPERATION  
TARAS

2019 —————> 2022



OPERATION  
ACHEI

2017 —————> 2019



OPERATION  
DEMETRA

2014 —————> 2018



OPERATION  
SOGLNO DI BIMBA

2019 —————> 2021



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## Operation Taras

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Operation Taras was carried out by of the Operational Department of the Carabinieri Cultural Heritage Preservation Command (TPC), in cooperation with the Judiciary Police Section (Carabinieri Personnel part) at the Public Prosecutor's Office in Taranto. The investigation saw law enforcement target an organised crime group involved in the large-scale trafficking of archaeological goods that had been illegally excavated in the Italian province of Taranto.

The main suspect was initially arrested in Germany in early 2020, whilst in possession of several looted archaeological items. By July 2020, authorities had seized around 1 000 archaeological goods through searches at a Belgium address and at antique shops across the city. The main suspect was arrested again, this time in 2021, while bringing a bronze Corinthian helmet to a restorer in the Netherlands. An additional 13 members of this criminal network have been reported to judicial authorities, and further activities are still ongoing in order to ensure the restitution of all looted objects.

01

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### Corinthian helmet

*c. 500 BCE, Corinth, Greece  
Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy,  
date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by Carabinieri  
Command for Cultural Heritage  
Protection and Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 60 000 (2022)

The Corinthian helmet the most widespread helmet type of its age, with observed use across Europe between the end of the eighth to the fifth century BC. However, as a symbol of the glorious past, it appeared in Greek and Roman sculptures well until the 1st century AD. The good state of conservation indicates the helmet was likely found in a tomb context, and being buried in arms was a popular practice among the ancient populations of present-day Puglia and Basilicata in around 500 BCE.

02



## Buckles

*Late medieval era, Italy*  
*Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection and Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 500 (2022)

Belts are a common feature in medieval art. This belt buckle exhibits minute details, and would have been attached to a belt, which were widely worn by both men and women in the medieval era.

03



## Greave

*c. 550 BCE, Corinth, Greece*  
*Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection and Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 6 000 (2022)

Greaves formed an essential part of the armour of a Hoplite, citizen-soldiers of Ancient Greece. Made of bronze and featuring leather internal padding, greaves were designed to protect the lower leg from knee to ankle. In male tombs, the presence of weapons sanctions the warrior virtue of the character, inspired by the great heroes of the Homeric poems.

04



## Part of horse armour

*c. 550 BCE, Italy*  
*Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection and Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 7 000 (2022)

This piece is a segment of a horse's suit of armour, and would have formed part of the protection for the pectoral area of the horse (between the neck and front legs). Horse armour at the time would also include masks and headpieces, and these have been found in prestigious graves of the Magna Graecia area.

05



### Greave

*c. 500 BCE, Corinth, Greece*  
*Bronze*

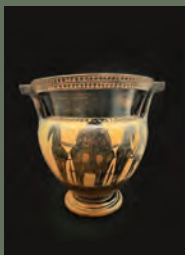
Illegally excavated from Southern Italy,  
date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by Carabinieri  
Command for Cultural Heritage  
Protection and Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 6 000 (2022)

Greaves such as those featured here and in item 3 are designed to protect parts of a Hoplite's body that were not covered by their shields. Still visible are the small holes where leather linings would be stitched in ahead of combat. Greaves would often be ornately decorated, and made to be an exact fit to the wearer.

06



### Crater with columns

*c. 550 BCE, Greece*  
*Ceramic*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy,  
date unknown

Retrieved in Switzerland by the Carabinieri  
Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in  
collaboration with the Swiss police, September 2021

Estimated value: EUR 50 000 (2022)

This object features a frontal quadriga (a chariot drawn by four horses) on one side and four figures on the other. The term crater derives from the Greek κρατήρ, from the verb κεράννυμι "to mix". The name of the vase explicitly refers to its function, which was to mix pure wine - which at the time had a particular high alcohol content - with water.

07



### Equine bit with jointed thread

*500-300 BCE, Italy*  
*Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy,  
date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri  
Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in  
collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 15 000 (2022)

This equine bit, featuring jointed thread in bronze with circular terminations, would be attached to a horse's bridle to improve the rider's communication with the animal. The threaded design makes a lighter and less invasive tool than 'lever' type bits, which were more suited to battle as they give the rider more control over the horse.

08



### Discoid mirror

*C. 350 BCE, Italy  
Bronze*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 1 500 (2022)

This disc-shaped mirror is typical of female burials in Taranto. With a slight convex and distinct margin, these mirrors would be accompanied by containers, mirrors and similar items, and often feature in bathrooms and boudoirs of the day.

09



### Bowl handle

*300-200 BCE, Italy  
Bronze*

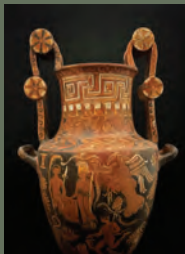
Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 4 000 (2022)

This handle would have been attached to a basin, and is notable for its bird's head termination and the leonine head on its base. These basins had a variety of applications, including for culinary and religious purposes, and were crafted with a variety of intricate details such as those visible in this example.

10



### Nestoris apula with red figures

*C. 300 BCE, Italy  
Ceramic*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 70 000 (2022)

Visible on this item are Nike, Athena and a male figure holding a spear and palm branch. It is also possible to see a satyr in the lower part of the object. The distinctive meander motif with vines and laurels in the upper parts is typical of the style used by indigenous craftspeople. The manufacture of such vessels is believed to have started around the second quarter of the fourth century BCE.

11



## Panatheniac amphora

*C. 300 BCE, Italy*  
*Ceramic*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 50 000 (2022)

Featuring a scene with Nike and a draped female representation, this example of Apulian red-figure pottery sports a high-flared lip, ribbon handles, and ornate decorations featuring a laurel wreath and palmettes. Panatheniac amphorae containing oil obtained from sacred olive trees were awarded as prizes in Athenian artistic and sporting competitions, which took place in the city every four years for the festival of Athena.

12



## Heads of female figures

*C. 200 BCE, Italy*  
*Terracotta*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 6 000 (2022)

Heads such as this are known as the “Tanagrina” type, and they feature various hairstyles and appearances. They are manufactured with the use of moulds, with separate handmade moulds being used for the fronts and backs of each head. These heads would be used exclusively in ritual practices in sacred ceremonies and events.

13



## Terracotta figurines

*300 – 200 BCE, Italy*  
*Terracotta*

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Retrieved in Belgium by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Belgian Police, June 2020

Estimated value: EUR 14 000 (2022)

These female figurines would have been used as votive objects – objects with no practical use that are placed in specific places as a symbolic gift to supernatural forces. They were manufactured using two matrices. In this set, you can observe a selection of hairstyles and both clothed and nude figures.



Operation Tria Signa was an investigation by the Italian Carabinieri – Cultural Heritage Preservation Command (TPC), which began following an interception by Customs Officers at the French-Italian border. After stopping Italian nationals who were driving into France with three statues in their vehicle, the officials decided to check the goods against the TPC database. The checks identified two of the three sculptures as ancient Roman artefacts, and one of the two suspects as Person of Interest (as he had previously been investigated for trafficking stolen goods); however, no feedback was provided for the third statue, fanciulla dormiente (sleeping girl).

The Court of Perpignan remanded the suspects in custody and imposed a one-year sentence, plus an EUR 8 500 fine, for illegal importation of cultural heritage. The works of art were impounded in France. A second check at the end of the investigation identified the third statue, and ascertained that all three statues had been stolen from a prominent Roman family. The cooperation between French Customs and the Italian Carabinieri led to the return of all three statues to their rightful owners.

14



### 'Child's Dream'

Marble sculpture by Arturo Dazzi  
1926, Italy

Stolen from the chapel of a private villa in Rome, April 2006

Seized in April 2006 in France by the French customs and repatriated on July 2021 with the collaboration the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection

Estimated value: EUR 200 000 (2022)

Arturo Dazzi was born in Carrara, Tuscany, and attended the Accademia di Belle Arti di Carraro in the 1890s. He was recognised worldwide, winning prestigious awards in both his native Italy and as far away as San Francisco, where he won awards at the International Exhibition in 1915. There are six examples of this sculpture preserved in galleries around the world. Unlike those other pieces, the work on display presents a different treatment of the polished marble of the body and the unfinished stone that characterises the hair.

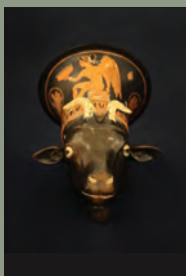




Operation Achei was carried out in Calabria by the Carabinieri – Cultural Heritage Preservation Command (TPC), and mainly focused on three major sites, all within the Calabria region of Italy. The operation uncovered large-scale national and international illicit trafficking of archaeological goods. The criminal *modus operandi* employed initial scouting with metal detectors, before mechanical excavators would be brought on-site to aggressively extract the goods from the ground.

The operation led to the arrest of four suspects, based in the UK, France, Germany and Serbia. A search carried out by TPC in partnership with the London Metropolitan Police led to the recovery of several precious goods, including a bronze Etruscan stamnos and a bronze mirror. A later search in Rome found more stolen cultural goods, including a rare rhyton (precious mug) which featured detailed animal engravings.

15



### Ram-headed rhyton, decorated with red figures

400-300 BCE, Italy  
Ceramic

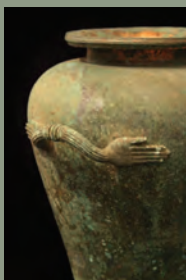
Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Recovered in Rome (Italy), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection, November 2019

Estimated value: EUR 4 000 (2022)

Rhytons were used for drinking wine at occasions such as the symposium; the part of a banquet involving music and dancing, which takes place after the meal. This example features a ram's head and is decorated with red figures and white overpainted details. Two palmettes are depicted on the glass framing an Erote seated on a rock. In Greek religion and mythology, Erotes were a collective of winged gods associated with love and sexual intercourse.

16



### Etruscan stamnos

400-350 BCE, Italy  
Bronze sheet

Illegally excavated from Southern Italy, date unknown

Recovered in London (United Kingdom), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police of London, November 2019

Estimated value: EUR 30 000 (2022)

The stamnos served as a (pure) wine container for the symposium. It was often featured in the tombs of wealthy aristocrats, and could be repurposed to contain the ashes of the deceased. The solid cast handles feature bronze leaf hands with elongated fingers, a stylistic feature typical of the time. Such objects were made between the sixth and fourth century BCE.

17



## Bronze mirror

*C. 5th century AD*  
Full cast bronze

Origins unknown

Recovered in London (UK), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police of London, November 2019

Estimated value: EUR 120 000 (2022)

This bronze mirror features details including a draped female figure on its handle, lions at its head, and a scene featuring a centaur with a hoplite on the back of the disc. These features are exceptional examples of the work produced by artisans in the bronze workshops of Crotona, Calabria. Such mirrors held high social prestige, as they were masterpieces of the day, and would also feature in funeral proceedings before being buried with the owner; this allowed the deceased to continue habitual beauty practices even in the afterlife.



## Operation Demetra

Operation Demetra began following an investigation into a mafia clan active in Sicily. The Carabinieri – Cultural Heritage Preservation Command (TPC), under the supervision of the Anti-Mafia Prosecutor's Office, were able to successfully uncover a large ring of looters who had been plundering archaeological sites for decades. The crime network had been able to sell the goods thanks to a smuggling operation to Germany, where they could procure false provenance documents that would facilitate the stolen goods' sale in legitimate auctions.

The suspects were identified through joint cooperation of the Italian Carabinieri, the Spanish Guardia Civil, the British Metropolitan Police and the German LKA of Baden-Württemberg. The identification of suspects and subsequent action day led to 28 arrests and the seizure of more than 25 000 looted archaeological goods, worth an estimated EUR 40 million. Authorities also seized 191 palaeontological objects, 1 500 fake archaeological goods, and 1 500 tools (such as metal detectors, tools used to counterfeit goods, etc.).

18



## Ointment bottle

*C. 4th century AD*  
Terracotta

Illegally excavated from Sicily, Italy, date unknown

Recovered in Catania (Italy), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection, July 2018

Estimated value: EUR 250 (2022)

This ointment bottle is decorated with a black paint grid, with white overpainted motifs on the shoulder. Such bottles typically contained ointments and perfumed oils, and were generally present in female burials, where they would denote the social status of the deceased. This specimen almost certainly came from a necropolis (graveyard), since it is almost perfectly intact.

19



### Attic kylix in black paint

*C. 4th century AD  
Terracotta*

Illegally excavated from Sicily, Italy, date unknown

Recovered in Catania (Italy), Italy, by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection, July 2018

Estimated value: EUR 300 (2022)

The kylix was a wine cup for Greek symposia, during which it could be used for pouring drinks out as an offering to a deity. This example is decorated with palmettes connected with arches printed on its base, and features a thin relief element on its interior. This type of pottery is mainly found in male tombs, and denotes the social status of the deceased.

20



### Bowl Guttus in black paint

*C. 4th century AD  
Terracotta*

Illegally excavated from Sicily, Italy, date unknown

Recovered in Catania (Italy), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection, July 2018

Estimated value: EUR 350 (2022)

The guttus is a container for daily use as a baby's bottle. This also means it is a regular feature within infantile burials, where it denoted social status. This example has a strigilated body and features an image of the gorgon Medusa. Such imagery implies this particular piece was indeed for funerary use.

21



### Black paint jug

*C. 4th century AD  
Terracotta*

Illegally excavated from Sicily, Italy, date unknown

Recovered in Catania (Italy), by the Carabinieri Command for Cultural Heritage Protection, July 2018

Estimated value: EUR 400 (2022)

This jug is an example of Gnathia ware, a style of pottery known for the extensive use of white paint on dark backgrounds. This example shows great craftsmanship, both in the shaping of the jug and in the painting of the laurel wreaths directly onto the jug. Its good state of conservation implies it most likely came from a necropolis, where it would have denoted the social status of the deceased. Such jugs were typical funerary equipment during male burials.

**In order to support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against cultural property crime, Europol offers a unique range of services.**

Europol is the EU law enforcement hub for collecting, processing, analysing and exchanging information through secure platforms such as EIS and SIENA. Europol also offers operational support for international investigations by crosschecking data received by the Member States, distributing intelligence packages, providing operational analysis and hosting operational meetings. In addition, Europol deploys analysts and specialists on the spot to support ongoing operations and assist Member States in organising joint action days (e.g. operational coordination centre). Finally, Europol produces regular assessments that offer comprehensive, forward-looking analyses in order to give deeper insights into this criminal phenomenon.



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