GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA · MINISTERIO DE CULTURA

DIRECCIÓN GENERAL DE PATRIMONIO CULTURAL Y BELLAS ARTES

MUSEO DE ALTAMIRA

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BRIDGING BORDERS IN HERITAGE PROTECTION

BEST PRACTICE AGAINST ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRIME
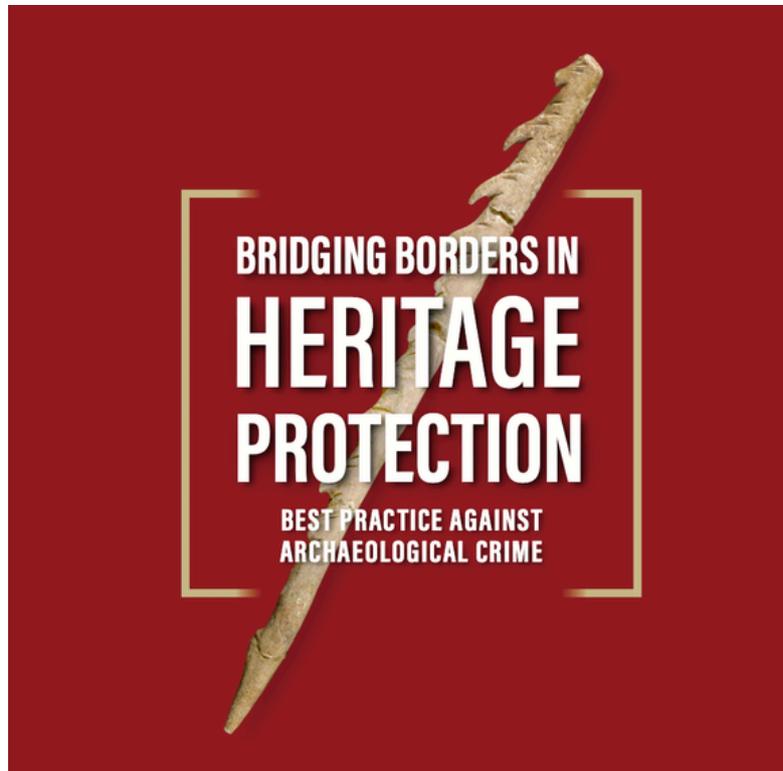
ABSTRACTS

KEY NOTE

Régimen jurídico y lucha contra el tráfico ilegal de patrimonio arqueológico en España (Legal framework and fight against illegal trafficking of archaeological heritage in Spain)

Carlos González Barandiarán, Deputy Director-General for Registers and Documentation of Historical Heritage, Ministry of Culture of Spain.

SESSION 1: JUSTICE FOR HERITAGE: LEGAL IMPROVEMENTS AGAINST LOOTING OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Strategies to combat spoliation vary according to the context and needs of each country. Some nations have opted to strengthen their laws and increase penalties, or to create specialized units to combat looting and facilitate international cooperation for the recovery of plundered property, while others have focused their efforts on education and public awareness. Although a number of legislative tools are available (e.g. Nicosia, Valletta and various UNESCO Conventions), understanding of their role is often low, and the legal tests for proving heritage crime are difficult to meet.

Assessing the damage caused to an archaeological site is a complex challenge that requires a good legal framework and the collaboration of experts in archaeology, law and other specialisms. Damage assessment must consider not only the economic value of the plundered property, but also the cultural, public and scientific impact of the loss. Developing standardized methodologies for damage valuation can help ensure fair compensation and raise awareness of the importance of protecting archaeological heritage.

Please dear lawyers, help us poor archaeologists
Leonard de Wit, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

EU law affecting heritage – how can EHLF help archaeologists?
Tove Elise Ihler, The Directorate for Cultural Heritage, Norway and Chair, EHLF

Strategic actions against archaeological crime in the Spanish National Archaeology Plan
Marta Arcos, Ministry of Culture of Spain

Looting and illicit trafficking of archaeological heritage remain pressing challenges across Europe – Spain being no exception – threatening the preservation of cultural assets and undermining historical knowledge. These crimes not only cause irreversible damage to archaeological and paleontological sites, but also fuel transnational networks of illicit trade. In response, the Spanish Ministry of Culture – working closely with regional governments and a wide range of stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, cultural institutions, and professional associations – has developed the National Archaeology Plan, recently approved by the Historical Heritage Council. This pioneering initiative establishes a comprehensive set of good-practice guidelines for the management, conservation, and protection of archaeological and paleontological heritage. One of the Plan's priority lines of action focuses specifically on combating looting and illicit trafficking. It proposes:

• New operational standards to strengthen cooperation and coordination among all actors involved.
• Foundations for robust, continuous training programmes for law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, and public administration specialists.
• Effective community-engagement strategies to mobilise civil society and local communities in the fight against these crimes.
• Legislative and regulatory updates, including the revision of existing frameworks and the promotion of new agreements and conventions.

This presentation will outline the Plan's strategic approach, highlight its innovative tools, and explore its potential to enhance inter-institutional collaboration, improve professional training, and actively involve society in safeguarding archaeological heritage against looting and illicit trafficking.

Context as a Criteria for Archaeological National Treasures
Patrícia Brum, Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal

The designation of archaeological objects as "national treasures" is a legal mechanism for their protection and constitutes one of the exceptions to the free circulation of goods within the European Union (EU). The EU has delegated in each member state the authority to define classification criteria for their "national treasures," and current frameworks often privilege intrinsic material value over archaeological context. Reorienting what is valued in an object – from its material aspects to the knowledge it contributes about territory and past societies –could be key to valuing objects not as isolated "treasures" but as common heritage that should be accessible to and shared by all. Archaeological context, including spatial relationships, stratigraphic associations, and landscape setting, constitutes irreplaceable scientific data that is systematically destroyed through looting. When "national treasure" legislation focuses primarily on rarity, aesthetic value, or state of conservation, it inadvertently creates a market hierarchy that incentivizes decontextualized extraction.

Objects on the Move: How Loopholes in Law and Market Enable Archaeological Crime: Legal Blind Spots, Criminal Overlaps, and the Need for Integrated Justice Tools in Combating Archaeological Looting
Gábor Virágos, Freelance Archaeologist, Hungary; István Elekes, National Bureau of Investigation (KR NNI) of the Rapid Response Police, Hungary

Illegal metal detecting and the consequent illicit trading of heritage assets remains one of the most pervasive forms of archaeological crime across Europe. While many countries have strengthened regulatory frameworks, enforcement practice reveals profound gaps between legal intent, administrative capability, and real-world behaviour. Drawing on joint insights from law enforcement and archaeological heritage management in Hungary, we examine how the blurred boundary between "ethical" and illicit detector use creates systemic vulnerabilities that current legislation is poorly equipped to manage. Although collaborative or community-based metal detecting schemes exist, practical experience demonstrates that without continuous archaeological supervision and transparent institutional protocols, such initiatives often drift into the grey zone or facilitate the laundering of illicitly obtained finds. We situate these national observations within a wider European context, identifying a number of persistent legal blind spots.

The paper argues that effective justice for heritage requires moving beyond the narrow regulation of detectorists toward a broader understanding of cultural-object mobility, market incentives, and the financial infrastructure underpinning illicit trade. We propose the creation of an International Heritage Crime Database, integrating object data, site-level intelligence, offender typologies, and cross-border trafficking indicators. Such a tool would support damage valuation, improve evidentiary standards, and facilitate cooperation between archaeologists, museums, auction houses, customs authorities, financial-crime units, and police. Finally, we critically evaluate several debated policy options—including state buy-back schemes, prohibition of independent detecting, mandatory provenance certification, and expanded confiscation powers—and assess their feasibility, legal implications, and potential deterrent effect. We highlight that combating archaeological looting demands not more punitive laws alone, but a holistic integration of legal, scientific, and criminological frameworks at least potentially capable of addressing the increasingly professionalized nature of heritage crime.

Who Will Protect Heritage? The Paradox of Legalised Vandalism and the Case of Papoura
Despoina Markaki, Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion / Panteion University, Greece

Across Europe, archaeological heritage protection is governed by a dense network of national legislation and international conventions designed to prevent damage, looting and degradation of cultural assets. Yet, despite this extensive legal architecture, significant heritage loss continues to occur through authorised development projects approved by the very institutions responsible for safeguarding heritage. This paper examines the structural limits of heritage protection frameworks in preventing what is here defined as legalized vandalism: the irreversible damage to archaeological sites and cultural landscapes carried out through lawful, state-sanctioned interventions. Rather than focusing on illicit activity, the paper interrogates how heritage damage is produced within legal and administrative processes, despite formal compliance with national laws and international instruments such as the Valletta and Faro Conventions. It argues that the problem lies not in the absence of legal tools, but in their procedural subordination to development-led decision-making, where archaeological assessment and mitigation are introduced only after core political and infrastructural choices have been made. This form of damage often remains institutionally invisible, as it occurs within the boundaries of legality and is therefore rarely recognised, recorded or addressed as heritage crime.

The argument is illustrated through the case of Papoura, a culturally and environmentally integrated archaeological landscape in Crete, threatened by the installation of aeronautical radar infrastructure linked to a major airport project. While the intervention formally follows established approval procedures, it entails substantial alteration of the site's integrity, spatial coherence and cultural meaning. Papoura thus serves as a paradigmatic example of how authorized projects result in vandalism carried out through lawful, state-sanctioned procedures. Special attention is given to the role of rescue archaeology and administrative approvals as mechanisms that normalise loss by framing destruction as mitigation or "managed impact". In this context, archaeological practice risks functioning less as a preventive safeguard and more as a legitimising instrument within predetermined development trajectories. By reframing vandalism as an institutional rather than illicit phenomenon, the paper calls for a critical reassessment of the capacity of existing heritage protection frameworks to prevent authorised damage. It argues that without structural changes in the timing, authority and enforcement of heritage law, national and supranational conventions will remain unable to prevent forms of heritage destruction that occur within legal frameworks and therefore escape recognition.

ValTArq, a tool to assess the value of damages to archaeological heritage
Ignacio Rodríguez-Temiño, Junta of Andalusia. Némesis. Asociación para la investigación y la defensa del patrimonio cultural contra el expolio y el tráfico ilícito; Ana Yáñez and Juan Martín-Fernández, Complutense University of Madrid; Jaime Almansa-Sánchez, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

As part of the protective measures for archaeological heritage, valuations must be carried out for various purposes: satisfying the right to a reward for by-chance-finds, assessing potential damage, managing imports and exports, as well as acquisitions by public or private entities, transfers in lieu of payment of taxes and other obligations, or establishing insurance policies when artefacts leave the institutions where they are kept. The lack of widely shared and accepted professional criteria on how to reconcile the unique characteristics of archaeological artefacts means that their valuation is often based on discretionary criteria that are difficult to understand because the reasoning behind a particular valuation is not explained. In cases where such valuations affect third parties, this discretion can create legal uncertainty for those affected. ValTArq aims to establish a set of reasoned criteria that plausibly combine the characteristics of archaeological heritage with the factors relevant to the specific case under assessment.

Although most archaeological assets fall outside the scope of ordinary legal transactions, it is necessary to indirectly reference the market value of these assets. Furthermore, research was needed to broaden the framework of cultural valuation and assessment, using appropriate analytical techniques, of non-market values. Altogether, the new tool built from ValTArq offers an easy-to-use guide to calculate the economic value of an archaeological asset for the cases considered above. From a series of items assigned with objective values, the result will be a justified total value that explains the criteria used and the amounts assigned. This presentation will show the process of creation of the ValTArq tool, its value for the protection of archaeological heritage and the general management of archaeological assets. While it has been designed for the Spanish context, the model can be of interest for a wider international audience that could replicate the methodology in different local contexts.

Forensic Archaeology in the Fight against Crimes against Historical Heritage
Francisco José Rufian, The Forensic Archaeology Laboratory of the Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain

The protection of archaeological heritage from looting and illicit trafficking faces significant challenges worldwide, and particularly in Europe. The effective prosecution of these crimes –often involving the irreversible destruction of archaeological context – requires a level of specialization and coordination that is still insufficient. Clear evidence of this is that, from the implementation of the UNESCO Convention in the 1970s to the present day, the same structural difficulties continue to arise in judicial proceedings.

This paper proposes a model of pedagogical innovation based on Forensic Archaeology as a systemic solution to improve the training of key professionals involved in heritage protection: public administration officers, museum professionals, art historians, lawyers, prosecutors, law enforcement agencies and security forces, and – most importantly – archaeologists. We believe that meaningful and effective proposals must be grounded in solid knowledge of heritage stewardship and protection. Although forensic archaeology is commonly defined as the application of archaeological methods to legal and judicial problems, its scope should be broadened to include the investigation and prevention of crimes against cultural heritage. This expanded perspective, however, has not traditionally been adopted by universities and research centres in Spain.

It is therefore unsurprising that scholars have pointed out that archaeologists (and other heritage professionals) often lack the specific legal and judicial training required for this field. At the same time, law enforcement agencies do not always possess in-depth knowledge of the forensic methodologies needed for the proper investigation of archaeological sites. Forensic archaeology should thus be recognized as a distinct discipline – one that integrates social science theory, the rigor of the natural sciences, and both the criminal and civil justice systems – providing the specialized training that this area so clearly demands.

At the Forensic Archaeology Laboratory of the Autonomous University of Madrid, under the direction of Professor Ángel Fuentes, a pedagogical model is being developed and delivered to integrate essential professional competencies: (1) Legal knowledge and judicial procedures: understanding police structures, legal frameworks, the importance of the chain of custody, the preparation of expert reports, and the fundamentals of criminal procedure law. This knowledge enables the effective participation of specialist experts—such as forensic archaeologists—in criminal investigations. (2) Applied scientific methodology: the use of archaeological methods, including planimetric techniques, geospatial analysis, and forensic archaeometry, for provenance studies, damage assessment, and related investigative tasks.

The implementation of this interdisciplinary model at UAM, inspired by collaborative work between forensic archaeologists and professional practitioners, seeks to achieve a significant improvement in the operational capacity of law enforcement agencies and the judicial system as a whole. Ultimately, it aims to maximize effectiveness in addressing legal cases related to cultural heritage, while simultaneously consolidating Forensic Archaeology as a leading reference discipline in this field of research.

SESSION 2: COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

The creation of collaborative networks within and between regions is essential to detect and address heritage crimes in the fastest, most coordinated and efficient way possible. International bodies such as the Council of Europe, the European Union and UNESCO provide a framework of protection of archaeological heritage from looting and illicit trafficking, but collaborative action is needed to underpin this.

Collaborative networks allow for the coordination of operations and implementation of joint strategies, and also promote the training of professionals and the exchange of best practice. They also enable the gathering of data and exchange of information, not just to combat crime, but to demonstrate the harm caused by heritage crime, and the value of combating it, to decision-makers.

Only people who know people can act - collaboration is key
Eva Steigberger, Federal Monuments Authority, Austria

The Austrian Monuments Authority has – beside many others – a department of Moveable Cultural Objects (Internationaler Kulturgütertransfer), that works closely with the archaeology department in all cases of archaeological requests for export (Ausfuhr) of archaeological objects.

In addition, the Monuments Authority has developed a close working relationship with the Federal Criminal Intelligence Service and its department for Kulturgutfahndung, Austrian customs offices and the Austrian Federal Museums for specific expertise. Together, both administrative and executive body are able to locate, confiscate and identify looted objects on Austrian Territory and also to bring those cases to court. Only a close collaboration can ensure such tasks and goals. Both monitor as far as possible, national online selling platforms, international art markets and auctions and interact in identifying seller and/or buyer in order to keep national cultural objects in Austria and also under monitoring of archaeological heritage management.

Looting is a widespread phenomenon in Austria as it is in many other European and non-European countries. Online selling platforms have opened up easy opportunities to buy/sell without much control, as big platforms often decline any information about seller using pseudonyms or aliases. Also, during the pandemic and the following years since 2020, metal detecting grew and a large group either does not know or care about legal regulations. In general, looting archaeological heritage is not considered a crime by the general public and efforts to educate on it or to act on those violations of federal law often lead to nothing. International cooperations prove to be more difficult than expected, especially along the main illicit trading routes relevant for Austria over the Balkans.

A few casefiles such as a Roman face mask, a stone pilar of a temple and Roman military diploma, or specific pottery illustrate, how these collaborations work. The presentation aims also to point out, what is lacking and especially, how EAC might be able to help.

Preserving Cultural Memory through Archaeological Heritage: Continuity and Protective Practices in Western Anatolia

Ozlem Atalan, Manisa Celal Bayar University; Elif Suyuk Makakli, Isık University, Turkey

Archaeological heritage serves not only as the physical remains of past civilizations but also as a dynamic medium of cultural memory, transmitting values and identities across generations. In Western Anatolia, successive Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman layers have created complex urban and architectural contexts, where earlier materials and spatial arrangements continue to influence subsequent constructions. These historical layers reveal both the continuity and transformation of settlements over time.

This research examines key Aegean sites, including Aigai, Teos, Ephesus, and Pergamon, focusing on how architectural and urban continuity contributes to the preservation of cultural memory. The adaptation of temples into churches, incorporation of ancient fortifications into new defensive structures, and the reuse of monumental civic buildings exemplify how communities consciously engaged with their historical environment. Such practices demonstrate that past architectural templates and urban layouts continued to shape later settlements while maintaining symbolic and functional connections to prior traditions.
The study also provides examples for heritage protection and management. Historical practices of material reuse and spatial continuity offer insights for addressing contemporary risks, such as neglect, illicit damage, or inappropriate interventions. These examples highlight the value of considering both tangible and intangible aspects of heritage in developing sustainable strategies. Interdisciplinary collaboration among archaeologists, architects, conservators, and local stakeholders further enhances the effectiveness of such approaches, ensuring that cultural memory is actively preserved.

By examining these Aegean cities, the research illustrates the role of archaeological heritage in sustaining cultural identity and urban character over centuries. The analysis emphasizes the importance of preserving continuity in both material and spatial dimensions while providing practical examples for contemporary heritage management. In particular, the study demonstrates how historical patterns of adaptation and reuse can inform current strategies, offering a model for responsible and informed protection of archaeological sites. This research specifically investigates the continuity of cultural memory in the selected cities, highlighting how architectural and urban identities have been maintained and transformed over time. The findings provide concrete examples for managing these sites today, contributing to a better understanding of how cultural heritage can be safeguarded while maintaining its historical and social significance.

Safeguarding Finland's Underwater Cultural Heritage: Best Practices and Vulnerabilities in the Baltic Sea

Riikka Minerva Alvik, Finnish Heritage Agency, Finland

Finland's waters contain one of the richest collections of well-preserved shipwrecks in Europe, forming a unique part of the Baltic Sea's underwater cultural heritage. These wrecks, protected by the cold, low-salinity environment, offer invaluable insights into maritime history. While most wrecks are open to divers, only six currently benefit from legally designated protection zones under the Antiquities Act. The Finnish Heritage Agency conducts research and implements protective measures, and the Border Guard provides surveillance. Yet these efforts alone are insufficient to ensure long-term preservation.

Persistent threats remain: Individuals continue to damage wrecks and remove artefacts, motivated either by personal gain or illicit trade. Such actions not only destroy fragile archaeological contexts but also erode collective memory and cultural identity. The challenge is particularly acute for exceptionally well-preserved wrecks, which are both scientifically invaluable and highly vulnerable to exploitation.

This presentation argues that innovative, multi-layered approaches are needed to reduce heritage crime. Beyond legal frameworks and professional oversight, broader engagement is essential. Volunteer divers can play a critical role in survey and monitoring sites. At the same time, public awareness campaigns, museum exhibitions, publications, and social media initiatives can foster a sense of shared responsibility for protecting heritage that remains largely invisible beneath the surface. By making underwater heritage more visible and valued, communities are more likely to defend it against threats.

The discussion will highlight Finland's experience as a case study, examining both successful practices and ongoing vulnerabilities. It will explore how citizen participation can complement state-led protection. Examples include volunteer monitoring networks, educational outreach, and participatory reporting systems that empower diving communities to act as guardians of cultural heritage. By situating Finland's practices within the wider European context, the presentation will contribute to debates on innovative approaches to heritage crime prevention. It will demonstrate how combining legal instruments, technological tools, and citizen engagement can create resilient frameworks for safeguarding underwater cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea and beyond.

Together for heritage – 20 years of cooperation in counteracting heritage crimes in Poland
Agnieszka Oniszczuk, Marcin Sabaciński, Zbigniew Misiuk and Agnieszka Makowska, National Institute of Cultural Heritage, Poland

Effective prevention and counteraction to crimes against cultural heritage require stable collaboration between various institutional stakeholders and established workflows. The proposed paper will present Polish experiences in this regard since 2007 onwards. Starting from the level of heritage awareness and the level of law-abiding in Poland, the Authors will then briefly outline still evolving cooperation with the Police, Border Guard, National Revenue Administration, Military Police and the National Prosecutor's Office. In order to ensure wider relevance, they will also explore the challenges and benefits of engaging each of these services in concrete actions for heritage protection. The paper will include practical tips on how to establish and maintain efficient working cooperation and how to adapt to the unfavourable geopolitical situation. To illustrate current challenges, the paper will describe a situation of the antiquities market in Poland, where artefacts illegally obtained and brought from Ukraine have been identified since the outbreak of war in 2014. In fact, recently, the biggest heritage-related criminal cases involve objects from Ukraine.

The Work of the Illegal Archaeology Commission of the Association of State Archaeologists in Germany
Josefine Falkenberg, Archaeological Heritage Office of Saxony, Germany; Mario Pahlow, Lower Saxony State Service for Cultural Heritage

The lecture presents the key tasks and significance of the Illegal Archaeology Commission of the Association of State Archaeologists in Germany. The focus is on its role in combating illegal metal detecting, looting, and the trafficking of illicit archaeological finds in Germany. Illegal archaeology in Germany is primarily associated with the unauthorized use of metal detectors. This uncontrolled search for historical artifacts not only leads to the destruction of valuable archaeological sites but also threatens the cultural heritage. Particularly problematic are the activities of metal detector users, who often work without regard to the historical significance of the sites and irreparably destroy important historical evidence. Other illegal activities even extend into organized criminal groups, causing substantial damage. One example of the severity of the problem is the spectacular theft of Celtic gold coins from the Manching Museum, which illustrates the scale of the illegal trade in archaeological finds.

Prosecuting illegal activities in the field of heritage protection presents major challenges for the responsible authorities. Germany's federal system results in 16 different heritage protection laws, each providing distinct regulations for dealing with illegal archaeology. This multitude of legal provisions complicates the coordinated fight against looting and illicit artifact trading. Within this complex legal framework, the Illegal Archaeology Commission plays a central role. It facilitates the networking of various heritage protection authorities and collaborates closely with other institutions such as the police, customs, and the public prosecutor's office. Another important aspect of its work is educating the public about the consequences of illegal archaeology and promoting constructive cooperation with metal detector users. The foundation for this collaboration is a 2007 position paper that defines the responsible use of metal detectors in archaeological contexts. As a result, many federal states have developed a licensing system that sets clear requirements for metal detector users and regulates their training and activities. An outstanding example of the evolving successful cooperation between archaeologists and metal detector users is the project at Harzhorn, a Roman battlefield, where archaeologists and licensed metal detectorists jointly discover and document historical finds. In conclusion, the Illegal Archaeology Commission, through its coordinating and educational efforts, makes a significant contribution to the protection of archaeological heritage in Germany. It not only promotes the exchange between various stakeholders but also ensures the sustainable and responsible management of cultural heritage.

Collaborative approaches in Luxembourg: the role of the private sector and amateurs in the protection against archaeological crimes
Mei Duong and David Weis, National Institute of Archaeological Research (INRA), Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, the Law of 25 February 2022 on Cultural Heritage establishes a comprehensive legal framework for safeguarding archaeological sites, regulating excavations, and combating illicit trafficking. However, the law is still very recent and is not widely known. Therefore, the protection of archaeological heritage must be a shared responsibility and requires collaboration between state institutions, private actors, and the public. For EAC's 27th Heritage Management Symposium, Director David WEIS and Deputy Director Mei DUONG from the National Institute of Archaeological Research in Luxembourg (INRA) would like to present a paper that explores two aspects of collaborative archaeology in Luxembourg: 1. Collaboration between the State, private archaeologists and developers in preventive archaeology 2. Collaboration with volunteers and metal detectors in Luxembourgish archaeology. By examining these aspects, our paper highlights how Luxembourg's recent legal and practical approaches foster cooperation, address challenges, and propose recommendations for strengthening archaeological heritage protection.

Part 1: Collaboration between the State, private archaeologists and developers in Preventive Archaeology, and its impact in reducing archaeological crime (Mei Duong). Preventive archaeology is a cornerstone of Luxembourg's heritage protection strategy. The 2022 law mandates that all construction projects in designated "archaeological observation zones" undergo archaeological impact assessments before permits are granted. This ensures that potential archaeological surveys or excavations are carried out before development begins. These operations are conducted by accredited private archaeologists. Benefits of collaboration between the State, private archaeologists and developers are: Private archaeologists bring specialized skills and additional resources, complementing state efforts; Shared responsibilities between the State and private sector accelerate archaeological operations and reduce delays in construction projects, as well as archaeological crime.

Part 2: Collaboration with Volunteers and Metal Detectors in Luxembourg – Regulation and Challenges (David Weis). Metal detection is a contentious yet often valuable tool in archaeology and site identification/investigation. Rather than prohibition as is the case in some places, Luxembourg's law regulates its use to prevent looting and ensure scientific integrity, while integrating detectorists in the wider archaeological environment. The use of metal detectors requires ministerial approval. Applicants must demonstrate a scientific purpose for their search, collaborate with INRA, and also complete a training programme on responsible metal detecting. Moreover, manufacturers and sellers of metal detectors must include warnings about legal requirements and inform users on the legal framework. Although Luxembourg's law is rather clearly regulated regarding metal detecting, there are significant challenges: Some view metal detectorists as potential looters, creating tension between different types of amateurs, as well as professionals; As a 'population', some metal detectorists are on principle reluctant to cooperate with state institutions; The balance to be found between strict regulation and an open-minded citizen science approach is not always straight forward; Monitoring and enforcing metal detection regulations, as well as following-up on finds, require significant resources, which may strain INRA's archaeologists. To overcome these challenges, INRA is looking to further develop collaborative projects between State archaeologists and metal detectorists as well as volunteers, by encouraging partnerships and common research projects to conduct supervised surveys, fostering mutual trust and managing incoming data in a more systematic way.

From Informal Networks to Institutional Architecture: A European Competence Centre Against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property
Benjamin Omer, Marco Fiore and Irène Zaitsev, ANCHISE, École française d'Athènes, Greece

The fight against archaeological looting and illicit trafficking in Europe presents a paradox: while individual Member States possess recognized expertise and substantial resources have been invested in protection efforts, the transnational nature of heritage crime demands coordination mechanisms that currently do not exist in sustainable form. This paper examines existing collaborative frameworks, identifies their structural limitations, and proposes an evidence-based pathway toward more effective European coordination.

What collaborations exist and how are they helping? Current coordination relies primarily on three models: law enforcement networks (CULTNET, EUROPOL operations like Pandora IX), international legal frameworks (UNESCO 1970 Convention, Valletta Convention), and time-limited research projects funded through Horizon Europe. These initiatives have demonstrated value—Operation Pandora IX alone resulted in 80 arrests and seizure of 37,700 cultural goods in 2024. However, systematic analysis reveals critical vulnerabilities: dependency on personal relationships rather than institutional structures, geographic coverage that remains uneven, and temporal limitations that create discontinuity in knowledge transfer and operational capacity.

What areas require attention? Three interconnected gaps undermine effectiveness. First, collaboration between law enforcement and cultural heritage professionals remains inconsistent across Member States, with some countries maintaining specialized units while others rely on general police forces. Second, research innovations developed through EU projects frequently fail to achieve sustained implementation—technological tools, methodologies, and networks disappear when project funding ends. Third, civil society organizations and market actors remain insufficiently integrated into coordination mechanisms despite their critical role in prevention and detection.

How could collaborations be extended? Drawing on comparative analysis of successful European coordination models in adjacent domains—including the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre's federated structure and the 4CH project's evolution from research pilot to permanent infrastructure—this paper proposes establishing a European Interdisciplinary Competence Centre for Cultural Heritage Protection. Unlike traditional agency models, this approach combines permanent institutional architecture with flexible, bottom-up methodology that respects national competencies while addressing collective weaknesses. The presentation will outline the Centre's proposed operational framework, funding mechanisms through the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), and concrete implementation steps informed by a decade of European research and field experience in combating heritage crime.

Networking to Address Heritage Crime: Reflections on what worked, what didn't, and where to go from here

Donna Yates, Maastricht University, the Netherlands; Jaime Almansa Sánchez, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Dante Abate, ERATOSTHENES Centre of Excellence, Limassol, Cyprus; *with* Stavros Katsios, Ilir Aliaj, Konstantinos Roussos, Andrezj Jakubowski, Valentina Todoroska, Emiline Smith

The platform that the non-profit SAFE (Saving Antiquities for Everyone) developed around 2010 did not endure; the NETCHER project's platform (Social Platform for Cultural Heritage) was abandoned years ago and is now inaccessible. Our networks exist scattered across some social media (primarily LinkedIn these days), and throughout our own email address books. As such, for a field that knows it needs to develop interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral bonds, our practitioners do not seem to like formal organisation or being told exactly how to network and what topics to network on. In this presentation we will reflect on the role that simple "networking" across disciplines and across competencies has played in shaping past approaches to the illicit trafficking of cultural objects and consider its potential for the future. We will put forward the idea of old-fashioned "put the right people in the room together and give them coffee" as perhaps the most fruitful way to support networking on this topic. While this counters the prevailing trend for a "tech solution" to every issue, it is clear that our field has rejected the tech solutions but we work well with coffee. As part of this we will present the idea behind the new COST Action CPP4ALL (Cultural Property Protection for All) and will also touch on some of the other networking projects occurring in this area.

SESSION 3: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO REDUCING CRIME

The development of clear, shared protocols that are easy to apply in a wide variety of circumstances is essential to protect archaeological sites. These protocols can include new technologies for the detection and prevention of archaeological looting and trafficking, or the training of personnel and systems.

Public awareness is also essential to protect archaeological heritage, to encourage respect and appreciation of the assets themselves, and to educate communities about theactivities that pose risks – intentional and unintentional – to cultural heritage. In this context, the legal status and reporting practices surrounding metal detecting vary significantly across countries, with notable differences in the frequency of illegal activities. Nevertheless, when used legally and appropriately, metal detecting can contribute to improved heritage protection strategies.

In this way, citizen and communities participation is key to the protection of archaeological heritage, according to the Faro Convention essence. Encouraging the creation of citizen networks and volunteer groups can help to monitor and protect archaeological sites. In this regard, many European countries, from very different approaches, have carried out success stories that should be kept in mind and encouraged to be applied in other spheres. Citizens and communities can also play an active role in reporting suspicious activities and promoting good practices, and it is crucial to listen to and take into account their identity demands.

Protecting Underwater Cultural Heritage: Developing Effective Enforcement Frameworks in England
Alison James, MSDS Marine, UK

In 1973 the UK government first created the legislation and policy to protect underwater cultural heritage with the implementation of the Protection of Wrecks Act. Yet, despite these developments, wreck sites have continued to be affected by illegal salvage, looting, souvenir hunting and deliberate destruction. Over recent years this heritage crime has been recognised as a significant threat to underwater cultural heritage; from the large scale looting and salvage of second world war wrecks to bronze cannon removed illegally from sites that are protected by law. As a result, governments, heritage managers and archaeologists are looking at new ways to prevent and investigate marine heritage crime and to tackle enforcement. Until now, the latter has been the weakest part in the heritage management schemes laid out by government and the heritage agencies.

This paper will look at the experience of tackling marine heritage crime in England in terms of prevention, investigation and enforcement. In recent years huge progress has been made including the creation of risk assessment methodologies to enable the targeting of limited resources, community-based approaches for developing and implementing site security protocols, common systems for enforcement and the development of new technology to allow better protection for sites and to enable effective enforcement. The English experience has shown that no one system in isolation can reduce heritage crime alone and that many ingredients need to come together to reduce the rate of marine heritage crime. This paper will use a series of case studies to explore the approach to marine heritage crime prevention, investigation and enforcement in England.

From the Analysis of Vandalism to Social Participation: Developing Strategies for the Protection of Rock Art. Contributions from the National Scientific Committee on Rock Art of ICOMOS-Spain (CCNAR)

Lucía M. Díaz-González, National Scientific Committee on Rock Art of ICOMOS-Spain (CCNAR)

Rock art in Spain, despite its designation as an Asset of Cultural Interest under national legislation, is currently facing a particularly delicate situation. Increasing accessibility to the sites – favoured by advances in scientific knowledge, the widespread use of geolocation tools and, paradoxically, by dissemination initiatives themselves – has led to a significant rise in vandalism of various kinds. This phenomenon calls into question the effectiveness of traditional protection models, which are fundamentally based on fencing off the sites, and demands the adoption of integrated strategies that prioritise prevention, systematic diagnosis and active social participation, in line with the principles set out in the ICOMOS-Spain Charter for the Integrated Management of Prehistoric Rock Art and its Landscapes, promoted by the National Scientific Committee on Rock Art (CCNAR).

Within this framework, the CCNAR is developing specific initiatives that align with the objectives of the congress concerning strategies to counter damage to this highly vulnerable archaeological heritage. First, it is promoting the creation of a comprehensive database on vandalism, designed not only to record the damage, but also to document its context, existing preventive measures, and the responses implemented. This approach will make it possible to identify risk patterns, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and support management decisions based on objective evidence.

Secondly, the CCNAR is promoting good-practice protocols aimed at visitors, guides, and local stakeholders, as well as social awareness-raising initiatives. Among these, the recent Guide to Good Practices for Discovering, Enjoying and Protecting Rock Art stands out. Its purpose is to strengthen the role of citizens as strategic allies in the protection (conservation) of heritage, fostering a culture of shared responsibility.

Furthermore, the committee is consolidating spaces for reflection and knowledge exchange —such as the specialised workshops organised on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of ARAMPI's inscription— which bring together perspectives from research, public management, and conservation. Added to this is the preparation of heritage reports in which the CCNAR analyses specific cases, diagnoses risk situations and formulates technical recommendations, thereby helping to improve both administrative decision-making and the effective protection of the sites.

Between Control and Cooperation: Legal Metal Detecting and the Protection of Archaeological Heritage in Slovenia

Judita Lux and Mihela Kajzer, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia; Ursula Belaj, Criminal Police Directorate, Slovenia

As in many other countries, Slovenia is facing the problem of illegal metal detecting. Despite the Cultural Heritage Protection Act, adopted in 2008, and subsequent legislation, based on the principles of the Valletta Convention, significant challenges remain, such as monitoring of archaeological sites, obtaining poofs of the damage caused, and, finally, prosecution of offenders. These problems have been present in Slovenia since independence in 1991, and reached a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic. Criminal legislation does allow sanctioning of damage or destruction of objects of special cultural significance as well as their illegal appropriation. Despite police efforts, however, in most cases the perpetrators remain unidentified. The consequences of such actions are damaged archaeological contexts and an irreversible loss of information. As over the years the existing legal instruments have proved to be insufficiently effective, it was decided to put focus on systematic awareness-raising of metal detector use through training programmes, which have been regularly implemented by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (IPCHS) since 2022.

The Slovenian legislation stipulates that the use of metal detectors for the purpose of searching for archaeological remains is permitted only on certain conditions: appropriate education or participation in a training programme provided by a competent institution, possession of the permit issued by the IPCHS. Searching activities may be conducted only outside registered archaeological sites. The training programme is a combination of raising legal awareness, presenting ethical principles and standardised documentation of finding, as well as inclusion of users in controlled and lawful practice. Particular attention is given to the search of the wartimes remains. In order to ensure safety and reduce potential risks (discovery of unexploded objects) other relevant institutions have been involved. Our work has resulted in several positive examples, which give us hope that we are making progress and that meaningful change in the protection of archaeological heritage can be achieved through cooperation. We are aware that long-term progress can be made only through sustained awareness-raising of metal detector users and coordinated action by all stakeholders. At the same time, and particularly in the light of comparable practices abroad, an important question arises as to which extent legal and controlled use of metal detectors, supported by clear protocols and training, can contribute to improvement of heritage protection, a more effective information exchange and strengthening of trust between institutions and the general public.

Forensic archaeometry and provenance research: a preliminary study in pottery

Jaime Almansa-Sánchez, Olalla López-Costas, Sabela Balboa-Méndez, Antonio Martínez-Cortizas, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela; Ana Yáñez-Vega, Universidad Complutense de Madrid; Ignacio Rodríguez Temiño. Junta de Andalucía

Provenance research on archaeological artefacts that have been illicitly extracted from their context is one of the main Achilles heels in the fight against looting and the illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. Being assets that had not been previously recorded and are usually seized by law enforcement agencies completely out of context, connecting an artefact with its original site, or the moment it was extracted from it, becomes highly difficult. Indeed, most court cases fail due to this lack of information. While judges require expert evidence to demonstrate provenance, there are not many tools currently available beyond the direct evidence collected by law enforcement agencies.

To address this weakness in the protection of archaeological heritage we propose the so-called "forensic archaeometry" as a potential alternative. Joining efforts between Némesis Association and the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, we have started to test several hypotheses for the determination of a moment of extraction that can be used as expert evidence in court cases. Due to the variability of conditions in which looted archaeological artefacts are recovered and the wide range of possible variables involved, a comprehensive response is difficult. However, ongoing pilot studies aim at proving the feasibility of different methods to determine a possible timeframe for extraction and, therefore, looting. So far, two lines of work are being completed, both focusing on pottery, as the main material available in the archaeological record: first, changes in the geochemical composition that can be linked to time of the extraction and site of origin and, second, changes in the communities of microorganisms living inside the pottery.

This presentation will address the general challenge and the experimental designs we found more suitable to offer possible solutions from forensic archaeometry, including some preliminary results of our pilot studies.

Heritage Crime in England: Advances and Approaches
Mark Harrison, Historic England (to be delivered by Barney Sloane), UK

This paper will provide an overview of some of the positive advances being made in the fight against Heritage Crime in England. Recent advancements in technology and collaborative protocols have significantly strengthened efforts to protect archaeological heritage. Innovative forensic marking products are now used to safeguard metals, such as those on church roofs, and to mark both metal and wooden artefacts on underwater wreck sites. Additionally, satellite monitoring and the increased deployment of drones by police and heritage professionals have enhanced surveillance and deterrence capabilities.

Community-driven initiatives have also played a vital role. Historic England introduced a two-part Heritage Crime Training program for police officers, combining online or in-person sessions with practical research on local heritage assets. Heritage Watch schemes are active across several counties, including Devon and Cornwall, Kent, Sussex, and Wiltshire, with similar programs emerging in Wales under Operation Heritage Cymru. Furthermore, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists has established a Heritage Crime Special Interest Group to foster professional engagement.

Key strategies for reducing heritage crime include leveraging partnerships across law enforcement and heritage sectors. The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Heritage and Cultural Property Crime Portfolio intersects with rural and organised crime, emphasizing the need for cross-county and international collaboration. Legislative measures have also evolved; between 2015 and 2019, the Sentencing Council introduced guidelines addressing theft, handling, and disposal of stolen heritage assets, as well as criminal damage and arson.

Youth engagement initiatives have proven effective, with member of uniformed youth groups participating in heritage awareness programs. The introduction of a 'Heritage Cadet' specialism Volunteer Police Cadets enables young people to record heritage sites and promote awareness. Additionally, integrating heritage crime awareness into undergraduate archaeology, heritage, forensics, and policing curricula is expanding the pool of individuals equipped to identify risks and support prevention and investigation efforts.

Collectively, these technological, legislative, and community-based approaches represent a comprehensive framework for safeguarding cultural heritage against crime.

A digital framework for AI-supported monitoring of cultural property sales online
Dante Abate, ERATOSTHENES Centre of Excellence, Limassol, Cyprus

Illicit trade in archaeological and cultural objects has increasingly moved into the online sphere, where the scale of activity, uneven documentation, and heterogeneous visual material complicate effective oversight. This paper outlines the development of an AI-enabled infrastructure aimed at observing online sales environments and supporting the detection of objects that may be of illicit origin. The proposed approach is conceived as a flexible and scalable solution and is organised around three core elements: automated web data collection, AI-based image analysis, and visual interfaces for decision support.

The first element concerns automated web data collection. Software tools are used to regularly observe selected online sales environments and gather publicly available information associated with object listings, including images and basic contextual details. This process is designed to be adaptable across different platforms and to maintain traceability to the original online sources. The resulting dataset provides a structured and regularly updated overview of online market activity, enabling systematic observation over time.

The second element focuses on AI-based image analysis. Visual material from online listings is examined using computer-vision methods that support comparison with reference imagery from trusted sources. The analysis is designed to work under real-world conditions, such as incomplete views, variable image quality, or visual alterations. Rather than producing definitive classifications, the system identifies potentially relevant visual similarities and assigns indicative confidence levels, helping to narrow down large volumes of data to a manageable set of cases for expert assessment.

The third element addresses data visualization and user interaction. Analytical outputs are presented through a user-oriented interface that allows authorised users to explore aggregated patterns, review selected listings, and observe changes over time. Simple visual tools, such as summaries and timelines, support interpretation while ensuring that results remain transparent and open to verification.

Combined, these elements allow the infrastructure to operate as an early warning mechanism, offering authorities and heritage professionals timely indications of potentially high-risk online activity and supporting quicker, better-informed responses to protect archaeological heritage.

Challenges of Managing the Metal Detecting Hobby in Estonia. 15 years later.
Ulla Kadakas, Estonian History Museum, Nele Kangert, National Heritage Board, Tuuli Kurisoo, Tallinn University, Estonia

After the restoration of independence in 1991 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, metal detectors reached the Estonian market quite quickly. Metal detecting became a popular hobby, though finds rarely reached the National Heritage Board and cases of looting and illicit sales were recorded. Following extensive debate, the Heritage Conservation Act was finally amended in 2011, recognizing that banning the hobby was unrealistic. Instead, Estonia chose to involve detectorists: after training and registration, they were legally allowed to search and required to report their finds.

Today, 15 years later, there are around 1000 registered metal detectorists in Estonia. Each year, thousands of finds are reported, hundreds of new sites discovered. The National Heritage Board integrates this data into archaeological management and spatial planning, while archaeologists collaborate with detectorists and involve them in research. Licensed hobbyists also monitor online sales, reporting suspicious cases. The strong community oversight has made licensed detectorists valuable partners in safeguarding cultural heritage.

However, the amendments to the law also created major challenges for heritage management. In addition to registering detectorists' activities, expert assessments of finds and sites must be carried out quickly and efficiently. Yet the number of archaeologists and available funding has not kept pace with the growth in licensed searchers and reported finds, resulting in slow feedback. This delay risks weakening hobbyists' trust in the state and undermining the collaborative framework designed to protect cultural heritage.

Although the NHB is seeking solutions, closer collaboration with academia is essential to effectively address these challenges. Some research projects have already been working on the topic of finds and sites of hobby searchers in the last 5 years. For example, an atlas of finds has been created for expert assessments (project MetDect - https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101003387). At the moment, the research and development project KUMTA-4 of the Ministry of Culture is studying the main search areas of metal detectorists – ploughed arable land – in order to find out whether and to what extent the cultural layer of different types of sites has been preserved in situ on the fields. One of the main goals of the project is to prepare a sufficient and suitable methodology for conducting initial expert assessment of such sites.

Addressing Heritage Crime in the Czech Republic: The Role of Participatory Archaeology
Robert Antal, Institute of Archaeology of the CAS, Czechia

Metal detecting represents one of the most significant challenges to archaeological heritage protection in the Czech Republic. In this area, the Czech Republic has avoided the extremes of both full liberalization and strict criminalization, instead relying on a balanced approach that combines legal restrictions with citizen participation on archaeological research. This paper reports on the current state and practical functioning of this system.

The contribution introduces the role of the Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic – Portal for Amateur Collaborators (AMČR-PAS) as a soft-tool for reducing illegal activities. A quantitative data analysis demonstrates a decline in the number of finds reported on unofficial detectorist platforms following the launch of the AMČR-PAS. From this evidence, it can be deduced that the AMČR-PAS system functions as a tool for registration, prevention, and education. Together with regional projects, it successfully channels a portion of the public towards legal collaboration, while simultaneously deterring others from illegal actions.

The observed phenomena confirm the authors' research, which indicates that extreme solutions—such as singular reliance on criminalization or liberalization—are ineffective on their own. Instead, effective crime reduction is achievable only through a balanced representation of both restrictive and participatory elements. Consequently, the paper details the concrete impact of the AMČR-PAS on enforcement practice, specifically in distinguishing between cooperating citizens and those acting unlawfully.

Finally, the paper identifies two main deficiencies in the current state of affairs. A key problem is the absence of explicit legal backing for the AMČR-PAS system, which reduces its enforceability, limits its potential for widespread implementation, and consequently diminishes its overall effectiveness. A further deficiency is the overall absence of comprehensive regulation of the issue in Czech legislation (e.g., vague or unspecific definition of an archaeological find, absence of a definition for archaeological research and its methods, and a lack of clear rules for public activity). This complicates the interpretation of the law for both the lay and expert communities, and consequently hinders practical application.