

Romanian police seize stolen archaeological treasures

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An employee of Romanian National History museum shows a golden coin in Bucharest on November 8, 2013

Romanian police have seized gold coins and a treasure trove of statues which are over 2,000 years old allegedly stolen from archaeological sites and destined for auction, prosecutors said Monday.

Three golden [coins](#) minted under the Dacian King Koson, 1,050 ancient silver coins, as well as 102 metal objects and 12 vases and ceramic statuettes were seized last week in raids on an auction house and three people claiming to be collectors, they said.

"At least some of these objects come from treasures stolen from protected [archaeological sites](#)," prosecutor Augustin Lazar, in charge of the investigation in Alba Iulia, central Romania, told AFP.

He said some of the pieces are so rare that it difficult to put a value on them.

Unless they are part of known collections which date back generally to the 19th century, "these objects cannot have been acquired legally, something of which their owners could not be ignorant," he said.

"We are not surprised that thieves try to put such objects up for auction," trying to "launder" them, Lazar added.

Numerous precious coins, mostly coming from illegal archaeological digs, have been found recently thanks to "systematic surveillance of the websites of Romanian and foreign auction houses," a [police](#) source told AFP.

Items seized last week will be examined by experts at Romania's national Historical Museum, who will decide on a case-by-case basis if they should be confiscated or returned to their owners, said Lazar.

He said it was too early to say if or when items could be put up for auction.

The Artmark auction house, targeted in the raids, said it had told police and the ministry of culture in advance of its plans to organise sales of

objects which could be part of the country's national heritage, but had not received a reply.

"By offering the police our full support for a proper investigation, we hope to be able rapidly to resume our legal activities," Artmark said in a statement.

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