



AiA News-Service

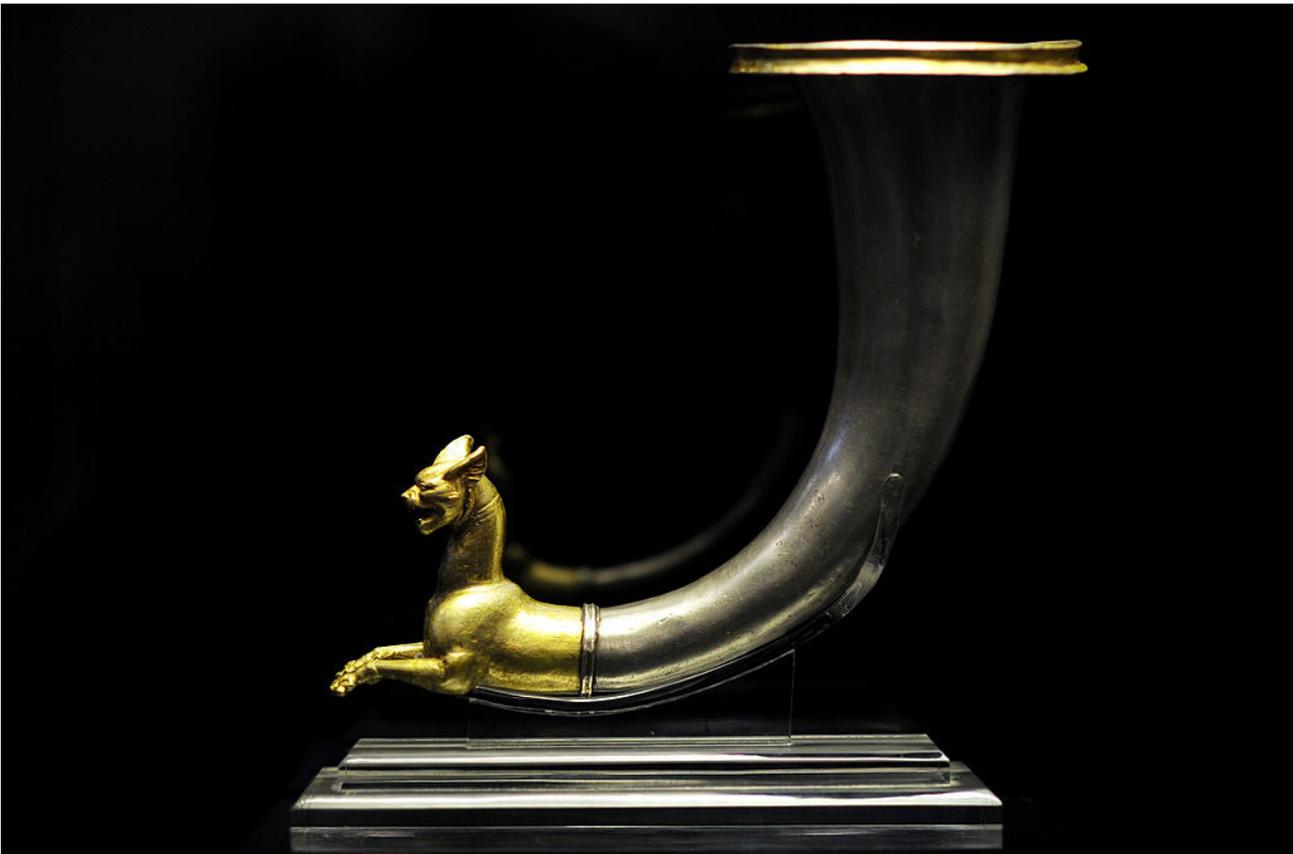
**artnet**<sup>®</sup> news

Art and Law

## A Gaming Billionaire's Questionable Trove of Ancient Artifacts Is Raided by Bulgarian Authorities

Vasil Bojkov has been detained in Dubai following charges filed against him.

**Amah-Rose Abrams**, February 3, 2020



Ancient Thracian silver with applied gold Rhyton (drinking horn) dating to the 4th century BC, seen at the “Thrace and the ancient world” exhibition of a private collection organized by the Thrace Foundation at the National museum of history in Sofia, 2011. Photo: Dimitar Dilkoff /AFP via Getty Images.

Bulgarian authorities have seized assets belonging to gaming billionaire Vasil Bojkov, including items from his collection of more than 3,000 ancient artifacts housed at the Thrace Foundation, which he founded in 2004. Bojkov himself has also been detained in Dubai.

In a dramatic move, Bulgaria’s prosecutor general filed charges against Bojkov in absentia on January 29 for alleged offenses that include leading an organized crime group, extortion, coercion, blackmail, and attempted bribery of an official.

The Thrace Foundation posted a statement on Facebook on January 31 claiming that the items had been seized on false pretenses. “We are reaching [out] to you with troubling news about an unprecedented violation against world cultural and historical heritage, taking place in Bulgaria right now,” the statement reads. “We are facing a blatant violation of the law regarding the priceless objects from the Vasil Bojkov Collection without any legal justification.”

The statement also claims that the objects taken by the Bulgarian authorities have been mishandled and packed in a way that could damage them.

“The authorities are attempting to seize fragile and unique works of art in plastic bags,” it reads. “Such barbaric behaviour and deliberately demonstrative acts toward the priceless cultural and historical heritage of Bulgaria are not only unprecedented but also deprived of the simplest understanding of the significance of these objects.”

The prosecutors office in Bulgaria denies the allegations, saying that nine staff from the National Museum of History in Sofia are dealing with the seized items, according to the [ARCA](#) blog.

Bojkov’s collection includes more than 3,000 items dating from 6,000 BCE up to the sixth century from the Greeks, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Bulgars, and the Thracians.

The artifacts amassed by the billionaire are widely believed to be of questionable origins. Indeed, in 2007 he tried to stage an exhibition at the European Parliament in Brussels titled “The Grandeur of Bulgaria” to celebrate the country’s admission to the European Union, but it was shut down amid protests over the provenance of the collection.

Bojkov, thought to be Bulgaria’s richest man, owns stakes in many of the country’s gaming and lottery companies but has long been believed to be involved in organized crime such as money laundering, extortion, illegal antique dealing, and racketeering.

He claims that the government is trying to take over his business as the authorities have already made moves to take control of their lottery in which he has a stake, shutting out private investors in order to improve tax collection.

“Until a court decision, none of the completely random charges against me is proven,” Bojkov said on Thursday in a statement to [Bloomberg News](#), in which he also claimed he and his businesses have paid all necessary taxes.

Bulgarian authorities are preparing an extradition request for him to return from the UAE to face charges, however there is currently no extradition treaty between the two countries.