

IDENTIFICATION OF THE ART OBJECTS STOLEN FROM THE PELES CASTLE

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ABSTRACT: Popescu Florin-Stelian had been working as a custodian at the National Peles Castle Museum, in Sinaia city until November 13th, 1994, when he was arrested for the theft of several art objects, which were part of the national cultural treasure, from the above mentioned museum. He was accused for stilling four paintings representing scenes from the mythology. During crime scene investigation, on the empty frames hanging still on the wall, there were discovered several fingerprints of the defendant, Popescu Florin-Stellan. He stated that the presence of his fingerprints was the result of his research job that he carried out in that room one month prior the incident, what involved moving the paintings.

KEY WORDS: Robbery; Art objects; Castle; Fresh fingerprints.

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In 1873, Prince Carol of Hogenzollern-Singmaringen, who had come to Romania's throne in 1866, started the building of the Peles Castle in Sinaia city, on a place known as "the Burnt Stones". The place chosen by the Prince for his castle was isolated but picturesque, what probably attracted it mostly. Carol had came for the first time to Sinaia on August 5–6, 1866, when he had been sheltered at the local monastery, erected by Michael Cantacuzino in 1695. In 1872 the monarch bought the land (1 000 acres) and asked the architect Wilhem Doderer, of German origin and school, to draw up the plans for the future residence. Building operations started in the autumn of 1873, but the foundation stone of the castle was placed later, on August 22, 1875. After 1876 the works at the Peles Castle were entrusted with the architect Johannes Schultz, Doderer's assistant. It was easier to convince him to change the initial plans of the castle. On October 7, 1883 the official inauguration took place. That was the date when the first building stage of the Peles Castle was practically ended, and other operations would be started, immediately. The Peles Castle was transformed and enlarged, attaining its present day shape only in 1914. The characteristic features of the exterior architecture are specific to the German Neo-Renaissance style: vertical and slim sharp profiles, irregular shapes, fragmented compositions

Fig. 1. 16 identification elements from crime scene fingerprints.

of the facades, asymmetry of the buildings, abundance of carved wood and decorative elements.

Popescu Florin-Stelian had been working as a custodian at the National Peles Castle Museum, in Sinaia city until November 13th, 1994, when he was arrested for the theft of several art objects, which were part of the national cultural treasure, from the above mentioned museum.

During the month of October 1994, the defendant, taking advantage of his job and of his good reputation among museum's employees (he was a former senator from a past legislation), had stolen from a storage room several

Fig. 2. 16 identification elements from Popescu Florin-Stelian's right thumb's prints.

art objects. Among them there was a sculpture representing the "Madonna with the holly Child", crafted by Rene Lalique in the first quarter of the 20th century, to be precisely in 1920.

After he managed to leave the museum's premises with the sculpture, he took it home, and several days later he asked a local photographer to take a few pictures of the statue so he could show them to possible buyers.

On October 27th, 1994, Popescu Florin-Stelian travels to United Kingdom on a tourist voyage, selling the piece in an antique's store for 30 000 British pounds.

In the morning of November 11th, 1994, around 8.15 a.m., the defendant was inside the Peles Museum, and because it was the pay day and most of his colleagues were in the administration offices to pick up their pay cheque, he went into the room called the “Rococo bedroom”, and managed to still four paintings representing scenes from the mythology: “The death of Socrates”, “Orpheus and Euripides”, “Prometheus stilling fire”, “Venus and Adonis”. All of them were a part of the Italian painter’s work, Giovanni Batiste Tiepolo. After taking the pictures off the frames, he rolled them and placed them under his long leather jacket, and left the museum noticed by nobody. Then, he hid the paintings in one of his neighbour’s dungeon, without his prior approval, and he planned to sell them also in United Kingdom.

The total value of the four paintings is approximately 80 000 USD. All of them were recovered in good state by the police and returned to the Peles Castle. The defendant pleaded guilty to all charges, although at the beginning of the investigation he motivated his actions as an attempt to prove the lack of security measures at the museum.

During crime scene investigation, on the empty frames hanging still on the wall, there were discovered several fingerprints of the defendant, Popescu Florin-Stellan. He stated that the presence of his fingerprints was the result of his research job that he carried out in that room one month prior the incident, what involved moving the paintings.

On the table inside the “Rococo bedroom” there were also revealed four other prints, two partial fingerprints and two partial palmprints, but all four were inconsistent and inconclusive to make a positive identification. On one frame there were discovered three fragments of fingerprints that could not be processed due to lack of identification elements.

Despite of these, on the frame located first on the right wall from the door two clear fingerprints were revealed with yellow fluorescent pigment, one of them on the left bottom side of the frame, and the other on the right middle side, as you look at the frame from behind. These prints were discovered at the first brush, the yellow fluorescent pigment added very well to the frame and revealed clearly the fingerprints. Both prints were dust free and looked very “fresh” when compared with the others. After processing them, a perfect match was established between them and the defendant’s fingerprints.

Figure 1 and 2 let us compare the 16 identification elements found on the crime scene fingerprints and Popescu Florin-Stelian’s right thumb’s prints.

Popescu Florin-Stelian was convicted for aggravated theft to 5 years in prison without parole.