

UDC 904 (0.028.3)(477) (091)



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## **DAMAGE TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE SITES IN UKRAINE: HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE AND PRESENT**

### **Summary**

*The article presents a comprehensive scientific study of the state of legal protection of the archaeological heritage of Ukraine in historical retrospect and at the current stage, particularly in the context of the challenges posed by the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation. The relevance of the topic is driven by the critical condition of preserving Ukraine's non-renewable archaeological resources. Despite significant historical experience in the formation of archaeological science, the modern system of protecting these sites demonstrates serious gaps.*

*The main body of the work provides a detailed retrospective review of the development of archaeological science in Ukraine, starting from the initiatives of Petro Mohyla and the first systematic excavations of ancient cities in the Black Sea region during the 18th and 19th centuries. The author analyzes quantitative indicators of*

*archaeological heritage, noting that nearly half of Ukraine's immovable cultural heritage sites are archaeological monuments, a significant portion of which remain unstudied or hold the status of newly discovered objects.*

*Based on the analysis of materials from the Unified State Register of Court Decisions, the author examines offenders through typological categories: «black diggers», «agrarians», and «metal hunters». Through the examination of specific court verdicts (notably in Kirovohrad, Cherkasy regions, and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), serious systemic problems in law enforcement activities are identified. It is proven that the number of actual convictions is negligible compared to the factual scale of site destruction.*

*The conclusions of the article emphasize the necessity for systemic reform of the sector: from completing the formation of the State Register of Immovable Monuments to implementing strict control over the metal detector market and online auctions. The author concludes that the effective protection of archaeological heritage is only possible through increased criminal liability, the establishment of effective cooperation between archaeological scientists and law enforcement agencies, and overcoming inertia in the field of cultural property accounting.*

**Keywords:** *archaeological heritage, judicial practice, cultural heritage, «black diggers», «agrarians», «metal hunters», protection of monuments, kurgans (burial mounds), criminal liability.*