



FAQ – Frequently asked questions regarding the application of the CPTA

A. General information: import, export and transit of cultural property

The Federal Act on the International Transfer of Cultural Property (CPTA, SR 444.1) and its associated implementing Ordinance (CPTO, SR 444.11) entered into force on 1 June 2005. They implement the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO Convention of 1970, SR 0.444.1) in Swiss federal law.

The CPTA regulates the import of cultural property into Switzerland, its transit and export as well as its repatriation from Switzerland. With this Act, the Swiss Confederation aims to make a contribution to the maintenance of the cultural heritage of mankind and prevent theft, looting, and illicit import and export of cultural property (Art. 1 CPTA).

Since entry into effect of the CPTA, the import, export or transit of cultural property must be specifically declared as such to the Swiss customs authorities (Art. 25 CPTO). The arrival of cultural property at customs storage facilities (duty-free warehouses) is deemed an import within the meaning of the CPTA (Art. 19, para. 3 CPTA). Moreover, the warehouse keeper is required to take inventory of all sensitive goods stored in the warehouse (Art. 66 Customs Act, CustA, SR 631.0 and Art. 182 ff. Customs Ordinance, CustO, SR 631.01). In accordance with item 14, Appendix 2 CustO, cultural property within the meaning of Art. 2, para. 1 CPTA is deemed “sensitive”.

In customs assessment procedures, the principle of self-declaration applies, according to which the person required to file a declaration bears responsibility for the lawful and accurate declaration of the movement of goods across borders (Art. 18, 21, 25 and 26 CustA, SR 631.0). The principle of personal responsibility applies to persons engaged in the movement of goods and persons over customs borders (Federal Gazette 2004 606, German Edition). It is therefore required that each object be inspected individually by the person bound by the obligation to register to determine whether it is cultural property.

Whoever imports, transits or exports cultural property must provide the following information at the customs declaration (Art. 25 CPTO):

- the **type of object**
- as detailed a description as possible on the **place of manufacture**, or if the result of archaeological or palaeontological excavations, the **place where the cultural property was found**
- information on whether the object was exported from a contracting state (UNESCO Convention of 1970) whose laws require a **permit** for an export. If so, the export permit, must be presented to the Swiss customs authority.

The Swiss customs authorities control the import and export of cultural property at the Swiss border. Customs clearance (tariff number, etc.) is carried out in accordance with the provisions of federal customs legislation (Art. 19 CPTA and Art. 23 CPTO).



False declaration as well as illicit export or import is punishable by law (Art. 24 CPTA).

B. FAQ – Frequently asked questions

1. What is the definition of “cultural property”?

All rights and obligations stemming from the CPTA are based in the definition of cultural property given in Art. 2, para. 1 CPTA. The following checklist helps to determine whether an object is deemed cultural property and should be completed according to the principle of self-declaration. To determine whether an object is cultural property, the following questions must be answered. If both questions are answered “yes”, the object is cultural property.

Does the object belong to one of the categories listed in the 1970 UNESCO Convention?	Yes	No
• rare collections and specimens of fauna, flora, minerals and anatomy as well as objects of palaeontological interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• property relating to history, including the history of science and technology, military and society history, to the life of national leaders, thinkers, scientists and artists and to events of national importance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• products of archaeological excavations (including regular and clandestine) or of archaeological discoveries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• elements of artistic or historical monuments or archaeological sites which have been dismembered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• antiquities more than one hundred years old, such as inscriptions, coins and engraved seals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• objects of ethnological interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• property of artistic interest such as: pictures, paintings and drawings produced entirely by hand on any support and in any material (excluding industrial designs and manufactured articles decorated by hand); original works of statuary art and sculpture in any material; original engravings, prints and lithographs; originals of artistic assemblages and montages in any material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• rare manuscripts, incunabula, old books, documents and publications of special interest (historical, artistic, scientific, literary, etc.) singly or in collections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• postage, revenue and similar stamps, singly or in collections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• archives, including sound, photographic and cinematographic archives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• articles of furniture more than one hundred years old and old musical instruments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

↓
Not cultural property

II. Is the object significant for one of the areas listed in Art. 2 para. 1 CPTA? (see question 2)

	Yes	No
• archaeology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• pre-history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• literature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• science	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

↓ ↓
Cultural property Not cultural property

2. When is an object “significant” within the meaning of Art. 2 para. 1 CPTA?

Whether cultural property is deemed significant, and in which context, is subject to fluctuations and differences in perception. The question can be answered only under due consideration of the society’s cultural heritage to which an object belongs and in the given context. The current state of scholarly discourse in the discipline in question is also a factor in the decision (cf. [Federal Council Dispatch \(in German\)](#) p. 572 ff.).

According to the parliamentary deliberations regarding the CPTA, archaeological objects are deemed significant and the OFC implements this will of the legislator. Since entry into force of the CPTA on 1 June 2005, this practice has been confirmed by numerous judicial decisions and corresponds to the purpose of CPTA. With this Act, the Confederation desires to make a contribution to the maintenance of the cultural heritage of mankind and prevent theft, looting, and illicit import and export of cultural property, which particularly concerns archaeological objects. Archaeological cultural property must therefore be declared as such at the Swiss border. In the case of illicit import as well as failure to declare or a false declaration of cultural property, it is impossible to make an adequate and risk-adjusted assessment of an object, which in turn endangers cultural heritage and infringes on the purpose of CPTA.

An object is furthermore deemed significant if:

- it is exhibited or worthy of exhibiting in a museum;
- its loss would represent a loss to the cultural heritage;
- it is of public interest;
- it is relatively rare;
- it is mentioned in specialised literature;
- ... (list not exhaustive)

3. Are there examples of objects that have been deemed cultural property?

Yes, the following link provides examples of cultural property:

<https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/en/home/cultural-heritage/transfer-of-cultural-property/what-is-considered-cultural-property-under-the-federal-act-on-th.html>

The following chart shows a selection of objects which have been treated as cultural property by judicial decisions; these objects were confiscated and returned to the country of origin. More information on restitutions is provided via the following link:

<https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/en/home/cultural-heritage/transfer-of-cultural-property/news---media-releases/news---media-releases-2015-2019.html>

Image of object	Description	Origin	Restitution
	Byzantine solidus, 7th century CE and sesterce of Diva Faustina, 2nd century CE	Serbia	23 April 2017
	Jug, balsa-wood vessel, bowl with base and fragment of a female torso, 6th century BCE	Italy	11 July 2016

	<p>Head of a king, Ancient Egypt, New Kingdom, 18th–19th Dynasty</p>	<p>Egypt</p>	<p>1 June 2015</p>
	<p>Two Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets, 3rd to 1st century BCE</p>	<p>Iraq</p>	<p>23 November 2015</p>
	<p>Terracotta statue from the Han Dynasty, around 200 BCE</p>	<p>China</p>	<p>11 December 2014</p>

4. Does the FOC provide an expert opinion on whether an object is cultural property and must be declared?

The Specialized Body for the International Transfer of Cultural Property provides information on issues of the transfer of cultural property to interested parties (Art. 18 CPTA). It can provide general information on the provisions of the Cultural Property Transfer Act; it does not, however, offer advice on declaring individual objects. In customs procedures, the principle of voluntary declaration applies. This includes responsibility for the lawful and accurate declaration of the movement of goods across borders (Art. 25 ff. CustA).

5. Does the FOC provide an expert opinion on the financial value of cultural property?

To determine the financial value of cultural property, a private expert must be consulted. The Specialized Body for the International Transfer of Cultural Property provides no expert opinions.

6. What is the definition of the terms: origin, provenance, dispatching country, export country etc.?

The meaning of these terms depends on the context in which they are used. An absolute definition for the expressions is therefore not always possible; to understand them correctly, their context must be given due consideration. The following chart offers a frame of reference for using the terms (list not conclusive).

Context	Usage
CPTO	According to CPTO, origin or provenance of cultural property is, in principle, the place an object was manufactured or found.
Customs offices	In customs declaration, a difference is made between the terms “origin” and “dispatching country”. Origin refers to the country where an object was entirely obtained or manufactured or where its last significant processing took place. Dispatching country refers to the country from which an object was sent to the Swiss customs territory (art. 10 “Verordnung über die Statistik des Aussenhandels”, SR 632.14)
Museums	Within the context of museums, “origin” refers to the provenance, which also describes the ownership of an object (cf. ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums): https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf

Note: The definition of a term may also differ according to the language used. For instance, the German term “Provenienz” and the French term “provenance” may be translated or described differently.

7. What “statistical key” should be used when registering cultural property at customs?

911	If an object is exported from a signatory state of the UNESCO Convention of 1970 (see link below) and this country requires an export permit.
912	If an object is exported from a signatory state of the UNESCO Convention of 1970 (see link below) and this country does not require an export permit.
913	If an object is exported from a state that is not a signatory of the UNESCO Convention of 1970.

The current list of states that have ratified the UNESCO Convention of 1970 can be found via this link:
<http://www.unesco.org/eri/la/convention.asp?order=alpha&language=E&KO=13039>
www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20012311/index.html

8. Can the FOC provide information about an object that has been detained at customs, in adherence with CPTA?

If an object was detained at customs, the customs authority is exclusively responsible for communications matters; as such, the FOC is not competent to provide information about a detained object.

9. When importing an object into Switzerland, is there a requirement to present the export permit issued by the foreign country?

The requirement to **present an export permit** applies for all dispatching countries that have concluded a **bilateral agreement** (Art. 7 CPTA, Art. 24, para. 3 CPTO). If no export permit is presented, the planned import is illegal and may be punishable by law (Art. 24 para. 1, letter c CPTA).

Bilateral agreements*			
Country		Date of signing	Entry into force
1	Mexico	24 Aug 2017	25 Jul 2018
2	Peru	12 Jul 2016	19 Oct 2016
3	China	16 Aug 2013	8 Jan 2014
4	Cyprus	11 Jan 2013	15 Feb 2014
5	Egypt	14 Oct 2010	20 Feb 2011
6	Colombia	1 Feb 2010	4 Aug 2011
7	Greece	15 May 2007	13 Apr 2011
8	Italy	20 Oct 2006	27 Apr 2008

*Further information on bilateral agreements is available at the website of the Federal Office of Culture: www.bak.admin.ch/kgf > Bilateral agreements

10. When exporting an object, is there a requirement to present an export permit authorised by the Swiss Confederation?

Only those objects listed in the Federal Registry for Cultural Property require a permit for a temporary export out of Switzerland. The Specialized Body for the International Transfer of Cultural Property issues this permit (Art. 5 CPTA). This applies exclusively to cultural property owned by the Swiss Confederation. You can access the Federal Registry at the following link:

<https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/en/home/cultural-heritage/transfer-of-cultural-property/federal-registry.html>

11. When exporting an object, is there a requirement to present an export permit issued by a Swiss cantonal authority?

In some cases, cantonal law limiting the export of cultural property may apply; as a rule, however, such law is not applicable regarding foreign cultural property. The **cantonal authority in question** is responsible for answering this question (e.g. if the object is listed in the canton's registry of cultural property).

12. Are there special rules regarding cultural property from Iraq or Syria?

Yes, based on Art. 2 of the Federal Act of 22 March 2002 on the Implementation of International Sanctions (Embargo Act, SR 946.231), the Swiss Federal Council issued two ordinances specifying measures vis-à-vis these two countries:

Iraq

Article 1a of the Ordinance on Economic Measures against the Republic of Iraq dated 7 August 1990 (SR 946.206) states that:

- The following acts are prohibited: the import, export and transit as well as the sale, distribution, marketing, purchase and other form of transfer of Iraqi cultural property that was stolen, otherwise unaccounted for (without permission of the owner) or illicitly exported out of the Republic of Iraq after 2 August 1990.
- The illicit export of cultural property is presumed if there is documentation verifying that the property was located in the Republic of Iraq after 2 August 1990.

Syria

Article 9a of the Ordinance on Measures against Syria dated 08 June 2012 (SR 946.231.172.7) states that:

- The following acts are prohibited: the import, export and transit as well as the sale, distribution, marketing and purchase of Syrian cultural property as well as objects of archaeological, historical, cultural, religious or scholarly significance, in particular objects defined in Appendix 9, if just cause exists to assume that the objects:
 - were stolen or reported missing by the lawful owner;
 - illicitly exported from Syria, in particular, if the objects are listed in the inventories of public Syrian collections, Syrian museums, archives, libraries or religious institutions.
- This ban does not apply if the following can be proven:
 - the cultural property was exported from Syria before 15 March 2011;
 - the safe return of the cultural property to the legal owner in Syria can be guaranteed.

13. Where can I find additional information about the customs requirements (forms etc.)?

Federal Customs Administration (FCA)

Contact form: <https://www.webapps.ezv.admin.ch/apps/contactForm/index.php?lang=en>
+41 58 467 15 15

<https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home.html> > Information for private individuals > Bans, restrictions and authorisations > Transfer of cultural property

14. Where can I learn more about CPTA?

Federal Office of Culture (FOC)

Museums and collections

Specialized Body for the International Transfer of Cultural Property

kgt@bak.admin.ch

+41 58 462 03 25

www.bak.admin.ch/kgt