ANCHiSE

Applying New Solutions for Cultural Heritage protection by Innovative, Scientific, social and economic Engagement

Artefacts, roots, networks: endangered archaeology and trafficking of archaeological objects

"The economic and social context of illicit trafficking in archaeological goods"

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THE ÉDOUARD GUIGOZ COLLECTION, A ROSETTA STONE OF THE POST-WAR ART MARKET

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Created since the 1930's and donated to the State of Valais in 1970, the Édouard Guigoz collection was one of the triggers for the creation of the Cantonal Museum of Archaeology, inaugurated in 1976. The Édouard Guigoz collection, through its early donation and exhibition, has had an atypical career in Switzerland. After a key work was returned to Italy in 1979, it was placed in storage in 1986; a source of rumours and allegations ever since, its subsequent history has been just as unusual. How can a leading Swiss museum institution manage a collection whose history is as problematic as it is little-known?

With financial support from the Federal Office of Culture and Michelle Guigoz, the collector's niece, a groundbreaking research conducted under the scientific direction of Marc-André Haldimann, was carried out by Arnaud Meilland (Bureau Clio Sàrl) for the historical aspects, and by a group of scientists specialised in the typological study of the objects[333]. The results include an online catalogue of the 3,709 items of the donation[334] and a scientific report that translates the transparency desire expressed by Pascal Ruedin, then Director of the Musées cantonaux du Valais, and implemented by Pierre-Yves Nicod, Archaeological Collections Curator at the Valais History Museum[335].

Édouard Guigoz as a person

Édouard Guigoz, born in Saxon on 7 July 1902 and died in Lugano on 13 December 1970, came from a family having close links to the Church. After graduating from the Schwyz College in 1920, he moved to Chiasso the same year and worked for three years at the international transport company GONDRAND. From 1923 to 1951, he was first representative and then manager of the BOTOT mouthwash branch in Ponte-Chiasso (Italy) and, from 1936 onwards in Chiasso (Switzerland). In 1951, he set up his own business, Verreries MIGNON SA, specialising in the manufacture of glass bottles. At the time of their creation, they were the largest glassworks in Switzerland; with 150 workers in 1966, they became the most important industry in Chiasso. Described as a "mezzo genio", Guigoz was a workaholic and held the reins of his business alone, assisted only by his accountant[336].

Already trained to their importance within his family, Édouard Guigoz quickly developed his own networks. Politically, he was a member of the Ticino Liberal-Radical Party and close to the radical State Councilor Isidoro Antognini (1935–1943), being engaged to his daughter until her tragic death in 1938.

333. For metal objects, the college includes Martin Guggisberg and Enrico Regazzoni (University of Basel), for glass objects Chantal Martin Pruvot (independent archaeologist), for ceramics Jean-Robert Gisler (University of Fribourg), for sculpture Clara Bolle-Fivaz (University of Geneva) and for oil lamps Marc-André Haldimann (University of Bern).
334. https://www.vallesiana.ch/patrimoine/recherche-14.html?q=edouardguigoz&size=n_20_n, consulted 08.01.2026
335. https://musees-valais.ch/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/RA_Guigoz_Rapport_final_20220502_low.pdf. Consulted 31.08.25.
336. Phone interview with Clementina Roncoroni, daughter of Lidia Ghielmetti, 12.12.2020.

Well-introduced politically and backed by his international professional experience with Italy and France thanks to BOTOT mouthwash, Édouard Guigoz became active in Swiss counter-espionage during the Second World War. He was hired because of his reputation as "re del contrabbando" by Captain Guido Bustelli, charged in 1940 with setting up an intelligence office in Lugano within the Frontier Brigade 9[337]. At Bustelli's request, Edo's (his code name) villa became the centre of the "REX" intelligence network, headed by Adelio Ponce de Leon (code name "Adelia") and Sandro Zafferi (code name "Maria"), active since spring 1944 throughout northern Italy. This network, created and monitored by Captain Bustelli, now attached to the Swiss Army General Staff, also had links with the French 2e Bureau and the British Intelligence Service. His villa in Chiasso also serves as a contact point for Allied and Swiss intelligence services for their networks between Switzerland and Italy, helping to move men and resources across the border[338].

Origins and constitution of the Guigoz collection

Immersed in a family tradition of collecting, Édouard had been building his own collection since the 1930s[339]; it was already "well advanced" in 1943 when Michelle Guigoz's father met him in Ticino during his mobilisation[340]. For a long time, the extent of the collection remained known only to close friends and family. In addition to the vast display cases housing his growing collection of antiques, his rooms were decorated by style.

The collection remained unknown to the public until 7 May 1964, when a double-page spread in the periodical Illustrazione Ticinese offered a reflection of the glass-centric collection entitled Un museo del vetro a Chiasso[341] **(fig.1)**. A new article, appearing in Die Tat of 9 April 1966[342], takes the reader into the private sphere of the collector whose residence is surrounded by a "militarily ordered jungle" lined with columns and colonnettes.

His interior, adorned with sgraffiti and varied marble paving, houses not only his archaeological collection but also his library, a collection of paintings, Persian hangings, Japanese and Chinese paneling, and a small chapel filled with Baroque works. This deliberately impressionistic description is precious, as it allows us to grasp the collector's overall environment within his patrimonial and botanical universe, while restoring the archaeological collection to its original setting.
It was in this context of growing recognition of his collection that Édouard Guigoz and Albert de Wolff, Director of the Musées cantonaux du Valais, came into contact and finalised a donation process. De Wolff's keen interest stemmed from the possibility of using the collection to develop the Cantonal Museums and raise awareness of heritage among the Valais political class, which at the time had little inclination towards culture.

Fig. 1: Page from the periodical Illustrazione Ticinese of 7 May 1964.
© Illustrazione Ticinese.

337. Correspondence with Matteo Millan, University of Padua, 13 November 2020; Fucci 1983, 205; https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/033499/2000-07-17/ consulted 15.11.20.
338. Millan, 2009: 250–251; Fucci, 1983: 203–205, 209, 217. Information about him comes from an interview between Franco Fucci and Guido Bustelli and from the Guido Bustelli collection in the Ticino cantonal archives. See also Meilland 2020: 32.
339. Meilland, 2020: 31.
340. Meilland, 2020: 31, note 112.
341. Meilland, 2020: 33.
342. Meilland, 2015: 34 ; Meilland, 2020: 33, note 119.

The arrival of the collection in Valais and its exhibition (1970–1976)

On 13 December 1970, the death of Édouard Guigoz triggered the process of transporting the donated collection. Following the Council of State's decision on 18 March 1970 to create a Cantonal Museum of Archaeology to house the Guigoz collection and the Neolithic steles from the Petit-Chasseur, planning and work to convert the Grange à l'Évêque into a museum took place between 1972 and its inauguration on 16 October 1976. Displayed in one of the two large halls, and benefiting at the time from a modern and meticulous museography, the Guigoz collection was particularly highlighted by the press of the time, which saw in it "a glass collection almost unique in the world"[343].

The Aldobrandini sphinge affair and its consequences

Published in the 1976 brochure of the Musée cantonal d'archéologie, the Roman marble sphinge is one of the highlights of the Guigoz collection **(fig. 2)**. Its illicit origin was known to the collector who, unlike the rest of his collection, kept it hidden under a blanket in a room away from the display cases housing the other objects[344]. In the autumn of 1953, this important work was uncovered on land belonging to Prince Aldobrandini in Pianabella, on the site of the ancient port of Ostia, near Rome. Reported to the Ostia Superintendency, the find was entrusted to the owner of the estate, who kept it on site. Its theft, during the night of 21–22 June 1958, was reported to the relevant authorities on 24 June[345]. Widely publicised in connection with the opening of the Musée cantonal d'archéologie, its illicit presence in Sion was reported in June 1978 by the Nucleo tutela patrimonio artistico to the Italian Ministry of Culture. Steps taken with the Valais authorities led to its restitution on 28 October 1979, with the sphinge returning to the Ostia Museum in November.[346]

In 1987, Marie-Claude Morand, Directress of the Musées cantonaux du Valais decided to stop exhibiting the Guigoz donation, as its provenance was too poorly documented, and it was therefore of little interest to the Valais public. It was the background to the Guigoz donation that led her, as President of ICOM Switzerland in 1993, to establish ICOM's deontology commission, a body for the dissemination of good museum practice, as well as for recourse in the event of deontological difficulties.

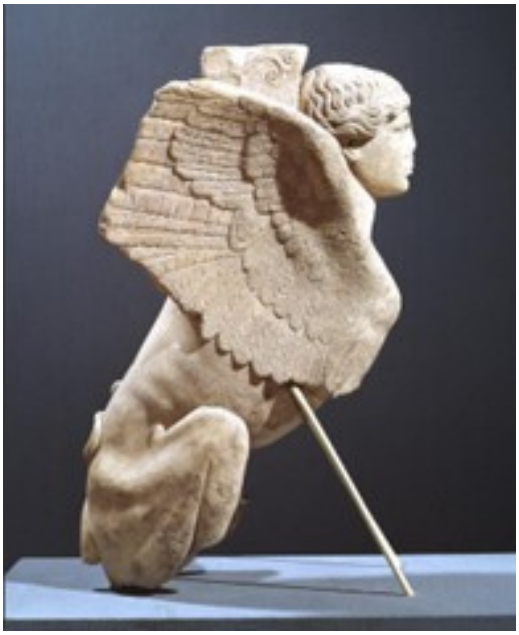

Fig. 2: The Aldobrandini sphinge in 1976. Photograph Heinz Preisig, Musée cantonaux du Valais.

A collection both consistent with and original among post-war private collections

Based on these two fundamental parameters – the geographical areas of provenance and the chronology of the works – Édouard Guigoz's collection is both consistent with and original among post-war private collections[347]. The predominance of works from the Near East and an interest in civilisations preceding and succeeding classical antiquity are key features. With its Near Eastern centre of gravity, the Guigoz collection reveals a close affinity with American private collections of lamps (Myriam Schaar-

343. *Nouvelliste* of 18.10.1976; L'Express of 18.10.1976; *Le Treize Etoiles of November 1976*; *Le Matin* of 18.10.1976: Meilland, 2015: 22.
344. Interview de Georges Spagnoli, 16 novembre 2016 in rapport Haldimann, 2017: 11.
345. Letter dated 17 July 2020 from Paola Germoni, superintendent of the *Parco archeologico di Ostia Antica* to Pierre-Yves Nicod, curator at the Musée d'histoire du Valais.
346. Walliser Bote, 29 October 1979; letter from the Ostia Superintendency, 17 July 2020.
347. Haldimann dir. 2022: chap. 6-7, 49–76.

Schloessinger, New-York; Louis and Carmen Warschaw, Los Angeles), Israeli glass collection (Eliahu Dobkin, Jerusalem), and Lebanese glass collection (Henri Pharaon, Beirut), all established in the post-war period. This strong focus is also reflected in the periods represented: more than a third of the chronologically determined objects belong to the Byzantine, Islamic and Medieval periods. These periods are also strongly represented in American and Near Eastern private collections of his time. Comparisons with post-war private collections in Europe are more delicate: they are rarely published, and do not offer easy points of comparison.

Points of convergence include an interest in pre- and protohistoric civilisations, a core collection devoted to the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods, and a substantial part of the collection devoted to the Byzantine world. The Guigoz collection, on the other hand, stands out for its lack of major works – less than twenty out of 3709 items – the core of the collection being marked by an abundance of everyday items. It also differs in the rarity of Egyptian objects and a higher concentration of Islamic, medieval and modern periods artefacts.

Édouard Guigoz, collector and business partner

Édouard Guigoz was not only a collector, he was also a figure of the art market, as evidenced by an interview with Clementina Roncoroni and the American Hesperia Arts Gallery advertising page published in the first issue of the Basel-based magazine Antike Kunst (n° 1, 1958: 30), which quotes Édouard Guigoz as follows: "A large part of our stock is in Europe. European customers are kindly requested to address their inquiries to our correspondent in Switzerland: Monsieur Édouard Guigoz, Chiasso (Switzerland), P.O. Box 308" **(fig. 3).**

The gallery's owner, George Allen, is no stranger. A recent study traces his background[348].

The son of Philadelphia bookseller William Allen, George and his brother Ernest completed their secondary education at Haverford PA College, both developing an interest in classical antiquity. George graduated in Latin and subsequently took over his father's bookshop. From the mid-1950s, he became the agent of Robert E. Hecht, himself a 1941 graduate of Haverford PA College.

As a renowned antiquities dealer, Robert E. Hecht appears in the background of all the court cases that rocked the business from 1961 onwards[349]. Joining the US Navy Reserve during World War II, he served post-war as a translator at the Nuremberg trials before returning to civilian life. After a semester at the University of Zurich, fascinated by Antiquity studies, he obtained a scholarship at the American Academy in Rome, being a member until 1949. This proved to be a decisive step in his career, forming the starting point for his activity in the antiquities market. Based permanently in Rome, he acquired antiques from all over the Mediterranean, selling them to collectors and museums in Europe and the USA[350].

It was in this context that he met George Allen and offered to sell directly from his bookshop the antiquities he had acquired in Italy. In doing so, he secured a sales outlet in Philadelphia, a city known for the large number of collectors living there[351]. Named Hesperia Arts, this new "gallery", originally set up in the backroom of his father's bookshop, quickly became a point of reference for the North American market, thanks to the very high-quality works imported from Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean, notably Turkey.

Switzerland played a central role in this context: in the absence of any specific regulations at the time to control the import or export of antique objects, it became the natural first export destination for objects originating from the illicit trade[352]. During their stay in Switzerland, the works benefited from talented restorers including Fritz Bürki, Robert E. Hecht's appointed restorer[353]. Switzerland thus served as a staging post for the illicit market in antiques, which were then preferably exported to London and New York to be sold there at the best price[354].

348. Felch 2014: 48.
349. Mazur, 6 December 2005.
350. Silver 2010: 26–27.
351. Telephone interview with Brian I Daniels, Director of the Penn Museum, Philadelphia, 30 September 2020.
352. Silver 2010: 30.
353. Felch and Frammolino, 2011: 153. Bürki later restored the Euphronios chalice sold to the Metropolitan Museum in 1972; see Silver, 2010: 65 and 69.
354. Silver, 2010: 29.

The link between Édouard Guigoz and Robert "Bob" E. Hecht was in fact direct. The two men knew each other and, in addition to their business partnership, had friendly ties, Bob Hecht often being Guigoz's guest in Chiasso[355]. Through his business partnership with Robert Hecht, who sold a number of major pieces to American museums and individuals until the 2000s, Édouard Guigoz found himself de facto at the heart of the illicit antiquities trade. As Robert Hecht's business partner and George Allen's Swiss correspondent, Édouard Guigoz could not have been unaware of the illicit provenance of works transiting through his intermediary. As a result, his collection could potentially have been greatly enriched by this market, illicit according to the legislation in many source countries[356].

Hesperia Art
2219 St. James Place, Philadelphie, Pennsylvania, USA

George Allen, General Manager

Monnaies, vases, figures en terre cuite, verres, pierres gravées, bijoux, sculptures en bronze et marbre, d'époque grecque, romaine, byzantine, égyptienne et du Proche-Orient.

Une grande partie de notre stock se trouve en Europe. Les clients européens sont priés d'adresser leur demande à notre correspondant en Suisse: Monsieur Edouard Guigoz, Chiasso (Suisse), case postale 308.

Nous éditons 4 fois par année un bulletin (Hesperia Art Bulletin) composé de 4 pages de texte et 4 pages de planches, avec un choix de notre stock, avec les prix y relatifs. Le prix de l'abonnement annuel se monte à Fr. s. 8.60, payables à Mm. Hugo Kahn, Banquier, Zürich, Bürcherweg 15, pour Kosmo Aktiengesellschaft.

Fragment de coupe attique à figures noires, vers 530 avant J.-C. Diamètre du pied 19 cm.

Fig. 3: Hesperia Fine Arts gallery advertisement in Antike Kunst 1 magazine, 1958.
© Antike Kunst.

Édouard Guigoz's networks: towards a new light on the historical framework of the post-war period?

Already perceived as *re del contrabbando*[357] in 1943, Édouard Guigoz's activity within Swiss counter-espionage with close links to Italian resistance movements, and his subsequent involvement in the art market circle operating around Robert E. Hecht, call for fresh questioning of the broad historical framework of the Second World War and the post-war period.

The Second World War is hardly ever cited as the cause of the post-war drift in the art market. Yet it was the cause. As with the rapid rebuilding of devastated towns and landscapes, the reopening and development of museums was just as much the result of a vital need to rebuild.

The post-war economic boom also saw the emergence of the nouveau riche, who turned out to be great art lovers, understanding the importance of art to their social ascension. They were particularly fond of the antiques niche, which offered a plethora of new masterpieces and instant social recognition. The combination of these expectations led to an explosion in demand in the Mediterranean Basin and the Near East, as well as in Latin America and Asia. Previously a niche market for passing tourists, the networks supplying the art market are becoming a global supply chain, with the corollary of an increase in clandestine excavations destroying archaeological sites[358].

Often driven by a desire for anonymity or business secrecy, widespread silence about the origin of works exhibited or acquired during these economically prosperous years is the rule[359]; it is justified by the false truth that an archaeological object in a showcase is a saved object. Archaeological science is the main victim of this state of affairs. In the 1960s, field archaeology was relegated to the background in favour of the aesthetic quality of works of art, as museums sought to enhance their value. This led to the adoption of the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

355. Telephone interview with Clementina Roncoroni on 12.12.2020.
356. Haldimann dir. 2022: chap. 10.
357. Millan, 2009: 251; see Meilland, 2020 report: 32.
358. Felch and Frammolino, 2011: 3–4.
359. When discussing the silence of the works, it's hard not to recall the attitude of the survivors of the conflict, most of whom preferred to keep silent about what they had experienced: "Contrary to popular belief, this silence was not imposed on them from outside, but rather imposed on them as a principle of survival and reconstruction – 'a structuring silence'" (Frischer, 2008).

"Particularly skillful and connected to underground networks[360]", Guigoz, il re del contrabbando, seems to have its rightful place within the historical economic and political framework of the post-war period, largely dominated by the Cold War and the ideological confrontation that resulted[361].

The Guigoz Collection: a lack of ordinary deontology?

Acquired without any preserved export certificate or authorisation, and with one exception – the Ostia sphinge discovered as such in 1978 – devoid of any traceable provenance, the works in the Guigoz collection are in the ordinary course of their time, their commercial origin depending solely on the memory of their owner. Reinforced by the absence of any inventory, this legal situation left the owner free to develop his collection with very little risk of seeing one of his pieces challenged under article 728 al. 1 of the Swiss Civil Code. The Guigoz Collection is by no means an exception among Swiss private collections: they all developed within this legally secure framework until the Law on the International Transfer of Cultural Property came into force without retroactive effect on June 1, 2005.

However, as the works in the collection are exclusively from the art market, their complete lack of traceability raises a problem. The trade in antiquities, by then already the obvious result of looting ancient sites, was already in the spotlight in source countries, particularly Italy and Turkey, in the 1950s. By its very nature, therefore, the Guigoz collection does not meet the deontological criteria promoted today by Swiss museum institutions. A working hypothesis which saw the Guigoz collection as "the hidden treasure of Mussolini and the Fascist regime" is, after examination by MIBAC expert Dr. Alessandrini, implausible[362].

Towards a study of the art market in the social, political and economic context of the post-war period

The context surrounding Édouard Guigoz's activities, from the Second World War to the 1960s, sheds light on the importance of the social, political, and economic framework in which the Western art market developed.

Édouard Guigoz's involvement in the circle of dealers gravitating around Robert E. Hecht is emblematic of the networks exponential development within the Western world in the midst of the Cold War, in which the reception of Antiques became a strong identity symbol, reaffirming the supremacy of democracies, the modern heirs of ancient Athens.

The historical study needed to capture the art market evolution within this broad framework remains yet to be done. It offers the prospect of shedding light on Switzerland's role as a hub in the post-war period, and even more recently. This study would be a much-needed key for a better understanding of the networks driving the art market in the Western world.

360. Meilland 2020, 32.
361. The presence alongside Édouard Guigoz of Me Pierfranco Campana, on trial for smuggling operations involving secret services from several countries (see Haldimann dir. 2022, chap. 2.4) is an indication of the need to take the political-economic sphere into account.
362. Haldimann dir. 2022, 102.

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