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– January 16, 2014 Posted in: [News](#)

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The ownership of a collection of medieval treasures worth an estimated \$250 million (US) will soon be decided. They will either remain with a German museum or go to a group of descendants of Jewish art dealers who sold the collection in 1935.



The Guelph Treasure consists of 42 medieval relics that were originally housed in the Brunswick Cathedral in Braunschweig, Germany. By the 17th century they had been sold to the members of the Guelph dynasty, who in turn sold them to a consortium of German-Jewish art dealers from Frankfurt in 1929. The art dealers were able to sell about half the collection but, because of the economic downturn of the 1930s, other buyers could not be found. Eventually the group decided to sell the remaining 42 pieces for 4.25 million Reichsmarks to the state of Prussia, which at the time was governed by Hermann Goering, one of the leading members of the Nazi party.

Mel Urbach, a New York lawyer representing the heirs of these dealers, told the [Associated Press](#), “These Jewish dealers faced a crisis of a magnitude that we cannot comprehend. People, targets of early terror, disappeared for a lot less than owning an art collection. But the Nazis wanted it.”

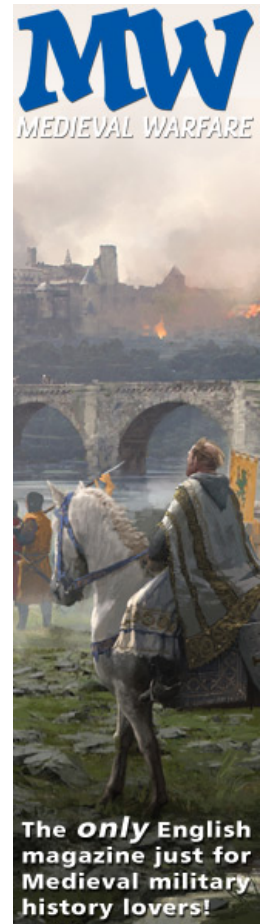
The heirs believe that the Guelph Treasure should be treated as art looted by the Nazis, claiming that the collection was forcibly sold to the state of Prussia for less than they were worth. The collection has been in Berlin’s Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) since the 1960s.

The German museum disagrees with the claims of the heirs. They note that the Guelph Treasure was actually being kept in the Netherlands when the sale occurred and that the sale price was in-line with what the dealers could have expected in an extremely strained art market.

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Yesterday, both sides presented their case to an Advisory Commission set up by the German government, an overseeing body that looks into claims of art that has been looted by the Nazis. A decision is expected from the commission within the next few weeks.



Hermann Parzinger, President

of the [Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation](#), which oversees museums in Berlin, explained, "I was able to present our arguments and point of view in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. Naturally, we look forward to a recommendation from the Advisory Commission soon. However, considering the particularities and complexities of this case, we understand that careful deliberation and justification are required."

It is estimated that the Guelph Treasure is worth between \$246 and \$273 million (US). The items, made from gold and silver, date from the 11th to 15th centuries.

Even the state of Israel has got involved in the dispute, with Israeli Culture Minister Limor Livnat writing to the German government to emphasize "the great importance of this issue to the Jewish people in general, and Holocaust survivors, in Israel and worldwide, in particular."

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