

Commission for Looted Art in Europe



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Press Release

Valuable Passion Cross Found in Rubbish

16 August 2007: On 16 July 2007 the Provincial Office of Criminal Investigation, EB 06, was notified by the Leogang Mining Museum that they were holding an allegedly medieval, valuable cross and asked to investigate whether it was linked to any criminal action.

Contact was made with the curator of the Leogang Mining Museum, who made the initial statement that the exhibit had been found by a person on a rubbish tip and handed over to the abovementioned museum.

During the course of the investigations then started and conducted jointly with the Federal Office of Criminal Investigation, the following facts could be established:

The cross is a passion cross, which were produced in the 12th and 13th C in the Limoges workshop. The object is made from gilded sheet copper and enamel and the front shows Christ on the Cross. Several medallions are affixed to the back.

As a result of an international inquiry the following was established:

According to documentation provided by the Head of the Department for Polish Cultural Heritage Abroad, the cross is from the art collection of Izabella Elzbieta Czartoryski Dzialinska at Glouchow Castle/ Poland.

Before the start of the Second World War, the then owner tried to save the collections from the Germans. She took the objects to the cellar of a house in Warsaw and there walled them in. However in December 1941 the hiding place was discovered by the Germans and the collection was taken to the Polish National Museum in Warsaw. Lists make it possible to follow the whereabouts of the cross.

After the Warsaw Uprising the Goluchow Collection was taken to Austria, to Fischhorn Castle in Bruck on the Glocknerstrasse, which had been requisitioned by the Nazis at that time.

From thereon, all trace of the cross is lost.

During a clear-out in an apartment in Zell am See in 2004, the old inventory was thrown into a container for bulky waste in front of the house.

A neighbour who loved old crockery obtained permission to take what she wanted from the container.

While rummaging in the container, a gold-coloured crucifix caught her eye, which she was also able to take home with the permission of the apartment owners.

As it did not fit in her apartment and her children did not want the cross either, she stowed it away under her couch, where it remained until 2007.

In July 2007 she showed the cross to a neighbour with whom she was friendly, and who recognized that it might be a rarity and who for the time being took it to the Leogang Mining Museum. The curator of the Leogang Mining Museum, Herman Mayerhofer, handed the cross over to the Salzburg Provincial Office of Criminal Investigation.

The cross was taken to Vienna and examined by experts at the Art Historical Museum. The bottom line is that it was established that the cross, with the exception of some replacements of a later date, was made in Limoges around 1200.

An informed valuation could not be made as the Art Historical Museum does not have comparable exhibits.

However, similar objects have fetched up to 400, 000 Euros at auctions in Paris or London.

The Commission for Looted Art, London, that specialises in tracing WWII looted art, has already been contacted by the Polish Ministry for Culture and represents the heirs.

After consultation with the Judge at Zell am See District Court, Mrs Brauer, MA, the exhibit was taken back to the Leogang Mining Museum as it can be stored there safely and adequately. According to the curator of the Mining Museum, the museum intends to exhibit this particularly valuable exhibit soon.

Further Information:

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