

The Antiquities Trade during the German Occupation of France, 1940–1944

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Abstract

Despite the confiscation of many art collections, mainly from Jewish families, the Parisian art market was prosperous during the German occupation of France, from 1940 to 1944. This boom was also driven by the vast number of purchases made by German museums. After the war, most of these acquisitions were returned to France, with postwar investigations focusing on the recovery of paintings. The lack of interest in other types

of art may explain, at least in part, why the acquisitions made by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin during the Occupation have been ignored for so long. Mainly antiquities, they are still part of the collections today. As this case study of the holdings of the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin shows, these acquisitions can serve as a starting point for learning more about the antiquities dealers active during the Occupation.

Introduction

[1] Not without pride, the archaeologist and art officer Hans Möbius (1895–1977) (Fig. 1) writes in the final report on his military activities during the Nazi occupation of France:

Paris has always been famous as a world trading center for antiquities and during the war it proved to be a market of inexhaustible abundance. While the British and Americans had previously been the main customers, since the Occupation there has arisen an opportunity for Germany to increase the Reich's art holdings¹.



Fig. 1. Hans Möbius (*left*), archaeologist and head of the Section of Prehistory and Archaeology of the German Kunstschutz, with colleagues in Paris, ca. 1941–1944 (photo: Vereinigte Adelsarchive im Rheinland e.V., Archiv der Grafen Wolff Metternich, NL Franziskus Graf Wolff Metternich, Akte 246)

As head of the Section of Prehistory and Archaeology of the German Kunstschutz, Möbius worked in Paris from 1941 to 1944². The Kunstschutz, founded in May 1940, was modelled on a military predecessor organization of the First World War³. Under the direction of Count Franz Wolff-

¹ Reprint of Hans Möbius, “Das Referat ‘Vorgeschichte und Archäologie’ in der Militärverwaltung Frankreich. Schlussbericht über die Tätigkeit 1940–1944“, in: *Berichte der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 82 (2001), 474-483: 482 [translation: ML] (hereafter, “Das Referat ‘Vorgeschichte und Archäologie’” [2001]).

² Martin Maischberger, “German Archaeology during the Third Reich, 1933–45. A Case Study Based on Archival Evidence”, in: *Antiquity* 76 (2002), 209-218: 215-216.

³ Christina Kott, “‘Den Schaden in Grenzen halten ...’. Deutsche Kunsthistoriker und Denkmalpfleger als Kunstverwalter im besetzten Frankreich 1940–1944”, in: Ruth Heftrig, Olf Peters and Barbara Schwellewald, eds., *Kunstgeschichte im ‘Dritten Reich’. Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, Berlin 2008, 362-392; Christina Kott, “‘Le Kunstschutz’ en 1939–1945. Une pierre dans la façade de l’Allemagne national-socialiste?”, in: Philippe Nivet, ed., *Guerre et patrimoine artistique à l’époque contemporaine*, Amiens 2013, 328-342; Christina Kott, “Militärischer Kunstschutz im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg. Institutionen, Akteure, Diskurse, Handlungsfelder”, in: Hans Werner Langbrandtner, Esther Rahel Heyer and Florence de Payronnet-Dryden, eds., *Kulturgutschutz in Europa und im Rheinland*, Cologne 2021, 115-140.

Metternich (1893–1978), it was comprised of former museum curators and conservators whose mission was to preserve the cultural heritage of France, including the maintenance of immovable monuments, the maintenance of excavations, and the protection of archaeological sites. However, the Kunstschutz also gathered information on private collections and closely monitored the art market during the Occupation. As a consequence, the famous Parisian auction house Hôtel Drouot was only given permission to reopen in 1941 on the condition that every transaction valued over a certain amount of money had to be reported directly to the Kunstschutz⁴. Möbius used his position as an art officer not only to acquire numerous objects for the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Kassel, where he had been responsible for the collection of antiquities before the war⁵, but also to support other German museums in their acquisitions:

As far as these purchases concerned antiquities, German museums and other organizations were advised in their acquisitions, and the export was facilitated in correct accordance with the Franco-German agreements⁶.

[2] Although British and American collectors, who had dominated the Parisian art market for decades, were suddenly excluded from it with the arrival of German forces in the French capital, the loss of demand was more than compensated for by the occupying forces. In addition to the leading National Socialists such as Hermann Göring (1893–1946) and Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), many German museums benefited by buying countless artworks, as mentioned in another report of the Kunstschutz:

The Parisian art market, the most important in the world, was in a state of total collapse after the armistice. It was reactivated and strict instructions [...] prevented any price increases. This was all the more necessary as the British and American buyers were naturally excluded from the market and the German art market with its unlimited absorption capacity took their place. The works that have since been transferred to Germany can hardly be quantified, but they are likely to exceed many millions. The Führer, Reichsmarschall, Reichsminister, Reichsleiter and Gauleiter and German museums and cities were [...] constantly provided with offers from the art market⁷.

Driven by advantageous exchange rates and a large supply, the latter of which was not least the result of forced sales by and expropriations from Jewish collectors, the Parisian art market flourished during the German occupation⁸.

⁴ Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, “Le marché de l’art à Paris sous l’Occupation”, in: Françoise Cachin, *Pillages et restitutions. Le destin des œuvres d’art sorties de France pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Paris 1997, 87-96: 94.

⁵ Justus Lange and Günther Kuss, “Ein unbequemes Erbe - die vergessenen Erwerbungen der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Kassel in Paris 1941/42”, in: Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, ed., “... denn der Ausverkauf ist bereits weit fortgeschritten ...”. *Die vergessenen Erwerbungen der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Kassel in Paris 1941/1942*, Heidelberg 2021, 9-33, <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.772>.

⁶ “Das Referat ‘Vorgeschichte und Archäologie’” (2001), 474-483: 482.

⁷ Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Referats “Kunstschutz”, in: Archives nationales (hereafter, AN), Paris, AJ/40/1671, 6-7 [translation: ML].

[3] After the war, however, most of the German acquisitions, which were considered illegal, were returned to France⁹. While some works were restituted to their original owners and others sold in auctions for the benefit of the French Republic, almost 2,000 works passed into the custody of national museums such as the Louvre without any further investigation into their origin¹⁰. Only in recent years has the origin of the holdings of the so-called *Musées nationaux récupération* (MNR) begun to be investigated¹¹. Nevertheless, the research focus on the acquisitions of German occupiers has always been primarily on paintings; the numerous purchases of antiquities Möbius explicitly refers to in his report have received little attention until recently¹². This lack of interest may explain, at least in part, why the acquisitions of the Berlin State Museums during the Occupation were ignored for so long. Mainly antiquities, most of these objects are still part of the collections. Since 2019 a research project funded by the German Lost Art Foundation has been conducted at the Technical University Berlin in cooperation with the Berlin State Museums and the German Center for Art History in Paris in order to systematically and comprehensively reconstruct these acquisitions. The preliminary results of these investigations demonstrate why it is so important to learn more about the antiquities dealers who were active during the Occupation and their networks—in particular, a group of Armenian dealers who handled the majority of sales to the Berlin State Museums and largely controlled the Paris antiquities market at the time.

⁸ On the Parisian art market during the Occupation, see Lynn Nicholas, *Der Raub der Europa. Das Schicksal europäischer Kunstwerke im Dritten Reich*, Munich 1997, 157-246; Hector Feliciano, *Das verlorene Museum. Vom Kunstraub der Nazis*, Berlin 1998, 121-151; Jonathan Petropoulos, *Kunstraub und Sammelwahn. Kunst und Politik im Dritten Reich*, Berlin 1999, 159-179; Emmanuelle Polack, *Le marché de l'art sous l'Occupation 1940–1944*, Paris 2019; Elisabeth Furtwängler and Mattes Lammert, eds., *Kunst und Profit. Museen und der französische Kunstmarkt im Zweiten Weltkrieg / Art et Profit. Les musées et le marché de l'art pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Berlin 2022.

⁹ Claude Lorentz, *La France et les restitutions allemandes au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, 1943–1954*, Paris 1998.

¹⁰ Corinne Bouchoux, *“Si les tableaux pouvaient parler ...”. Le traitement politique et médiatique des retours d'œuvres d'art pillées et spoliées par les nazis (France 1945–2008)*, Rennes 2013.

¹¹ Isabelle le Masne de Chermont and Laurence Sigal-Klagsbald, eds., *À qui appartenait ces tableaux? La politique française de recherche de provenance, de garde et de restitution des œuvres d'art pillées durant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale / Looking for Owners. French Policy for Provenance Research, Restitution and Custody of Art Stolen in France during World War Two*, exh. cat., Paris 2008, 2-59.

¹² See Anne Dunn-Vaturi, François Bridey and Gwenaëlle Fellingier, “‘Unclaimed’ Artworks Entrusted to the French Museums after World War II: The Case of the Near Eastern Art and Antiquities”, *RIHA Journal* 0291, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92790>.

Acquisitions by German museums during the Occupation

[4] During the occupation of France, the Nazis not only looted numerous works of art, mostly from Jewish collectors and dealers, but also bought countless paintings, sculptures, and objects. Through the Allied “London Declaration” of 5 January 1943, the French government-in-exile had already created the legal basis to reclaim not only the *confiscated* but also the *purchased* works of art after the war¹³:

Accordingly, the governments making this declaration and the French National Committee reserve all their rights to declare invalid any transfers of, or dealings with, property, rights and interests of any description whatsoever which are, or have been, situated in the territories which have come under the occupation or control, direct or indirect, of the governments with which they are at war [...]. This warning applies whether such transfers or dealings have taken the form of open looting or plunder, or of transactions apparently legal in form, even when they purport to be voluntarily effected¹⁴.

However, the full dimension of the art “transactions apparently legal in form” only became clear after the end of World War II.

[5] As part of his investigation into art looting by the Germans, the British art officer Douglas Cooper (1911–1984) confiscated the business records of the Schenker company in their abandoned Paris office shortly after the Liberation¹⁵. Since Schenker not only was one of the largest transport companies but also handled most of the transfers of artworks, the business records proved to be extremely valuable for locating and returning artworks after the war. In addition to providing information on the consignor in France and the recipient in Germany, the records also contain details about the shipping date and insurance value, strong indicators of the purchase date and acquisition price. The numerous references to German museums as recipients raised awareness of their important role as buyers during the Occupation and resulted in the drafting of the report “Accessions to German Museums and Galleries during the Occupation of France” (Fig. 2)¹⁶. This report, dated 5 April 1945 and better known as the Schenker Papers, remains to this day probably the most important source for reconstructing the purchasing

¹³ Wilfried Fiedler, “Die Alliierte (Londoner) Erklärung vom 5.1.1943: Inhalt, Auslegung und Rechtsnatur in der Diskussion der Nachkriegsjahre”, in: Jürgen Basedow et al., eds., *Private Law in the International Arena. Privatrecht in der internationalen Arena*, Den Haag 2000, 197-218; Thomas Armbruster, *Rückerstattung der Nazi-Beute. Die Suche, Bergung und Restitution von Kulturgütern durch die westlichen Alliierten nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Berlin 2008, 215-222; Tessa Friederike Rosebrock, *Kurt Martin und das Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg. Museums- und Ausstellungspolitik im ‘Dritten Reich’ und in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit*, Berlin 2012, 237.

¹⁴ Quoted according to Armbruster (2008), 215.

¹⁵ Feliciano (2008), 127.

¹⁶ The National Archives, London, FO 1046/763/3 (hereafter: Schenker Papers, part 1).

activities of German museums¹⁷. It shows that in the first years of the Occupation, when the supply was still large and the prices low, the museums in the Rhineland—such as the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, and the Landesmuseum in Bonn—acquired works of art for millions of francs on the Parisian art market.

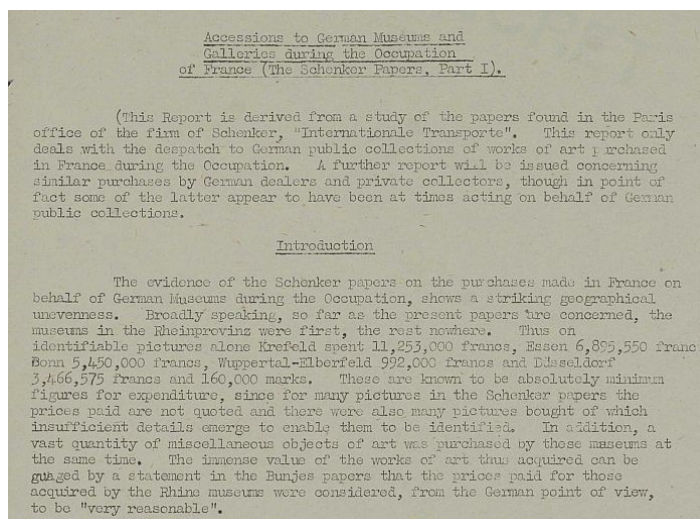


Fig. 2. First page of the so-called Schenker Papers, "Accessions to German Museums and Galleries during the Occupation of France", 5 April 1945. The National Archives, London, FO 1046/763/3 (photo: The National Archives, London)

[6] Regarding the Berlin museums, only some individual pieces for the Islamic and the Egyptian Departments (today: Ägyptisches Museum) are mentioned, which at first seems insignificant compared to the major accessions by the Rhenish museums. Only a small number of objects is listed, and specific prices are mentioned for only two objects (Fig. 3). For the majority of the acquisitions, not even dates of purchase are given, and most of the descriptions—for example, "stele", "bas-reliefs", "vases"—remain generic¹⁸.

¹⁷ In addition to the list of purchases made by German museums, a separate list of acquisitions made by German individuals constitutes the second part of the so-called Schenker Papers, "Purchases of Works of Art in France during the Occupation by and on behalf of German Dealers and Officials" (Schenker Papers, part 2), in: The National Archives, London, FO 1046/763/3.

¹⁸ Schenker Papers, part 1, p. 2.

. Berlin : State Museums (Egyptian Department).

The following articles were purchased on behalf of the above
Department :-

Description of work of art	Dealer	Price Paid	Date
Female head (stone)	Brummer	28,000 fr:	5/10/43.
Dog (stone)	"	40,000 fr:	5/10/43.
5 Stele	Hindamian		30/7/43.
1 Relief with Kings	Sambon		
" " " "	"		
Small wooden figure	"		
lion's head	"		
Statue of man crouching	"		
Relief of group of men	"		

17 further articles (bas-reliefs, vases etc.) were purchased from Kalebjian.

Fig. 3. Record of purchases for the Egyptian Department of the Berlin State Museums, from the so-called Schenker Papers, 5 April 1945. The National Archives, London, FO 1046/763/3 (photo: The National Archives, London)

The report, therefore, reached a conclusion that is still prevalent in research today:

The evidence of the Schenker papers on the purchases made in France on behalf of German museums during the Occupation shows a striking geographical unevenness. Broadly speaking, so far as the present papers are concerned, the museums in the Rheinprovinz were first, the rest nowhere¹⁹.

However, recent research conducted in German and French archives has shown that this assumption must be rectified. As a matter of fact, numerous departments of the Berlin State Museums purchased objects during the Occupation, and on a much larger scale than previously known. Despite the deceptive impression given by the Schenker Papers, the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin provides a particularly impressive case study of the important role the Berlin museums played in the Parisian art market²⁰.

Acquisitions by the Berlin Egyptian Department during the Occupation

[7] While the director of the Egyptian Department, Günther Roeder (1881–1966) (Fig. 4), was in France on assignment from the Luftwaffe in October 1941, he seemed impressed by the

¹⁹ Schenker Papers, part 1, p. 1. On the acquisitions of the Rhenish museums, see Bettina Bouresh, "Sammeln Sie also kräftig! 'Kunstrückführung' ins Reich im Auftrag der Rheinischen Provinzialverwaltung 1940–1945", in: Bazon Brock and Achim Preiß, eds., *Kunst auf Befehl? Dreiunddreißig bis Fünfundvierzig*, Munich 1990, 59-75; Nikola Doll, "Die 'Rhineland-Gang'. Ein Netzwerk kunsthistorischer Forschung im Kontext des Kunst- und Kulturgutraubes in Westeuropa", in: Andrea Baresel-Brand, ed., *Museen im Zwielicht. Ankaufspolitik 1933–1945*, 2nd enlarged ed., Magdeburg 2007, 63-90; Elisabeth Furtwängler, "... ungewöhnlich günstige Möglichkeiten für die Bereicherung der westdeutschen Kunstsammlungen", in: Julia Drost, Hélène Ivanoff and Denise Vernerey-Laplace, eds., *Arts et politiques: Le marché de l'art entre France et Allemagne de l'Entre-deux-guerres à la Libération*, Heidelberg 2022, 156-179, <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.878.c13311>.

²⁰ I am grateful to the director of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Friederike Seyfried, as well as Jana Helmbold-Doyé and Klaus Finneiser.

opportunities the Paris art market offered to the Germans. In a letter he wrote to a Berlin colleague, he made no secret of his ambitions to use that situation to the benefit of the Egyptian collection he had taken over shortly before: “There are a number of good pieces on sale here that I would like to acquire”²¹. After years of negotiations, Roeder, who had joined the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) in 1937 and headed the Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim, was appointed to succeed Heinrich Schäfer (1868–1957) in 1940²². The most important argument for his appointment was the hope that with Roeder’s move to Berlin the collection of the Pelizaeus Museum—and in particular the finds from the Hermopolis expedition for which he was responsible—would also reach Berlin²³. These objects, as parts of the last still-active German excavation in Egypt, were of the greatest interest to the Egyptian Department.

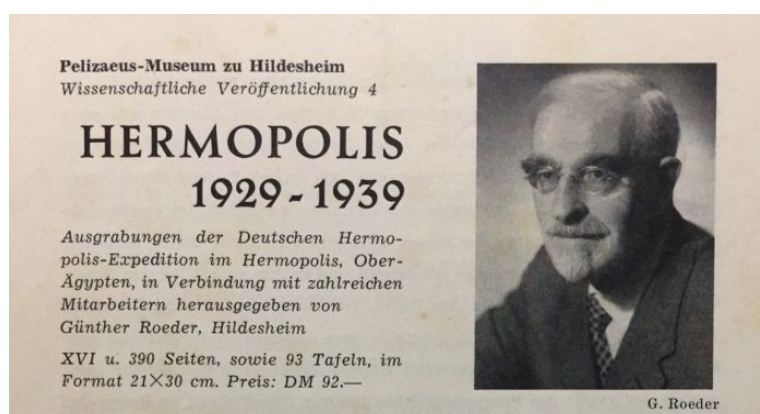


Fig. 4. Book announcement for Günther Roeder’s *Hermopolis 1929–1939* (Hildesheim 1959); Roeder was director of the Egyptian Department of the Berlin State Museums between 1940 and 1945

However, the Hermopolis expedition came to a standstill at the beginning of the war, before most of the finds could even be brought to Germany. Therefore, the most important reason for his appointment suddenly became obsolete²⁴; now Roeder had to find another way to increase the

²¹ Letter from Roeder to Anthes, 18 October 1941, in: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (hereafter, SMB-ÄM), Archiv, unnumbered [translation: ML].

²² Herbert Reyer, “Der Ägyptologe Günther Roeder 1881–1966. Biographische Skizze eines Hildesheimer Museumsdirektors mit einem Verzeichnis seiner Schriften”, in: Antje Spiekermann, ed., “Zur Zierde gereicht ...”. *Festschrift Bettina Schmitz zum 60. Geburtstag*, Hildesheim 2008, 187-216; Bettina Schmitz and Antje Spiekermann, “Der Roeder-Handke-Nachlass im Stadtarchiv Hildesheim (Bestand 364). Ein erster Überblick”, in: *Hildesheimer Jahrbuch* 80 (2008), 273-289; Thomas Schneider, “Ägyptologen im Dritten Reich. Biographische Notizen anhand der sogenannten ‘Steindorff-Liste’”, in: Thomas Schneider and Peter Raulwing, eds., *Egyptology from the First World War to the Third Reich. Ideology, Scholarship, and Individual Biographies*, Leiden 2012, 120-247: 184-185.

²³ Note of Roeder, 18 November 1939, in: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv (hereafter, SMB-ZA), I/ÄM 91.

²⁴ Günther Roeder, *Ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Ausgrabungen in einer ägyptischen Stadtruine: Deutsche Hermopolis-Expedition 1929–1939*, Hildesheim 1951.

holdings of the Berlin collection²⁵. This opportunity presented itself when he was regularly detached to France for the Luftwaffe during the Occupation²⁶.

[8] Although Roeder used his military assignments in France from the very beginning to identify potential acquisitions, the Berlin State Museums were unable to make any major purchases in the first years of the Occupation due to a lack of funds²⁷. But once the necessary funds were finally made available in 1943, Roeder immediately acquired at least 32 objects, which he had carefully selected in advance, for around 1.5 million francs²⁸. Since the export of works of art posed a major challenge in the final years of the Occupation, their transport to Berlin almost failed. Administrative hurdles included transport capacities being considerably limited by the war economy; a shortage of packaging material, which could only be procured on the black market; and the German occupying power's tightening of export regulations. Even though most of the objects had already been collected from dealers by July 1943, important proof of payment was missing, so the necessary permits for onward transport to Germany could not be issued²⁹. The situation seemed so desperate that art officer Möbius felt compelled to intervene by pointing out the urgency of the matter, whereby it becomes clear that he was already aware of the limited time remaining: "I would be very grateful if you would inform Director Dr. Roeder of the Egyptian Department about all these difficulties, since he never submitted the proper invoices, so that even the payment of his purchases has caused almost insurmountable troubles for us. In his case, an export in the normal way is by now completely out of the question [...]"³⁰. And he was to be proven right in his assessment.

[9] Eventually, the "timely" export only succeeded thanks to the support of the Luftwaffe, as a letter from Roeder to the transport company Schenker indicates:

²⁵ On the history of the acquisitions of the Ägyptisches Museum, see Mariana Jung, *Verhandeln – Kaufen – Sammeln. Ägyptische Objekte und ihre Erwerbungs geschichten am Beispiel des Ägyptischen Museums in Berlin 1884–1894*, Heidelberg 2023.

²⁶ During World War II, Roeder was repeatedly in France on assignment of the Luftwaffe; see Reyer (2008), 204.

²⁷ In reference to the numerous purchases on the Parisian art market made by Rhenish museums during the Occupation, the Director General of the Berlin State Museums, Otto Kümmel (1874–1952), successfully intervened with the responsible Reichsminister for Science, Education and Volksbildung, Bernhard Rust (1883–1945), to obtain an increase in the acquisition budget. See protest letter of Kümmel to Rust, 20 October 1941, in: SMB-ZA, I/ÄM 48.

²⁸ List of objects acquired during the Occupation in France, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

²⁹ Receipt from Hindamian, 30 July 1943, in: (US) National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, RG 260, M1946, Administrative records, correspondence, denazification orders, custody receipts, property cards, Nazi Art Shipments July 1943–September 1943 (hereafter NARA, RG 260, M1946), 923.

³⁰ Letter from Möbius to the director of the Skulpturenabteilung, Theodor Demmler (1879–1944), 11 August 1943, in: SMB-ZA, I/SKS 65, F 92/43 [translation: ML].

*I have therefore contacted the responsible officers of the Luftwaffe, for whom I have been working, and I have found there obliging understanding for the special situation of this case. With reference to this accommodation, I ask you to hand over all the boxes [...], about which you will also receive an order from Professor Dr Möbius of the Kunstschutz of the German Military Commander in France [...]*³¹.

The respective order from Möbius followed a few days later³². Although knowledge of the Egyptian Department's acquisitions is due not least to their listing in the Schenker papers, further investigations have proven that they were never actually transported by Schenker to Germany. Rather, it was Roeder's good relations with the Luftwaffe that helped the objects eventually make it to Berlin, even without the usually required export license. As this example shows, the export was by no means carried out "in correct accordance with the Franco-German agreements"³³. Quite the opposite: Möbius himself actively supported the Egyptian Department in circumventing the existing export regulations.

Postwar and current status of the acquisitions

[10] Immediately after the liberation of Paris, the *Commission de récupération artistique* was founded and tasked with systematically collecting all available information on works of art both *confiscated* and *purchased* by Germans from France during the Occupation³⁴. Within this framework, acquisitions by German museums were verified with the help of British and American occupying powers. Documents from the archives of the Egyptian Department indicate that after the war, the museum was requested to issue a list of "all assets from the occupied territories that were not taken away by the Wehrmacht but were acquired in free trade with approved amounts of foreign currency"³⁵. This was followed on 27 November 1947 by another, more specific, request by the French military government:

*Inspector General Hepp of the French Military Government has taken note of the notification that the former State Museums do not possess any art objects stolen from France during the war. However, he requests a complete list of those works of art that were purchased from France by the Berlin museums during the Occupation, together with an indication of where these works of art are currently located*³⁶.

[11] As the annotations on the lists suggest, the latter question in particular was difficult to answer in view of the chaotic circumstances in the Berlin State Museums after the war³⁷. As a matter of fact, most of the Egyptian collection had already been evacuated when the objects from

³¹ Letter from Roeder to Schenker, 8 September 1943, in: NARA, RG 260, M1946, 929, 930 [translation: ML].

³² Letter from Möbius to Schenker, 2 October 1943, in: NARA, RG 260, M1946, 928.

³³ "Das Referat 'Vorgeschichte und Archäologie'" (2001), 474-483: 482.

³⁴ Lorentz (1998).

³⁵ Questionary, 24 May 1947, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered [translation: ML].

³⁶ Inquiry of Eugène Hepp, 25 November 1947, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered [translation: ML].

³⁷ List of objects acquired during the Occupation in France, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

Paris arrived in Berlin in March 1944 and were provisionally hidden in a basement of the Museum Island together with objects from other departments³⁸. Although the building of the Egyptian Department, the Neues Museum, was largely destroyed by repeated bombing in February 1945 (Fig. 5), the acquisitions miraculously survived the last months of the war without major damage.



Fig. 5. The destroyed building of the Egyptian Department on Berlin's Museum Island, 1949 (photo: Bundesarchiv, 183-S89884; photographer: Kümpfel)

As a result, these objects were situated in the Soviet sector after the war—and therefore outside the reach of the Western Allies³⁹. In order to enforce its claims, the French government was dependent on the support of the Soviet occupying power, and it remains doubtful whether the Soviets ever forwarded the lists compiled in response to the French request.

[12] Instead, the Soviet art officers began their own investigations and contacted Rudolf Anthes (1896–1985), who succeeded Roeder as director after the war.⁴⁰ Thanks to Anthes postwar diary, it is possible to reconstruct the fate of the acquisitions in relative detail, at least in the immediate

³⁸ "Erhalten Berlin 3.3.1944", in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered. On the Ägyptisches Museum in the war period, see Hannelore Kischkewitz, "Die Jahre 1939–1945 im Ägyptischen Museum", in: Jörn Grabowski and Petra Winter, eds., *Zwischen Politik und Kunst. Die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne 2013, 287-301; Klaus Finneiser, "Auslagerung des Ägyptischen Museums in Sophienhof. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Folgen", in: Grabowski and Winter (2013), 303-316.

³⁹ On the Berlin State Museums in the postwar period, see Petra Winter, *"Zwillingsmuseen" im geteilten Berlin. Zur Nachkriegsgeschichte der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin 1945 bis 1958*, Berlin 2008.

⁴⁰ David O'Connor, "In Memoriam Rudolf Anthes", in: *Expedition Magazine. Bulletin of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania* 27 (1985), 34-36; Henry George Fischer, "Rudolf Anthes 1896–1985", in: *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985), 1-3; Schneider (2012), 150-152.

postwar period⁴¹. The Soviet art officers inspected the Paris acquisitions several times in 1948 and finally ordered Anthes to contact the French dealers and ask them to send him “a certificate of lawful and voluntary sale”⁴². Although the original replies are apparently lost, transcripts from December 1948 suggest that almost all dealers complied with this request, and the Soviet investigations were discontinued⁴³. Whether this was due to the certificates actually being produced or to the changed political conditions after the foundation of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, remains an open question. However, a recent check of the inventory has shown that the majority of these acquisitions are still in the possession of the Berlin State Museums today⁴⁴, with some of them on display in the permanent exhibition.

The Parisian antiquities market during the Occupation

[13] Since all these purchases were made during territorial occupation and religious persecution, it seems important to reconstruct their circumstances. In fact, on closer examination, the circumstances turn out to be much more complex than the certificates of “lawful and voluntary sale” may suggest, as will be shown by three examples.

[14] The first example is the purchases from the Parisian art dealer Arthur Sambon (1867–1947), whose shop was then located at 5, quai Voltaire. Roeder acquired from him seven Egyptian objects for a total of 555,000 francs, including a limestone statue of a lion-headed god from the Late Period (ÄM 24021), a quartzite cube figure of the high steward Iuput under Ramses II from Thebes (Fig. 6, ÄM 24022), a funerary relief from the 19th Dynasty (ÄM 24023), and another four objects (ÄM 24024-24027)⁴⁵.

⁴¹ A copy was kindly made available to me by the director of the Zentralarchiv of the Berlin State Museums, Petra Winter. Rudolf Anthes left the German Democratic Republic in 1950 to become a professor of Egyptology at the University of Pennsylvania; see Fischer (1985).

⁴² Accompanying letter from Anthes, 15 December 1948, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered [translation: ML].

⁴³ SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

⁴⁴ The check of the inventory was realized thanks to Jana Helmbold-Doyé from the Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

⁴⁵ Four objects (ÄM 24024-24027) were officially acquired from his son Alfred, but Arthur Sambon later lists these objects as his own sales; see Dossier “Sambon”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9632.



Fig. 6. Quartzite cube figure of the high steward Iuput II, Thebes. Acquired by the Egyptian Department from the Gallery Sambon, Paris, in 1943. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 24022 (photo: SMB-ÄM; photographer: Jürgen Liepe)

[15] In light of the French archival material, doubts are warranted about the account that the sales were entirely voluntary. Like many other art dealers, Sambon was accused of collaboration with the Germans after the Liberation⁴⁶. Most of the dealers were acquitted by the *Commission nationale interprofessionnelle d'épuration*. Their investigation files remain, nonetheless, an important source for reconstructing the circumstances of acquisitions on the Parisian art market during the Occupation. During the investigation against Sambon, his lawyer confirmed the sales but denied their voluntary nature:

From September 1940, the Germans in Paris came to see him [Arthur Sambon] and demanded that they would be allowed to enter his townhouse without any delay. [...] The museum curators Dr. MOBIUS, Professor ROEDER, SCHMIDT, RUITGENS [...] appeared together as a delegation at his house. And he was immediately threatened and confronted with the following dilemma: Either Mr. Sambon would let the Germans have the pieces they had selected, or his house would be confiscated and his collection taken away immediately. From then on, Mr. Sambon had only one goal: to gain time and only give in if he could thereby prevent the massive spoliation he had been threatened with⁴⁷.

Roeder would have already inspected Sambon's collection at the beginning of the Occupation and, together with other German officials, exerted massive pressure on him. The later acquisitions of the Egyptian Department are explicitly addressed in this statement:

⁴⁶ Dossier "Sambon", 1947–1947, in: AN, F/12/9632.

⁴⁷ Dossier "Sambon", 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9632 [translation: ML].

In July 1943, Professor ROEDER, Director of the Egyptian Department of the Berlin Museums, and deputy to Dr. MOBIUS, returned again. This time he wanted to take the Egyptian objects he had been after since 1940 immediately. Tempers flared and Mr Sambon was personally threatened. [...] Finally he let him have the objects in question for half the total value to prevent the whole collection being confiscated⁴⁸.

While the accusation of collaboration leveled against Sambon may have contributed to a dramatized account of the circumstances surrounding the acquisitions, the fundamental question remains: To what extent can a sale during territorial occupation be described as voluntary? Even if Roeder was not Möbius's deputy, as claimed here, this false association reflects the close cooperation between the German occupation administration in the form of the Kunstschutz, on the one hand, and representatives of the German museums, on the other.

[16] The second example is an object acquired from the Brummer Gallery in Paris, which was founded in 1909 by Joseph Brummer (1883–1947); his younger brother Ernest Brummer (1891–1964) joined the business shortly after⁴⁹. When Joseph went to New York in 1914 to expand, Ernest eventually took over the Parisian gallery entirely. Even though the sales of the New York branch quickly overtook those of the Parisian head office, the Paris location continued to thrive, as Ernest constantly provided new supplies for the American market. Due to the Brummer Gallery's role in acquisitions for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the gallery documentation was donated to The Met for preservation⁵⁰. Although most of the Brummer Gallery Records consist of archival material from the New York gallery, they also contain some of Ernest Brummer's personal documents. Among them are seven photographs that show the interior of his Parisian gallery at 126, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré⁵¹. In one of these photographs (Fig. 7), a statue sitting on a table in the center is strongly reminiscent of an object Roeder bought there in 1943: the

⁴⁸ Dossier "Sambon", 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9632 [translation: ML].

⁴⁹ "Brummer", in: Colum Hourihane, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, vol. 1, Oxford 2012, 445–446; Caroline Astrid Bruzelius and Jill Meredith, *The Brummer Collection of Medieval Art*, London 1991, 1–11; Branislav Anđelković and Jonathan Elias, "Ernest Brummer and the Coffin of Nefer-renepet from Akhmim", in: *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 8 (2013), 565–584: 568–571; Yaëlle Biro, "African Arts between Curios, Antiquities, and Avant-Garde at the Maison Brummer, Paris (1908–1914)", in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015), 1–15; Christine E. Brennan, "The Brummer Gallery and the Business of Art", in: *Journal of the History of Collections* 27 (2015), 455–468; Mattes Lammert, "Paris als Drehscheibe des Antikenhandels", in: Bénédicte Savoy, Merten Lagatz and Philippa Sissis, eds., *Beute. Ein Bildatlas zu Kunstraub und Kulturerbe*, Berlin 2021, 202–205; Yaëlle Biro, Christine E. Brennan and Christel H. Force, eds., *The Brummer Galleries, Paris and New York. Defining Taste from Antiquities to the Avant-Garde*, Leiden/Boston 2023.

⁵⁰ The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), New York, Thomas J. Watson Library Digital Collections, Cloisters Archives Collections, Brummer Gallery Records, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/watson-digital-collections/cloisters-archives-collections/the-brummer-gallery-records> (hereafter, Brummer Gallery Records). See also Irene Bald Romano's introduction to this special issue, "Antiquities in the Nazi Era: Contexts and Broader View", *RIHA Journal* 0282, paras. 47–57, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92735>, for more on the Brummer Gallery and antiquities.

⁵¹ Paris gallery photograph, 1940, in: Brummer Gallery Records, Laszlo-02-009-003.

limestone statue of a dog (Fig. 8, ÄM 24034)⁵². Though the dog on the table has ears, Roeder noted during his visit that they were added, and he probably had them removed later (Fig. 9)⁵³.



Fig. 7. Interior of the Brummer Gallery, Paris, with limestone statue of a dog on a table, 16 May 1940 (photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cloisters Library and Archives, Brummer Gallery Records; photographer: R. Gauthier)



Fig. 8. Limestone statue of a dog, Egyptian. Acquired by the Berlin Egyptian Department from the Brummer Gallery, Paris, in 1943. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 24034 (photo: SMB-ÄM, Archiv)

⁵² List of objects acquired during the Occupation in France, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

⁵³ Note of Roeder, undated, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

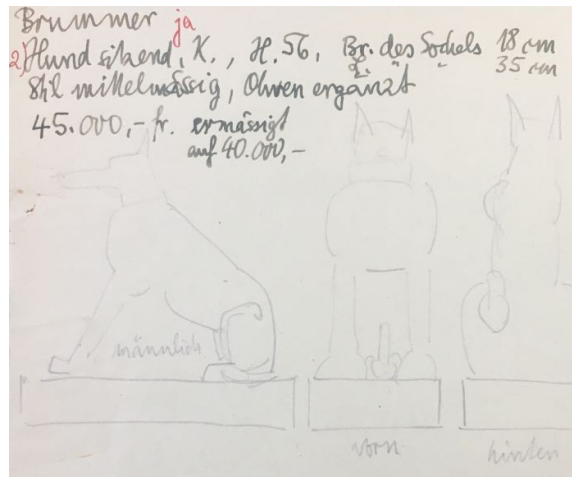


Fig. 9. Note of Günther Roeder during a visit to the Brummer Gallery, Paris, undated. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Archiv (photo: SMB-ÄM, Archiv)

On the basis of an invoice, the photos can be dated to 16 May 1940, which suggests that Ernest Brummer commissioned them as a memento⁵⁴. Being a Hungarian Jew, he was forced by the racial laws to leave France a few days later to avoid the fate that would befall his sister, who was killed by the Nazis in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944⁵⁵. As had happened in Germany before, once Paris was occupied, the collections of Jews were immediately confiscated and their businesses Aryanized. Ernest Brummer had succeeded in shipping parts of his collection to the United States, but some objects remained in Paris⁵⁶. He entrusted his gallery and the rest of his collection to a certain Charlotte Gautheron. While letters between them attest to a close relationship, there is no evidence of any authorization of the sale to the Egyptian Department, which was completed after his forced emigration⁵⁷. Since the certificate of “lawful and voluntary sale” is signed only by her, its actual truth must remain in question⁵⁸.

[17] The third example concerns a bronze animal coffin with three ichneumons of the Late Period (Fig. 10, ÄM 24008) acquired from Bellerophon Geladakís⁵⁹. His name appears in the American

⁵⁴ Invoice, 16 May 1940, in: Brummer Gallery Records, Laszlo-02-009-008.

⁵⁵ “Etelka Brummer has been deported from Szeged to Auschwitz in 1944. She never returned from Auschwitz. She is reported to have been executed in the gaz cells” (death certificate of Etelka Brummer from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, in: Brummer Gallery Records, Laszlo-04-039).

⁵⁶ Inventory of objects shipped by Brummer, 19 February 1940, in: Brummer Gallery Records, Laszlo-04-300.

⁵⁷ Correspondence between Brummer and Charlotte Gautheron, in: Brummer Gallery Records, Laszlo-04-300, Correspondence.

⁵⁸ SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

⁵⁹ Invoice of Bellerophon Geladakís, 23 November 1941, in: SMB-ZA, I/GV 1671. It appears that there was not even a request for confirmation of the “lawful and voluntary sale”, since the animal coffin, which had already been purchased in 1941, was—as a result of its early removal—no longer on the Museum Island, which was controlled by the Soviets in the postwar period, but rather in the Central Collecting Point Wiesbaden, which was controlled by the Americans. List of art objects acquired in France during the Occupation, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Art Looting Intelligence Unit's so-called Red Flag List, which listed all those allegedly involved in art thefts in France: "Geladakis B., Paris, 1 rue Milton: Dealt with Bornheim. Specialist in sculpture and objects d'art. Sometimes sold on commission"⁶⁰. The later investigation by the *Commission nationale interprofessionnelle d'épuration*, however, seems to contradict this assessment and thus reveals the sometimes ambivalent value of the Red Flag List, which to this day is often the only source for a first provenance check.



Fig. 10. Bronze animal coffin with three ichneumons, Late Period (664–332 BC), Egypt. Acquired by the Egyptian Department from Bellerophon Geladakis, Paris, in 1941. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 24008 (photo: SMB-ÄM; photograph: Kyra Gospodar)

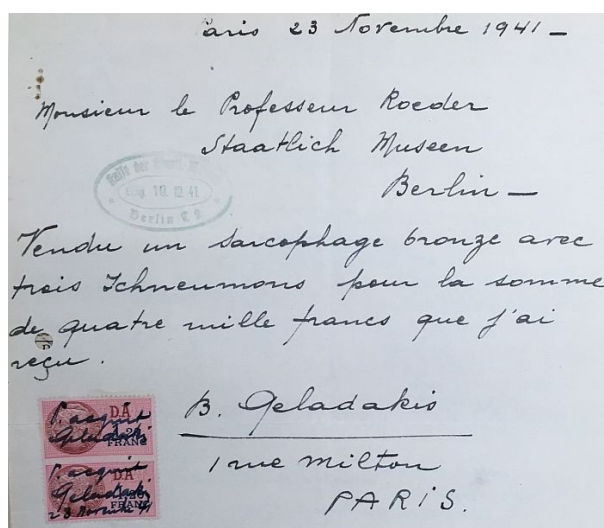


Fig. 11. Invoice of Bellerophon Geladakis, 23 November 1941. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv, I/ GV 1671 (photo: SMB-ZA)

⁶⁰ Art Looting Intelligence Unit, Final Report, 1 May 1946, "Biographical Index of Individuals Involved in Art Looting", 103, in: NARA, RG 239, M1944, "Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (The Roberts Commission), 1943–1946".

According to the French investigation files, Bellerophon Geladakis was born in Athens on 21 January 1897 as the son of Elie Geladakis, who also worked as an art dealer⁶¹. Together with his wife, the younger Geladakis ran a stall for antiques at the Marché de Saint-Ouen in Paris but also received clients in his private flat at 1, rue Milton, where Roeder bought the small animal coffin in 1941 (Fig. 11).

[18] While Geladakis openly confirms in his statement to having sold objects to the German art dealer Walter Bornheim (1888–1971)⁶², he vehemently denies the voluntary nature of these sales: “The only reason I agreed to these was to save my wife’s life”⁶³. His wife, Aida Valdman, was indeed Jewish⁶⁴. As further investigation files of the *Comité de confiscation des profits illicites* show, the business originally belonged to her and was put under external administration at the beginning of the Occupation, before Geladakis was able to take it over in June 1941⁶⁵. But the danger was by no means averted: the Gestapo raided their private apartment and confiscated their remaining art collection in February 1944⁶⁶. Although there is no evidence that Roeder was aware and took advantage of Geladakis’s precarious situation, this example shows the necessity of taking a critical approach to the conclusions of some postwar reports, especially with regard to antiquities dealers who still have received very little attention.

The Armenian art dealers and their network

[19] Nevertheless, most of the acquisitions of antiquities on the Paris market during the Occupation were made through Armenian dealers, who largely controlled this market. Many of them had come to France at the end of the 19th century to escape the pogroms against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire; thereby, they shared not only the same ethnic background but also the same fate of displacement. By the time they arrived in Paris, antiquities had become a valuable commodity due to increased demand, and the new niche market offered compelling opportunities. Some Armenian merchants quickly shifted their business to the antiquities trade, in which they could benefit from their international networks in the widespread Armenian community, especially when importing from the Middle East⁶⁷. With Armenian dealers serving as intermediaries between the East and the West, Paris quickly developed into the main trading hub for antiquities, whose offer attracted not only European but also many American collectors. Although almost every major museum today owns objects that were brokered by Armenian

⁶¹ Dossier “Geladakis”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9630.

⁶² Detailed Interrogation Report No. 11: Walter Bornheim, 15 September 1945, in: NARA, RG 239, M1782, “Reports by the Art Looting Investigation Unit of the OSS relating to jewels, paintings, and other art objects appropriated during World War II”.

⁶³ Dossier “Geladakis”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9630 [translation: ML].

⁶⁴ Dossier “Geladakis”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9630.

⁶⁵ Dossier “Geladakis” (411, 412), 1947, in: Archives de Paris (hereafter, AdP), 118W53.

⁶⁶ Dossier “Geladakis” (411, 412), 1947, in: AdP, 118W53.

⁶⁷ Jessica Hallett and Maida Chavak, “The Gift of Antiquity: Armenian Art Dealers and Their Networks”, in: *The Rise of Islamic Art, 1869–1939*, exh. cat., Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon 2019, 55–66.

dealers like Altounian, Indjoudjian, and Hindamian, hardly anything is known about these dealers. With regard to the provenance of antiquities acquired during the Occupation, this large gap in knowledge can only be addressed by further fundamental research.

[20] Two of the most important Armenian art dealers were the brothers Hagop (1869–?) and Garbis Kalebdjian (1885–1954), who alone sold 16 objects for almost 440,000 francs to the Egyptian Department during the Occupation, among them a wooden head of a man (ÄM 24040, Fig. 12)⁶⁸.



Fig. 12. Wooden head of a man, Egypt. Acquired by the Egyptian Department from the Kalebdjian Gallery in 1943. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 24040 (photo: SMB-ÄM, Archiv)

One of the rare sources of their activities is a short description in a sociological study on Armenian immigrants in Paris⁶⁹. Originally from Constantinople, born into a family from Anatolia, the Kalebdjians emigrated to Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, where their uncle already owned an antique shop⁷⁰. While they initially traded old jewelry in their first shop in 17, rue Le Peletier⁷¹, they quickly adapted to the demand and specialized in Egyptian antiquities, which promised a higher profit. To this end, they opened a shop in Cairo, where they traded with objects

⁶⁸ List of objects acquired during the Occupation in France, in: SMB-ÄM, Archiv, unnumbered.

⁶⁹ Paul Descamps, *La formation sociale des Arméniens*, Paris 1926, 86-91.

⁷⁰ Although this uncle is not named, it was probably Mihran Sivadjian: “A nephew of Sivadjian, by name Kalebdjian, is in his employ in Paris [...]”. Memorandum of Hercules Read, 29 March 1904, quoted according to Christopher Entwistle, “‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth’. The British Museum and the Second Cyprus Treasure”, in: Christopher Entwistle, ed., *Through a Glass Brightly. Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, Oxford 2003, 226-235: 227.

that probably came from illegal excavations⁷². However, after the Egyptian state increasingly restricted this practice, they moved back to Paris, continuing to profit from the contacts they had built and becoming one of the most important addresses for Egyptian art in Paris: they now offered antiquities in a gallery on the prestigious rue de la Paix (Fig. 13), just across the famous jewelry shop Cartier, with whom they also collaborated on several occasions⁷³.



Fig. 13. The Kalebdjian Gallery at rue de la Paix, Paris, 1919 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris)

This collaboration reflected not only the growing interest in antiquities at the time, but also the social rise of the Kalebdjians, who had come to Paris as immigrants. Their success was also apparent in the fact that they increasingly appeared as buyers in auctions of private collections like the sale of the MacGregor Collection in 1922⁷⁴. The Kalebdjians often acted on behalf of the oil tycoon Calouste Gulbenkian (1869–1955), also of Armenian origin, and helped him to build his art collection⁷⁵. In fact, at the time Roeder bought his objects, they had moved their gallery into a luxurious townhouse, 52 bis, avenue d'Iéna, which was located in the vicinity of Gulbenkian's

⁷¹ Joseph Zenker, *Pantheon. Adressbuch der Kunst- und Antiquitäten-Sammler und -Händler, Bibliotheken, Archive, Museen, Kunst-, Altertums- und Geschichtsvereine, Bücherliebhaber, Numismatiker*, Esslingen 1914, 348.

⁷² Frederik Hagen and Kim Ryholt, *The Antiquities Trade in Egypt 1880–1930. The H.O. Lange Papers*, Copenhagen 2016, 225–226.

⁷³ Hans Nadelhoffer, *Cartier*, London 2007, 146. The Kalebdjian gallery was located at 12, rue de la Paix, and Cartier at 13, rue de la Paix.

⁷⁴ Tom Hardwick, "Five Months before Tut. Purchasers and Prices at the MacGregor Sale, 1922", in: *Journal of the History of Collections* 23 (2011), 179–192: 181–182.

⁷⁵ Hallett and Chavak (2019).

Paris mansion. The Kalebdjian brothers benefited strongly from the cooperation among Armenian dealers themselves. As newcomers on the Parisian art market, they quickly and very successfully developed collective strategies—often together with other minorities like Jewish dealers—to compete against the long-established French dealers⁷⁶. In addition to the specialization of each dealer, which was intended to prevent unnecessary competition, it was apparently common practice for them to buy and exploit larger excavation findings or collections together in order to raise the required funds and minimize individual risk.

[21] After the Liberation, the activities of the Kalebdjians during the Occupation were investigated by the French *Commission nationale interprofessionnelle d'épuration* (Fig. 14), and the brothers had to compile a list of all their sales to Germans⁷⁷. Although this impressive list is 32 pages long, surprisingly not a single sale of an item to the Egyptian Department is mentioned. Furthermore the Kalebdjians state in their defense that they were seriously threatened by the German authorities. Other archival documents confirm that the German military commander in France initiated proceedings against them in order to confiscate their collection as foreign property due to the Egyptian citizenship of Garbis Kalebdjian. Officials of the Kunstschutz intervened several times to avert a seizure, since that would endanger acquisitions by German museums: “At German museums [...] there is currently a strong demand for antiquities, which at present can almost only be satisfied by the K.[alebdjian] company. For this purpose, however, it is necessary that the owners can pursue their business unhindered [...]”⁷⁸.

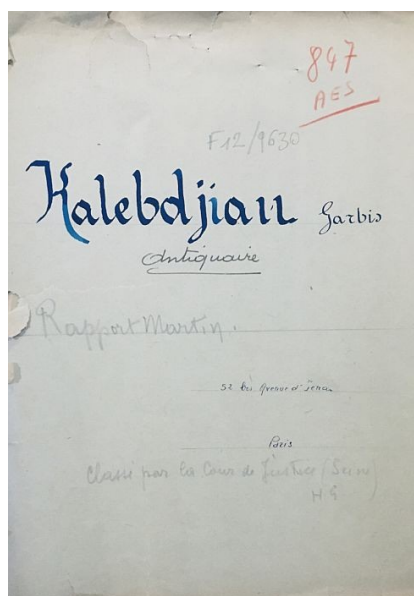


Fig. 14. Investigation file “Kalebdjian” of the *Commission nationale interprofessionnelle d'épuration*, 1946–1947. Archives Nationales, Paris, F/12/9360 (photo: AN)

⁷⁶ Descamps (1926), 86-91.

⁷⁷ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9630.

⁷⁸ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, 1946–1947, in: AN, AJ/40/649 [translation: ML].

The planned seizure was abandoned, but insolvency proceedings were filed against the Kalebdjians instead, as a result of which they had to increase their sales to their mostly German clientele if they did not want to be shut down. This case demonstrates that persecution-related sales during the Occupation were not limited to Jewish art dealers and collectors.

[22] As another result of the insolvency proceedings, the Kalebdjians had to submit balance sheets on a regular basis, which are preserved among the records of the German occupation administration⁷⁹. Although these balance sheets do not include any information on single objects, they are a very valuable source from which to learn more about the Armenian dealers and their networks, since almost none of their business records were preserved. A balance sheet from 1940, for example, gives an insight into the complex business relationships of the Kalebdjians, who owned a large part of their stock together with others, such as Armenian dealers Altounian and Sevadjian and Jewish dealers Bacri Frères⁸⁰ and M. Ascher⁸¹, whose collections were looted during the Occupation⁸². However, a better understanding of the antiquities trade for provenance research is not limited to the finding of this practice of shared ownership. More tellingly, an other balance sheet from 1941 shows that the total value of objects sold on a commission basis (478,000 francs) was much larger than the value of those objects on their own account (230,000 francs)⁸³. The same is true for a balance sheet from 1943, when the Egyptian Department purchased many objects⁸⁴. These discrepancies raise the question of to whom and for whom the Kalebdjians sold objects on a commission basis. The brothers explicitly point out in their postwar investigation reports that they had hidden countless objects for their Jewish colleagues, some of whom did not survive the German occupation:

Through patience, prudence and diplomacy, we were able to prevent the catastrophe. Not only for us, but also for others. In fact, a certain number of Israelites had entrusted us with their assets and our cellars were full of them. We have hidden about 3 to 4 million pieces of jewellery, as well as furniture and other belongings that belonged to: the wives of Jean and Lucien SAUPHAR, LANG, Jean SALOMON, and the gentlemen François LANG (deported and murdered), ACHARD, Pierre KANN (deported and murdered), ASCHER⁸⁵.

Might the Kalebdjians have sold some these objects in order to help their Jewish dealer colleagues? Could this even explain why the acquisitions of the Egyptian Department do not appear on the list of sales? Taking into account shared ownership and sales on commission in the

⁷⁹ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, 1946–1947, in: AN, AJ/40/649.

⁸⁰ Dossier “Bacri Frères” (45.541), in: Centre des Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve (hereafter, AD), 209SUP.

⁸¹ Dossier “M. Ascher” (46.291.1315), in: AD, 209SUP.

⁸² Dossier “Kalebdjian”, in: AN, AJ/40/649.

⁸³ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, in: AN, AJ/40/649.

⁸⁴ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, in: AN, AJ/40/649.

⁸⁵ Dossier “Kalebdjian”, 1946–1947, in: AN, F/12/9630 [translation: ML]. It seems highly likely that “million” is a typing error and should be “milles”, i.e., “3 to 4 thousand”.

antiquities trade, it seems at least that the name that appears on an invoice, and consequently in a museum inventory, is not necessarily that of the true (or only) owner. This is a meaningful observation when it comes to the reconstruction of provenance in the antiquities trade in general, but especially during the Occupation.

Conclusion

[23] As this case study of acquisitions made by the Egyptian Department of the Berlin State Museums shows, a more critical approach to the reports made by the Allied art officers in the immediate postwar period is urgently needed. Previous research on the art market during the Occupation, based primarily on these reports, inevitably adopted those reports' evaluations. Thus, the focus was largely on paintings, while the important purchases of antiquities were ignored – a historical fact that also reflects the history of aesthetics and the changing appreciation of different forms of art. Furthermore, today's provenance research on antiquities is hampered by the often generic names of the concerned objects. Therefore the long overdue investigation on the antiquities trade during the German Occupation can only be successful if it breaks through the boundaries of provenance research in museums, which traditionally focuses on individual objects, and instead equally conducts contextual research on the relevant dealers and their networks. This kind of examination not only will contribute to a better understanding of the complex implications of acquisitions made during territorial occupation and religious persecution, but also will fill in some blanks in the study of the Parisian art market in general and the antiquities trade in particular.

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