







Anatolian Gold Ewer, ca. 2000 BCE. *The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection*

On Tuesday, London's Victoria and Albert Museum returned an ancient Anatolian gold ewer to Turkey. Dating back to more than 4,000 years ago, the golden ewer is believed by experts to have been made as a funerary gift by Haitian people of Anatolia in the 3rd century B.C.E.

The artifact came into the museum's collection as a gift from its previous owner. In 1989, British collector and real estate developer Arthur Gilbert purchased it from Los Angeles dealer Bruce McNall, who was involved in the illegal antiquities trade, [according to the Art Newspaper](#). Gilbert reportedly purchased the ewer for a substantial sum of around \$250,000.

Gilbert's collection, which comprises around 1,200 decorative art and mosaics alongside silver and gold artifacts, went on display at Somerset House in London in 2000. Eight years later, the collector's estate trust placed the group of works on long-term loan at the museum, where many of the works are housed in an eponymous gallery. Because the ewer was the only antiquity in the Gilbert collection, the work had largely been kept in storage by the V&A.

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Jacques Schuhmacher, a provenance expert appointed by the Gilbert trust in 2018 to review the collection's compliance with [restitution](#) standards, uncovered more details about the ewer's ownership record recently. Through further research, he learned that McNall had illegally sold looted antiquities.

Schuhmacher told the *Art Newspaper* that details surrounding when the ewer left Turkey are still unknown, but that he believes it was looted in the 1980s. According to the expert, there is no export license or record of the ewer's origin.

The record of provenance for the artifact is littered with figures that have, in recent decades, been linked to illicit antiquities trade. McNall allegedly obtained the ewer from Zurich-based art restorer Fritz Bürki, who has been linked to the Italian-convicted antiquities trafficker Giacomo Medici.

In compliance with U.K. government standards on combating the illicit trade of antiquities for museums instated in 2005, the V&A returned the ewer to the Gilbert Trust once the research emerged. The guidelines require that U.K. museums reject objects that have suspicious provenance "after undertaking due diligence."

Many archaeological artifacts with Turkish origins remain at large in U.K. museums and on the market. In 2020, two Turkish antiquities that surfaced at a London auction house—an ox-driven cart sculpture and a three-piece Sidamara sarcophagus dating from around 3000–2000 B.C.E. Anatolia—were returned to the government. Even though Bonhams refused to stop the sale, the objects were restituted by their owner after the Turkish ministry of Culture contacted U.K. authorities to intervene.

The Gilbert Trust and the V&A facilitated the restitution of the ewer together with the Turkey's ministry of culture. The artifact will be showcased at the Ankara's Museum of Anatolian Civilizations as part of its permanent collection, which houses a significant group of Haitian artifacts.

Source: [London's Victoria and Albert Museum Returns Artifact to Turkey](#)