

# It's Finally Agreed: Germany to Regain A Stolen Trove

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

After a year and a half of wrangling, representatives of the German Government and the heirs of Joe T. Meador, an American art collector who stole a nearly priceless collection of medieval treasures from a mineshaft outside of Quedlinburg in the final days of World War II, completed an agreement yesterday to return the artworks to Germany.

First, however, the glittering, thousand-year-old treasures, which Klaus Maier, the chief German negotiator, called "one of the most important collections of religious art of the early Middle Ages" — will be displayed at the Dallas Museum of Art for seven or eight weeks beginning March 7. Officials of the museum had agreed to store the artworks during the legal battle in exchange for the right to exhibit them when a settlement was reached.

After the exhibition in Dallas, the treasures are to be shipped to Berlin for conservation at the Fine Arts Museum of the Foundation for Prussian Cultural Heritage. They will be exhibited there in the late summer.

Afterward, the artworks will be returned to the small Lutheran church,

formally called the Stiftskirche Domgemeinde Quedlinburg, where many of them had been kept in a Schatzkammer, or treasure chamber, for centuries.

The Rev. Friedemann Gossias, the minister of the church, said in a telephone interview last week that the Bonn Government was spending about \$15 million to make the church's Schatzkammer a modern three-gallery exhibition complex for the display of the treasures beginning in 1993.

The terms of the settlement, reached after months of sparring in and out of Federal District Court in Dallas, first came to light in a meeting in London a year ago. They include the payment by the German Government of \$912,500 to Jack Meador and Jane Meador Cook, the brother and sister of Joe T. Meador, who died in 1986. In exchange, the Meadors relinquish all claim to ownership of the treasures.

This payment increases their total gain from selling the treasures to the Germans a \$2.75 million, a sum that has shocked the art world since the Meadors admitted in court that their brother "inappropriately removed" the treasures from Germany.

Another controversial part of the settlement is that three separate departments of the German Government have supplied the Meadors with "To Whom It May Concern" letters that may be sent to appropriate agencies of the United States Government informing them that the matter has been resolved amicably, and that the Germans do not want the United States Government to take any action against the Meadors.

## 2 Countries' Laws

These letters, absolving the Meadors of wrongdoing, are not referred to in the written agreement, however. The reason, according to a participant who spoke on condition that his name would not be used, is that the Meadors feared they might be accused of breaching the silence of complaining witnesses.

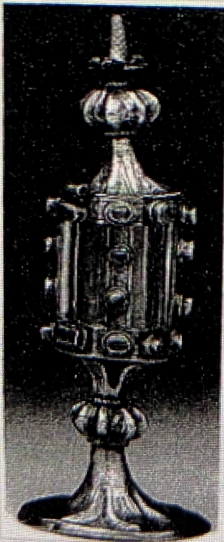
Asked about this, Randal Mathis, the Meador family's lawyer, said, "Everyone on both sides worked hard to make certain that the settlement did not violate any German or American law, whether civil or criminal."

Mr. Mathis acknowledged his expectation that the letters from the German Government would help the Meadors in their dealings with the Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Justice. Last January, the tax agency made public its ruling that the Meador siblings were wrong not to have filed an estate-tax return when they inherited the treasures. Henry Holmes, a spokesman for the I.R.S., said that the agency was now determining the value of the treasures as of 1966 when Joe T. Meador died, and would levy a tax on that basis.

Some critics of the settlement have said it would be inappropriate for the German government to attempt to influence law enforcement in the United States.

A lawyer involved in the case who spoke only after being assured anonymity, said the agreement on that point had been worded artfully. "The German Government has a right to

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Joe T. Meador/The Dallas Museum of Art  
The Quedlinburg treasures, including this 10th-century reliquary, will be exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art.

From The New York Times,  
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# It's Agreed: Stolen Trove Is Returning to Germany

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ask the United States Government to prosecute a lawbreaker," he said, "but what they're saying in this case is that they don't insist on it. They believe they can go that far without offending international doctrine, whether by treaty or general practice."

After a monthlong investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice is now deciding whether to prosecute the Meadors for possession of stolen property or transporting it across state or international borders, said a member of the investigating team who spoke on condition that his name not be used.

"A lot of things can affect a decision to prosecute," the Justice Department official said. "These are elderly people, hometown people. It's not as if they were a couple of yuppies who would get much less sympathy, especially down here."

The German Government has been negotiating with the Meador family for the return of the Quedlinburg treasures since the summer of 1990. When the Meadors threatened to move the treasures out of the country, the lawyers for the German Gov-

ernment filed suit in Federal District Court.

The settlement came about, said Mr. Mathis and Thomas Kline, the chief of the team of American lawyers who represented the German

## The Germans are done. Now for the F.B.I. and I.R.S.

Government, because the Germans recognized that although their case was strong the outcome of a jury trial in Texas would be uncertain.

Swayed by Old Angers

A source within the German team said the German Government feared that a jury verdict might be influenced by smoldering resentments from World War II. For that reason, also, the source said, the Germans will not vigorously press the Meadors to assist them in tracking down two relatively minor items from the treasure believed to have been stolen from Joe T. Meador toward the end of

his life. It is thought the items may still be in Texas.

The Dallas Museum of Art has also been criticized for its involvement in the case. Richard Brettell, the director of the museum, acknowledged having remarked some months ago that if the museum could have an exhibition like the Quedlinburg show once a year he "wouldn't have to worry about this year's projected deficit." But Mr. Brettell said he was "sick of being told the museum's role in this was money grubbing."

"Our interest was to preserve the art in a neutral place during the trial, and we are now pleased to present the treasures because they are important works of art," he said.

The treasures have not been seen publicly since the early days of World War II when the Nazi Government stored them in a bank vault and later moved them to the mineshaft outside of Quedlinburg, in central Germany. They include the gold, silver and jewel-embellished biblical manuscript from the ninth century called the Samuhel Gospels; a similarly decorated manuscript dated 1513; a lavishly decorated box for religious relics which is said to have belonged to Heinrich I, the 10th-century ruler of an early configuration of German

states; a liturgical comb dating to the seventh or eighth century; five reliquaries of cut rock crystal dating to the 10th century, and a heart-shaped vessel believed to have been fashioned in the 15th century.

## Bible Is Staying Home

The Samuhel Gospels, which a German expert has described as being as valuable as a van Gogh painting, is now undergoing conservation in Berlin and will not be returned for exhibition.

Dr. Charles T. Little, the curator of medieval art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art who studied the treasures at the Dallas Museum last year and advised the museum in the preparation of its catalogue, said that the rock crystal flask in the form of two birds is "one of the finest pieces of its kind; this transparent crystal was unknown in Europe and seemed quite marvelous to the early Germans."

"The liturgical comb is also very important," Dr. Little continued. "It was probably a personal affect of Heinrich I, and is one of the earliest Islamic ivory carvings in existence, dating to the eighth century. It has balance, elegance and a great curvilinear shape that is quite sumptuous."