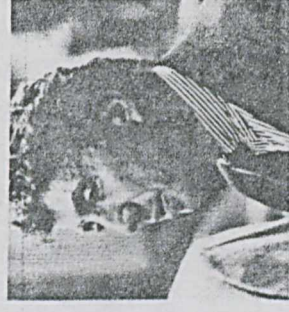


CONNOISSEUR



From Turkey a Greek statue of a Muse, now at the Getty and a Roman sarcophagus, at the Brooklyn Museum.

The mother lode of illegally excavated antiquities smuggled to the West is Turkey. Tens of thousands of ancient Greek and Roman masterworks, exceeding a billion dollars in value, have flowed through the smugglers' pipelines in the past two decades. Up to now the smugglers, every bit as ruthless as the Mafia, have been incognito, unknown to all but their clients—certain dealers, curators, and distinguished private collectors.



Top lieutenant in the smuggling ring, Fuat Uzülmöz.



The kingpin himself, the much feared Edip Telli, in his swank Gryphos Gallery, in downtown Munich.

Now, *Connoisseur* has penetrated the network. Who runs the ring and how it works are revealed for the first time in the article starting on page 130. Certain museums, dealers, and collectors will doubtless be very surprised.

SMUGGLERS



ALSO:

GARY OLDMAN—ACTOR

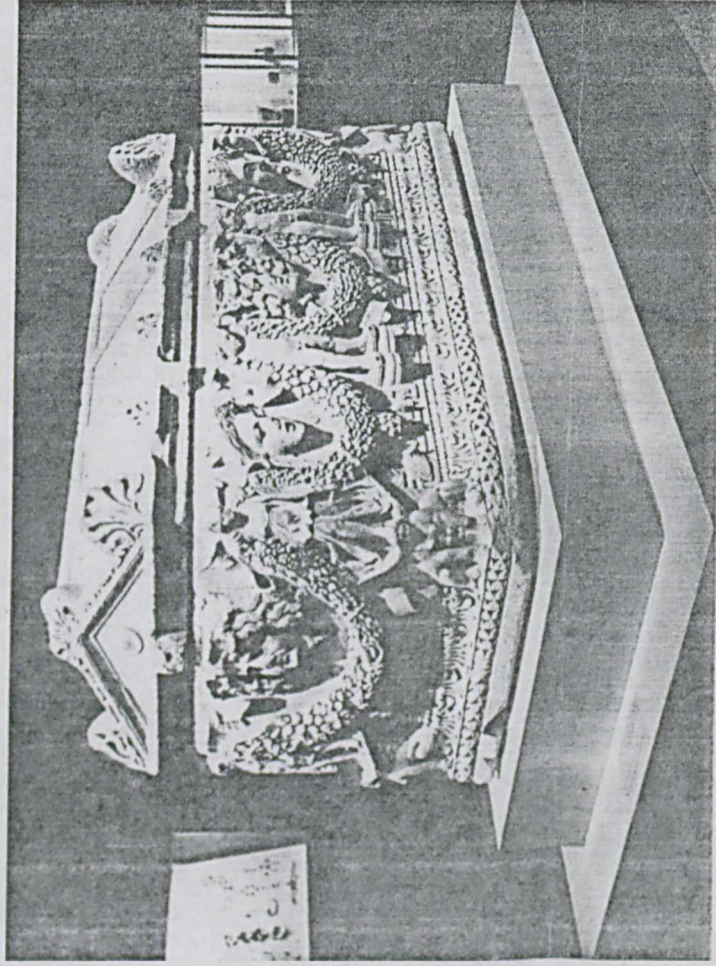
ON THE EDGE OF GREATNESS



THE TURKISH CONNECTION

AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON THE SMUGGLING OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES

BY ÖZGEN ACAR AND MELİK KAYLAN



THIS HANDSOME SARCOPHAGUS, DECORATED WITH REPRESENTATIONS FROM GREEK MYTHOLOGY, IS ON LOAN TO THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM, WHERE IT IS PROUDLY DISPLAYED. IT WAS MADE ABOUT A.D. 150 AND SMUGGLED OUT OF SOUTHERN ANATOLIA.

Turkey is the world's number one supplier of classical antiquities to the West—all illegal. The marble sarcophagus shown below is Roman and is in one of America's finest museums. It was smuggled from Turkey. The three-foot-tall Muse at right was illegally dug up in Turkey and smuggled out of the country; it now graces the richest museum in the United States.

Where were the antiquities unearthed and how did they get to market?

There are more ancient Roman towns in Turkey than in Italy, more antique Greek sites in Turkey than in Greece. Remember that two of the seven wonders of the ancient world were in Asia Minor (Turkey)—the Halicarnassus Mausoleum and the Ephesus Artemisium. Turkey's immensely rich archaeological heritage—it was home to thirty-six great cultures, including the Hittite, Assyrian, and Byzantine—is spread across and down the multilevels of its fertile soil. Thrust a plow into the land, and you may well hit a treasure. Push the start-up button on your metal detector, and chances are the machine will soon start screeching.

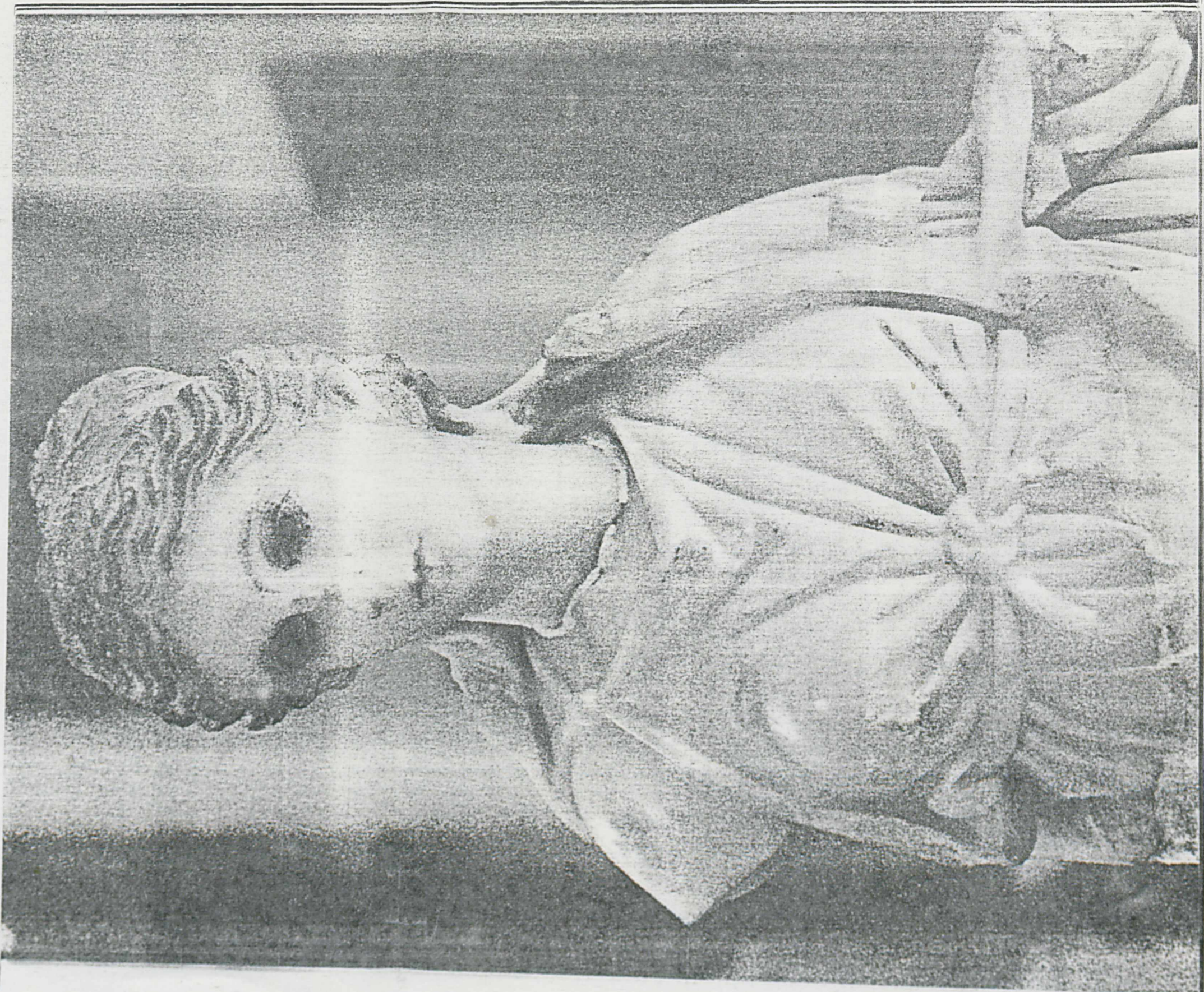
In the United States, if your local museum has just put on view some "singular" Greek or Roman acquisition or loan, the odds are six out of ten that it came from Turkey. If someone you know collects Roman busts, or bronzes, or ancient seals, the lion's share of the collection has to have come from Turkey. What might amaze you (and possibly the collector) is that the pieces are almost certainly stolen and smuggled. Turkey absolutely forbids the export of any and all antiquities.

The International Foundation for Art Research estimates that the yearly worldwide trade in illicit art amounts to \$2 billion. Probably half of that consists of antiquities, the most valuable of which are classical antiquities. The exact worth of the Turkish portion is not known—

let us say, conservatively, some hundreds of millions of dollars—but that is plenty enough for someone to make a vast sum of money, tax-free. With such amounts at stake, organized crime enters the game, manipulating the spoils into Western coffers, private or public. How does this well-organized illicit Turkish art market work? Who runs it? Where in the United States are some of the most important treasures today?

The answers lie along what we might

RIGHT: ONE OF
THE FOUR MUSES
IN THE GETTY
MUSEUM. IT WAS
SMUGGLED FROM
CREMNA, IN
SOUTH TURKEY



call the Antiquities Route. Its source is the Turkish countryside. It sweeps into Istanbul, then veers northwest into Europe, becoming a caravan of gold and silver, marble and ceramics. The first destination is the clean and bustling city of Munich. There, the top smugglers have opened galleries, attracted by the lax laws concerning stolen property and the avid market for antiquities. When we started our investigation—one that was to last almost two years—we naturally headed for Munich.

We wanted to talk to Edip Telli, a Turk of Kurdish extraction and without doubt the most important Turkish smuggler. He and his family participated in the smuggling of the two most renowned treasures to arrive on American, or any, shores: the Lydian Hoard, of sixth-century B.C. objects, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, and the opulent silver Byzantine treasure at Dumbarton Oaks, in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

INSIDE THE LION'S DEN IN MUNICH

We had good reason to believe that Telli would talk to us. He had avoided all our previous attempts to reach him. We had run across his traces while reporting on the so-called Decadrachm Hoard—an astonishing find of some 2,000 silver coins dating back to 475 B.C. and including no fewer than fourteen decadrachms, the rarest of rare Greek coins (*Connoisseur*, July 1988). Telli had helped to smuggle the hoard out of Turkey and to sell it to the Boston multimillionaire William Koch for \$3.5 million. One week after publication of the story, he called us.

The man was almost painfully cordial. "You really should have called me before this article. But now, ask me anything. You can reach me anytime. Anytime. And of course you know where I work, at the gallery." Edip Telli was calling from Munich, where he lives with his family. He is married to a German woman named Monika. His gallery, Gryphos, is located in an affluent quarter of Munich, on the tree-lined Ottostrasse. This is definitely not the layman's idea of a modern-day Barbary Coast teeming with pirates. But that's what it is.

Among curators, collectors, and dealers of superior antiquities, Telli's gallery has been for decades the place to go. What we discovered, while doing the research, is that a second stop is

becoming necessary—at the Artemis Gallery, named, ironically, after the goddess of chastity and owned by Fuat Uzülmöz. Like Telli, he is a Turk (but of Syrian descent) and was involved in the decadrachm caper. Fuat is in his midforties, a sharp dresser going slightly to flab. His gallery, on the vast and leafy Maximiliansplatz, is a quiet hideaway at the end of a balcony on the third floor of number 12A. Unlike Edip's Gryphos, Fuat's Artemis seems a place more to make deals than to view treasures.

Then again, each man comes from a different smuggling background. The Telli family's involvement in serious smuggling goes back to the sixties. At that time, contraband Western goods were flooding into Turkey. The Tellis plunged into nylons, jeans, cigarettes, and guns coming mostly from Germany by truck. Having set up an efficient smuggling organization, they were in the perfect position to act as brokers for the exporting of antiquities in the same trucks. Edip's elder brother Nizamettin was killed in 1967 in a police shoot-out. In 1968, Edip was arrested for smuggling, an event that prompted his move to Germany soon afterward. (As if to uphold the family tradition, his younger brother Nevzat did five years in the early 1980s in a German penitentiary with a man regarded by Turkish authorities as one of the country's top five drug lords; they were running two tons of hashish a month into Europe.)

Fuat's heritage is more cultivated. He was trained by his father, Faraç, the dean of antiquities dealers in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. Edip and Fuat, oddly enough, appear to be far from competitors. They are colleagues, not quite equal partners in crime; Edip used to be the unchallenged kingpin, but Fuat seems to be rising fast. Together, they run the Munich antiquities mafia.

Around them orbits a galaxy of Turkish suppliers and Western buyers. Sometimes a job is clinched without them, but that is rare. Even then, if you look carefully, you will find that Telli and Fuat are not too far away.

On a bleak night in February 1976, at the ancient Roman city of Aphrodisias, deep in a forested valley in southwestern Turkey, thieves slipped into a depot that housed hundreds of artworks that had been uncarthed in this, the world's most famous classical dig. Eight fine marble pieces were kidnapped. The police came the next day. The countryside was searched. Nothing, not a trace, was found. No one had any doubt that,

within days, perhaps hours, after the theft, the valuable sculptures had left the country. The incident created something of an international sensation. The celebrated archaeologist Kenan Erim, of the New York University professor who has patiently been bringing the ancient city to light, was astonished to find that he had been accused of the theft. He worked tirelessly to clear his name and to recover the loss, publishing photographs of the pieces in art and archaeological journals. His efforts paid off when a piece was mailed back anonymously. Then, in November 1977, four pieces were spotted for sale in the Summa Gallery, in Los Angeles, owned by the West Coast's most active antiquities dealer, Bruce McNall. McNall, a moviemaker, race-horse breeder, owner of the L.A. Kings, and former art adviser to Nelson Bunker Hunt, was "aghast" at the news that the pieces were stolen. He promptly returned them to Turkey.

THE "GHOST" IN THE HALF-TON CRATE

A sixth Aphrodisias marble was found in early 1978 in New York. A research associate of Erim's happened to come across a charming two-foot-high marble Eros on sale at the Winter Antiques Show. The U.S. Customs special agent Charles Koczka looked into it, establishing that the Eros matched the one in Erim's photo. Further research revealed the importers to be Noel and Ronald Meli, of the Phoenix Gallery of Ancient Art (now defunct). According to Koczka's notes, the Melis stated that they had bought the piece from a woman called Monika Telli at a gallery in Germany. As to the final two pieces, they remain missing to this day.

We have dug up countless similar stories. On June 18, 1988, a cargo official of KLM in Istanbul was puzzled by the half-ton weight of a large wooden crate, which seemed too heavy for the plaster casts for dolls described in the documents accompanying it. The official ordered the crate opened. Inside he found a larger-than-life marble statue of the goddess Demeter, elegantly sculpted and beautifully detailed. She was headless—heads can be sold separately—but there was no doubt about her identity because she was holding a baby and a horn of plenty. The authorities discovered that the statue belonged to Fuat Aydiner, known in Turkey as "Little Fuat" to distinguish him from the Mu-

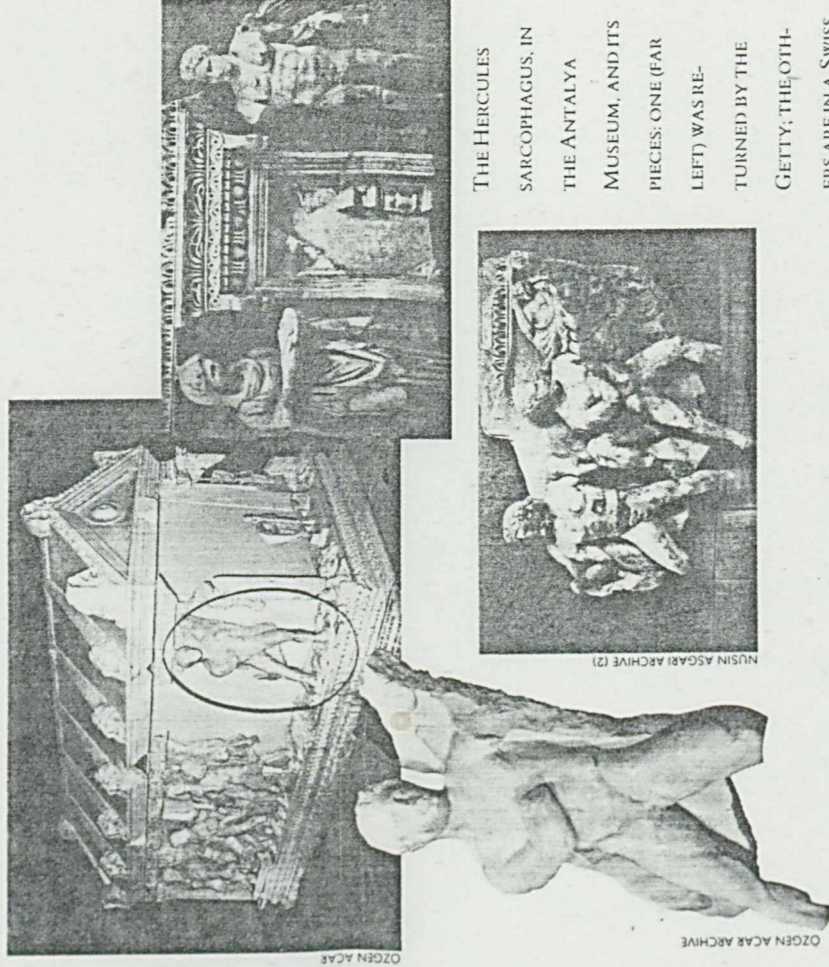
nich Fuat. An unsavory character, Aydiner was at the time already being sought by Turkish police and Interpol for questioning for his supposed role as a participant in the smuggling of the Decadrachm Hoard. "Little Fuat" had fled Turkey because of that problem. (He returned later with a forged English passport, was arrested, tried, and sentenced to five years in jail.)

Wary of getting too close to the Demeter, "Little Fuat" Aydiner had deputized his nephew, Sait, to handle the job. Sait contacted his usual customs broker for exports. He got all the papers approved for a ghost shipment out of Turkey (of doll casts) and then used them to authorize the transportation of a real object (the Demeter).

Sait, forewarned of the discovery of his ruse, fled to Canada, where he has citizenship. He was convicted in absentia. In the trial it was revealed that the Demeter was not the first such rare antiquity to be shipped. Evidence was produced that a crate—exactly the same type and size and switched in the same way at the last minute—had departed the Istanbul airport two months earlier for Munich, Germany. The address on the bill of lading was that of Fuat Üzülmmez's gallery on Maximiliansplatz, Artemis. A few months later, a stunning, larger-than-life marble empress appeared in a prime gallery of the San Antonio museum, in Texas, loaned anonymously. According to a highly placed confidential source, this statue is the very one Sait successfully slipped out of Turkey to Fuat. It is expected to become one of the high points of the dazzling new classical-antiquities wing that will open in November at San Antonio's Museum of Art.

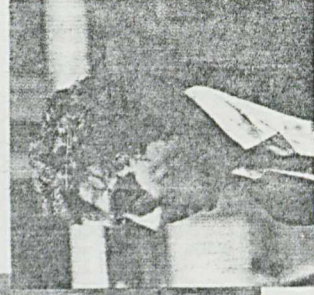
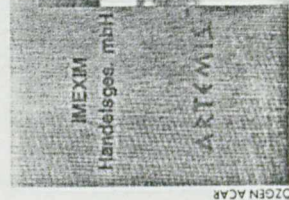
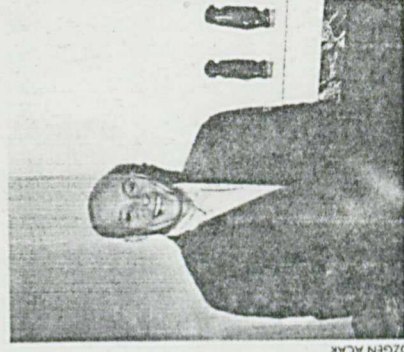
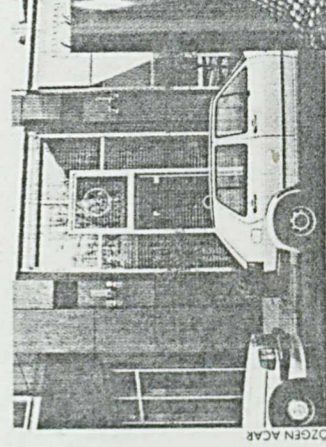
Between Edip's unexpected invitation to talk to him in person, in mid-1988, and our arrival in Munich in mid-1989, his real motives became clear. He was feeling the hot breath of the Turkish authorities. When the Turkish police first uncovered the disappearance of the Decadrachm Hoard, in 1984, they issued a bulletin to the German police for Edip's arrest and extradition through Interpol. In fact, Edip was the only man living outside Turkey mentioned by name in police documents concerning the coin hoard. Having uncovered the hoard's location in the United States, *Connoisseur* published the full account four years later with fresh information on the roles of both Fuat Üzülmmez and Edip's younger brother Nevzat. The story was picked up by the Turkish

MUNICH, LIKE THE BARBARY COAST, SEEMS TO TEEM WITH PIRATES.



THE HERCULES SARCOPHAGUS, IN THE ANTALYA MUSEUM, AND ITS PIECES; ONE (FAR LEFT) WAS RETURNED BY THE GETTY; THE OTHERS ARE IN A SWISS COLLECTION.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: THE GRYPHOS GAL- LERY; EDIP TELLI; FUAT ÜZÜLMEZ; HIS ARTEMIS GAL- LERY; NEVZAT TELLI.



press. Yet, inexplicably, neither Fuat nor Nevzat was indicted. Only Edip remained an official fugitive.

The police pressure forced him to hunker down in Munich and restricted his movements throughout Europe. Indeed, venturing into Italy, he was briefly arrested but subsequently released. This unrelenting pressure begins to explain why Edip finally had the urge to talk to us. He wanted to use the press to clear his image.

The interviews took place at Gryphos, in an impressive marble and glass building overlooking a park. Edip seemed genuinely willing to cooperate and insisted he was ready to answer our questions frankly. Over the course of three days, he sat for hours each day at a glass-and-steel desk in his pristine gallery, offering us refreshments, fielding our questions, a model host. If anything, his cordiality was slightly overdone. At frequent intervals he introduced his children. His wife, Monika, an attractive German woman of early middle age, was present throughout.

Slim, sleek, and dapper, Edip maintained the air of an urbane, cultivated man who knows another, darker world but who is not talking about that other world. On his safe turf, Edip acted the role of the family man. In answer to all our queries about his involvement with smuggled antiquities, he defended himself as a respected businessman, a pillar of the Munich community. If Germany did not consider him "undesirable" or "criminal," who were the "ignorant" Turks to claim otherwise?

Throughout our conversations with Edip, one crucial question haunted the meetings—the question of Fuat Üzülmöz. He apparently was taking advantage of Edip's restricted life to expand his own activities. Why? A longtime American dealer who knows both Edip and Fuat has noted a key difference between the two: "Edip is wealthy, happy, and comfortable with his family, and his wife is a solid businesswoman. Fuat, though married, is a playboy and throws away his earnings. He is hungrier and has to work harder because he's always broke."

A story about Fuat reported in the Turkish newspapers backs up that assessment. On a quiet afternoon at the Frankfurt airport in April 1975, the police were alerted to an oversize suitcase revolving round and round on the conveyor belt while baggage from other flights had come and gone. The officials opened the suitcase and were astonished

to be confronted with a trove of antique treasure—coins, gold jewelry, and a terra-cotta vase—worth several hundred thousand dollars. It was six hours after the plane carrying the suitcase had touched down when a gentleman named Fuat, whom the Turkish police identify as usually operating out of Munich, finally turned up to claim the goods. The reason for the casual tardiness was that Fuat had been up partying the night before. The German police let him go but turned the suitcase over to

SOMETHING LIKE THE MAFIA

Although Edip Telli and Fuat Üzülmöz, centrally placed in Munich, are the dominant public figures in the international smuggling network, they are only part of a larger, if loose, organization. Of the subgroups that operate within Turkey—whence they often supply the Munich distributors—the Kolaşins, the Aydıners, and Sami GüleNER's gang are the most prolific.

Sami GüleNER was a Telli protégé—though his allegiance wavered momentarily—and he operates like an old-fashioned smuggler. He has a nationwide network in place, which he runs for Telli. His couriers maintain contacts in the countryside who are responsible for buying up cheaply any and all antiquities found in their local regions. Then, the couriers travel from Istanbul to the contacts and gather up the hauls. They deposit the antiquities back in Istanbul at various safe houses. When the time comes, the goods are driven across the Turkish-Bulgarian border and transferred to a waiting vehicle inside Bulgaria. The new courier then drives to Edip in Munich. According to the testimony of gang members, the Bulgarian authorities never interfere. They are probably well rewarded for that.

The other groups—the Kolaşins, Deres, and Aydıners—are not so much dyed-in-the-wool smugglers as old-time antiques dealers who have turned to smuggling. Based in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, they do not need to maintain a network in the interior. The cannier farmers will take especially valuable pieces directly to them in Istanbul, where the farmer can strike a better deal. The result is that Telli's people get tons of material but of a lesser quality.

This, no doubt, displeases Edip Telli and helps to explain why he has reacted strongly to any disruption in his well-thought-out operation. He has threatened dissidents with hit men and has obstructed rival deals by informing the authorities. Conversely, the Aydıners and Deres have tried to avoid dependence on Telli by opening their own outlets in the West. Sait AydınER, a partici-

the Turkish consulate. In Turkey, arrest warrants were issued for Fuat, his father, Faraç Üzülmöz, and another Turkish smuggler, Nihat Kolaşin.

In the course of our research, we came upon ten murders that were related to smuggling. The business is dangerous, and Edip Telli in particular has a reputation for using force. He moved from mere smuggling to big-time antiquities dealing way back in 1971 by violently pushing aside the father of the industry, the scholarly George Zacos, who was

part in a foiled attempt to smuggle a statue of Demeter out of Turkey, has a business in Quebec, Canada. Selim Dere, who had a role in the heist of the Hercules sarcophagus, owns the Fortuna gallery, in New York.

The extraordinary thing about the Turkish antiquities smugglers is that most of them come from the same town, Mardin, in southeastern Turkey. The Üzülmöz, AydınER, and Dere clans are Syrians, Christian Arabs, whereas the Tellis are Muslim Kurds. Mardin is an ancient place, many of whose ethnic groups and traditions go back over a millennium. When the poet W. B. Yeats, in "Sailing to Byzantium," wrote of "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make/Of hammered gold and gold enamelling," he referred to the self-same tradition that Turkey's Syrians have kept alive from Byzantine times. Since they are renowned goldsmiths, it was to them that Turkish farmers took newly unearthed jewelry, silver, or gold. From there, knowledge of antiquities followed naturally. The Kurds, however, operated exclusively in smuggling. Spread as they are over several contiguous countries and because they are more nomadic than the Christians, they have always shifted goods across borders. Add to that a tradition of powerful feudal customs (binding loyalties; patriarchal control over peasants), and the Telli code of business becomes clear.

Still, the Tellis are fighting an uphill battle. Like the Mafia, or any organization of crime lords, the smugglers must be ceaselessly alert, constantly wary. So abundant is the supply of antiquities and so great the Western demand that the flow always threatens to bypass the established organization. Every newfound artifact can spawn a new little competitive subgroup. The more people in smuggling, the bigger the risks of gang wars and of one's being turned in to the authorities. Conversely, Western buyers are always happy to find new, cheaper maverick sources. As Edip put it, "If I withdraw from the scene, do you think there will be no more smuggling from Turkey?"—Ö.A. and M.K.

TURKISH SMUGGLERS USED TO BE "SCHOLARS AND GENTLEMEN" NOW,...

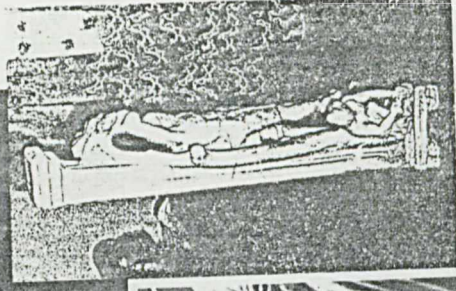
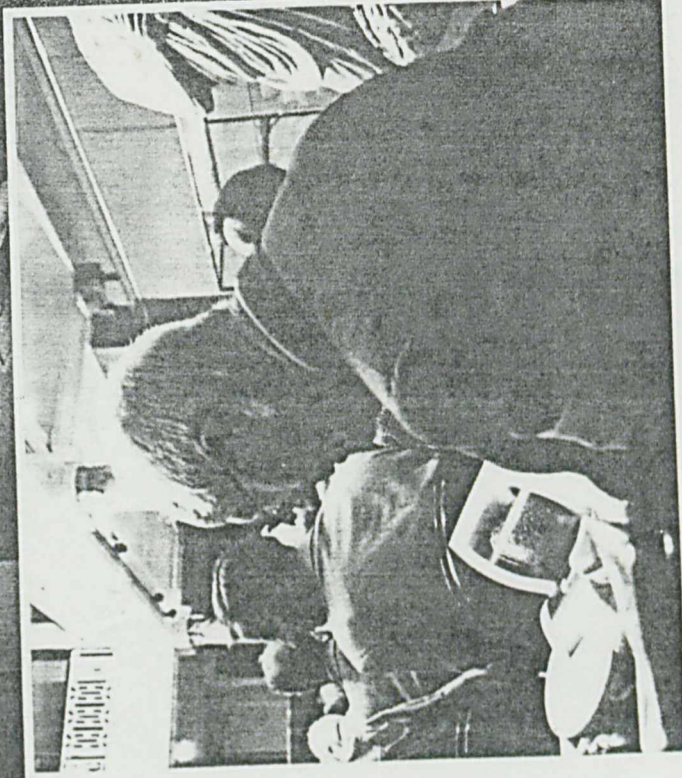
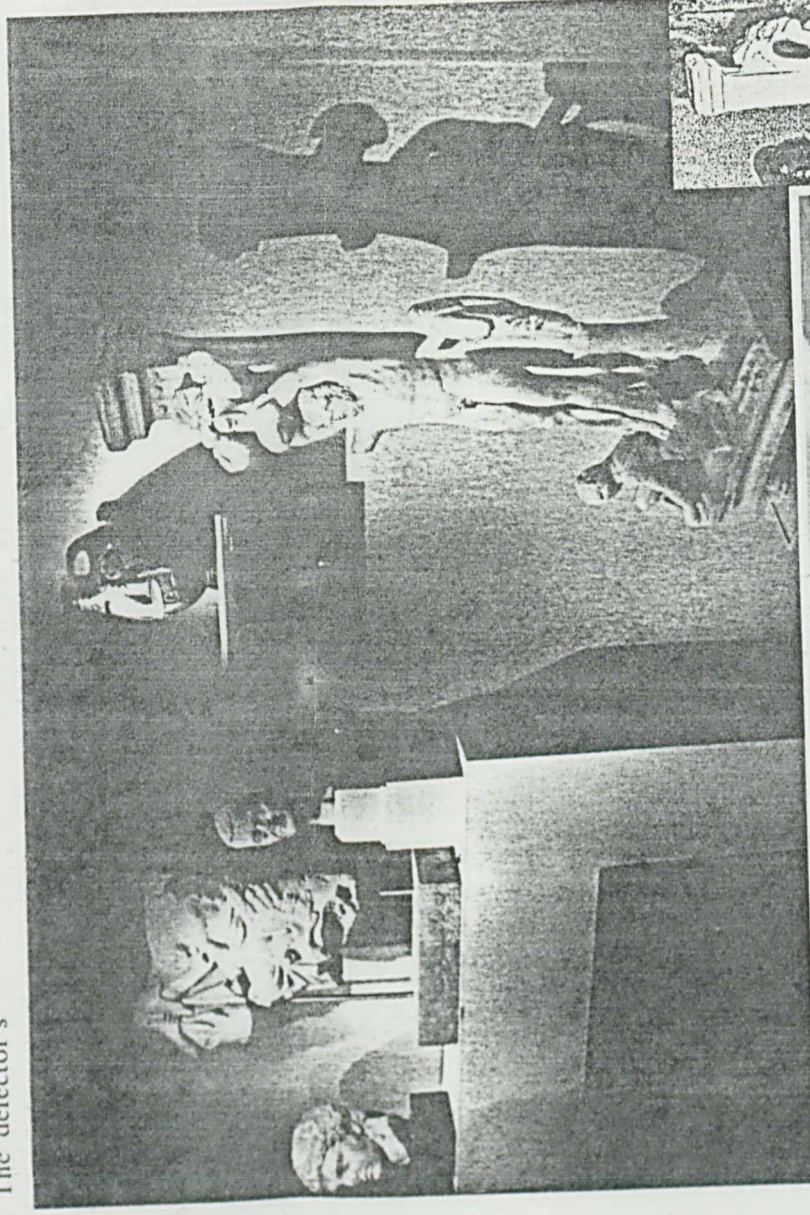
lucky to come out of alive. Even now Edip is quick to threaten violence, a ploy he has found works.

This was borne out by reports in the Turkish press—full of smuggling-related stories after the publication of our article on the Decadrachm Hoard. One paper asserted that a hit man from the Telli organization was sent to Istanbul to eliminate a defector who had joined a rival outfit. The defector's name was Sami Gü-lener, and he was a longtime protégé of Telli's. Sami had joined up with the Nihat Kolaşin gang, a group of notorious antiq-uities racketeers in Istanbul. Edip did not actually deny the report: "Of course we were upset. Sami came up under us. He was practically our kid." Within months, however, Sami had resumed working for Edip, presumably scared back into line.

Edip clearly has been able to continue doing a lot of business despite the restrictions hob-bling him. Why, then, does he tolerate Fuat's increased activity on his own turf? What is Fuat's role? Edip would say only, "Ask him, ask him!" He refused to say anything about Fuat even though dealers often go out of their way to criticize the competi-tion.

But whether the two are now really competing is questionable. Being im-mobilized in Germany, Edip needs a front man—an ambassador-partner who can travel throughout Europe and to America. Fuat can fill that role. It also seems likely that Edip has a stake in much of Fuat's business and perhaps has cut a deal as well with Nihat Kolaşin, up to now exclusively an ally of Fuat's.

Less is known of Fuat's operations, mainly because they have not been, until recently, as extensive as Edip's. We did uncover an early job that took place in 1973. Although the full story still remains a mystery, it is known that, on April 4, a truck loaded with sand was parked on a side road in Istanbul. Chil-



WHEN DUG UP, A RELIEF OF MAKSYAS WAS PHOTO-GRAPHED (ABOVE). IT IS NOW IN MAN-HATTAN'S POSH ATLANTIS ANTIQ-UITIES (TOP). OWNED BY ROBERT HECHT (LEFT).

ÖZGEN ACAR ARCHIVE

NOT TO HIS SURPRISE THE SMUGGLED STATUE WAS HEADLESS—HEADS CAN BE SOLD SEPARATELY.

dren climbed into it to play and dug up a group of marble fragments with figures hidden in the sand. The police were called. The pieces were identified as coming from a large and historically important sarcophagus found in a farmer's field near the ancient Roman metropolis of Pergé. On the four sides of the sarcophagus, in a dynamic style, the twelve labors of Hercules were exquisitely carved. The exceptional object, dating from about A.D. 170, had been all but dismembered by thieves. Police began to track the pieces. At a shop belonging to a goldsmith named Aziz Dere, they discovered five scenes. It turned out that he and a New York student named Boris Alexander Muscinko had bought the pieces for 110,000 Turkish lire, or \$7,700. Dere, his brother Selim, and Fuat Üzülmöz's father were arrested. The remains of the sarcophagus found in the truck and the pieces found in the goldsmith's shop were sent to the archaeology museum in Istanbul. The authorities gave up hope of finding any more of the missing scenes of Hercules. But in February 1974, a Turkish archaeologist, Jale İnan, working at the Getty Museum on a grant, happened to see photographs of three Hercules scenes in the museum's photo archive. She sent copies to the director of the Istanbul museum, where curators enlarged them to life-size. The scaled photographs fitted exactly to episodes missing from the sarcophagus. The Getty returned the one piece it had in its possession.

Jiri Frel, then the Getty's curator of Greek and Roman antiquities, was asked by Turkish authorities about the other two pieces. He denied ever having had them physically at the Getty, explaining that a California art gallery, run by the then-partner of Bruce McNall, had offered him the pieces for the sum of \$16,000. Immediately after the discovery of the photographs, the actual sculptures vanished and seem eventually to have turned up in the Mahboubian Gallery, in London. A story about the fragments appeared in the *Sunday Times* of London, and they were shown on television. The television correspondent, attempting to interview Mahboubian, received a death threat and was told by Scotland Yard for her own sake not to pursue the story. The pieces ended up in a Swiss private collection; they were shown for a while in the art museum in Kassel, Germany.

Other illicit Turkish antiquities remained at the Getty, however. Among

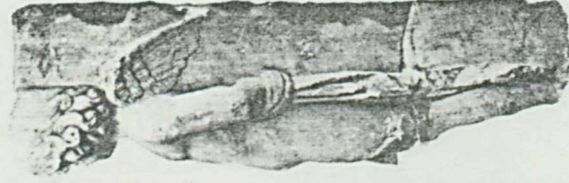
CONNOISSEUR



ISTANBUL ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM



M. ALI DOĞENCI (3)



RESCUED FROM THE SMUGGLERS. CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: A ROMAN STATUE OF DEMETER; HEAD OF A MAN; STATUE OF EROS; COLUMN FRAGMENT. THE LAST THREE CAME FROM APHRODISIAS.



Boğaziçi Üniversitesi

Arşiv ve Dokümantasyon Merkezi

Jale İnan Arşivi



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