

# Reliquary Medallion (Pendant Reliquary / Theca)

*S. Guidonis · Ep. Aquensis · Saint Guido of Acqui (ca. 1004–1070)*

<b>Object type</b>	Reliquary medallion (pendant with relic); related to the pendant reliquary / theca typology
<b>Saint</b>	St. Guido of Acqui (Guido, Wido, Guy), Bishop of Acqui
<b>Relic class</b>	Likely <b>first-class relic</b> (body relic, <i>ex ossibus</i> ); small fragment under glass or wax sealing
<b>Inscription</b>	“S. Guidonis / Ep. Aquensis” (hand-written cedula)
<b>Materials</b>	Brass / bronze, fire- or mercury-gilt (broadly rubbed); glass; silk; metal-foil paillettes; paper (cedula)
<b>Decorative work</b>	<b>Klosterarbeit</b> (convent work): stylised cross in metal-foil paillettes, as relic setting
<b>Form</b>	Round with scalloped cast rim; upper suspension loop
<b>Period</b>	Probably second half 19th – early 20th century
<b>Origin</b>	Italy, probably Piedmont (Diocese of Acqui)
<b>Diameter</b>	ca. 25–30 mm (to be confirmed by measurement)
<b>Condition</b>	Age-appropriate; gilding broadly rubbed; no authentica seal preserved on the reverse; no authentica document present

## Plate I — obverse and reverse



*Obverse: setting in Klosterarbeit with paillette cross in turquoise-green metal foil, and cedula “S. Guidonis / Ep. Aquensis”*



*Reverse: smooth domed metal back plate; the authentica seal (typically red sealing-wax impressed with the episcopal coat of arms) is no longer present*

## Typological classification

Following the system of the information sheet “Reliquiare” issued by the Swiss Federal Office for Civil Protection (Cultural Property Section), a distinction is made between:

- the **pendant reliquary / reliquary capsule** (*Reliquienkapsel*) — a small box-shaped container for relics, of crystal or precious metal, worn on a chain or ribbon around the neck; and
- the **reliquary medallion** (*Reliquienmedaillon*) — a pendant containing a relic.

The present piece combines features of both: through its applied suspension loop and flat glazed pendant form it is best described as a **reliquary medallion**, although in the trade and the older literature it is also widely referred to as a pendant reliquary or *theca*. Both terms are appropriate here.

## Description

Small round reliquary medallion with a scalloped cast rim in gilded brass or bronze. The gilding is broadly rubbed, exposing the darker base metal. Under slightly domed glass, a velvet-brown silk ground serves as backing. Upon it, in the tradition of **Klosterarbeit** (convent work), a stylised cross has been assembled from turquoise-green metal-foil paillettes. At the intersection of the cross sits the central element: likely the relic particle itself (*first-class relic / body relic*, probably *ex ossibus*) under a small wax or glass sealing. Below the cross, a hand-written paper **cedula** in brown ink carries the inscription “**S. Guidonis / Ep. Aquensis**”. The reverse shows a smooth, slightly domed metal plate. The upper suspension loop is present and intact.

## Excursus: Klosterarbeit and relic setting

**Klosterarbeit** (literally “convent work”) refers to a decorative tradition developed particularly in European nunneries from the 17th century onward, in which body relics were artistically framed or enveloped using fine wire-work, glass stones, pearls, paillettes, and gold- or silversmith elements. The technique arose primarily in connection with the so-called catacomb saints — martyrs’ remains rediscovered in the Roman catacombs from the 16th century onward and translated across the Alps. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the tradition was continued in a simplified, often serial form for smaller personal reliquaries such as medallions and capsules. The present piece, with its foil-paillette cross, corresponds to this later, serial variant of the relic-setting technique.

## Inscription and identification

The Latin abbreviation on the cedula reads *Sancti Guidonis, Episcopi Aquensis* — “of Saint Guido, Bishop of Acqui”. This identifies **Saint Guido of Acqui** (also Wido, Guy, Guisto; ca. 1004 – 2 June 1070), Bishop of Acqui (now Acqui Terme) in Piedmont, northern Italy, from 1034 until his death. He is the principal patron of the city and diocese of Acqui, and patron against famine. Under his episcopate the cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta was built, consecrated in 1067. His relics are preserved in this same cathedral. The formal confirmation of his cult (*confirmatio cultus*) was issued by Pope Pius IX in 1853. His liturgical feast day is 2 June; in the Diocese of Acqui he is celebrated on the second Sunday of July.

## Dating and stylistic context

The combination of the scalloped cast rim, the *Klosterarbeit* decoration in coloured metal foil, the hand-written cedula and the plain reverse without preserved seal is entirely consistent with production by Catholic devotional workshops in Italy and southern Germany during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The *confirmatio cultus* issued by Pius IX in 1853 provides a plausible *terminus post quem* for wider distribution of relic particles of St. Guido. The workmanship suggests a production date of ca. **1860–1920**, with a Piedmontese or more broadly north-Italian origin as the most likely provenance. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the veneration of relics was substantially reduced; many such small-scale reliquaries subsequently passed from ecclesiastical ownership into private collections — a plausible route also for the present piece.

## Condition report

The overall condition is age- and use-appropriate. The gilding of the setting is broadly rubbed, revealing the base metal; the plastic decoration of the rim shows minor compressions and localised material loss. The viewing glass is clear; the inner silk backing shows age-related toning. The *Klosterarbeit* paillette cross is complete. The hand-written cedula is fully legible. The suspension loop is intact.

**Note on authentication:** no original sealing-wax impression is present on the reverse (typically in red wax, carrying the coat of arms of the issuing ecclesiastical authority). Equally, no accompanying **authentica** is present — the document on parchment or paper that would certify the origin and authenticity of the relic. In the absence of both seal and authentica, canonical authentication of the relic is not formally documented. The piece is accordingly to be classified as an antique devotional object of historical and decorative interest; attribution of the relic content rests solely on the hand-written cedula.

### **Historical context — Saint Guido of Acqui**

Guido was born around 1004 at Melazzo near Acqui, son of the noble family of Acquesana, and was educated in Bologna. In 1034, at around the age of thirty, he was elected Bishop of Acqui, and over 36 years in office shaped the diocese through liturgical and moral reform, the donation of his personal fortune to the Church, the promotion of education for girls, the foundation of the monastery of Santa Maria de Campis, and — as his most visible legacy — the building of the cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, consecrated on 13 November 1067. Guido died on 2 June 1070; his relics rest in the cathedral he built. In 2004, the millennium of his birth was marked in Acqui with a papal letter from John Paul II.

### **Plate II — overall view**



*Obverse, overall view, photographed on neutral ground*

### **Handling and inventorying**

Because of their combination of disparate materials and often considerable age, reliquaries are among the most fragile objects one encounters in a collection. The following guidelines — drawn from the information sheet “Reliquiare” of the Swiss Federal Office for Civil Protection (B. Sonnberger, 2004) — apply equally to

the handling and inventorying of reliquaries in the antiques trade:

- Check the stability of the object carefully before handling.
- Wear fine cotton gloves when handling the piece.
- Do not open or dismantle the capsule.
- Do not attempt to clean the piece in-house (gilding, cedula and silk are delicate).
- Produce complete photographic documentation (obverse, reverse, cedula detail).
- Measure the diameter and the full height including loop precisely.
- Record all cedula inscriptions verbatim — they are the key to identification.

### Notes for the trade

Reliquaries are, from a canonical point of view, not tradeable in their sacred character under *Codex Iuris Canonici* can. 1190 §1; however, the trade in and private collection of historical reliquaries as works of art and cultural heritage is well established and legal. When offered for sale, such pieces should be described as “antique reliquary medallion / pendant reliquary with contents” or as works of decorative art; the isolated sale of the relic itself should be avoided. At point of sale, the **absence of ecclesiastical authentication** (missing wax seal, missing authentica) should be disclosed transparently.

### Sources and further reading

- **Sonnberger, B.**: Information sheet “Reliquiare”. Federal Office for Civil Protection, Cultural Property Section, Berne 2004. [Source of the technical terminology used here.]
- **Glossarium artis**, trilingual dictionary of art, vol. 2: *Church furnishings, crosses and reliquaries of the Christian churches*, 3rd ed., Munich 1992.
- **Legner, A.**: *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult*. Darmstadt 1995.
- **Legner, A.** (ed.): *Reliquien — Verehrung und Verklärung*. Cologne 1989.
- **“Gold, Perlen und Edel-Gestein ...”** — *Reliquienkult und Klosterarbeiten im deutschen Südwesten*. Exhibition catalogue, Augustinermuseum Freiburg, Munich 1995.

---

*Catalogued and edited by S.D.H.*

*Terminology following the Swiss Federal information sheet “Reliquiare” (Sonnberger 2004). Plates from own photography.*