

Documenting Nazi Cultural Looting and Postwar Retrieval: Surviving Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR)^{*}

Patricia Kennedy Grimsted

*International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam);
Ukrainian Research Institute, and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies,
Harvard University*

I am delighted to be here today together with Dutch friends and colleagues many of whom I have been working with over the past two decades on my many projects regarding cultural displacement and restitution issues. Today we present my *Survey* of archival remains of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) and related documentation, which now appears on the website of the International Institute of Social History (IISG[IISH] – (http://www.iisg.nl/publications/errsuey/errsuey_total_111019.pdf), with which I have been associated now for almost twenty years. I am very appreciative for the IISH production of this work (under supervision of Aad Blok) in cooperation with the NIOD. I also tremendously appreciate the generous sponsorship of the Conference on Jewish Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference, NYC and Frankfurt), and am glad the research director, Wesley Fisher, could be with us today. I'm only sorry that my research assistant from Berlin, Ray Brandon, who skillfully served as copy editor for the *Survey*, could not be here. I'm particularly grateful to Julie-Marthe Cohen for organizing this gathering at the Jewish Historical Museum.

In earlier presentations today, we have already heard about the ERR seizure and sad fate of Jewish ritual silver and other Judaica from the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, which Julie-Marthe is tracing in her admirable new database, and her article in the new book she edited. Most of that loot ended the war in Frankfurt area or after 1943 in Hungen, the evacuation site for the Frankfurt-based Institute for Research

* Paper presented at the launch of the online publication by Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, [Reconstructing the Record of Nazi Cultural Plunder. A Survey of the Dispersed Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg \(ERR\)](#), at the expert meeting “Cultural Plunder During the Second World War”, 19 October 2011, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam.

on the Jewish Question (IEJ – Institut der NSDAP zur Erforschung der Judenfrage), a Rosenberg offshoot institution, under the projected Hohe Schule. Frankfurt and Hungen were likewise the destinations for the Rosenthaliana Library from the University of Amsterdam, for example, among many other Dutch Jewish collections, most of whose fate have been well traced by colleagues here today. Many were returned from the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD), the postwar U.S. collecting point and book restitution center, whose records my survey covers in the U.S. National Archives (NACP).

Aside from seized Judaica, the ERR was most active in the Netherlands for the seizure of books and archives from major Dutch socialist and Masonic collections. This ERR project, as already noted by others, has a special meaning in the history of the IISH. First, because during occupation of the Netherlands, the ERR used the former IISH building on the Keizersgracht as their wartime headquarters, and a center for collecting socialist library and archival loot from Belgium as well as the Netherlands. And second, because the ERR seizures from the IISH library and archives, including those parts of the collections then located in Paris, were among the largest so ruthlessly removed during occupation from any Western European institution.

Many – but hardly all – of the books, newspapers, and archives seized have returned to Amsterdam. Over 900 crates of IISH library materials came home from the remote Monastery of Tanzenberg in Austrian Carinthia, the collecting point for Rosenberg's future Central Library of the Hohe Schule (ZBHS – Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule), which ended the war in the postwar British Zone of Occupation. Thus I found references to the IISH on ERR lists of library seizures and British lists of looted collections amassed in Tanzenberg, among Foreign Office restitution records in the British National Archives (TNA) in Kew. Across the continent in Kyiv, I found more details about the seizures of the IISH Paris branch, on even more extensive lists of ERR Paris library seizures, now held among the ERR records in Ukrainian state archives (TsDAVO). Other IISH loot was evacuated from Berlin in 1943 to the ERR research and library processing center in Ratibor (Silesia; *now Polish Racibórz*) and remained in Poland after the war, a part of which was returned to Belgium and the Netherlands in 1956. Some archives and books were later transferred by the Polish Communist party to

Moscow, but only several hundred of those books came home to IISH from Moscow on exchange in 1992.

Additional IISH books not returned, along with those from other Dutch libraries, have recently been identified in Minsk, together with many more from France and Belgium. They were part of the close to half a million Western ‘trophy’ books shipped to Minsk from the Racibórz area in the fall of 1945. Six years ago I identified books in the National Library of Belarus with markings from at least 100 private libraries in Western Europe that matched up with names on ERR library seizure lists, including many rare gems belonging to French members of the Rothschild clan, and others dedicated to Léon Blum or the Turgenev Library from Paris, for example. While many of the ERR-seized Dutch and Belgian archives were returned from the Special Archive within the past decade, many printed materials seized with them remain there. Elsewhere in Moscow, even more exceedingly valuable socialist archives belonging to the IISH and to Amsab (from Ghent) that were transferred to Soviet Communist Party archives; Russia is still refusing their restitution, even when Western ownership is clearly documented.

I open with these examples of Dutch wartime victims to underscore the European-wide dispersal of both the ERR loot and the documentation relating to its seizure and migration. While the ERR was one of the principle Nazi Party agencies organized specifically for cultural looting, it was only one of many German agencies involved in such war crimes against the European cultural heritage. The ERR operated only in Nazi-occupied countries, as opposed to those incorporated in the Reich, and hence not in Germany itself, Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland. Yet much of the ERR loot ended the war in those countries.

Most important for identification and recovery of cultural loot after the war was the detail with which the ERR and other German agencies documented their cultural seizures and its destinations. In Western Europe, this was particularly true in the case of art and library loot, for which we can hence often plot migration. Much of the art loot processed by the ERR in Eastern as well as Western Europe was found after the war in designated ERR repositories in Bavaria and near-by Austria, many of which are identified in the second appendix of my *ERR Survey*. ERR documentation was often found together with the loot, or sometimes in the hands of the perpetrators who were

likewise captured by the ‘Monuments Men’, or MFA&A – the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives officers who accompanied Western invading armies. Despite significant wartime losses and intentional destruction at the end of the war, it is amazing that so much documentation has been preserved. My *Survey* now describes original ERR files located in twenty-nine repositories in nine countries. Unfortunately, like the Minsk and Moscow examples, having the documentation and identifying owners has not always meant the return of ERR loot to its prewar victims.

Much better description than mine of remaining ERR documents would be possible if the now dispersed ERR files were all brought together in Germany. Legally, the original ERR documents covered are of German creation (i.e. of German provenance), and hence ideally should be restituted to Germany so they could be consolidated and described in the Bundesarchiv. But in many cases that is impossible, because many of the documents are legally incorporated in other agency records, such as Allied restitution files or war crimes trial records. Even within the Bundesarchiv in Germany, the most important ERR art-looting documents are in Koblenz among postwar German restitution records (acquired by the Bundesarchiv in 1992), rather than with the ERR agency records in Berlin-Lichterfelde, which were originally part of the ‘Rosenberg Collection’ captured by the U.S. Army, and returned to Germany in the 1960s. In foreign cases, political realities have long prevented return of many of the most important original documents to Germany. While Germany may claim them officially, countries abroad would argue that many of them, while created by German agencies, were not created on German territory.

The Netherlands, for example, is one of the few countries retaining significant local ERR agency records as well as two major collections of inventories of household seizures by the Möbel-Aktion, the ERR off-shoot that stripped furnishings from the homes of deported Jews. Both the local ERR files (discovered in the IISH building in 1967) and a major part of the Möbel-Aktion component are combined in a single record group in the NIOD and will soon appear in digital form on the NIOD website; more Möbel-Aktion seizure files are held on deposit in the Amsterdam Municipal Archives with postwar Dutch Jewish claim records (JOKOS). Although the ERR files would be subject to German claim, there is little likelihood of their being transferred to the

Bundesarchiv, given their provenance in the occupied Netherlands, and the Möbel-Aktion files were generated by a different local occupation agency.

On the other hand, many of the original ERR documents held by the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDJC) Memorial for the Shoah in Paris were created by ERR agents in various German occupied countries throughout Europe, including the Rosenberg-headed Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories (RMbO, i.e. the USSR). They were withdrawn from the larger so-called Rosenberg Collection captured by the U.S. Army after the war, most of the rest of which was returned from the U.S. to West Germany in the 1960s. But the Paris segment had been turned over to offices preparing for the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg and then was formally presented to a French Jewish delegation after the trials. They have been well described and open for public use since their deposit in CDJC (now part of the Memorial for the Shoah). Gradually they are being prepared for the Internet, in part with sponsorship of the Claims Conference ERR project. The legal case for retention outside of Germany is hardly as clear-cut for the long-hidden ‘trophy’ ERR records in Kyiv, the largest existing complex described in my *Survey*, captured by Red Army scouts in Germany in 1945. Probably of provenance in Berlin and Ratibor, some of those files were created in occupied Ukraine, but many more were reports by ERR agents all over Europe and especially in other occupied Soviet republics.

Six years ago when the Claims Conference ERR project started, we were planning – and had then hoped – that all of the dispersed ERR files could be brought together in a virtual digitized archival consolidation or reconstruction. But that plan proved too complicated and costly to realize, and unrealistic from an archival standpoint, despite wonderful cooperation with the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) and sophisticated new software created especially for the project. Simultaneously, many holding repositories in different countries started digitizing their own holdings.

Accordingly, the Claims Conference has been encouraging (and supporting) digitization of individual segments by the holding archives. A year ago we celebrated in Kyiv the launch on the Internet of that largest extant segment of ERR files anywhere, now located in Ukrainian state archives, where they had been hidden away for almost half a century before 1990. That segment unfortunately was not adequately processed

according to offices of creation before digitization. While a basic Russian-language ‘guide-index’ has been published, research access remains difficult among the jumbled files of diverse provenance that still lack more linguistically accessible finding aids.

In May of this year we celebrated in Washington, DC, the launch of the NARA International Research Portal for Records Relating to Nazi-Era Cultural Property (<http://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/international-resources/navigate.html>). A number of repositories and record groups represented in my *Survey* are already part of that Portal, including significant records from the National Archives of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine, soon to be joined by some from France and Belgium. The *Survey* accordingly now provides descriptive locations and hyper-links to relevant ERR components available on the Internet in their home repositories, although many more have been launched since editorial work on the *Survey* was finalized a year ago. As a background account of ERR activities and the postwar fate of both its loot and related archival sources, in connection with the brief notes that follow, I can suggest my Introduction to the *Survey*.

While my *ERR Archival Survey* started with only the original ERR wartime files, I have been expanding coverage of postwar restitution records in attempt to follow the fate of the ERR loot. Many important ERR wartime documents became incorporated in those postwar complexes of restitution records in the course of processing for repatriation in the Western Allied occupation zones in Germany and Austria, and also within internal restitution records in major countries to which ERR loot was repatriated, especially France.

Restitution and related records in the National Archives in College Park (NACP) from the U.S. Office for Military Government (OMGUS) and other agencies have long been open for research, and many are already available on microfilm. For specific ERR-related components, I have tried to add more detailed description and identification of source than is provided by the often too-minimal NARA finding aids. Those files in NACP are now gradually being made available on the Internet and searchable in full-text mode through a commercial vendor. Described in the *Survey* as ‘Footnote.com’, the vendor name and URL has since August 2011 changed to ‘www.fold3.com’. Of special significance for fate of the ERR art loot are the records generated at the Munich Central Collecting Point (MCCP) run by the MFA&A under OMGUS, which processed most of

the art objects from both eastern and western Europe found in ERR repositories in Bavaria and near-by Austria for restitution to their countries of seizure. Since the *Survey* was completed, the MCCP series have recently joined others on the Internet through 'fold3.com', and more are slated to follow soon.

Additional records from the Wiesbaden CCP (mostly dealing with art from within Germany) and the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD, mentioned above for books and Judaica), are linked to my descriptive coverage in the *Survey*. (The old 'footnote.com' references appear to update to 'fold3'.) Additional MCCP records, and many ERR files within them, are today held in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, within the records of the Trust Administration for Cultural Assets (TVK – Treuhandverwaltung für Kulturgut), which continued restitution processing under the West German government, following the end of U.S. occupation in 1949. Most of those are gradually being prepared for Internet display in the context of a detailed new German finding aid (http://startext.net-build.de:8080/barch/MidosaSEARCH/B323-52029_Version_online/index.htm). Although ERR art-looting operations in Western Europe did not include the Netherlands, considerable art seized by other agents were also processed through MCCP.

In France, by contrast, under Göring's instigation, the ERR's principal claim to fame as war criminals for art-looting was the seizure and processing of over 200 private Jewish art collections – and a handful from Belgium – in the Jeu de Paume building next to the Louvre, during German occupation. As part of the Claims Conference ERR project, my colleague Marc Masurovsky at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC has put together an object-level Internet database (<http://errproject.org//jeudepaume>), bringing together the ERR registration cards now held in the National Archives in College Park (NACP) with 16,000 ERR wartime photographs located in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. The first Appendix to my *Survey* identifies owners and correlates archival sources for the over 200 French and Belgian collections processed in the Jeu de Paume. We should not forget, however, that those ERR art-processing operations represents perhaps no more than one-fifth of the 100,000 art objects the German seized in France. Yet focusing on those specific 20,000 seized individual works of art for which we have detailed registration cards and many photographs presents an admirable example of documenting wartime seizures of the

world-class art collected in France before the war. So far, Marc is reporting at this point that only about one-half of the objects processed in the Jeu de Paume have been restituted to their prewar owners or heirs. However, much more tedious research is needed to find photos of more objects, and match up them with restitution files in Paris.

Most important in that connection, we are now able to utilize the French claims and restitution processing records recently opened for public research in the Archives of the French Ministry Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE), now located in a modern new building in La Courneuve (on the RER metro line to Roissy). The archivists in charge have been exceedingly cooperative and kindly gave me advance copies of her new finding aids for our project. In Paris just two days before our Amsterdam presentation, Wesley Fisher and I attended a meeting at the Quai d'Orsay, called by the new director of the MAEE archives, to discuss their digitization plan for the massive French restitution records, long closed to the public. Digitization will mean that at least some of those records can soon be included in the NARA International Portal. With respect to privacy considerations, however, personal claims dossiers will probably be available only in the archival reading room, similar to the situation with the MCCP claims files now in Koblenz,

A year ago in The National Archives (TNA, earlier PRO) in Kew (Surrey), I was thrilled to see the new detailed descriptive work underway for the British component of the NARA International Portal. Document-level description of relevant files in many different record groups was undertaken by a team of graduate students, under the auspices of the Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property, 1933–1945. These include British restitution research files in various British Foreign Office series, now already linked to digitized images of the documents themselves on the TNA website (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/looted-art.asp>). I fear, however, some of the detailed claims and restitution transfer documentation from the British Zone in Germany may not have been preserved, because so far I have not found all that I would have expected, especially from the British cultural processing center at Celle Castle (Lower Saxony), comparable to those held in French or U.S. records. The *Survey* already references the corresponding detailed British restitution records from Austria covering the ERR library loot found in Tanzenberg mentioned earlier. More details about British holdings will be appropriate in an updated version of the *Survey*.

Also now linked to the NARA Portal are two ambitious bilingual interrepository databases on the website of the German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin. The first links art registration cards – known as “property cards art” – for some 170,000 objects that passed through the Munich CCP, held by the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, with original photo prints held by the Federal Office for Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues of Finance (BADV) in Berlin (http://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm_ccp.php?seite=10&lang=en). This marvelous resource for tracing looted art includes many thousands of items seized by the ERR in both Eastern and Western Europe. A parallel database with the registration cards and photos from Hitler's Linz Collection is easy to link with the MCCP database (<http://www.dhm.de/datenbank/linzdb/indexe.html>); however, only 56 items from the Jeu de Paume were to the Linz Collection. Although neither database has a separate field for the ERR collection codes used in the Jeu de Paume, manual cross-references are easy to establish using the MCCP numbers or other data fields. It is to be hoped the DHM will obtain the funding needed to expand the database to include the digital copies now available of the over 50,000 MCCP property cards and photographs for art objects held in the United States, as well as those in other countries.

Of particular interest here, I have been urging Dutch colleagues to pursue the fate of one special ERR art collection that is of provenance in the Netherlands, many objects from which are represented in databases both from the Jeu de Paume and from the MCCP. The so-called Neuwied Collection, brought together in a customs house on the Rhine north of Koblenz, consists of close to two hundred works of art apparently seized from Dutch Jewish households during the Möbel-Aktion. Although included in the Jeu de Paume Database, and with remaining ERR inventories and photographs, the collection was not processed in Paris, but was rather shipped directly to the ERR art repository in Kogl (Austria). Processed after the war in the MCCP, Dutch (or a few Belgian) owners were never identified, and the ‘heirless’ items were all turned over to the Jewish Reconstruction Successor Organization (JRSO).

Of particular interest for restituted items of Soviet provenance from MCCP, fifteen years ago the Bremen University Center for East European Research (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) prepared a CD-ROM database of objects that were seized by the ERR and other German agencies from occupied Soviet lands and returned to the

Soviet Union from MCCP. Ideally, an updated version of this database should now be integrated with images available in the DHM MCCP Database and additional photographs from other sources, including the U.S. National Archives.

Indeed, we need to focus more attention on the Eastern Front in tracking wartime looted cultural property, postwar retrieval, and ERR-related sources, about which data has long been suppressed. However, the most serious problem in countries of the former Soviet Union is that the Soviet records of cultural valuables that were found and retrieved after the war, including those restituted from the West, are still classified in Moscow. Soviet authorities after the war – and now again many Russian politicians – have been claiming they received nothing back from the West, justifying their own seizure of extensive ‘spoils of war’. The Soviet Union, unlike the Western Allies, engaged in very little cultural restitution after the war, although they received considerable German-looted cultural assets from American, British, and French authorities in Germany and Austria. On the other hand, Soviet Trophy Brigades seized vast quantities of cultural loot, including some previously captured by German agencies from other occupied countries. Many of the items that were turned over to Soviet authorities were never returned to their prewar institutions, especially in Ukraine, which suffered an estimated two-thirds of all Soviet cultural losses. Perhaps the combination of those factors helps to explain why many restitution- retrieval-, and trophy-related records are still off-limits, even to Russian and Ukrainian Government specialists, all of which makes it very difficult accurately to follow the fate of ERR loot on the Eastern Front.

Gradually since 1990, some important Soviet documentation about ‘trophy’, retrieval, and restitution shipments have been surfacing, and I have had considerable open access to many such files in the past. Two years ago, for example, I finally identified the long-lost restitution records from the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG/SMAD), including copies of many receipts for cultural returns from the Western Allies as well as reparation shipments from Germany. Unfortunately, this past summer in Moscow, most of those documents relating to cultural property are now again closed to researchers, and with them other related files I had seen in the past. I only hope such setbacks are only temporary, and that Russian authorities can be convinced it is to their interest to encourage more open access and transparency on such

matters. This is particularly important, because Russian repositories are anxious to find more of their own ‘lost’ cultural valuables that they still report missing.

As a consequence of continued lack of access, regrettably in the present version of the *Survey* I have been unable to cover adequately the postwar Soviet restitution and repatriation sources, even though the *Survey* does cover the most important concentrations of the wartime ERR documents held in archives of the former Soviet Union, as far as I know.

In the Soviet lands, the ERR and related occupation agencies seized predominantly state library collections. When they were retreating, they also plundered considerable state-owned art and archives, fearing their destruction during what they saw as the brutal Red Army recapture of German-occupied territory. Private cultural property had been nationalized after the revolution, and they did not find world-class masterpieces in private Jewish collections such as those sequestered in France and the Netherlands. Thus, except for the Baltic countries, what cultural valuables the ERR and other German agencies plundered were not Holocaust-related, and hence the term ‘Holocaust-Era Cultural Assets’ is for the most part inappropriate in German-occupied areas of the former Soviet Union.

This summer in Moscow, despite the newly reclassified documents I could not consult, I have identified German inventories (actually prepared by Ukrainian museum curators the Germans took as hostage) for close to 1200 works of art and icons seized from two Kyiv museums. In this case the art was not sent to the ERR art repositories in Bavaria as was most other ERR loot, but rather transferred to East Prussia in 1944 by an ERR successor agency under the Reichskommisar Ukraine headed by Reichsleiter Erich Koch. The Germans intentionally destroyed all of that art when the Red Army was recapturing East Prussia, most of which is now the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. Those inventories are not listed in my *Survey*, because I only identified them this summer. It turns out variants of those documents, found by the U.S. Army and processed for the Nuremberg war crimes trials, were actually presented by the Soviet Union as official exhibits in the International Military Tribunal, although the accompanying inventories never published with the trial records. Suppressed and classified until recently, museum curators in Kyiv never knew of their existence until I showed them copies from Western microfilms this summer. I am still trying to locate the originals.

The *Survey* we are presenting today is thus only a start for describing sources needed to study the appalling ERR wartime operations and the postwar Allied efforts to recover their wartime loot. Already the Claims Conference has promised funding for at least one update next year. But I need help from other researchers, including colleagues here today, who find more such documentation still to be described. And, as we are reminded by the perpetrators of art looting in the Netherlands, we must remember that the ERR was only one, and not always the most important, war criminal in the cultural *Rape of Europa*.

In closing, let me add special thanks to Eric Ketelaar for his perceptive archival-oriented analysis today of my production. I can only hope that serious consideration can be given in subsequent revisions and updates to Eric's suggestions for improvement of navigation and researcher access by implementation of a more dynamic electronic structure, including use of more two-way hyperlinks and metadata. Perhaps such improvement could be meshed with resources of the recently launched European Holocaust Remembrance Initiative (EHRI) based at the NIOD. In the course of editing, I did investigate the possible use of EAD, but was advised by archival specialists that my inconsistent level of repository coverage and scholarly footnotes would unduly inhibit transformation to the current version of EAD. I'm afraid my limited archival education almost fifty years ago could not include such recent developments, and thus as I pursue archival reference projects, I do so primarily as a research historian, and I will have to turn to IT specialists for such technical refinements. I was particularly intrigued by Eric's concern about my use of '*Survey*' in my title. Indeed, I recall my own serious reservations on that account during the editorial stage, but again, I can only hope that archivists will tolerate my inconsistencies. Even if the end product lacks some of the attributes of a professional archival finding aid, perhaps it will nonetheless assist historians, provenance researchers, prospective claimants, and other interested specialists in following the cultural looters in Europe during the Second World War and tracking down more of their still lost or unidentified loot.