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REPUBLIC

**ARCHIVAL RECORDS IN THE MORAVIAN
DISTRICT ARCHIVE IN BRNO**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to take this opportunity to acquaint you with archive sources concerning the Aryanisation of Jewish property in Moravia and the postwar restitution of that property, which are stored in the archive of the Moravian Museum in Brno. In view of the subject of this Conference, I shall concentrate on documents concerning the treatment of works of art, even though artworks only comprise a specific fraction of the archive records. I would like to point out that, in view of the fragmentary nature of the material, it is not possible to list all archive collections. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to mention all the most important ones.

The most significant set of files can be found in the archive collection of the Reichsprotektor in Bohemia and Moravia, at the Office for Moravia in Brno (B 251). Files on the Aryanization of Jewish assets have the shelf numbers 7900–7999. As regards content, they specifically concern provisions for the sequestration of industrial enterprises, shops, and agricultural property. They also deal with the Aryanization of these assets, land-register paperwork relating to Jewish property, and the handling of Jewish capital, jewelry, securities and insurance policies. Other documents include a section on the status of Jews in general and on the implementation of anti-Jewish measures in particular. The Reichsprotektor's Office effectively began operating in Brno as early as April 16, 1939. It was virtually shut down in 1942

after an extensive reorganization, and subsequently housed only a department for cultural policy. Most of the other existing competences and clerical tasks were assumed by the Brno Regional President, an administration established by order of the Reich (B 252), which continued working on open Aryanization cases. In this collection, in paperwork concerning enemy assets, there are reports from haulers throughout Moravia on whether they have the property of Jews or foreigners in their depots.

Supreme regional councils (Oberlandrats) were established as lower-level branches of the German administration. From the outset, duties assigned in decrees issued by the Reichsprotektor on June 21, 1939 and January 26, 1940 on Jewish economic enterprises and the exclusion of Jews from economic activity in the Protectorate were among the most important tasks carried out by these bodies. Our archive contains documents from the *Oberlandrat* for Brno, Jihlava, Kroměříž, Prostějov, and Zlín (B 254, B 255, B 256, B 257, B 258). In these collections, there is a total of 39 boxes of files, which primarily deal with the Aryanization of Jewish firms and real estate, sequestration provisions, and other aspects of the Jewish question.

The collection of the Customs Investigation Bureau, Brno Branch (D 25) (*Zollfahndungszweigstelle in Brünn*) has been almost completely preserved. Besides Brno documents, it also contains documents from branches in Jihlava, Uherské Hradiště, Moravská Ostrava, and Olomouc. On the basis of a regulation issued by Adolf Hitler on the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia dated March 16, 1939, the Protectorate became part of the German customs area. Consequently, German customs authorities were established on the Moravian-Slovak border. Initially, they were subordinate to the Reich authorities, but after a reorganization in 1941, the Brno office became a branch of the *Zollfahndungszweigstelle*

Prag. Besides routine foreign-currency offenses, the customs investigation bureaus were entrusted with special financial duties, especially with respect to Jewish monetary assets, securities and jewelry. Most of the collection comprises individual investigation dossiers and criminal files. Of particular interest are lists of Jewish assets in individual financial institutions, Gestapo notifications about the seizure of Jewish property, or orders for the sale of jewelry to the Hadega firm in Prague (*Handelsgesellschaft Prag* – this commercial company carried out valuations and also executed the enforced sale and purchase of Jewish jewelry and precious metals).

The originator of the archive collection of the German Administration of Seized Assets (G 427) is the *Treuhand und Revisionsgesellschaft*, specifically its branches in Brno and Ostrava. This corporation administered Jewish property and other seized assets. Among other things, the collection contains seventy boxes containing the records accounting for chattels for the Asset Authority of the Reichsprotektor in Bohemia and Moravia (the *Vermögensamt*). These are arranged alphabetically according to the original owners, and they contain lists of pictures, carpets, period furniture, silver and gold utensils, and jewelry. The lists have been very thoroughly prepared, and occasionally even contain a brief biography of the artist who painted a picture. Most of the collection (60 boxes) comprises documents on individual seized assets (usually finances, accounts, insurance policies, and houses), which are arranged alphabetically according to the names of the original owners.

The Emigration Fund for Bohemia and Moravia (*Auswanderungsfond für Böhmen und Mähren*) was another of the institutions that was established for the purpose of administering and liquidating Jewish assets. Of the activities it carried out, our archive has

documents from its offices in Brno and Jihlava in the Emigration Fund, Brno Office (B 392) and the National Administration of Assets, Jihlava District Office (B 283) collections. The Brno Office's collection contains documents on individual houses with Jewish owners in the city of Brno from the years 1939–1945 arranged according to cadastral territory and the building registration number. Each file contains a contract for the enforced sale of the real estate to the Emigration Fund, an official evaluation, a statement by the owner on the condition of the building as well as easements and insurance pertaining to it, an excerpt from the land registers, an announcement by the *Oberlandrat* on the appointment of an authorized representative, lease contracts, and possibly proceedings concerning the sale of the real estate. The Jihlava Office contains documents of this type, not just for Jihlava itself, but also for an extensive area of western Moravia. The collections have materials dating through 1950. Consequently, they also have documents from the National Asset Administration Authority and the Emigration Fund. National administration was imposed on the abolished Emigration Fund by way of a decree issued by the Ministry for the Protection of Labor and Social Welfare (dated June 8, 1945, ref. no. P-1809-1/1945). Files concerning individual houses are arranged alphabetically according to localities in two series. The first comprises files on restituted houses that were returned while the second contains files on real estate that was transferred to national administration by people's committees or to communal enterprises.

The aforementioned comprises a cursory list of material exemplifying the process of seizing Jewish assets during the Second World War. Naturally, it is not possible to ignore written materials documenting how the consequences of this process were dealt with after 1945 in restitution proceedings. The Moravian Regional Archive contains the most documents in the collection

of the Provincial People's Committee in Brno (B 280), which existed from 1945 to 1948. It passed on unresolved cases to its successors, which operated from 1949 to 1960, i.e., the Regional People's Committees. Of these, we have stored documents from the Regional People's Committees for Brno, Jihlava, and Gottwaldov (B 124, B 126, B 125). In 1950, the Regional People's Committees also took over the unresolved paperwork of the financial public prosecutor's offices and bureaus of the National Renewal Fund, who participated as representatives of the state in restitution cases involving Jewish assets. (Consequently, it is not possible to overlook the collections in the Jihlava (D 153) and Uherské Hradiště (D 156) financial public prosecutor's offices.) I have also come across cases where restitution proceedings were not completed until the end of the 1960s by another successor, the South Moravian People's National Committee in Brno (B 338). The work of each researcher and employee was made immensely harder by the fact that Jewish assets were not dealt with in any of the aforementioned institutions as a special separate group, but can be found nearly anywhere. (To give you a better idea – the collection of the Brno Provincial People's Committee contains paperwork on state citizenship, national loyalty certification, registry paperwork, particularly death declarations, name changes, war damages proceedings, the establishment of national administration for industrial enterprises, and appeals against the confiscation of property. In the Regional People's Committee documents, the financial, agricultural, and economic sections are crucial for searching for Jewish assets).

This year, a separate range of restitution files stored in the records office of the Municipal Court in Brno has been taken over. At present, these files are part of the collection Brno People's Civil Court (C 152). They comprise around 40 boxes, which predominantly contain cases involving the restitution of Jewish

assets from the years 1947–1951. According to Act No. 128/1946 of the Collection of Laws, dated May 16, 1946 (on the invalidity of property rights proceedings from the era when there was a lack of freedom and claims concerning this invalidity), in the event of a rejection of an application for the return of property by an institution that established national administration (or if it issued no statement on the restitution claim within a deadline of three months), the claimant could exercise his claim before the appropriate regional court.

In this list, I cannot overlook one completely exceptional collection, namely Moses Löw Beer, national administration of private property (H 1008). The entire collection is only four cartons of archive records. The members of this family who were also partners in the firm Moses Löw Beer left the Czechoslovak Republic in 1939. Thanks to this decision, they all survived the war and lodged restitution claims when it was over. The collection contains completely unique material, which documents the course of national administration and restitution proceedings in the years 1945–1954 with regard to the private assets of this extensive and very important family of Moravian industrialists. The assets consisted of securities, insurance policies, accounts, automobiles and real estate, including the world-renowned Tugendhat Villa. The collection also includes lists and valuations of items stored in individual houses in Brno and Svitávka.

In conclusion, I would like to state once more that this is not a complete list of all archive collections in which it is possible to find information on the fate of Jewish assets. Nevertheless, I have attempted to mention all the most important archive collections, particularly those that have, in the past 15 years, become the basis for dealing with applications by natural persons and

legal entities to search for documents concerning their property. These archive records are also becoming an important source for academic research on the era of the Second World War.

► **Marc Masurovsky**

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, USA

**A NEW PARADIGM FOR RESTITUTING
LOOTED CULTURAL PROPERTY**

First, I would like to dedicate this presentation to the memory of Officer Stephen Jones who lost his life on June 10, 2009, at the hands of an American neo-Nazi, while protecting the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

Second, I regret the absence of a number of veterans of art restitution like Willi Korte, Ori Soltes, Konstantin Akinsha, Randy Schoenberg, and many others.

Third, I would like to restate the obvious:

- ▷ The Holocaust is a very personal matter. It engulfed the lives of six million Jews and five million non-Jews across continental Europe and North Africa. Those men, women, and children died in a network of 20,000 prisons, ghettos, camps and extermination centers, stretching from the Channel Islands to the far reaches of Estonia and the shores of Tunisia.
- ▷ The Holocaust, in particular, and the WW II, in more general terms, went hand in hand with the forcible transfer

and seizure of property of all kinds belonging to the victims of Nazi/Fascist persecutions.

- ▷ These forcible transfers and seizures reshaped the wartime economies of Europe and laid the foundations of a new economic order that stretched into the postwar era.
- ▷ The highly selective punishment of collaborators and war criminals prevented the victimized populations from achieving a badly-needed measure of justice and closure, which is one reason why we meet here in Prague, 64 years later.
- ▷ All in all, after war's end, 55 million people were dead, one third of Europe's infrastructure lay in tatters, in some countries, like the Soviet Union, a third of the male population had been killed, creating a multi-generational trauma with severe consequences on the social, cultural, economic and spiritual life of the survivors.

The artistic legacy of all nations under Nazi/Fascist occupation or control was amputated, embodied in the loss of creative power of thousands of visual and performing artists, most of them Jewish or belonging to groups targeted for special treatment by the occupiers and their collaborators. Those left to survive were, for a large part, either collaborators themselves or those whose styles conformed to the needs of the regimes in place.

The works of art stolen by the Nazis and their local henchmen belonged to these persecuted artists, as well as to collectors, dealers, and institutions. If we look only at the Jewish community and accept a broad definition of cultural property, several million objects were looted. If we add cultural property forcibly