

Foreword

Facilitating restitution of Judaica plundered during the Holocaust is a priority for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO). Extensive efforts at identifying and returning Jewish ceremonial objects and Jewish manuscripts, archives, and libraries that were plundered by Nazi Germany, its allies and collaborators to their original owners started immediately after the end of the Shoah, but the task is far from completed, even so many decades later.

To encourage provenance research to be done on Judaica, the Claims Conference-WJRO over the years has stimulated and encouraged the Association of European Jewish Museums (AEJM), the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM), and the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) to adopt declarations in this area, which they all have done, and to move forward with examination of their collections. And we have worked in cooperation with Hashava-The Company for the Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' Assets to ensure that Israeli museums, libraries, and archives do the same.

To better understand the situation in all countries, we compiled a *Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica* (published online in 2009, updated in 2016 – see <http://art.claimscon.org/our-work/judaica/descriptive-catalogue-of-looted-judaica/>), which provides a worldwide snapshot of what is known concerning the fate of Judaica. The *Catalogue* presents a summary of the history of Nazi looting of Judaica and of Judaica restitution efforts after the war divided by 70 separate countries. For each country, projects to identify looted Judaica are described, if they exist, followed by discussion of objects of Judaica in the country that are known to have been looted or to have gaps in their provenance that have been identified in databases, publications, or other sources. In some instances, information exists on the individual object level, while in other cases only more general descriptions of looted collections as a whole are available. The *Catalogue* also contains a list of relevant archives and a bibliography. The compilation is based on information from existing published and unpublished literature and archives, as well as information obtained from experts in various countries.

In 2009, 47 nations, observer countries, and relevant non-governmental organizations, including the Claims Conference and the WJRO, convened for the Prague Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets. Among the reports prepared by the Claims Conference/WJRO was *Holocaust Era Judaica and Jewish Cultural Property: A World-Wide Overview* (see <http://www.claimscon.org/forms/prague/Judaica.pdf>), which recommended actions to be taken by participating nations to address the challenges in restitution of looted assets. The report was based on the *Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica*.

The Prague Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets resulted in the Terezin Declaration, which for the first time specifically dealt internationally with looted Judaica separately from looted art. The Prague Conference was followed by the establishment of the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI), which as part of its Advisory Council appointed a Working Group on Judaica and Jewish Cultural Property chaired by Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek and with the following members: Inka Bertz, Julie-Marthe Cohen, Daniel Dratwa, Wesley Fisher, Karen Franklin, Rhoda Rosen, Hila Tene-Gilad, Photini Tomai-Constantopoulou, and Magda Veselská. Over the years that followed, many of the members of this Working Group held discussions among themselves – generally in conjunction with meetings of the Association of European Jewish Museums (AEJM) – about what would be most

helpful to the field of provenance research on Judaica and what should happen concerning the restitution or other disposition of looted Judaica.

These discussions led to the identification of two main goals. The first was the creation of a guide to how to do provenance research on Judaica – it was recognized that while some similar guides or manuals exist regarding provenance research on looted art, nothing comparable has existed for Judaica. The second was the eventual creation of an online exhibition on plundered Judaica that would provide a mechanism and opportunity for discussion of what best practices and standards should be in this field.

The present *Handbook on Judaica Provenance Research* is an attempt under the auspices of the Claims Conference-WJRO Looted Cultural Property Initiative to reach the first of these goals in regard to ceremonial objects. It constitutes a major step forward in assisting museum and synagogue curators, dealers, researchers, survivors and their heirs to be able to determine the history of the ritual items in their collections or to learn more of the fate of cherished objects that may have been lost in the Holocaust.

We have long supported databases, projects on archival sources, and training programs that are relevant to provenance research on art and cultural property generally, some of which are mentioned in the pages that follow. Among the grants that the Claims Conference has provided specifically in Judaica was one to help publish the book *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War and After*, edited by Julie-Marthe Cohen, with Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek [Crickadarn, 2011]. We are most pleased that these two specialists agreed to author this *Handbook*. They are joined by Ruth Weinberger of the Claims Conference staff, who was largely responsible for the *Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica*.

Julie-Marthe Cohen studied Italian language and literature at the University of Amsterdam. She is curator of cultural history at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. In that capacity, she organizes exhibitions and publishes on topics relating to the Museum's collection and to Amsterdam Portuguese and Ashkenazi Jewish communities. Since 2000, she has taken a special interest in the wartime history of the Museum's collection and of Judaica collections of Jewish communities in the Netherlands and developed a database of missing and misplaced objects from the Museum's collection. In 2011 she co-edited with Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War and After*.

Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek holds a Ph.D. in Jewish Studies and Art History from the University of Vienna. Since 2011 she has worked as a freelance curator, consultant to Jewish museums and university lecturer (see: <http://www.xhibit.at/heimann>). Prior to that she served as chief curator at the Jewish Museum Vienna for twenty years. Since 2013 she heads the Advanced Curatorial Education Programme for the Association of European Jewish Museums. In addition to numerous publications on Jewish cultural history, she published together with Julie-Marthe Cohen *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* in 2011.

Ruth Jolanda Weinberger holds a doctoral degree in history from the University of Vienna. She is a historian for the Looted Art and Cultural Property Initiative at the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. She co-produced the worldwide *Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica* and worked on the 2014 report *Holocaust-Era Art: An Overview of Worldwide Progress*. She created a report entitled *The Looting of Jewish and Cultural Objects in Former Yugoslavia: The HAG Südosten & the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg in Belgrade, Agram (Zagreb) and Ragusa (Dubrovnik)*, and a large number of internal papers on provenance research and restitution procedures in various countries worldwide.

Previously she worked for the Swiss Refugee Program of the Swiss Bank Settlement, the Vienna-based Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria, and the Fund for Victims of Medical Experiments and Other Injuries administered by the Claims Conference, under the auspices of the German Foundation. While administering and researching applications to this compensation program, which was part of the much larger Slave and Forced Labor Program, she was able to reveal more medical experiments in additional locations than previously known.

Provenance research on Judaica is important on moral grounds. It is important for the preservation and understanding of Jewish culture. It is important for Holocaust remembrance. And it is a worldwide matter. This *Handbook* should prove a helpful step forward.

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