

B. THE FATE OF THREE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS THAT ILLUSTRATE THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE HOLOCAUST ON JUDAICA COLLECTIONS IN EUROPE,⁵⁸⁴ JULIE-MARTHE COHEN

Provenance research on Judaica involves understanding and researching the migration paths of ceremonial objects during and after the Second World War. The following is intended to provide insight on possible migration paths of Jewish ceremonial objects after their confiscation. The examples try to show that, although we have less knowledge about ceremonial objects than about books and archives, in many instances the migration paths of objects more or less follow the same migration paths of books and archives as traced by Patricia Grimsted. Her findings therefore may serve researchers to establish parallels (for her publications see https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patricia_Grimsted/publications).

The Second World War and the Holocaust had a profound and dramatic impact on Judaica collections in Europe. Both institutional and private collections were confiscated, looted, destroyed, melted down, carried off and sold. The ceremonial objects, books and archives that the Nazis looted all over Europe were shipped to one of their pseudo-scientific institutions. After the war, when the Western Allies discovered the loot, most often the objects could not be returned to their former owners. The Jews had been brutally murdered, and nothing remained of the once flourishing Jewish religious communities and Jewish cultural institutions. Heirless objects and objects that had belonged to German Jewish communities were distributed among Jewish institutions and communities outside Europe or ended up in non-Jewish institutions.⁵⁸⁵

In the framework of the international agreements that were made in the last two decades, museum professionals and other researchers have made a commitment to serious provenance research of their collections. They are searching for lost collections or individual items, or are trying to identify the provenance of displaced objects. A considerable number of scholars have dealt with the fate of Jewish books and archives, but ceremonial objects have had far less attention. The American historian and archival specialist Patricia Kennedy Grimsted has published influential articles on the fate of archives and book collections that were confiscated by the Nazis. She has traced their war and postwar paths and has unfolded several patterns. Grimsted points to the fact that in trying to find lost libraries, or to identify the provenance of displaced ones, it is ‘most essential to know first, what Nazi agency plundered these objects and second, where these objects ended the war.’ In the case of books, the two principal plundering agencies were the so called Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg or ERR and the Reichsicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office) or RSHA. The competition for the spoils between these two agencies was sometimes a determining factor for the fate of the objects.

⁵⁸⁴ This text is based on a lecture given by Julie-Marthe Cohen in the framework of The Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, Keter: A Professional Training Course for Museum Experts in Ukraine, Lviv, 23-26 January 2012.

⁵⁸⁵ Although the United States, the United Kingdom, and France generally dealt with looted moveable property according to the general principle of escheat, which implies that heirless property would be returned to the nation from which it was plundered, including Germany, Jewish groups insisted that Jewish property should not remain in Germany. Thus, JCR policy was to ensure distribution of Jewish ritual objects to countries other than Germany. See Dana Herman, Hashavat Avedah, p. 47 and Katharina Rauschenberger, “The Judaica collection of Frankfurt’s Museum Jüdischer Altertümer and its worldwide dispersion after 1945,” Julie-Marthe Cohen, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War and After*, Crickadarn 2011, p. 95. See also Constantin Goshler, “Jewish Property and the Politics of Restitution in Germany after 1945,” Martin Dean, Constantin Goshler, Philipp Ther, *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, New York 2008, pp. 113-133. See also Ayaka Takei, “‘The Gemeinde Problem’: The Jewish Restitution Successor Organization and the Postwar Jewish Communities in Germany,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies: An international Journal*, 16, 2 (2002), p. 101-102.

In this article I will focus on the fate of a number of Judaica collections that belonged to Jewish museums. In tracing their fate, we will see that, broadly speaking, the war and postwar paths of ceremonial objects and books followed the same pattern. The patterns are quite numerous, however, so for the sake of clarity we will limit ourselves here to two of the main patterns Grimsted describes. These are the following: Objects that were looted by the ERR were shipped to the *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (IEJ) in Frankfurt, many of which were evacuated to Hungen and then were discovered in Germany by the Western Allies in 1945. In the following years these objects found their way to Israel, the United States and other countries

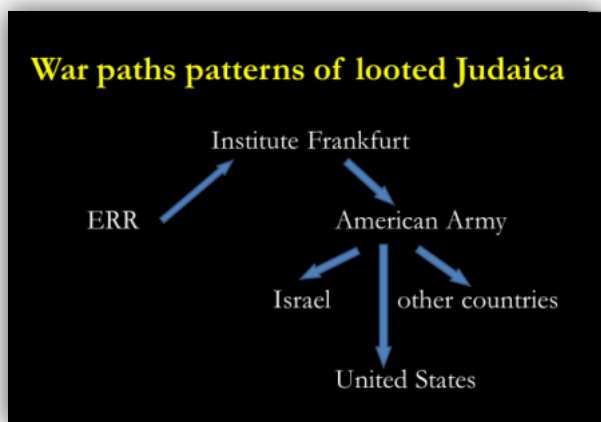


Figure 11

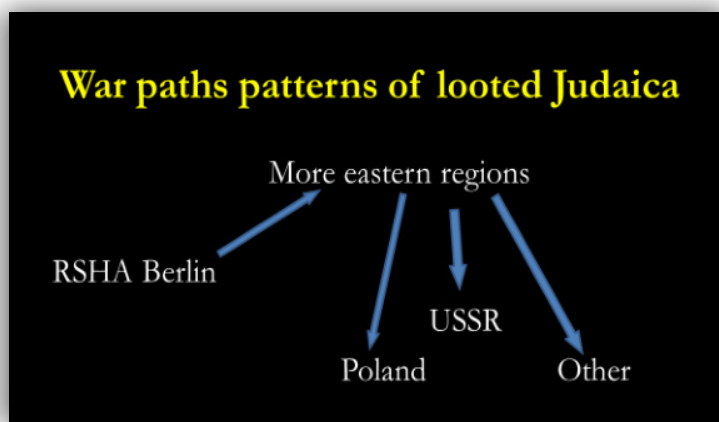


Figure 12

(fig. 11). The other plundering agency, the RSHA, had its main office in Berlin but was forced to evacuate the loot to more eastern regions when Berlin was under attack by air raids. After the war, part of these objects were discovered by the Red Army and brought to the Soviet Union as war trophies. Another part was found by the Polish authorities and remained on Polish soil. Stolen items also found their way to institutions in Czechoslovakia (fig. 12).

This article is structured as follows: With Grimsted's patterns in mind, we will first look at the fate of the collections of the Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam, of the Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (YIVO) in Vilna and of the Jewish Museum of Berlin. Thereafter we will turn to the postwar period, and will see how Judaica collections were further affected in countries under communist control, particularly in the cities of Lviv, Prague and Budapest. In my summary I include some final remarks.

Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg ERR⁵⁸⁶

In Western Europe, one of the the main organizations that was involved in the seizure of cultural items was the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR). This was a unit set up by Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, to collect, register and supervise cultural objects of enemies of the Reich. In March 1941, the first institute of Rosenberg's *Hohle Schule* opened in Frankfurt a/M. In this so-called *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (the Institute for Research on the Jewish Question) the looted archives, libraries and ceremonial objects were studied on a pseudo-scientific basis to prove that Judaism was degenerate.

⁵⁸⁶ Please see chapter "1.2 Nazi Agencies Engaged in the Looting of Material Culture" for more information.



Figure 13: The Amsterdam municipal air raid shelter in the dunes at Castricum with crates from the Jewish Historical Museum, on the right, c. 1941. Photo collection, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Netherlands.

One of the collections that fell victim to Rosenberg's unit was that of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.⁵⁸⁷ The Museum was founded in 1930 and officially opened in 1932. When the Germans occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, the museum building was closed. Between October 1939 and July 1942, the Museum entrusted around 600 objects for safekeeping to Amsterdam's Municipal Museum. For security reasons, the objects were stored in a shelter 30 kilometres from Amsterdam (fig. 13).

An inventory list of the objects that were transferred has survived. In May 1943 the museum objects were confiscated by the ERR and sent to one of its main storage depots in Amsterdam. The items on the inventory list were ticked off when the boxes were inspected by a German employee, who also added some entries in German handwriting (fig. 14).

Figure 14: Inventory list Jewish Historical Museum, ca. 1941. Document collection JHM.

INVENTARIS - LIJST.	
Joodsch Historisch Museum.	
4 glazen met H. W. Rosenberg, d. 1. d. 1.	
2 gebroeders.	
van van. E. van.	
Nr.	Beschrijving.
7	Tallith (zijde) Gebedskleed
8	"
13	Joelab-versiering (kruissteekbord.)
14	Bemijdenkistje met inhoud. H. W. Rosenberg, d. 1. d. 1.
44	Tegel, Delftsch aardewerk m/voorstelling van een bemijdenis
55	Twee tellers, gebruikt bij dominospel
57	Portret van Mr. J. Zees de Leeuw Lagema
59	Klein model van een doorkant m. alle ingrediënten
74	Bechal (kast voor de H. W. Rosenberg)
75	Ketubah (trouwacte)
108	Maagquillan (Makkebehn-lamp) (koper)
123	Schilderij voorst. het maaien v. d. ioterijlijsten
123	Beknal m. opdracht van Koningin Sophie d. Nederlanden
123	Fenais aangevoerd door het College van Beantien
123	Stal met miniatuur-gewer en daarbij behorende instrumenten
127	Kijkkastje met voorstellingen
129	Begroet. naar 2 schilderijen: Het Joodsche Bruidje
129	De Weterol-schrijver
129	Twee nagelbeschermeren (zilver) gebruikt bij bemijdenis
129	Portret van D. Henricus de Castro
129	Plaatbewijs voor de korte lantare d. Fort. Iar. Synagoge
129	Ascanot de K. L. de T. T. que conteno. etc.
129	Copie des articles que entablent etc.
129	Twee stempels met houten handvat
129	Koperen plaat voor adreskaart
129	Tien houtblokken v. d. illustraties eener Hagadah
129	Lijst van ontrent beh. waarnemen van de functie van
129	Hutan Beresith
129	Kopergravures: Bemijdenis, lossing van een eerstgebore
129	Kopergravure: Feestfeest in de Fort. Synagoge
129	Gouden Sabbathring
129	Megillah (rol van Esther)
129	Memoerah ingelijst (blad)
129	Speldekussen m. Hebr. gelukswaard
129	Bequeste bemijdenisgilde te Wierberg
129	Sabbath-Geliedekje m. gouden letters en franje
129	Speldekussen, bruin
129	Gege betischen lukt met dik gastjes bord.
129	Houten, gebruikt bij bemijdenis
129	Speldekussen voor kramkamer
129	Megillah, met zilver gewantend
129	Ole van de Castro m. inscriptie
129	Dankliederen aan God
129	Kiddoesh-beker (zilver)
129	Bemijdenkistje m. zilveren inhoud
D. W. Rosenberg, d. 1. d. 1.	
H. W. Rosenberg, d. 1. d. 1.	
H. W. Rosenberg, d. 1. d. 1.	



Figure 15: Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage, Otto Paul (?), acting director of the Institut (left), Johannes Pohl, the Catholic theologian and director of the Hebrew section of the Institut library (centre), and Wilhelm Grau (probably), first director of the Institut, looking at Judaica in a showcase, 1941. Wolff & Tritzschler / Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Finally, in August 1943 nine crates with Museum items were sent to Rosenberg's Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage in Frankfurt. Very little is known about how ceremonial objects were regarded at the Institute. Were the crates unpacked, were the objects sorted and studied? (fig. 15)

⁵⁸⁷ For the extensive war and post-war history of the museum, see Julie-Marthe Cohen, "Theft and Restitution of Judaica in the Netherlands During and After the Second World War," Julie-Marthe Cohen, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek (eds), *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War and After*, Crickadarn 2011.

and vermin. Boxes and safes containing valuable items and incunabula were broken into and their contents ransacked during the first few days after the US Army arrived. The maltreatment and theft was also reported by a Hohe Schule curator who was interrogated in late July 1947. He stated that ‘books were handled very carelessly; valuable material as silverware was better taken care of, draperies if not burnt already in Frankfurt were used to wrap private furniture of people who worked at the Hohe Schule.’⁵⁸⁹

Offenbach Archival Depot

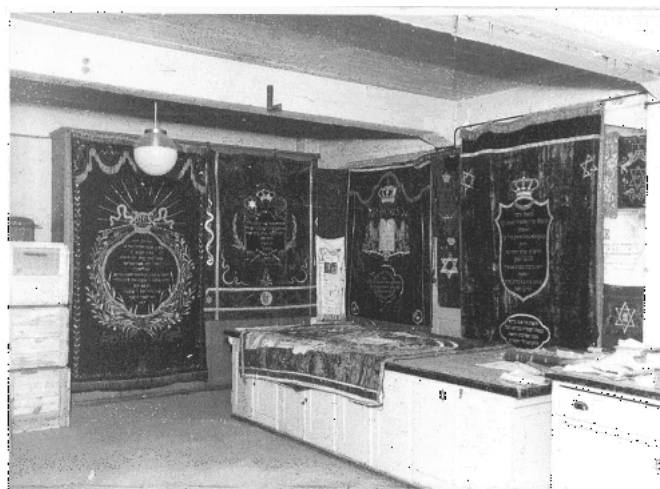


Figure 13: Major D.P.M. Graswinckel by his car, on the left, in front of the Offenbach Central Collecting Point, 1946. Photo collection JHM.

Early in 1946, objects found in Hungen were transferred to a huge storage building in the nearby town of Offenbach that became known as the Offenbach Archival Depot or OAD (fig. 18). It was one of the four Central Collecting Points (CCP) the American army had established to secure recovered cultural assets and arrange for their quick and orderly return to their countries of origin. Offenbach became the depot for more than 3,000,000 books and other looted cultural items that were discovered in Hungen and in other locations in the American zone. Approximately one third of these cultural items were identifiably Jewish, most of which had been left heirless as a result of Nazi atrocities.

After arrival in the Offenbach depot, the crates were unpacked and the objects sorted. As for the ceremonial objects, these were neatly arranged in cabinets according to type and barred with iron bars in different rooms (figs. 19, 20, 21).

Figures 19, 20, 21: Storage of ceremonial objects at the Offenbach Archival Depot, 1946. A number of objects were identified as belonging to the Jewish Historical Museum and Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam. Photo collection JHM and NACP.



⁵⁸⁹ M 1947 - Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points ("Ardelia Hall Collection"): Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, 1945-1952: Wiesbaden Administrative Records: Series: Status of Monuments, Museums, and Archives; Category: Hungen Investigation, Hohe Schule (online available at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/115/232897750>)



Figure 20



2nd Floor, South Side
Holy Scrolls (Torah) desecrated by Nazis.
Religious articles piled in cases, unsorted.

Figure 21

Restitution

How did the restitution of the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum come about? Thanks to efficient wartime documentation of art stolen from the Netherlands and close cooperation with the US Army, the return of items via the collecting points soon gathered pace. In June 1945, the Dutch government established the so called Stichting Nederlands Kunstbezit (SNK, Dutch Art Foundation) that was to track down and manage stolen works of art and restore them to their original owners. Two Dutch officers working for the SNK visited the Offenbach Depot where they identified and selected the Jewish cultural items of Dutch origin. In the course of 1946 objects of the Jewish Historical Museum and of Dutch Jewish communities were restituted in five shipments to the Netherlands.⁵⁹⁰ There the crates were handed over to the Dutch Art Foundation. According to an inventory list with poor descriptions, around 300 objects were returned to the Museum, mainly ceremonial objects for domestic and synagogue use, as well as some engravings. The objects were stored until some time before the reopening of the museum in 1955. Today, we estimate that around 400 items remain missing, among which are many documents. What happened to

⁵⁹⁰ M 1942 - Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points ("Ardelia Hall Collection"): Offenbach Archival Depot, 1946-1951: Offenbach Administrative Records; Series: Cultural Object Restitution and Custody Records; Category: Netherlands OAD 13, pp. 68-75, 77; (online available at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/114/232163020>) The 30/31 October 1946 shipping contained the largest number of Jewish ceremonial objects; pages 65 and 66 include packing lists (in German) of boxed objects; pages 78-80 refer to the shipment on 5 October 1946, which included 6 coins; pages 89-90, and page 93, refer to the shipment of 3 boxes, with i.e., glasses, hanukah lamp ('macabeeenlamp'), three silver rimonim and one silver [Torah] crown on 30 August 1946; pages 124-126 refer to shipment on 31 May 1946 of 13 coins; pages 146-147, refer to shipment on 9 March 1946 of 'Various Dutch Collections. Contains also pictures and objects belonging to the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam'; For an overview of all the Dutch shipments, see page 151. For Jewish ceremonial objects, not identified as belonging to the Jewish Historical Museum, see pages 113-115 dated 26 June 1946, with 2 boxes DIV, containing Torah cloth covers. Described as "Contents in fair condition".

these items is a matter of speculation. They may have been lost, damaged, stolen or destroyed and eventually may resurface in auctions or in institutions that have started provenance research on their collections.⁵⁹¹

Like the Jewish Historical Museum collection, other collections that could be identified were returned from the Offenbach Archival Depot to their countries of origin. Such was the case with the renowned Jewish library Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana that was restituted to Amsterdam almost complete and some of the books looted from the rabbinical college library in Rome that returned to Italy in 1948.⁵⁹²

YIVO

The Central Collecting Point in Offenbach (OAD) not only included objects from Western European countries. Rosenberg had also been active in the Baltic States in Eastern Europe and the objects he had confiscated there were also shipped to the Frankfurt Institute. In 1941 the Nazis marched into Lithuania. Soon after, the ERR arrived in Vilna, that was one of the cities with a flourishing Jewish culture. Its most renowned cultural institute was the Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (YIVO) that conducted the interdisciplinary study of all aspects of the culture of East European Jews. It became active in 1925 and had an important archive and library. In the 1930s it established its own art museum and its collection included religious art and liturgical objects and works by contemporary Jewish artists. In Vilna, Jewish collections were also held by the Jewish Museum that belonged to the Ansky Historical and Ethnographic Society.⁵⁹³ Founded by the Association of Enthusiasts of Ancient Jewish History it was opened officially in March 1913, on the premises of the Vilnius Jewish community building at St. Ignatius lane 1–3a (today: Vincas Kudirka square).

Its collection consisted mainly of artefacts collected from the territory of the Polish Commonwealth and Russia and works of art by contemporary Jewish artists, as well as Jewish folk art.⁵⁹⁴ Another, small museum that had Judaica objects belonged to the Society of Jewish Historical Art Lovers and was opened in 1927.⁵⁹⁵ In 1942 the ERR confiscated the rich YIVO collections and the collections of the other Jewish cultural institutions and Vilna's synagogues. The most valuable objects were selected and shipped to Rosenberg's Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage in Frankfurt. YIVO's library survived almost in its entirety. After the war part of the collection was discovered in Frankfurt, part in Hungen.⁵⁹⁶ Later, part of the YIVO collection was identified in the Offenbach Archival Depot. In the summer of 1947, 420 crates with about 80,000 items were shipped from Offenbach to the YIVO headquarters in New York, re-established in 1940. But what happened to the other cultural valuables from Vilna that had become heirless objects?⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹¹ In 2015–2017 several objects of the prewar Jewish Historical Museum were discovered. A painting by Benjamin Prins, prewar inventory number 108, is in a private collection. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem holds several objects of the prewar Jewish Historical Museum that can be viewed in the Israel Museum World War II provenance research online database, see, for instance, s.v. amulet, amuletic jewelry, Persia 18th c., Wiesbaden CCP number V4.

⁵⁹² For the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, see F.J. Hoogewoud, "The Nazi Looting of Books and its American "Antithesis"", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 26 (1992), pp. 158–192. For the Rabbinical College Library in Rome, see Final report of the Commission for the Recovery of the Bibliographic Heritage of the Jewish Community in Rome, looted in 1943: http://www.governo.it/Presidenza/USRI/confessioni/rapporto/rapporto_fi_nale_attivita_Commissione2.pdf.

⁵⁹³ Vilma Gradinskaite, "History of Art Collection in Vilnius Jewish Museums: from the Time of the Russian Empire to the Present," *Art in Jewish Society*, Vol. XV, 2016, pp. 263–270.

⁵⁹⁴ Nawojka Cieslinska-Lobkowicz, "The History of Judaica and Judaica Collections in Poland Before, During and After the Second World War: An Overview", Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witnesses*, pp. 133–134.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 134.

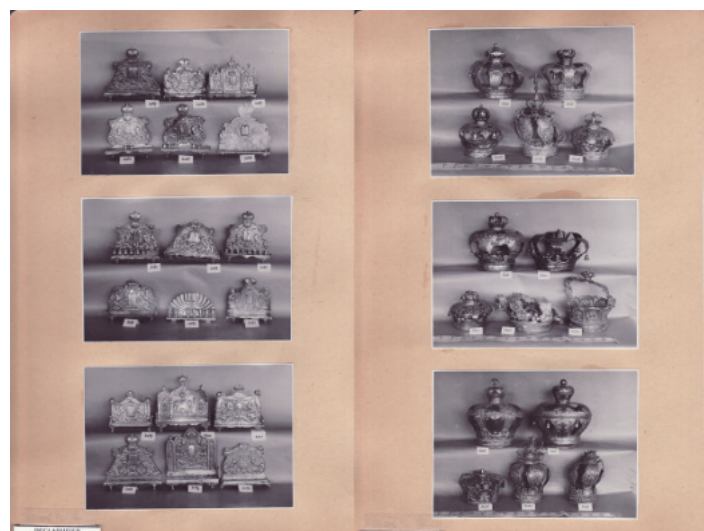
⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 153.

⁵⁹⁷ So far as the books are concerned, they were kept in secret for 40 years in a church under the Lithuanian Book Chamber and then the National Library. See the Edward Blank YIVO Collections Project (partly financed by the Claims Conference) at <https://www.yivo.org/Vilna-Collections-Project>.

The American Zone in Germany: JRSO and JCR (fig. 22)

Like the ceremonial objects from the Jewish cultural institutions in Vilna, the majority of objects that were found in the American zone and were collected in the Offenbach Archival Depot had become heirless objects that could not be returned to their former owners. The question of what should be done with these objects arose in the American occupied zone as early as 1945 and was a political issue from the outset. To whom did these heirless objects belong? According to traditions of escheat, heirless property would be returned to the nation from which it was plundered — even Germany.⁵⁹⁸ However, for international Jewish

groups it was unthinkable that this property should escheat to the very state that had tried to annihilate the Jews. To prevent this, the creation of a Jewish successor organization was imperative. Thus, in May 1947, a general Jewish trusteeship was formed, which was called the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO). It was recognized by the



Figures 23, 24: These photographs are only a small selection from approximately 200 pages, with three photos per page, showing unidentified and unclaimed ceremonial objects that were eventually distributed by JCR. NACP, see Fold3 database, WW II, Holocaust Collection, Ardelia Hall Collection: Wiesbaden Administrative Records, Cultural Object Movement and Control Records, Jewish Devotional Silver.

Ceremonial objects were photographed and catalogued under the following categories:

Seder Plates; Torah Shields:	76
• Goblets:	224
Collections Boxes:	59
• Spice Boxes:	1 244
Menorahs:	1 285
• Hanukkah Lamps:	550
Torah Shields	492
• Rimmonim:	932
Torah Crowns:	74
• Pointers:	741
Eternal Lights:	36

Figure 22

American Military Government in Germany as the agency authorized to assume control of ownerless private and communal Jewish property. JRSO would act as representative of the Jewish people and would make a collective claim to the ownerless properties. The cultural arm of JRSO, also established in 1947, was the so-called Jewish Cultural Reconstruction that was responsible for the distribution of heirless Jewish cultural, religious, and historical objects. At the basis of its distribution policy stood the principle that the greatest possible number of Jews should benefit from the material. Israel and the U.S.A. were to benefit most.⁵⁹⁹

JCR operated from the American Central Collecting Point in Wiesbaden, one of the other American collecting points in Germany. It had received the unclaimed, heirless cultural objects that had remained in the Offenbach Archival Depot after its closure in 1949. In Wiesbaden 5,700 objects were classified and numbered, the majority coming from synagogues with visible

⁵⁹⁸ Dana Herman, *Hashevat Avedab: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.*, PhD diss., McGill University, 2008, p. 5. There is no international law of escheat as such. Rather it is the case that most or all states have escheat laws, with various procedures.

⁵⁹⁹ “Eighty-one percent of the cultural property was sent to Israel and the United States; nine percent was allocated to West European countries (with half going to Britain), and the remaining ten percent was distributed to more than fifteen other countries including South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, and Canada.” See: Herman, p. 7.

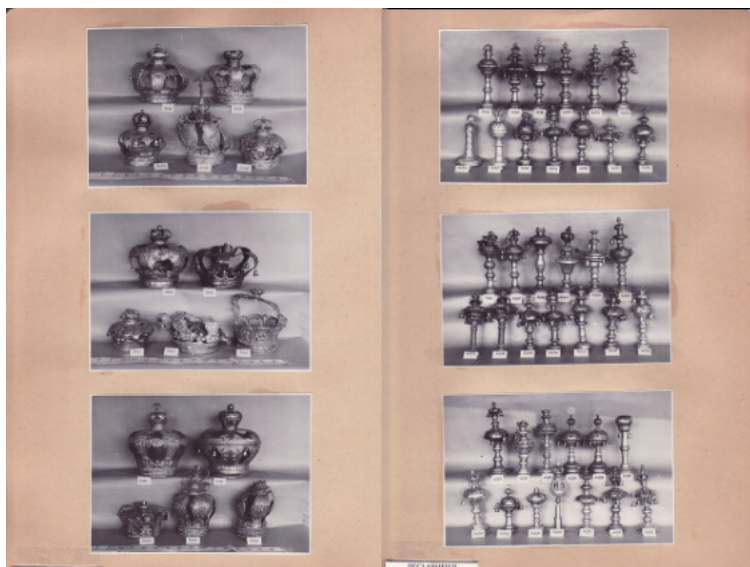


Figure 24

and those appropriate for synagogue use. Narkiss was entitled the right of first refusal for museum objects. The remainder of these were to be shared among other established Jewish Museums in Tel Aviv, London, New York and Cincinnati. As for synagogue material, the committee recommended that one third should go to synagogues in Israel and one third to the United States, with the remaining third to be shared by other countries (fig. 25).

The Jewish Museum Berlin

Among the items that were distributed by JCR, were objects that had belonged to the Jewish Museum Berlin. The Jewish Museum was opened in 1933. After the November pogroms of 1938 (*Kristallnacht*; November pogrom) the museum was closed, its doors were sealed, and its collection was confiscated by the Nazis. What happened to the collection afterwards is not exactly known.⁶⁰² In 1945 a large part of the paintings collection was discovered in

marks of willful destruction. Almost 85% of the recovered ceremonial objects originated in Eastern European countries (figs. 23-24).⁶⁰⁰

Under the leadership of Salo Baron, renowned professor of Jewish history at Columbia University in NY, a distribution committee met in February 1949 to establish how the silver and other ceremonial objects were to be shared. Among its members were museum professionals working in the United States who had previously been working in Jewish museums in Europe.⁶⁰¹ Mordecai Narkiss, director of the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, came to Wiesbaden to examine the objects. He divided the objects into two categories: those suitable as museum pieces

World distribution of ceremonial objects and Torah scrolls			
Country	Museum pieces	Synagogue pieces	Scrolls
Israel	2,285	976	804 + 87 fragments
United States	1,326	1,824	110
Great Britain	245	66	12 (s. below)
France	125	219	s. below
Germany	31	89	
Western Europe (excl. France & Germany)		129	
Western Europe (incl. France & Great Britain)			98
South Africa	150	66	
Canada	151 (museum + synagogue)		
Argentina	150 (museum + synagogue)		
Peru	35 (museum + synagogue)		
Total	7,867		1,024

Figure 25

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 230.

⁶⁰¹ Stephen Kayser and Guido Schoenberger of the Jewish Museum in New York, Franz Landsberger of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and former curator of the Jewish Museum Berlin, and Rachel Wischnitzer of New York, who was a former scientific advisor at the Jewish Museum Berlin.

⁶⁰² Hermann Simon, „Auf der Suche nach einer verlorenen Sammlung. Was geschah nach dem 10. November 1938 mit den Beständen des Berliner Jüdischen Museums,“ Chana Schütz, Hermann Simon (eds), *Auf der Suche nach einer verlorenen Sammlung. Das Berliner Jüdische Museum (1933-1938)*, Berlin 2011, pp. 17-46.

the American zone of Berlin, in a building that had housed the former Reichskulturkammer.⁶⁰³ In 1949 the American Military Government passed the collection over to the Berlin branch office of JRSO that was then to deal with its restitution. The Jewish Community of Berlin took part in the negotiations and agreed that over 80% of the paintings be sent to Israel, stating that the transfer of these objects for them expressed “a visible sign to commemorate the murdered Jews of Berlin”.⁶⁰⁴ Only a few paintings, masterpieces, that were found by the British Military Authorities and were released into the hands of the JCR, found their way to the United States and are today in the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles.⁶⁰⁵



Figure 26

The RSHA and the repositories in Lower Silesia

Other parts of the collection of the Berlin Jewish Museum had a different fate. After confiscation, most of the collection was eventually evacuated from Berlin to Lower Silesia, where the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA), that amalgamated the SD (Security Service of the SS), the Criminal Police (Kriminalpolizei) and the Gestapo, stored much of its loot. One of its departments, Amt VII, was responsible for the creation of antisemitic propaganda and was the major destination repository for books and archives. The RSHA transferred

lots of their own cultural treasures along with those plundered from many countries to Lower Silesia when Allied bombing of Berlin intensified in 1943. Objects from the Berlin Jewish Museum were evacuated to one of the RSHA depots in the Kłodzko region, possibly to a depot in Wilkanów (Wölfelsdorf) (fig. 26).

After discovery in 1945, the Polish authorities transferred these objects to nearby Bozkow (Eckersdorf), where they had established a depot for museum and cultural goods.⁶⁰⁶ Among the objects were a couple of old printed books, files of the art collection of the Museum, and around 150 ritual objects, among which were dozens of lamps, a washing vessel from the Old Synagogue in Berlin, synagogue textiles, Torah crowns and a yad (pointer). In addition there were almost 4.000 graphics (water colours, drawings, lithos, etchings), reproductions and photographs.⁶⁰⁷ Prior to the war these photographs had been used for lectures to disseminate knowledge about the collections of the Museum. They showed images of, for example, ritual objects, of synagogues and cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe, of portraits and art works, and of

⁶⁰³ Hermann Simon, *Auf der Suche*, op. cit. pp. 32-33.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 35-36: „dass die jüdische Gemeinde in Berlin bereit ist, ein sichtbares Zeichen zum Andenken an die ermordeten Juden Berlins zu errichten“.

⁶⁰⁵ Grace Cohen Grossman, “The Scirball Museum JCR Research Project: Records and Recollections,” Julie-Marthe Cohen, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek (eds.), *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War and After*, Crickadarn 2011, pp. 323, 335. See also Dana Herman, *Hashava Avedat*, p. 216.

⁶⁰⁶ Jakob Hübner, „Auf der Suche nach Objecten des Berliner Jüdischen Museums in Polen. Funde und Hypothesen,“ pp. 73-85, p. 80-81, in Chana Schütz und Hermann Simon (Hg): *Auf der Suche nach einer verlorenen Sammlung. Das Berliner Jüdische Museum (1933-1938)*, Berlin 2011.

⁶⁰⁷ Jakob Hübner, *Auf der Suche*, p. 81-82.

modern architecture in Palestine. By 1935, with a collection of more than 3.600 images, the Berlin Jewish Museum had become the center for Jewish photographs.⁶⁰⁸

In September 1951, the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art transferred the Berlin objects to the so-called Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw – see below.⁶⁰⁹

The collection of the Berlin Jewish Museum was split up even more. Archival and other documents of the Museum that were stored in Lower Silesia were found by the Red Army and taken to Moscow. A box with silver and other cultural objects, also from the Berlin Museum, ended up in Moscow too. It is not known if the objects were taken there directly from Berlin or arrived via the Nazi storage depots in Lower Silesia. They were handed over to the Moscow Historical Museum and then transferred to the Museum of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad in 1954. Some of these objects may have been returned to Berlin in 1958 as part of a restitution of paintings.⁶¹⁰



Figure 27: Top part of the Holy Ark from an unknown Warsaw (?) synagogue, first half of the 19th century. It was found at the German collecting point in the National Museum in Warsaw and given to the Jewish Historical Institute in 1951. Collection of the JHI, Warsaw, Poland.

The Jewish Historical Institute (ZIH) in Warsaw

Poland succeeded to the looted property that was discovered on Polish soil and considered German and Jewish cultural assets that were found in Poland a form of reparations for the losses the Polish state had endured. The majority of Judaica objects that were found in Nazi depots found their way to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny* or ŻIH), such as the collection of the Berlin Jewish Museum referred to above. The Institute grew out of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland that was established in 1944 to supervise the organized search for looted assets. The Committee had immediately formed the

Central Jewish Historical Commission that was to salvage cultural heritage and established archives, a library, a museum, and a photographic collection. In 1947 it was renamed the Jewish Historical Institute, also known as ZIH.

The Institute tried to secure as many looted Judaica objects as possible. In 1948 it received a significant collection that was discovered in the Kunzendorf (now Trzebieszowice) castle, in Lower Silesia. Among the objects were thousands of books, several hundred manuscripts and old prints, and three *parochot* and 11 Esther scrolls of unknown origin. Beside castles, museums were also used as collecting points by the Nazis. In 1949 the Ministry of Culture and Art instructed the Municipal Museum in Torun to transfer 89 artefacts to the Institute. These had been looted from synagogues in Chelmno Province, including the synagogue of Chelmza, one of the largest Jewish communities in the region. Objects also arrived from the National Museum in Warsaw, such as some pieces of a wooden Torah ark that probably originated from one of the many small private synagogues in Warsaw (fig. 27).

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 77.

⁶⁰⁹ About 35 glass slides belonging to the collection of the Berlin Jewish Museum were discovered in an eighteenth-century castle in Schlesiersee (Slawa), about 80 km southwest of Poznan. These show images of works by mostly contemporary artists like Hermann Struck (1876-1944), Max Fabian (1873-1923) and the Polish artist Henryk Glicentstein (1870-1942). Eventually, these glass slides found their way to the State museum Wojewodstwu Lubuskie in Góra (Grünberg) in Poland. Most probably they were stored in the Selisian city Slawa (Schlesiersee), an 'Ausweichstelle' organized in the local Castle by the Amt VII of the RHSA in August 1943. See Jakob Hübner, *Auf der Suche*, p. 77.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

The National Museum had been used as a depot by the *Einsatzkommando Paulsen*, a special unit that was established on the order of the SS and Gestapo head Heinrich Himmler to secure artistic and historic objects in Poland. Most of the objects it confiscated, including Jewish libraries and Jewish ceremonial objects, were sent off to the RSHA in Berlin. In 1950 the Jewish Historical Institute's collection was expanded by more than 100 artefacts assembled by the Polish branch of the American humanitarian organization the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Among the objects were sixty-six ceremonial objects of unknown provenance, such as Torah crowns, yadot, menorot, spice boxes and Torah shields. Private ritual objects that are believed partly to have been stolen from Greek Jews from Thessaloniki on their way to Auschwitz, were passed on to the Institute by the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1951. These objects, mostly *rimonim* and Torah mantles, had been discovered in another German depot, in the Eckersdorf (now Polish Bożków) castle. Finally, in 1952 the State Museum at Majdanek in Lublin contributed approximately 1,100 objects to the Institute, among which were ceremonial objects that had belonged to the destroyed Jewish communities of the Lublin region (fig. 28).

Not all looted Judaica found its way to the Jewish Historical Institute. A considerable number of looted objects has remained in museums used for storage by the Nazis. In addition, museum collections may include Jewish ceremonial objects that circulated in abundance after the war. They were stolen during the war by the non-Jewish local population or found in the ruins of ghettos before appearing on the black market or at antique markets. Finally, some professionally managed museums were able to enrich their Judaica collections by recovering a good deal of silver Judaica from so called silver scrap metal that was kept in special depots, thus saving these objects from being melted down. The National Museum in Warsaw has the largest such collection: of its 340 Judaica objects, over 250 were recovered from scrap.⁶¹¹

Figure 28: Showcase with objects of the Institute's permanent exhibition. The second shelf from the top holds some of the rimmonim of the Jews of Thessalonika. All the Judaica in the showcase were found at the German collecting point in Bożków (formerly Eckersdorf), Lower Silesia and given to the JHI by the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1951. Collection of the JHI, Warsaw, Poland.



Judaica Collections under Communist Control

After the war, communist policies in the Eastern European countries had a dramatic impact on Judaica objects, and Jewish cultural institutions suffered further considerable losses. Expropriation went hand in hand with the incorporation of Jewish collections in state-owned institutions. Again collections were split up, illegally seized or sold (often on a flourishing black market).

In several regions that were connected to the USSR in 1939, Soviet occupation had already severely affected the status of Jewish cultural assets even before the German invasion. In Lviv, for example, already during the Soviet Occupation between 1939 and 1941, compulsory changes in property ownership occurred. Lviv's Jewish Community was dissolved and its property confiscated, entailing the closure of two of prewar Lviv's

⁶¹¹ Nawojka Lobkowicz, "The History of Judaica Collections in Poland Before, During and After the Second World War: An Overview," Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek (eds.), *Neglected Witnesses*, p. 172.

most important Jewish cultural institutions, the Community's library and its museum. The library holdings that constituted about 18,000 volumes were incorporated in the newly established Lviv branch of the library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. The Community's museum that was opened in 1934 had about 5,000 exhibits that were handed over to Lviv's Museum of Arts and Crafts.⁶¹² The collection included various ceremonial objects from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, deposits from synagogues in Lviv, contributions from private donors and other acquisitions, and objects from the private collection of Marek Reichenstein comprising marriage contracts, graphic works and part of his library. Shortly after the German occupation, in July 1941, apparently to protect it from German seizure, Maximilian Goldstein added his personal collection to the former holdings of the Jewish community at the Museum of Arts and Crafts.⁶¹³

When Soviet troops reconquered Lviv in July 1944, Judaica found its way, again, to the same institutions that had received objects during the first Soviet Occupation. Today, a significant part of the collection of the Jewish Community Museum as well as the Goldstein collection is kept by the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts. The numismatic parts of Goldstein's collection were transferred from the Ethnography Museum to the History Museum at the end of the 1940s. The Museum of Religions also obtained objects from these two former Jewish collections and received 30 objects from the Lviv Synagogue that closed in 1962, as well as further acquisitions. In addition, the Lviv Art Gallery holds portraits of rabbis and wealthy people and objects that were described as 'ownerless things', that originally were part of the Jewish Community Museum, along with pictures from the former Goldstein collection.⁶¹⁴

Expropriation of Jewish property by the communist state sometimes resulted in the loss of museum holdings, as happened with the Jewish Museum in Prague. During the Second World War, when the Nazis renamed it the Central Jewish Museum, its collection was largely expanded when almost all the ceremonial objects, books, manuscripts, and archival documents of the former Jewish religious communities in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were gathered in its repositories. After the communist takeover of the Museum in 1950 the collection suffered considerably. The most dramatic event took place in 1963, when the Museum lost almost its entire collection of more than 1,500 Torah scrolls and 400 Torah binders. The scrolls were sold in pursuit of foreign currency to enrich the state budget and were placed in trust with the Westminster Synagogue in London. There they were restored and their origins researched. Many of these scrolls have since been sent as loans to be used in synagogues throughout the United States, Israel and other countries.⁶¹⁵

In Hungary, communist administration and control over the Jewish Museum of Budapest had a tremendous impact on the cultural historical significance of the collection. In 1963 a new director was appointed who was an agent of the communist secret service. Under her leadership, the collection was re-inventoried in accordance with the statutory regulations: the original order of the collection was lost when around 4,600 objects lost their original inventory numbers. Data about the provenance of the individual objects, about where they were used, about which community or association owned the objects and how they had been

⁶¹² Tarik Cyril Amar, *Lviv 1944 – 2009: Jewish Cultural Objects and Property. Some Cases and Tendencies* (unpublished paper). See Appendices to Part 1, C.

⁶¹³ Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, „Judaicasammlungen zwischen Galizien und Wien: Das Jüdische Museum in Lemberg und die Sammlung Maximilian Goldstein,“ *Wiener Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte, Kultur und Museumswesen*, 1, 1994-95, p. 133. See also Sarah Harel Hoshen, „Research and Collection of Judaica in Lvov: 1874-1942,“ Sarah Harel Hoshen (ed.), *Treasures of Jewish Galicia. Judaica from the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lvov*, Ukraine, catalogue of the exhibition Rediscovered Treasures: Judaica Collections from Galicia From the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lvov, Ukraine, Beth Hatefutsoth, Tel Aviv, July 1994-January 1995, p. 51.

⁶¹⁴ Amar, *Lviv 1944 – 2009*.

⁶¹⁵ Magda Veselská, „Jewish Museums in the Former Czechoslovakia,“ Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witnesses*, pp. 103-128.



Figure 29: JCR tags. Photo, courtesy of Dr. Ira Rezak, New York, USA.

acquired, were also omitted. Names and occupations or social status of the donors were also obliterated, as was the cultural context of the objects and their owners. Without these data the objects lost their symbolic, historical, social and cultural meaning, and their value was reduced to a merely material one. Even worse, historical objects and memorabilia that were regarded as possessing relatively little aesthetic or material value were not considered worthy of preservation. Today, scholars are trying to reconstruct what was lost, using Jewish newspapers and magazines that published information on the objects of the Museum collection.⁶¹⁶

Conclusion

By following the war path of several museum collections, we have shown that these more or less followed the same routes Patricia Grimsted has identified for books and archives.

Judaica objects that were looted by the ERR and shipped to the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage were discovered in 1945 by the American Military (Monuments, Fine Art &

Archives Section of the U.S. Army - MFA&A) and collected for restitution processing at the Archival Depot in Offenbach. The collections of the Jewish Historical Museum Amsterdam and of YIVO that were identified and claimed were returned from Offenbach to Amsterdam and New York respectively. On the other hand, heirless objects found in the American zone, such as the portraits of the Jewish Museum Berlin, were distributed by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, mainly to Israel and the US.

The second main plundering agency, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, Amt VII (dealing with 'Ideological Research and Evaluation'), evacuated the majority of its loot from Berlin to one of its repositories in Lower Silesia, as happened with the majority of the Berlin Jewish Museum collection. The final destination of these objects depended on the finder. Objects found by the Polish authorities were, for the most part, handed over to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Those discovered by the Red Army Trophy Brigades were taken to the Soviet Union. We do not know the present location of these objects.

In the postwar communist era, expropriation of Jewish property in countries behind the Iron Curtain led to further losses. Collections were split up once again, as was the case in Lviv; objects were sold, as happened with the Torah scrolls of the Jewish Museum in Prague; and an entire collection, of the Jewish Museum in Budapest, was deprived of its historical, cultural, social and emotional meaning, thereby often creating insurmountable problems for provenance research.

One remark should be made about the fate of Judaica objects that were distributed by JCR in the US and Israel. To remind prosperity of the history and provenance of these objects, the items were provided with a JCR tag (fig. 29). According to a recent survey done among American institutions that received these objects, fewer than two-thirds of the around 1,000 items can still be identified. In Israel, the Israel Museum Jerusalem has an online database with more than 700 ceremonial objects it received from JCR. We have, however, no information about the location of JCR objects that were distributed among Jewish communities in Israel.

⁶¹⁶ Zsuzsanna Toronyi, "The Fate of Judaica in Hungary During the Nazi and Soviet Occupations," Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witness*, pp. 285-306.

When tracing the fate of Judaica collections or individual objects, or when trying to determine the provenance of dislocated Judaica, we must bear in mind the warpath patterns Grimsted identified for books and archives, as described in her many books and articles. If we can establish what Nazi agency plundered the objects, we can also consult the relevant archives hoping these will help us to reconstruct the fate or provenance of these objects. A major source for the dispersed ERR archives is Patricia Kennedy Grimsted's online publication *Reconstructing the Record of Nazi Cultural Plunder. A Guide to the Dispersed Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) and the Postwar Retrieval of ERR Loot*, revised and updated, 2015-2017. This publication and the methodology and information in this *Handbook* are two important sources for professionals who deal with provenance research of Jewish ceremonial objects. Although Grimsted's numerous articles provide us with information on the present locations of the archives of the RSHA, an overview of this and other plundering agencies remains a desideratum.