

# Primary Sources

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## 3.1 Resources

Provenance and quovadiance research aims at reconstructing the migration path of an object in all its details in order to establish ownership and location respectively. This chapter gives practical information on how to conduct archival research on Jewish ceremonial objects. In general, research on Jewish ceremonial objects may be hindered by at least two factors: 1. Often, the scarce object description in archives or publications does not permit (clear) identification and 2. contrary to fine art, books and archives, the looting of ritual objects was not systematically organized, documented or catalogued by the Nazis, which has resulted in a lack of documentation in war and post-war archives.<sup>388</sup> These complications define the problematic and capricious character of research. The researcher, therefore, needs perseverance, patience, and luck. At the same time, the researcher should always be aware that, while an archival document may not help to identify a specific object, it may include information that increases our understanding and completes our overview of the looting and migration paths of Judaica.

This chapter provides guidelines for practical quovadiance and provenance research. In the first case one is looking for a lost object from a pre-war museum/community/other institutional/private collection. A precondition would be the reconstruction of a (partially) lost pre-war/community/other institutional/private collection. In this case collecting as many details about the object as possible in a pre-war inventory, a pre-war catalogue, guide, or any other description, is crucial. Obviously one lacks clues that can be derived from the examination of the actual object (for instance a silver mark or label), and when a photograph of the object is missing, identification is even more complicated and sometimes impossible. In the second case one wants to determine the provenance of an object in a post-war museum/community/other institution/private collection or on the market. Sometimes the provenance of the object is already known. In this case, the researcher knows the beginning and current location and should try to reconstruct the migratory history of the object by searching for documents that unfold each individual step of that history, working from the side of the pre-war owner and from the side of the post-war holder. Reconstructing the migration history of an object without known provenance is often even more complicated and time-consuming because one first has to establish useful leads.

When starting work, you are advised to make a separate folder for each object you are going to research. Every step in the research and the findings of these steps is noted down and added to the folder. You should make copies of relevant documents and put them into the folder. A photograph of the object, should be included too, if available. If any of the collected information is speculative, identify it as such in your notes. Do not forget to document your sources. If you did not find any information, note that down too.

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<sup>388</sup> The ERR, one of the main plundering agencies was divided into seven special commandos covering practically every area of cultural activity. These were, for instance, *Sonderstab* Bildende Kunst, *Sonderstab* Kirchen, *Sonderstab* Musik and *Sonderstab* Bibliotheken, dealing with fine arts, Christian objects, music and libraries respectively. A separate *Sonderstab* for Jewish ritual objects did not exist. There is reason to believe that the looting of this category of objects had a low priority for ERR. 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, pp. 199-252.