

1.2 Nazi Agencies Engaged in the Looting of Material Culture³⁹

The spoliation of Jewish cultural and religious property was an official part of the Nazis' campaign against those labeled as "ideological enemies of the Reich." Aside from *objets d'art*, a myriad number of Jewish cultural objects were also looted from 1933 to 1945, including various kinds of Judaica, such as ritual, sacred and/or everyday objects, books, and archives. Numerous looting agencies both within the Reich, including those territories that were annexed to Nazi Germany, as well as agencies operating outside of the Reich, yet not outside of Nazi-occupied territories, were responsible for what can be called the greatest theft in the history of humanity.⁴⁰



Figure 1: "German Prewar Territorial Gains"

https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10005141&MediaId=371, last accessed 14 April 2016)

The looting of Jewish cultural property was not orchestrated by a central institution, rather it was carried out by a number of Nazi organizations. Their rivalry with each other and their pursuit in gaining the biggest portion of the Jewish property led to an even more drastic situation. In the case of the Gestapo and the SD, two competitive forces in the expropriation of Jewish property within the German Reich, their antagonistic approach ended with their union within the newly founded RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) in September 1939.⁴¹ However, inter-agency rivalry continued in the occupied territories and often determined not only the outcome but also the subsequent distribution of the spoil.⁴²

³⁹ For a more in-depth presentation of the various looting agencies, see Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (ed.), *Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica*, partially updated edition 2016. (Online available at: <http://art.claimscon.org/our-work/judaica/descriptive-catalogue-of-looted-judaica/>); See also the online bibliography at <http://art.claimscon.org/resources/resources-bibliography/> for additional literature on Nazi looting agencies.

⁴⁰ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder: Books Still Not Home from the War," Regine Dehnel (ed.), *Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut*, Zweiter Hannoverisches Symposium, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 143.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Dierker, "The SS Security Service and the Gestapo in the National Socialist Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1945," Gerald Feldman and Wolfgang Seibel (eds.), *Networks of Nazi Persecution: Bureaucracy, Business and the Organization of the Holocaust*, New York 2005, p. 20.

⁴² See for example Martin Dean, "Seizure of Jewish Property and Inter-Agency Rivalry in the Reich and in the Occupied Soviet Territories," Gerald Feldman and Wolfgang Seibel (eds.), *Networks of Nazi Persecution: Bureaucracy, Business and the Organization of the Holocaust*, New York 2005, pp. 88-117.

The following briefly outlines the main Nazi organizations that played a role in the looting of Jewish cultural property, including Judaica. It should be noted that while this chapter primarily focuses on the looting of books and manuscripts, ceremonial objects were often taken in the process.

SD (Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS)

At the initiative of Heinrich Himmler, the *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS* (SD; German Security Service) was created in 1931 as the intelligence branch of Hitler's bodyguards.⁴³ From its inception, Reinhard Heydrich was appointed to head up the operation. After his death in 1942, and with the exception of Adolf Eichmann assuming control for a couple of months, he was succeeded by Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who not only directed the SD but also the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA).⁴⁴ One of the SD's main tasks was the so-called *Gegnerforschung* or *Gegnerbeobachtung und –bekämpfung* (Enemy Research; Enemy Observation – and Enemy Abatement). This 'enemy research' was not limited to Jews but also targeted Freemasons, the Catholic and Protestant churches, and followers of Marxism or Liberalism. As a result, literature of these 'enemy groups' was confiscated or outright looted and afterwards handed to the *SD-Referate* (SD-offices) for further analysis.

In 1935 Heinrich Himmler ordered the establishment of a central scientific library within the SD: this central library was designed to include political literature that was defined as "damaging and undesirable," including literature dealing with Judaica, Hebraica, liberalism, pacifism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, sexology, anthroposophy, occultism, Masonic literature, political churches, sects, and critiques of Nazism.⁴⁵

The pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 – commonly referred to as *Reichskristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass – and its eruption of violence significantly increased the collection of the soon-to-be-established central library. Among confiscations that entered the SD's collection as a result of the November pogrom were the holdings of the Berlin, Breslau, Hamburg, Dresden, Munich and Frankfurt rabbinical seminaries, amounting to about 70 collections. Soon thereafter the collection of the *Zentralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens* (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith) entered the library as well as collections from other Jewish organizations and individuals.⁴⁶

By 1939, the central library of 'opposition collections' became operative after the various Jewish libraries were consolidated into one unit headed by Franz Alfred Six. By the time the RSHA was established in September 1939, the SD's Jewish library had not only collected about 300,000 books,⁴⁷ but Franz Alfred Six had also proposed that existing divisions within the central library should be given a new organizational structure.⁴⁸ Six's suggestions were ultimately put into place in addition to his being put in charge of not only the RSHA's Amt VII, but also of ongoing research on opponents of the regime. Among his responsibilities was the development of a library, a museum, and scientific

⁴³ Schidorsky, *Library of Reich Security Main Office*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ For more information on the SD see: Michael Wildt, *Die Judenpolitik der SD 1935 bis 1938. Eine Dokumentation*, Munich 1995; Shlomo Aronson, *Reinhard Heydrich und die Frühgeschichte von Gestapo und SD*, Stuttgart 1971; George C Browder, *Foundations of the Nazi Police State. The Formation of Sipo and SD*, Kentucky 1990.

⁴⁵ Schidorsky, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Gideon Botsch, "Raub zum Zweck der Gegnerforschung," Inka Bertz and Michael Dormann (eds.), *Raub und Restitution. Kulturgut aus Jüdischem Besitz von 1933 bis heute*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 95.

⁴⁷ As Grimsted noted, "Himmler's patronage proved stronger than Rosenberg's, and none of this Judaica was transferred to the IEJ." Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Roads to Ratibor: Library and Archival Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19.3 (2005), p. 409.

⁴⁸ Schidorsky, p. 24.

research.⁴⁹ In this context the RSHA Amt VII may have also looted Jewish ceremonial objects, but to date evidence is lacking.

Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Head Office; RSHA)

In 1939 the RSHA was created by combining the SD, the secret police, and the criminal police, with Reinhard Heydrich heading the organization. The RSHA thus “became one of the more significant agents of the looting of Jewish public and private library collections under the Nazi regime.”⁵⁰ In total, the RSHA ‘collected’ 2-3 million books from Jews, but also from Freemasons, leftists and churches – all of which were considered ‘enemies.’⁵¹

Within the RSHA, the main department responsible for the looting of Jewish cultural treasures (predominantly libraries and archives) was Department VII⁵² “*Kultur*” (culture),⁵³ located in Berlin at Emserstrasse 12/13.⁵⁴ The other principal building in Berlin that housed the RSHA library before evacuation in 1943 was the Eisenacherstrasse 11/13 depot (a former Masonic lodge), which held approximately 100,000 volumes.⁵⁵ And it was the RSHA’s own staff, which included members of the SS, that were responsible for the looting in addition to making decisions as to what should happen to the looted material.⁵⁶

Early on officials of the RSHA planned to establish a library of looted Jewish books which was to be called simply the *Judenbibliothek*.⁵⁷ Generally speaking, most of the books looted for the RSHA library came from Jewish public and private libraries, such as books ‘secured’ from the 150 libraries of B’nai B’rith’s offices. Additional loot came from various public and private libraries in Germany, as well as from Vienna and Warsaw. Among the libraries plundered were the collections of the rabbinical seminaries in Berlin and Breslau and the libraries of Jewish organizations.⁵⁸ Another 3,600 books came from the *Leipziger Institutum Delitzschianum Judaicum*. In 1938, about 13 shipments arrived from Vienna of boxes full of books and archival material. These boxes held important collections of Austrian Jewish organizations such as the *Israelitische Allianz*, *Hebräisches Pädagogium* and the *Union Österreichischer Juden*. In that year, the collection of the RSHA already encompassed 85,000 volumes, not including books and other treasures stolen during the *Kristallnacht* (November Pogrom),⁵⁹ which

⁴⁹ Idem, p. 25.

⁵⁰ Idem, p. 21.

⁵¹ Leonidas Hill, “Nazi Attack on ‘Un-German’ Literature,” Jonathan Rose (ed.), *The Holocaust and the Book: Destruction and Preservation*, Amherst 2001, p. 30.

⁵² Originally Amt II (*Gegnerforschung*) was assigned to hold confiscated library collections as well as significant Judaica holdings. However, by 1941, it was Amt VII (*Weltanschauliche Forschung und Auswertung*) that held all the confiscated libraries and other cultural property. At the same time, the Gestapo took over Amt IV and entitled it *Gegnerforschung- und bekämpfung*. see: Botsch, *Raub zum Zweck der Gegnerforschung*, p. 96.

⁵³ Klaus Dieter Lehmann, “Restitution Jüdischer Kulturgüter als Aufgabe der Deutschen Kulturpolitik,” *Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Beutegut*. Eine Veranstaltung des Niedersächsischen Landtages und der Niedersächsischen Landesbibliothek. Symposium im Niedersächsischen Landtag am 14. November 2002. Heft 50 der Schriftenreihe des Niedersächsischen Landtages. Der Präsident des Niedersächsischen Landtages, January 2003, p. 19. For more information on Amt VII, see: Jörg Rudolph, “‘Sämtliche Sendungen sind zu richten an...’. Das RSHA-Amt VII ‘Weltanschauliche Forschung und Auswertung’ als Sammelstelle erbeuteter Archive und Bibliotheken,” Michael Wildt (ed.), *Nachrichtendienst, politische Elite, Mordeinheit. Der Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS*, Hamburg 2003, pp. 204-240.

⁵⁴ Grimsted, *Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder*, p. 147.

⁵⁵ Idem, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Schidorsky, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Idem, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Idem, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Idem, p. 26.

undoubtedly advanced the development of the central library.⁶⁰ After the invasion of Poland, in September 1939, the collections of Polish Jews, including most of the book collections of the synagogues and the large Jewish libraries (for example the Great Synagogue on Tlomackie Street in Warsaw and the Borochoy Library) were added to the RSHA library.

Organizationally, the *Judenbibliothek* of *Amt VII* was divided into three groups, one of which was labeled 'regime opponents,' that included Jewish books or books written by Jews (in addition to, for example, Masonic collections), such as Hebraica, Jewish manuscripts and pamphlets. Excluded were books that were classified as political and ideological literature that were transferred to Rosenberg's Institute for Research of the Jewish Question (*Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage, IEJ*) in Frankfurt am Main.

During heavy Allied bombings in August 1943, an effort was made to bring the collection of Department VII to safe depositories. While over a million books of the RSHA's book collection were evacuated to the Sudetenland (the library headquarters were in Niemes, now Czech Mimoň) from Berlin in the summer of 1943,⁶¹ most of the Hebraica books were shipped to the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp, where Hebrew scholars were assigned to classify and catalogue them.⁶² However, a number of books, including a number of Jewish collections, remained in various locations in Berlin. After the fall of Berlin, the Soviet Army confiscated many of the books that were looted by *Amt VII*.⁶³ In addition, due to the depository not being safely secured, a small part of the archives was looted by the city's residents and especially by book dealers. Only in July 1945, through the efforts of the U.S. Army, were the remaining books secured and transferred to the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD),⁶⁴ as were Jewish ceremonial objects that were discovered in various storages.

Overall, there are no concrete figures regarding the total number of books actually amassed by the RSHA. Estimates vary between 500,000 to one million, but also up to 2 to 3 million volumes. According to Schidorsky, the latter numbers seem more plausible, as not only Jewish collections were involved but also collections of Leftists' literature and collections from Freemason orders and church sects.⁶⁵ After the RSHA took over the collections of its predecessors (the SD and Gestapo),

⁶⁰ Idem, p. 26.

⁶¹ Please note that archives were evacuated to Silesia. Patricia Grimsted, "The Road to Minsk for Western 'Trophy' Books: Twice Plundered but not Yet 'Home from the War,'" *Libraries & Culture* 39.4 (2004), p. 370.

⁶² Grimsted, *Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder*, p. 146. According to Grimsted, "There is now evidence that most of the Breslau materials were in Berlin by the spring of 1939, as confirmed by an RSHA May 1939 list which notes 28,000 volumes from the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, along with another 10,000 from the Synagogue and over 8,000 from several other Breslau collections. That explains why Niemes was the source of the Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula from the Saraval Collection held by the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary recently returned from Prague to Breslau."

⁶³ In addition, a significant amount of Nazi loot, mainly from two principal Nazi plundering agencies, the already mentioned *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR) and the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, or RSHA), reached the former Soviet Union through the work of its trophy brigades. The records of, for example, the RSHA's *Amt VII* are held in Moscow. For more information, see: Konstantin Akinsha and Grigori Kozlov, *Beautiful Loot. The Soviet Plunder of Europe's Art Treasures*, New York 1995; Konstantin Akinsha, "Stalin's Decrees and Soviet Trophy Brigades: Compensation, Restitution in Kind, or 'Trophies' of War?," *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 17, Issue 02, May 2010, p. 195-216; Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *Trophies of War and Empire. The Archival Heritage of Ukraine, World War II, and the International Politics of Restitution*, Cambridge 2001, p. 288.

⁶⁴ Schidorsky, p. 38.

⁶⁵ Idem, p. 27; In March 1939, Six proposed that the central library make use of six to eight Jewish forced laborers in order to handle the large quantities of books. He further recommended that these six to eight laborers would be paid by

its cultural arm, RSHA *Amt VII*, specifically designated for ‘Ideological Research and Evaluation’ (*Weltanschauliche Forschung und Auswertung*) might have amassed even more books than its competitor, the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR), Alfred Rosenberg’s Task Force.⁶⁶ But generally speaking, it was not always clear which Nazi organization would loot which collection, and to quote Patricia Grimsted Kennedy, “...on some occasions, library books and archives found in the same household or institution went to different Nazi agencies. For example, the ERR had to turn over most of the



Figure 2: German Administration of Europe, 1942;
https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/media_nm.php?MediaId=347, last accessed April 14, 2016.

Jewish and Masonic archives plundered by the ERR in France and the Benelux countries to the RSHA *Amt VII*. But *Amt VII* generally separated out the books from the archives. While most of the Jewish books went to the Sudetenland, most of the Jewish and Masonic archives (together with those received from the ERR) were evacuated to Silesia.”⁶⁷

At the same time the RSHA’s book collections were evacuated in the summer of 1943, its archival materials, which included objects looted by the RSHA’s predecessors, namely the SD and Gestapo, were evacuated from Berlin and stored in

the Castle Fürststein (now Polish Książ). In the beginning of May 1944, the RSHA’s archival collection was again moved, this time to Wölfelsdorf (now Polish Wilkanów), a remote Silesian village which soon thereafter “became the RSHA hideaway storage center for their vast archival plunder from all over Europe (RSHA Amt VII, C-1).”⁶⁸ The Wölfelsdorf depot, located in the region of Klodzko, was possibly also storage for objects from the Jewish Museum Berlin. After their discovery in 1945, Polish authorities transferred these objects to nearby Bozkow (Eckersdorf), which had functioned as a depot for museum and cultural goods. Among the objects were a couple of old printed books, files of the art collection of the museum, and around 150 ritual objects, as well as dozens of lamps, a washing vessel from the Old Synagogue in Berlin, synagogue textiles, Torah crowns and a yad (pointer).⁶⁹

the Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Reichszentrale für Jüdische Auswanderung*) and supervised by an SS command labeled *Bibliothekskommando*. However, Six’s plan was not put into practice on the grounds that, among other reasons, the RSHA personnel would refuse to work with a group of Jews and it would damage the image of the SD if the matter became known. As a result, during the library’s early years, it suffered from not only insufficient storage, but also from a lack of skilled workers. In 1941 Six reintroduced his suggestion to employ skilled Jewish forced laborers to work in the RSHA’s library. The Federal Union of the Jews in Germany was subsequently tasked with providing eight skilled Jewish librarians. By October they started their work in the offices located in Eisenacher Strasse. In 1943, the group of Jewish librarians was increased, and twenty-five more were enlisted to work in the library. (Schidorsky, pp. 28-29.)

⁶⁶ Grimsted, *Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder*, p. 145. For more information on the ERR, see pp. 8-12.

⁶⁷ Idem, p. 148.

⁶⁸ Idem, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Jakob Hübner, ‘Auf der Suche nach Objekten des Berliner Jüdischen Museums in Polen. Funde und Hypothesen’, in Chana Schütz und Hermann Simon (Hg): *Auf der Suche nach einer verlorenen Sammlung. Das Berliner Jüdische Museum (1933-1938)*, Berlin 2011. pp. 73-85, p. 81-83.

The RSHA's archival collection is of some significance, especially considering that while the *Hohe Schule* and other ERR destinations retained priority for the books seized by the ERR, the Rosenberg units were eventually asked to hand over their archival loot to the *Amt VII*.⁷⁰

Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei)

Similar to the *Amt VII*, the Gestapo also took part in the expropriation of Jewish property.⁷¹ Founded on 26 April 1933 by Hermann Göring, then Prussian Minister of Interior, and headed by Reinhard Heydrich beginning in April 1934, the Gestapo developed into a secret *Gesinnungspolizei* (patriotic ethos police). Its main responsibility was the systematic fight against people labeled as enemies of the NS-regime, in particular communists, socialists and Jews. Organizationally speaking, in 1941 the Gestapo took over *Amt IV* within the RSHA and entitled it *Gegnerforschung- und bekämpfung*.⁷² The Gestapo was the main operational center for anti-Jewish persecution policy, with Adolf Eichmann playing a central role in it. By 1944, it employed about 32,000 people. Between 1938⁷³ and 1941, the Gestapo was largely responsible for the practical implementation of anti-Jewish policies. In doing so, it often dealt with Jewish communities and in the process confiscated their cultural and religious properties.⁷⁴ As a result, Adolf Eichmann's Gestapo-Referat *Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung*⁷⁵ (Central Office for Jewish Emigration) decided to establish a Jewish Central Museum in Prague. This museum, which started its activities in 1942⁷⁶, was to hold cultural and religious objects from communities in Bohemia and Moravia..⁷⁷

By 1941, the Gestapo started to liquidate its inventory of cultural objects. While many of Hitler's agents were given first choice, other cultural objects were sold by an Austrian agency called the *Vugesta* (an acronym for *Vermögens-Umzugsgut von der Gestapo* or Property Removed by the Gestapo) and headed by Karl Herber. The *Vugesta*'s proceeds for the years 1941 and 1944, amounted to 14 million Reichsmarks, of which 10 million Reichsmarks came from the Dorotheum auction house.⁷⁸ The revenues of these auctions went to the Reich (or the federal government) by way of the Finance Ministry.⁷⁹

⁷⁰ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 409-410. (Grimsted pointed out that starting with 1939, Rosenberg and Himmler competed over each other's loot and authority. In July 1940, for example, "Rosenberg complained that Himmler was abusing his authority and did not appreciate Rosenberg's mission.")

⁷¹ For more information on the Gestapo, see: Rupert Butler, *The Gestapo: A History of Hitler's Secret Police 1933-45*, Barnsley 2004.

⁷² Botsch, p. 97.

⁷³ The Gestapo's launch in confiscating Jewish-owned cultural property, mostly art, began in annexed Austria following the *Anschluss* in March 1938.

⁷⁴ Botsch, p. 97.

⁷⁵ For more information on the *Zentralstelle*, specifically in Austria, see: Gabriele Anderl, Dirk Rupnow and Alexandra-Eileen Wenck, *Die Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution*. Historikerkommission der Republik Österreich, Wien 2004.

⁷⁶ Magda Veselka, "Jewish Museums in the Former Czechoslovakia," Julie-Marthe Cohen, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witnesses. The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects During the Second World War*, Crickadarn 2011, p. 123.

⁷⁷ For more information on the Jewish Central Museum, see, for example: Dirk Rupnow, *Täter-Gedächtnis-Opfer: Das Jüdische Zentralmuseum' in Prag 1942-1945*, Wien 2000.

⁷⁸ Helen Junz, *Das Vermögen der jüdischen Bevölkerung Österreichs. NS-Raub und Restitution nach 1945*, Wien, München 2004, p. 182.

⁷⁹ Jonathan Petropolous, "For Germany and Themselves: The Motivation Behind the Nazi Leaders' Plundering and Collecting of Art". Special Reports, *Spoils of War*, No 4, August 1997.

Sonderkommando Paulsen

At the same time the RSHA was operative, the *Sonderkommando Paulsen* was tasked by the RSHA to confiscate cultural objects in Poland.⁸⁰ Peter Paulsen, the leader of this special unit, was a Gestapo *Unterscharführer* (Lieutenant). The leading force behind the *Sonderkommando* was Heinrich Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*,⁸¹ which employed art historians and experts to draft lists of museums, noteworthy prehistoric material, and valuable art collections for confiscation. The research conducted by these experts was put at the disposal of Himmler's forces and more specifically at the disposal of the *Sonderkommando Paulsen*.⁸²

Between October and December 1939, the *Sonderkommando Paulsen* was able to loot numerous cultural objects,⁸³ in addition to prehistoric, ethnographic and scientific collections, as well as various special libraries, mostly from the cities of Cracow, Sandomir, Warsaw and Lublin.⁸⁴ Further looting sprees by the *Sonderkommando Paulsen* were subsequently inhibited by Hans Frank, governor-general of the General Gouvernement, who had his own looting agenda in mind. In summary, the damage caused by the *Sonderkommando Paulsen* was limited, especially in comparison with the agencies of Himmler and Göring.⁸⁵ To date little is known about Paulsen's role in the looting of Jewish ritual objects. However, it is known that in Warsaw, the *Kommando Paulsen* confiscated 'three crates containing the Masonic and Jewish ceremonial objects from the National Museum', which was used as a collecting point by *Kommando Paulsen* in Warsaw. They arrived in Berlin on 23rd December 1939.⁸⁶

Wehrmacht

Another, somewhat reluctant, player in the looting of cultural objects was the Wehrmacht, the Nazis' unified armed forces, which was active between 1935 to 1945. With the Führer's decree (*Führererlass*)⁸⁷ from 1 March 1, 1942, the Wehrmacht alongside the offices of the Nazi party and the Nazi state was authorized to officially conduct art looting sprees. But already two years earlier, on

⁸⁰ For more detailed information on the Kommando Paulsen, see for example: Andrzej Meżynski, *Kommando Paulsen. Organisierter Kunstraub in Polen 1942–45*, Köln 2000.

⁸¹ The *Ahnenerbe* (*Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte*, *Deutsches Ahnenerbe e.V.* – Study Society for Primordial Intellectual History, German Ancestral Heritage [registered society], after 1937 renamed *Forschung- und Lehrgemeinschaft das Ahnenerbe e.V.* – Research and Teaching Community the Ancestral Heritage [registered society]), was founded in 1935 by Heinrich Himmler and had as its goal research on the anthropological and cultural history of the Aryan race. For more information see: Michael Kater, *Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS 1935–1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, Munich 2001.

⁸² Petropolous, *Art as Politics*, p. 102.

⁸³ Most cultural objects were looted in October 1939.

⁸⁴ Petropolous, p. 103.

⁸⁵ Idem, p. 103.

⁸⁶ The crates may also have contained some exhibits from the Bersohn Museum confiscated by the other special SS unit, which was led by Lothar Beutel (Einsatzgruppe IV. (Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, "The History of Judaica and Judaica Collections in Poland Before, During and After the Second World War. An Overview", Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek (eds.), *Neglected Witnesses*, pp. 141-142) After the war, the National Museum in Warsaw handed some pieces of a wooden Torah ark, probably from one of Warsaw's small private synagogues, over to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (ZIH) (Eleonora Bergman, "The Jewish Historical Institute: History of Its Building and Collections," Cohen, Heimann-Jelinek (eds.), *Neglected Witnesses*, p. 191).

⁸⁷ "(...) alle Dienststellen der Wehrmacht, der Partei und des Staates (...)" "Juden, Freimaurer und die mit ihnen verbündeten weltanschaulichen Gegner sind die Urheber des jetzigen gegen das Reich gerichteten Krieges. Die planmäßige geistige Bekämpfung dieser Mächte ist eine kriegsnotwendige Aufgabe. Ich habe daher den Reichsleiter Alfred Rosenberg beauftragt, diese Aufgabe im Einvernehmen mit dem Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht durchzuführen. (...) see: Bundesarchiv, NS 8/260, Bl. 110; here cited after: Hannes Hartung, *Kunstraub in Krieg und Verfolgung: die Restitution der Beute- und Raubkunst im Kollisions- und Voelkerrecht*, Berlin, 2012, p. 42.

the occasion of the Nazi invasion of France in spring 1940, the Wehrmacht set up a special unit called the *Kunstschutz* or Art Protection Unit. The *Kunstschutz* was a re-creation of the World War I era art and monument protection office.⁸⁸ Its head was the art historian Franz Wolff-Metternich.⁸⁹

The Wehrmacht – in contrast to other Nazi organizations – adhered to the 1907 Hague convention⁹⁰, which stipulated the protection of private property and respect for art objects and monuments. Yet the Wehrmacht only applied those principles to territories that were occupied and under military rule, such as France, Belgium, Greece, Serbia and at a later stage Italy. (The Netherlands, for example, was under civil administration).⁹¹ Objects owned by Jews were regarded by the Wehrmacht as “heirless” and therefore not covered by the Hague convention.⁹² Those items seized by the *Kunstschutz* in accordance with the Hague convention were placed under military control, even though up until the end of 1943, the organisation was not officially under the OKH (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*; High Command of the Armed Forces).⁹³

In France, following the Hague rules, Wolf-Metternich stipulated that historic buildings were off-limits to German troops, including 500 castles, and compiled a list of sites that he deemed worth protecting. Another task of the *Kunstschutz*, as defined by Wolf-Metternich, was the continuation of cultural life. Consequently, at the end of September 1940, the *Kunstschutz* organized the re-opening of some rooms in the Louvre. The Wehrmacht’s opposition to the outright looting of cultural property, in particular the transfer of cultural objects to Germany, and continuation of cultural life, did not always meet with approval from other Nazi organizations, and it soon found itself having to cooperate with the ERR.⁹⁴ To that effect, on September 17, 1940, Hitler directed the Army to extend all possible assistance to the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, which was entitled to not only “secure” objects deemed of cultural value, but also to transport them to Germany.⁹⁵

Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR)

Because of the ERR’s importance in the looting of Judaica, “and the fact that the ERR library commandos may have been responsible for the most extensive library plunder,”⁹⁶ this overview will give emphasis to the role that Rosenberg played as well as to the *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, IEJ). In addition, it should be noted that precisely because of the looting sprees of the ERR and because of its ambition to study classified enemy groups, large Judaica libraries and archives as well as Torah scrolls and ritual objects (which were often seized along with libraries) were ‘saved’ from destruction. To quote Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, “Ironically, many libraries and archives of the victims were ‘saved’ for the extensive ERR anti-Semitic research, library and propaganda operations.”⁹⁷

⁸⁸ Lynn Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa. The Fate of Europe’s Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, New York, 1994, p. 119.

⁸⁹ Anders Rydell, *Hitlers Bilder: Kunstraub der Nazis - Raubkunst in der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/New York, 2013, p. 144.

⁹⁰ Haager Landkriegsordnung (HLKO) from 1907.

⁹¹ Günther Haase, *Kunstraub und Kunstschutz: eine Dokumentation*. Vol. I: “Kunstraub und Kunstschutz,” Norderstedt, 2008, p. 61.

⁹² Erich Wiedemann, “Die Kunsträuber.” *Der Spiegel*, Teil 7 “Jagd nach Kunst”, 18 June 2001.

⁹³ Haase, p. 68. (The art protection unit was officially part of the “Oberkommando des Heeres Generalquartiermeister.)

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 64; Rydell, p. 146.

⁹⁵ Nicholas, p. 125.

⁹⁶ Grimsted, *Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder*, p. 143.

⁹⁷ Idem, p. 144.

Research conducted by Dr. Grimsted, in cooperation and with the sponsorship of the Claims Conference, has led to the recent publication of *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*. The Guide is available online⁹⁸ and provides information on the current whereabouts of ERR records in addition to detailing their contents and providing links to records that are online available.

The ERR's looting sprees were far-reaching and extensive: ERR units investigated 375 archives, 402 museums, 531 institutions and 957 libraries in the countries the ERR was active. The ERR set up headquarters in Berlin with offices in Brussels, Amsterdam, Paris, Belgrade and Riga, as well as numerous sub-offices in other parts of Europe.⁹⁹

Alfred Rosenberg, born in Reval (Tallin, then part of the Russian Empire, today the capital of Estonia), after the Russian Revolution had a long and distinguished career with the Nazi party. Starting in 1923, he was the founding chief of the newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, in addition to serving as the editor of the antisemitic monthly *Der Weltkampf*. Furthermore, Rosenberg was instrumental in shaping the idea of a worldwide Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy, exemplified by the writing of his *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the Twentieth Century), which was first published in 1930.

By January 1934, Hitler ordered Rosenberg to direct 'the Plenipotentiary of the Führer for the Supervision of the Entire Intellectual and Ideological Enlightenment of the Nazi Party' (*Dienststelle des Beauftragten des Führers für die Überwachung der gesamten geistigen und weltanschaulichen Schulung und Erziehung der NSDAP*; DBFU). Following Hitler's order, Rosenberg began to create a far-reaching organization that covered all fields of art, music, culture, and science,¹⁰⁰ along with other fields of culture, which were later to provide staff, bureaucracy, and a cultural network for the ERR as an operational offshoot.¹⁰¹

Six years later, on January 29, 1940, Hitler appointed Alfred Rosenberg to head the *Höbe Schule*, which was to become the center for National Socialist ideological and educational research and an alternative to universities for Nazi elites – to be established after the war. The *Höbe Schule* was administered by the DBFU and the Rosenberg *Dienststelle* in Berlin.¹⁰²

After the invasions of France, the Netherlands and Belgium (May to June 1940), on July 17, 1940, Alfred Rosenberg created the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR). The ERR was designed to be an operational unit that had emerged from the DBFU and consisted of several individual command

⁹⁸ <http://www.errproject.org/guide.php>; As of August 2017, the following chapters are available for download: Introduction to the Guide: "Alfred Rosenberg and the ERR: The Records of Plunder and the Fate of Its Loot;" Chapter 1: "Belgium;" Chapter 2: "France;" Chapter 4: "Israel;" Chapter 6 "Netherlands;" Chapter 10 "United States". A chapter on Germany is expected shortly. A previous full edition entitled "Reconstructing the Record of Nazi Culture Plunder: A Survey of the Dispersed Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR)" from 2011 may be seen at <https://socialhistory.org/en/publications/reconstructing-record-nazi-cultural-plunder>.

⁹⁹ Hill, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Willem de Vries, "Special Reports: The 'Sonderstab Musik' of the 'Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg' 1940-1945," Special Reports, *Spoils of War*, No. 1, 19 December 1995.

¹⁰¹ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *A Guide to the Dispersed Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) and the Postwar Retrieval of ERR Loot*. Revised and Updated Edition, 2017, p. 22. (online at: <http://www.errproject.org/guide.php>)

¹⁰² Elisabeth Yavnai, "Jewish Cultural Property and Its Postwar Recovery," *Confiscation of Jewish Property in Europe, 1933-1945*. One Day Symposium at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, USHMM, 22 March 2001, p. 127; Saul Friedländer called Rosenberg's *Höbe Schule* "the party university, Rosenberg's pet project". Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939-1945. The Years of Extermination*, New York 2007, p. 162; Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 403.

forces, called *Sonderstäbe*, covering a wide range of fields such as visual arts, music, theatre, folklore, prehistory, churches, archives, science and genealogy.¹⁰³ The ERR was thus authorized to ransack objects deemed of interest to its organization, including Judaica, Jewish libraries and other cultural property that would contribute to the “ideological task of the NSDAP and the later scientific research work of the Hohe Schule.”¹⁰⁴

One of the advantages held by Rosenberg’s team was the fact that it was authorized to loot in both the western and eastern spheres. The ERR’s approach differed geographically. In Western Europe and the Balkans it concentrated on private and religious organizations – including Jewish institutions, Masonic lodges, socialist organizations, East European émigré groups, and a variety of other agencies – as well as on private, primarily Jewish, individuals. But in Eastern Europe and particularly within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, the ERR’s cultural plunder was primarily directed at state repositories, since most private and religious collections in these areas had long before been nationalized.¹⁰⁵

The ERR’s Special Command Force for Occupied Western Territories started its operations in occupied France in June/July 1940 on the basis of the Führer’s authorization to seize major art collections of Jews who had fled the invasion. Its headquarters were first established in Berlin at Margarethenstrasse 17, Berlin W35. After the occupation of France, the ERR headquarters were temporarily transferred to Paris, but in 1941 they were again moved to Berlin, to the *Haus am Knie* (Bismarckstrasse 1, Berlin-Charlottenburg). Operations carried out by the ERR in Western Europe were based out of Paris and directed by Baron Kurt von Behr (who started in March 1942), who also headed the Western Office (*Dienststelle* or *Amt Westen*) of the RMbO (the *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*; Reichs Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories).¹⁰⁶ By 1943, with the advance of the Allies and their increased bombing, the order was given to evacuate cultural property from Berlin, and several of its “divisions and major research operations were evacuated to the isolated Silesian city of Ratibor (postwar Racibórz, Poland), south of Kattowitz (postwar Katowice, Poland).”¹⁰⁷

Following a decision by Hitler and at the time that the deportations of Jews from Western occupied lands intensified in 1942, the ERR started also to link itself closely with the so-called *Möbel Aktion* (*M-Aktion* or Furniture Action), an organization responsible for the stripping of contents from Jewish homes. The *Möbel Aktion*, technically part of the RMbO, was supervised under Rosenberg’s *Dienststelle Westen*, with its French part run by Baron Kurt von Behr. Initially the *Möbel Aktion* was designed to provide household furnishings for bombed-out homes in the Reich, in addition to the RMbO and the ERR, but through its confiscations of Jewish household goods, even more cultural and religious items fell into the hands of the ERR. *Möbel Aktion* branches came into existence in countries such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Willem de Vries, *Sonderstab Musik. Music Confiscations by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg under the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe*, Amsterdam 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg 14 November 1945-1 October 1946, Vol. VI (Nuremberg, 1947), p. 85; here cited after Yavnai, *Jewish Cultural Property*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 394; see also: Grimsted, Patricia Kennedy, *Documenting the Plunder of Judaica: Perspectives from Remaining Archives of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR)*, Paper presented at the Holocaust Era Assets Conference, Prague, 26-30 June 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 395.

¹⁰⁷ Grimsted, Introduction, ERR Guide, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 396.

Books looted under the supervision of the ERR were sent to Rosenberg's *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, IEJ),¹⁰⁹ which was founded in April 1939. The institute was originally located in Frankfurt but later, in the summer of 1943, was moved to Hungen.¹¹⁰ With the opening of the Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question in March 1941 it could claim to be the first institute to be established under the auspices of Rosenberg's *Hohe Schule*,¹¹¹ and apart from the Central Library of the *Hohe Schule* (*Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule*, ZBHS), it was also the only one of the planned *Hohe Schule* affiliates that was formally established during the war.¹¹²

The IEJ was first directed by Dr. Wilhelm Grau, and its repositories were established in eight different facilities. The IEJ's library was directed by Johannes Pohl, who earlier had studied Judaica at Jerusalem's Hebrew University from 1934 to 1936 at the Nazi Party's request.¹¹³ The library was initially based on the Rothschild Library in Frankfurt along with other Frankfurt Judaica holdings.¹¹⁴ By April 1943, the library could already claim that in theory it had a collection of about 550,000 volumes (which included books not yet received), originating from France, the Netherlands, Greece, and occupied Soviet territories. The IEJ, however, also received loot from occupied Soviet territories, such as Hebraica from eastern Ukraine and Belarus. More Judaica came from the Baltics, especially from Lithuania, but after some time, the RSHA started insisting that they needed stronger reference collections. By that time, however, many of the most important Jewish collections in the West had already been confiscated.¹¹⁵

In the end, the ERR had amassed such an enormous amount of Judaica, including Torah scrolls, that in a report by the ERR on March 18, 1944 there is a note that "(...) there are numbers of Torah rolls [sic: scrolls] lying here, in which the Frankfurt Institute no longer has an interest. Perhaps, however, the leather can still have some use for bookbinding. Please inform me whether I am to pack available Torah rolls or those which may arrive in the future for the central library."¹¹⁶

The *Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule* was first established in Berlin at Behrenstrasse 49 in early 1939 and directed by Dr. Walther Grothe. In 1942, it moved to Tyrol, Austria, to the Grand Hotel Annenheim and later on to the remote Monastery of Tanzenberg, in Austria's Carinthia. The ZBHS was designed to become the central research facility of the *Hohe Schule*. Soon after the invasion of France, ZBHS director Grothe and IEJ director Grau were sent to Paris to head up the special ERR unit "*Sonderstab Bibliothek der Hohen Schule*" (Special Unit Library of the Hohe Schule). Their mission was to target in particular Jewish institutional and private libraries, and by November 1940, the *Sonderstab* started to become active in Brussels and Amsterdam.¹¹⁷ A year later, the *Sonderstab* started its activities in the occupied Soviet lands, particularly in Ukraine. But aside from its own loot, the ERR also received books previously looted by the Künsberg Commando of the Foreign Office, totaling more than 40,000 volumes.

¹⁰⁹ See also Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People*, New Haven 1999, pp 97-101.

¹¹⁰ Prior to that, Rosenberg had already founded the *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* in Munich in 1932. Lehmann, *Restitution Jüdischer Kulturgüter*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ Grimsted, *Road to Minsk*, p. 371.

¹¹² Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 403.

¹¹³ For more information on Pohl, see: Maria Kühn-Ludewig, *Johannes Pohl (1904-1960). Judaist und Bibliothekar im Dienste Rosenbergs. Eine biographische Dokumentation*, Hannover 2000.

¹¹⁴ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, p. 162.

¹¹⁵ Idem, p. 410.

¹¹⁶ Joshua Starr, "Jewish Cultural Property under Nazi Control," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, January 1950, p. 42.

¹¹⁷ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 404. See also: Grimsted, *Tracing Patterns of European Library Plunder*, p. 154.

By the time the war ended, over half a million books were collected in the monastery in Tanzenberg, which was then in British hands.¹¹⁸ An additional repository for looted books was Hitler's planned cultural center in Linz, Austria,¹¹⁹ and the ERR research and library center in Ratibor (now Polish Racibórz), to which the Germans transported more than two million books.¹²⁰

At the end of the war, the Allies were faced with tens of millions of books looted by various Nazi organizations, including the RSHA and the ERR. However, this did not account for the looting conducted by the allies and collaborators of the Nazis. Yet, research into the confiscations by the Italians, Croats, Hungarians etc. is for the most part still outstanding.

*Please see also Appendices to Part I:
Organizational Charts - Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)*

¹¹⁸ For more information on Tanzenberg, see: Evelyn Adunka, *Der Raub der Bücher. Plünderungen in der NS-Zeit und Restitution nach 1945*, Wien 2002.

¹¹⁹ For more information see Murray Hall's research on the *Führerbibliothek*: Murray Hall and Christina Köstner, ... *allerlei für die Nationalbibliothek zu ergattern. Eine österreichische Institution in der NS-Zeit*, Wien 2006; Murray Hall, Christina Köstner and Margot Werner, *Geraubte Bücher. Die Österreichische Nationalbibliothek stellt sich ihrer NS-Vergangenheit*, Wien 2004.

¹²⁰ Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor*, p. 390.