



Claims Conference ועידת התביעות
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

**From the Post-War Jewish Restitution Successor
Organization to the 2018 Jerusalem Declaration:
The Handling of Looted Cultural Property by the
Claims Conference**

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FIVE BASIC QUESTIONS

- What should be considered Jewish cultural property?
- How should the size of the plunder of Jewish cultural property by the Nazis, their allies and collaborators be measured?
- How to handle restitution of cultural property belonging to individual families and heirs?
- How to handle restitution of cultural property belonging to Jewish communities?
- What to do with unclaimed “heirless” cultural property?



Picture: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/10/how-the-nazis-confiscated-jewish-belongings.html>

Jewish Attempts in Intergovernmental Conferences

Bretton Woods
Conference (United
Nations Monetary
and Financial
Conference)

July 1944

Yalta Conference

Feb. 1945

Paris Peace
Conference, incl.
Article 8 on
Reparation

July–Oct. 1946

Oct. 1944

International War
Emergency
Conference of the
World Jewish
Congress (WJC)

July–Aug. 1945

Potsdam Conference

Picture: Nehemiah Robinson. "Ten Years of Indemnification. Nehemiah Robinson. Memorial Edition," Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, New York, 1964, p. 7. CAHJP/CC18417

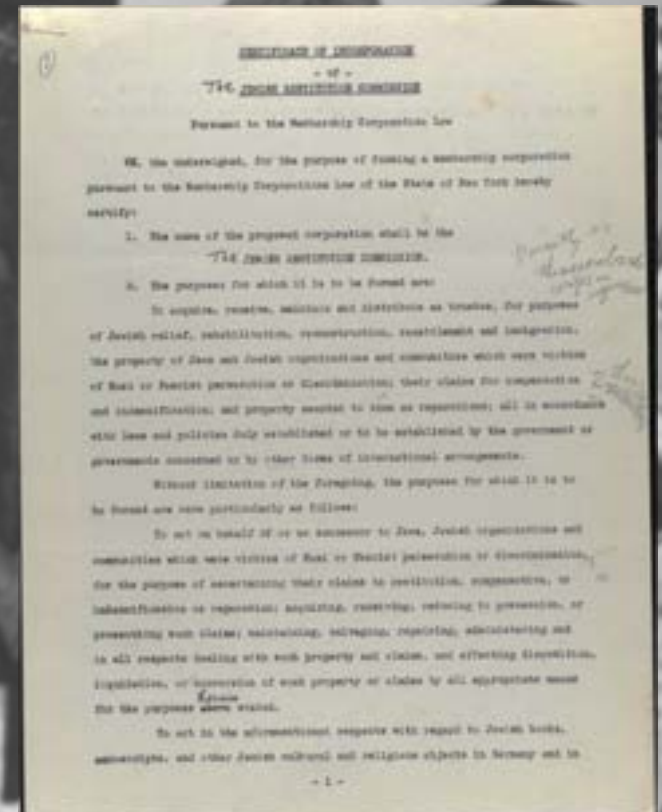
Immediate Postwar Efforts

U.S. Military Law 59 –

10 November 1947, the Office of Military Government for Germany, United States (OMGUS) issued that property shall be restored to its former owner or to his successor.

Collecting Points –

The Monuments, Fine Arts, & Archives Section (MFA&A) was the agency of the military government responsible for the Collecting Points in the American occupation zone.



Picture: <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Experience/VE-Day/>

Jewish Restitution Successor Organization



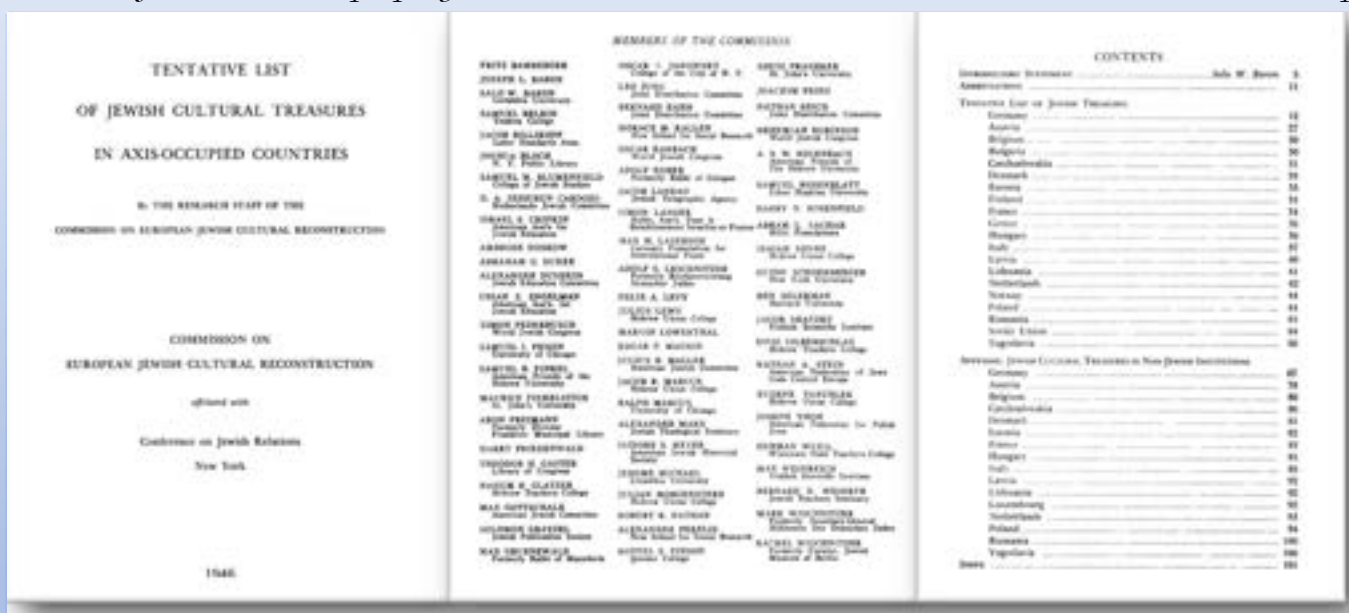
Picture: Group portrait of members of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) at a staff conference in Nuremberg, Germany, USHMM Photograph Number: 41624

1947 – JRSO incorporated to aid in “the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.” JRSO activities included the recovery of heirless property, monetary claims filed against the German government, pensions and hardship funds, restitution of communal property, indemnification claims for destroyed synagogues and communal property, recovery of cultural objects, maintenance of abandoned cemeteries and legal aide. Funds obtained from restitution and indemnity claims were allocated to other service organizations.

Definition of Jewish Cultural Property

1946 – Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries by Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction

- ❑ *Jewish Cultural property included “movable treasures, such as books, documents or museum pieces”*



Picture: The Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction. "Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries." *Jewish Social Studies*. 8, 1 (1946): 1–103.

1947 – U.S. Military Government: Restitution Law 59 (Restitution of Identifiable Property)

- ❑ *Jewish books, archives and miscellaneous documents in various languages; Torah scrolls and miscellaneous synagogue vestments, prayer shawls; Jewish ritual objects or precious metal and including precious stones; paintings and furnishings of previous but specifically unidentifiable Jewish ownership*

Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR)

- JCR became the cultural agent of the JRSO, which it joined in 1947.
- JCR sought to recover Jewish cultural, artistic and religious objects the Nazis had plundered within Germany or had transported to German territory from occupied eastern countries.
- Heirless object distribution: 40% Israel, 40% USA and remainder to Great Britain, South Africa and other countries.

Picture: <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1115&context=library>



Claims Conference

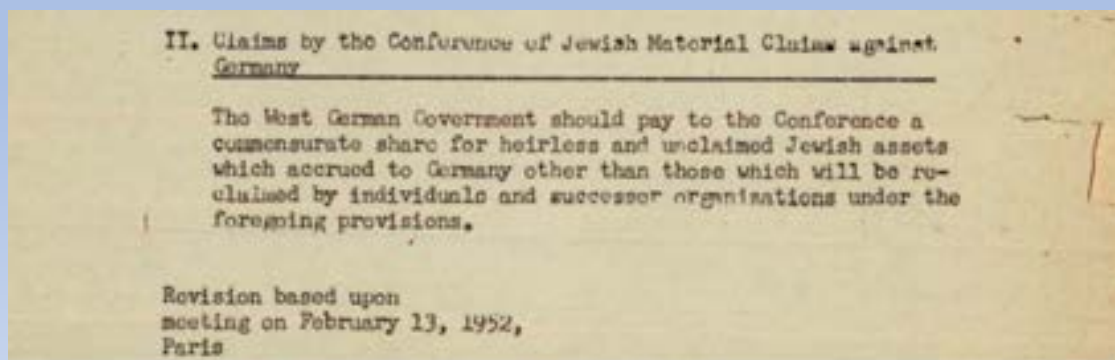
October 1951 -- Claims Conference founded

September 10, 1952 -- The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the State of Israel and the Claims Conference sign “the Luxembourg Agreements,” which form the basis for the German federal indemnification and restitution programs for Holocaust survivors



Picture: www.claimscon.org

- **Protocol I: individual compensation to Nazi victims**
- **Protocol II: allocation program**



Picture: Outline of Jewish material claims against Germany (based on Paris meeting on Feb. 13, 1952). CAHJP CC/8012

The Experience of the Leaders of the Claims Conference

Nehemiah Robinson, Benjamin Ferencz and Saul Kagan all already had major leadership roles before the Claims Conference was founded.



Picture:

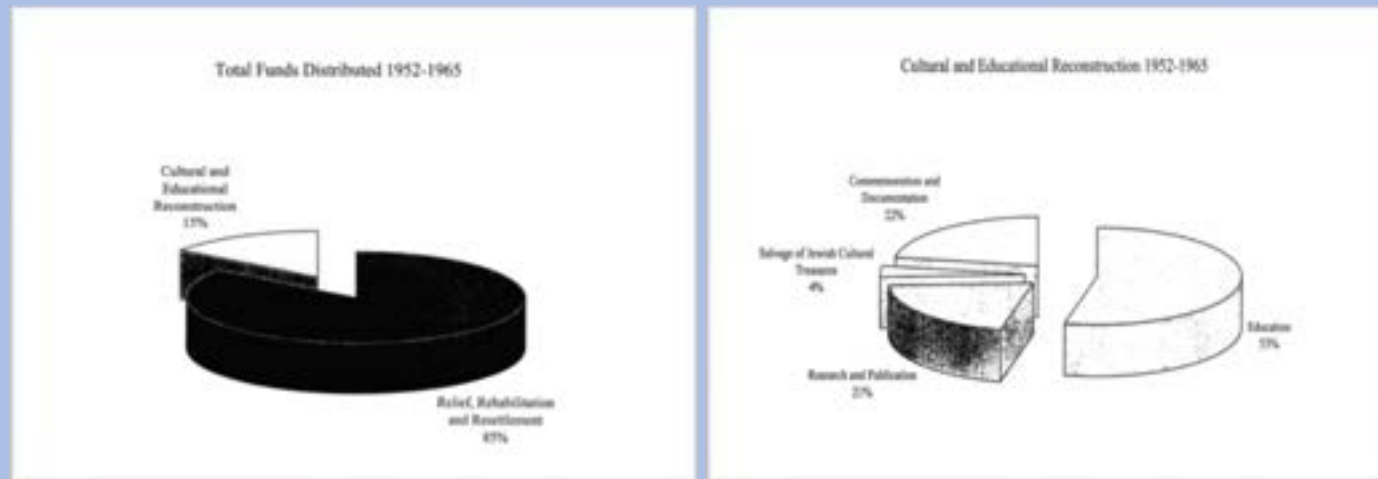
<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/15/world/europe/saul-kagan-who-won-holocaust-restitution-is-dead-at-91.html>



Picture: <https://benferencz.org/>

Their experience had a huge impact on the Claims Conference.

Aid In Reconstructing Jewish Communities And Institutions



Picture: "Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany Overview of Allocations 1952 – 1999." Saul Kagan Archive. CLAI4011, p. 61

Protocol II provided the Claims Conference with the opportunity to help survivors aside from state sponsored compensation programs:

- 85% of the funds supported ***Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement*** programs worldwide;
- 15% of the funds were dedicated to ***Cultural and Educational Reconstruction***, of that:
 - 51% Education
 - 22% Commemoration and Documentation
 - 21% Research and Publications
 - 4% Salvage of Jewish Cultural Treasures

Salvage of Jewish Cultural Treasures

Central Catalogue of Looted Judaica and Hebraica in European Libraries

1953 – JCR project to identify and microfilm approximately one million pages of Jewish material in European libraries.

1954-1958 – Claims Conference spent \$242,837 on an initiative labeled “**Salvage of Jewish Cultural Treasures**” that supported the restoration of libraries and historical monuments.

The Conference’s 5-year anniversary issue (1958) noted that “*to the very outset, the Conference was called upon to define and develop programs of cultural and educational reconstruction while coping with a flood of specific applications for aid.*” (...) *The undertaking lacked all precedent.*”



YAD VASHEM

Established in August 1953

Between 1954 and 1964, the Claims Conference received \$125 million from Germany with parts of the funds intended to fund commemorative and historical projects.

6 October 1954: Claims Conference/Yad Vashem agreement stipulating that the Claims Conference would provide up to one-half of the total annual expenditures for the activities agreed upon by both partners.

Special emphasis on publication of the *Pinkas Hakehilot* (Annals of the Jewish Communities in Nazi occupied Europe).



Picture: Hall of Names, Yad Vashem

The Anticipated End of the Claims Conference



From the early 1970s until the mid-1990s, interest in Holocaust-related matters subsided.

The 1979 Claims Conference report noted that “*the Conference objectives in the field of relief and rehabilitation of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution have essentially been achieved.*”

The emergence of the Hardship Fund in 1980 revived the mission of the Claims Conference.

Picture: 200,000 People in Soviet Jewry Rally, May 1978. JTA Archive.



Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture

Founded in 1965 by the Claims Conference with its last allocation money.

The Memorial Foundation was envisioned to serve as a living memorial to the 6,000,000 Jews who perished in the Holocaust and to reconstruct Jewish cultural life around the world.

Picture: Bardejov Jewish Community



End of the JRSO and Sotheby's Judaica Auction

1951 – JRSO took over JCR.

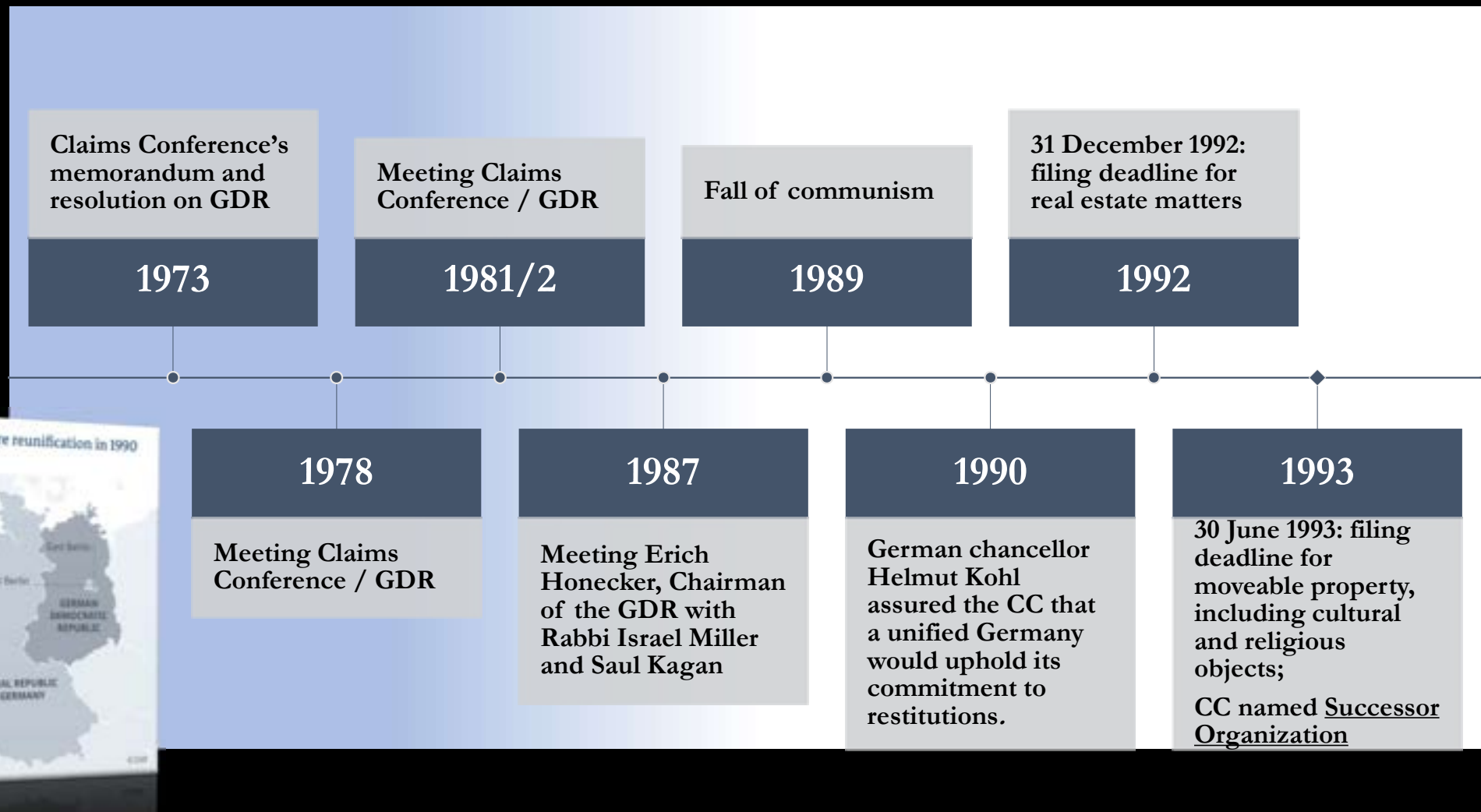
1952 – JRSO uncovered a collection of nearly 400 paintings in the Office of the Administration of Properties of the City of Berlin, plundered from the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*.

1975 – JRSO gradually handed over its responsibilities to the Claims Conference.

1984 – Sotheby's Judaica Auction.

2012 – JRSO officially ended its activities.

Committee for Claims Against the German Democratic Republic



Former East Germany -- Successor Organization



The Successor Organization submitted claims for artworks and cultural property under the German Property Restitution Law.

The Claims Conference policy has been to return to owners and heirs any looted art from the former East.

All successor organization claims for cultural property have essentially been resolved.

Picture: Weathervane of the former Strausberg synagogue was transferred to the Claims Conference Successor Organization by decision of the Brandenburg State Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues in December 2000.

Committee on Jewish Claims Against Austria

Committee on Jewish Claims Against Austria (CJCA) founded
Nahum Goldman commenced negotiations with Chancellor Raab

1953

Sammelstellen
(collecting points)
created under the directorship of Dr. George Weis (JRSO)

1957

Second Art and Cultural Assets Settlement Act

1985

Negotiation CJCA (I. Miller and S. Kagan) with Chancellor Sinowatz to press for legislation to claim stolen art objects

1985

CJCA contacted international auction houses for a potential auction

1988

Kunstrückgabegesetz and establishment of Commission for Provenance Research

1998

1955

Austria's state treaty established that property shall be restored to its former owners or to their successor.

1969

Determination of Ownership of Works of Art and Cultural Assets law (*Kunst- und Kulturgutbereinigungsgesetz*)

1984

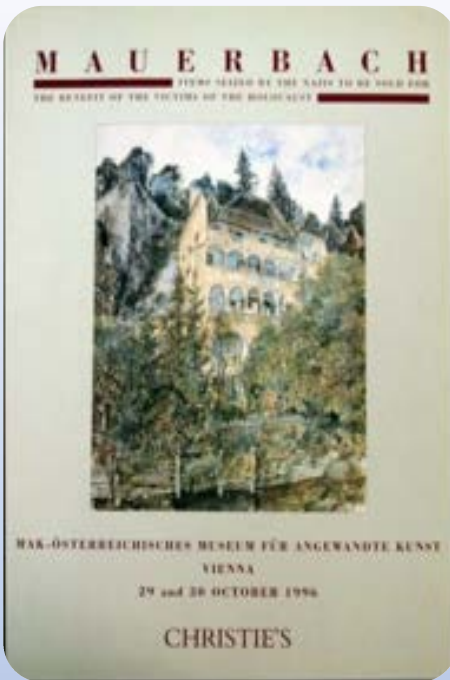
Mauerbach scandal triggered by ARTnews article "The Legacy of Shame"
Press release: CJCA called for artworks not to be auctioned off.

1986

Second Art and Cultural Objects Settlement Act: artworks needed to be claimed by 30 September 1986

1996

Mauerbach auction



Picture:
Mauerbach
Auction Catalog;
[https://auctioncat
alogs.com/product
/christies-auction-
mauerbach-items-
seized-by-nazi-for-
holocaust-victims-
austria/](https://auctioncatalogs.com/product/christies-auction-mauerbach-items-seized-by-nazi-for-holocaust-victims-austria/)

Picture:
[https://www.mak.at/en
/program/exhibitions/r
ecollecting](https://www.mak.at/en/program/exhibitions/recollecting)



Mauerbach Auction

The exhibition “Recollecting” that took place at Austria’s Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) between December 2008 and 2009, showcased that many Mauerbach objects had traceable original owners.

Establishment of the World Jewish Restitution Organization

The WJRO represents world Jewry in pursuing claims for the recovery of Jewish properties in Europe (outside of Germany and Austria).

The organization was established by leading world Jewish organizations to address the restitution of Jewish property, primarily in the former communist countries.

The WJRO works closely with the Claims Conference on looted art and cultural property matters.

Picture: Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts



The Return of Attention to Looted Cultural Property in the 1990s

**1998 - Washington Conference on
Holocaust Era Assets**

**2000 - Vilnius International Forum
on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural
Assets**

**2004 - Creation of Claims
Conference-WJRO Looted Art and
Cultural Property Initiative**

Picture: <https://art.claimscon.org/resources/national-organizations/>

Importance of Archives

Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg

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, including its updated chapters on France and Germany are available online.

Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg: Database of Art Objects at the Jeu de Paume

The database was the first to bring together archival information from various sources to show what objects were plundered, from whom, and the subsequent fate of those objects looted and ransacked in Western Europe.



Picture: <https://www.errproject.org/>



JD CRP

Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project

The JDCRP is compiling and linking data from relevant European archives into its central Database.

By offering expanded search options in various archives, the JDCRP database will allow users to trace the cross-border journeys of artworks and other cultural objects stolen by the Nazis and their collaborators. This will enable new opportunities for users to gain a more comprehensive picture of the fate of objects.

Picture: <https://jdcrp.org/>



Judaica

2007/2016

Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica

<https://art.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Descriptive-Catalogue-of-Looted-Judaica-3-February-2016.pdf>

2009

Holocaust-Era Judaica and Jewish Cultural Property: A World-Wide Overview

<https://www.claimscon.org/forms/prague/Judaica.pdf>

2019

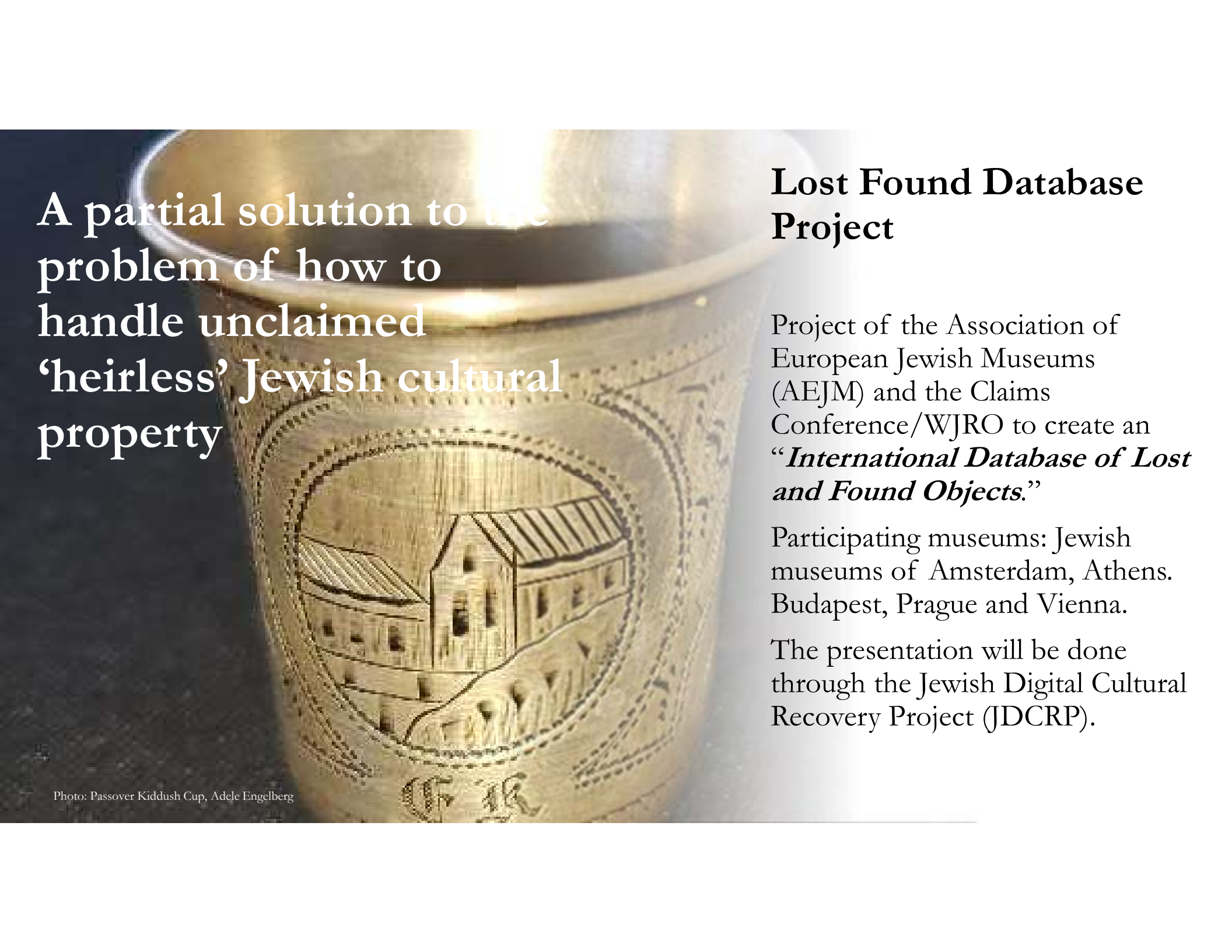
Handbook on Judaica Provenance Research: Ceremonial Objects

https://art.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Judaica-Handbook_17-Sep-2019.pdf

Picture: Offenbach, Germany, Some of the six hundred Torah scrolls that were brought to the Offenbach Archival Depot from all over the American-administered area, 1946. Yad Vashem Photo Archive. Archival Signature: 368 Album Number: FA255/42

Technological Partial Solution to the Problem of How to Handle Jewish Communal Cultural Property

- ❑ Information can be used for stopping auctions of Jewish Cultural Property.
- ❑ One proposed solution could be to copy the communal property, loan it to the Jewish Community and make the information available around the world.
- ❑ Current issue: Pinkhasim from Samarkand.



A partial solution to the
problem of how to
handle unclaimed
'heirless' Jewish cultural
property

Lost Found Database Project

Project of the Association of
European Jewish Museums
(AEJM) and the Claims
Conference/WJRO to create an
“*International Database of Lost
and Found Objects.*”

Participating museums: Jewish
museums of Amsterdam, Athens.
Budapest, Prague and Vienna.

The presentation will be done
through the Jewish Digital Cultural
Recovery Project (JDCRP).



The Relevance of Looted Cultural Property to Holocaust Education



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