

**Archive sources for the seizure and restitution of Jewish property in the collections of the Moravian Museum's archive (focusing on works of art)**

by Božena Kovářová, Moravian District Archive in Brno, Czech Republic

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to acquaint you with archive sources concerning the Aryanisation of Jewish property in Moravia and its post-War restitutions, which are stored in the archive of the Moravian Museum in Brno. In view of the subject of this conference, I shall concentrate on documents concerning the treatment of works of art, even though artworks only comprise an absolute fraction of the archive records. I would like to point out that, in view of the fragmentary nature of the material, it is not possible to mention all archive collections. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to mention all the most important ones.

The most significant set of files can be found in the archive collection **Reichsprotector in Bohemia and Moravia, at the office for Moravia in Brno (B 251)**. Files on the Aryanisation of Jewish assets have the shelf marks 7900-7999. As regards content, they specifically concern provisions for the sequestration of industrial enterprises, shops, and agricultural property. They also deal with the Aryanisation of these assets, land-register paperwork relating to Jewish property as well as the handling of Jewish capital, jewellery, securities and insurance policies. Other documents include a section on the status of Jews in general and on the implementation of anti-Jewish measures in particular. The Reichsprotector's office effectively began operating in Brno as early as 16 April 1939. It was virtually shut down in 1942 after an extensive reorganisation, because only a department for cultural policy operated there subsequently. Most of the other existing competences and clerical work was taken over by the **Brno Regional President, an administration by order of the Reich (B 252)**, which continued working on cases of Aryanisation that had not been concluded. In this collection, in paperwork concerning enemy assets, there are reports from hauliers throughout Moravia on whether they have the property of Jews or foreigners in their depots.

Supreme regional councils (oberlandrats) were established as lower-level branches of the German administration. From the outset, duties ensuing from decrees issued by the Reichsprotector on 21 June 1939 and 26 January 1940 on Jewish economic enterprises and the exclusion of Jews from economic activity in the Protectorate were among the most important tasks carried out by these bodies. Our archive contains documents from the **Oberlandrat for Brno, Jihlava, Kroměříž, Prostějov, and Zlín (B 254, B 255, B 256, B 257, B 258)**. In these collections, there is a total of 39 boxes of files, which primarily deal with the Aryanisation of Jewish firms and real estate, sequestration provisions, and other aspects of the Jewish question.

The collection of the **Customs Investigation Bureau, Brno branch (D 25)** (Zollfahndungszweigstelle in Brünn) has been almost completely preserved. Besides Brno documents, it also contains documents from branches in Jihlava, Uherské Hradiště, Moravská Ostrava and Olomouc. On the basis of a regulation issued by Adolf Hitler on the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia dated 16 March 1939, the Protectorate became part of the German customs area. Consequently, German customs authorities were established on the Moravian-Slovak border. Initially, they were subordinate to the Reich authorities, but after a reorganisation in 1941, the Brno office became a branch of the Zollfahndungsstelle Prag. Besides routine foreign-currency offences, the customs investigation bureaus were entrusted with special financial duties, especially with respect to Jewish monetary assets, securities and jewellery. Most of the collection comprises individual investigation dossiers and criminal files. Of particular interest are lists of Jewish assets in individual financial institutions, Gestapo notifications about the seizure of Jewish property or orders for the sale of jewellery to the Hadega firm in Prague (Handelsgesellschaft Prag – this commercial company carried out valuations and also executed the enforced sale and purchase of Jewish jewellery and precious metals).

The originator of the archive collection **German Administration of Seized Assets (G 427)** is the Treuhand und Revisionsgesellschaft, specifically its branches in Brno and Ostrava. This was a corporation that administered Jewish property and other seized assets. Among

other things, the collection contains seven boxes containing the accounting of chattels for the Asset Authority of the Reichsprotektor in Bohemia and Moravia (the so-called Vermögensamt). These are arranged alphabetically according to the original owners, and they contain lists of pictures, carpets, period furniture, silver and gold utensils and jewellery. The lists have been very thoroughly prepared, and occasionally even contain a brief biography of the artist who painted a picture. Most of the collection (60 boxes) comprises documents on individual seized assets (usually finances, accounts, insurance policies, and houses), which are arranged alphabetically according to the names of the original owners.

The Emigration Fund for Bohemia and Moravia (Auswanderungsfond für Böhmen und Mähren) was another of the institutions that was established for the purpose of administering and liquidating Jewish assets. Of the activities it carried out, our archive has documents from its offices in Brno and Jihlava in the collections **Emigration Fund, Brno office (B 392)** and the **National Administration of Assets, Jihlava district office (B 283)**. The Brno office's collection contains documents on individual houses with Jewish owners in the city of Brno from the years 1939-1945 arranged according to cadastral territory and the building registration number. The specific content of the files comprises contracts on the enforced sale of the real estate to the Emigration Fund, an official evaluation, a statement by the owner on the condition of the building as well as easements and insurance pertaining to it, an excerpt from land registers, an announcement by the oberlandrat on the appointment of an authorised representative, lease contracts and possibly proceedings concerning the sale of the real estate. The Jihlava office contains documents of this type, not just for Jihlava itself, but also for an extensive area of western Moravia. The collection has materials dating up to 1950. Consequently, they also have documents from the National Asset Administration Authority and the Emigration Fund. National administration was imposed on the abolished Emigration Fund by way of a decree issued by the Ministry for the Protection of Labour and Social Welfare (dated 8 June 1945, ref. no. P-1809-1/1945). Files concerning individual houses are arranged alphabetically according to localities into two series. The first comprises files on restituted houses that were returned while the second contains files on real estate that was transferred to national administration by people's committees or to communal enterprises.

The aforementioned comprises a cursory list of material exemplifying the process of seizing Jewish assets during the Second World War. Naturally, it is not possible to ignore written materials documenting how the consequences of this process were dealt with after 1945 in so-called restitution proceedings. In the Moravian Regional Archive, we can find the most documents in the collection of the **Provincial People's Committee in Brno (B 280)**, which existed in the years 1945-1948. It passed on unresolved cases to its successors, which operated in the years 1949-1960, i.e. **Regional People's Committees**. Of these, we have stored documents from the Regional People's Committees for **Brno, Jihlava and Gottwaldov (B 124, B 126, B125)**. In 1950, the Regional People's Committees also took over the unresolved paperwork of financial public prosecutor's offices and bureaus of the national renewal fund, who participated as representatives of the state in restitution cases involving Jewish assets. (Consequently, it is not possible to overlook the collections **Jihlava (D 153) and Uherské Hradiště (D 156) financial public prosecutor's offices**.) I have also come across cases where restitution proceedings were not completed until the end of the 1960s by another successor, the **South Moravian People's National Committee in Brno (B 338)**. The work of each researcher and employee has been made immensely harder by the fact that Jewish assets were not dealt with in any of the aforementioned institutions as a special separate group, but can be found practically anywhere. (To give you a better idea –the collection of the Brno Provincial People's Committee contains paperwork on state citizenship, national loyalty certification, registry paperwork, particularly death declarations, name changes, war damages proceedings, the establishment of national administration for industrial enterprises, and appeals against the confiscation of property. In Regional People's Committee documents, the financial, agricultural and economic sections are crucial for searching for Jewish assets).

This year, a separate range of restitution files stored in the records office of the Municipal Court in Brno has been taken over. At present, these files are part of the collection **Brno People's Civil Court (C 152)**. They comprise around 40 boxes, in which there is a predominance of cases involving the restitution of Jewish assets from the years 1947-1951. According to Act No. 128/1946 of the Collection of Laws, dated 16 May 1946 (on the invalidity of property rights proceedings from the era when there was a lack of freedom and claims concerning this invalidity), in the event of a rejection of an application for the return of

property by an institution that established national administration (or if it issued no statement on the restitution claim within a deadline of three months), the claimant could exercise his claim before the appropriate regional court.

In this list, I cannot overlook one completely exceptional collection, namely **Moses Löw Beer, national administration of private property (H 1008)**. In terms of its extent, it only comprises four cartons of archive records. The members of this family who were also partners in the firm Moses Löw Beer left the Czechoslovak Republic in 1939. Thanks to their taking this decision, they all survived the War and lodged restitution claims when it was over. In terms of content, it comprises completely unique material, which documents the course of national administration and restitution proceedings in the years 1945-1954 with regard to the private assets of this extensive and very important family of Moravian industrialists. The assets consisted of securities, insurance policies, accounts, automobiles and real estate, including the world-renowned Tugendhat Villa. The collection also includes lists and valuations of items stored in individual houses in Brno and Svitávka.

In conclusion, I would like to state once more that this is not a complete list of all archive collections in which it is possible to find information on the fate of Jewish assets. Nevertheless, I have attempted to mention all the most important archive collections, particularly those that have in the past 15 years become the basis for dealing with applications by natural persons and legal entities to search for documents concerning their property. Last but not least, these archive records are becoming an important source for academic research on the era of the Second World War.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERED