

Project Related Promotion of Provenance Research in Germany.

Taking Stock after the First Year

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1. Introduction

In November 2007 the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media has decided that the provenance research in Germany shall be considerably strengthened. Since 2008 the Federal Government Commissioner has been specially promoting research into cultural assets taken from their rightful owners as a result of Nazi persecution. He is providing one million euros a year to help public establishments and institutions to research the provenance of items in their collections. The funds are channeled through the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research, which has been working at the Institute for Museum Research at the National Museums - Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin. The Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research started its activity in June 2008. One year after this way of promoting provenance research already achieved satisfactory results. This report by the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research will contain a summary of the granted projects and reflect on first-year experiences.

2. Why project related promotion of provenance research was started?

As a result of the *Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets* and the realization of the principles a bigger attention and a growing interest in the processing of the results of the national-socialist art and cultural asset robbery could be seen in wider German public. Significant efforts to improve considerably the provenance research were also established. But soon the possibilities as well as the limits of this kind of historical research were clearly recognizable.

But public cultural institutions and collections in Germany were largely caught unprepared by the tasks resulting from the obligations laid out in the *Washington Principles* and the subsequently formulated *Joint Declaration of the Federal Government, the Federal States and the National Association of Local Authorities* (1999). Over the past ten years investigations into unclear provenances were usually undertaken on a case-by-case basis, in response to specific information requests or restitution claims. In addition, efforts by public institutions to clarify provenance and identify former owners took place within an underdeveloped infrastructure. Only a few museums and libraries had engaged qualified employees or charged staff members with provenance research as their primarily or almost exclusively scientific work. It also became increasingly clear that a comprehensive research into the origin of historical artworks and other cultural objects – together with the goal of identifying heirs or other entitled claimants – could not be achieved in just a few short years.

Particularly with regard to the federalist system on the area of culture in Germany one problem became clearly: the majority of the municipal museums, libraries and archives in Germany were unable to make a systematic research because they had a low budget and a little house staff. The German states and the local authorities as the providers and sponsors of the public cultural institutions demanded more financial support and methodical assistance.

The funding of provenance research projects with a financial support by the German Federal government is the way to give new impetus after a period of stagnation during the past years.

3. The tasks of the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research

The Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research which is affiliated to the Institute for Museum Research of the State Museums in Berlin - Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation has the task of supporting museums, libraries, archives and other publicly run institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany in the process of identifying those cultural artefacts in their collections or in their possession, which were taken from their lawful owners during the period of National Socialist rule.

The establishment of the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research was the direct result of the findings issued on November 13, 2007 by the working group on matters of restitution set up by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Bernd Neumann. The financial resources for the day to day running of the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research have been provided by the Kulturstiftung der Länder (Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States - www.kulturstiftung.de).

From 2008 onwards, funds totalling one million euros will be assigned each year by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media to supporting the investigation and study of the provenance of cultural artefacts in German public collections. The Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research allocates these funds to individual projects.

The Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research is also tasked with linking the findings of the various research projects, evaluating these and following up issues that arise out of the projects either by conducting contextual research of its own or by initiating further research projects. While the starting point of the Bureau's work is the loss of certain cultural assets by individuals as a result of National Socialist persecution, it is hoped that a bigger picture will emerge, shedding light on the history of important private collections, the functioning of the art trade in the National Socialist era, but also on the activity of the government officials involved in the dispossession of, in particular, the Jewish population. As laid out in a cooperation agreement, the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research works closely with the Koordinierungsstelle für Kulturgutverluste (Office for the Documentation of Lost Cultural Property - www.lostart.de) in publishing its findings and in the search for the lawful owners of art works.

The Bureau will work on facilitating access to the resources necessary for provenance research, for example enhancing the accessibility of relevant documents. It is also the aim of the Bureau to improve networking between individuals and institutions active in the field of provenance research and to encourage the sharing of the resulting information and experience.

4. What kinds of projects can be promoted?

There are three different types of funding available:

1. Short term research projects

If administrations of museums or libraries are confronted with requests about former owners of pieces in public collections or with restitution claims and they have no information on a context of Nazi persecution and confiscation as yet, they can seize the opportunity to use the funding

for starting into research. The research results are supposed to help them for making the first official statement in such cases.

Institutions which have short term research needs, usually relating to ongoing restitution cases, can apply for grants of up to 15,000 €. Decisions on such applications will be made within one month. The same procedure is applied with applications for subsidies for drawing up legal expert opinions.

2. Subsidies for legal expert opinions

If administrations of museums or libraries or their funding bodies need assistance or consulting in legal technicalities, they can take the opportunity to use the funding for ordering legal expert opinions or for engaging lawyers. For this purpose they can make application for a grant-in-aid.

3. Long term research projects/systematic checking of collections

Alternatively, institutions wishing to systematically study their collections and institute wider research projects can apply for larger grants. Twice a year – in March and in September – the applications can be submitted.

The advisory committee to the Bureau for Provenance Investigation/Research makes a significant contribution to deciding which applicants are to receive this latter type of funding. The committee consists of representatives from the world of politics and culture as well as experts from the fields of history and art history.

The funding bodies of institutions applying for grants are expected to match funding to a certain degree. This kind of grant can be used for engaging research assistants for one or two years.

5. What kinds of projects were already granted?

To date 53 applications were submitted at the Bureau for Provenance Investigation/Research and a funding has been allocated to 35 different projects. Among the 35 granted projects were 23 long term research projects and twelve short term projects. 23 applications were submitted by museums, ten by libraries and two by archives.

a) Checking museum collections – systematic indexing of inventories

Example 1: The Wiesbaden Museum

The research project of the Wiesbaden Museum is concerning with the paintings in the collection, which have been purchased between 1935 and 1945 when Hermann Voss was the director of the Wiesbaden Museum. In addition Voss was the commissioner for the *Führerauftrag Linz* from 1943 to 1945.

b) Checking library collections

Example 2: The Central and Regional Library Berlin (Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin)

In 1943 the Berlin City Library purchased about 40.000 books from the municipal pawnshop. These books came from private libraries of deported Jews.

Staff members are making investigations to find the former book owners or their descendants.

c) *Examination of archive contents and interpretation of data for provenance research*

Example 3: German Fine Art Archives Nuremberg (Deutsches Kunstarchiv im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg)

Since 1972 the business documents of the Jewish Munich art dealer Heinemann are owned by the museum. The Heinemann Gallery was one the important German art galleries at the beginning of the 20th century. These documents cover the period from the formation of the company in 1872 to the expropriation ("Aryanisation") in 1939 and contain a lot of information about the art sales by the Heinemann Gallery. Many clients of the Heinemann Gallery were victims of Nazi persecution.

After finalizing the indexing and digitizing of the documents an online research for about 15.000 works of art and 10.000 persons and institutions will be available.

d) *Connecting the indexing of collections with historical contextual research*

Example 4: Bavarian State Painting Collections, Jewish Museum Munich, the Municipal Gallery, the Munich City Museum, the Villa Stuck Museum, the Bavarian National Museum and the State Graphic Arts Collection Munich (Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Jüdisches Museum München, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Museum Villa Stuck, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München)

The collaborative research project of the state and municipal museums in Munich *The fate of Jewish art collectors and dealers in Munich 1933-1945* was started on 1 June 2009. The aim of the project is to reconstruct, what was happened during the *Judenaktion* in Munich in winter 1938/39. At that time the *GESTAPO* seized art works from about 30 Jewish collectors and about 70 Jewish art dealers. These were initially acquired by the Bavarian National Museum and the Munich City Museum and then further distributed to the Munich Galleries (*Alte und Neue Pinakothek*) and other museums in Munich. The documentation of these art collections and its whereabouts is scheduled.

6. Prospective

From the viewpoint of the provenance research post, the list of the tasks required to attain sustainable research results on the origin and whereabouts of artistic and cultural assets directly or indirectly related to the National Socialist tyranny is as follows:

1. Improvement and expansion of the infrastructure of provenance research, which means abridging the research paths and preventing the redundancy when one and the same confiscation or acquisition proceeding is researched two or three times. This applies in particular to the intensified and in-depth examination of certain archive contents and the online publication of the corresponding indices, the verification of the auction catalogues and their examination and appraisal, as well as the question of the handling and in particular the archiving of whatever internal "business documents" have been handed down within a

museum or library — for example the correspondence between a director and art dealers or public authorities.

2. The acceleration and expansion of online access to informational resources on the model of an open source community of knowledge, together with a further development of user-based processes to enable more flexible search and query procedures.

3. The development of provenance research as the organisation of a continuous scholarly dialogue within the community of the discipline, with an exchange on the principles of action, the subject areas of research, etc.

4. The creation of research associations — both institutional and international, not only among museums and libraries but also above all with universities and other research institutions and between disciplines – in particular a closer relation between the research efforts in art and cultural history and contemporary history.

Consequently one of the main goals of the Bureau for Provenance Investigation and Research is to set up a secure virtual space for the provenance research community which is to be understood and function as a socio-technical system. The Bureau for Provenance Investigation will act as an editor and custodian of this information system and function as a contact partner. The results of research and the outcomes of projects supported by federal funding will also be incorporated in the information system.

A shift from a predominantly reactive examination of the provenance of individual objects in the collections to the systematic indexing of inventories in the course of reconstructing and documenting the developmental stages of public and private collections, especially for the second third of the 20th century, remains the major challenge of provenance research for the near future.

With the project-oriented research funding established in the past year, an apparatus has been made available in Germany that can link the research on individual cases with contextual research and that can be further built upon.