

Title: Archive research on the issue of lost works of art in the Czech Republic**Petr Bednařík**

I work at the Centre for the Documentation of the Transfer of Property and Items of Cultural Value from Second World War Victims, which conducts thorough research in Czech and foreign archives. As regards our work methods, based on good cooperation with archive institutions, we are allowed to photocopy or digitally photograph relevant documents. At our workplace, the photocopies are then expertly stored in a computer database, in which all basic data is given – the archive, the call number, reference number, links with other archive documents, people and institutions figuring in the documents as well as the document's basic annotation. We are simultaneously working with a second "Works of Art" database, in which we enter data from the copied documents on specific works of art that are found in archive sources. Each item has its own record file, which contains all the data from the archive source. Unfortunately, we often encounter a problem in that only completely basic data can be found about the item in the source (the artist, the title and the dimensions of the work). With the aid of computer databases, we then try to ascertain whether the item is also mentioned in other archive sources where we would obtain further information about it. A computer database of archive records enables us to search in our documentation for all photocopies that pertain to a certain person or institution.

I would like to emphasise that searching archive sources on this topic in the Czech Republic is, for the most part, a complicated activity. Our foreign colleagues probably have similar experiences. Working with inventories in archives represents a basic problem. A number of archive collections have inventories of an older date, which specifically means that they are not in documentary form on the archives' websites. Consequently, it is actually necessary to examine inventories directly at the archives. This is complicated further by the fact that inventories often only contain the basic characteristics of call numbers or cartons in individual collections. It is then not always possible to discern from such characteristics whether any sources on works of art are located there. Consequently, if we only find basic characteristics in an inventory (e.g. the confiscation of Jewish assets), we have to study these materials even though we might subsequently discover that they merely contain a small quantity of archive sources (or no sources at all) on stolen works of art. Thus a situation often arises where it is necessary to go through a number of archive records, which nonetheless end up not being relevant to our research. Naturally, this prolongs the period of study for individual collections.

Nevertheless, our experiences show that it is necessary to conduct a genuinely extensive examination of archive collections. It is only possible to seek answers to various questions concerning the given issue by comparing many sources. If we come across a specific case, we must put together data from different archive sources as though we were assembling a mosaic. It is obvious that archive research has already been underway for a long time, it is necessary to continue thoroughly examining archives for many years to come. The National Archives in Prague are understandably crucial in this respect. With regard to the given topic, it is important to conduct a detailed survey of collections concerning the activity of the Reichsprotektor's Office, which arranged the German administration of occupied territory at the time of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. We can find documents here that pertain to the persecution of the Jewish population, the Aryanisation of Jewish assets (i.e. Aryanisation orders, the activity of the Assets Authority (Majetkový úřad), individual cases of Aryanisation and the appointment of *treuhänders*). Furthermore, there are also documents that illustrate the movement of cultural assets (the activity of Einsatzstab I and II, which made inventories of plundered works of art, the activity of the Andree firm, which was involved in the sale of these items, correspondence concerning the Protectorate's chateaus, museums and galleries, as well as an inventory of Prague Castle and Černínský Palace). It is important to compare the results of domestic and foreign research. For example, we have inventories of Prague Castle and Černínský Palace at our disposal from the National Archives, which we can compare with inventories of the same buildings that we studied in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin and in the

Russian State Military Archive in so-called "trophy" collections. We do not just deal with Jewish assets, but generally pay attention to the assets of people who were persecuted on the territory of the Protectorate.

The collections of individual ministries are also stored in the National Archives. These collections usually begin as far back as the era of the First Czechoslovak Republic. They contain documents from the post-Munich Second Republic and from the era of the Protectorate. It is important that the collections also deal with the post-War period. I would particularly like to draw attention to certain collections. The first of these is the collection of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Ministerstvo práce a sociální péče), which contains post-War applications for the restitution of movable chattels (including works of art) and real estate. In the documents, applicants specify the items whose return they are seeking. At the same time, the collection also contains notifications from the ministry on granting or not granting restitutions.

Furthermore, I would also like to mention the collection of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment (Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty), in which we can study documents concerning the Ministry's correspondence with the National Gallery (after being renamed the Bohemian and Moravian Federal Gallery – Českomoravská zemská galerie) in the years 1939–1945, which deals with purchase committee reports, loans of items, individual collections and the organisation of the National Gallery. An important part of the collection also comprises applications for the export of works of art, including the years 1938–1939, when an export permit was sometimes contingent on the owner of the collection having to leave the most precious items in Czechoslovakia (later the Protectorate). In this instance, I would like to draw attention to the publication by my colleagues Helena Krejčová and Maria Vička entitled *Lives for Ransom (Výkupné za život)*, which deals with the export and enforced donations of works of art during the emigration of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. It documents this issue using the example of the Museum of Decorative Arts (Uměleckoprůmyslové museum) in Prague and items in its collections that came from enforced donations.

A third collection I would like to mention in this context, is the one kept by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (Státní památková správa), which includes applications for the post-War export of works of art. In this collection, we can find documents concerning chateaus that were confiscated during the time of the Protectorate. Documents about the depositing of items from German confiscations in individual museum and gallery institutions are also another important source of information. Furthermore, there are very substantial archive sources stored in the collection of the National Property Administration (Národní správa majetkových podstat), i.e. the institution that in the years 1945–1950 administered assets that were forfeited during the occupation by their original owners who were being coerced by national, political and racial persecution.

The Archive of the National Gallery in Prague (Archiv Národní galerie) is an important resource with regard to the subject of stolen works of art. We can find documents there relating to the activity of the National Gallery (later the Bohemian and Moravian Federal Gallery) during the time of the Protectorate (e.g. minutes of purchase committee meetings, correspondence concerning exports of works of art and taking receipt of donated artistic artefacts). Furthermore, this depositary allows us to study archive sources from the post-War years (the securing of works of art from German confiscations, applications for restitution, and the export of works of art).

I would also like to mention the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí) in Prague. This ministry handled restitution and reparation duties after the Second World War. Studies in the archive concern papers that document the course of international negotiations, agreements and treaties between states. Of particular importance with regard to the actual subject of artistic artefacts are papers from the Reparation and Restitution (Reparace a restituce) collection and the collection of the Central Reparation and Restitution Committee (Ústřední reparační a restituční komise), insofar as it concerns works of art and other cultural assets. In this archive, it is possible to find individual applications/

requests for searches for specific items in individual occupation zones. Furthermore, one can also find documents on negotiations in specific restitution cases and their subsequent outcomes. In this instance, we also carry out comparisons with documents from foreign archives, specifically the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz and the National Archives in London.

It is also possible to study archive materials that are useful in terms of plundered art in the Security Forces Archive (Archiv bezpečnostních složek) in Prague. In collection 325 – State Security Investigation Directorate (Správa vyšetřování Státní bezpečnosti) – there are documents that were created in connection with the collation of data for the Commission for the Prosecution of War Criminals (Komise pro stíhání válečných zločinců). It is possible to obtain information here on individual people who participated in the persecution of the Jewish population, including the confiscation of assets. The records of names of this archive allows for personal data and basic information about specific people to be added in a number of cases or in some instances to find references to documents that are today stored in other archives.

It is also necessary to conduct research in archives outside of Prague which are also very important in terms of stolen works of arts. Another of this panel's contributions will deal with the Moravian Regional Archives (Moravský zemský archive) in Brno. In another panel, my colleague Mečislav Borá will talk about the Regional Archives (Zemský archiv) in Opava and the State Regional Archives (Státní oblastní archive) in Litoměřice. Naturally, these are only some of the archives outside of Prague. Of course, in order to thoroughly map this subject, it would be necessary to conduct heuristic research in a number of archives. It is obvious that regional research at the level of individual districts (the activity of individual administrative authorities, regional museums and galleries) also represents an extensive field for research on works of art.

My paper has only tried to present basic information on the possibilities for archive studies in the Czech Republic in connection with the subject of works of art stolen during the Second World War. As I have said, searching archive sources is immensely complicated. It is often very hard to find a number of archive sources in the given archives. With a lot of the information that is missing, however, we have to reckon on the possibility that it will not be possible to find it at all, because this data has not been preserved.