

Provenance Research in the Collection of Historic Musical Instruments in Vienna – Background, Configuration, and Practice

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Abstract

This paper comprises three parts: a short summary of the genesis of the Kommission für Provenienzforschung (Commission for Provenance Research) and the legal framework in Austria for returning stolen artworks; a look at the present state of provenance research at the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Collection of Historical Musical Instruments in Vienna; and a case study of a musical instrument discussed by the Kunstrückgaberat (Council for Returning Artworks).

Provenienzforschung in der Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien. Grundlagen, Strukturen und Praxis

Der vorliegende Beitrag gliedert sich in drei Teile. Nach einem kurzen Überblick zur Entstehung der Kommission für Provenienzforschung und den gesetzlichen Rahmenbedingungen zur Kunstrückgabe in Österreich soll der Stand der Provenienzforschung in der Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente im Kunsthistorischen Museum in Wien skizziert werden. Eine Fallstudie – es geht dabei um ein Musikinstrument, das 2015 im Kunstrückgabebeirat behandelt wurde – schließt den Aufsatz ab.

1. The Commission for Provenance Research and the Kunstrückgabegesetz 1998 / 2009 (Law for Returning Stolen Artworks)

In the fall of 1997 the Museum of Modern Art in New York hosted the largest Schiele exhibition ever shown in the US: »Egon Schiele: The Leopold Collection. Vienna«. In December 1997, the New York Times published an article by Judith H. Dobryzynski in which she highlighted the »troubled past« of some of the works in the collection assembled by Rudolf Leopold (1925-2010).¹ Subsequently, the New York District Attorney issued subpoenas for two paintings, »Portrait of Wally« and »Dead City III«,² forbidding their return to Austria.

1 Judith H. Dobryzynski: The zealous collector – A special report. A singular passion for amassing art, one way or another. In: The New York Times, 24 Dec. 1997. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/24/arts/zealous-collector-special-report-singular-passion-for-amassing-art-one-way.html> [2. 5. 2017].

2 The subpoena on »Dead City III« was lifted in 1998; in July 2010, an out-of-court settlement regarding »Portrait of Wally« was reached, and after the payment of 19 million dollars, the painting returned to Vienna. Olga Kronsteiner: Leopolds Gespür für Wally. In: Der Standard, 26 Feb. 2015.

This event encouraged the Austrian press to take up the subject of Nazi-looted artworks. A number of in-depth articles by the journalists Hubertus Czernin and Thomas Trenkler looked at Aryanization and the confiscation of property, as well as compensation and restitution after 1945, greatly raising public awareness of these matters. Among other things they drew attention to what were known as »Widmungen« (dedications) made after 1945: even if stolen artworks were subsequently returned to a persecuted family, the latter were not free to do with them what they wanted because a ban on the export of art collections was enshrined in the Denkmalschutzgesetz (Law on the Protection of Historical Monuments). The required export permits were all too often conditional on gifting selected high-quality artworks to Austrian

URL: <http://derstandard.at/2000012223492/Leopolds-Gespuer-fuer-Wally> [2. 5. 2017]; Die »Tote Stadt« ist zurück. In: Vorarlberg online, 23. Sept. 1999. URL: <http://www.vol.at/die-tote-stadt-ist-zurueck/vienna-migrate-28974> [2. 5. 2017]; Thomas Trenkler: Neue Begehrlichkeiten nach Egon Schieles »Tote Stadt III«. In: kurier.at, 4 June 2016. URL: <https://kurier.at/kultur/neue-begehrlichkeiten-nach-egon-schieles-tote-stadt-iii/> 134.313.325 [2. 5. 2017].

museums. Trivialised and belittled as »donations«, these »gifts« were in fact a form of extortion because they were the only way that former owners were able to export at least part of their restituted collections.

The first meeting of the Commission for Provenance Research was called in March 1998 by the then Minister of Education, Elisabeth Gehrler. It met in the Ahnensaal of the Bundesdenkmalamt (BDA, Federal Monuments Authority Austria). Among other things, the meeting revealed that the number and quality of records and archival research differed greatly between the various museums.³

Today the Commission is part of the Department of Monument Protection and Art Restitution of the Federal Chancellery. Its administrative director is Heinz Schödl; Eva Blimlinger, the director of the Academy of Fine Arts, is in charge of scientific coordination. The National Council is informed of the Commission's activities in the annual Restitution Report. The Bureau of the Commission for Provenance Research functions as a point of contact and coordination for all federal provenance research. It provides assistance to the Commission's management and provenance researchers working at the federal museums. In addition to administration, research, investigation of files, and archiving the Commission's research results, the Bureau also handles inquiries about historical records. Additional members of the Commission are provenance researchers working at the different federal museums.⁴

»In December 1998 the »Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art« were endorsed by 44 governments including Austria. The goals of these principles are to identify Nazi-looted art, to find their owners or heirs, and to achieve fair and just solutions in the restitution of Nazi-looted objects.«⁵ However, for restitution in Austria, the Kunstrückgabegesetz (Art Restitution Act) of 1998 and its amendment of 2009 are of even greater importance than the Washington Declaration.

3 Bundesdenkmalamt (BDA)-Archive, Restitutionsmaterialien (restitution sources), Gz. 31.923/1/1998. See also Anneliese Schallmeiner: 1998 – die Kommission für Provenienzforschung und der Weg zum Kunstrückgabegesetz. In: ... wesentlich mehr Fälle als angenommen. 10 Jahre Kommission für Provenienzforschung. Ed. by Gabriele Anderl et al. Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2009, pp. 34–47.

4 URL: <http://www.provenienzforschung.gv.at/?lang=en> [2. 5. 2017].

5 URL: <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=55751&L=1> [2. 5. 2017].

The Federal Act on the Restitution of Works of Art and Other Movable Cultural Assets from Austrian Federal Museums and Collections and Other Federal Property (Art Restitution Act) 1998 / 2009

The aim of the Art Restitution Act, which was passed in Austria in 1998, and its amendment of 2009 is to return artworks which became federal property as a result of the NS-tyranny and are now held in Austrian federal museums or collections to their original owners, or the latter's rightful heirs. Generally speaking, there are three possibilities for restitution:

1. The law covers objects formally restituted after 1945 but that were, in fact, transferred to the property of the State in direct connection with proceedings under the provisions of the Federal Law on the Prohibition of Export of Objects of Historical, Artistic or Cultural Significance. If the Federal State made payment for the transfer of title, this amount or its value at the time of the restitution shall be returned by the original owners or their legal heirs before restitution. Amounts are to be adjusted in accordance with the consumer price index published by Statistics Austria.

2. Objects that legally became the property of the State but had been part of a forced legal transaction (Decree for the Registration of Jewish Property, Export Prohibition Law, discriminating tax demands ... – these measures forced many persecuted individuals to sell selected works of art or entire collections at knockdown prices before emigrating or being deported).

3. Art objects or other cultural assets that were not returned to the original owners or their legal heirs on conclusion of restitution proceedings and, without payment, became the property of the State as unclaimed goods, and continue to be State property. These artifacts are to be transferred to the Österreichischer Nationalfonds für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus (Austrian National Fund for Victims of the National Socialism).⁶

Provenance researchers working at the different federal museums are tasked with systematically reviewing all acquisitions after 1933. In addition to inventories, files on acquisitions, as well as records and documents held at in-house archives, they also research other archives. Today, thanks to the Internet, much of this work can be carried out without

6 Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich (BGBl.) I no. 181 / 1998, BGBl. I no. 117 / 2009. URL: <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10010094> [6. 8. 2018].

leaving one's desk, and these databases and online search tools are discussed in more detail later. In some cases, »autopsies« of objects were carried out: the backs of paintings, for example, often feature labels, stamps, signatures etc. that help shed light on their former owners. If an acquisition is deemed suspicious, the researcher prepares a file which is then presented to the Kunstrückgabebeirat (Advisory Board).

The Advisory Board includes one representative each of the Ministries of Finance, Economic Affairs, Families and Youth, Justice, Education, Arts and Culture, and Defense and Sports, as well as a representative of the State Attorney's Office (Finanzprokurator), and two experts from the field of history and art history. Following a comprehensive review of each case, the Advisory Council rules in favor or against restitution. The Art Restitution Act empowers the federal minister in charge of federal museums and collections to transfer ownership of works of art.⁷

In most cases, the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG, Jewish Community of Vienna) is charged with discovering heirs, a frequently complex and time-consuming undertaking. The artworks are then handed over by curators and registrars. This generally means that the work of the provenance researcher is completed when they hand in the file. They are not charged with evaluating the case or physically handing over the artwork in question. Unlike the files, the Council's recommendations are published on the Commission's website.⁸

2. Provenance Research at the Kunsthistorisches Museum

Even before the Art Restitution Act was passed in December 1998, Herbert Haupt, a historian and then-director of the Museum Archive, researched the provenance of all artifacts that had entered the museum holdings during or immediately after the Nazi era. In June 1998 Haupt, assisted by Lydia Gröbl, published a comprehensive and detailed account of the facts, entitled »Die Veränderungen im Inventarbestand des Kunsthistorischen Museums während der Nazizeit und in den Jahren bis zum Staatsvertrag 1955« (Changes in the Holdings

of the Kunsthistorisches Museum during the Nazi Era and the Years before the Signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955). His report focused on extant sources in the archives between 1938 and 1955, and, together with some later research, it forms an important basis for all subsequent provenance research. Sabine Pénot, curator of the Picture Gallery, researched a number of suspect paintings in the Picture Gallery that are listed in the art database compiled by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. Additional research was carried out by Ulrike Ni-meth, a member of the Commission. In April 2009 the Commission commissioned Susanne Hehenberger and Monika Löscher with a systematic study of all acquisitions by the Kunsthistorisches Museum after 1933. Since March 2016, Löscher has been the sole provenance researcher working at the Kunsthistorisches Museum.⁹

In connection with the planned Haus der Geschichte (Museum of Austrian History), which will be installed at the Neue Burg, the Commission asked the provenance researchers to give priority to the study of the holdings of the Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente (SAM; Collection of Historical Musical Instruments), which is also housed at the Neue Burg. Subsequently (i. e., from 2015), provenance research at the KHM has primarily focused on the SAM, while also continuing the systematic study of the provenance of works in the Picture Gallery, which has not yet been completed, and answering enquiries.

History of the Collection of Historical Musical Instruments

The Collection of Historical Musical Instruments became an independent collection in 1939 when the holdings of historical musical instruments formerly in the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Collection of Sculpture and Decorative Arts and the historical instruments belonging to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna were amalgamated. Previously displayed at the Neue Burg, the instruments were moved to Pallavicini Palace at Josefsplatz 5 in central Vienna. The new collection was only inventoried in 1940. In the years 1933-1945 the collection acquired over two hundred musical instruments (fig. 1).¹⁰

7 BGBl. I no. 181 / 1998, BGBl. I no. 117 / 2009, § 3 (note 6).

8 URL: <http://www.provenienzforschung.gv.at/empfehlungen-des-beirats/?lang=en> [2. 5. 2017].

9 URL: <https://www.khm.at/en/learn/research/provenance-research/> [2. 5. 2017].

10 Kunsthistorisches (KHM)-Archive, 15/SAM/1939/40. Tätigkeitsbericht der Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente Juli 1939 (progress report of the Collection of Historical Musical Instruments July 1939).



1 Palais Pallavicini in Vienna housing the collection of historic musical instruments. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien © KHM-Museumsverband

A major aspect of the work with which the collection was charged during that period was to collaborate with the BDA on »monitoring« the export of historical musical instruments, as Heinrich Klapsia (1907-1945), then-director of the collection, put it. In this context he complained about the fact that, since March 1938, a »remarkable number of precious instruments belonging to »prominent artists« have left the Reich

without our knowledge.«¹¹ In addition to Klapsia, the staff comprised a curator, Viktor Luthlen (1901-1987), who had previously worked for the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, and a conservator, Franz Sobolak (1879-1944), who had recently joined the staff and whose first task was to restore

¹¹ Tätigkeitsbericht 1939 (note 10).

the keyboard instruments so that they could be played again. It was Klapsia who selected musical instruments from the Rothschild Collection, then stored at the central depot for confiscated Jewish collections at the Neue Burg, requesting them as »important and desirable additions for our collection«. ¹² In February 1939 all important artifacts were removed from the collection, ¹³ and in December 1939 seventy-one musical instruments formerly in the Alphonse Rothschild Collection were transferred to the museum's holdings. ¹⁴ On 30 September 1940, Luithlen confirmed that »all the objects recorded in the agreed list from the Central Depot were received into the collection in perfect condition«. ¹⁵ Shortly afterwards, however, Luithlen corrected himself and noted that »almost all received instruments proved to be in need of repair, as they lacked strings or needed restringing«. ¹⁶ Some of these instruments were included in the exhibition intended to showcase recent acquisitions, which was held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1940. ¹⁷ After 1945, Luithlen made the case for the collection to remain in Vienna. ¹⁸ In order to be allowed to export the remainder of her art collection, Clarice Rothschild was asked to donate, among other things, four musical instruments; these instruments were first inventoried in 1947. In addition, the SAM retained another sixty-nine musical instruments as loans until all instruments were returned to the Rothschild family in 1999. ¹⁹

Acquisitions by the Collection of Historical Musical Instruments

Today, the Collection of Historical Musical Instruments has assigned around 1350 inventory numbers; 962 instruments have been acquired since 1933, and their provenances must therefore be analyzed carefully. In twenty-five cases these ac-

quisitions must be regarded as suspect; in 311 cases the acquisitions do not appear to be problematic; and in sixty-five cases they have been judged »undecided«. In around 450 cases a final decision is still outstanding (as of May 2017). One of the suspect cases is an acquisition made by Eduard Reiseder (1893-1964), an instrument maker and piano dealer. In October 1943 he sold a square piano built by Joseph Anton Knam (1790-?) to the SAM. His shop was located on Mariahilferstrasse 3 in Vienna's 6th district, which, by his own account, he had taken over from a »Jew named Steiner« ²⁰ following the »Anschluss« (Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938). ²¹ After 1945 a preliminary investigation according to § 11 of the Verbotsgesetz (Prohibition Statute) was initiated against Reiseder, who had been a member of the NSDAP and the SS since 1932 but who, again according to his own account, had quit the party in 1942. ²²

In another suspect case, the SAM bought a square piano built by Wenzel Ledezki (c. 1761-1823) in the summer of 1940; it had been offered by Ferdinand Nagler, who worked as the Aryanizer for the Albert Kende auction house in Vienna. The Kunst- und Auktionshaus Kärntnerstrasse (Art and Auction House Kärntner Strasse) played a pivotal role in the art market of the time, mainly as a center for buying and selling confiscated art, as documented by Gabriele Anderl in her publications on Vienna's art trade during the NS era. ²³ Like many of the dealers who specialized in musical instruments, Kende was in contact with Ulrich Rück in Nuremberg, who was also interested in this piano. ²⁴

Several other acquisitions from art dealers made during the NS era are suspect too, among them artifacts and instruments bought at auction at the Dorotheum; these include the

12 Tätigkeitsbericht 1939 (note 10).

13 7/SAM/38/39, filed under 189/SAM/96, Luithlen to Dworschak, 18 Feb. 1939.

14 7/SAM/38/39 filed under 189/SAM/96, Musical instruments formerly in the Rothschild Collection, 8. Dec. 1939; handwritten complemented »obsolete«.

15 7/SAM/38/39 filed under 189/SAM/96.

16 7/SAM/38/39 filed under 189/SAM/96, Pro Memoria Luithlen, 17 Oct. 1940.

17 7/SAM/38/39 filed under 189/SAM/96, list of objects with handwritten note »all returned in the fall of 1941«.

18 189/SAM/96, report from Luithlen to the State Institute for Preservation of Historical Memorials, 4 Sept. 1946.

19 See list of musical instruments from the collection of Alphonse Rothschild in: 189/SAM/96.

20 Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLa), Ma8 Vg-akt VGVr 3998/45, statement made on 14 Jan. 1946.

21 However, the Lehmann directory for 1938 does not list anyone called Adolf Steiner at this address: <http://www.digital.wienbibliothek.at/wbrobv/periodical/zoom/270394>. The »Klavierleihanstalt« (piano lending institution) Steiner was located on Währingerstrasse 18. URL: <http://www.digital.wienbibliothek.at/wbrobv/periodical/zoom/269166> [26.6.2017].

22 WStLa, Vg-Akt VGVr 3998/45.

23 Gabriele Anderl: »Euer armer, unglücklicher, vollständig gebrochener alter Albert Kende«. Die »Arisierung« des Kunstauktionshauses Kärntnerstraße 4 in Wien. URL: <http://www.david.juden.at/kulturzeitschrift/76-80/79-anderl.htm> [2.5.2017].

24 Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM), Nürnberg, Historisches Archiv, Nachlass Rück, I, C-0626, Rück to Nagler, Vienna 1st district, Kärntnerstrasse 47/II, 28 Aug. 1940; Nagler to Rück, 1 Sept. 1940.



2 Double pedal harp, SAM 502, acquired February 1941. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien © KHM-Museumsverband

double pedal harp (SAM 502; fig. 2) auctioned at the Dorotheum in February 1941, or the square piano (SAM 573; fig. 3) purchased there in March 1944.

Files on stolen art compiled so far

Since 1998 the restitution department at the KHM has presented eight files to the Advisory Board. Five of these cases have been discussed since 2009. The first looked at the so-called »donations« after 1945 and featured well-known names and collections, among them those of Elisabeth and Oscar Bondy,²⁵ and Alphonse and Clarice Rothschild;²⁶ these,

²⁵ Post horn (SAM 508): recommendation 1999.

²⁶ Small harp (SAM 597), hunting horn (SAM 598), natural trumpet (SAM 599), fortepiano (SAM 600): recommendation 1999.

however, differ greatly from more recent cases, which require very different research work.

In the case of Felix and Josefine Löw-Beer, the restitution of a slide trombone, a guitar, two violas d'amore, and a cittern was recommended in 2009. Interestingly, none of these instruments was ever listed in the collection's inventory. In the case of Siegfried Fuchs – facts and circumstances had already been researched by the Austrian National Library, MAK (Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art) and the Vienna City Library – the Advisory Council recommended the restitution of a mandola (SAM 379) and a mandolin (SAM 380) in April 2012. The legislative amendment of 2009 made it necessary to prepare a file on Elisabeth and Oscar Bondy. In November 2012, the Advisory Council did not recommend the restitution of an English violet (SAM 530), a violin (SAM 531), and a viola (SAM 532). A file on the fortepiano (SAM 795) that had belonged to Mary Wooster, in turn, was merely forwarded to the Advisory Council for their information. In October 2015 the latter recommended the restitution of a fortepiano formerly owned by Frida Gerngross; following a deferral, the restitution of another fortepiano (SAM 534) was finally recommended in June 2017. All these recommendations are published on the website of the Commission for Provenance Research.²⁷

Databases and online search tools

Over the last two decades, research has become a lot easier. Countless databases, archives, and other sources are now available online, and their number is steadily growing. These are some of the most important databases: the first is the »Findbuch« (Finding Book), the result of many years of experience and research by the Allgemeine Entschädigungsfonds (General Settlement Fund). The Findbuch makes it possible to search 150,993 records for information on individuals and companies listed in files relating to NS property seizures, as well as restitution and compensation proceedings, in the Austrian State Archives and other cooperating archives. In addition, it is also possible to search 21,774 pages of digitized historical directories and registries and official handbooks listing public offices and institutions.²⁸

²⁷ URL: <http://www.provenienzforschung.gv.at/empfehlungen-des-beirats/beschluesse/beschluesse-alphabetish/> [2.5.2017].

²⁸ URL: <https://www.findbuch.at/en/?switchtobrowserview=1> [2.5.2017].



3 Square piano, SAM 573, acquired March 1944.
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien
© KHM-Museumsverband

»The Lehmann«,²⁹ Vienna's digitalized address registry, has also become an integral part of this work. Likewise, researchers access continually updated genealogical databases such as genteam.at.³⁰ In addition, there are specialized databases listing victims of the Nazis, such as the Shoa database maintained by the Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes (Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance).³¹ The IKG also makes available their extensive databases, which have greatly expanded during the last two decades.

Documenting Research

Each individual research step is documented in the Kunsthistorisches Museum's internal database TMS, in which a special provenance research entry screen has been installed. Researchers record, among other things, the extant sources

used, the restitution status, and a valuation of the artifact. A separate entry field entitled »comments« allows them to write down all relevant information. These documentations form the most important part of the final report which is presented to the Advisory Board. It comprises the artwork's history as well as a short history of the respective collection and major actors. At present, these final reports are not released to the public, but some form of publication that meets data protection requirements is being considered. However, provenance researchers report on the state of their research in the Kunst- und Kulturberichte des Bundeskanzleramts every year (annual reports on art and culture published by the Austrian Federal Chancellery), and these are freely available online.³² In addition, the Commission for Provenance Research in 2009 founded a series of publications designed to place these findings in a broader context and make them available to the public.³³

29 URL: <http://www.digital.wienbibliothek.at/wbrobv/periodical/title/info/5311> [26. 7. 2017].

30 URL: <https://genteam.at/> [22. 8. 2017].

31 URL: <https://www.doew.at/> [26. 7. 2017].

32 URL: <http://www.kunstkultur.bka.gv.at/> [22. 8. 2017].

33 URL: <http://www.provenienzforschung.gv.at/kommission/publikationen/> [2. 5. 2017].

3. »Mir ist alles einerlei« (It's all the same to me) – a case study

In the following, I consider in more detail a case that was discussed by the Advisory Board in 2016. It concerns the fortepiano built by Johann Promberger (1779-1834) in 1810, acquired by the SAM in March 1940. The inventory records that it was sold to the collection for 550 Reichsmark by Anton Jirowsky (1877-1941), an instrument maker domiciled in Vienna's 3rd district.³⁴ At first glance, the acquisition does not seem suspicious, as Jirowsky was neither active as an Aryanizer nor persecuted and thus forced to sell.³⁵ However, the acquisition file contains some additional details: in February 1940, Viktor Luithlen informed the director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum that »Ms Maria Gardi (Gerngross) of Reichsrathstrasse 17 in Vienna's 1st district« was trying to sell a fortepiano, and was asking 2,000 Reichsmark for it, a price Luithlen was not prepared to pay. He felt that 500 RM was more than adequate.³⁶ The following day, his superior at the SAM, Heinrich Klapsia, noted: »the price initially suggested by Ms Gardi is based on a conversation with me, during which I was presented only with a photograph of the instrument and its owner's assurance that it was in perfect working order. However, Luithlen's and Sobolak's subsequent visit showed that the quite attractive instrument houses a total ruin.«³⁷

Eventually, Ms Gerngross agreed to sell the fortepiano for 500 Reichsmark.³⁸ A special type of fortepiano, a so-called »giraffe piano«, that had been built in Munich was also on sale, but the collection was not interested in acquiring it.³⁹ This instrument (fig. 4) was sold at auction at the Dorotheum in May 1943, from which date all trace of it is lost.⁴⁰ The SAM eventually acquired the Promberger piano – not, however, from its original owner but from Anton Jirowsky, who acted as a middleman. Clearly an attempt at obfuscating the instrument's



4 Giraffe piano, acquired in May 1943. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien
© KHM-Museumsverband

original provenance, this ruse was to play an important role after 1945. Jirowsky earned 50 Reichsmark from this transaction.

Who was Maria Gardi / Gerngross, the original owner of the Promberger pianoforte? Frida Gerngross was born in 1885 in Vienna as Frida Maria Beck.⁴¹ Her birth is recorded in the lists of births kept by the IKG.⁴² She became a successful singer,

34 SAM inventory, entry for SAM-440.

35 Findbuch-search accessed on 27 June 2017: URL: <https://www.findbuch.at/de/findbuch.html>.

36 KHM-Archive, 35/SAM/39/40, Luithlen to the director of the museum, 1 Feb. 1940.

37 KHM-Archive, 35/SAM/39/40, hand-written comment by Klapsia, 2 Feb. 1940.

38 KHM-Archive, 35/SAM/39/40, report by Luithlen, 28 Mar. 1940.

39 KHM-Archive, 35/SAM/39/40, Luithlen to Dworschak, 1 Feb. 1940.

40 KHM-Archive, 35/SAM/39/40, hand-written comment by Luithlen, 25 May 1943.

41 WStLa, B-MEA-406168-2015-2, request for information from registry office on Frida Gerngross.

42 WStLa, 48 T 4103/47, Frida Gerngross's death certificate.



5 Portrait photo of Maria Gardi from an announcement of Radio Wien, 6 Dec. 1929, p. 9

using Maria Gardi as her stage name (fig. 5); in the 1930s she performed, for example, with the Frank-Fox-Tanz-Orchester (also known as »Wiener Graben Café«). Hits such as »Ich bitte« or »Halt! Einen Moment« made her a household name in the Austrian capital.⁴³ She was known for her repertoire of popular tunes but she also sang operatic arias, performing, for example, a selection from works by Puccini in December 1929.⁴⁴ The papers at the time celebrated the subtlety and sensitivity of her voice.⁴⁵

Maria's first husband had died from battle wounds in 1916;⁴⁶ and some time later she married Robert Gerngross.⁴⁷ Born on 6 January 1876 in Frankfurt/Main, Robert and his younger brother Paul were heavily involved in the running of the large eponymous department store owned by their family; it was the largest department store in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and it still exists today.⁴⁸ Contemporary advertisements celebrated the building that had been designed in the

early twentieth century by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, a team of architects famous for theatres that dotted the Habsburg Empire, as one of »Vienna's main sights«.⁴⁹ Even in the early 1930s, the department store's Jewish ownership led to it being singled out by the Nazis for politically motivated attacks. On one of the Sundays before Christmas in 1932, when the store was packed with shoppers, they entered it throwing tear gas and stink bombs, causing a stampede which resulted in a number of casualties.⁵⁰ After the »Anschluss« the department store was quickly Aryanized and its name changed to Kaufhaus der Wiener – Ludwig & Co (Department store of the Viennese – Ludwig & Co). Most family members managed to emigrate in time, but not Robert and Frida Gerngross. Forced to move into a »Sammelwohnung« (flats in which Jews were, literally, »collected« before their deportation), they were deported to Izbica in April 1942, where they were murdered.⁵¹

In 1946, the Gerngross's piano was close to being included in the list of objects that had to be reported to the authorities according to the Vermögensentziehungs-Anmeldeverordnung (Decree on the Notification of Seized Property), but a crossed out hand-written note shows why the director of the collection did not, after all, think that this was necessary: »9200 (440) fortepiano, by Promberger and others, P. Z. 24 10 30 March 1940, bought from Jirowsky, violin maker, who had bought the piano from Ms Gardi (Gerngross), only indirectly Jewish. Price of 500.– rather high.«⁵²

Fortunately, a number of audio recordings by Maria Gardi have survived. For example, one can find on the Internet a 1930 recording of her singing »Mir ist alles einerlei«, the title song of »Das Geld auf der Strasse«,⁵³ a film from the same year.⁵⁴ Knowing her terrible fate, the line »Wer wird denn das Leben so tragisch nehmen« (Why should we take life so seriously?) is extremely depressing.

43 URL: http://www.phonomuseum.at/includes/content/disko/disko_graphie_oesterreich.pdf [18.6.2015].

44 Radio Wien, 6 Dec. 1929, p. 9.

45 Freiheit! 18 June 1930, p. 5. Wiener Salonblatt, 24 Nov. 1929, p. 1.

46 Neues Wiener Tagblatt, 17 Dec. 1916. URL: <http://www.digital.wienbibliothek.at/wk/periodical/pageview/720717> [18.6.2015].

47 According to the Registry Office, they married in Vienna on 6 Feb. 1918; according to Georg Gaugusch: Gardi, Maria. In: Wer einmal war: Das jüdische Großbürgertum Wiens 1800-1938, Vol. 1. Vienna 2011, p. 872, they married on 8 Jan. 1918 in Vienna.

48 See also Astrid Peterle (Ed.): Kauft bei Juden! Geschichte einer Wiener Geschäftskultur. Vienna 2017.

49 Advertisement in the program booklet »Das Mirakel«, 15 Sept.–3 Oct. 1912 Vienna Rotunde.

50 See Wiener Montagsblatt, 1 Dec. 1932, pp. 1-2.

51 URL: <http://www.doew.at/personensuche>, searching for Frida Gerngross [2.5.2017].

52 KHM-Archive, 4/SAM/46, note, undated, crossed out.

53 URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_on_the_Street [6.8.2018].

54 URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BSKC7-aW_o [2.5.2017].

Closing remarks

At the present stage of provenance research, most of the restituted artifacts are stored in the museum depot and now have little material value. Unlike the instruments removed from celebrated collections, they do not attract much attention and live in the shadows of the SAM's holdings. Yet their

marginal status makes drawing attention to the lives and tragic fates of their original owners even more imperative – each time that the name of a former owner falls into oblivion represents a symbolic death, and, to quote Horkheimer and Adorno, »the dead suffer a fate which the Jews in olden days considered the worst possible curse: may you perish from remembrance.«⁵⁵

(Translation by Agnes Stillfried and Henry Hope)

55 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Transl. by John Cumming. London, New York 1979, p. 216.

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