

Removal goods from the “Adriatic Depot”

Table of contents

- Title of the holdings
- Origins of the holdings
- Informational content
- Alternative sources of information
- Explanations and comments
- Sources

Title of the holdings

Austrian State Archives/Archives of the Republic
Record group: **Entschädigungs- und Restitutionsangelegenheiten** (“Compensation and restitution matters”), 1938–1945
Holdings: ***Vermögensverkehrsstelle*** (“Property Transaction Office”), 1938–1945
File series: “s. Verz” (“See index” – i.e. a mixed collection).
Title: Elenco riassuntivo delle varie partite di masserizie sequestrate con D.P. no. 1100/12409 dell’ 11 Maggio 1943 (“Summary list of the various holdings of confiscated household items with D.P. no. 1100/12409 of 11 May 1943”), Verzeichnis des in Triest sequestierten jüdischen Umsiedlungsgutes (“Index of Jewish removal goods sequestrated in Trieste”)
Box no.: 1574

Origins of the holdings

As a result of the anti-Semitic policies implemented by the Nazis in Germany and annexed Austria, large swaths of the Jewish population eventually saw little other alternative than to leave Reich territory and enter into exile. As the violence intensified (“Anschluss” pogroms in March 1938, November Pogroms in 1938) and spread (partial annexation of Czech territory in October 1938 and March 1939, war against Poland from September 1939), the number of people seeking refuge grew. However, the number of escape routes and countries willing to accept refugees dwindled following the outbreak of war. As a result, people wishing to flee had to look further afield to countries and regions beyond mainland Europe.

If the Jews who had been forced to “emigrate” had had any assets left after the “wild” and quasi-legal “aryanizations” and other forms of looting, and after having paid the “Reich Flight Tax” and later the “Jewish capital levy”, any remaining day-to-day objects, furnishings and, in some cases, tools and utensils needed for work, were entrusted to removal companies. If the exile destinations could only be reached by sea (England, Palestine, North and South America, Australia, Shanghai/China), the removals were loaded on board at the ports of e.g. Hamburg or Trieste and sent from there. Following the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939, commercial overseas shipping was severely restricted and the removal goods remained, as in the case at hand, in the warehouses at the Port of Trieste. Here they were either stored in the “Magazzini Generali” or in the “private” stores of the forwarding agents.

Following the downfall of Germany’s close ally Italian dictator Mussolini in July 1943 and faced with the advancing Western Allied armies, German troops occupied parts of Italy from September 1943. In order to maintain control over northern Adriatic territory, the Germans created an “Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral” whose civil administration was led by a “Supreme Commissar”. The city of Trieste and its port were also situated in the “Operational Zone”. From this time onwards the German occupying forces and the Gestapo could only gain access to the removal goods stored at the port if they were deemed to be subject to the 11. *Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz* (“Eleventh Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law”), which stipulated that German Jews who were not permanently resident in Germany would have their citizenship annulled (including Jews who were deported to concentration camps and ghettos that were occupied by Germany, e.g. the territory of the former state of Poland), whereupon their assets were forfeited to the German state.

The removal goods found in the free port of Trieste were confiscated by the Supreme Commissar of the “Adriatic Littoral” (secret order of 14 October 1943). In the following months, some of the goods were viewed and sorted by the German authorities. Upon the order of the Supreme Commissar, over the course of 1944 day-to-day items were brought by rail to Berlin, Vienna, “Niederdonau” (Lower Austria), Carinthia and Salzburg, where the “National Socialist People’s Welfare” was supposed to distribute them to people who were in need as a result of the war. Goods that were deemed to be valuable – items made of precious metals, artworks and crafted objects, books and stamp collections, rugs and antique furniture – remained under the control of the Nazi authorities.

It can be gathered from the Austrian Ministry of Finance’s correspondence relating to the list that the list was given to the Federal Ministry of Finance by the Austrian Embassy in Rome through the Federal Chancellery – Foreign Affairs (Foreign Ministry) in January 1954 during the course of the settlement of restitution claims that had been submitted to the Department for Property Control and Restitution Matters.

Informational content

The available version of the list, compiled in Italian, is in all likelihood directly related to the confiscation orders for the removal goods issued by the German authorities. It can be assumed that it was compiled between October 1943 and early 1944. Under no circumstances does the list provide an exhaustive record of the removal goods stored in the warehouses at the Port of Trieste. The information contained in the list, or at least

that referring to the removal goods in storage, most probably originated from the documentation of the Italian forwarding agents. This is indicated by the fact that Prefect of the Province of Trieste had issued a decree ordering the confiscation of the Jewish assets stored at the Free Port of Trieste whose owners were living abroad on enemy territory (e.g. in the British Mandate of Palestine), and that the dates which are sometimes given all fall between July 1940 and July 1943, the period prior to the German occupation of Italy. The list is entitled (in English translation) “Summary list of the various holdings of confiscated household items with D.P. no. 1100/12409 of 11 May 1943, XXI [the 21st year since the Fascist seizure of power in Italy] // CONFISCATOR: Bruno de Steinkühl – Trieste”. The remarks about the confiscation relating to individuals could be based on information provided by German authorities (Gestapo).

As the list generally, however not always, contains the identifiers surname, forename, place (territory) of dispatch, and target destination but not residential addresses at the time of dispatch or dates of birth, as well as containing transcription and spelling errors (umlauts, special characters), its informative value is dependent on the supplementary documentation. The list alone does not allow for findings to be made as to what the stored goods comprised, their removal or how they were utilized. In cases where the owner is clearly identified the list substantiates that “Jewish” removal goods at the Free Port of Trieste were expropriated by the Nazi authorities and that a seizure as defined by law had occurred. However, attributing a name to a shipment is not necessarily the same as identifying the sender and the entitled owner.

The forwarding agent that presumably transported the removal goods from their place of origin to Trieste can be gathered from the individual remarks on confiscation. For the most part these records are missing for the forwarding agent E. Schufer. In 45 cases the “Jewish Committee Trieste” is recorded as having claims to the removal goods, among other things. As the “Jewish Committee Trieste” supported emigrating Jews in the transfer of removals predominantly to Palestine, these remarks must originate from the time prior to the creation of the Operational Zone, when the Committee had gained powers of disposition over the goods and, in some cases, had paid overdue bills for forwarding. Once the confiscation order had been issued by the Nazi authorities, however, the tenure to the property was no longer of any legal significance.

The list contains 478 records; 429 of them include the location from which the removal goods were dispatched. 270 of these locations were in Austria, with Vienna being named as place of dispatch in 254 cases. A further 97 locations were elsewhere on German territory and 38 were in the German-occupied so-called “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia” (predominantly Prague).

Alternative sources of information

In general, all files that originated during the course of compensation and restitution proceedings in postwar Austria can potentially be consulted for research and documentary purposes, since from time to time a more in-depth overview of the losses of assets incurred as a result of expulsion, flight or deportation was occasionally submitted to the relevant Austrian authority regardless of whether compensation and restitution claims could be legally enforced.

Documents that were created before the war was over (in May 1945) from which the ownership of the removal goods can be inferred can be found in the files of the Financial Directorates; given the frequency with which Vienna is named as the place of dispatch, special emphasis is placed on the restitution files of the Financial Directorate for Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland at the Austrian State Archives. Furthermore, these restitution files can contain notices of restitution and compensation claims filed after 1945 which yield clues as to the removal goods. The notices filed by injured parties pursuant to the Vermögensentziehungs-Anmeldungsverordnung (“Ordinance on the Notification of Seized Property”) are an additional source of information and can yield, for example, details on the contents of the removal goods. Finally, the notices on reparation claims pursuant to Art. 26 (2) of the Staatsvertrag (“Austrian State Treaty”) 1955, are worthy of mention; they are held at the Austrian State Archives.

Lists of seized removal goods formerly under Jewish ownership can be found in an internal file of the Collection Agencies A and B at the Austrian State Archives: these overviews were exchanged between the Collection Agencies and the “Central Archive of Jewish Successor Organizations”, Frankfurt am Main, and correspond to the list in question in two respects: thematically, with a list entitled “List V on confiscated Jewish removal goods” containing 69 records and – with one exception – only Jews from Germany (“Altreich” – mostly Berlin), and no names matching those on the list at hand. Another list, “List IV on the confiscated Jewish removal goods at the Free Port of Trieste”, with 168 records, fully corresponds with the list contained in the Findbuch: according to the correspondence, “List IV” took people into account who were not known to the records of the Frankfurt “Central Archive”. Due to the fact that the names are listed alphabetically, the references made in the individual records referring to the previous entry (come sopra – “as above”) are taken out of context and – if retained – placed in a misleading context.

Explanations and comments

Although the list mainly deals with the confiscation of removal goods from Jewish ownership, it also covers people who were not subject to the Nazis’ anti-Semitic “Nuremberg Laws”.

The list is organized according to the forwarding agents who had stored the cargo in the storage warehouses at the Port of Trieste. The information is entered into ten columns (see information on data processing). The removal goods are entered as a number of lifts (liftvans, removal lifts or shipping crates – standardized solid wood crates, into which the items were packed) and/or boxes (plural: “colli”, singular: “collo”).

The figures stated are the storage fees that had been incurred up to 31 October 1943 (presumably in the Italian currency, the lira; following the German occupation the exchange rate was 100 lira to 10 Reichsmark. Another three-figure number is presumably also a monetary amount, possibly a “processing fee” charged by the forwarding agent when the records were being made.

It should be noted that in cases where the place of residence was given as a neutral country (e.g. Switzerland, Argentina) or in states that were allied with the Nazis (e.g. Italy, Hungary, Slovakia) a final confiscation was not considered. This is even more so the case if the person in question was not a German national. These circumstances are reflected in the standardized remarks on the individuals, which are worded in such a way as to relativize them:

“Wares (removal goods) possibly owned by Jews who have probably emigrated to a hostile country, or owned by Jews who have emigrated to a neutral territory – therefore it may be possible to lift the confiscation order.”

“Wares (removal goods) owned by citizens of neutral territories or non-Jewish, German nationals who are still resident in their country of origin, on neutral territory, or in Italy. It may be possible to lift the confiscation order on request.”

“Wares (removal goods) owned by natural persons whose race, Jewish or otherwise, is uncertain or who have declared themselves to be German, Aryan nationals without providing documentation. They are currently either in Germany or on neutral territory. It may be possible to lift the confiscation order on request.”

In contrast, the presumption that “[the] goods [removal goods] […] were certainly owned by Jews, who are resident in enemy states” led to the conclusion, “Confiscation possible without further notice”.

In the cases where the confiscation order could potentially be lifted, someone would have to intervene and provide suitable proofs (such as proof of ownership, citizenship, “origin”, place of residence). In isolated cases it is noticeable that cargos were evidently sold at court-ordered auctions in Trieste in order to settle claims of forwarding agents and the “legal” ownership had passed over to other people. On occasion, the German occupying authorities determined when carrying out the confiscations that the contents of liftvans were missing and had, in fact, been looted.

The removal goods that were attributed to people who, for example, were recorded as owners of cargo following an auction, or goods that had no identifying features (surnames), can only be traced by making targeted searches using known characteristics (e.g. liftvan number or company name of the forwarding agent).

The place of dispatch does not necessarily constitute the place of residence and the destination does not necessarily constitute the final place of exile, even if it can be assumed where a large volume of removals were involved (one or more liftvans) that the place of dispatch was, at the same time, the place of residence. Identical places of dispatch and destination permit cautious conclusions to be drawn: either a certain destination was not yet know at the time of dispatch and the place of dispatch was simply recorded as the destination, too, when the list was being drawn up in 1943/1944, and/or the sender was still living at his/her place of residence. In these cases, it must be assumed that it was no longer possible to emigrate legally due to the ban on emigration for German Jews and Jews from German-occupied territory that had been in place since October/November 1941 and that they had, as a result, fallen victim to the genocide of Jews.

It can be gathered from the documentation from the Austrian State Archives that the cargo that had been stored in store no. 56 was sent to Berlin, with transport commencing in February 1944. Fourteen records bear dates between 6 and 30 December 1944. These are preceded by an “F” and may be the records of the confiscation by the German occupying authorities.

Sources

Anderl, Gabriele/Blaschitz, Edith/Loitfellner, Sabine/Triendl, Mirjam/Wahl, Niko: “Arisierung” von Mobilien (Publications of the Austrian Historical Commission, vol. 15) (Vienna, 2004), p. 195–223.
Lütgenau, Stefan August/Schröck, Alexander/Niederacher, Sonja: Zwischen Staat und Wirtschaft. Das Dorotheum im Nationalsozialismus (Vienna, 2006), p. 127–151.
Rabinovici, Doron: Instanzen der Ohnmacht. Wien 1938–1945: Der Weg zum Judenrat (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), p. 223–242.
Austrian State Archives/Archives of the Republic, Entschädigungs- und Rückstellungsangelegenheiten (“compensation and restitution measures“), sub-holding Hilfsfonds (“Assistance Fund”), Sammelstellen A und B (“Collection Agencies A and B”), folder J 7 (internal files)
[NB.: As the folder J 7 could not be located at the time of the research, Mag. Wiebke Krohn has kindly provided us with her scans of the folder’s contents.]
Austrian State Archives/Archives of the Republic, Entschädigungs- und Rückstellungsangelegenheiten (“compensation and restitution measures“), sub-holding Bundesministerium für Finanzen (“Federal Ministry of Finance”), Department 34 (Vermögenssicherung und Rückstellungsangelegenheiten [“property control and restitution matters”]), box 8490 (“Masse Adria” [“Adriatic Depot”]).

Information on data processing: Removal goods from the “Adriatic Depot”

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