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Restitution: Transnational return of books

24 Jan 2023

On 13 December 2022, books were returned to the heirs of Heinrich Klang (1875-1954) in a multi-party, transnational restitution.

Klang, who was renowned for his commentary on the Austrian General Civil Code, habilitated in Austrian Private Law at the University of Vienna in 1923 and received the title of associate university professor in 1925. After the “Anschluss” of Austria to the German Reich in 1938, he was persecuted, removed from office and had his *venia legendi* withdrawn by decree of the Ministry of Education because he was Jewish. As a result, Klang was forced to sell the majority of his private library comprising around 9,600 volumes through antiquarian bookshops in Vienna, Leipzig, Berlin and Frankfurt am Main. In September 1942, Klang was deported to the Nazi ghetto in Theresienstadt.

Klang survived the ghetto and returned to Vienna in July 1945. Having been appointed honorary professor of civil law in August 1945, he served as a judge on the Supreme Court (Senate President) and as Chairman of the Supreme Restitution Commission from 1945 until his retirement in 1949. This three-judge senate had to enforce the Third Restitution Act of March 1947 as the second and highest court of appeal. Klang, who died in Vienna on 22 January 1954, did not live to see the restitution of his own library.

The restitution of books from the holdings of the University of Vienna, the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration and six other libraries in Austria and Germany to Klang’s heirs is the result of extensive provenance research. While it does not “redress” the injustices of the Nazi regime it is hoped that it provides some form of belated justice.

Links

Press release by the media portal of the University of Vienna (in German)



The restituted books

Photo: Universität Wien/Marc Drews