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Austrian National Library

Common information

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Provenance research

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In accordance with the Art Restitution Law (Federal Law Gazette I 181/1998) the Austrian National Library presented its provenance report on illegal acquisitions during the era of National Socialism in early December 2003. The report was preceded by careful and detailed research into all questionable holdings. Around 150,000 printed items and several thousand objects from collections were examined for indications of previous owners. Following research in the relevant files of the Austrian National Library, the Austrian State Archive, the Vienna City Library, the Vienna City Archive, the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments and of other archives it was possible to document the seizure and distribution of the library's holdings and to determine the fate of at least some of the wronged former owners. The report, which has been submitted to the Advisory Board at the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture for processing, contains information about 38,210 collection items and 14,193 printed works that have been identified as questionable in the meaning of the Art Restitution Law.

As of September 2006, 32,252 objects had been returned to their rightful owners.

On 1st June 2010, during a commemorative ceremony at the Austrian National Library, the National Fund symbolically accepted three of 8,363 books seized during the National Socialist era, the previous owners of which were, despite intensive research, no longer able to be determined.

During its 48th session on 11th September 2009, the Art Restitution Advisory Board for the first time recommended that these publications, which had remained heirless, be transferred to the National Fund in order that they could be utilized appropriately.

The objects subject of the recommendation are so called ownerless publications which had come into the possession of the Austrian National Library via the Gestapo (Secret State Police).

After the ceremonial transfer, the books were repurchased by the National Library for 135,000 Euros. The proceeds from these one-time looted books will be used to benefit survivors of the Holocaust in accordance with the provisions of the National Fund Law. The books will remain in the holdings of the National Library; however the origins of the books will be indicated in the catalogue.