**Guide to the *List of Owners of Objects Housed at the Jewish Museum***

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A variety of sources, primarily via the Internet, have recently been spreading fragmentary and incomplete information that has regrettably misled many a non-specialist and specialist alike. Given this situation, the Jewish Museum in Prague (JMP) considers it their duty to provide for the public the contents of the *List of Owners of Objects Housed at the Jewish Museum*.[[1]](#footnote-1) The *List* is supplemented with data compiled from the relevant sources at the JMP and at the Terezín Initiative Institute (TII), including commentary, with the purpose of setting the record straight on the misinformed claims that the *List* is a reliable key for determining the ownership history of the art and cultural objects that have been housed in the collections of the JMP since the war years of 1942 to 1945.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The aforementioned twenty-six-page *List* published in 1948 by the National Administration for Property Assets of the Jewish Council of Elders (Czech acronym NSMP ŽRS)[[3]](#footnote-3) and made available for sale to the public, is as commonly accessible in the public libraries of the Czech Republic as any other publication.[[4]](#footnote-4) Appearing on the 25 paginated pages are a total of 874 names of persons mainly from Prague and the surrounding area, though in some cases there are names from other locations in the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, deported to the ghettos in Łódź and Terezín (Theresienstadt), and they are designated as the original owners of objects that as of the date of publication were thought to be found in the collections of the JMP.

The short introduction in the published *List* mentions that the data inventoried are the name of the person (the last known owner), last known place of residence in the territory of the Protectorate (only municipality and district given), and transport number, under which this person was deported either to Łódź or to Terezín. The Introduction also summarizes in six points everything that the original owner, or his/her legal successor, must do and submit as of the date of publication if he/she wished to make a restitution claim to the NSMP ŽRS pursuant to Act No. 128/1946 Coll. from May 16, 1946, On the Invalidity of Certain Property Related Acts Effected in the Period of Unfreedom and on Claims Stemming from this Invalidity and from Other Encroachments on One’s Property.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Introduction to the *List* unfortunately provides no information on how the data was compiled, that is, what concrete sources of information did the authors refer to and how comprehensive, reliable, and up-to-date these sources were at the time the compilation was made and published.

In view of the fact that almost immediately after the Second World War ended the Jewish Museum in Prague, which along with other Jewish organizations was placed under national administration on May 13, 1945, began working on properly documenting the till then uncatalogued parts of the collection (confiscated objects in the warehouses and depositories under Museum administration) and on identifying the original owners of confiscated property, and regularly publishing their findings in the *Bulletin of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities* over the course of this work, it might be reasonably assumed that the *List* published by the NSMP ŽRS was based, at least in part, on the work performed by the Jewish Museum’s curators.

Because the list was published at a relatively late date (the identification and documentation of original owners on which restitution cases relied had been ongoing since 1945, while the *List* was not published until 1948), it is likely that by the time of its publication it was no longer current and even contained the names of those who, or whose survivors, were identified as owners and had already had the objects found in the JMP’s collections returned to them between 1945 and 1948.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Further analysis of the list also revealed that it contained a considerable number of errors or imprecise data. The discrepancies were largely of the following types:

**1. Incongruity between the name and transport number in a number of entries.**

Because nothing is known about the methodology used when compiling the list or about the sources the list is based on, in those cases where the transport number does not correspond to the person’s name it is not possible to determine which of the two data points, name or number, was the one erroneously recorded. In these cases, two names are generally given in the respective field of the table, that is, the person to whom the listed transport number refers and the person recorded in the databases of the JMP and the TII under the listed name (where it is possible to exactly identify the person based on name from the available sources). The frequency of errors associated with transports G and H is 100%, and although the absence of other information sources makes it impossible to verify this assertion, it could be assumed that the transport number is the more likely to have been recorded correctly (transport H was dispatched from Prague for Terezín on November 30, 1941), and the names of the persons recorded in the *List* as belonging to transport H actually match those in the TII’s database for transport G (which left Brno for Terezín on December 2, 1941).

2. **In some cases minors are listed as the owners (including children who were born in Terezín).**

In these cases the respective field of the table gives the parents’ names (or at least of one parent), or the names of older siblings as well, if identification was possible from the available sources.

**3. In some cases the names of the members of the same nuclear family appear on the list as a discrete entry.**

Because the list is reproduced exactly as it was published, this fact was not given special consideration in our table. By the correspondence of names, last registered addresses prior to transport, and often the proximity of transport numbers entered in the respective column of the table, it is clear that these are members of the same family and household.

Taking all this into account and the fact that nothing is known about the methodology and the types of sources used to compile the data, it should be evident that the published *List*, which came out at the very end of the first round of restitutions that was brought to a halt once the Communists seized power in February 1948, contains a large number of errors and inaccuracies and should therefore be considered nothing more than one of dozens, if not hundreds, of historical publications used in provenance research (such as auction house catalogues, historical publications of collections, inventories, catalogues raisonnés, etc.).

Lastly, the *List* is nowhere near a comprehensive compilation of the names of all the original owners, whose property was, or is still, housed in the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Many objects, particularly those found in the Visual Arts Collection, provide no clues as to provenance, and likewise there is no information on provenance in the historical documents that would allow us to unequivocally determine the last original owner prior to the artwork’s confiscation through the agency of the Prague Treuhandstelle.[[7]](#footnote-7) Be that as it may, clearly the vast majority of these objects were incorporated into the JMP’s collections between 1942 and 1945, and thus it was property confiscated from private owners. Researching the ownership history of these artworks and cultural objects involves many challenges, not least of which is the time-consuming process of searching for and verifying additional provenance clues and pieces of evidence, whether from published or archival sources. Since we are not dealing with first-rate works of art, which, given their importance, were published and have a sales history, the chances are very low that a reliable determination of the original owner can be made without further evidence coming to light, and more than likely this would need to be provided by the very person who is requesting identification for the purpose of a potential restitution claim.

The Jewish Museum in Prague, therefore, calls on anyone who knows or thinks that a family member was deported to either Łódź or Terezín from the territory of the so-called Oberlandratsbezirk Prag (the Prague administrative district of the Protectorate that encompassed the city of Prague and its immediate environs, such as Zbraslav, Roztoky, etc.) to request that background research be undertaken, a service the JMP’s professional staff performs free of charge and once a request has been submitted. This has been our policy to date, and it will continue to be so. The research entails examining all available sources and all the relevant data and information that could help in identifying any work(s) of art in our collections. For us to begin this research, the following minimum information is required: full name and date of birth, or at least year of birth, of the person(s) deported.

1. Official bibliographical data: *Seznam majitelů předmětů uskladněných v Židovském museu*, Praha: Národní správa majetkových podstat v Praze V, Josefovská 7, 1948, 25 paginated pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The contents are provided as an Excel spreadsheet. This is done primarily to create conformity between the contents of the *List* and the data from the databases of the Terezín Initiative Institute, or in some cases the data from other relevant sources. The data from the *List* has been transcribed faithfully from the officially printed version. In those instances where a clear mistake has been made, the correct data is given in brackets. Discrepancies between the transcription of names in the published list and the entries in the databases (e.g., Eugen=Evžen, Bedřiška=Frieda, Valtr=Walter, Hanuš=Jan, Elsa=Eliška, Benedikt=Benedict, etc.) have not been emended if they are not clearly in error. The database entries were excerpted from the English version of the TII database so that non-Czech users could also orient themselves to the data. Some of the entries given in English are accompanied by Czech glosses without further translation as they represent information that is supplemental and not essential. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The National Administration for Property Assets was an executive organ for implementing what Decree No. 5 of the President of the Republic from May 19, 1945, On the Invalidity of Certain Property Related Acts Effected in the Period of Unfreedom and Concerning the National Administration of Property Assets of Germans, Hungarians, Traitors and Collaborators and of Certain Organizations and Institutions mandated as: “All enterprises and all property assets shall be taken under national administration wherever this is required in the interests of continuous production and economic life.” One of the so-called Beneš decrees, the full version of Decree No. 5, including links to amendments (116/1949 Coll. – governmental order from April 22, 149, On the Further Redeployments of the Scope of Public Administration and 122/1951 Coll. – governmental order from December 11, 1951, On the Further Redeployments of the Scope and on Additional Streamlining of Public Administration), is found at the website of the Parliament of the Czech Republic: <http://www.psp.cz/docs/laws/dek/51945.html> or at the website of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic: <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/SearchResult.aspx?q=5/1945&typeLaw=zakon&what=Cislo_zakona_smlouvy> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The link to the relevant record in the online catalogue of the National Library of the Czech Republic: [http://aleph.nkp.cz/F/MQK42UXPAU8A3MCTMLIP8E21R2424VDSAG9FMFGLVH1M558BHB-07734?func=find-b&find\_code=WRD&x=28&y=11&request=Seznam+majitel%C5%AF+p%C5%99edm%C4%9Bt%C5%AF&filter\_code\_1=WTP&filter\_request\_1=&filter\_code\_2=WLN&adjacent=N#tail](http://aleph.nkp.cz/F/MQK42UXPAU8A3MCTMLIP8E21R2424VDSAG9FMFGLVH1M558BHB-07734?func=find-b&find_code=WRD&x=28&y=11&request=Seznam+majitel%25C5%25AF+p%25C5%2599edm%25C4%259Bt%25C5%25AF&filter_code_1=WTP&filter_request_1=&filter_code_2=WLN&adjacent=N#tail). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The full version of Act No. 128/1946 Coll. is found at the website of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic: <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/SearchResult.aspx?q=128/1946&typeLaw=zakon&what=Cislo_zakona_smlouvy>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. From 1945 to 1950 a total of 2396 objects from the JMP’s collection were earmarked for return. This number includes restituted works of art as well as ritual objects that were distributed to the 52 restored Jewish religious communities for their use. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Treuhandstelle Prag was set up on October 13, 1941, in conjunction with the onset of the mass deportations of Jews in the Protectorate. Though officially part of the Prague Jewish Religious Community, which was later renamed the Jewish Council of Elders, its activities were naturally under the supervision of the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung (Central Office for Jewish Emigration), itself renamed in 1942 the Zentralamt für Regelung der Judenfrage (Central Office for the Solution of the Jewish Question). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)