

World Jewish Restitution Organization



For Immediate Release

CLAIMS CONFERENCE AND WJRO ANNOUNCE ONLINE PUBLICATION ON 150 LIBRARY SEIZURE OPERATIONS STOLEN BY THE NAZIS IN BELGIUM

Historic online publication documents wartime private libraries containing more than 250,000 books

(New York, NY) December 7, 2020: The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) announce the publication of “Documenting Nazi Library Plunder in Occupied Belgium and Limited Postwar Retrieval” at https://www.errproject.org/looted_libraries_be.php.

“This new online publication represents years of knowledge that many thought were lost forever during the Holocaust in Belgium,” said Gideon Taylor, Chair of Operations, WJRO and President of the Board of Directors of the Claims Conference. “This work that was researched and investigated by experts in the field, will be a powerful resource for Holocaust survivors and their families, the Belgian Jewish community, and researchers around the world.”

The publication features data about Belgian library collections stolen by the Nazis during World War II. Information about the contents of those collections is now available in digital format online for the first time. The library materials were taken from victims of the Holocaust more than 75 years ago by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR)—the Nazi agency organized by Hitler’s ideological spokesman, Alfred Rosenberg. During its operations, the ERR deliberately and methodically identified private libraries of individuals and institutions that contained important cultural and historical knowledge, and plundered materials that were curated over many careers and lifetimes. From August 1940 to February 1943, the ERR conducted 150 library seizure operations across Belgium that included an estimated 250,000 – 300,000 volumes of books.

“Understanding where these books and cultural artifacts ended up not only offers a more accurate account of what happened, but also lays the beginning foundational work for individuals and organizations who seek to pursue possible claims in the future,” continued Taylor.

This new two-part publication includes digitalized original ERR wartime library seizure lists documenting the contents of looted collections, extensive charts naming all the victims, and combined data regarding the 150 ERR seizure operations. The historic publication is part of a series of interrelated original projects that offer information on the location of ERR records and presents results of extensive new research on specific Nazi-seized cultural items.

The launch of the publication on the Claims Conference ERR Project Website coincides with the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and of the beginning of the historic International War Crimes Trials in Nuremberg where Rosenberg was condemned to death.

The publication focuses on the private libraries in Belgium filled with collections of cultural knowledge that were confiscated from Jews, Masons, political elite, liberal professors, labor and socialist sources, and more, often with considerable archived materials (and sometimes art) that were shipped to Germany between the fall of 1940 and the summer of 1944. Large portions of the combined library loot were shipped to the former Soviet Union, where they remain today. Other portions were dispersed throughout Eastern Europe.

Part 1 of the publication, now issued online, is based on the ERR Belgian office files that surfaced in Kyiv in the 1990s, long hidden in Ukraine as part of the most extensive surviving collection of ERR records from Europe.

The forthcoming Part 2 focuses on the minimal postwar repatriation of books to Belgium retrieved by the Western Allies from Germany and Austria after defeat of the Nazi regime. It then identifies examples of ‘twice-looted’ Belgian books, first seized by the ERR in the West and then appropriated a second time postwar. Many were nationalized in several countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Some of these books are now held in national or state libraries in Moscow and Minsk, many of them even with dedications to Western European Holocaust victims. Others have been identified in Poland and the Czech Republic.

This publication is part of an ongoing series that documents looted cultural artifacts. An earlier publication focused on looted French libraries, and following this Belgium publication, an additional study underway focuses on Dutch libraries.

“Documenting Nazi Library Plunder in Occupied Belgium and Limited Postwar Retrieval” was researched and produced by Belgian historian/archivist Michel Vermote (Amsab Institute of Social History, Ghent, Belgium) and Dr. Patricia Kennedy Grimsted (based at the Ukrainian Research Institute and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University). Funding for the project was provided by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), including digitization of the extensive ERR archival sources used, in cooperation with the Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine (TsDAVO) and the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv).

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[WJRO](#) represents world Jewry in pursuing claims for the recovery of Jewish properties in Europe (outside of Germany and Austria). WJRO was established by leading world Jewish organizations to address the restitution of Jewish property and to remind the world that the time has come to redress the enormous material wrongs caused to European Jewry during the Holocaust.

More information about the Claims Conference can be found [here](#).

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