

## Decoding the Records of Cultural Plunder:

AI, Linked Data, and Nazi-era
Looted Art

We invite you to come with us on our digital journey of unlocking and decoding historical evidence that provides a more complete picture of the largest cultural plunder campaign in history. Discover how archival material helps trace the fates of looted objects and rescue biographies of forgotten Jewish contributors to European cultural life.

Such examples help us learn more about what was stolen, by whom, where it was taken, and the fate of the objects and their owners. With this information, we can reconstruct and recover long forgotten cultural legacies of Holocaust victims.

## MARGINALIZING JEWS AND SUPPRESSING JEWISH LIFE

Following the National Socialist takeover of power in Germany on January 30, 1933, the government instituted numerous antisemitic laws and regulations that stripped Jews of their rights, livelihoods, and societal presence. Jews were forced to sell or give away their businesses, homes, and personal property, including art, household furnishings, musical instruments, libraries, and Jewish religious objects.

The active Jewish presence in the cultural world was brought to a crashing halt with forced resignations and regulations abruptly ending Jewish participation in cultural life. Jewish artists, writers, musicians, actors, and directors were dismissed from their positions and professional engagements for their alleged corrosive influence on German art. One antisemitic regulation after the next robbed Jews of ever more layers of cultural identity and human dignity.

The Nazis made no secret of their desire to suppress and ban Jewish life and culture from German society, ultimately annihilating all traces of Jewish life and identity. The Nazi plunder of Jewish-owned cultural property was the prelude to the genocide of the Jews of Europe.

## DOCUMENTING THE LOOTING OF JEWISH CULTURAL PROPERTY

Following the end of the war, the significant role of cultural theft in the Holocaust was largely ignored. The perpetrators suffered limited consequences, many quickly regaining prewar positions of distinction and prominence. Although large amounts of the stolen property were recovered by Allied Forces, experts estimate hundreds of thousands of artworks remain missing.

Far more research of archival material is needed to understand the unprecedented scale and consequences of the Nazi looting campaign of Jewish cultural property. Although many records were burnt and lost during the war, the theft remains a well-documented crime. However, the evidence is buried in hundreds of archives scattered across Europe and beyond, largely inaccessible to those without expertise or the time and means to visit multiple archives.

Many documents have been scanned and are available online. However, this material is not easily searchable for specific details; a major hurdle to researchers, given that the information on cultural property is primarily *within* the documents. Instead, computer transcriptions of scanned records into machine-readable documents allow both cross-archival research and research at the individual document level.

## DECODING THE RECORDS OF CULTURAL PLUNDER

Advanced computer technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), poses growing risks in research fields, such as increasingly sophisticated AI-generated Holocaust distortion material. However, AI also opens new opportunities to put previously difficult-to-access archival material online. Technological advancements are allowing the Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project (JDCRP) for the first time to create a transnational online digital platform that will facilitate the linking and matching of documents for provenance research on stolen objects and their owners. While a similar digitization process has begun in some archives documenting the murder that took place in the Shoah, the JDCRP Foundation is presumably the first to do this for the documentation of the theft that preceded and accompanied that murder.

