

Wartime and Post-War Confiscations of East Asian Objects Held in the Collections of the Celje Regional Museum

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Abstract

The article attempts to clarify, on the basis of laws adopted during and after the Second World War, how East Asian items became part of the museum collections held today by the Celje Regional Museum (Pokrajinski muzej Celje, PMC). The first part of the article focuses on confiscations of cultural and historical objects carried out by the Nazis in Lower Styria (*Untersteiermark*) between 1941 and 1945. The second part of the article covers the period immediately after the end of the Second World War. This was the period that saw the start of the formation of so-called national property, in other words the passage of ownership from private to state hands. As will be shown, a series of laws regulating the new authorities' attitude towards property were passed in a relatively brief period. In the summer of 1945, the task of collecting cultural and historical objects was taken over by collection centres established for this purpose. One such collection centre was located in Celje. With the help of archival sources, we have attempted to shed light on its operations.

Keywords: East Asian objects, confiscation, legislation, Celje Regional Museum

Med- in povojne zaplembe vzhodnoazijskih predmetov, shranjenih v zbirkah Pokrajinskega muzeja Celje

Izvleček

Prispevek poskuša na podlagi zakonov, sprejetih med vojno in po njej, pojasniti, kako so vzhodnoazijski predmeti sploh postali del muzejskih zbirk, ki jih danes hranijo v Pokrajinskem muzeju Celje. Prvi del prispevka se osredotoča na nacistične zaplembe kulturno-zgodovinskih predmetov na Spodnjem Štajerskem med letoma 1941 in 1945. Drugi del prispevka obravnava čas neposredno po koncu druge svetovne vojne, ko se je začela oblikovati t. i. narodna imovina, se pravi prehod lastništva iz zasebne v državno last. Kot bo prikazano, se je v kratkem času zvrstila množica zakonov, ki so urejali novi odnos do premoženja. Nalogo zbiranja kulturno-zgodovinskih predmetov so poleti 1945 prevzeli v ta namen ustanovljeni zbirni centri. Eden izmed takšnih zbirnih centrov je bil tudi v Celju. S pomočjo arhivskih virov smo poskusili osvetliti njegovo delovanje.

Ključne besede: vzhodnoazijski predmeti, zaplembe, zakonodaja, Pokrajinski muzej Celje

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Introduction

Among its collections The Celje Regional Museum also holds the collection of objects from Asia and South America. The collection came into being as a stand-alone collection during the organization and cataloguing of the museum's holdings in 1964. At the time of this inventory, curator Milena Moškon (1928–2021) noted that objects of Asian and South American provenance had been collected together and separated from the material that had come to the museum via the District Collection Centre in Celje. At this time the collection ran to 152 inventory items (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2021, 7–18).¹ Even then, the museum staff were faced with the problem of establishing where the individual items came from, with Moškon writing that it would still be necessary “to determine the exact provenance of each item separately”.² As part of the project *Orphaned Objects: Examining East Asian Objects Outside Organised Collecting Practices in Slovenia (J6-3133)*, we determined that 126 objects held in the collection were of East Asian provenance. We also identified a further 33 East Asian objects held by the museum as part of its Cultural History Collection. For the most part these are various types of Japanese and Chinese ceramics made for export. In total, then, we are talking about 159 objects of East Asian origin.

As part of this same project, we also succeeded in establishing that not all the objects were the subject of post-war confiscations. The first part of the article focuses on confiscations of cultural and historical objects carried out by the Nazis in Lower Styria (*Untersteiermark*) between 1941 and 1945. Responsibility for the confiscation of objects of this type lay with the branch office of the General Trustee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Assets (*Generaltreuhänder für die Sicherstellung der Kulturgüter*) at the Office of the Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in Maribor. A task force (*Einsatzkommando*) was created specifically to collect and record objects of cultural heritage. The task force started working in November 1941 and completed its work in July 1942. At least two objects that are held today in the museum's Asian collection can be connected to confiscations by the Nazis during the Second World War. The objects in question are a set of Japanese armour from Sternstein Castle in Frankolovo (*Schloss Sternstein*) and a small Japanese lacquered cabinet with relief decoration taken from dvorec Golič near Slovenske Konjice (*Schloss Golitsch bei Gonobitz*).

1 For more insight into the topic on collecting East Asian objects in Slovenia, see the articles in the thematic issue “East Asia in Slovenia: Collecting Practices, Categorization and Representation” in the *Asian Studies* journal (2021, 9/3).

2 “Azijska in deloma južno-ameriška zbirka.” Document held by PMC.

In the case of post-war confiscations, and based on the documents kept in the Celje Regional Museum (*Pokrajinski muzej Celje*, PMC), we can distinguish between those that took place in castles and country mansions and those carried out in the homes of wealthy members of the bourgeoisie. This was the period that saw the start of the formation of so-called national property. A series of laws regulating the new authorities' attitude towards property were passed in a relatively brief period. The process of moving from private to state ownership also included cultural heritage objects. At the end of August 1945, the task of collecting cultural and historical objects was taken over by collection centres established for this purpose, namely the Federal Collection Centre (*Federalni zbirni center*, FZC) at the Ministry of Education in Ljubljana for cultural and historical objects located anywhere in Slovenia, along with district collection centres in Maribor, Celje and Novo Mesto. With the help of archival sources, we have attempted to shed light on its operations. A case described in the article illustrates the functioning of the post-war authorities and describes a confiscation of property that later proved to be unjustified. This particular confiscation was the origin of a pair of candelabra of a type rare in Slovenia that the museum holds today as part of its collection. In this context one thing has to be kept in mind, which is that the reconstruction of provenance is made more difficult by the scant descriptions of the objects concerned, and the small amount of archival material available, which is also fragmented and dispersed. Taken as a whole, the issue of confiscations is a complex matter and, at least as far as our collection is concerned, we have to take into account both confiscations by the Nazis and confiscations by the Communist authorities. The Nazi authorities used confiscations to weaken the economic power of the Slovene nation, to destroy it and incorporate it as quickly as possible into the Reich. The post-war Communist authorities, on the other hand, wanted to destroy the private sector and create a state or social sector. As Mikola notes, the Nazi confiscations had a mainly racial basis, while those carried out by the Communists had a class basis (Mikola 1999, 9).

Nazi Confiscations

Just as elsewhere in Europe, confiscations of property in Lower Styria were an integral part of the Nazi assimilation policy towards the Slovenes. The first discussions of the form that Nazi measures would take in Lower Styria and Upper Carniola (*Oberkrain*; present-day Gorenjska) took place on 8 and 9 April 1941 at a meeting in Graz. More precise instructions on what property should be confiscated in Lower Styria were given by Himmler himself during a visit to Maribor on 18 April 1941. In his special "instructions on confiscation", Himmler ordered

the confiscation of all Yugoslav state property, all Church property, the possessions of all deported individuals and Habsburg possessions (Ferenc 1980a, 62).³

The Chief of Civil Administration (*Chef der Zivilverwaltung*), Sigfried Uiberreither (1908–1984), was directly subordinate to Hitler himself and was the only legislative authority in Lower Styria. The laws and ordinances of the German state administration only applied in occupied territory if introduced by the Chief of Civil Administration by an ordinance or proclamation in his own official journal (Žnidarič 2004, 29). Among the earliest ordinances of the Chief of Civil Administration for Lower Styria was one on the protection of cultural monuments (Ferenc 1968, 736).⁴ This ordinance, no. 4 of 21 April 1941, was written in Slovene as well as in German and it follows from it that “all movable and immovable objects of historical, artistic or cultural character, and all groups and collections of objects that form a single whole by virtue of a historical, artistic or cultural connection, shall be placed under protection as monuments with immediate effect”.⁵ All destruction, alteration or sale of the aforementioned cultural monuments was prohibited. Any exceptions would only be permitted with the authorization of the Chief of Civil Administration and “the acquisition of such monuments by means of voluntary sale” without the authorization of the Chief of Civil Administration was likewise prohibited.⁶ The Nazi authorities also removed valuable cultural and historical objects from churches, monasteries and museums on the pretext of safeguarding them from the dangers of war (Godeša 2005, 662).

On 22 April 1941, pursuant to the Ordinance on the Consolidation of German Nationhood in Lower Styria, the Office of the Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in Maribor (*Dienststelle des Beauftragten des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums in Marburg*) was established (Ferenc 1980a, 70–71).⁷ The ordinance itself, no. 5 of 24 November 1941, reveals that the Office’s duties included the confiscation of property and the administration of confiscated property. The above mentioned ordinance no. 4 of 21 April 1941 appears to have been largely ignored, and traffickers

3 See “Richtlinien und Anweisungen des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums zur Aussiedlung von Slowenen und Ansiedlung von Deutschen in der Untersteiermark” (Ferenc 1980f).

4 See *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark*, no. 4/1941, 21 April 1941, 31.

5 Ibid.

6 See *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark*, no. 4/1941, 21 April 1941.

7 See *Verordnung des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark über die Festigung deutschen Volkstums in der Untersteiermark*, no. 5/1941, 24 April 1941.

and German dealers continued to remove or sell cultural and historical objects. Accordingly, in May 1941, the Chief of Civil Administration issued in Maribor an ordinance, no. 11 of 16 May 1941, on the protection of household furnishings of “national historical” value in Lower Styria, in which the purchase, exchange or removal of such objects was prohibited until further notice.⁸ Simultaneously, an ordinance was issued for Styria stating that cultural and historical heritage had to be separated from other confiscated items and made available to the economic department of the service of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*) (Mohar 2020, 216).

The third ordinance on the consolidation of German nationhood in Lower Styria, dated 23 May 1941, set out the entire procedure concerning the confiscation, removal and management of confiscated property.⁹ This ordinance represented the legal basis for the actual implementation of confiscations in Lower Styria in the period 1941–1945. The confiscated property in Lower Styria also included the property of citizens of those countries that were at war with Germany. A regulation issued on 30 July 1941 relates to the confiscation of “the entire property abandoned in Lower Styria by persons who fled or emigrated abroad after 1 March 1941, confiscated and placed at the disposal of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood for the benefit of the province of Styria”.¹⁰ Following the confiscation and removal of property, a trustee (*Treuhänder*) or administrator (*Verwalter*) was appointed to manage and look after the confiscated property. Himmler gave some general instructions regarding administrators on 18 April 1941, while they were appointed and supervised by the Office of the Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood.¹¹ On 14 April 1941 the Chief of Civil Administration for Lower Styria was also appointed Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in Lower Styria. In April 1941 Erwin Seftschnig was appointed head of the Office and remained in this position until

8 The reference is to older peasant furnishings/Folk Art. Published 16 May 1941 in *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs des Zivilverwaltungs in der Untersteiermark*, no. 11/1941, 37.

9 Published 23 June 1941 in *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs des Zivilverwaltungs in der Untersteiermark*, no. 26/1941, 201–204. With the fourth ordinance of this type, issued on 7 March 1943, the provisions were extended to the property of Jews in Lower Styria. See *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs des Zivilverwaltungs in der Untersteiermark*, no. 7/1943, 35.

10 See “Anordnung über die Einziehung des zurückgelassenen Vermögens in das Ausland geflüchteter oder übersiedelter Personen”. Published 12 August 1941 in *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs des Zivilverwaltungs in der Untersteiermark*, no. 36/1941, 279–80.

11 Published 23 June 1941 in *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs des Zivilverwaltungs in der Untersteiermark*, no. 26/1941, 201–204.

1944. He was succeeded by Herbert Leonhard, the head of the provincial cultural administration under the Chief of Civil Administration for Lower Styria in Graz. From 15 June 1941 until May 1942 the Office had its own Chief of Staff (*Stabsführer*), one Wilhelm Laforce (1896–1965).¹²

The seizure of cultural and historical objects in occupied territories was also carried out by a group headed by Wolfram Sievers (1905–1948), General Secretary of the SS research group *Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage) (Ferenc 1968, 742; Mohar 2020, 219–20; Kater 1974, 28–36). From October 1941 onwards, responsibility for confiscations of cultural and historical objects in Styria lay with the branch office of the General Trustee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Assets (*General-treuhänder für die Sicherstellung der Kulturgüter*) at the Office of the Representative of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in Maribor. Formal consent to set up this branch office in Maribor was given on 4 November 1941 and at the same time the other district commissars in Lower Styria were informed about its operation and the imminent arrival of a “task force” (*Einsatzkommando*) in the field (Ferenc 1980a, 341–42). The task force for the collection and recording of objects of cultural heritage in Lower Styria began its work in early November (Ferenc 1968, 742; 1980a, 477–80).¹³ The task force consisted of a leader, Johannes Wilhelm (also: Willi Johann) Dettenberg (1908–1942) (Wedekind 2019, 47; Ferenc 1980a, 477–80; 1968, 742), and his assistant, the painter Kurt Federlin (1912–1986) (Wedekind 2019, 47; Ferenc 1968, 742; Mohar 2020, 220).

A shortage of fuel and an unusually harsh winter slowed down implementation of the plan in the Celje and Brežice districts and rendered it more difficult. As a result, the original plan to finish collecting at the end of May was delayed and the work was eventually completed on 15 July 1942 (Ferenc 1980a, 477–80). A week later, on 22 July 1942, the branch office of the General Trustee in Maribor was dissolved (*ibid.*). Dettenberg and Federlin began work in the Celje and Brežice districts towards the end of January 1942. Here they received considerable assistance from Pastor Gerhard May (1898–1980), the cultural and national political adviser of the Celje district leadership of the Styrian Homeland Union (*Steirischer Heimatbund*) (Ferenc 1968, 744). A considerable quantity of antique furniture and books belonging to deported Slovene families from Celje and the surrounding area were stored in Celje. The locations in which confiscated property was stored included the Capuchin monastery. Towards the end of

12 See *Verordnung des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark über die Festigung deutschen Volkstums in der Untersteiermark*, no. 5/1941, 24 April 1941.

13 Sievers gives the date of the start of activity as 10 November in his final report. A written note dated 3 March 1942 indicates 5 November 1941 as the start date.

the war Gerhard May submitted a report on cultural activities in Celje in which he describes, among other things, the situation in the repository for cultural and historical objects in the Capuchin church. He also mentions the area from which these objects were taken.¹⁴

Information on the activities of the occupation authorities in the wider Celje area is also provided by Martin Perc, who on 31 May 1945 prepared a report on the acquisitions of the Celje Municipal Museum during the occupation. Perc was—against his will—appointed guardian of the museum from 11 May 1942. He writes, among other things, that the occupation forces had set up a museum repository in the Capuchin church, while many items were also stored in the Orel Hall (*Orlovski dom*).¹⁵ They stored more valuable items in their own storage space in the rooms of the café where they were also billeted, sending them to Berlin or selling them off as confiscated property.¹⁶

In the final report of the branch office of the General Trustee, sent to the central office in Berlin, Sievers noted among other things that most of the seized property consisted of objects of museum value connected to the province, and proposed that these objects be ceded free of charge to, in particular, museums in Lower Styria (Ferenc 1980a, 477–80). He dedicated two points of his report to explaining why museums could not purchase these objects. In the first place, because museums did not have sufficient funds at their disposal to be able to pay for such a large influx of objects. And secondly, because museums could not be expected to use their limited resources to purchase museum pieces for which they have no urgent need or which might even be their property already (ibid, 477–80). In another point Sievers notes that the protected objects had not been removed from Styria and that, with the help of local offices and museum directors, they had, despite problems with transport, been conveyed to museums and stored there safely. This meant that transferring these objects to the museums in question was a mere formality that did not involve any change of location. The numbers of cultural goods seized in Lower Styria were as follows: around 60,000 books and 7,000 coins, 3,130 manuscripts, documents, chronicles and transcriptions of folk

14 The area consists of the Celje district and beyond. Loka pri Zidanem Mostu (*Laak bei Steinbrück*), Novi Dvor in Radeče (*Schloss Weixelstein bei Ratschach*), dvorec Ruda in Loka pri Zidanem Mostu (*Schloß Ruth in Laak bei Steinbrück*), dvorec Golič near Slovenske Konjice (*Schloß Gollitsch bei Gonobitz*) and Slovenske Konjice (*Gonobitz*). SI ZAC, 0075, Okupacijska občina Celje, box 20, sig. 461, Poročilo o kulturni dejavnosti v mestu (1941–1944).

15 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 002, 00007, “Celjski mestni muzej v Celju med okupacijo”. The Orel Hall secretariat is said to be at Cankarjeva ulica 4, and they also had their premises at Samostanska 4, where the task force had a free hand with regard to taking and selecting items.

16 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 002, 00007, “Celjski mestni muzej v Celju med okupacijo”.

songs, 741 antique craft items, 104 religious items and 198 pieces of folk art, 105 old weapons and 828 paintings, drawings and sculptures (ibid., 477–80). At the same time it was agreed that responsibility for further work and any later confiscations would be assumed by the Styrian provincial conservator Walter von Semetkowski (1886–1965) in cooperation with the caretaker of the museums in Styria (*Museumspfleger des Reichsgaues Steiermark*) Hans Karl Anton Riehl (1891–1965)¹⁷ and other museum directors, since this would guarantee ongoing care for cultural items (ibid., 477–80).

This is also thought to have been the most likely scenario with the objects from the Celje repository. The report written by Gerhard May in Celje in 1944 indicates that these objects were intended to be used to create a large-scale homeland museum in the city, although these plans had not yet been realized at the time the report was written.¹⁸ In reality, the situation was different, particularly as regards the problem of the sale of confiscated cultural and historical objects, as can be seen from the report by Martin Perc.

Following the successful completion of work in Lower Styria, activities were meant to continue in Upper Carniola, where the plan was to set up a branch office of the General Trustee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Assets on the Styrian model. In late July 1942, Dettenberg set off on his official mission to Upper Carniola accompanied by SS Obersturmführer Karl Starzach (1913–1945), the officer responsible for archival material, books and museums in occupied Upper Carniola (Oberkrain) at the time. Dettenberg was wounded in a Partisan attack and taken to Golnik Hospital, where he later died. Federlin was unhurt in the attack (Wedekind 2019, 47–49; Mohar 2020, 220). On 11 March 1943 the Chief of Civil Administration, Sigfried Uiberreither, sent a letter to the central office in the Dahlem district of Berlin regarding the final report of the Maribor branch office of the General Trustee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Assets. In it, he thanked everyone who had taken part in this campaign and expressed his acknowledgements. He particularly praised Dettenberg and Federlin, who had completed their difficult task “*tactfully, and in an exemplary and most thorough manner*” (Ferenc 1980a, 584). He expressed his regret at the tragic events in Upper Carniola that had led to Dettenberg’s death and said that the latter’s meritorious actions would be remembered with the greatest admiration (ibid.).

With the completion of work of the task force in Lower Styria, the organized collecting of cultural and historical objects also came to an end. The final report

17 In 1941 he founded the Neue Galerie Graz at the Styrian Provincial Museum (aka Joanneum).

18 SI ZAC, 0075, Okupacijska občina Celje, box 20, sig. 461, “Poročilo o kulturni dejavnosti v mestu (1941–1944)”.

of the branch office of the General Trustee that was sent to the central office in Berlin also leads us to this conclusion. That said, we cannot rule out the possibility that there were individual confiscations of cultural and historical objects, but the museum does not keep any kind of documents which would indicate that after May 1942 new objects were arriving in the museum repository. Moreover, as it turned out during the research into archival material, objects of East Asian provenance were also part of the confiscations. Two such examples are known to us from preserved museum and archive documentation. The first is the confiscation of the Golič Manor near Slovenske Konjice. Golič was visited towards the end of May 1942 by German units from the Branch Office of the General Trustee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Assets. The list of 23 items removed from the property on this occasion include one that is specifically described as being of Japanese provenance, namely a small Japanese lacquered cabinet with relief decoration (“*1 japanisches Aufsatzschränkchen mit schönen Flachreliefschmuck in Schleiflack*”).¹⁹ Among the objects in the collection today, the lacquered cabinet under inventory number A 10 is the item that best corresponds to this description. An inscription at the top of the cabinet reads “Sauerbrunn”, which could indicate the spa of Rogaska Slatina. Another example is a larger confiscation that took place in the Sternstein Mansion, from where the task force took, among other things, items from a set of samurai chest armour, which are presented in more detail below.

Group of Citizens of Countries at War with Germany—Samurai Chest Armour

The property confiscated in Lower Styria also included the property of citizens of those countries that were at war with Germany. This is an important factor, as the following case is related to this type of confiscation, because the owner was a British citizen. The PMC’s collection of objects from Asia and South America includes some items of samurai armour, and the joint inventory number A 144 covers 13 such items. Details of the origin of this armour were first published in 2017 (Trnovec 2021a, 8; 2021b, 41). That same year some of the pieces were shown at the exhibition *Ways of the Samurai* at the National Museum of Slovenia (Trnovec 2021b, 41; Lazar 2017, 311–17). Until recently it was thought that all 13 pieces were among the items removed from Lemberg Castle (Lazar 2017, 311), although research has revealed an alternative story, at least as regards one of the sets of armour.

19 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 001, 00002, “Schloss Golitsch bei Gonobitz”. The list is dated 29 May 1942.

Based on the museum archival documents, the German authorities had also confiscated the Sternstein Castle and Estate. The confiscation was carried out by the Land Office (*Bodenamt*) on 7 June 1941. The detailed inventory of the many objects that were in the castle at that time includes, in the library on the first floor, “1 *chinesische Rüstung*” (1 suit of Chinese armour).²⁰ In May 1942 Dettenberg and Federlin received, from the administrator of the Sternstein Estate, “1 *Samurai-Rüstung*” (1 suit of samurai armour).²¹ It might seem reasonable to assume that they are one and the same, yet the mere mention of samurai armour is not in itself a sufficient indicator to allow us to state with certainty that this particular armour is part of the museum’s collection. A few more clues are provided by the entry: “1 *asiatische Rüstung (vermutlich Samurai XVII. Jahrhundert mit einem in Gold aufgelegten Hakenkreuz)*” (1 Asian suit of armour (supposedly Samura XVII. century with a golden swastika)).²²

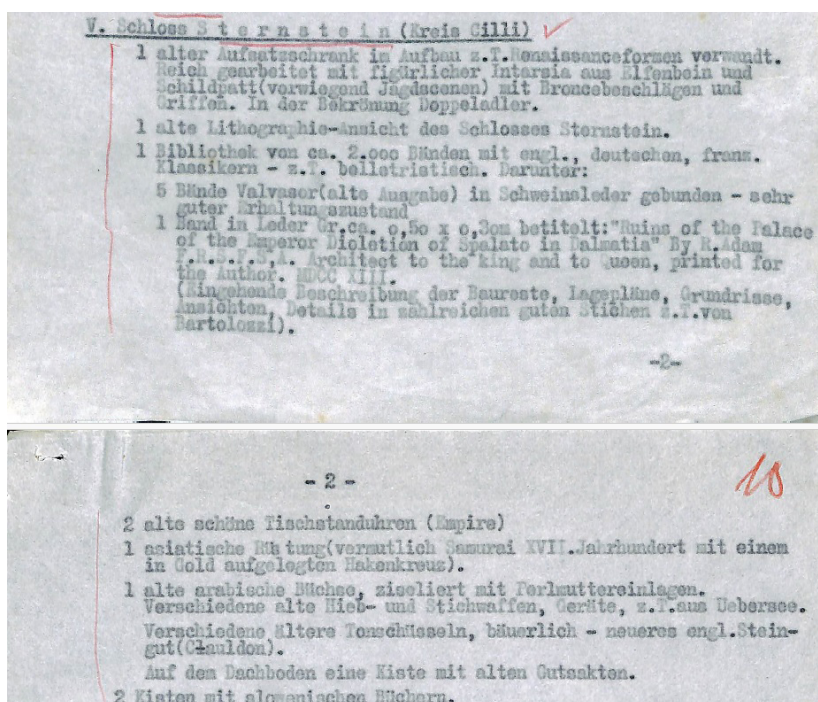


Figure 1. List of confiscated cultural and historical objects from Sternstein. (Source: Historical Archive Celje)

20 SI ZAC, 0072, Urad pooblaščenca državnega komisarja za utrjevanje nemštva v Mariboru, izpostava Celje, box 3, Zaplembe premoženja posameznikov, ustanov, uradov, podjetij (A-H), folder F BA – 1941/42, “Faber Sidney – Vojnik, Frankolovo”.

21 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 001, 00001, folder 1942, “Schloss Sternstein”.

22 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 001, 00002.

Examination of the item in question reveals that a heraldic symbol—a Buddhist swastika in a circle—done in gilt over black lacquer, is a prominent feature of the armour. By comparing the German record with the item itself, we can state that the item comes from Sternstein Castle, as this is the only armour with the swastika in the museum collection.



Figure 2. *Dō* breastplate. (Source: Asian and South American Collection, Celje Regional Museum, A 144/13)

Sternstein Castle was acquired in September 1881 by the wife of the British consul, George Louis Faber (1843–1915), in Fiume (present-day Rijeka in Croatia), Alice Franziska Faber (1852–1938).²³ Alice Franziska (Fanny), née Krupp, was born into a wealthy and powerful German and Austrian family of factory owners. In 1843 her father Hermann opened a factory in Berndorf (Austria) and began manufacturing nickel silver cutlery under the Alpaca trademark, which would become famous around the world. Interestingly, her maternal grandmother was the sister of George's father August Faber. She and George married on 4 March 1871 (Lukezić 2006, 218).

23 Okrajno sodišče v Celju, Zemljiška knjiga, Verpete 1–60, insert no. 5, 57.

The local land and property gazetteer of the Drava Banovina for 1937 lists “the Englishman Sidney George Faber” as the owner of the castle (*Krajevni leksikon dravske banovine* 1937, 109). It is further noted that the castle contains a valuable collection of antique objects, a rich library and other things (*ibid.*). Following the outbreak of the Second World War and the capitulation of Yugoslavia, Sidney Faber and his younger brother Lionel were arrested on 20 April 1941, a Sunday, and taken to the prison in Celje.²⁴ As British citizens, they belonged to the group of citizens of countries that were at war with Germany. This was the basis on which Sidney’s Sternstein estate was confiscated and he and his brother were taken into custody.²⁵

How did the armour find its way to Frankolovo? The most likely answer is provided by the Faber family themselves, particularly Sidney (1872–1963) and his father George (Lukežić 2006, 216–17).²⁶ The former served in India as an officer of the British Army, while the latter served as British consul in Fiume. George began his diplomatic career as vice-consul in Fiume in August 1876, before being promoted to consular rank in 1882 and remaining in this post right up until the start of the First World War (Lukežić 2004, 128). It goes without saying that the family was one of the most prominent in Fiume at that time. Given their professional careers and taking into account their wide circle acquaintances, it is possible that they may even have obtained the armour in question in one of the ports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The post-war authorities were aware that the estate was the property of a British citizen, but a decision issued in Celje on 6 July 1946 officially expropriated the estate from Sidney Faber, by then living in London, in favour of the land fund.²⁷ As a British citizen, Faber was entitled to receive compensation for his confiscated property. That this turned out to be a lengthy process is demonstrated by a letter from the British Embassy in Belgrade dated August 1951, although the valuation of the property had already been carried out by early November 1947.

24 SI ZAC, 1318, Osnovna šola Frankolovo (1816–1993), box 13, “Kronika dogodkov 1941–1945”.

25 SI ZAC, 0072, Urad pooblaščenca državnega komisarja za utrjevanje nemštva v Mariboru, izpostava Celje, box 3, “Zaplemba Sidney Faber”.

26 George Louis Faber (1843–1915) was born into a commercial family of many branches. In the early eighteenth century, his ancestors moved from Bavaria to Lower Austria, and from there to Vienna. George’s father, August Faber (1802–1862), moved from Vienna to Great Britain and founded the chemist’s Faber & Co.

27 SI ZAC, 0241, KLO Frankolovo (1945–1951), box 2, 019, 00002, “Okrajna komisija za agrarno reformo Celje okolica”.

Post-war Confiscations

Towards the end of the war and in the first post-war years, the national liberation movement passed a series of laws designed to regulate the way the new state dealt with property. This was the start of the formation of so-called national property, in other words the passage of ownership from private to state hands. In Slovenia the confiscation of “enemy property” took place from the end of the war, in May 1945, until the end of 1946 (Mikola 1992, 155–71). Confiscations in this period can be divided into those ordered by the administrative authorities (confiscation commissions) and those ordered by the courts (judicial seizures). In cases of collaboration with the occupying forces or criminal acts against the nation, seizures of property were ordered by military courts up to the end of August 1945 and after that by district courts (Žontar 1990, 5–13).

The most important legal regulation on the basis of which confiscations were carried out was an ordinance of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašistični svet narodne osvoboditve Jugoslavije*—AVNOJ) on the nationalization of enemy property, the administration by the state of the property of absent persons, and the seizure of property forcibly alienated by the occupation authorities, adopted on 21 November 1944 (*Odlok AVNOJ-a o prehodu sovražnikove imovine v državno last, o državnem upravljanju imetja odsotnih oseb in o zasegu imetja, ki so ga okupatorske oblasti prisilno odtujile, sprejet 21. novembra 1944*) (Mikola 1999, 15; Vodopivec 2020, 276).²⁸ At the first session of the Slovene National Liberation Council (*Slovenski narodnoosvobodilni svet*—SNOS), a Commission for the Administration of Expropriated Property was established at the Presidency of the SNOS. Reorganized after the end of the war and renamed the Commission for the Administration of National Property (*Komisija za upravo narodne imovine*—KUNI), it began work in October 1945 (Rodulović 1990, 12–15; Kozina 1990, 15–19).²⁹ The most extensive confiscations were carried out by confiscation commissions.³⁰

Federal, district, municipal and local confiscation commissions operated across the territory of Slovenia and were responsible for the confiscation of German property (Mikola 1992, 156). These commissions issued decisions on the con-

28 The AVNOJ adopted the ordinance on 21 November 1944 and it was published on 6 February 1945 in the Official Gazette of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (*Uradni list DFJ*, no. 2/1945).

29 For more insight into the topic of confiscations through archival material, see the articles in *Arhivi: glasilo Arhivskega društva in arhivov Slovenije*, 13 (1/2).

30 Under the provisions of Article 30 of the Confiscation of Property and the Execution of Confiscation Act of 9 June 1945, these commissions were responsible for the confiscation of German property (*Uradni list DFJ*, no. 40/1945, 12 June 1945).

fiscation of the whole of an individual's property, both movable and immovable, on the basis of officially collected data from the local people's committee (Žontar 1990, 6).³¹ In the case of the confiscation of the property of the German Reich and its citizens and the property of ethnic Germans, the inventory and valuation of the property was carried out by the KUNI (ibid., 7). The commissions were supposed to complete their work by 15 September 1945, but in some areas they were reappointed in 1946 and were not phased out until 1947 (ibid., 6–7). The majority of confiscations were completed by mid-1947.

The aforementioned process of the passage from private to state ownership also included cultural heritage objects. To begin with these objects came under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry, but responsibility for them later passed to the Ministry of Education (Vodopivec 2020, 276). Among the regulations adopted during the war, the one that was most important for the subject in question was the Ordinance of the Presidency of AVNOJ on the transfer of enemy property into state ownership (mentioned above). On 31 July 1946 this ordinance was promulgated as a law called the "Act on the Transfer of Enemy Property into State Ownership and the Sequestration of the Property of Absent Persons" (*Zakon o prenosu sovražnikovega premoženja v državno last in o sekvestraciji premoženja odsotnih oseb*) (Mikola 1999, 15).³²

While on the subject of cultural heritage objects, it makes sense to cite the newly emerging legislation in this area. On 27 January 1945, the SNOS adopted an Ordinance of the Presidency on the Protection of Libraries, Archives and Cultural Monuments (*Odlok Predsedstva SNOS o zaščiti knjižnic, arhivov in kulturnih spomenikov*),³³ Article 1 of which states that, regardless of ownership, all libraries, archives, artistic, cultural and historical monuments, scientific and artistic collections and natural curiosities shall be under the protection of Slovenia's national authorities.

On 24 May 1945 the Presidency of the AVNOJ adopted the "Act on the Collection, Safeguarding and Distribution of Books and Other Scientific and Artistic Objects of Cultural or Historical Value that Became State Property under the AVNOJ Ordinance of 21 November 1944" (*Zakon o zbiranju, čuvanju in razdeljevanju knjig in drugih kulturno-zgodovinskih znanstvenih in umetniških predmetov, ki so postali državna last po odloku Antifašističnega sveta narodne osvoboditve Jugoslavije*

31 The confiscation of the property of the German Reich and its citizens and the property of ethnic Germans also covered property disposed of by its owners after 6 April 1941.

32 *Uradni list FLRJ*, no. 63/1946, 2 August 1946.

33 "Ordinance of the Presidency of the SNOS on the protection of books, archives and cultural monuments." *Slovenski poročevalec. Glasilo Osvobodilne fronte* 3/45, 27 January 1945, 3.

z dne 21. novembra 1944) (Vodopivec 2020, 277).³⁴ Article 1 of this Act provides that the Ministry of Education of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia is competent for the “collection, safeguarding and distribution of books, archival and museum objects, paintings and sculptures, scientific collections, musical instruments and all other objects of historical, scientific or artistic character that became state property under the terms of the ordinance of the AVNOJ of 21 November 1944 ...”

When researching transfers of objects of cultural heritage, it is also necessary to take into account other contexts where at first glance one might not expect to find them. On 25 July 1945 the Yugoslav Ministry of Education adopted the Rules on the Transfer of the Operations of the State Administration for National Property from the Competence of the Ministry of Industry to the Ministry of Education of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (*Pravilnik o prenosu poslov državne uprave narodnega imetja iz pristojnosti industrijskega ministrstva v pristojnost prosvetnega ministrstva Demokratske federativne Jugoslavije*).³⁵ These Rules actually established the collection centres. Article 1 of the Rules provides that in places where district administrations for national property already existed, the competent education authorities should establish district collection centres for the “collection, safeguarding and distribution of books, archival and museum objects, paintings and sculptures, scientific collections, sheet music and all other objects of historical, scientific or artistic importance that have become state property”.³⁶

The Ministry of Education issued a decree establishing collection centres for cultural and historical objects at the end of July 1945.³⁷ Consisting of just six articles, the decree was signed on 25 August of the same year by the minister, Ferdo Kozak (1894–1957). This decree established a Federal Collection Centre (FZC) (*Federalni zbirni center*) at the Ministry of Education in Ljubljana for cultural and historical objects located anywhere in Slovenia, along with district collection centres in Maribor, Celje and Novo Mesto. The FZC also functioned as a district collection centre for Ljubljana and the Ljubljana district (Article 1). Presidents and managers of district collection centres were to be appointed by the education minister. They were to be assisted by art, science and music officials from the culture department of the Ministry of Education and the head of the Monument Protection Institute (Article 3).³⁸ Despite this, the activities of collection centres

34 *Uradni list DFJ*, no. 36/1945, 29 May 1945.

35 *Uradni list DFJ*, no. 54/1945, 31 July 1945.

36 For more insight into the topic of transfer and distribution of library material, see Kodrič-Dačić (2000, 51–63).

37 *Uradni list SNOS in Narodne vlade Slovenije*, no. 33/1945, 8 September 1945.

38 The Monument Protection Institute had not yet been established. The proposal to establish it was adopted in August 1945 and published in the official journal on 22 September 1945.

were not well coordinated (Komelj 1976, 20), which was mainly a consequence of Article 5 of the decree, which provided that all cultural and historical objects within the territory of Slovenia that became state property under the AVNOJ ordinance of 21 November 1944 were at the exclusive disposal of the Federal Collection Centre and its district centres.

The head of the fine arts and museums section was appointed president of the FZC, although in fact all the president's duties were actually discharged by the secretary, Čoro Škodlar (1902–1996). In October 1945 the KUNI sent all the district administrations for national property a copy of Document No. 674/45-28, which authorized the FZC to collect and safeguard cultural and historical objects throughout Slovenia and transfer them from one district to another, but primarily to collect them in Ljubljana for a future central museum of Slovenia (Vodišek 2012, 10).³⁹ To summarize, the FZC was responsible for identifying, collecting and managing the confiscated cultural and historical property of the occupying powers and domestic traitors. Movable cultural heritage was taken from nationalized mansions, castles, villas and other dwellings belonging to the bourgeoisie, as well as from offices and other locations, and placed in the repositories of district collection centres. The FZC was abolished in 1948 although not legally dissolved. Instead, its work was taken over by the Ministry of Education and, from 1949 onwards, by the Ministry of Culture and Science (*ibid.*).

Celje District Collection Centre

It is possible to show, from the fragmentary surviving documentation held by the PMC and other available literature, how the Celje District Collection Centre (*Okrožni zbirni center* – OZC) operated.⁴⁰ A report from the branch office of the Commission for the Determination of Damage, dated 30 July 1945 and held by the PMC, contains a proposal to use Celje, Šoštanj, Slovenske Konjice and Brežice as the main collection bases for the Celje district. In early July 1945, even before the collection centres were established, a commission for the safeguarding of cultural and historical objects was set up at the Celje District Committee of the Liberation Front.⁴¹ All Liberation Front local committees and KUNI officials

39 Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade and Supply issued an authorization under the terms of which the FZC was permitted to access, inspect, safeguard and remove objects that had become national property pursuant to the AVNOJ ordinance of 21 November 1945.

40 For more detailed insight on the topic of confiscation of cultural objects during and after the Second World War see Murovec and Šmid (2022, 319–86).

41 The circular is dated 11 July 1945 (SI ZAC, 0097, Okrožni ljudski odbor Celje, box 4, sig. 33, "Ustanovitev komisije za zavarovanje kulturno zgodovinskih spomenikov").

were ordered to assist this commission and provide it with all necessary support in its work. They were also required to grant commission members access to various confiscated buildings “in which the largest number of these items will be located”.⁴² The report goes on to detail the procedure to follow when removing objects.

On 23 October 1945 an ordinance of the Ministry of Education appointed Anton Stupica (1900–1973) president of the Celje (OZC). Stupica was an art historian and museum curator who served as head of this centre and provisional manager of the municipal museum. Between October and the end of November the members of the OZC inspected the KUNI repositories in Celje several times and selected from among the confiscated property those objects that they considered would serve their purpose.⁴³ The 30 July 1945 report of the branch office of the Commission for the Determination of Damage reveals that a temporary repository for cultural and historical items was located in the Capuchin church, where the German occupation authorities had earlier stored confiscated objects. All confiscated objects were then moved elsewhere. The report states that a total of 10 days, with intervals, and six journeys were required to move the objects. Transport was provided by the removal company Baldasin, since despite its efforts the Commission was unable to obtain a vehicle of its own either from the district authorities or from other bodies.⁴⁴ The objects were transported to the *Grofija*, the former count’s residence, and the *Narodni dom* (House of the People, or National Home), recently renamed the *Dom ljudske prosvete* (House of Popular Culture) for storage.⁴⁵

Martin Perc and Cvetko Ščuka (1895–1987), the latter a teacher at the *gimnazija* (upper secondary school) in Celje, also acted as authorized agents of the Celje OZC. Ščuka was from the beginning an active employee for the OZC, but after he got a teaching position at the gimnazija in Celje, his work was only occasional. For this reason Stupica wrote several letters that in the interest of the OZC Ščuka “should be temporarily relieved from teaching and be assigned to our Office all day”.⁴⁶ In addition to the two people mentioned above, Anica Presinger also acted

42 Ibid.

43 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 002, 00002, “Okrožni zbirni center Celje, Poročilo čas od 15. oktobra do 30. nov. 1945 III/67”.

44 On the basis of the invoice submitted by Baldasin, we can take 26 July 1945 as the day on which the removal was completed. Report for the second half of July 1945, dated 30 July 1945. Letter held by the PMC.

45 The *Narodni dom* building today houses the offices of the City Municipality of Celje and the local offices of the state administration.

46 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 002, 00002, “Okrožni zbirni center Celje, Poročilo čas od 15. oktobra do 30. nov. 1945 III/67, dated 3 December 1945”.

as a representative.⁴⁷ The work of the OZC was not without difficulties at first, and Stupica reports a number of obstacles, particularly the need to obtain authorization from the FZC in order to collect cultural and historical objects, since this meant he was prevented from acting on his own initiative. This relates above all to activities involving the collection of objects from confiscated estates. These estates were allocated to different ministries and the official removal of cultural and historical objects in order to transport them to the repositories of the OZC was not possible without authorization. In his report for the first half of December 1945, Stupica states that “misappropriations” had occurred without the OZC’s knowledge.⁴⁸ The OZC had not received a single item for the repository in the first half of December. The main problem was that the collection centre did not have its own vehicle and had no access to funds.

An answer to the report came at the end of the month. In it, the FZC secretary Škodlar cautions the OZC that in future it should report

above all on its work for the collection centre (removal, safeguarding, making inventories, etc.) and that its work for the OZC should be its prime concern. That other cultural work for the Institute for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Monuments, the district museum and the study library was certainly laudable, but should never be done “at the expense of collection operations.”⁴⁹

He goes on to warn the OZC to carefully follow up cases where the arbitrary disposal of cultural and historical objects was suspected and to hand the individuals concerned over to the public prosecutor if they were unwilling to surrender objects when officially invited to do so. Since the OZC did not have a lorry of its own, Škodlar suggested applying to the local authorities to arrange the loan of one of their vehicles. The FZC would pay for petrol and travel costs up to the amount of 5,000 dinars by no later than the beginning January 1946, when it was due to be granted credit by the Ministry of Education.⁵⁰

47 The President of the OZC, Anton Stupica, advocated in one of his letters for her workplace to be kept, at least until she was employed at a Celje textile factory (which was expected to be in three months’ time). He justified the proposal due to the necessity of field and office work, and he also stressed the importance of making an inventory list. The document is dated 25 February 1946. Okrožni zbirni center Celje. VI/197. Letter held by the PMC.

48 SI ZAC, 1135, Pokrajinski muzej Celje, box 1, 002, 00002, “Okrožni zbirni center Celje, Poročilo za 1. polmesečje decembra 1945 III/75”.

49 Federal Collection Centre at the Ministry of Education, E.C. 152-45 of 31 December 1945. Held by the PMC.

50 Federal Collection Centre at the Ministry of Education, E.C. 152-45 of 31 December 1945. Held by the PMC.

In Celje, just as elsewhere, the personal interests of specific groups or individuals played out in the background. Thus, on 7 May 1946, the Art and Museums Department at the Ministry of Education was briefed on matters concerning the museum in Celje. The report submitted stated that the existing administrator of the museum, Comrade Martin Perc, performed his duties conscientiously, “but his powers and abilities are inadequate in the light of the urgent need for reorganization”.⁵¹ The management of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments proposed, “at the request of the Museum Society and Celje’s cultural community” (this was the formulation used in the report), that Perc be dismissed and that Anton Stupica, the head of the collection centre in Celje, be appointed as temporary museum administrator in his place.⁵² This is in fact what happened later that same month. On 20 May the Ministry of Education sent a letter to the Municipal People’s Committee in Celje relieving Perc of his duties and appointing Anton Stupica as temporary museum administrator.⁵³ One individual who did not agree with this decision was the president of the Celje Museum Society, Janko Orožen (1891–1989).

In September of the same year, Orožen wrote a number of letters to the Ministry in which he stated that he considered Stupica to be incompetent and described his appointment as “irregular and unlawful”.⁵⁴ Along with the latter’s alleged incompetence, Orožen highlighted the fact that now Stupica was the only one to have the keys “to the museum storerooms in both museums”. This statement relates to the fact that in May 1946 the Celje OZC ceased operations, after which the museum premises were used to store both objects belonging to the Museum Society and objects from the collection centre. According to Orožen, all the objects in the museum premises were “self-evidently museum property, deriving from Celje and the surrounding area”.⁵⁵

Orožen’s correspondence with the Ministry included one rather stern letter in which he claims that certain items had been removed from the museum storerooms in the *Grofija* and taken to various locations. Orožen writes that within a week of Stupica’s appointment as museum administrator a large lorry had come to the *Grofija* on two occasions and removed various objects including valuable rugs, 12 large and valuable framed paintings, antique furniture, valuable antique chests,

51 It had been known since the end of the war that Perc’s appointment as museum administrator was only temporary (ARS, AS 231, box 51, 8438-4_46, “Mesto upravnika muzeja v Celju”).

52 Ibid.

53 ARS, AS 231, box 51, 8438-4_46, “Dokument IV. 8438/1”.

54 ARS, AS 231, box 51, 8438/4_46.

55 Ibid.

porcelain, ceramics, etc.⁵⁶ “Who”, Orožen wonders, “ordered Stupica to allow the removal from the museum of these objects that are museum property?” He then demands that all the objects removed be returned to the museum forthwith.⁵⁷ One possible answer to the question of who gave the order may lie in the document itself. Later on in the document, an entire paragraph is marked by hand and the name “Škodlar” is written in the margin. This suggests that the order came from the very top: from Ljubljana.⁵⁸

Orožen calls on the Ministry to issue a written order assigning both the museum administration and the collection centre to him, as legal representative, and removing Stupica from both positions. This did not happen, however, and Stupica continued to serve as director of the museum until the summer of 1964. On 28 February 1947, the FZC sent out a circular instructing the Celje OZC to take an inventory of all the stored cultural and historical objects without delay. All the objects were to be given numbers and the completed inventory sent to Ljubljana as soon as possible. The instructions stated that antique and artistic objects should be accurately labelled in such a way that their importance would be evident from the list.⁵⁹

Difficulties of Object Identification

On the basis of the archival material currently known to us, we are aware of three confiscations relating to castles and country mansions that are connected to the Asian collection. These are the confiscations at Lemberg Castle (*Lemberg*), Dobrnica Castle (*Guteneck*) and Dvorec Dobje (*Dobiehof*). The first one is Lemberg Castle. A few days after the official end of the war, a delegation from the Celje District Committee of the Liberation Front went to Lemberg Castle to take possession of it and, at the same time, compile a detailed description of the state of the castle and its contents (Slatinek 2013, 103).⁶⁰ Representatives

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Čoro (Franc) Škodlar (1902–1996), painter, restaurateur and journalist. After the war he was a part of the Commission for the Determination of Damage to Cultural and Historical Objects of Slovenia and later part of the FZC. Some years following the abolition of the FZC a large amount of objects obtained illegally were found in his studio and two apartments. After in a court trial in 1951, Škodlar and his wife were found guilty and sentenced to prison terms. For more insight into the topic of the Škodlar affair, see Lazarini (2016, 738–46, ARS, AS 231, box 89, “Sodba v imenu ljudstva, no. K 373/51-31”).

⁵⁹ Federal Collection Centre at the Ministry of Education, No. 4–10. Document held by the PMC.

⁶⁰ The report on the confiscation of the castle was compiled on 18 May 1945.

of the KUNI took possession of the castle on 13 July 1945, by which time its owner, Netta Gallé, was already in detention (*ibid.*).⁶¹ On this occasion they also compiled a report, from which we learn that the castle contained a “Japanese room”.⁶² Simultaneously with the confiscation and the drawing up of the inventory, a list was compiled of “objects from the castle for the national museum in Celje”. Objects destined for the museum were taken by the Commission for the Determination of Damage and taken to the “Celje repository”.⁶³ From the compiled list a total of more than 34 objects of Asian or Japanese provenance are listed.

The second confiscation was carried out at Dobrnica Castle. The documentation held by the museum includes various documents relating to Dobrnica and the confiscation of cultural and historical objects. The Commission for the Determination of Damage visited the castle in July 1945 and drew up a list of confiscated cultural and historical objects. Dobrnica was visited by a two-member team consisting of Božo Vodušek (1905–1978) and Čoro Škodlar, they sealed six first-floor rooms and the chapel, where various cultural and historical objects were stored.⁶⁴ The documents held by the museum include a report on the removal of items dated 17 November 1945. Among the seized property taken to the Celje OZC, the report (compiled the following day) lists a number of objects which, from their description, could be linked to East Asia. Five are expressly listed as “Japanese”: a cabinet with table, two round tables, a “chandelier” and a “small tray”.⁶⁵ Among the confiscated property on the list was a wooden statue of Buddha that was taken to the Celje collection centre. On examining the museum’s collection, however, we find that it does not contain a single object corresponding to this description. The

61 She was arrested on 13 May. Her son Hubert fled to join his wife in Gornja Radgona on 31 April 1945 (SI ZAC, 0107, KUNI – uprave narodne imovine 1945–1958, box 13, “Poizvedbe na gradu Lemberg”). In the record from 18 May it is stated that the owner had been evicted as a national traitor. Hubert Gallé claims that Netta was killed by Partisans in May 1945 at Bezovica near Vojnik (Gallé 1991, 203; 2007, 279).

62 SI ZAC, 0107, KUNI – uprave narodne imovine 1945–1958, box 13, “Okrajni odbor OF Celje okolica pooblaščenec za KUNI, zapisnik z dne 15. 7. 1945”. It is not clear from the report whether there were any Asian objects in the room, since the inventory reads as follows: three curtain rods, four armchairs, one child’s table (old), one small chair, two card tables, one writing table, two stands, one tray, one music stand, one chest, and one basket, all antique and unusable.

63 SI ZAC, 0107 KUNI – uprave narodne imovine 1945–1958, box 13, “Seznam prevzetih predmetov iz graščine Galle Nette v Lembergu št. 1”.

64 Responsibility for ensuring that the seals were unbroken lay with the warden, one person by the name Ramšak, who was appointed by the local committee in Dobrna (“Zapisnik o delu Komisije za ugotovitev škode na kulturno-zgodovinskih predmetih Slovenije na uradni poti od 9. do 11. julija 1945”). Report held by the PMC.

65 *Ibid.*

question that naturally raises itself is: what happened to this object? Was it disposed of en route to the museum? Did one of the inventory-takers appropriate it? Was it loaned out and never returned? There are several possibilities, that require further examination.

Besides those from Lemberg Castle, a large number of objects of Asian provenance were obtained during the seizure of the property from Dvorec Dobje (*Dobbihof*) near Slovenske Konjice. Up until the end of the Second World War, the property belonged to Countess Alexandrine (Sandra) Sermage (1864–1945).⁶⁶ The post-war authorities arrested her and sent her to the Strnišče concentration camp near Ptuj, where she died.⁶⁷ The inventorying and seizure of Alexandrine's property were carried out before the end of 1945. This is indicated by a copy of the inventory kept by the museum, which was compiled on 6 September 1945 and states that the items listed were removed by an KUNI agent from Celje for Celje Museum.⁶⁸ The copy of the inventory includes a total of 32 items of Asian provenance. So in these three buildings alone, around 70 objects of East Asian origin have been identified on the basis of the above mentioned post-war inventories of confiscated property.

In these particular cases, reconstruction of provenance is made more difficult by the scant descriptions of the objects concerned, along the lines of "1 Japanese vase", "1 Japanese table", and so on. Rare are the cases in which we can confirm with certainty the specific museum piece that the inventory-taker had in mind when compiling the inventory. The biggest obstacle to the work is the small amount of archival material available, which is also fragmented and dispersed. A further difficulty is presented by the lack of knowledge or expertise of the individuals carrying out these inventories in the field. Provenance was most probably attributed on the basis of a glance at the outward appearance of an object and no more.

66 Alexandrine (Sandra) Sermage von Szomszédvár und Medvedgrád (see *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon, 1815–1950* 2002, 189).

67 This camp was established by the Department for Protection of the People (*Oddelek za zaščito naroda* – OZNA) and was the main internment camp for Germans in Slovenia (Mikola 2007, 11–26).

68 Prepis. Inventarni zapisnik grf. Xande Sermagi, Dobrova Slov. Konjice. Document held by the PMC.

Inventar predmetov iz zbirke Narodne
imovine - Celje Pokolice, katere sem prevzel na Okrajni
rešni center in depoziral v Celjski muzej 30. III. 1996.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Sliske 75 + 13 + 1 | 1 skatljol 7 srebrnih alen |
| Miniature 15 + 5 | 1 " 3 porcelanastimi komodi |
| 5 ura | 1 " 5 pisalnikov pri lustru |
| 1 globus | 6 kovin. prečiščev |
| 1 Kotel bakra | 1 kovinasti kabl, 1 majoli ku- |
| 3 medeni kotljiči | stai, kalnico, 1 črna in 1 kovinasti |
| 3 medeni svacniki | 1 japonski soluniki |
| 2 turški medenizvesti skatljol | 9 sablj |
| 4 provice | 4 stare puške |
| 1 cinasta vrča | 3 majoliha krovniki |
| 2 posrebrnjeci kerami | 2 kov. vazi |
| 2. Rleci iz slobozor | 1 etujke vaze, 1 revoček |
| 1 črni kotliček + 1 | 1 vremenika ura |
| 4 kovinasti | |
| 1 Kovinasti mostovč s 2 steklenimi krovniki | |
| 7 steklenice | |
| 2 japonski vazi | |
| 2 porcelanasti tinkari | |
| 5 4 " provice | |
| 1 mala dvojna mizica (gips) | |
| 5 Kovinasti majoliha | |
| 6 Kovinasti krovniki | |
| 7 vaz, 1 nikalnik | |
| 3 kapi majoliha | |
| 1. Kip, (bron) | |
- prevzel: *[Signature]*
- predel: *[Signature]*

Figure 3. Example of a handwritten list of confiscated items. (Source: Celje Regional Museum)

Given these factors, it is almost impossible to assert which confiscated object corresponds to an object held in a museum collection. Various types of Japanese and Chinese ceramics made for export are held by the museum as part of its Cultural History Collection. Entries such as “1 Japanese vase” and “1 antique Japanese bowl” are not much help when it comes to identifying a specific object. Some objects of these types are also listed in the inventories of confiscated property relating to Lemberg Castle and dvorec Dobje. In early February 1946 a “Japanese porcelain vase” was removed from the confiscated estate of Prince Hugo of Windisch-Graetz in Slovenske Konjice by officers from the Celje collection centre.⁶⁹ A week later, a similar list was compiled for the Šenek Estate, which was then state property. The items confiscated here included two “large Japanese vases”, which were deposited along with the other items in the museum.⁷⁰

The category of confiscations from the homes of the bourgeoisie includes the contents of the villa of August Westen in the summer of 1945.⁷¹ The following items in the inventory of this confiscation were marked as Asian: “2 vases with Japanese motifs”, “1 Japanese vase” and “1 bronze figure, Indian elephant (decorated miniature)”.⁷² A similar situation can be seen in the case of the list of objects confiscated from Villa Kodela in Celje, drawn up on 15 September 1945. This list includes a mention of “1 large Japanese vase”.⁷³ This group of confiscations also includes the two candelabra made from a vases that are held in the museum under inventory number KZ 1979/1–2. These are two candelabra that are essentially a combination of a porcelain vase painted in the famille rose style and a metal framework richly decorated with motifs of East Asian inspiration: plum blossoms, bamboo, dragons and demonic masks. These two candelabra are currently the only two known examples of this type of mounting in any museum in Slovenia. These interesting objects conceal an interesting story that we will look at further below.

69 The list of contents removed was drawn up on 6 February 1946. The removed items were taken to Celje and stored in the *Groffja*. The removal report was signed by Anica Presinger. List held by the PMC.

70 List of contents removed, dated 13 February 1946. The objects were removed by Ščuka acting on behalf of the Celje OZC. Šenek's park and mansion lie on the northern edge of Polzela in the Savinja Valley.

71 Family of German entrepreneurs who developed the enamelware industry in Celje (Orožen 2013).

72 Inventory report dated 4 June 1945. The removed items were transported to the Commission's repository. The document is part of the documentation held by the PMC.

73 The villa stood in Celje. As in the case of the inventory of the villa of August Westen, the inventory and removal was carried out by the Commission for the Determination of Damage. Cvetko Ščuka was present at the removal. The report is part of the documentation held by the PMC.

Confiscation of the Property of the German Reich and its Citizens and the Property of Ethnic Germans—the Case of the Candelabra

In the process of researching the provenance of East Asian objects, we also undertook an examination of older museum documentation, in the hope that this might provide starting points for further research. Our attention was drawn to a document relating to objects belonging to one Amalija Hellmann, which were stored in the premises of what was then the Celje Municipal Museum (*Mestni muzej Celje*) and is today the Celje Regional Museum (PMC). The document consists of three typewritten pages, the first two of which are dated 30 July 1964. The second and third pages are of particular interest to us. The second page contains a list of objects that do appear in the museum's inventory and were the property of Amalija Hellmann. Item number 12 on this list reads as follows: "Candelabra, 2, inv. no. 1979". The last page of the document, which unlike the other two is undated, contains a list of objects that were included in the museum inventory and for which there is no official proof that they were ever the property of Amalija Hellmann. The document was clearly created at a later date, since Amalija Hellmann is referred to as deceased and the name of the institution has already changed from the Municipal Museum to Regional Museum. Item number 12 on the list reads "candelabra, three-branched, metal, combined with painted porcelain KZ 1979, 2 pieces".⁷⁴ These two candelabra are the focal point in the following case and are also mentioned above in the category of confiscations from the homes of the bourgeoisie.

On the basis of the above, the question that automatically raises itself is why did the personal belongings of Amalija Hellmann end up in the premises and inventory of the museum? We found an answer to this question among the court files of Celje Local Court (*Okrajno sodišče v Celju*), which are held in the Celje Historical Archives (*Zgodovinski arhiv Celje*). In April 1952, Celje Local Court annulled a confiscation decision of the Celje Municipal Confiscation Commission (*Mestna zaplenjena komisija v Celju*) dated 24 August 1945 (confiscation order 457/45), under which all movable and immovable property of Amalija Hellmann⁷⁵ located in the sub-district of Celje or anywhere in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) was transferred to state ownership.⁷⁶ The court also ruled that the confiscation proceedings against Hellmann could be reopened. According to the judgment all of her confiscated property should be returned to her.

74 List of items in private property of Amalija Hellmann. Copy held by the PMC.

75 At the time of the judgment, in April 1952, Amalija Hellmann was residing at Muzejski Trg 9.

76 SI ZAC, 0611, Okrajno sodišče Celje, box I-1952, I 59/52.



Figure 4. Candelabrum. (Source: Cultural History Collection, Celje Regional Museum, KZ 1979/2)

The court file also states the basis on which the Municipal Confiscation Commission adopted its original decision, *viz.* “because the named individual is an ethnic German”.⁷⁷ As will be demonstrated below, this was a false allegation. The grounds of judgment clearly state that under a confiscation decision of the Celje Municipal Confiscation Commission dated 24 August 1945 (confiscation order 457/45), all movable and immovable property of *Emilija* Hellmann located in the sub-district of Celje or anywhere in the FPRY was confiscated. The first thing to point out here is that this is not a typographical error on our part. Rather, we are talking about two different people: Amalija Hellmann and Emilija Hellmann. When did this mistake occur? It occurred at the time the document was drawn up. The confiscation decision against Amalija Hellmann was based on an official confirmation from the Local National Liberation Committee (*Krajevni narodnoosvobodilni odbor*—KNOO) dated 24 August 1945 which, however, refers to an individual with the first name Emilija, resident at Na Okopih 9 in Celje, and contains the assertion that this individual was an ethnic German. The KNOO was also in possession of the information that “Amalija”, a schoolteacher, had allegedly abused her pupils by calling them “*windische Hunde*” (Slovene dogs).⁷⁸

The Celje Municipal People’s Committee (*Mestni ljudski odbor Celje*) reported this evident error in a letter dated 14 August 1947, stating that at the time in question Amalija Hellmann was actually resident at Razlagova 3 in Celje. On questioning Amalija, it was established that she was not and had never been a schoolteacher and consequently could not have abused her pupils in the manner described. She further explained that one of her relatives was a schoolteacher. Having realized that there had been a mistake, the Municipal Council issued the rather non-committal opinion that “this may be a case of mistaken identity”.⁷⁹ Not only that, but Amalija’s husband was a Jew, meaning that the exception contained in the first article of the Act on the transfer of enemy property into state ownership and the sequestration of the property of absent persons would have applied in her case. A number of years would pass before the Executive Committee of the Municipal People’s Authority in Celje proposed, on 3 January 1952, that confiscation proceedings in this confiscation matter be reopened.

When giving evidence Amalija Hellmann stated that she was a Czech by nationality and citizenship and a Slovene by birth. Born in Klagenfurt (Celovec) on 2 April 1893, she had moved with her parents to the Celje area when she was still very young. She spent her school years in Liboje and Celje and then in 1920

77 SI ZAC, 0611, Okrajno sodišče Celje, box I-1952, I 59/52.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

married Vítězslav Petr Hellmann, thereby obtaining Czechoslovakian citizenship. The evidence she submitted to the court included her marriage certificate, which shows that she was married on 29 November 1920 and that her husband was of the Jewish faith. Her husband had owned property in Brandlín, in what was then Czechoslovakia, but had died in 1932. Having lost all her property in bankruptcy proceedings, Amalija went back to live with her parents in 1937 and obtained employment in Sevnica and Celje. On the basis of these facts, she proposed at the hearing that the confiscation proceedings should be reopened and that the whole of her confiscated property, insofar as it was still located in Celje, should be returned to her.

A second surviving court file from the Celje Historical Archives, dated 1971, also relates to Amalija Hellmann's property in the museum. That year Alfonz Smolnikar, the nephew of the late Amalija Hellmann, who had died the previous year, brought an action against the museum. Following a hearing, the court ruled that the furniture located in the museum was the property of the late Amalija Hellmann and that these objects were part of her estate. Item number 10 on the list of objects refers to the "two Japanese candelabra" already mentioned.⁸⁰ The grounds of judgment and witness statements allow us to fill in the blanks. The applicant emphasized that the museum had not acquired ownership of the listed objects (through possession) and that it was merely storing them as a depositary.⁸¹

The museum did not deny, in these proceedings, the fact of the confiscation of the property and its subsequent annulment. It did, however, take the view that the museum was in possession as owner (*animo domini*) of all the objects that were still disputed and had thus acquired the right of ownership over them.⁸² It was stated that these disputed objects had arrived in the museum in 1945 via the OZC and that they were considered social property under the legislation in force at the time. Following the annulment of the original judgment, Amalija Hellmann went to the museum on multiple occasions demanding the return of the objects. According to the museum, she did not bring a list with her and it was therefore not possible to identify the objects as her property. Based on letters preserved in the court file it would appear that the candelabra came along with Amalija Hellmann's furniture to the museum directly from her home, at her own request, rather than via the OZC. Not only that, but this furniture did not arrive all at once but

80 SI ZAC, 0611, Okrajno sodišče Celje, box 354, P 479/70.

81 His grounds for believing this lay in two letters dated 23 January 1963 and 6 April 1965 in which the museum called on Amalija Hellmann to remove her furniture and other objects from the museum because the museum needed its premises for its own material (SI ZAC, 0611, Okrajno sodišče Celje, box 354, P 479/70).

82 Ibid.

in two stages: first in 1945 and then in 1954. Witnesses at the hearing stated that they were aware that Amalija Hellmann's antique furniture was stored in the museum. One witness testified that in the years after the war Amalija made regular visits to the prosecutor's office and the municipal offices in Celje in an effort to assert her rights.

A number of photographs of Amalija Hellmann's legacy that were in the possession of Smolnikar proved to be of key importance for the resolution of this problem. During the court proceedings, he submitted as evidence a large number of photographs of furniture and other objects that he had found in the late Amalija's home, along with a number of documents. On the basis of the statements of witnesses and an inspection of the objects in the museum, Smolnikar reduced his list to those objects that he had been able to examine at the museum and identify on the basis of the submitted photographs. After considering all the evidence, the court approved the reduced list submitted in the claim. It was evidently not possible to prove that the candelabra, which remained in the inventory under inventory number KZ 1979/1–2, were the property of the deceased, so they are still to be found in the museum's Cultural History Collection.

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