TRANSFER OF CULTURAL OBJECTS IN THE ALPE ADRIA REGION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

CHRISTIAN FUHRMEISTER, BARBARA MUROVEC (HG.)

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The Transfer of Cultural Objects in the Alpe Adria Region in the 20th Century

Introduction, Assessment and Outlook

Christian Fuhrmeister

In the past decade, the transfer of cultural assets has become a pervasive and urgent topic, with unprecedented repercussions on a global scale. Cultural identity is still a key characteristic of national identity, and thus the ever-growing globalization processes of the world economy have direct implications not only on states and societies, but also on various kinds of institutions, in particular, institutions in the humanities. Methodological reflections on cultural heritage need to be adapted, modified and developed further, as do the conceptual frameworks upon which they are based. During the long 19th century (1789–1914), emerging nation states emphasised their distinct cultural developments, objects and features, using the past, with its material manifestations in the form of (cultural) heritage, to legitimise their coming into being. Today, the past continues to be studied, analysed, inspected and used in ways that are not so different. Indeed, discussions about culture and heritage are, by definition, genuinely political issues.

The relatively new field of investigating the provenance and changes of ownership of objects—and by extension investigating translocations and dispossessions on a larger scale—is thus *radical* in the true sense of the word, since it addresses a core issue in power relations. It is telling that not only are universal or supranational designations of "world heritage" thriving, so are specifically national claims (such as the initiative to return the so-called Elgin Marbles to Greece). Connected to this is the still emerging debate on how to address (and possibly reverse) the displacement during the colonial era of thousands of cultural artefacts. In the course of the 2010s, questions of ownership, stewardship and custodianship, as well as calls for action regarding return, repatriation and restitution have become daily subjects in many media channels, including social networks. These commentaries and debates, intensive reporting of individual acts, and ongoing processes of recognition are clearly responding to a need. There seems to be an uneasy and unsettling sense that the image of the past we grew up with needs adjusting—it needs to be discussed, deliberated, and studied further.

Our project grew out of this observation a few years ago. Sceptical of traditional narratives, weary of complacent explanations, eager to explore and go beyond what is known and

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regularly reiterated, we embarked on an archival journey into unknown territory. And while tracing the history of transfers, while searching for places, dates and modes of ownership changes, we soon encountered obstacles. We were denied access to institutional repositories, such as the archive of the Superintendence for Trieste-Friuli-Giulia in Trieste although it is a public institution, and to archival documentation, such as in certain Slovenian museums and galleries. Indeed, it is revealing—and in a sense, entirely appropriate—that research into ownership questions immediately triggers emotional responses, responses ranging from interest and curiosity to equally strong emotions of disregard and obliviousness, from welcome and acceptance to sudden refusal or outright denial of the relevance or even validity of a particular set of research questions. Research on provenance and translocation follows a trajectory that *goes against the grain*. Such research does not accept the current status quo as given, as the natural or organic outcome of historical processes. It rather questions, reassesses and re-evaluates the status quo (as far as is possible, i. e., as far as evidence is provided by historical documents): What do we know about previous locations and owners of particular objects or collections? And, as a corollary: What might happen if we know more?

These questions have not been asked for very long. This has many reasons. Despite public debates and a perceptible increase in the number of research projects involving provenance, investigating previous whereabouts and ownership is—still—new and unusual for many stakeholders, whether repositories, museums, institutions, scholars, dealers or private collectors. Admittedly, the increase in such research has reached—and affected—all larger German public art museums. However, in most of the almost 7,000 museums in Germany, research on provenance and translocation is uncommon. And this is still the case in many institutional collections in other places in Europe. Also the private collectors in Europe who have taken care to make provenance inquiries certainly do not outnumber those who chose, and still choose, not to do so (or simply do not know how to undertake such an inquiry). The field of provenance and translocation research is thus often precarious, fragile, and even provisional. This last is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that the overwhelming majority of such research is carried out in the form of fixed-term projects that last, at best, a few years, but often for only a few months. Despite the many advances in our knowledge, despite the major steps that have been taken, we have barely begun to grasp the intimidating dimensions of the research challenge ahead of us.

This particular set of circumstances also characterised the TransCultAA project, which was underway in the years 2016–2019/2020 (https://www.transcultaa.eu), and this volume, which reflects an attempt to summarise and present that project's key results. Both the project and this volume were invigorated and spurred on by many discussions, including ardent dialogues and heated debates, held between the involved scholars, discussions that also regularly included invited guests, experts, colleagues, and the scholarly community at large. In this sense, this is fundamental research at its best: a critical review and re-evaluation of the relevant scholarly literature, complemented by (in part joint) archival research, leading to several important discoveries and a constant evolution of digital strategies. In the

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process we have always searched for the best—or at least the most convincing—argument, perspective, or interpretation. It comes as no surprise that the exchanges and dialogues within this multinational and multidisciplinary group also encountered obstacles, ruptures, problems, and friction. Tracing the causes and consequences of the transfer of artworks in the 20th century is not just an intellectual pastime. It is a serious, demanding, vast, and vital task. As researchers, we were faced with the multiple outcomes and implications of historical processes, in particular their different interpretations as inscribed or embodied not only in individual and collective memory, but also in present beliefs and responses. Since unresolved conflicts tend to linger and resurface, it was occasionally a major challenge to establish scholarly or fact-based narratives.

Despite these difficulties, it is quite astonishing to see how smoothly the project actually proceeded and evolved. In retrospect, it was perhaps naïve optimism (which already fuelled the 2015 application and submission process) that later enabled the group to bypass the interruptions, blocked roads, or inaccessible document collections to find a different *piste de recherche* or avenue of research, to bridge gaps by using the larger narrative for integrating or enfolding unknowns. It is also fair to say that it has proven overly optimistic to assume that the European society of today has distanced itself sufficiently from the totalitarian and nationalistic ways of thinking that characterised long periods in the 20th century. Nonetheless, while this publication is but a small stepping stone for future endeavours, it remains a major achievement.

TransCultAA

The TransCultAA project involved the first broader investigation of the various transfers of cultural assets that occurred in the Alpe Adria region during the 20th century. Using unprecedented transnational and collaborative means, the project's multinational team of scholars analysed historical and current conflicts of ownership, patrimony, and cultural heritage, in particular the various "uses of the past" associated with these conflicts. Despite its regional focus, the concrete material results of the TransCultAA project have produced a truly European history of transfers of cultural objects, including their translocation, displacement, confiscation, looting, and theft. More specifically, the project asked: Who transferred or translocated which (cultural) objects in the Alpe Adria region, as well as when and why? What explanations were given then and are given now? What narratives have ensued and why? How do archival documents (from both the region and beyond, produced by victims, perpetrators, or complicit actors in the grey zone in between) help us understand how the past has been utilised, both regionally and nationally? It goes without saying that all of these questions were heavily charged for political reasons.

By highlighting the transfer and fate of cultural objects, the project's consortium of four principal investigators and their collaborative partners examined a wide range of unresolved

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questions, questions that have implications for tensions and problems existing still today. Accordingly, the research addressed the complexity of the phenomena at transnational levels by studying objects that were located in or moved from particular territories at key moments in history. The project team traced not only the tangible movement of these objects, but also their role as symbolic capital.

The main objective of the TransCultAA project was to collect accurate data through comprehensive archival research, evaluating both written sources and visual evidence. Data on translocations of cultural heritage were collected, stored, analysed, and discussed in standard academic venues, as well as through various channels for the broader public, including the general media. As part of the current process of discussions on historical and contemporary appropriation and restitution, as well as the ongoing search for criteria to use when renegotiating ownership of cultural heritage, the TransCultAA project encouraged dialogue both within and beyond academia. Above all, the project attempted to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the European past as a history of conflict, transfer, and dispossession. Moreover, its research results have been crucial in developing theoretical and practical approaches to the transfer of art objects in general.

A key focus of the TransCultAA project was, by definition, how the "past" has been read, understood, conceptualised, utilised, mis-used, or actively appropriated, not only with regard to art and cultural heritage, but also in the care and curating of that heritage. Our research confirmed that in a region as multi-layered both nationally and ethnically as the Alpe Adria, the various concepts of culture and identity that evolved in the 20th century, indeed shaping that century, were crucial. By analysing the approaches, intentions, and methods adopted by the various actors involved during, between, and after the two World Wars, it could be shown that concepts of culture and identity decisively influenced the processes of transferring, safeguarding, and appropriating assets and artefacts. Similar analyses will be essential when developing future policies, for both Europe and beyond, in the larger field of cultural heritage and collective identity.

The TransCultAA project specifically addressed historical as well as current uses of patrimony and cultural heritage in transnational, transdisciplinary, and inter-institutional ways. Thus the project can also serve as a valuable tool for a serious assessment of diversity in today's Europe. If we do not fully recognise the various meanings given to gains and losses of cultural assets in the past, it will not be possible to understand the dynamics of many sensitive present-day issues.

Cultural heritage, with its complex composite of tangible and intangible memories, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences, offers a unique viewpoint for observing how the past is used for various purposes, both political-diplomatic and social. The past can be used:

- to affirm or reaffirm local identities for the population involved;
- to evoke or enforce the national identity of a state—including its military and civil forces—that is claiming a particular territory;
- as a token in war and diplomatic affairs;

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- to confer meaning, dignity or nobility, as well as commercial or market value;
- to strengthen regional, ethnic, racial affiliations and traditions in competitive, non-inclusive ways;
- to control, shape and define present and future concepts of collective identity.

In fact, the 20th century in the Alpe Adria region can be considered a laboratory for testing case studies that have a direct impact on ongoing processes, for example, the "Istria paintings" on view today in the Museo Sartorio in Trieste, or the urgent issues of cross-border restitutions and cultural trafficking. Retracing the 20th-century processes and analysing their evolution opens paths to new, more nuanced and complex understandings of issues such as identity and integration, political legitimacy, and cultural relationships.

Discussing matters such as these, as well as dealing with the different approaches that emerged in the work of the four research teams and their partners, was most fruitful and effective. It not only increased our awareness of the growing need for integrated cultural practices and policies, it also showed us the absolute necessity for intensive and open-ended fundamental research across borders. Whenever appropriate, the project team members continue to communicate this gained awareness, whether vis-à-vis stakeholders in institutional administrations or ministries, or at all levels of political and parliamentary groups.

The intense interest in the TransCultAA project comes as no surprise, since the past is, by necessity, permanently being re-evaluated and re-negotiated. This is evidenced, for example, by the current re-evaluations of the colonial history of France, Germany, and Britain, to name only three imperial nations. TransCultAA thus became a prime test case for the humanities: Can we achieve a professional, nuanced, and critical view of the past—with all of its manifold components—in a way that is open and transparent? And can we do this in a transdisciplinary manner that acknowledges joint collective efforts, as opposed to mere cooperation between individuals? In this regard, the project progressed in a way similar to a living organism, adapting and reacting to ongoing debates, but also proactively seeking to affect permanent changes in interpretations of the past. By virtue of its unbiased international scope, the TransCultAA project indeed evolved into a model case. This status is perhaps best reflected in an invitation to present the project at a public hearing of the JURI Committee of the European Parliament in Brussels on 3 December 2019 that was titled "Cross-border restitution claims of works of art and cultural goods looted in armed conflicts and wars".[1]

Although the TransCultAA project was led by four art historians, it was strongly shaped by interactions with other disciplines, thus offering an innovative and inclusive way of examining the history of the Alpe Adria region. Based on archival research results that were made available in a shared internal repository, a series of public events in different formats took place: lectures, workshops, meetings, various kinds of conferences, a summer school,

1 See https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/juri/events-hearings.html?id=20191112CHE06501 for the programme and a link to the workshop's web streaming.

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a public exhibition, virtual shows, and a variety of publications. From the outset, the common goal was to reflect on different views, approaches, and ways of seeing, speaking, and understanding. The aim was to know exactly how and why the transfer of cultural objects took place in the Alpe Adria region—a region we decided to define as neutrally as possible, namely, by means of a largely geographical concept rather than nationalities or ethnicities. We focused on transfers that took place in Slovenia and Croatia, in north-eastern Italy, especially Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and in Austria, with a focus on Styria, Carinthia and Vienna. In a second step, we compared our archival research findings with a) the current role of cultural heritage in the region, and b) the current state of research in the field of provenance and translocation studies. A key question was how a history of transfers and change of property that is partly known, partly masked, and partly hidden still influences or perhaps even determines relationships in the involved countries between various groups, institutions, and people, including scholars in the humanities, heritage conservationists, curators at galleries and museums, officials concerned with cultural policy, the media, and the general public.

Evolution of the TransCultAA Project

The first step in the TransCultAA project application involved convening the workshop "Zwischen Kunst(geschichte) und Politik: Kulturguttransfer in der Region Alpe Adria im 20. Jahrhundert" (Between Art [History] and Politics: Cultural Asset Transfer in the Alpe Adria Region in the 20th Century), which took place in 2015 at the German-Italian Centre for European Dialogue at Villa Vigoni on Lake Como (Centro Italo-Tedesco per l'Eccellenza Europea/Deutsch-Italienisches Zentrum für Europäische Exzellenz). The organisers, from Germany, Italy and Slovenia, together with participants from various countries mainly discussed possible research questions, including facts, data, scope, range, etc. After the project was submitted to the funding scheme HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and approved in early 2016, it became clear that many of the research issues would be of a different nature. In fact, how the TransCultAA project was received in Slovenia, and to some degree also in Italy and Croatia, was unexpected and challenging.

The project was coordinated by Christian Fuhrmeister (Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich). There were also principal investigators from Italy, Slovenia and Croatia: Donata Levi (University of Udine/Università degli Studi di Udine, Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage/Dipartimento di studi umanistici e del patrimonio culturale), Barbara Murovec (Research and Documentation Center, Jewish Archive of Slovenia in Ljubljana/Raziskovalno-dokumentacijski center JAS), and Ljerka Dulibić (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts/Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetosti, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters/Strossmayerova galerija starih majstora, Zagreb). This core group cooperated closely with several associated partners: the Croatian Conservation Institute, Zagreb, Croatia; the Commission for Provenance Research, Vienna, Austria; the National Museum of

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Contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia; and the Research and Documentation Center JAS, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

For both the TransCultAA project and this volume, a key characteristic of the scholars taking part has been their diversity with regard to their individual (national, linguistic, political, spatial, gender) and professional competencies. The coordinator's own research focus on National Socialist confiscation of Jewish property (in accordance with the Washington Principles) was expanded in time and geography to transfers throughout the 20th century. This expansion went in various directions, from translocations during the First World War, damage to transfers and changes of ownership "caused" by the Independent State of Croatia, Socialist confiscations in Slovenia and Croatia, to contested and still unfinished restitution processes between Italy and Slovenia. Regarding the post-Yugoslav states, an important result of the project has been observing a current insistence on cultural-political attitudes towards property and cultural heritage. In the case of Slovenia, we even encountered a structural unwillingness in the country to dissociate itself from post-war communist confiscation policies.

On the other hand, many archives, museums, galleries opened their doors to the TransCultAA research group, and many organisations, particularly in Austria, offered their support to the project. In fact, a number of institutions and individual scholars were inspired to undertake systematic research of their own, both as consequence of and parallel to the unfolding of the project. We are thus convinced that the project will have a huge impact on the study of transfers and provenance, not only in the Alpe Adria region but also beyond.

Key Outcomes of TransCultAA

A key event of the TransCultAA project was an international conference on confiscation of Jewish heritage that was held at the IMT Lucca (Institute for Advanced Studies, Institutions/Markets/Technologies) in September 2017. The event was also remarkable because it was the first public academic presentation devoted to this topic to have ever been held in Italy. The proceedings were published online as *The Transfer of Jewish-owned Cultural Objects in the Alpe Adria Region*, edited by Daria Brasca, Christian Fuhrmeister and Emanuele Pellegrini as a special issue of *Studi di Memofonte. Rivista on-line semestrale* (22/2019; available at: https://www.memofonte.it/studi-di-memofonte/numero-22-2019/).

In addition to the present publication, another major outcome of the project is the critical source edition edited by Donata Levi and Michael Wedekind, *Contested Space—Contested Heritage. Sources on the Displacement of Cultural Objects in the 20th-Century Alpine-Adriatic Region*, Udine 2022 (available online at: https://forumeditrice.it/percorsi/arte/fonti-testi/contested-space-contested-heritage). This volume of more than 500 pages not only contains a selection of instructive maps and 84 documents, but explains and contextualises the archival records from a transnational and transdisciplinary perspective.

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The Contents of this Volume

This volume is the product of a broad joint effort and contains a collection of individual research initiatives executed at many levels. This includes master's theses, PhD dissertations, both in process and finished, and independent research of both postdoc and senior scholars. While heterogeneous, the participants shared above all a common interest as well as a strong belief in the unique relevance of pursuing this particular set of research questions.

Generally speaking, this volume—its genesis, development, contents, and detail—is not a coincidence, but representative in the true sense of the word. It is a powerful demonstration of a dynamic and evolving research field that is being fuelled by critical thinking, international agreements such as the 1998 Washington Principles, the rise of provenance research questions, a renewed interest in art market studies and the history of collecting, the public urge, for various reasons, to come to terms with looted art, translocations, and appropriations, the gradual opening and indexing of archives, the growing number of digital repositories and databases, and the persistent demand by a young generation of students to explore what has been taboo for decades and to go beyond what is currently known. As a consequence, the present volume is as much a product of a great deal of work over the last decade as it is a stepping stone for further inquiries.

The contributions begin with a ground-breaking, wide ranging article by Donata Levi. Focussing on "tensions below the surface" and "objects as hostages", she poses the highly relevant question of how and to what degree professional art historical expertise was tainted or compromised by bourgeoning nationalism and ideologies during the first half of the 20th century. Levi addresses how an academic discipline system interacts with other spheres and fields (military, political, ideological, etc.), in particular the extent to which the discipline of art history can be considered a supranational structure in the presence of national divisions,

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claims of unique national patrimony, or strong ideological conflicts. Levi's argument revolves around two international conferences, the 10th International Congress of Art History (1912) including the convoluted decade-long publication process of its proceedings that appeared only in 1922, and the obvious tensions that accompanied the 15th International Congress of Art History, held in London at the end of July 1939. Above all her article reveals how relatively easy it was to manipulate professional expertise for straightforward nationalistic purposes.

Given the high relevance of cultural heritage for national identities, it comes as no surprise that guarding cultural heritage played a crucial role before, during, and after the First World War. This general observation gains still greater significance in borderland areas such as the Alpe Adria region. Throughout the 20th century, energetic efforts went into protecting and safeguarding cultural artefacts, but also into seizing and dispossessing them. In this regard, Martina Visentin charts the situation in Friuli during the 1917–1918 Austro-Hungarian/German occupation. Focusing on the two *Kunstschutzgruppen* in the area, her case study exposes the propagandist dimension of attempts to show the civility of the Austro-Hungarian and German armies, while highlighting the professional competence of the protagonists. The next contribution, by Francesca Coccolo, starts with the armistice of November 1918, signed between the armies of Italy and Austria. While it put an end to hostilities, it also initiated a process of re-evaluations and re-appropriations that culminated in lengthy and complex disputes about objects transferred before, during, and after the war. The diplomatic manoeuvring at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and beyond—analysed here in detail—sheds light on how artefacts are attributed cultural and political meaning, in particular as a result of nationalistic impulses and historical narratives.

Also Dejan Ristić addresses wartime destruction and the dispersal of cultural objects, in this case the collection of the Serbian National Library in Belgrade (which in 1919 became the National Library of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In the turmoil of intensive bombing during the First World War, attempts to move precious holdings of the library to safe sites failed, with the result that many books and manuscripts went missing. Ristić stresses that the search for artefacts should continue, even after more than a century. In a sense, this also holds true with regard to the study undertaken by Karin Leitner-Ruhe of painting loans from the Landesmuseum Joanneum to the spa resorts of Rogaška Slatina (Rochitsch Sauerbrunn) and Dobrna (Bad Neuhaus), at the time in Austria's Lower Styria and today in Slovenia. In a nutshell, the trajectory of these two groups of works—starting in the early 1900s and extending into the 2010s—mirrors the major changes that occurred in the area, most notably the immediate impact of political shifts in the aftermath of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and then again in the early 1940s, when the area was occupied by the Germans. Accepting the fact that moved borders and changed political systems deeply affect how objects are owned, cared for, or protected, Leitner-Ruhe's unsettling narrative is also an appeal for research to continue.

Calling for a critical revision of the role played by the art historian, *homme de lettres* and art dealer Benno Geiger (1882–1965) in various processes of dispossession, Katharina

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Hüls-Valenti traces his activities during and after the Second World War. Highlighting ambivalence and ambiguity makes the reader realise how necessary contextualization is in art (market) history and art (market) studies—an argument that is also substantiated by Emmanule Pellegrini's assessment of Eugenio Ventura (1887–1949). In 1942/1943, Ventura exchanged artworks with a certain art collector named Hermann Göring—none other than the notorious German Reichsmarschall. Based on extensive archival studies, Pellegrini explores the background and details of this deal. In fact, the transaction soon turned into an international diplomatic affair. Moreover, like several other cases presented in this volume, there are aspects of the story that still today remain open and unsolved.

Underlining the importance of sources, the next two articles by the archivists Simon Greco and Valeria Toscano take an empirical approach to the persecution and dispossession of Italian Jews during the Second World War. Concentrating on the Italian Central State Archive in Rome (Archivio Centrale dello Stato), Greco explores various relevant holdings in the Archive and their provenance. This useful overview is complemented by Toscano's report on the process of inventorying and cataloguing these records, which includes details about the process of creating and establishing the first genuine digital search aid geared specifically towards the TransCultAA research questions. This will provide a basis for future investigations of this kind in Italy.

The next group of four articles are similar in that they analyse hitherto overlooked sources, especially paper trails of shipment, storage, sequestration and confiscation, commodification, dispersal, and finally post-war attempts to reconstruct this trajectory. Forced (e)migration is a common undercurrent in all four. Within the research fields of translocation and provenance, focusing on material traces from ports and harbours to reconstruct deportation processes is a relatively new and quite specific research perspective. (It can be best compared perhaps to the paper trails found in German reparation files of the 1950s.) Supporting the call for more comprehensive assessments of historical processes of dispossession, the four papers form a strong argument for including harbours, as key trans-shipment centres, in provenance research. Daria Brasca starts the series with a comprehensive and highly detailed overview of the fate of the goods of Jewish emigrants in the Trieste Free Port during the Second World War. Her diligence is exemplary and yields fundamental results in the best sense of the term. Anneliese Schallmeiner traces the main operative figures active in Trieste between 1943 and 1945, including their institutional and organizational background and motives, while Albena Zlatanova explores an operation organised in early 1945 by the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt)—a social policy measure aimed at the re-distribution of seized goods—that was thwarted by the defeat of the Nazi regime. These three papers on various aspects related to Trieste are complemented by the fourth, which examines corresponding processes that took place in northern Germany at the harbour of Bremerhaven. Susanne Kiel's case study demonstrates that there were key similarities between the Mediterranean and the North Sea/Atlantic during the Second World War in how Jewish emigrants' removal goods were registered, processed, and exploited.

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Returning to the Alpe Adria region, the next group of articles examine the fate of the art collection of the Trieste family of Filippo Brunner. Margherita Colusso has condensed her master's thesis on the seizure of the Brunner collection, while Helen Brunner, the great-granddaughter of the former collector, describes her reactions to Colusso's findings. In turn, Maria Tischner reflects on the activities of the German art historian Erika Hanfstaengl (1912–2003), recounting Hanfstaengl's role as assistant to Walter Frodl (1908–1994) and his involvement in the translocation of the Brunner collection. Although shaped by different perspectives, all three contributions clearly indicate that this is "unfinished business", an example of historical processes (such as war-time actions) that have been partly transmitted, partly addressed, partly mitigated, and partly ignored until today.

The next two articles shift the focus eastward toward Maribor (formerly Marburg an der Drau). Barbara Murovec and Karin Šmid have been able to demonstrate a striking continuity between National Socialist and Socialist confiscations, as demonstrated by the successive policies governing the bodies operating in Maribor Castle. Furthermore, the somewhat organised concept of (Allied) collecting points such as those in Wiesbaden or Munich is contrasted with the principles of Socialist collecting or distribution centres. Continuing, Janez Premk and again Karin Šmid analyse the policies of both the city's civil administration and the Maribor Office of the Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood regarding the confiscation of real estate and valuables, providing insights into the concrete implementation of strategies of dispossession and relocation.

The immediate impact of the TransCultAA research questions on Croatia must be highlighted. Of the former eastern bloc countries, Croatia—which became part of Socialist Yugoslavia in 1945—demonstrated an openness and willingness to participate in the project that was outstanding, notably with regard to its serious and extensive responses to questions of Socialist property transfers. The papers assembled here as a group testify to this. Ljerka Dulibić and Iva Pasini Tržec succinctly explain how post-war processes, such as the forced musealisation of formerly privately owned works of art, became intertwined with other transfers of artworks from private property to state ownership or authorities. Because the newly established Socialist order was based on creating new ownership relations, the dissolution or liquidation of private assets was common and widespread. Particular attention is thus paid to KOMZA, the commission for gathering and protecting cultural monuments and antiquities, and how this organisation assigned or allocated objects to museum collections. In this context, "Private Collections of Public Interest" was a key historical expression. Pasini Tržec not only investigates this general policy, but also its concrete implementation based on the example of the confiscation of artworks owned by Eugen and Kamila Radovan. Another specifically "Croatian" dimension—and yet simultaneously international, or at least European—is addressed by Ivan Ferenčak in his study of the elusive Ante Topić Mimara. Based on hitherto unknown documents, found among other places in Swiss archives, Ferenčak probes the validity of the many cock-and-bull stories associated with the collector, dealer and museum director whose legacy is still present today, not least in the Muzej Mimara which opened in 1987 in the Croatian capital of Zagreb.

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In the Alpe Adria region, a large role in the region's cultural heritage has been played by borderland issues, territorial transformations, and political and governmental changes. This is illustrated at the beginning of the volume in Martina Visentin's paper on professional activities that often bordered on propaganda. Such activities also form the background of the paper by Elena Franchi. Her analysis of the negotiations between Italy and Yugoslavia on the restitution of certain cultural assets, negotiations that continued for over thirteen years, from 1947 to 1961, neatly illustrates the degree to which questions of national, cultural and collective identity are inextricably linked and interdependent. While different in scope and period, the papers by Visentin and Franchi form a connecting frame for the volume. This also holds true for the concluding contribution by Kristina Uhlíková and Jan Uhlík that mirrors the opening paper by Donata Levi with regard to definitions of "theirs" and "ours", or "them" and "us". Levi meticulously presents the process of ascribing meaning and national relevance to cultural assets; similarly the Czech authors reveal how the case for confiscations was "argued", that is, what reasons and justifications were given for dispossessing "enemies of the nation". Moreover, they reveal the role of art historians in implementing the policies of the newly restored Czechoslovak state in 1945.

Outlook

Overall, the contributions to this volume seek to contextualise the Alpe Adria region within a larger geographical area in order to demonstrate similarities and differences with other regions or countries, such as the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary or Serbia. As the lasting record of a transnational cross-border research effort about contested histories of cultural heritage transfer, this volume also unequivocally attests to the fact that such research is feasible and meaningful. It would be ideal if the HERA project is seen as a bridgehead or baseline for similar initiatives in the future. In this regard, however, it would be fair to mention that the success of the TransCultAA project was distributed somewhat unevenly. The teams of the two larger countries (Italy and Germany) basically delivered what they had promised: innovative research that has expanded what we know about the topic. But the teams from the two smaller countries (Slovenia and Croatia) encountered unexpected paths. The Slovenian research team faced many more difficulties than expected, while in Croatia, willingness to support the project goals, especially during the last year of the project, was much greater than envisaged. Three examples may suffice to illustrate this. First, archival documents in Croatia regarding the establishment and functioning of the so-called Collecting Points (both during the Ustasha Regime and in the post-war years) that had not been accessible to scholars for decades were made available in 2019 by the Ministry of Culture. Second, the final TransCultAA exhibition in Zagreb was opened on 24 September 2019 by the Croatian Minister of Culture herself, Nina Obuljen Koržinek. And third, at a subsequent Study Day at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, it was clearly demonstrated that the

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Strossmayer Gallery in Zagreb, which was the base for the Croatian TransCultAA research team, was considered by Croatian museum professionals to be a key institution and leader in the field of provenance studies. Indeed, the team would have been unable to develop its status as a role model without the HERA funding and acknowledgement of the relevance of provenance and translocation research. The pioneering status of this research effort certainly deserves to be recognized beyond the European Union.

By focusing on the transfer of cultural objects across space and time together with relationships and power structures, TransCultAA is exemplary for the HERA Program "Uses of the Past": Only by fully recognising the various meanings that were given to gains and losses of cultural assets in the past can we understand the dynamics of the attitudes, beliefs, convictions, and memories of today.

As a corollary, we can summarise that studying objects—which is what governed the project from beginning to end—inevitably also implies:

- studying the past,
- recalibrating perspectives,
- re-evaluating categories and classifications,
- revising and attributing (new) meaning,
- disturbing and challenging beliefs, stories, narratives, myths, interpretations, concepts, ideas, and theories,
- touching on relationships and disturbing personal / private / individual trajectories, remembrances, memories, feelings / emotions, identities, and
- (re-)negotiating the past.

In this context, it is fitting to mention the related transnational networking activities that are part of the Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project (JDCRP; see http://jdcrp.org/). Its aim is to "construct a comprehensive object-level database of Jewish-owned cultural assets plundered by the Nazis and their allies and collaborators from 1933 to 1945." Members of the JDCRP were either present as audience members, or were active participants or presenters at the major TransCultAA events (the conferences in Lucca, Ljubljana and Munich, and the Zadar summer school). The JDCRP is a long-term project that has received major initial financial funding from the European Commission. Thus the JDCRP is certainly a setting where the TransCultAA research questions, results, and outcomes will continue to dwell and proliferate in the future.

Similarly, the paper "Researching Objects = Researching Emotions? Lessons Learnt in the HERA Project TransCultAA" jointly delivered by the Italian and German principal investigators at the conference "translocations—Historical Enquiries into the Displacement of Cultural Assets", held in Berlin in December 2019,[2] is characteristic for the repercussions and

2 See: http://www.translocations.net/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF_s/translocations_international_conference_flyer_.pdf—An interview that was broadcast a week later can be accessed at: https://

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reverberations of the TransCultAA project. The paper demonstrated the broader implications of the project's research questions, and the potential of both contributing to and learning from related debates. Another collaborative "offshoot" of the project was a workshop held in May 2019 at the German-Italian Centre for European Dialogue at Villa Vigoni. For this workshop, the four principal investigators assembled a group of academics and doctoral students to explore the related topic of the Fascist art market in Italy.[3]

The papers in his volume seek to outline the conclusions of the project as such. They present analyses of various case studies as well as a comprehensive re-evaluation of the same. From a broad comparative perspective, the volume examines the processes of cultural heritage and object transfer that occurred during both World Wars, as well as during the inter-war and post-war periods. It features in-depth research into changes of ownership, temporary loans, trading, reselling and restitution, looting, safeguarding, confiscating, stealing, forced deprivation, expropriation, giving, presenting, exchanging and exploiting of objects for various purposes, including transfers as the result of political agreements and negotiations. Without any doubt, the new findings and insights presented in this volume will help forge a more complex understanding of inflexible narratives as well as of issues of patrimony that are still unresolved. Identifying obstacles such as ownership disputes is the first step; addressing them is the second. Both are indispensable for the third step: overcoming these obstacles. Understanding the evolution of problems is the key to solving them.

TransCultAA was conceived as a pilot study, a pioneering attempt to provide an overview of cultural transfers of all kinds based on factual evidence. Thus an essential role was played by archival documents: searching for, collecting, documenting, analysing, and assessing them. Whilst this may be seen a rather mundane approach, it is actually innovative because the dispersed and multilingual sources used for this volume had never been collected and studied at an international level until now. Strictly speaking, both the online source edition *Contested Space – Contested Heritage*, edited by Donata Levi and Michael Wedekind, and the present volume have entered new territory. They also point to the need for still more rigorous and comprehensive assessments of the intersection between politics and art in this region during the 20th century, including core issues of identity, patrimony, and how different European countries today view and handle the past.

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www.deutschlandfunk.de/aus-kultur-und-sozialwissenschaften.1147.de.html.

3 See: https://www.villavigoni.eu/event/the-fascist-art-market-before-during-and-after-the-rome-berlin-axis/?lang=en; cf. also https://www.villavigoni.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Abschlussbericht_Fuhrmeister_05_2019.pdf.

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1. Nationalism Versus "Values which Survive all Temporal Conflicts"

Art Historians in Times of War

Donata Levi

Introduction

> Es war kein schöner Impuls, meine Herren, der Euch bewogen hat, die Wiener Bilder und Kodices zu verlangen. Denn Ihr seid die geistigen Urheber dieser Requisition fremder Kulturgüter, ohne Euren Rat wäre Eure Regierung kaum auf den Gedanken gekommen, in dieser Weise ihre Macht zu mißbrauchen.[1]

This sentence, a harsh and distressed indictment, opened Max Dvořák's public letter to his "Italienische Fachgenossen" (Italian colleagues), published in 1919 as a preface to Hans Tietze's book on the "Entführung" (abduction) of Viennese artworks to Italy soon after the end of the First World War. Tietze (1880–1954), at the time Second Head of the Institute of Art History of the German-Austrian State Monuments Authority (II. Vorstand des Kunsthistorischen Instituts des Deutschösterreichischen Staatsdenkmalamtes), presented Austria's position from a legal point of view, complaining about the ruthless coercion exercised by the Italian military authorities, who had threatened to stop food supplies if the Austrians did not relinquish artworks and manuscripts which had been the property of the Habsburg monarchy for decades, if not centuries. On his part, Dvořák (1874–1921) accused his Italian colleagues on ethical grounds. Since the bulk of his text had already been written in 1915 (to be published in Italy, a plan rendered futile after Italy had entered the war on 24 May 1915),[2]

1 "It was not a nice impulse, gentlemen, that prompted you to demand the Viennese pictures and codices. For you are the spiritual originators of this requisition of foreign cultural assets; without your advice, your government would hardly have thought of using its power in this way." Dvořák 1919, p. 3. See Lucas Cladders' comment on Dvořák's letter at https://translanth.hypotheses.org/ueber/dvorak (accessed 20 Nov. 2020), with bibliography.

2 McEwan 2013, pp. 37–39; for the 1915 version see pp. 228–233. It was written for the journal promoted and sponsored by Aby Warburg, of which only two issues were published: *La guerra del 1914. Rivista illustrata dei primi tre mesi agosto settembre ottobre* and *La guerra del 1914–15. Rivista illustrata dei mesi novembre dicembre gennaio*, available online at http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=2425 (accessed 20 Nov. 2020).

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Dvořák's later changes and additions are highly significant. The 1915 contribution was not directly addressed to Italian art historians but generally aimed at highlighting the strong links between Austrian and German culture and Italian art and poetry, which Dvořák regarded as an indelible spiritual and unifying source. It is true that, while acknowledging Italy's (the Italy of the past) "ideelle Machtstellung" ("spiritual position of power"), he claimed German intellectual life to be the exclusive true interpreter and tireless herald of this intangible power. However, he also stressed that

> die Ursachen dieser Verwandtschaft liegen nicht nur in gegenseitiger Beeinflussung, sondern noch weit mehr in dem parallelen Streben nach einem gemeinsamen Ziele, das so oft italienische und österreichische Forscher in treuer Freundschaft verband.[3]

The tone of the 1919 paper was obviously completely different. Not only did he explicitly transform his assessment of the role of German *Kunstwissenschaft* into a harsh criticism of the backwardness of Italian art history, but Italian art historians were even accused of sharing the views of those—arguably the Futurists—who had considered the appreciation of Old Masters as an aberration and had expected the salvation of art to arise from the destruction of those works. Italian art historians, Dvořák stated, were now trying to execute such a programme in Austria. He explicitly accused them of having recommended to their government what was commonly referred to as pillage. In Dvořák's words, there could be no better evidence of the weight of the political and diplomatic responsibility of art history regarding the management of art and cultural heritage. It was only art historians, with their expertise and their knowledge of the 'provenance' of Austrian art treasures, who could induce diplomats involved in peace negotiations to put forward requests for restitution that far exceeded war reparations.

Dvořák's allegation against Italian art historians can be interpreted in various ways and many of them have to do with psychology. In his text, one senses the bitter disappointment towards colleagues who had previously admitted the superiority of Austrian and German historiography: a disappointment that was accompanied by a number of complaints and accusations of betrayal. However, Dvořák's complaints were also inspired by a desperate sense of *finis imperii* that also characterized the feelings and actions of several Austrian and German art historians, such as Julius von Schlosser (1866–1938). On 9 November 1919, writing from Vienna to his friend Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), the Italian philosopher, Schlosser described the city as "moribonda, anzi putrescente".[4] In this, Schlosser, whose mother was

3 "the causes of this kinship lie not only in mutual influence, but even more so in the parallel pursuit of a common goal which so often united Italian and Austrian researchers in loyal friendship", McEwan 2013, p. 232.

4 "moribund, indeed rotting", Lönne 2003, p. 40. The sense of discouragement that emerges from a letter dated 4 October 1919 is particularly significant: "Perché Lei, vivendo all'estero, può difficilmente

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of Italian origin (Magnino was her maiden name), was giving voice to the helpless sense of estrangement of a scholar in the face of the inevitability of historical processes.

Dvořák's 1919 letter is also an excellent starting point for dealing with the role of art history as a discipline during periods of critical historical watersheds, such as the First World War and its immediate aftermath. Here, at least three issues are at stake:

- how the discipline's network and systems (that is: scholars' status, relationships among them, affiliations to universities, academies, scholarly associations, the system of publishing, etc.) interact with other spheres and fields (military, political, ideological, etc.);
- to what extent the art historical system can work as a supranational entity in the presence of national divisions and strong ideological conflicts; or, in other words, how strong is the attachment / feeling of belonging of a scholar to his professional community / group, as opposed to nationalistic choices / ideologies;
- and, more generally, how the discourse on a human endeavour—in this case, art—claiming alleged universal values relates to expertise on art heritage, which can be easily manipulated to foster nationalist or identity aims.[5]

Certain episodes during the traumatic periods immediately after the First World War and on the eve of the Second World War demonstrate the complexity of the interplay (to be mainly declined on a rhetorical basis) between art as a humanistic, universal, supranational expression, and art as one of the most eloquent demonstrations of specific feelings of belonging and national identity. Two such episodes involve international congresses of art history, congresses that, at least in theory, should strengthen the feeling of belonging to a transnational community and promote exchange and collaboration as well as fruitful sharing of research results. A third case offers an insight into the role of art experts in diplomatic affairs.

Misinterpreting the Nature of Art Heritage?

In 1922 Adolfo Venturi (1856–1941), the doyen of art history in Italy, published a review of the exhibition of art and historical works which had been returned to Italy by defeated Austria after the First World War.[6] The exhibition, accompanied by a *Catalogo di oggetti d'arte*

immaginarsi qual sorta di mendicanti, in ogni senso, siamo diventati […]; in questo brandello di quello che fu un grande impero, noi, ceto medio intellettuale senza patrimonio né bottino di guerra, non siamo neanche più in grado di acquistare libri tedeschi!" [Because you, living abroad, can hardly imagine what sort of beggars, in every sense, we have become […]; in this shred of what was once a great empire, we, the intellectual middle class with no wealth or spoils of war, are no longer even able to buy German books!], Lönne 2003, p. 33.

5 Cladders 2018 addresses these topics, especially focusing on the network of international museums.

6 Venturi 1922. On restitutions, see Frank 2016.

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