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Atrocities and Artifacts. The Berlin Museum of Ethnology and a Collecting Trip into Eastern Galicia

„What is cultural heritage?
We may answer: everything“[1].

1. Introduction

In the late summer of 1942, Hans Nevermann from the Berlin Museum of Ethnology and his assistant Ivan Senkiv requested funding for a collecting trip to the German-occupied Polish „Generalgouvernement“. Permission was granted and supported with around 5,000 Reichsmarks. The Berlin researchers spent a whole month in October and November 1942 on what is now the border between Poland and Ukraine - a region that historian Timothy Snyder described as the „Bloodlands“ [Snyder 2010]. The museum staff‘s „haul“ was considerable: they were able to acquire a total of 361 objects. To this day, they are stored in the museum depots in the Dahlem district in south-west Berlin[2].

[1] [Pruszynski 1997: 50].
[2] The objects are listed in the corresponding inventory book of the Museum of European Cultures from p. 89. This can be viewed at https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/smb_iv_mek-b_eub_nc_04260-08440_lz_1935-1980_2/0049/image,info,thumbs (2 May 2025).

Research into the expropriation and confiscation of (art) historical objects owned by Jews has also made progress. This applies both to the former German Reich and to the territories occupied by Germany[3]. Since the opening of the archives in the former Soviet Union and the former Warsaw Pact states, numerous studies have also been published for Central and Eastern Europe on the extent and the actors involved in the plundering of local museums, libraries and archives [Kuhr-Korolev, Schmiegelt-Rietig, Zubkova 2019].

It is significant that this finding does not apply to German (and Austrian) ethnographic collections during the Second World War. It is known that they also benefited from the expropriation of Jewish collectors[4]. They recorded significant growth during this period, not least from Ukraine[5]. However, in contrast to the involvement of (museum) ethnologists in the war events of 1914-18[6] there are still no systematic studies on the acquisition policies of folklore and ethnological museums in German-speaking countries for the Second World War[7]. The partial dismemberment of larger ethnographic collections in occupied territories has also not yet been investigated[8]. This blind spot in research is surprising at first, but it certainly corresponds with the priorities set during National Socialism: in the planned „Führer Museum", to put it bluntly, no ethnographic department was planned[9]. While the looting of artworks was centrally controlled and carried out by art historians and military personnel on site, the acquisition of ethnographic objects was apparently largely down to the interest and initiative of individual actors.

This is precisely the starting point for the following remarks, which deal with a „collecting trip" organized and financed by the Berlin Ethnographic

[3] From the multitude of literature, see here only [Dean, Goschler, Ther 2007; Duma 2025].

[4] Cf. for example [Pallestrang, Puchberger, Raid 2023].

[5] For one of the rare cases in which a genuinely folkloristic collection of painted Easter eggs was restituted to Ukraine in 2011, see Jewhen Solonyna, Українські писанки повернулися з Німеччини, Radio https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/3554073.html (2 May 2025).

[6] Cf. for example the contributions in [Johler 2010].

[7] For initial findings from various museums, see [Saalmann 2014: 205-225]. For the Viennese museum, see Johler 2017]. The corresponding inventory books for the former Hamburg Museum of Ethnology can be viewed online: https://markk-hamburg.de/files/media/2020/07/MARKK-Eurasien-ab-1921-NEU.pdf (2 May 2025).

[8] See, however, [Herrmann 2018].

The files also show that the folklore collections in Krakow and Lviv had apparently been dissolved and transferred to the German occupation administration, see Werner Kudlich to the Governor of the Krakow district (February 11, 1944), in: Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, R 52-II/279: Kanzlei des Generalgouverneurs.

[9] On this museum project, see for example [Schwarz 2018].

Museum. This took Hans Nevermann and Ivan Senkiv, who were commissioned to do so, deep into the territory occupied by Germany in Poland and today's Ukraine. From October 14 to November 20, they first traveled to places around Kraków before visiting the district of Galicia, which had been part of the „General Government" since June 1941. Ironically, the objects they collected from Poles, Ukrainians, Boyks, Lemkos, Hutsuls as well as Gorals, Russians and Hungarians still bear witness to the cultural diversity of the region, which was to be irretrievably lost as a result of expulsions, deportations and mass murders during and after the war[10]. In this context, Senkiv and Nevermann were also interested in Jewish objects, especially cult objects. They wrote quite openly in their travel application how they wanted to „create" a collection of Jewish folklore for the museum „in view of the containment of Judaism in the East"[11]. The fact that the ritual objects brought to Berlin in this way had probably belonged to people who had recently been deported or had already been murdered is unlikely to have escaped their notice, given the everyday violence and deportations taking place in full view of the public[12].

In the 1960s, the Ethnographic Museum gave those objects that had been left behind by Jews or had been extorted from them to what is now the Israel Museum.[13] However, the ethnographic objects that were acquired during the same journey among the other population groups in occupied Galicia are still in Berlin. After several reorganizations, they are now part of the collection of the Museum of European Cultures (MEK) [Kuhr-Korolev, Schmiegelt-Rietig, Zubkova 2019].

They have been stored in the museum's depots for over eighty years now, without ever having been the subject of a request or even a protest. This is hardly surprising: the background to this collection was largely unknown until recently[14]. The objects were also not requisitioned from museums or appropriated by direct coercive measures, but were generally bought from local residents. They therefore differ from those items that had previously

[10] For illustration, cf. [Mikanowski 2023: 198-215].

[11] Letter from Nevermann to the Director General (23.9.1942), in: Archiv des Ethnologischen Museums – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (henceforth: EM-Archive), MV I/1040.

[12] For a particularly vivid account, see [Wildt 2022: 397-405].

[13] The corresponding file can be found in the director's registry at the Museum of European Cultures - National Museums in Berlin. I would also like to thank Gioia Perugia from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem for information on the whereabouts of this collection.

[14] For mentions of this collection, see only [Seethaler 2014: 76; Tietmeyer, Vanja 2013: 399].

been in the possession of Jewish owners and were ritual objects that were involuntarily left behind.

But does the absence of physical violence in the direct acquisition of an object automatically imply its legality? Does the mere fact that Senkiv and Nevermann did not confront the people as Wehrmacht soldiers suggest an open-ended transaction on an equal footing? And what consequences does the answer to these questions have for the assessment of the collection? In order to assess this, the journey and the contemporary (museum) political, ideological and economic contexts against which the object acquisition took place are reconstructed below. Beyond the reconstruction of the appropriation contexts and also beyond the mere question of restitution, this text argues, museum collections from the occupation period always offer an opportunity for dialogue about shared historical experiences and are therefore part of a „responsibility to remember" [*Erinnerungsverantwortung*] [Aust 2021].

2. Museum collecting under National Socialist auspices

Fig. 1 & 2: Wooden containers collected in the Polish village of Brzozów near Sanok. The necklace was attributed to the Bojkos and comes from the village of Lutowiska in south-eastern Poland. © Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

From pot lids, feeding troughs and flax rakes to necklaces, shirt embroidery and children's toys - on their trip in October/November 1942, the Berlin museum employees Ivan Senkiv and Hans Nevermann were primarily interested in objects from the rural working and everyday world. They were basically following a „rescue paradigm" that had been widespread across disciplines since the late 19th century[15]. The department „Eurasia", for which Senkiv and Nevermann had set off for the „Generalgouvernement", was also clearly committed to this approach[16] and was primarily interested in the supposed peripheries and outlying areas. [Buchczyk 2023: 5]. Here, according to the widely shared opinion, cultural development stages could be traced back over centuries on the basis of material culture [Cf. Penny 2019: 13-20]. Even if this perspective was not necessarily based on a völkisch-racist division of the world, the proximity of physical anthropology and ethnology, which was still largely unquestioned at the time, meant that it could be connected [Laukötter 2011]. A proximity to völkisch positions also seems to have been quite widespread at the Berlin folklore and ethnological museums, as suggested by the NSDAP membership and the völkisch positions of some of their protagonists[17].

In addition to the often undoubted agreement with the ideology of National Socialism, the hour of the opportunists struck at the Berlin Ethnological Museum, especially with the beginning of the war: the occupation of Poland, the so-called „destruction" [Zerschlagung] of Czechoslovakia, but also the attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 provided largely „favorable" conditions for the acquisition of ethnographic objects. While racial resentment and imperial arguments had hardly been used to underpin the importance of acquiring objects in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, such justifications became increasingly prominent from 1939 onwards. The Eurasian department, as its head Kunz Dittmer informed the Director General of the National Museums shortly after the start of the war, was ready „to take over, view and process any objects collected in Poland". To this end, Dittmer also undertook a trip to the occupied territories in order to ultimately lay the foundations for the complete

[15] [Habermas 2021]. On ethnological museums explicitly, see [Laukötter 2008].

[16] Cf. on this, albeit affirmatively, [Nixdorff 1973]. On the Europe-collection, see also [Tietmeyer 1996].

[17] Examples include Hermann Baumann, the first director of the Eurasia department at the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, and Konrad Hahm, the first director of the Museum of German Folklore, see [Tietmeyer, Vanja 2013].

plundering of the Polish museums [Tietmeyer 2001]. In Dittmer's opinion, the looted cultural property should be donated to the Berlin Ethnological Museum, which would correspond to „the rank of the Berlin State Museum of Ethnology as the most important ethnological museum in the world"[18].

Even if this plan ultimately did not come to fruition, those responsible obviously remained true to their vision of capitalizing on the subjugation of Europe for the museum. In 1940, for example, Kunz Dittmer acquired several hundred objects from Slovakia - a fascist satellite state of Nazi Germany since 1939[19]. And in the case of the Galicia collection, the museum also bluntly referred to the „good opportunity" of the geopolitical situation. Dittmer's interim successor Hans Nevermann found that the occupation of Eastern Galicia by the Wehrmacht from June 1941 was the ideal moment to come into possession of „valuable ethnographic objects" from the „eastern territories". The imperial and Lebensraum policy brutally pursued by Germany seemed to fit seamlessly into old and almost „classic" collecting interests. In the same letter, Nevermann warned that „as a result of the upheavals caused by the war and the complete reorganization of the East, there will soon be nothing left of most of the old things". He felt that the time was right for intensive collecting among ethnic groups such as the Boyks and Hutsuls[20].

Regardless of the undoubted opportunism that undoubtedly underpinned these ideas, Nevermann and Senkiv's desire to collect corresponded to the fundamental paradigms of European ethnology, which was dedicated to the search for the „elementary, primitive forms of human culture"[21]. Accordingly, a strong (popular) scientific interest in supposedly particularly „primitive" cultural groups, such as the Hutsuls in the eastern Carpathians, was sparked early on[22]. Initially still highly exoticized, over time their representation became increasingly ethnic. This was particularly true in Ruthenian/Ukrainian circles in the Habsburg Empire. Here, ethnography, linguistics and the arts increasingly incorporated the Hutsuls, but also the

[18] Report on Dr. Dittmer's business trip to the occupied Polish territories (11.12.1939), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 0629.

[19] EM-Archive, I/MV 1254.

[20] For the quotations, see letter from Nevermann to the Director General (23.9.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/ MV 1040.

[21] [Korff 1994: 380]. For the program of a „Völkerkunde Europas", see, among others, [Buschan 1926].

[22] The founding father of German ethnography, Adolf Bastian, had already described them in 1871 as the „purest" equivalent of the „Ruthenian tribe", see [Bastian 1871: 226].

aforementioned Boykos, into a national narrative and postulated them as the epitome of the Ukrainian [Rohde 2023; see also Rohde 2021: 237-240]. Under different circumstances, this also applied in the interwar period, when in the Second Polish Republic the material culture of the Hutsuls was cultivated, promoted and extensively researched ethnographically as a kind of reservoir of national Polish customs [Dabrowski 2021: 109-110].

Fig. 3: Ivan Senkiv and Hans Nevermann acquired this nutcracker in Riczka, now in Ukraine, a center of Hutsul wood and metal art. © Museum Europäischer Kulturen - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

With their collection of the material culture of the Boykos and Hutsuls in particular, Senkiv and Nevermann were building on ethnographic „trends“ that had been in existence for some time and had already been inspiring museum collections, exhibitions and research trips for around 70 years at that time. This naturally applied to regional centers such as Stanislaviv/Stanislawów/Stanislau (now Ivno-Frankivsk) and Lviv/Lwów/Lviv with their trade shows and museum foundations. In Vienna, too, museum director Michael Haberlandt was quick to acquire objects from the Eastern Carpathians [Plöckinger 1998]. Only the Berlin Folklore Museum acquired objects of Hutsul provenance earlier than the museum in the capital of the Habsburg Empire did. This was mainly due to the collector and patron Alexander Meyer-Cohn. These objects were transfered to the Museum of Ethnology when the Eurasia department was founded in 1935[23].

[23] Cf. the protocol of the meeting of the Verein für Volkskunde, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 1 (1891), 459.A further collection can be traced back to the merchant and folklorist Paul Träger, cf. meeting of May 23, 1903, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 35, 4 (1903).

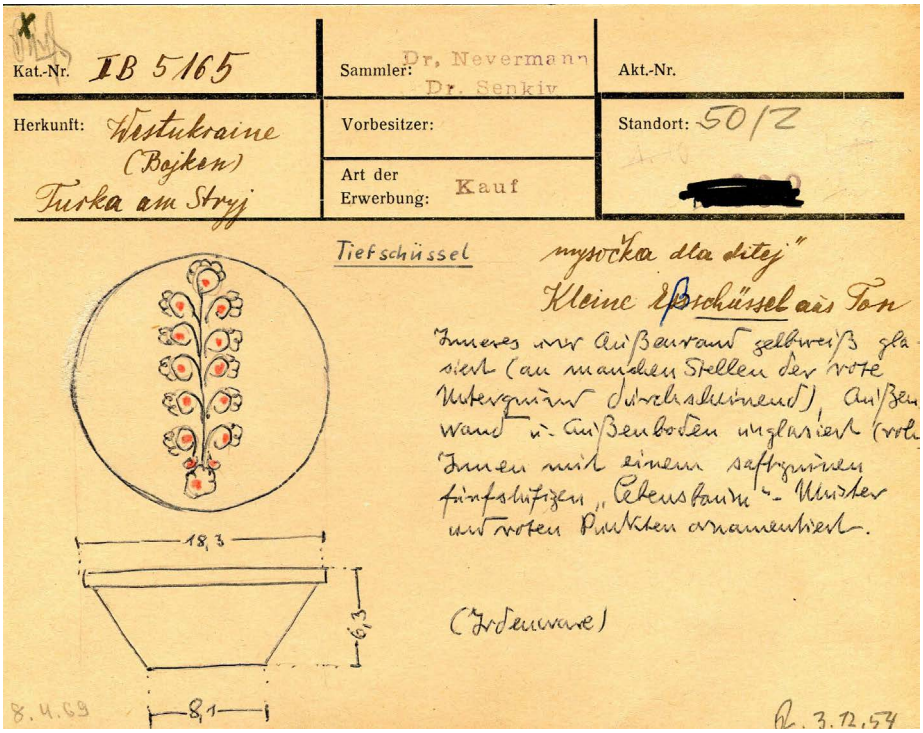

Fig. 4: After his return, Ivan Senkiv made an index card for each of the objects he had collected. Some information was visibly added later, presumably on the occasion of a revision of the collection in 1954. © Museum Europäischer Kulturen - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

3. Preparing for a research trip

None other than Ivan Senkiv was entrusted with the recording and processing of those objects from the Carpathian region. The meticulously completed index cards, which have survived to this day, suggest that he devoted himself to this task with great zeal[24]. As a trained ethnologist, he had already dealt intensively with the material culture of the Hutsuls during his studies[25]. Kunz Dittmer, head of the „Eurasia" department at the Berlin Ethnological Museum since 1939, was correspondingly emphatic in his support of Senkiv's approach[26].

Born on October 7, 1910 in the village of Pobereże, now Poberezhzhya in western Ukraine, Senkiv fled from the advancing Soviet troops in September 1939, who were to occupy the region until its German annexation

[24] Senkiv's work contracts with a rough description of his commission are filed in the archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, I/MV 1354.
[25] Ukrainische Vertrauensstelle to SMB (17.11.1939), in: Ibid.
[26] Dittmer to General Director Kümmel (24.10.1939), in: Ibid.

two years later as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact[27]. As a graduate in folklore and ethnology from the University of Warsaw, he immediately sought employment at the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin and received several contracts to work on the collection from 1939 to 1944. He also furthered his university career and completed his doctorate under Adolf Spamer with a thesis on „The pastoral life of the Hutsuls[28].

Given Senkiv's keen interest in the material culture of his home region, it is likely that he took the initiative for the trip here in the late fall of 1942. Although the interim head of the Eurasia department, the Oceania specialist Hans Nevermann, had submitted the application for the trip and its financing, he probably only acted as „tour guide" on paper[29]. For Nevermann, who was able to seamlessly continue his career at the Berlin Museum and as a professor of ethnology after the war as an „unencumbered" person, this trip was to remain his only „collecting experience" in Europe [Cf. Zepernick 1985].

This distribution of roles is also supported by the fact that it was not Senkiv's first trip to the region: he had already spent July 1942 in his home region - „to examine the folklore museums in Galicia", as he recorded in a travel report[30]. So when Nevermann wrote to Otto Kümmel, General Director of the Berlin museums, that the aim of the joint trip was to „supplement the collection of Hutsuls and [the] creation of a new collection of the Bojkos" as well as the creation of a Podolia collection, this was probably only secondarily based on his own knowledge of the collection. The intention to acquire mainly household goods and „folk technology", but not traditional costumes, as these were difficult to obtain, can probably be attributed primarily to Senkiv's local knowledge[31]. After his first trip, he had already informed the director general that „the really valuable items (traditional costumes, carpets, etc.)" were significantly more expensive than expected[32].

[27] Senkiv questionnaire (5.12.1939), in: ibid. On this aspect of German migration history, which has been largely overlooked to date, see [Antons 2017].

[28] Other examiners were the Eastern Europe specialist Hans Übersberger and the folklorist Richard Thurnwald, see examination file Johann Senkiv, in: Archive of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, UA, Phil.Fak.01: Nr. 930, Promotionen.

[29] Senkiv explicitly requested this official allocation of roles, as this would „make the journey easier" for him as a „foreigner", see Senkiv to the General Director (30.9.1942), in: EM-Archive, MV I/1040.

[30] Senkiv to General Director, report on the journey (1.7.-31.7.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1354.

[31] Quotes, cf. Nevermann to General Director (23.9.1942), in: EM-Archive, MV I/1040.

[32] Senkiv to General Director (August 22, 1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1354.

Whether Senkiv's driving force also applied to the „creation of a Jewish collection", which Nevermann held out the prospect of in his letter to the Director General, cannot be conclusively assessed here. However, Senkiv had not come up with any such „acquisition proposals" on his first trip. Nor did this play a role in a further trip to the region a year later[33]. At the same time, there is no reason to assume that the „seizure of existing [Jewish, MT] objects with the help of the German police stations" presented Ivan Senkiv with major problems of conscience[34]. He and his German colleague clearly took advantage of the „favor of the hour" at the height of German tyranny in Europe to expand their collection in all directions. The fact that this went hand in hand with the systematic murder of the Jewish population, which was carried out with bestial brutality precisely at this time and in Senkiv's and Nevermann's area of travel, obviously did not play a major role for either of them[35].

4. Ethnography as an instrument of imperial visions

After Ivan Senkiv had already undertaken a preparatory trip to his East Galician home region in today's Ukraine around the town of Stanislaviv/Stanislawów/Stanislau (today Ivano Frankivsk) in July 1942, he and Hans Nevermann asked for the release of funds for a more extensive collecting trip in September of the same year. „The complete reorganization of the East" would leave nothing of the „valuable folkloristic objects" that supposedly still existed there. The requested funds would be used primarily to purchase farming, craft, hunting and household tools and to document „folk technology". They identified the current Ukrainian-Polish border region around the towns of Tarnopol, Rohatyn and Sambor as the regional focus. The two museum employees also outlined the aforementioned acquisition of Jewish objects in this letter. They were „of course not thinking of purchases from Jews, but of [sic] securing existing Jewish objects with the help of the German police[36].

[33] This was primarily used to record local songs on wax cylinders, which are still in the Berlin museum collections today. The collection now belongs to the Ethnological Museum and is inventoried under the number VII WS 278.

[34] Nevermann to General Director (23.9.1942), in: EM-Archive, MV I/1040.

[35] [Sandkühler 1997]. For a detailed local study of the town of Buczacz, only 60km from Senkiv's birthplace, see [Bartov 2018].

[36] Quotes, cf. Nevermann to General Director (23.9.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.

Approval was granted promptly: They were to set off with 5,000 Reichsmarks, with 3,000 RM budgeted for the purchase of the property alone[37]. A trip by two ethnologists to the occupied Generalgouvernement was of course anything but an everyday occurrence: contact had been made with the Galician district administration in advance[38]. For security reasons, the business trip permit was also to serve as identification for the researchers at the local police stations. Ivan Senkiv had already anticipated in Berlin that his surname together with his place of birth in „Pobereze" was likely to make them suspicious. He had been calling himself „Johann" for some time and, as a precaution, asked for his place of birth to be removed from the letter at the beginning of October[39].

On October 15, 1942, Senkiv and his German colleague Nevermann arrived in Krakow, the capital of the Generalgouvernement[40]. They immediately reported to the local authorities and drove the following day to the spa town of Rabka, about 50 km away. Here they bought wooden toys and drove on to Sanok the same day which had been the border between the General Government and the Soviet-occupied part of Poland until June 1941. They stayed until October 19, visited the local museum, a trade exhibition and the surrounding villages and acquired everyday objects such as sieves, a chair and clay bowls. These objects were then sent to Berlin in a wooden chest as the first shipment[41]. A note on the chest, which identifies the „German House" in Sanok as the place of dispatch, suggests that the two made use of the occupying power's logistical and social infrastructure[42]. After a short detour to what is now Sambir, where they visited a weaving mill and the Bojko-museum, among other things, Senkiv and Nevermann spent the week of October 22-29 in the towns of Stanislviv/Stanislawów/Stanislau and Turka / Stryj. From here, a total of eight crates were sent to Berlin, containing not only a lot of agricultural equipment but also a collection of Bojkian everyday and art objects, which still fills an entire cupboard in the depot of the Museum of European Cultures[43]. The two also used these stops for visits to local officials and police officers, and probably also for

[37] Letter of authorization (26.9.1942), in: Ibid.
[38] Cf. handwritten note (18.8.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1354
[39] Senkiv to General Director (8.10.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.
[40] Cf. the itinerary with rough details of the individual places of stay, in: ibid.
[41] Waybill (19.10.1942), in: ibid.
[42] On the „German Houses", among other things, as places of symbolic separation between occupiers and occupied, see [Roth 2009: chap. I].
[43] Waybill (29.10.1942), in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.

putting together the collection of Jewish religious objects, including entire gravestones from these two places[44].

Those „Jewish objects that were collected by the Stanislau Jewish Council at the instigation of the local security police“[45] were in all probability nothing other than the remains of previously deported people[46]. The sobriety with which Hans Nevermann informed his superiors of this genocidal acquisition context is downright hair-raising. There was obviously no awareness of injustice at any time. Instead, there was a simple desire to add as many objects as possible to the museum. The „museum-political“ implications of Germany‘s striving for great power should certainly also be considered here: as a museum at the center of the „New European Order“, it was seen as a mission to give the European „mosaic of peoples“ a museum form[47].

This attitude of erecting a monument to the peoples and cultures of Europe and at the same time celebrating Germany‘s alleged modernization achievements in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe was by no means alien to the German imperial fantasies of the interwar period. To a certain extent, it also determined the collecting impetus of the Berlin Ethnological Museum in the interwar period[48]. Ultimately, Senkiv’s and Nevermann’s collecting trip in late 1942, albeit in a much clearer imperial context, was linked to this interest in collecting. This also applied to the second part of the journey in the very south-east of Galicia, Pokutia, which today lies on the Romanian-Ukrainian border. Here, too, the aim was to collect regions that were still largely *terrae incognitae* for the Berlin museum. These included the villages of Vorochta and Riczka, which were predominantly inhabited by Hutsuls. Since the end of the 19th century, these were treated as a kind of epitome of inner-European exoticism. As a result, their artifacts were highly sought-after collectors‘ items in folklore and ethnological museums, which gave local arts and crafts a major boost[49]. Another focus of the collection during November 1942 was between

[44] For a list of these items, see ibid.

[45] Nevermann to Museum (7.11.1942), in: ibid.

[46] For a detailed overview of the deportations, as well as the ghettoization and murder of the local Jewish population, see [Browning 2012].

[47] Nevermann’s predecessor Kunz Dittmer had also formulated this desire quite explicitly in December 1939 in his report on the official trip to the occupied Polish territories, in: EM-Archive, I/MV 0629. On National Socialist cultural policy in the occupied territories [cf. Martin 2016]. On the fascist reorganization of Europe in general, see [Mazower 2008].

[48] With regard to Southeast Europe, see [Thaden 2024].

[49] [Amato 2021: 61]. On the Hutsul collection and its history at the Vienna Folklore Museum, see, among others [Beitl 2015].

the villages of Chodorow, Rohatyn, Yezupil and Pobereze – with detours to the surrounding villages. The museum staff worked here in Ivan Senkiv's immediate home region. Here too, pottery, models of agricultural tools, embroidery and other textiles were acquired, as well as a home-made altar (Fig. 5). Apparently under adverse conditions - black ice, but also the „excessively poor living and accommodation conditions" made collecting impossible in some cases[50] - the two concluded their activities in Stanislawów/Stanislaviv/Stanislau (now Ivano-Frankivsk) on November 17 and traveled back to Berlin via Lviv and Krakow, where they arrived again on the morning of November 20.

5. The price of objects: Collecting in the system of National Socialist exploitation policy

The biggest problem in collection and provenance research often lies in reconstructing the specific acquisition practices and the interaction with the people on site. A „smoking gun" that directly indicates an unlawful or even criminal appropriation or at least an obvious overreaching is rarely found in the sources[51]. This also applies to the collection trip of the Berlin museum employees – at least if we disregard the basic constellation that it could only have taken place because of the war of aggression against Poland and the Soviet Union, which violated international law. However, the sources are silent on how Hans Nevermann and Ivan Senkiv actually proceeded, whether and what resistance they had to overcome or whether they did (not) shy away from the threat of violence.

At the same time, the collection trip to Eastern Galicia in October and November 1942 and the numerous stays in small towns, villages and hamlets did not take place in a historical vacuum. They were characterized by an occupation situation that shaped everyday life at various levels and was permeated by blatant power asymmetries between locals and Germans. The Germans were largely perceived as an occupying collective. Encounters with them were always a risk that could result in arbitrary violence and humiliation – „German wishes became law" [Tönsmeyer 2024: 139]. It can be assumed that this also largely applied to Hans Nevermann and

[50] Cf. itinerary, EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.

[51] On the procedure and systematics of provenance research, see, among others [Zuschlag 2022: 83-114].

Ivan Senkiv and that the local people did not make a clear distinction between German museum employees on the one hand and members of the occupying forces on the other.

The fact that the military occupation also always had a cultural policy component is suggested by the basic principles of German cultural policy in occupied Poland, which was essentially aimed at eliminating all political, cultural and national awareness[52]. From March 1940, the district chiefs in the Generalgouvernement were instructed in this sense to prevent the cultivation of culture in any case [Madajczyk 1987: 339]. This did not only apply to „high culture": in addition to libraries, archives and art museums, local and ethnographic museums were also closed early on[53]. In this sense, the acquisition of rural artifacts by the Berlin museum also represented a loss of cultural identity, which was exhibited in a Berlin museum as a testimony to outdated everyday culture, but was withdrawn from the people as a potential source of historical self-assurance[54].

It must be pointed out at this point that the Nazis' plans for Polish cultural, and to an even more monstrous extent for Jewish cultural heritage, ultimately envisaged its destruction[55]. However, a tactic of national differentiation of the population in the style of ethno-political divide-and-rule was accompanied by a certain special status and preferential treatment of Ukrainians. This also had cultural-political consequences, insofar as previously Polish museums were now rededicated under Ukrainian nationalist auspices[56].

Particularly in the eastern Galician travel region, where the previous Soviet occupation had caused massive social upheaval and great suffering, the Wehrmacht was welcomed by the population in part as a liberator. However, this can only partly explain the sheer extent of the violence perpetrated against the local Jews by parts of the Ukrainian and Polish civilian population[57]. Without being able to go into this adequately at this point, it

[52] Cf. for example [Grelka 2009: 253-279].

[53] Cf. for example „Bericht über den Sammlungen (sic) des ehem. Ethnograph. Museum in Krakow" (2.8.1943), in: Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, R 52-II/276.

[54] On the role of material culture of cultural identity in postcolonial constellations and the disputes about its whereabouts in Europe's museums, see for example [Savoy 2021: 11-21].

[55] Cf. in detail [Harten 1996].

[56] Cf. [Zając 1979].

On this role and perception of the German occupiers, among other things against the background of the previous Soviet presence, see, among others, [Gur'ianov 2009].

[57] For a concise summary of the events in Stanislau, today's Ivano-Frankivsk, see [Löw 2012].

should be noted that some local people may well have had certain sympathies towards the Berlin museum employees. This is particularly likely in the case of Ivan Senkiv. He was born in the Stanislaviv/Stanislawow/Stanislau region and represented the Berlin museum and thus the German occupiers, but was also able to present himself and collect as a local. It was probably comparatively easy for him to acquire objects for the museum in his birthplace of Pobereze or in Jezupol, where he had attended school and still had relatives and contacts[58]. However, whether it was ultimately the collector's personal contacts or the broad-mindedness or relative willingness of the local population to collaborate with German museum people that was decisive cannot be conclusively assessed at this point. In any case, it is noticeable that significantly more expensive and large objects were acquired in the places mentioned. More detailed local studies would have to show whether the purchase of museum objects is also indicative of their previous owners' connection to the German occupiers, as could be assumed in the small town of Sanok in south-eastern Poland, for example[59].

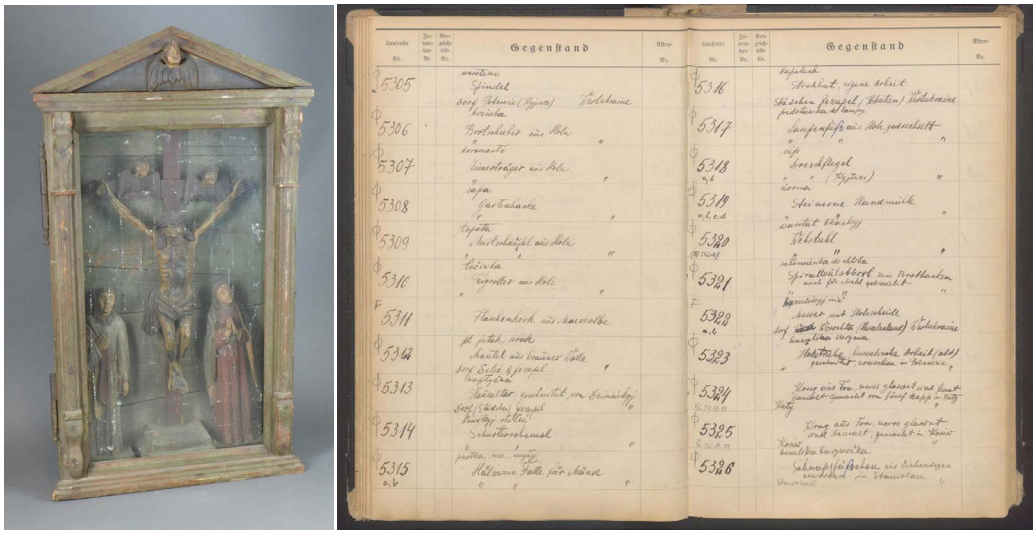

Fig. 5&6: Household altar, carved and acquired in Jezupol/Jesupil. Excerpt from the inventory book of the Museum of European Cultures with objects from the Pokutia region. © Museum Europäischer Kulturen - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

[58] The address of the two employees in Jezupol was „M. Senkiv", who was probably Ivan Senkiv's brother Michael. For details, see the file of his daughter Irena, in: Application for IRO Assistance (CM/1), Iwan Senkiv, Archive of the ITS, Bad Arolsen.

[59] In Sanok, Poland, several objects were acquired from the trader Tadeusz Robel, whose family was on the „folk list", cf. invoice, in: EM-Archive, I/MV 1040. A photograph of the gallantry run by his relative Zdzislav Robel has been preserved in the Historical Museum of the City of Sanok. I would like to express my gratitude to its director Jarosław Serafin for this information.

It is well known that there was a certain degree of collaboration with the occupiers, especially in the former Soviet Western Ukraine. Among Ukrainian nationalists and their paramilitary units, but also among the local gendarmerie, there was partially a great willingness to participate in the mass murder of Ukrainian Jews and also to commit massacres against of the Polish and Jewish population on their own authority[60]. It seems likely that parts of the civilian population benefited in particular from the brutal measures against the local Jews, whose murder took precedence over the targeted expropriation and disenfranchisement[61]. This is all the more relevant for the collection as there were Jewish communities in every town visited without exception. Deportations and mass shootings were the order of the day at the time of the trip[62]. Whether the Berlin museum collection also contains objects in this respect that were acquired by the non-Jewish population but had previously belonged to Jews would be an important question to be investigated by means of targeted local studies[63].

Despite all collaboration with the Nazis, however, one thing remains clear: Poles and Ukrainians alike were „destined to become servants of the German master race“ under occupation [Grelka 2009: 274]. Even the integration of Eastern Galicia into the Polish General Government was a measure directed against Ukrainian nationalism; the National Socialist „New Order“ ultimately only envisaged subordination to German interests, even for Ukrainians willing to collaborate. In the „colonial fantasies of a German-ruled ‚eastern space‘, millions of people were destined, if not to be murdered, then only to play the role of helots.“ „Violence, hunger, lack of housing, deportations to forced labor [and] fears for one‘s neighbor“ - this was everyday life under occupation in Eastern Europe, regardless of ethnic and cultural affiliation [Tönsmeyer 2024: 385].

This was also evident in Eastern Galicia: Originally planned as a region for „Germanization“, the original plan to preserve existing economic structures was quickly abandoned in favour of maximum and ruthless exploitation. Confiscations and nationalizations were enforced, with forced labour,

[60] [Berkhoff 2004]. Specifically on the collecting region, cf. e.g. [Struve 2015].

[61] On these objects, which have received little attention from „classical" provenance research, see [Waligórska, Sorkina 2023]

[62] Cf. again the corresponding entries on the collection sites in [Browning 2012].

[63] I would like to thank Magdalena Waligórska for this suggestion, who is investigating similar questions in an ongoing project entitled „Plundered Lives/Intimate Dispossession: The Afterlives of Plundered Jewish Personal Possessions in the Aftermath of the Holocaust" at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

unemployment, the murder of the Jewish population and brutal reprisals being the order of the day. This quickly led to a massive destabilization of the economy and the violent enforcement of production quotas, particularly in the agricultural sector [Pohl 2009: 160-164]. The forced recruitment of over 172,000 Polish workers, who were deported to the Reich as part of the so-called „Aktion Sauckel", had a particularly fatal effect. This affected 108,000 people from Galicia alone, who were „recruited" between April and June 1942. Immediately at the time when the Berlin museum employees set off on their journey, the local economy had to cope with a mass forced exodus of local workers and shopkeepers[64].

At the same time, the people were affected by the rigorous skimming of agricultural production, with the German occupiers setting ever larger quotas for the steadily dwindling crop incomes. From the summer of 1942, when the plans for the Berlin round-up were in full swing, it was decided to shoot future „quota refusers" under martial law [Roth 2009: 165]. This mixture of a reign of terror, which ultimately also depended on the arbitrariness of individual decision-makers in the ruling apparatus, and the precarious supply situation that accompanied it always had racist components: While the Reich profited from cheap grain and raw materials from the occupied territories[65] and the rations for Germans in the occupied territories remained the same, these were successively reduced for the local population - Poles and Ukrainians alike - or completely cut for Jews[66].

Thus, the collecting trips of Berlin museum employees Hans Nevermann and Ivan Senkiv to Eastern Galicia took place under extreme conditions. In 1942, the region was characterized by brutal occupation rule: disenfranchisement, forced labour, the targeted starvation of large sections of the population and the mass murder of the Jewish population not only meant that the terror became commonplace, but also led to the widespread collapse of the local economy. The consequences were hyperinflation, a massive loss in value of the official currency and a gradual transition to a natural economy.

Against this background, the acquisition of objects by Nevermann and Senkiv cannot be understood as a normal exchange or bartering. Although they officially paid in zlotys at the official exchange rate, this in no way

[64] On organized forced labour, cf. [Greve 2019].
[65] On various aspects of consent on the part of „average Germans" and their involvement in the „reorganization of Europe", see classically [Aly, Heim 2013²].
[66] Cf. in detail [Madajczyk 1987: 596].

reflected the real value: prices on the black market were many times higher, and in a lot of places the monetary economy had effectively ceased to function. The sums paid therefore meant that the museum employees only paid a fraction of the actual value for the objects they collected [Kleemann, Kudryashov 2012: 190-194].

However, local resistance and refusals to exchange testify to the fact that some people - despite hardship, hunger and dependence - were able to retain a certain degree of freedom of action. This might explain that why even before the trip, the museum staff were obviously expecting difficulties in persuading people to hand over their objects. In a report from Sanok, Nevermann was all the more surprised that the „opportunities for collecting [were] better than we expected, despite some difficulties“[67]. These difficulties were an expression of the „tendency towards demonetization“ as a result of the occupation rule [Tönsmeyer 2024: 199]. Valuables were sometimes only issued in exchange for special payments in kind such as „peasant premium coupons“[68]. Ivan Senkiv had already established that certain objects – such as traditional costumes – were simply not sold by the people and were withheld[69].

Finally, a distinction must also be made between the relatively small-scale, semi-official collections of Nevermann and Senkiv and the openly violent raids by so-called „collecting units“ of the Wehrmacht[70]. While the latter were armed and operated under direct orders, the museum employees were dependent to a considerable extent on the cooperation or at least a certain degree of consent from the local population[71].

Nevertheless, the quid pro quos negotiated - often embroidery thread or cheap cigarettes – ultimately also illustrate how limited this local agency remained[72]. The structural conditions of violence, impoverishment and economic devaluation set narrow limits to the scope for negotiation. The total price of 4900 zloty for over 360 objects was not exorbitantly low at around 12 euros per property – converted to today‘s purchasing power. However,

[67] Nevermann to Museum für Völkerkunde (21.10.1942), EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Senkiv to General Director (August 22, 1942), EM-Archive, I/MV 1354.
[70] See, for example, [Gyllensvärd 2022: 335-359].
[71] For more recent approaches to the history of everyday life that also point beyond the dichotomous notion of „collaboration” and „resistance” in this respect, see, among others, [Drapac 2015].
[72] Cf. the account of the journey, EM-Archive, I/MV 1040.

in view of the complete collapse in the value of the currency, a transaction relationship on an equal footing can certainly not be assumed.

6. Conclusion

The collecting trip by Berlin museum employees Hans Nevermann and Ivan Senkiv in late 1942 took place with state funding in an environment characterized by brutal occupation rule, economic collapse and systematic cultural expropriation. While they acquired 361 objects from different population groups over a period of about one month in Poland and what is now Ukraine, the exchange between the researchers and the local actors reflected the extreme power asymmetries on the ground, in which monetary value and reality were in a radically devalued transaction relationship.

At the same time, the collection was an expression of a broader ideological and opportunistic project: against the backdrop of National Socialist cultural and imperial policies, the appropriation of ethnographic objects cannot primarily understood in terms of a fair exchange, but as part of an instrumental strategy to consolidate German rule and reshape cultural identities. Although the acquisition of objects by Nevermann and Senkiv formally took place as a transactional exchange and was not directly linked to physical violence, it is difficult to speak of trade on an equal footing. Even if a relationship of trust with the local population and a voluntary nature of the transaction may indeed have existed for Senkiv‘s home region in particular, this is unlikely for the other collection contexts. The discrepancy between the official exchange rates and the actual black market values, combined with the coercive context of the occupation and the devaluation of the local currency, ultimately made an exchange on an equal footing impossible.

In addition, there was a certain degree of collaboration with the German occupiers, especially in the former Soviet Western Ukraine, which was particularly evident in the willingness of Ukrainian nationalists, paramilitary units and local gendarmeries to actively participate in the mass murder of the Jewish population or to commit massacres on their own. Parts of the civilian population also profited directly from the systematic disenfranchisement and expropriation of the Jews. In almost all of the towns visited by Nevermann and Senkiv, Jewish communities existed until shortly beforehand, whose members were murdered as part of deportations and mass shootings - with the aim of wiping them out not only physically,

but also culturally and economically. Against this background, it seems extremely relevant to ask whether the objects collected also include items that formerly belonged to Jewish owners and were transferred - voluntarily or under duress - to non-Jewish villagers in the course of the persecution before they found their way into the Berlin collection.

With over 360 objects collected, this collection forms a significant proportion of today's museum collection from Poland and Ukraine, which raises questions about the legality of the appropriation. Detailed information needs to be obtained about the individual objects, their original owners and the specific circumstances of their appropriation. An intensive exchange with experts and cooperation with local institutions - especially in Ukraine, where files from the German occupation administration are available - appears to be essential. An in-depth exchange with local museums will also be important in the future, not only to examine the collected objects for their ethnographic value, but also to find out more about the specific appropriation contexts of the objects and their value for the local people in cooperation with local actors. Last but not least, this is central to thinking about the whereabouts of the objects. Or to put it another way: should these objects actually remain in Berlin in view of the conditions under which they were acquired in the context of the occupation in violation of international law in the context of world war and mass murder? The „Washington Principles" ultimately provide no answer to this question, as they refer to „cultural property seized as a result of persecution", but not to its appropriation in the context of war[73]. However, it seems obvious that a critical examination is also required for the objects that were taken from Eastern Galicia to Berlin in the fall of 1942. In practice, however, this can only be decided in close consultation and cooperation between the museums[74].

Epilogue

The objects collected by Nevermann and Senkiv in Poland and Ukraine remained in the so-called European collection of the Museum of Ethnology in southwest Berlin. After the artifacts looted from Jews went to Israel in

[73] Cf. for example the comments in [Zuschlag 2021].

[74] For an interesting example of such collaborative work, albeit from a completely different context, see [Bründlmayer 2023]. See also the current research project on the Sámi collection at the Museum of European Cultures, see Resilient und lebendig: Projekt zur sámischen Sammlung im MEK, Museum and the City. SMB blog (17.2.2023), https://blog.smb.museum/resilient-und-lebendig-projekt-zur-samischen-sammlung-im-mek (2 May 2025).

the 1960s, the remaining objects remain still in Dahlem up until today. The fate of one of its collectors, Hans Nevermann, was also characterized by extensive continuity. In the fall of 1945, he took over the South Seas department at the Berlin Ethnological Museum; in 1951, he was awarded an honorary professorship in ethnology at the newly founded Free University [Koch 1983; Zepernick 1985].

The biography of the second collector - Ivan Senkiv - was far less straightforward: after being conscripted to build entrenchments in June 1944 and thus losing his job at the museum, he spent the end of the war near Dresden for unknown reasons. His subsequent career is comparable to that of thousands of people from Ukraine, Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe[75]. As an anti-communist and through his collaboration with the National Socialists. A return to the now Soviet Ukraine was out of the question. After an application to enter the USA failed, he spent the next few years with his wife and two children in various UNRRA and IRO camps in Germany. At the beginning of the 1950s, the family settled in Dortmund. Senkiv remained a „homeless foreigner" with a precarious legal status until he was naturalized in 1975[76]. However, he remained true to his subject: Senkiv continued to pursue his scholarly interests in Hutsul folk culture after 1945, maintaining an active correspondence and intellectual exchange with Polish intellectuals whom he had known since the interwar period[77]. Almost 40 years after its defense, his revised dissertation was published in the Marburg Herder Institute series [Senkiv 1981]. Based in part on objects that he himself had collected in 1942 - which Senkiv did not mention in the text - the monograph is still the essential reference in German on the material culture and customs of the Hutsuls in Ukraine.

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[75] As standard works for the German case as well as a more global-historical perspective, see [Jacobmeyer 1985]; [Gatrell 2015: 89-117].

[76] Information from the Senkiv personnel file in the archives of the City of Dortmund, information provided by the Dortmund City Administration to Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Director of the MEK (6.9.2012), in: Registry of the Director, MEK.

[77] [Kowalczyk 2002/2003; Bembenek 2021]. I would like to thank Marta Skwirowska from the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw for drawing my attention to these publications.

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Okrucieństwa i artefakty. Berlińskie Muzeum Etnologiczne i wyprawa kolekcjonerska do Galicji Wschodniej

Artykuł analizuje wyprawę kolekcjonerską zorganizowaną w 1942 roku przez pracowników Berlińskiego Muzeum Etnologicznego do Galicji Wschodniej, znajdującej się wówczas pod okupacją niemiecką. Wyprawa zaowocowała zdobyciem 361 obiektów etnograficznych od miejscowej ludności, w tym przedmiotów pozyskanych w warunkach przymusu w czasie wojny, okupacji i Holokaustu. Analizując źródła archiwalne, artykuł uwypukla złożoną zależność władzy, oportunizmu i ideologii, która ukształtowała kolekcjonerstwo muzealne w tym kontekście. Dziedzictwo tych obiektów, nadal przechowywanych w Berlinie, rodzi pilne pytania dotyczące proweniencji, restytucji i odpowiedzialności współczesnych muzeów.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, Ukraina, Generalne Gubernatorstwo, zrabowane dzieła sztuki, etnografia, narodowy socjalizm, II wojna światowa, Huculi, Bojkowie, Łemkowie, okupacja, Holokaust

Abstract: This article explores a 1942 collecting trip by staff of the Berlin Museum of Ethnology to Eastern Galicia, then under German occupation. The expedition resulted in the acquisition of 361 ethnographic objects from local populations, including items obtained under coercive conditions amid war, occupation, and the Holocaust. By analyzing archival sources, the article highlights the complex interplay of power, opportunism, and ideology that shaped museum collecting in this context. The legacy of these objects, still housed in Berlin, prompts urgent questions about provenance, restitution, and the responsibilities of museums today.

Keywords: Poland, Ukraine, General Gouvernement, Looted Art, Ethnography, National Socialism, World War II, Provenance Research, Hutsuls, Bojkos, Lemkos, Occupation, Holocaust