

Provenance Research at SKKG

Brochure

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Theory

1. Introduction

The *Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte*, SKKG, [Foundation for Art, Culture and History], located in Winterthur, owns one of the largest collections of artworks, as well as historical and cultural objects in Switzerland. The collection comprises several sub-collections and contains a total of approximately 100,000 objects. In recent years, the SKKG has cleaned and cataloged its holdings. The collection has been available online since early 2025. The digital presentation of these objects is continuously updated.

This informational brochure on provenance research at the SKKG explains how the foundation conducts provenance research and seeks to achieve just and fair solutions for objects that were lost due to Nazi persecution.

The SKKG places a high priority on determining whether its collection contains objects with a problematic history. It feels ethically obligated to proactively investigate the provenance of these objects. The aim is to identify objects lost due to Nazi persecution, to reconstruct a timeline of previous ownership and the circumstances of their loss, and to honor them through just and fair solutions. To this end, the foundation has developed a procedure based on the collaboration of two independent bodies: the SKKG Provenance Research Team and the Independent Commission SKKG (*Unabhängige Kommission SKKG*, hereafter UK-SKKG). From the foundation's perspective, the focus is on the clear separation between research (reconstruction of the case history) and legal assessment (decision on findings regarding the object). This allows the research team to focus on their investigative work. The evaluation of the findings in each individual case is the responsibility of the UK-SKKG.

Strengthening provenance research and its role beyond the foundation is a central objective of the SKKG Provenance Research Project, because both the current owners of the works and the wronged (Jewish) families and collectors, or their legal representatives, depend on reliable documentation to find just and fair solutions. Against this backdrop, the source-based reconstruction of case histories is a task that is both scientifically and ethically demanding.

The Provenance Research Team consists of provenance researchers and an editorial office. It is led by an external Project Management Team, which coordinates the research and provides its findings to the UK-SKKG, for which it also serves as a point of contact. The UK-SKKG and the external Project Management Team serve as independent oversight bodies for in-house research. More information on the SKKG Provenance Research Team can be found on the SKKG website.

2. Provenance Research and Justice

Between 1933 and 1945, the National Socialist regime systematically persecuted millions of people, particularly European Jews. It stripped them of their civil rights and property, forced them to escape or deported them to ghettos and camps, and abused and murdered them.

After the end of World War II, the situation in Central Europe was impenetrable in many respects, though efforts were made toward so-called reparations. Investigating the loss of cultural goods and works of art during the Nazi era was not a priority, even though these had been targeted by the authorities as valuable components of the movable assets of the persecuted. During the postwar period, it was difficult to reconstruct the looting and forced sales that had taken place during the Nazi regime.

To this day, the actual amount of artworks confiscated by Nazi officials remains unclear. A significant number have still not been returned to their rightful owners or their descendants. In light of the urgent need for action, eleven principles were adopted at the 1998 Washington Conference, in which the signatory states – including Switzerland – committed to clearing up injustices related to the looting of art. This includes, among other things, locating art and cultural goods lost due to Nazi persecution. A so-called *just and fair solution* should be found for recovered artworks, which could result in their return. The Washington Principles were confirmed and expanded at several subsequent conferences, most recently by the Best Practices in 2024.

The SKKG regards its collection – Bruno Stefanini's legacy – as part of our shared heritage. The foundation is committed to examining the collection for cultural goods lost due to Nazi persecution, publishing their provenance and acknowledging any claims that may arise. In doing so, it is guided by a holistic understanding of justice. In the SKKG's view, this includes an open and equal exchange among all parties involved, the unbiased consideration of opposing views, and continuous reflection on its own position.

Thorough, in-depth provenance research is an absolute prerequisite for the UK-SKKG's decisions. The foundation grants former owners who were injured by the Nazi state, or their descendants, the right to reclaim lost property and the right to know about the injustices that were perpetrated. In keeping with this understanding, the burden of proof for demonstrating lawful ownership lies with the current owner, not with the injured party. This means that it is neither the injured parties nor their descendants who must prove the persecution-related loss, but rather the foundation that must demonstrate that it lawfully owns the objects in its collection. In doing so, it aims to set a good example for other institutions and collections and to share both knowledge and practical resources.

Past injustices cannot be undone, even through meticulous provenance research and an open-minded approach to restitution. Instead, our focus is on acknowledging the injustices suffered, and fostering a societal dialogue about Nazi persecution and the loss of cultural goods.

3. Provenance Research at SKKG

Die Provenienzforschung der SKKG befasst sich mit zwei grundlegenden Aufgaben:
SKKG Provenance Research focuses on two fundamental tasks:

- During **initial checks**, objects are examined for any obvious red flags. The findings are published in clear, research documents (data sheets).
- **In-depth research** comprises comprehensive research. It is initiated by a suspected case, usually following an initial check. The results are documented in well-reasoned, detailed research reports that serve as the basis for the UK-SKKG's work.

A prerequisite for a prudent legal assessment by the UK-SKKG is research that goes beyond simply establishing provenance that is as complete as possible, instead comprehensively reconstructing the context of persecution and bringing to light the associated history of life and suffering.

The SKKG has decided to subject its collection to a systematic provenance review. In order to identify as many potentially problematic works as possible, specific criteria first had to be established for selecting the works to be examined – focusing on paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints. Works with a purchase value of 5,000 Swiss francs or more are being reviewed, based on the reference value set by the Swiss Cultural Property Transfer Ordinance (CPTO, Art. 16, Para. 2). Special due diligence obligations apply above this price limit under the Cultural Property Transfer Act, (CPTA, Art. 15–17). Particular attention is paid to objects by artists whose works were favored by the Nazi elite, or which were preferred by Jewish collectors, or which are or were the subject of restitution disputes. After applying these criteria to the whole SKKG collection, approximately 1,290 works remain to be examined as part of the Provenance Research Project.

The above-mentioned price limit does not apply if a search request is filed in the Lost Art database or if the foundation receives a substantiated claim. Information received from external sources may at any time result in works that have not yet been investigated or that were previously considered unproblematic being subjected to further investigation.

Changes in ownership during the period of Nazi rule (1933–1945) are of particular interest. Depending on the location, different time periods apply to persecution; in occupied France or Belgium, for example, the period is from 1940 to 1944. Events prior to 1933 or prior to country-specific dates of occupation may be relevant if collective or individual repression occurred. The period after 1945 is examined if there is evidence that the economic repercussions of persecution spilled over into the postwar era (particularly before the enactment of restitution legislation), such as the sale of works of art to alleviate economic hardship resulting from persecution under the Nazi regime.

To categorize the works of art to be studied, the SKKG has developed a process-oriented system that deliberately departs from the conventional traffic-light color scheme (yellow, orange, red, green). The four categories are:

- **In progress:** The work is currently under investigation. If evidence emerges that the work was lost due to Nazi persecution, a request to initiate proceedings will be filed with the UK-SKKG.
- **Clear:** There is no evidence that the object was lost due to Nazi persecution.
- **Resolved:** An agreement has been reached between the parties, or a decision has been issued by the UK-SKKG. The provenance has been duly acknowledged.
- **Unresolved:** The provenance still raises issues. The available data is not yet sufficient for the work to be submitted to the UK-SKKG for evaluation. The work is in a reactive phase. If new information becomes available, its status will revert to "in progress." This category also includes paintings with a purchase value of less than 5,000 Swiss francs.

These process-oriented categories take into account the fact that in provenance research, definitive conclusions can rarely be reached, due to the nature of the sources. Instead, gaps and

doubts regarding individual facts often persist. Information that emerges later – for example, in connection with previously inaccessible or unknown sources and archival holdings – may either corroborate or refute existing suspicions of a persecution context. This dynamic element is difficult to represent within the standard traffic-light-color scheme. The SKKG's system makes the status of objects being processed both clear and publicly accessible as part of its transparent research process.

The works to be examined undergo an initial check, during which their individual provenance is fundamentally reconstructed to identify preliminary evidence. Subsequently, the process-oriented categories are applied to determine how the works should be processed further. If there is suspicion of loss due to Nazi persecution, in-depth research becomes necessary. This involves the thorough investigation and documentation of the case history, including an exhaustive evaluation of available sources.

4. Independent Commission SKKG (UK-SKKG)

The SKKG has established an independent commission dedicated to resolving issues related to cultural goods lost due to Nazi persecution and the claims of the descendants of the former owners: the Independent Commission of the *Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte* for Clarifying Claims Resulting from Nazi Persecution, hereafter: UK-SKKG. The commission is tasked with finding just and fair solutions for cultural goods lost due to Nazi persecution that are currently owned by the foundation. It is based on broadly supported principles and a structured procedural framework. The SKKG is committed to recognizing and implementing the decisions of the UK-SKKG as binding.

The interdisciplinary UK-SKKG is tasked with determining whether a cultural good owned by the foundation was lost by former owners between 1933 and 1945 due to Nazi persecution. If this is the case, it works with the descendants of the victims to find a just and fair solution. The primary focus is on the unconditional return of the cultural good.

The UK-SKKG maintains its independence and impartiality in the adjudication of claims arising from Nazi persecution. It adheres to the guidelines of the 1998 Washington Conference and the 2024 Best Practices, the 2009 Terezín Declaration, the 2004 ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, and the 2023 Principles of the Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte (SKKG) in Dealing with the Loss of Cultural Goods due to Nazi Persecution.

In keeping with the 2009 Terezín Declaration, the UK-SKKG considers the loss of cultural goods due to Nazi persecution to be all losses suffered by victims of the Holocaust (Shoah) and other victims of Nazi persecution, including theft, coercion and confiscation, and on grounds of relinquishment as well as forced sales and auctions, occurring during the Holocaust era between 1933-45 and as an immediate consequence thereof.

The UK-SKKG makes decisions according to what is just and fair. It aims to find a solution that is to the highest degree reasonable and appropriate for all concerned. In cases where a cultural good was lost due to Nazi persecution and sufficient proof of legal succession is provided, the commission decides on the unconditional return of the cultural good or another just and fair solution.

The UK-SKKG's decisions are published once the proceedings have concluded. Due to confidentiality obligations, both the commission and the foundation do not comment on ongoing proceedings.

Further information on the composition of the UK-SKKG and its Rules of Procedure can be found on its [website](#).

5. Research Reports

The SKKG's research reports document the results of provenance research with the utmost care and in accordance with scientific standards. They take into account all identifiable sources and clues that contribute to reconstructing the case history. The research reports serve as the basis for the UK-SKKG's decisions. Once a decision has been made, they are made available to the public. In this way, they allow the public to fully follow the work of the research team as well as the commission's decisions.

The SKKG's reports result from in-depth research (see Chap. 3), which is triggered by initial checks that have uncovered evidence of loss due to Nazi persecution. In this way, research reports react to a red flag that calls for a thorough review of the facts requiring further investigation.

The research reports address three fundamental questions:

1. **Identification:** Is the object in the SKKG collection the same as one that is believed to have been lost?
2. **Ownership:** Was the presumed lost object the (legal) property of the former owners?
3. **Loss:** Was the object in question lost by its former owners due to Nazi persecution?

Documenting these facts and providing a plausible presentation of relevant leads and proof (circumstantial evidence and supporting documents) are essential prerequisites for the UK-SKKG's assessment of restitution claims. A reflective approach to both limited information as well as facts and scenarios of varying probabilities is just as necessary as taking into account the possible subjective perceptions or individual motives of those wronged.

Research reports aim to provide an objective, scientific presentation of research findings and do not constitute expert opinions. They focus on the factual reconstruction of historical events and refrain from offering personal opinions, assessments or recommendations.

Forschungsberichte bemühen sich um eine objektive, wissenschaftliche Darlegung von Rechercheergebnissen und stellen kein Gutachten dar. Sie konzentrieren sich auf die sachliche Rekonstruktion historischer Vorgänge und enthalten sich persönlicher Meinungsäußerungen und der Abgabe von Bewertungen oder Empfehlungen.

Practice: Research Reports

6. Structure

The provenance research reports of the SKKG follow a standardized format. Their structure is based on the Examination schedule of the Independent Commission SKKG (UK-SKKG) dated September 21, 2023. The table of contents outlined below may be adjusted in specific instances as needed.

Overview of available and reconstructable provenance (in table form)

1. Introduction
2. Was the cultural good in question owned by the presumed previous owners or their legal predecessors?
 - 2.1 Physical characteristics
 - 2.2 Identity of the owners or collectors
 - 2.3 Available provenance information from archives, exhibitions and literature
 - 2.4 Lost Art search request
 - 2.5 Identification of the work
3. Were the previous owners persecuted by the Nazi regime between January 30, 1933, and May 8, 1945?
 - 3.1 Biographies of collection founders
 - 3.2 Financial situation of the collection owners prior to 1933 (or the start of persecution measures)
 - 3.3 Biography of the work's last owners before it was lost
 - 3.4 Collective and individual persecution of former owners between 1933 and 1945
 - 3.4.1 Loss of Asset 1 (e.g. fiscal persecution / compulsory levies)
 - 3.4.2 Loss of Asset 2 (e.g. household effects)
 - 3.4.3 Loss of Asset 3 (e.g. real estate)
4. Object-related loss of assets due to persecution between 1933 and 1945
5. Post-war period: compensation, settlements and restitution after 1945
6. Decisions and recommendations regarding the same collection (precedents)
7. Source directory
 - 7.1 Published sources
 - 7.2 Unpublished sources
8. Provenance characteristics of the object (photos)
9. Secondary literature
10. Images

7. Reading Guide

Dieses Kapitel bietet eine kommentierte Lesehilfe für die Forschungsberichte der SKKG. This chapter provides a guide, with comments, to reading the SKKG's provenance research reports. The following explanations follow the structure of the standardized table of contents (see Chap. 6).

Overview

Research reports begin with a tabular overview of the traceable provenance of the object under review. A detailed discussion of the transactions with citations follows (Chap. 2.1 and 2.3). The overview lists changes of ownership chronologically, with details such as the date as well as the holder, owner or location. Dates may refer to specific points in time or time periods and, depending on the available sources, may vary in level of detail. Personal information is listed, where possible, together with dates of birth and death as well as locations. Birth names, married names and common names, as well as any spelling variations of these names, must be taken into account to reliably identify ownership. For changes of ownership, the method of acquisition (e.g. inheritance, purchase, loan, gift, exchange) and price information (purchase price or auction price) are noted, if known.

The ideal scenario is the ability to reconstruct a reliably documented, unbroken chain of provenance. In research practice, however, this is often not possible despite extensive research – whether because available sources are scarce or because accounts contradict one another. Nevertheless, trends can often be identified, or a certain overall picture emerges. In such cases, relative gradations of probability (degrees of evidence) such as “possibly,” “probably,” or “likely” are helpful in presenting the facts. (see P. 17). A certain degree of subjectivity is inevitable in this assessment.

1. Introduction

The introduction provides a concise summary of the key points of the research report. It addresses the following questions:

- Which cultural good is the subject of this examination?
- Who were the previous owners of the object, particularly between 1933 and 1945?
- Is there any evidence or documentation indicating that the object was lost due to Nazi persecution between 1933 and 1945?
- Are there any unresolved issues or particular difficulties in reconstructing the presumed loss?
- When and where did the most recent owners – in this case, Bruno Stefanini or the SKKG – purchase the object?

2. Was the object owned by the presumed former owners and their legal predecessors?

This chapter examines: on the one hand the object in question, which is owned by the current owner (in this case, the SKKG); and on the other, the object presumed to have been taken from the presumed former owners. Two questions are central here:

1. Was the object in question actually owned by the presumed former owners, and was it demonstrably part of their collection? (proof of ownership)
2. Is this actually one and the same object? In other words: Is the object in question really the one that belonged to the previous owner? (proof of the work's identity)

Proving ownership can sometimes be difficult, for instance when available sources contain references to ownership but cannot provide conclusive proof – such as when a collector reconstructs her lost collection from memory long after the end of the war due to a lack of surviving records, and her descriptions of the lost works contain gaps, discrepancies or contradictions.

The identity of the work (Chap. 2.5) is also not always clear either. Uncertainties may arise because the available information is incomplete, ambiguous or contradictory, or because the sources do not contain illustrations of the listed works, which would make identification easier.

2.1 Physical Characteristics

This chapter provides a physical record of the object under examination. The description includes details such as:

- Artist or attribution
- Title, including variations
- Motif
- Materials
- Technique
- Mass
- Signature
- Provenance characteristics on the object (front or rear)

2.2 Identity of owners or collectors

This chapter provides a brief biographical overview of the presumed former owners. A more detailed account of their lives follows (Chap. 3.1 ff.).

2.3 Available provenance information from archives, exhibitions and literature

What provenance can be reconstructed for the object being examined? This involves a chronological account of all traceable provenance based on archival records, research literature, exhibition and auction catalogs, as well as other sources that provide insight into holders, owners and locations. The goal is to trace the object's history as completely as possible, supported by source material.

2.4 Lost Art search request

"Lost Art" is the leading international database for reports of lost and found cultural goods believed to have been confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution. This section determines whether a report matching the work in question has been registered in the database, and records the details of the object being sought, the date the report was submitted, and the name of the person who submitted it.

2.5 Identification of the work

Is the work actually identical to the one that is presumed to have been lost? In addition to this question, it must be determined who might have a claim to the object in question. This involves the respective legal successors of the former owners, usually their descendants as heirs.

3. Were the previous owners persecuted by the Nazi regime between January 30, 1933 and May 8, 1945?

This chapter aims to use facts and evidence to demonstrate the extent to which the presumed former owners were persecuted by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. Clarifying the circumstances surrounding transfers of ownership during the period in question is crucial so that the competent authority – in this case, the UK-SKKG – can assess their nature: Was it really due to Nazi persecution, such as a confiscation by the Nazi regime? Or was the object sold voluntarily without demonstrable coercion? Were there other circumstances or indirect pressures that indicate an emergency, such as a professional, economic situation resulting from having to escape, or relatives in need of assistance?

3.1 Biographies of collection founders

This chapter provides more detailed information about the presumed former owners, their families and backgrounds; such as parents, siblings, children and close relatives. Of particular interest are: dates of birth and death; places of residence and moves; marriages, births and deaths; professional activities; as well as information about their art collecting activities:

- When did the founders of the collection begin acquiring works of art?
- How large was their collection?
- Is there a particular focus or theme to the collection?
- Did they only buy artworks, or were some also sold?

3.2 Financial situation of the collection owners prior to 1933 (or the start of persecution measures)

What were the standard of living and financial circumstances of the former owners before persecution began, apart from the collection? Any evidence or specific details may be based on the following aspects or sources:

- Tax payments
- Land and real estate
- Company shares
- Cash and securities
- Memberships on committees
- Positions in foundations and commissions
- Wills

3.3 Biography of the work's last owners before it was lost

This chapter provides biographical information on the last verifiable owners prior to the presumed loss (provided they differ from the collection founders discussed in Section 3.1). The aim is to reconstruct their economic and professional circumstances. This allows for any changes and developments occurring after 1933 to be identified and placed into context.

3.4 Collective and individual persecution of former owners between 1933 and 1945

The aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which the last owners were persecuted prior to the alleged confiscation. The following questions serve as a guide:

- What evidence is there of collective persecution – did they belong to or associate with a group persecuted by the Nazi regime, such as Jews?
- What evidence is there of targeted persecution (measures directed at individuals)?

- To what extent did living conditions, financial circumstances and employment change after 1933? Did the course of the war, opportunities to escape, changes in professional status, tax obligations, or personal experiences of violence, as well as a subjective sense of being threatened, play a role in this?
- Did collecting habits change significantly after 1933?
- To what extent was the person able to engage in paid employment after emigrating or escaping to a transit country or a “safe third country”? Were they subject to restrictions or did they face discrimination? Did they have access to their assets?

The loss of the following types of assets are relevant for reconstructing individual persecution:

- Loss due to fiscal persecution (compulsory levies, Reich Flight Tax, etc.)
- Loss of company shares
- Loss of household effects
- Loss of real estate

The following sources and collections are relevant for this purpose:

- Files on foreign exchange controls and escape
- Tax files from state finance offices and “asset realization” offices
- Sources on *Feindvermögen* [enemy assets], confiscation and *Verwertung* [realization] by the German Reich
- Company archives and documents on *Ent-Besitzungen* [expropriation] (“Aryanization”) of companies and businesses
- Sources on banks and insurance companies, to the extent that assets were affected
- Sources on restitution and compensation proceedings, which describe the loss from the perspective of the victims
- Files from lawyers
- Journals, private correspondence (so-called ego documents)
- Records regarding stays in transit countries or “safe third countries,” such as resident registration records or *Fremdenpolizei* [Swiss or Austrian federal aliens police], customs documents, residence permits, tax records, work permits and wills – which, for example, provide information about the local economic situation or attempts to transfer assets

The subsections of Chapter 3.4 list and describe various types of verifiable asset losses, organized by type of asset (see above), that affected the last owners. Of particular note are specific acts of reprisal and references to experiences of violence, as well as any instances of indirect pressure. In the case of sales and auctions, both the amount obtained and the buyers or beneficiaries are of interest.

4. Object-related loss of assets due to persecution between 1933 and 1945

The fourth chapter aims to provide information on whether the object in question was lost due to persecution between 1933 and 1945, for example through forced sale or confiscation/expropriation.

This is based on the research findings from Chapters 1 through 3, specifically the following aspects:

- Evidence of and receipts for transfers of ownership

- Search results for buyers, dealers, auction houses, museums and art galleries
- The appearance and disappearance of items on lists, including asset and account statements or storage lists

The following questions serve as a guide for determining the nature of sales:

- Is the purchase price known? Was it reasonable?
- In the case of multiple sales: Is there a trend in prices, or perhaps a steady decline in proceeds?
- Were the proceeds from the sale freely available? If yes: Was their availability restricted by payment pressure, discriminatory payments, or limited/no access to accounts (so-called frozen accounts), or by attempts to rescue relatives or close friends?
- Did the buyer and seller have a special relationship? Was there a history between them or did they keep in touch? Did the buyer assist the seller, for example by helping them escape or transferring the proceeds to a safe country abroad?

Some of the factors that may support this assessment include:

- Documents containing information about the purchase price
- Evidence of payment
- Sales of comparable works in open markets, or the general market situation

5. Post-war period: compensation, settlements and restitution after 1945

This chapter focuses on documented compensation proceedings and their outcomes, taking into account any imbalances in the legal dispute, such as unequal power dynamics between the parties, the disproportionate allocation of the burden of proof by the court, or factors related to the claimant's life circumstances. Key questions include:

- Were the former owners compensated after the war for the financial losses they suffered?
- Did they receive any restitution or compensation?
- Was there any attempt at restitution?

6. Decisions and recommendations regarding the same collection

Is there evidence of decisions or recommendations regarding the collection under review having been made? Information regarding such decisions and their outcomes provides a frame of reference for the UK-SKKG. As a rule, these are not commented on or evaluated.

7. Source directory

The following chapters constitute the appendix. The source directory distinguishes between published sources (Section 7.1) and unpublished sources (Section 7.2). A system of abbreviations offers concise references in the footnotes and streamlines the scholarly apparatus.

8. Provenance characteristics of the object

This chapter comprises a table listing the provenance characteristics discussed in detail in Chapter 2.1; they are described concisely and documented with photographs.

9. Literature directory

The secondary sources used are listed separately in this directory.

10. Images

This chapter contains the images used in the report.

8. Editing

As a basis for decision-making by the UK-SKKG, reports are essential documents in provenance research. They must therefore meet specific requirements: consistent structure; precise wording; easily understandable, even when dealing with complex issues. Care must be taken to maintain a factual tone, ensure the consistent use of terminology and handle certainty and uncertainty (evidence) transparently.

Given these requirements, we recommend that research reports undergo editorial review by a second person (dual-reviewer principle). On behalf of the SKKG, a professional editor specializing in research-based and legal texts is responsible for the second review. This editor processes the reports in accordance with internal guidelines, critically and constructively reviewing them for language, content and form, while improving their accuracy and clarity. Particular attention is paid to key points of argumentation (see Chap. 5). The separation of research and editing roles increases both report quality and consistency in case report presentation, which improves their comparability during evaluation by the UK-SKKG.

SKKG research reports follow a standardized structure (see Chap. 6), adhering to various formal and language guidelines that have proven effective during the course of the research work. They are based on the principles of academic writing, as well as the principles of consistency, clarity and accuracy.

In provenance research, great importance is attached to dealing critically with sources and tracing the loss through sound documentation. Given the source-intensive nature of the research, particular attention must be paid to clean documentation and evidence, as well as to scholarly structure (footnotes, lists of sources and references, cross-references and margin numbers). The goal is to provide rigorous, clear documentation on the research findings. In addition to standard academic norms, there are several considerations specific to SKKG research reports. A selection of these is discussed below.

Transparent communication

The more complex the research findings, the more important questions of presentation and communication become – especially when the available sources do not allow for the complete, unambiguous reconstruction of events. In this respect, the following are crucial: a transparent approach to gaps and contradictions; and the well-thought-out, comprehensible communication of sources and facts. When evidence is limited, even unsuccessful research or negative results are significant and worth mentioning. Possible phrasing for this may include:

- “Requests made to ... have not yet been answered.”
- “Research on ... was unsuccessful.”
- “For this source as well, there is no ...”
- “The ... archive is currently not accessible.”
- “According to ... documentation on ... has not survived.”
- “What is unknown in this case is whether ...”
- “It is also unclear whether However, it cannot be ruled out that ...”
- “It could not be determined whether ...”
- “It can neither be confirmed nor disproved that ...”

If there is evidence pointing in a particular direction, negative results regarding points relevant to the argument can be supplemented with reasoned assumptions and cautious hypotheses, for example:

- “However, it is conceivable that ...”
- “However, it is rather unlikely that ...”
- “It could be that ..., because it has been proven that ...”
- “It is possible that ..., because ... or ... – or for another reason.”

Another way to deal with gaps and unclear facts is to develop possible scenarios (“In this context, three scenarios are conceivable: ...”). The various possible options for courses of events must be evaluated in terms of plausibility and probability, and their implications on the overall context must be explained (“This would mean that ...”).

Margin numbers

All sections of the main body of the research reports are numbered in the margin. This sequential numbering allows specific passages in the text to be precisely referenced (“see margin no. 73”), both within the report (cross-references) and in the UK-SKKG’s assessment.

Certainty and uncertainty

Evidence (proof), circumstantial evidence (leads) and hypotheses are clearly distinguished from one another and explicitly identified in the research reports. It must be unambiguously clear at all times what constitutes evidence, what constitutes circumstantial evidence and what constitutes hypothesis.

In general, the research reports distinguish between clear and unclear facts in their arguments.

Clear fact are based on verified documentation. Something is considered proven and a fact when there are documents and evidence that leave no room for doubt as to their plausibility. If the historical context is clear, reference is made to the relevant known situation and circumstances. In this case, the facts are clear. Sample phrases for clear facts:

- “The case for persecution is conclusive.”
- “It has been proven that ...”
- “It has been clearly documented that ...”
- “It is clear that ...”
- “The evidence proves that ...”

Unclear facts may be based on circumstantial evidence to arrive at a probable scenario or, at the very least, an exclusion scenario that cannot be proven with certainty. In this case, circumstantial evidence must be evaluated with due caution to determine the extent to which it allows for inferences regarding possible factors and circumstances. This presupposes that, apart from any remaining uncertainties or gaps in the facts, the overall picture presented by the available evidence and undisputed facts provides a conclusive, strong basis. Sample wording for unclear factual situations:

- “It is not possible to answer ...”
- “The question whether ... must remain open.”
- “It remains unclear whether ...”
- “It is not clear whether ...”
- “It has not been proven whether ...”

A variety of formulations are available for epistemic qualification, each indicating different degrees of probability regarding facts and the strength of arguments. What is a fact and therefore

something considered proven is “established.” For unconfirmed statements, gradation (with decreasing probability) into the categories “likely,” “probably” and “possibly” has proven useful. The degrees of certainty commonly used in everyday language cannot be clearly distinguished or defined with mathematical precision. It is inevitably up to the researcher’s subjective assessment as to how probable or improbable a particular fact is. The following characterizations provide guidance:

- **“likely”**: a strong assumption, often based on one strong piece of circumstantial evidence or several pieces of circumstantial evidence. Level of plausibility: high.
- **“probably” (“presumably”)**: assumption, often based on one piece of circumstantial evidence. Level of plausibility: moderate to high. The distinction from “likely” may sometimes be unclear.
- **“possibly” (“maybe”)**: a weaker assumption that has a certain degree of conclusiveness and against which there is no evidence. Degree of plausibility: moderate.

Conclusions and their probability-based classification are based on the careful assessment of the case scenarios under consideration, taking into account historical sources, research findings and typical or known courses of events in comparable cases. The most probable scenario is adopted when there is no clear evidence of the identity of the work, ownership or the injured party; and/or the weight of evidence falls short of the level necessary to establish a clear factual basis, but the circumstantial evidence points to a specific sequence of events that can be reconstructed, despite gaps in the available information.

Rückschlüsse und ihre wahrscheinlichkeitsgestützte Gewichtung beruhen auf der sorgfältigen Abwägung der in Betracht kommenden Fallkonstellationen unter Einbezug historischer Quellen, Forschungsergebnisse sowie typischer oder bekannter Abläufe bei vergleichbaren Fällen. Ein wahrscheinlichstes Szenario kommt dann zum Zug, wenn eindeutige Nachweise von Werkidentität, Eigentumsverhältnissen oder geschädigter Partei fehlen und/oder die Beweisdichte unter dem notwendigen Mass liegt, um einen eindeutigen Sachverhalt belegen zu können, die Indizien aber trotz lückenhafter Erkenntnislage für einen bestimmten, rekonstruierbaren Hergang sprechen.

Formats for dates, names, places and currencies

The research reports must be understandable and clear not only to the research community but also to potential (global) descendants of those affected. For this reason, full spellings are preferred over abbreviations, even when referring to place names or currencies. For the sake of readability and international clarity, dates are written in alphanumeric format (“March 9, 1943”), because a purely numeric format of day/month/year [or month/day/year] could lead to misunderstandings internationally. Special attention must be paid to the spelling of place names if different, or in some cases historical, names exist. For names of individuals, any changes in name resulting from life events – such as marriage, divorce or escape/emigration (adoption of new names), as well as shortened names or nicknames – must be taken into account to ensure that individuals can be identified as reliably as possible.

Dealing with Nazi terminology

When placing actions and events within their relevant historical contexts, the use of historically charged vocabulary and Nazi terminology (“perpetrator language”) is sometimes unavoidable. To indicate a distancing from such terms, they are placed in quotation marks or preceded by the word “so-called” when used outside of direct quotations, for example:

- “after the ‘Anschluss’ of Austria”
- “the ‘Aryanized’ branch”
- “as so-called ‘Geltungsjuden’ [considered as Jewish]”

Religious and ethnic affiliations and designations

In historical contexts, it is not always possible to unequivocally distinguish between self-identification, external designation and the classification of group affiliation. For example, it is not always clear to which extent a particular member of a presumed Jewish family identified as Jewish – whether because they had left the Jewish community or because the family had converted to Christianity. In this case, discrepancies can arise insofar as the racist and antisemitic concepts of the Nazi regime included classifications that served as the basis for genuine persecution measures against those falling under them, regardless of their own identity. Phrases such as “... was persecuted by the Nazi regime as a Jew” do justice to this circumstance by focusing on the repression that took place, leaving open the possibility of discrepancies between self-perception and external perception of identities.

The terms “escape” and “emigration”

Wording regarding events that occurred in the context of injustice and may have been caused by Nazi persecution requires special attention. For individuals who were or are likely to have been targeted by the Nazi regime for collective or individual reasons, the term “escape” is used for departures between January 30, 1933, and May 8, 1945; otherwise, the term “emigration” is generally used. However, a thorough examination of the circumstances, motivations and predicaments behind a departure is important in all cases.

Handling sensitive data

The family histories of living descendants may sometimes be affected when events in historical contexts of injustice are reconstructed. Provenance may bring to light previously unknown sensitive details about ancestors, which are associated with suffering and injustice and may re-traumatize descendants. For this reason, such matters must be handled with absolute care and respect.

Contacts

Do you have questions about provenance research at the SKKG, or comments and suggestions regarding this informational brochure? Would you like to conduct or further develop provenance research at your institution and are interested in receiving assistance? The SKKG team looks forward to hearing from you and receiving your feedback.

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SKKG Provenance Research Informational Brochure

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