

## Press release

### Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum - Leibniz-Institut für Maritime Geschichte

Thomas Joppig

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Research projects, Transfer of Science or Research  
Cultural sciences, History / archaeology, Politics, Social studies, Traffic / transport  
transregional, national



## German Maritime Museum researches the handling of removal goods from Jewish households during the NS era

**In the newspaper Bremer Nachrichten of 26 June 1942, a mysterious newspaper advertisement is found: It announces a public auction on behalf of the Chief Finance President of the Weser-Ems area offering emigrants' removal goods - including entire living room and bedroom furnishings, refrigerators, crystal and porcelain items and even medical instruments. But who emigrated in 1942, in the middle of the war? And why were these goods offered by a public institution? Researchers from the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History are currently investigating these questions in a project.**

This new research work developed from the provenance research that has been ongoing at the DSM since 2017, in which the museum systematically examines its holdings for unlawfully seized cultural property during the Nazi era.

Thanks to further funding from the German Centre for Lost Cultural Property, information on the auctions in Bremen has been collected, analysed and made accessible via a database since 2018. Susanne Kiel, provenance researcher at the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History, mainly draws on materials from archives and analyses, among other things, restitution files, auction records and newspaper advertisements. The aim of the project is to reconstruct the routes taken by Jewish emigrants' emigration goods from the time they left the front door until they were sold. On the basis of this, an attempt can then be made to retrieve objects and - in the best case - to enable the return of the objects to their owners or their heirs.

The reconstruction of the routes of the lift vans is the top priority in the project. This involves the boxes filled with removal goods. These overseas crates remained in the warehouses of the ports after the beginning of the war in September 1939, as civilian shipping was stopped. Thus, removal goods to be shipped such as household goods, furniture, musical instruments, paintings, clothing, professional equipment or similar items were stored in the Bremen ports without ever making their way overseas.

From 1940 the Gestapo confiscated the lift vans in order to have the contents subsequently auctioned off publicly. The responsibility for the auctions was taken over by the Financial Directorate of the Weser-Ems region from autumn 1941. The buyers of the auctioned goods were supposed to be the bombed-out victims of air raids, but it was mainly traders who made good profits from the subsequent resale in their shops. Either way, the possessions ended up in private households, but also in public institutions such as museums.

Many of those affected never saw their property again. After the war, the Allies set up contact points - including the later state offices for reparations - in an attempt to reconstruct processes. However, the restitution processes were complex, very bureaucratic and dragged out over many years. From the restitution files, which Susanne Kiel is examining in detail, important information for the project can be derived. They also show, however, that in most cases those affected received at most and mostly small amounts of compensation, but not the lost family pieces.

"It is not compensation," says Kiel. "Nevertheless, it is a sign to the affected families that these incidents are not forgotten, but are researched, processed and told".

The museum calls on citizens to participate in the project. Especially helpful for the project is information about contemporary witnesses, letters or documents or oral information about the events in the harbours or the whereabouts of the emigration goods auctioned in Bremen. Anyone who suspects that they may have such an object in their possession is also asked to help. Such information will be treated confidentially. Interested parties can contact Susanne Kiel of the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History (Email: [Kiel@dsm.museum](mailto:Kiel@dsm.museum), by post: German Maritime Museum, Susanne Kiel, Hans-Scharoun-Platz 1, 27568 Bremerhaven, Germany).

Bremerhaven was not the only place where the removal goods from stored lift vans were auctioned and passed on. Similar processes could also be observed at other European ports. For this reason, a symposium is planned in Bremen to make the topic visible to the public, but also to enable an exchange among researchers. The aim is to develop a scientific network that researches the stories of the port cities of Bremen, Hamburg, Rotterdam and Trieste on the basis of the confiscation of Jewish emigrants' removal goods by the Nazis.

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Dear editors,

the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History cannot be visited during the corona crisis until further notice. However, our research work is continuing. We would like to keep you informed about this in press releases like this one. We would be pleased to put you in touch with the appropriate contact person. Please understand, however, that due to the current recommendations, we too are currently restricting personal external contacts as far as possible. Therefore, our scientists are currently available for your questions preferably by telephone or e-mail.

Your German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History communication team

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About the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History:

The German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History in Bremerhaven has set itself the task of exploring the relationship between man and sea and making it possible to experience it in exhibitions. It is one of eight Leibniz research museums in Germany. With about 100 employees and trainees and around 8000 square metres of covered exhibition space, it is one of the largest maritime museums in Europe. The German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History is currently in a state of flux and combines a building renovation and the construction of a research depot with a comprehensive new concept for all exhibition and research areas. Research projects at the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History are supported by renowned national and international funding programmes. As an attractive workplace for young and professionally experienced talents in maritime research, the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History maintains a variety of cooperations with universities, colleges and non-university research institutions.

contact for scientific information:

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## **Versteigerungen**

**Öffentl. Versteigerung.** Heute, Freitag, d. 26. 6., 14 Uhr, und morgen, Sonnabend, 27. 6., 10 Uhr, versteigern wir im Auftrage des Herrn Oberfinanzpräsidenten Weser-Ems in den Lagerräumen der Weser - Lagerungsgesellschaft, Schuppen 8, Emden Str. (Haltestelle der Linie 3, Emden Str.) Auswanderer-Umzugsgut: Schlafzimmer-Einrichtungen, Wohnzimmer - Einrichtungen, Küchenschränke, Bettstellen, Eisschränke (Frigidaire), Nähmaschinen, Gas-herd, ärztl. Instrumente, div. Einzelmöbel, Teppiche u. Brücken, Ölgemälde, Heiligenfiguren (alte Holzschnitzereien), Kristall- und Porzellansachen, Kleidung u. Wäsche, Haus- u. Küchengeräte und viele nicht genannte Gegenstände meistbietend gegen bar. Kählung, Berthold, Gerichtsvollzieher.

Historical newspaper advertisement from the year 1942.  
Photo: DSM



Susanne Kiel, provenance researcher at the German Maritime Museum / Leibniz Institute for Maritime History  
Photo: DSM