

PART A**INTRODUCTION**

I. Goal And Purpose

The focus of this Descriptive Catalogue is Judaica spoliated by Nazi Germany and its allies. However, there is a certain amount of extension, since in many cases it is not possible to separate Judaica looted during World War II from other confiscated Judaica. The listings therefore include such items as Torah scrolls and other sacred objects looted by the Bolsheviks from 1917 until the death of Stalin in 1953.

Emphasis has been given to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union on the assumption that most Torah scrolls or other religious objects that carry a quality of holiness (*tashmishey kedusha*) that are thought to have been looted during World War II and may not be held by or used by appropriate bodies or may be improperly cared for are to be found in this region.

This catalogue has been compiled based on:

- (1) Information from existing published and unpublished literature and archives;
and
- (2) Information obtained from experts in various countries.

In regard to (1), it is important to note that some information on looted Judaica exists on the individual-object level. For example, items of looted Judaica are listed in the databases of Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, etc. In addition, there are lists that have been compiled of Torahs in public institutions in Poland, Ukraine, and elsewhere. In a few cases there are specialized full-scale illustrated catalogs, such as for the manuscripts and archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau held in Russia.

In other instances there are more general descriptions of looted collections as a whole. For example, Project Judaica has published a guide to the Jewish collections in the Russian State Military Archive (the former *Osobyi arkhiv*) that were brought to Moscow by the Soviet Army. In still other instances, the location of looted Judaica is known but no overall description has been made (e.g., the Jewish libraries taken from France that are now in Minsk).

This catalogue is not meant to repeat or duplicate already existing work on this subject. There are a number of researchers and organizations who have devoted themselves to researching questions pertaining to looted cultural and religious property. These scholars are cited prominently within the catalogue. Rather, this catalogue is intended to make accessible and piece together information already available into a more readily searchable form.

Definition of Judaica

By “Judaica” is meant historical and literary materials relating to Judaism. Included are not only objects that carry a quality of holiness (*tashmishey kedusha*) or that are essential to the performance of a particular ritual or commandment (*tashmishey mitzvah*), but also those that have no intrinsic quality that can be defined as sacred or holy. Included are not only archives, libraries, and objects relating to Judaism as a religion but also those relating to Jewish organizations and Jewish life generally.¹

As for the first category, objects that are labeled as *tashmishey kedusha*, “accessories of holiness” or “objects which carry holiness,” the classic example is a Torah scroll. However, there are other objects that fulfill the criterion of carrying a quality of holiness. These objects include

- a) the mantle that is used to cover a Torah scroll in Askenazic communities, as well as the binder that keeps the scroll closed and silver and gold ornaments that are added after the mantle is in place, or the special hinged wooden Torah case used by Sephardic and Oriental Jews;
- b) the Torah ark curtains;
- c) the chair, or holder, on which the Torah is placed when it is removed from the ark;
- d) tefillin, including the leather cases, the biblical texts written on parchment that are inside, the leather straps used to fasten them to the head and arm during prayer, and any bag specifically made to hold them and used for that purpose on a regular basis;
- e) the mezuzza, which is fastened to the doorpost of a house, including both the case and the handwritten text inside; and
- f) cases for books, specifically a container for either a scroll or bound volume that contains one or more of the books of the Bible.²

In summary, objects labeled as carrying a quality of holiness all “contain words, specifically the name of God, but by extension any words divinely written or inspired, from which the quality of holiness is derived.”³ The category of holy objects includes not only other handwritten Biblical texts (such as the Scroll of Esther) but also printed Bibles, prayer books, volumes of the Talmud, law codes, and commentaries, and not only in Hebrew but in other languages as well.⁴

As for the second category of ritual objects, labeled *tashmishey mitzvah*, “accessories of religious observance,” or, more clearly, “objects which make it possible to perform a commandment,” this category includes ritual objects that are essential to Jewish life. This category encompasses wine cups used on Sabbaths and holidays, Sabbath candlesticks, the spice box and candle holders used for the Havdalah service at the end of the Sabbath, challah and matzah covers, wedding canopies, the Hanukkah menorah (*hanukiyah*), seder plates used on Passover, the *shofar*, the *tallit* (a prayer shawl with special knotted fringes, called *tzitzit*), the *sukkah* (temporary dwelling built on the holiday of Sukkot), etc.⁵

¹ Greene, Virginia. “Accessories of Holiness’: Defining Jewish Sacred Objects”. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* (JAIC), 1992, Volume 31, Number 1, Article 5, pp 31-39.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.