

# Lost and Looted

## Removal Goods of Jewish Emigrants in the Port of Rotterdam

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### **Abstract/Zusammenfassung: Verloren und geplündert: Umzugsgut jüdischer Emigrant:innen im Hafen von Rotterdam**

In this article, I investigate what happened to Jewish refugees' removal goods, which were stored in the port of Rotterdam during the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany. This article is based on twenty files from the archives of the Dutch Custody Institute (NBI) and the research by Loek Elfferich in the archives of the Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Rotterdam grew into the most important port in Europe. Every year, thousands of migrants arrived in the city, where they settled or from which they traveled elsewhere. Furthermore, Rotterdam was an important port for the transit of goods. Supplied by train or boat from Europe, the goods were transhipped in Rotterdam for shipment overseas. After the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, overseas transport declined until it came to a complete standstill after the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany in May 1940. In the meantime, hundreds of boxes with Jewish removal goods had piled up in the harbor sheds. Some of these boxes, together with the sheds in which they were stored, were destroyed by war violence in May 1940.

After the victory over the Netherlands and the installation of an occupation administration, the stored Jewish goods were inventoried from the summer of 1940. Transport and storage companies were instructed to register the Jewish belongings they transported or stored, which most companies seem to have done without hesitation. The goods were then seized by the *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte* (SfH). Household goods were used to furnish the houses and offices of Nazis in the Netherlands, or were auctioned

at auction houses. From the autumn of 1941, the items were shipped to Germany as a *“Liebesgabe”* from the Netherlands for the bombed families in Germany.

When Germany capitulated in May 1945, it was not easy for the duped Jewish owners to get their belongings back or to receive compensation. According to Dutch post-war legislation, German and Austrian Jews were declared enemy subjects. They first had to submit a request for immunity and then be able to prove that they were victims of the Nazi regime and that the SfH had stolen their belongings. It was a long and arduous process that also involved the necessary costs to pay a lawyer or legal representative and to arrange the papers and statements.

This first inventory of the archive material in the Netherlands shows how the robbery of Jewish removal goods took place, which companies and institutions were involved, and what problems the Dutch post-war restoration of rights legislation posed. In addition, research into Jewish removal goods helps to gain insight into the diversity of the migrants who traveled through the Netherlands in the 1930s in search of a safe haven. While the Dutch government and Jewish refugee organizations in the 1930s were mainly afraid of impoverished refugees who would become a burden on the Dutch treasury, this concerned a completely different group of refugees, often well-to-do. This may alter our understanding of the term “refugee.”

In diesem Artikel untersuche ich, was mit dem Umzugsgut jüdischer Flüchtlinge passiert ist, das während der Besetzung der Niederlande durch Nazi-Deutschland im Rotterdamer Hafen gelagert wurde. Dieser Artikel basiert auf zwanzig Akten aus den Archiven des Nederlands Beheersinstituut (NBI) und auf den Recherchen von Loek Elfferich in den Archiven der Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL).

In der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts entwickelte sich Rotterdam zum wichtigsten Hafen Europas. Jedes Jahr kamen Tausende von Migranten in die Stadt, wo sie sich niederließen oder von wo aus sie weiterzogen. Darüber hinaus war Rotterdam ein wichtiger Hafen für den Warentransport. Per Bahn oder Schiff aus Europa angeliefert, wurden sie in Rotterdam für den Versand nach Übersee umgeladen. Nach Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkriegs im September 1939 ging der Überseetransport zurück, bis er nach dem Einmarsch Nazi-Deutschlands in die Niederlande im Mai 1940 völlig zum Erliegen kam. In der Zwischenzeit stapelten sich Hunderte Kisten mit jüdischem Umzugsgut in den Hafenschuppen. Einige dieser Kisten wurden zusammen mit den Schuppen, in denen sie gelagert wurden, in den Maitagen 1940 durch Kriegseinwirkung zerstört.

Im Anschluss an die Besetzung der Niederlande und die Einrichtung einer Besatzungsverwaltung wurden die eingelagerten jüdischen Güter ab Sommer 1940 inventarisiert. Transport- und Lagerunternehmen wurden angewiesen, die von ihnen transportierten oder gelagerten jüdischen Gegenstände zu registrieren, was die meisten Unternehmen offenbar ohne zu zögern taten. Anschließend wurden die Waren von der »Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte« (SfH) beschlagnahmt. Haushaltswaren wurden zur Ausstattung der Häuser und Büros der Nazis in den Niederlanden verwendet oder in Auktionshäusern versteigert. Ab Herbst 1941 wurden die Gegenstände als »Liebesgabe« aus den Niederlanden an ausgebombte Familien nach Deutschland verschifft.

Als Deutschland im Mai 1945 kapitulierte, war es für die betrogenen jüdischen Eigentümer nicht einfach, ihr Hab und Gut zurückzubekommen oder eine Entschädigung zu

erhalten. Nach der niederländischen Nachkriegsgesetzgebung wurden deutsche und österreichische Juden zu feindlichen Subjekten erklärt. Sie mussten zunächst einen Antrag auf Immunität stellen und dann nachweisen, dass sie Opfer des NS-Regimes waren und ihr Eigentum von der SfH gestohlen wurde. Dies war ein langer und mühsamer Prozess, der auch mit den notwendigen Kosten verbunden war, um einen Anwalt oder Rechtsvertreter zu bezahlen und die erforderlichen Papiere und Erklärungen zu organisieren.

Diese erste Bestandsaufnahme des Archivmaterials in den Niederlanden zeigt, wie der Raub jüdischen Umzugsguts vonstattenging, welche Unternehmen und Institutionen daran beteiligt waren und welche Probleme die niederländische Nachkriegs-Wiedergutmachungsgesetzgebung mit sich brachte. Darüber hinaus trägt die Recherche zu jüdischem Umzugsgut dazu bei, Einblick in die Vielfalt der Migrant:innen zu gewinnen, die in den 1930er-Jahren auf der Suche nach einem sicheren Hafen durch die Niederlande reisten. Während die niederländische Regierung und jüdische Flüchtlingsorganisationen in den 1930er-Jahren vor allem Angst vor verarmten Flüchtlingen hatten, die eine Belastung für die niederländische Staatskasse darstellen würden, handelt es sich hier um eine ganz andere, oft wohlhabende Gruppe von Flüchtlingen. Dies kann auch unser Verständnis von »Geflüchteten« verändern.

## Introduction

On February 4, 1948, Dr. L. Landsberger, a lawyer of international law seated in The Hague, sent a letter to the office of Special Custodies of the Dutch Custody Institute (*Nederlands Beheersinstituut* (NBI), *Bureau Bijzondere Beheren*).<sup>1</sup> For his client, Dora Königstein, who lives in Sydney, Australia, he inquires whether the liftvan with removal goods, which was stored at the firm of Ruys & Co in Rotterdam, was requisitioned by the *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte* (SfH) during the war years.<sup>2</sup> After the 'Anschluss' of Austria to Hitler's Germany in 1938, the Jewish Dora Königstein made plans to emigrate abroad. In 1939, she had a liftvan with her household goods embarked and insured in Vienna. The coffin had to be shipped via Hamburg to Sydney by train and small steamer. Dora would pick him up there. She made it to Australia, but her liftvan did not. With the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe (September 1939) and the occupation of the Netherlands by the Nazis (May 1940), it got stuck in the port of Rotterdam. In early 1948, Dora Königstein contacted the lawyer Landsberger to help her retrieve her liftvan or to obtain compensation for its contents.

In this article, I investigate what happened to the removal goods of Jewish refugees like Dora, which were stored in the port of Rotterdam during the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany. Although since the 1990s a lot of research has been done in the Netherlands into the robbery and restitution of Jewish property during the

1 In addition to his law practice, Dr. L. Landsberger presumably worked at the information office of the Dutch Red Cross, where he contributed to publications about the transport of Dutch Jews to the various concentration camps.

2 Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI, dossiernummer 198814.

occupation, the robbery of removal goods from Dutch ports has remained out of the picture.<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge, there is only one researcher who has touched on this subject. In his book on the betrayal of Rotterdam, Loek Elfferich wrote a chapter about the looting of Jewish removal goods in the Rotterdam harbour.<sup>4</sup> The chapter was based on archival materials from the Dutch shipping company Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL), which are stored at the Jewish Historical Museum.<sup>5</sup>

This article is based on twenty files from the archives of the NBI and the chapter written by Elfferich. It is a first exploration of what happened to the removal goods during the war and how the restitution process went after the war. First, I will briefly say something about the importance of the port of Rotterdam, the Jewish (trans)migrants, and the organizations that helped them. Then, I will discuss the transportation of the removal goods, the Dutch companies involved, and the companies where the goods were stored. Then I will discuss the looting of these goods during the war. Finally, I will briefly discuss the restitution process after the war.

## Rotterdam: Port of Europe, Gate to the World

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Rotterdam developed from a merchant city to a transit city. Investments were made in the development of the port, and the infrastructure around the city was expanded and modernised. The construction of a rail network, the excavation of the Nieuwe Waterweg, and the establishment of HAL, in particular, were significant developments for the port's growth.<sup>6</sup> Rotterdam became the most important port in Europe, fulfilling an essential function in the European logistics network.<sup>7</sup> Every year, tens of thousands of migrants came to Rotterdam.<sup>8</sup> Most of them were transmigrants, passing through Rotterdam on their way to elsewhere, usually England or America. A smaller part settled permanently in Rotterdam.<sup>9</sup> An entire infrastructure grew up around the emigrants. Landlords and lodging houses in particular received a bad reputation; their accommodations were often unhygienic, and they took advantage of the migrants.<sup>10</sup>

For shipping companies, it was essential to ship their passengers in good health, as the admission requirements in America were strict, and sick travelers had to be taken back at the expense of the shipping company. Various shipping companies, such as the

3 Aalders 2001b, 2004; Veraart 2005; Commissie-Kordes 1998; Commissie-Scholten 1999; Commissie-Van Kemenade 2000; Piersma/Kemperman 2015.

4 Elfferich 1990, chapter 7 "Jodenskasten" is about the removal goods.

5 The cargo division of the Holland America Line was transferred to Incotrans in 1975. In 1987, they donated part of the transferred archive to the Jewish Historical Museum, which then gave it to Loek Elfferich for inspection. The transferred archive mainly relates to Jewish removal goods which were stored at the Holland America Line.

6 Cf. van de Laar 2000, p. 47.

7 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

8 van Schip 1995, p. 4; Bruggeman/van de Laar 1998.

9 Tammes 2013, p. 132.

10 van de Laar 2000, p. 197.

HAL, set up agencies in Central and Eastern Europe that arranged transport by train to Rotterdam and the passage to America. At the Maas station in Rotterdam, the migrants were met by employees of the HAL and taken to the emigrant hotel on the Wilhelminakade.<sup>11</sup> Here they remained in isolation until they could embark. An auxiliary facility was built in the 1920s for travelers who came to Rotterdam independently.<sup>12</sup>

## Montefiore

Jews formed only a small part of the total number of migrants who visited Rotterdam. Historian Paul van de Laar estimates that the percentage of Jewish migrants in the second half of the nineteenth century was approximately three percent.<sup>13</sup> Around the turn of the century, their numbers began to increase. It was mainly Eastern European Jews who came to the Netherlands. Russian Jews fled the pogroms and anti-Jewish measures in their country, Romanian Jews migrated because of the systematic oppression and the second-class position they occupied in the newly founded state; Jews from Galicia, the Northeastern part of Austria-Hungary, hoped to leave the economic malaise behind with their migration.<sup>14</sup>

Initiatives were developed early on by the Jewish community to specifically help Jewish emigrants. In 1883, Abraham David Lutomirski founded the relief committee “Assistance to Transitters in Honour of Moses Montefiore.”<sup>15</sup> This made Rotterdam the first place in the Netherlands where Jewish emigrants could count on organized help from their ‘brothers of faith’.<sup>16</sup> That help was motivated not only by the Jewish duty of hospitality and charity, but also by fear of increasing anti-Semitism.<sup>17</sup> The migrants, often poor and recognizable as Jews because of their clothing and customs, could easily fuel the latent anti-Semitism in Dutch society. They thus threatened the position of Dutch Jews, which, despite the legal equality of Jews in 1796, was not as strong as the term ‘equality’ suggested. In addition to shelter, Montefiore also helped the migrants to move on.

## Jewish Refugees in Rotterdam in the 1930s

After Hitler’s takeover of power in Germany in 1933, a greater Jewish migration started. Jews from the Third Reich sought refuge in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, or, if possible, the United Kingdom, the United States, or South America. The flow of Jewish mi-

11 van Schip 1995, p. 4.

12 van de Laar 2000, p. 197.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

14 van Schip 1995, pp. 6–7.

15 The establishment of ‘Montefiore’ was preceded by a temporary committee to support Russian-Jewish refugees. Temporary committees were also set up elsewhere in the Netherlands. They were subcommittees of the Dutch branch of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. For more information about the (pre)history of Montefiore see: van Schip 1995.

16 N.N. 1885.

17 van Vree 1989.

grants to or through the Netherlands since 1933 would not dry up until the start of the Second World War in September 1939.<sup>18</sup>

As a neighbouring country, the Dutch government had to somehow relate to the situation in Germany. On April 6, 1933, a few days after the first boycott measures against the Jews were announced in Germany, Minister for Justice J. Donner announced that humanitarian considerations would outweigh the standard admission requirements for foreigners only in the event of mortal danger. This decision was prompted, among other things, by the economic crisis in the Netherlands and the resulting unemployment. At that time, there was no question of a refugee policy. A settlement permit was issued to migrants if they could support themselves. There were three exceptions to this: political refugees, so-called 'East Jewish' refugees, and stateless refugees, who were regarded as an 'undesirable' or 'too foreign' element for Dutch society and had to be banned.<sup>19</sup> More than a year later, on May 30, 1934, it was decided that refugees of German nationality could only stay in the Netherlands for a short period. Only those who were threatened with physical danger upon their return were allowed to enter the Netherlands for the time being. Four years later, the policy became even stricter: on May 7, 1938, it was decided that the borders would be closed.<sup>20</sup> Refugees were henceforth unwanted aliens. Until then, about 24,000 to 25,000 refugees had entered the Netherlands. Most of these migrated to other countries.<sup>21</sup>

Aid to Jewish migrants was mainly provided by the Jewish community in the Netherlands. This was partly due to government regulations: the Jewish migrants had to provide for themselves and were not allowed to come at the expense of the state treasury. In addition, there was also an effort from the Jewish to help the refugees within the community, hoping to prevent fuelling anti-Semitism in society due to the arrival of the refugees.

This fear had been one of the motivations to set up Jewish migrant organizations around 1880, aimed at further migrating Jewish migrants. Jewish aid organizations also used the appeal to these fears in the 1930s to mobilize the Jewish population to help the Jewish migrants from the Third Reich. Both existing and new organizations provided aid to Jewish migrants. The leading organization became the Committee for Special Jewish Interests, and in particular its subsection, the Committee for Jewish Refugees, which were established on March 23, 1933. This national organization had local branches, including in Rotterdam.

Regarding the nature of the migratory flows, the situation in Rotterdam differed from that in other places in the Netherlands. While most places faced the task of housing

18 It was not about a constant stream of refugees, but about peak moments. Large groups of refugees came after important events, such as the promulgation of the Nuremberg Race Laws and the Reichskristallnacht.

19 In his study of refugees from Nazi Germany, historian Bob Moore has shown that in the early years a large part of the Jewish refugees from Germany consisted of East Jews. Their orthodox lifestyle made them easily recognizable as Jews and therefore easy targets for the Nazis. Moore 1986, pp. 19, 21–22.

20 They were only temporarily opened after the Kristallnacht of November 9–10, 1938.

21 Berghuis 1990, pp. 8–9, 11. Moore 1986, p. 5, mentions a number of 25,000–33,000 in his study, which seems very high.

and maintaining refugees for a longer period, the activity in Rotterdam aimed to facilitate their migration further. In 1938, the Rotterdam committee provided support to 1,110 people. About 400 people had come directly from Germany, 652 from Austria, and 45 from other countries. Most of the refugees migrated to the United States (approximately 600), while 84 went to China, 65 left for Australia, and a few dozen went to England, Belgium, and Germany. Moving back to this last country was probably not a voluntary decision.<sup>22</sup>

Migrants in the Netherlands were taken care of by Dutch families and, from 1938 onwards, also in camps established explicitly for this purpose. Around Rotterdam, two of these camps were located: one for legal refugees (the quarantine station at Beneden-Heyplaat) and one for illegal refugees (Hoek van Holland). In 1939, a central refugee camp was built in Drenthe (North of the Netherlands), where the migrants were brought from the other camps in late 1939 and early 1940.<sup>23</sup>

### Transport of Jewish Removal Goods

Although the Nazis encouraged emigration among Jews until the end of 1941, all kinds of restrictions were imposed on Jews at the same time. This applied, among other things, to the goods and assets that they were allowed to take with them. The Nazis wanted the Jews to leave, but not their wealth to leave the country. When shipping their goods abroad, the owners had kept a record of what was in the liftvans, boxes, or suitcases. Partly this was to insure the goods, partly it was so the Nazis could control what was being shipped. For example, Florentine Schütz-Neustadt stated before the customs office in Breslau that the goods she had shipped, including a clock, a dining room, a bedroom, and a kitchen, were for her use. The police president of Breslau confirmed that the items were used for their intended purpose.<sup>24</sup> Dora Königstein, already mentioned in the introduction, informed the NBI in a post-war letter that she could only insure her goods worth £ 1,000 when shipped in 1939 for £ 500. It was not possible to pay in the requested foreign currency from Vienna. Moreover, she had not listed all the items on the official packing list, since there were also things that she was not supposed to take with her. It concerned a linen cupboard, two wardrobes, a dining room table, eight dining room chairs, a Persian carpet, four garden chairs, a garden table, a garden screen, four sun loungers, and garden tools. All this stuff was new.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the items that could be taken along, the shipment of the goods was also subject to rules. Concerning their properties, Jews were only allowed to pay in ad-

22 “Verslag omtrent de werkzaamheden van het Joodse-Vluchtelingen-Comité en de overige commissies van het Comité voor Bijzondere Joodse Belangen over het jaar 1938”, pp. 18–19, SAR Archief NIC, inv.nr. 1087.

23 The Dutch government paid 1 million guilders for the construction of camp Westerbork and required the Jewish community to repay this within 25 years. In July 1942, the management of the camp was taken over by the *Sicherheitsdienst*. From then on it functioned as *Polizeiliches Judendurchgangslager*.

24 Statement by Florentine Schütz-Neustadt, confirmed by the *Polizeipräsident* of Breslau, dated September 21, 1939, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI dossiernummer 198816.

25 *Liste der amtlich nicht angegebenen Artikel*, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI dossiernummer 198814.

vance for transport from Germany to the Netherlands as far as Rotterdam. The goods were transported by rail or boat. The Jewish owners registered their goods with travel offices or agencies in Germany, who took care of the transport to the Netherlands. Transport costs were also paid to these offices, both for transport to Rotterdam and overseas. The offices then had to transfer the latter amount to the Rotterdam companies that carried out the overseas transport.

What the Jewish owners did not know was that the moment they handed over their goods to the offices in Germany, the ownership of these goods temporarily transferred to the respective company. The goods remained in the possession of the sending company until the Jewish owners had paid all costs to the company. The ‘Bewijs van Opslag’ (or *Lagerschein*) was, by definition, in the name and possession of the sending company, not the submitting owner.

Due to the German regulations, the overseas transport from Rotterdam could only be paid for *after* the goods had been transported overseas. The Rotterdam shipping companies, on the other hand, applied the rule that payment had to be made *before* the goods were transported, especially after Europe was at war in September 1939.<sup>26</sup> The German requirement to transport first and then release payment, and the requirement of the Dutch shipping companies to transport only after payment, resulted in the boxes of Jewish migrants piling up in the port of Rotterdam.

The ironic thing about these bureaucratic rules is, as the HAL archives show, that in many cases, the Jewish owners had indeed paid the offices in Germany for the overseas shipment as well as for short-term storage in Rotterdam. This applied, for example, to the home furnishings and medical instruments of the physician Julius Ohlman.<sup>27</sup>

However, this money was not to be released until the event occurred. As a result, the goods remained stored in the port of Rotterdam, and payment had to be made for this storage. When the German army invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, hundreds of these liftvans, popularly called ‘Jodenkisten’ (Jewish boxes), were stored at the port of Rotterdam. Only at the HAL were there already at least five hundred boxes. They were spread over various sheds or barracks and sometimes also loose on the quays.

## The Loss of Goods

To force the Netherlands to surrender, the German air force carried out a surface bombing raid over Rotterdam on May 14, 1940. Its city center was almost completely destroyed. Additionally, several sheds on the quays were hit. This also applied to the warehouses “Rotterdam” and “Philadelphia” of the HAL, in which, among other things, Jewish removal goods were stored.

In the summer of 1940, concerned owners inquired what had happened to the goods. However, they did not get an answer easily. J. Buchendahl was one of them. He probably had not succeeded in leaving Germany; in the autumn of 1940, he was in any case

26 Elfferich 1990, p. 125.

27 Letter of Julius Ohlmann to the Nederlands Beheersinstituut afd. Bijzondere beheren, June 5, 1948, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI dossiernummer 198829.

(again) in Germany. Through the Committee for Jewish Refugees, he had inquired with the HAL about the status of his goods.<sup>28</sup> The HAL stated that he had to arrange this through the transport company, since they did not communicate with ‘third parties.’<sup>29</sup> The company Philippens & Co (located Heemraadssingel 166, Rotterdam), which transported Buchendahl’s goods, was told after they requested information that the clean-up work on the Wilhelminakade had not yet been completed, and it was therefore impossible to say whether or not the items were “completely and/or partially” destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

It was not until the end of 1941 that most of the owners were notified that there was nothing left of their goods.<sup>31</sup> Like the Rotterdammers who had suffered damage as a result of the bombing, they could submit a claim to the Schade Enquête Commissie (Damage Inquiry Committee/SEC). They were assisted in submitting their claim by the Committee for Special Jewish Interests.<sup>32</sup> During later Allied bombing raids, more boxes with Jewish belongings were lost to fire.<sup>33</sup>

## The Looting of Goods

On June 24, 1940, the German occupation administration issued a decree stipulating that all enemy properties present in the Netherlands were placed under German administration (VO 26/1940). Enemies were all persons, companies, and institutions located or established in allied countries. The estates of German Jews stored at Dutch forwarding companies were also regarded as enemy property within the meaning of VO 26/1940. The implementation of the regulation was in the hands of the *Abteilung Feindvermögen*, part of the *Generalkommissariat für Finanz und Wirtschaft*. Separate *Sammelverwaltungen* were established for the different categories of enemy assets. Stored household goods were managed by the *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte* (SfH). Forwarders and transport companies were required by the *Deutsche Revisions und Treuhand AG* (DRT) to declare goods stored with them. In total, the DRT registered 4,500 lots with valuable household effects or other valuables.<sup>34</sup>

This also included the household effects of Ludwig Auerbach. Auerbach had the valuable home furnishings of his villa in Köln-Marienburg shipped to Rotterdam by the transport company Danzas & Co in the late 1930s. In addition to antique furniture, the liftvan contained Oriental carpets, objects made of bronze, porcelain, and crystal, as well as oil

28 Letter of Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen to Holland-Amerika Lijn, October 20, 1940, JCK Archief Incotrans.

29 Letter of Holland-Amerika Lijn to Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen, October 25, 1940, JCK Archief Incotrans.

30 Letter of Holland-Amerika Lijn to Philippens & Co, October 30, 1940, JCK Archief Incotrans.

31 Letter of Holland-Amerika Lijn to H. Hoogewerff Jr. & Co’s Transport Mij., January 29, 1941, JCK Archief Incotrans.

32 Letter of H. Hoogewerff Jr. & Co’s transportbedrijf nv to Holland-Amerika Lijn, February 14, 1941, JCK Archief Incotrans.

33 Elfferich 1990, p. 128.

34 History archive 282 NIOD.

paintings by well-known artists. On April 29, 1942, the Holland-America Line, where the liftvan was stored, received a message from the SfH:

“Ich habe die Absicht, obige Sendung endguelting in meine Verwaltung zu uebernehmen und ich bitte Sie daher hoefl., dieselbe am Montag, d. 4. Mai '42, zur Verfuegung der Firma Binneveld & Schellen, Rotterdam, zu halten, welche Firma bereits von mir weitere Instruktionen erhalten hat. Die Kosten, welche bereits auf dieser Sendung entstanden sind, werden z. Zt. von mir bezahlt, falls dieselben den Wert der Gueter nicht uebersteigen.”<sup>35</sup>

The firm Binneveld & Schellen seems to have been the fixed transporter for the SfH in Rotterdam. This transport company, founded in 1881, was located at Keilehaven in Rotterdam and primarily focused on the transportation of hides.<sup>36</sup> As explained in the letter to the *Holland-Amerika Lijn*, the Binneveld & Schellen firm received instructions from the SfH on when and where to pick up goods and where to take them. Until March 1944, the goods were taken to the SfH storage area in Scheveningen, where the SfH office was also located. After that period, the SfH relocated to Arnhem, and the goods were then delivered to ‘Loods 24’ (Shed 24) at the Stieltjesstraat in Rotterdam.<sup>37</sup> Between July 30, 1942, and September 1943, most of Rotterdam’s Jewish population was transported from this shed/barrack to the Dutch transit camps Westerbork and Vught, from where they were further deported to the concentration and extermination camps in the East.

It is unknown whether the SfH previously used Loods 24 as a collection point for goods or if this was done by other roofing authorities. On September 24 and 25, 1943, the following advertisement was published in various Rotterdam newspapers:

“Public voluntary sale, on Tuesday, September 28, 1943, in the morning at 10 am in Schiedam, bailiff Jac. De Groot in Schiedam will sell a batch of furniture to the public for cash in shed 24, Binnenhaven in Rotterdam, to be viewed on Monday, September 27, 1943 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.”<sup>38</sup>

This may have been the contents of the liftvans that were stored in the port of Rotterdam. It is also possible that this concerned the household effects of Rotterdam Jews. Their houses were emptied after their deportation, after which the goods were confiscated by the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR).

Part of the furniture seized by the SfH was used to furnish the homes of German officials stationed in the Netherlands. This was arranged by the ‘Heim in Holland’ department of the SfH. German officials could rent confiscated household goods at ten percent of the appraised value.<sup>39</sup> On October 15, 1941, Fischböck announced that household goods confiscated by the SfH would henceforth be shipped to Germany. There, they were sold to Germans who had lost their homes due to the Allied bombing. Most of the furniture pieces ended up in Münster, Mannheim, Lübeck, and Cologne.<sup>40</sup> However, the SfH had

35 Letter of *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte* to firma Holland-Amerika Lijn, April 29, 1942, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI, dossier 198820.

36 Little about the company can be found in the archives and it is therefore still unknown why they took care of the transports for the SfH.

37 History archive 282 NIOD.

38 N.N. 1943a; N.N. 1943b.

39 For a standard rental contract see: NIOD Archief 282 inv.nr. 443.

40 History archive 282 NIOD.

the majority of the confiscated estates and works of art auctioned through Dutch auction houses. This occurred, among other places, at the Rotterdam auction house Van Marle, de Sille en Baan, where the household effects of Bernhard Lewin, who had fled from Germany to Bolivia in 1940, were auctioned.<sup>41</sup> The goods of Georg Cohn were sold by the Hague auction house Van Marle & Bignell. Most items were sold on May 25 and 26. Ten pages of goods, ranging from porcelain, tableware, to pyjamas and from a mahogany bedroom to a children's jacket with slobbers, hat, and mittens, raised 7,463.73 guilders for the SfH. Converted to current purchasing power, this is 57,813.15 euros.<sup>42</sup> The auction house earned 1,115.27 guilders (€ 8,638.75) from the sale.<sup>43</sup> Four months later, some remaining items were auctioned. Eight walnut chairs and a pair of men's shoes, worth 71 guilders (€ 549.96).<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the SfH, the aforementioned *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* also showed interest in the aircraft. The very last group or body that reported in 1944, with a license to robbery issued by the German military commander of Rotterdam, was the Rotterdam branch of the German NSDAP.<sup>45</sup>

## Restitution

During the war, the Dutch government-in-exile had already considered the question of restoring rights. Three decisions were important for the German and Austrian migrants whose removal goods had been confiscated in the Netherlands during the war. The 'Royal Decree on Occupational Measures' (KB E93), the 'Restoration of Legal Traffic Decree' (KB E100), and the 'Enemy Assets Decree' (KB E133).

The first decree provided substance to the question of whether the binding regulations issued by the Germans should be maintained after liberation or should be abolished.<sup>46</sup> The 'Restoration of Legal Transactions Decree' determined who, what, where, why, and how the restoration of rights had to take place.<sup>47</sup> The 'Enemy Assets Decree' entitled the Dutch State to confiscate all assets belonging to enemy citizens within the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Germany, Italy, and Japan, as well as territories occupied by one of these states from January 1, 1938, onwards, were classified as enemy states. Enemy citizens were: civil servants, officers, agents, and representatives of an enemy state, as well as people who fulfilled a similar position between May 10, 1940, and the implementation of this decree; persons, who were or had been citizens of an enemy state since May 10, 1940; persons, who according to Decree A6 of June 7, 1940 (as published in the Government Gazette) were declared citizens of an enemy state;

41 Dossier 685, NA Archief Nederlands Beheersinstituut, dossiernummer WE8444.

42 <https://iisg.amsterdam/nl/onderzoek/projecten/hpw/calculate.php>.

43 Note from the auction house Van Marle & Bignell to *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte*, November 25 and 26, 1941, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI, dossier 198821.

44 Note from the auction house Van Marle & Bignell to *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte*, March 21, 1941, Nationaal Archief, Archief NBI, dossier 198821.

45 Elfferich 1990, p. 129.

46 Sanders 2022, pp. 22–23.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

persons, who were neither Dutch, nor Dutch citizens, who were declared citizens of an enemy state by the Minister of Justice.<sup>48</sup>

The implementation of the decrees lay with the Council for the Restoration of Rights, which was specifically established for this purpose, and the NBI, which fell under its jurisdiction.<sup>49</sup> The task of the NBI was “to make provisions in connection with administration for legal entities and absentees (mainly non-returned Jews), pursuant to Decree E100.” In addition, it also managed “traitorous assets” (of political offenders and organizations) and enemy assets, as per Decree E133.<sup>50</sup>

According to Decree E133, German Jewish refugees were categorized as German enemy citizens.<sup>51</sup> In that capacity, they could not claim legal reparation. On the contrary, enemy citizens were expropriated and liquidated to compensate for the losses the Netherlands suffered during the war. To retain their property and qualify for legal reparation, they had to challenge their enemy status and apply for a declaration of de-enemisation. In principle, declarations of de-enemisation were intended for residents. In exceptional circumstances, ‘nonresident enemy citizens,’ whose property had been confiscated by the Dutch authorities could also apply for a de-enemisation procedure, but only when they could provide a supportive statement issued by the local police of their place of residence, a statement issued by the Alien Police, and a motivated advice by the Consul, all confirming the trustworthiness of the person in question. These additional requirements also applied to, for example, Germans who had become residents after the implementation of the Decree on Enemy Property.<sup>52</sup>

To file a claim for their missing goods, the German Jews had to prove that they were Nazi victims or apply for a declaration of de-enemisation. For the latter, they had to pay fifty guilders in retribution costs. The procedures were complex, which meant that some were only approved in 1953 or 1954, after which the claim for their stolen *liftvan* could be processed. But the necessary hurdles also had to be taken for the allocation of the claim. For example, the claimants had to provide two oaths from eyewitnesses about the value of the goods, an insurance policy, and an inventory mentioning the value of the effects.<sup>53</sup>

48 Oprel 2020, p. 35.

49 The Raad voor het Rechtsherstel was dissolved on June 1, 1967. Only the Afdeling Effectenregistratie survived longer, until October 1, 1971, see: Aalders 2001a, pp. 53, 56.

50 In addition to the head office in The Hague, offices were established in the three major cities of Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam. In addition, representaties were established in 23 places. “Het NBI Indeeling der Bureaus/Vertegenwoordigingen,” NA 2.09.49 (NBI Hoofdkantoor) inv. no. 101. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

51 According to historian Marieke Oprel (2020, p. 128): “Jews were neither Reichs-, Auslands- nor Volksdeutsche in Nazi German ideology: Germans of Jewish origin were not considered German citizens. However, the Decree on Enemy Property included former German Jewish refugees in its definition of enemy citizen. After the German capitulation, the Dutch authorities declared invalid the Nazi racial laws that deprived Jewish citizens of their German citizenship, but it should be noted that this was a unilateral decision. Jewish citizens from Germany initially had no legal status in the immediate post-war period, and the Allied nations considered them officially stateless. Nevertheless, in the Netherlands, many Jewish refugees from Germany were registered as German nationals. Others were categorised as stateless persons from Germany.”

52 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

53 Letter of H. Stravers (NBI) to Leopold Schwartz, June 10, 1948, NA Archief NBI dossier 198819.

Most of the Jewish owners now lived outside the Netherlands themselves, which made their situation more difficult. They had to find someone in the Netherlands who could represent their interests. Of the twenty files examined, the legal expert L. Landsberger, mentioned in the introduction, acted as an authorized representative for the Jewish claimant in eight cases. In four cases, the Society for the Return of Jewish Property 'Revindicatio' was involved in the restoration of rights process.

The procedure drove Leopold Schwarz, who fled to New York from Düren (between Aachen and Cologne) in 1939, to despair. In May 1948, he contacted the NBI to submit a claim for the two liftvans and one case that the Germans had confiscated. He initially filed a claim with the State Department of Washington, D.C., but they referred him to the NBI.

It took him the greatest effort to provide the evidence requested by the NBI. In August 1949, he announced that he had sent all the papers in his possession to the NBI. The other documents were with the forwarding agent, Gebr. Frings in Düren, Germany. Unfortunately, their building was bombed out and all documents were destroyed. However, the NBI stated that the evidence was insufficient and had to be supplemented with witness statements.<sup>54</sup> On July 18, 1950, Schwartz wrote to the NBI:

"The last thing I can do for you is to again send you a complete list of contents and the two signatures of the packer and his helper which was notarized. According to your request the list with the two signatures are enclosed of the two eye witnesses of the packing of the liftvan. I hope this will settle the case now as this is going on now for the last six years. I am 76 years of age and could use the money now in order to make my living a bit more comfortable. You certainly cannot deny that the contents are correct. The only thing you can assess is the value and I would appreciate that you do so with an appraiser. I expect to be reimbursed for the full amount and not with 15 % of the value only."<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The Jewish migrants who fled Nazi Germany and, after the 'Anschluss,' Austria, were only a small number of the migrants who passed through the port of Rotterdam each year. Since the 1880s, migrant organizations have been actively involved in receiving migrants in Rotterdam and assisting them with further migration. After Hitler seized power, new organizations were set up to support the Jewish migrants. After the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany, these organizations tried to help the Jewish migrants trace their goods, which had become stuck in the port of Rotterdam, and to file a claim for damages in the event of loss due to acts of war.

The policy of the Nazis in the 1930s to allow the Jews but not their possessions to leave caused their removal goods to pile up in the port of Rotterdam. Some of the goods were lost to fire during the battle for Rotterdam in the first days of the war (May 10–14,

54 Letters of NBI to Leopold Schwartz, August 23, 1949 and January 6, 1950, NA Archief NBI dossier 198819.

55 Letter of Leopold Schwarz to Nederlands Beheersinstituut, July 18, 1950, NA Archief NBI dossier 198819.

1940) and the German bombing of Rotterdam (May 14, 1940). After the victory over the Netherlands and the installation of an occupation administration, the stored Jewish goods were inventoried from the summer of 1940. Transport and storage companies were instructed to register the Jewish belongings they transported or stored, which most companies seem to have done without hesitation. The goods were then seized by the *Sammelverwaltung feindlicher Hausgeräte*. Household goods were used to furnish the houses and offices of Nazis in the Netherlands, or were auctioned at auction houses. From the autumn of 1941, the items were shipped to Germany as a 'Liebesgabe' from the Netherlands for the bombed families in Germany. After the capitulation of Germany, it was not easy for the duped Jewish owners to get their belongings back or to receive compensation. According to Dutch post-war legislation, German and Austrian Jews were declared enemy subjects. They first had to submit a request for immunity and then be able to prove that they were victims of the Nazi regime and that the SfH had stolen their belongings. It was a long and arduous process that also involved the necessary costs to hire a lawyer or legal representative, as well as to arrange the papers and statements.

This first inventory of the archive material in the Netherlands shows how the robbery of Jewish removal goods took place, which companies and institutions were involved, and what problems the Dutch post-war restoration of rights legislation posed. In addition, research into Jewish removal goods helps gain insight into the diversity of migrants who traveled through the Netherlands in the 1930s in search of a safe haven. While the Dutch government and Jewish refugee organizations in the 1930s were mainly afraid of impoverished refugees who would become a burden on the Dutch treasury, this concerned a completely different group of refugees, often well-to-do. This may change our understanding of 'refugees.'

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