

I am currently a librarian. I work as head of the section of Dunkirk and the department of public services of the library of the Opal Coast University.

Ten years ago, I worked as an archivist in Metz, in the East of France. Library and archives are maybe more separated professions in France than they can be in other European Country. During the autumn two-thousand-five, I had to classify again the archive collection of the Office des biens et intérêts privés – Office of private goods and interests.

The peculiarity of the Alsace and Moselle departments is that they have been two time part of Germany: first from eighteen-seventy-one to nineteen-nineteen (then the Wilhelminian empire) and then from nineteen-forty to nineteen-forty-five (then the third Reich). This second period was called *Annexion de fait* (annexion in fact).

The installation of nazi administration in Alsace and Moselle from june nineteen forty led to the establishment of the racial discrimination already applied in Germany.

July thirteenth of year Nineteen forty, the decision was made to expel every Jewish and French people who had settled in Alsace and Moselle since nineteen eighteen. People got expelled without the possibility to bring any goods with.

Then the Gauleiter Wagner applied diligently the dispossession of the goods and businesses of expelled people. Those goods were entrusted to temporary managers. The armistice convention was obviously contempted.

On September third of nineteen forty, a member of the armistice commission, German general Huntziger wrote a letter to denounce those illegal measures. It of course did not have any effect.

The legal frame of dispossession

A German decree of nineteen thirty eight banned the Jews from trade activity and gave a legal frame to the aryanisation process: 1) location of some goods, buildings or a business to dispossess ; 2) appointment of a temporary manager; 3) evaluation of the nature and interest of the goods ; 4) search for an aryanisation solution; 5) transformation, sale or liquidation ; 6) consignment of the dispossession product on a bank account.

The legal frame of compensation

French law about war damages (October twenty eighth nineteen forty six). (1946)

This law does set the principle of the integral compensation of the material damage made to real or personal properties and for personal and professional purpose. Every victim of the war could ask for a compensation. The Ministry of reconstruction and housing managed the compensations.

The commission of occupation costs was set up in nineteen forty six and gave its conclusions on april twelve of nineteen forty nine (1949). The point was that the dispossessions resulting of French anti-semitic laws had funded the French public bank (Caisse des dépôts et consignations) . This public bank has given compensations from nineteen forty four to nineteen forty eight. Since then, the compensations have been made by the treasury via the OBIP.

“BRÜG” Law, july nineteenth, year nineteen fifty seven (1957). This law allowed the compensation of furniture, jewels and commodities dispossessed in the frame of the “Aktion Möbel” measures.

The seekers could be represented by the United Jewish social Fund or by the Defense comitee of dispossessed. They had to send a file to an office in Berlin. The compensation was calculated to the actual value or by a scale. This new process allowed to dispense to bring proofs of the value.

The process of compensation for war damages was retroactively adapted to the process of the Brüg Law. The compensation was of eighty percent of the Brüg scale and eighty percent of the previously compensated sums was deducted of the new compensation.

An exceptional process was set up from nineteen sixty four (1964) for the seekers who had previously given up because of the difficulty to build a file. There was a ceiling of eight thousand Deutsche Mark for furniture and two thousand Deutsche Mark for jewels.

The OBIP

The OBIP was created by decree in nineteen nineteen. It worked under the joint authority of the Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Ministry of Finance.

It first aimed to deal with the dispossessions that occurred during World War On. It settled in Metz in February nineteen-forty-five.

Its mission was to identify and recover the goods and documents held by the german sequestration organisms in order to give them back or compensate to their owners.

It also had to give information about the dispossessions and sequestrations and legal measures about them.

It received and checked the accounts of the german management organisms and of every organism or person involved in the dispossessions. It appointed managers for left businesses and goods and declared claims german persons and organisms who settled in Moselle during the annexion.

The OBIP disappeared in nineteen-fifty-three. It left seventy five thousand files (five hundred fifteen linear meters).

The collection

This collection is made of three-hundred-twenty-one boxes and gathers files from two offices.

First: the *Zivilverwaltung Überleitungstelle für das Volks- un Reichsfeindliche Vermögen*. (Direction de la défense civile pour les patrimoines hostiles au peuple et au Reich) Direction of the civil defense for the holdings hostile to the people and to the Reich.

The files are from nineteen-fourty to nineteen fourty-four.

- a) General informations : instructions, state of pieces of value. Iron Mines. Metallurgical plants. Iron mines real estate. Agricultural social insurance funds.
- b) Auction of piece of furniture by *Kreis*

Second : Office des biens et intérêts privés.

- a) General informations from nineteen-fourty-four to nineteen-sixty.
- b) Files from the german sequestration of the enemy properties and from the OBIP

Those files are divided in four categories

B I – Industrial activities: two hundred sixteen boxes

B II – Wholesale trade: twenty-two boxes.

B III – Retail trade: twenty-eight boxes

B IV – Handicraft: eleven boxes

This collection is only a sample of the huge volume of files produced by the OBIP of Metz.

The files are composed of documents regarding the dispossession and the management of goods.

Spending three autumn months working on this anthology of nazi signage was quite painful.

The collection does not only deal with the dispossession of jewish French people: the biggest file is the one of the Canal des mines de fer de la Moselle, the Moselle iron mines canal. The grip on industrial infrastructures and plants was at stake in this area during the three French-German wars.

Besides, in France, the dispossession could also aim opponents, Gaullists or Freemasons.

The interests of this collection

The interest for compensation

The French president Jacques Chirac admitted an imprescriptible debt to the Jews who were present on the French soil during the years of war. An historical research commission was set up under the chairmanship of Jean Matteoli. The dispossession was not anymore accounted as the partial disappearance of French holdings, but as a crime committed against a specific part of the population. This created the possibility for the French State to pay compensation to dispossessed persons who could not recover their goods.

Since then, twenty nine thousand three hundred seventy eight (29378) files have been registered nationwide. Among them nineteen thousand four hundred ninety three (19493) material files and nine thousand eight hundred eighty five (9885) bank files.

Though the collection has been sorted and archived in nineteen seventy six, it could be used again in the frame of such researches.

The interest for historical research and memory

The case for compensation of nazi dispossession is well-known in the domain of artistic goods, confer the movie *Monument Men*. The dispossession of material goods in order to redistribute it to aryan population is also identified as a way for the regime to maintain its social support. The dispossession of businesses, mainly small businesses, is more rarely mentioned. It can sometimes merge itself with the economical plundering of occupied countries.