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In accordance with Section 3 of the Federal Law on the Restitution of Art Objects from Austrian Federal Museums and Collections (Art Restitution Act), Federal Law Gazette, BGBl. I No. 181/1998 as amended by BGBl. I No. 117/2009, at its meeting on 30 March 2022, the Art Restitution Advisory Board unanimously adopted the following

DECISION

If the circumcision knife in a wooden box, ÖMV/60.664/a and b, dealt with in the Commission for Provenance Research and Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art Vienna dossier “Arthur Kohn” (01/2022) were owned by the State and if the Art Restitution Act BGBl. I no. 181/1998 as amended by BGBl. I no. 117/2009 was thus applicable, the Board would **not** recommend the return of this ritual object loaned by Arthur Kohn to his legal successor *causa mortis*.

GROUNDINGS

The Board has considered the Commission for Provenance Research and Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art Vienna dossier and established the following facts of relevance to the decision.

Art(h)ur Kohn was born on 16 January 1890 in Vienna. He was the youngest son of Rudolf and Ernestine Kohn, née Kohn [sic], and had two older siblings, Emilie (Emmi) Kohn, born 17 March 1885, and Viktor Kohn, born 19 August 1886. His father Rudolf Kohn was co-owner of the well-known piano dealership Bernhard Kohn. The family lived at the latest after 1893 at Himmelpfortgasse 20 in Vienna’s 1st district, where the piano showroom was also located. After finishing secondary school at k.k. Franz-Joseph-Gymnasium (now Gymnasium Stubenbastei) Arthur Kohn enrolled at the University of Vienna to study primeval history. His doctoral thesis “The prehistoric periods in Palestine” in 1913 was published in 1914 in *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft Wien*. The thesis indicates that he had close contacts with the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, since Moriz Hoernes and Eugen Oberhummer, who supervised his thesis, were members of the Austrian Association of Folk Life, which managed the museum. Hoernes was also one of the three founder members of the Museum.

In 1917, Arthur Kohn married Ida Steiner, born 19 May 1894 in Prague, in a Jewish ceremony. They lived (with interruptions) until the early 1930s together with Arthur’s parents and his brother Viktor and wife Hermine in Himmelpfortgasse. In 1932 they moved to Salesianergasse 4 in the 3rd district. After the death of Arthur Kohn’s mother Ernestine in 1929, his father Rudolf lived with the couple until his death in 1937.

Sport played an important role in the life of the Kohn siblings. Arthur, Emmi and Viktor Kohn were passionate mountain climbers and skiers. Their diverse activities and commitment to the Alpen-Skiverein for over twenty years (1906–1927) can be seen in the club newsletter *Der Schnee*. In winter of 1914/15 Arthur Kohn held a ski course for 600 men in the Austrian army and regularly gave talks on map reading and safety in the mountains. He and his brother Viktor also drafted a rescue regulation for the Alpen-Skiverein, and the three siblings were in the club’s rescue team. Arthur Kohn sat on the board for many years.

Arthur and his brother Viktor joined the family piano dealership at the latest by the end of the First World War, in which Arthur served as a volunteer in the 1st Regiment of the Tiroler Kaiserjäger. Ten years after the founding of the first showroom in Prague in 1856, their grandfather Bernhard Kohn (1829–1898) had also established the Klavier- und Harmonium-Etablissement in Vienna. Customers included the imperial household – the company was a supplier by appointment to the court – and also members of the

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Wittgenstein family, Richard Wagner, Heinrich Schenker and Gustav Mahler. After the founder's death, the two sons Rudolf Kohn, Arthur Kohn's father, and Friedrich Kohn, who changed his surname shortly afterwards to Karbach, took over the business. In the late 1920s the Bernhard Kohn company was enlarged through the takeover of the Vienna piano manufacturers Schweighofer and thereafter sold its own pianos.

After the annexation of Austria to the Nazi German Reich in 1938, the Kohn and Karbach family situations deteriorated rapidly. They were considered Jewish under the Nuremberg Laws and were subject to massive systematic theft and persecution by the Nazi regime. According to the asset declarations made by Arthur and Viktor Kohn, they each held a 27.5 per cent in the general commercial partnership [offene Handelsgesellschaft] Klavierhaus Bernhard Kohn. The piano dealership was "Aryanized" on 31 October 1938 and incorporated into Klavierfabrik Ehrbar at Parkring 16–18 in Vienna's 1st district, whose owner Friedrich Ehrbar (1900–1970) was the liquidator and provisional administrator. As far as can be established from the asset expropriation declaration after 1945, Viktor Kohn was the "first administrator" of the piano dealership until his death in October 1945. The showroom in Himmelpfortgasse was coercively sold to Hugo Michl, director of Marathon-Edelstahl-Vertriebs-GesmbH, a subsidiary of Deutsche Edelstahlwerke AG in Krefeld, one of the most important wartime companies, where many forced labourers were obliged to work.

Arthur and Ida Kohn were forced in August 1938 to move to collective accommodation, initially at Wiesingerstrasse 6 in the 1st district and then Seegasse 8 in the 9th district. They were deported to Theresienstadt on 10 September 1942. Arthur Kohn died there – as his uncle Friedrich Karbach and her wife had – on 6 April 1944 at the age of 54 under unclear circumstances. Six months after his death, on 19 October 1942, Ida Kohn, then 50 years old, was deported to Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp and murdered there.

Arthur Kohn's sister Emmi and her husband Julius Klinger were also forced to live in collective accommodation after August 1939. On 2 June 1942 they were deported to Maly Trostinec and murdered there. Arthur Kohn's brother Viktor survived the Nazi period thanks to his marriage to an "Aryan" woman. Hermine Kohn, who had become a member of the Vienna Jewish Community (IKG) in 1917 on account of her marriage, did not decide until the end of February 1942 to leave the IKG Vienna. This decision probably had to do with the forced move to a collective apartment at Grosse Schiffgasse 1a in the 2nd district. Until January 1942, Hermine and Viktor had continued to live at Himmelpfortgasse 20.

After the end of the Nazi regime in Austria, Hugo Michl kept the house in Himmelpfortgasse and there was a settlement with the two legal successors of the former owners Viktor and Arthur Kohn and Friedrich Karbach. Immediately after the death of her husband Viktor in October 1945, Hermine Kohn moved out of the collective accommodation to Himmelpfortgasse 3, close to the family's former piano dealership, which remained in the hands of Friedrich Ehrbar following a settlement in 1953. She died in 1965 at the age of 84.

During the systematic investigation of the old inventory in the archive of the Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, the provenance researchers noted a handwritten comment "Jewish circumcision knife in wooden box, owned by stud. Artur Kohn in Vienna", written by Michael Haberlandt (1860–1940), the museum's director at the time. The memo is dated 31 May 1911. The circumcision knife and box, first inventoried in 1962 as ÖMV/60.664/ab, were identified with the aid of this letter and Haberlandt's written comment "owned by stud. Artur Kohn in Vienna" on a label stuck to the underside of the box. Arthur Kohn lent the ritual object to the Museum in 1911, before the First World War. The mention of a university connection and the fact that according to the university archive for the 1910s there is no other student by the name

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of Arthur Kohn, it may be assumed that the comment by Haberlandt on the provenance document for the knife and box referred to the Arthur Kohn under consideration here. The knife and box has remained on loan in the museum since 1911.

The Advisory Board considered the following:

In this case, the Board does not recommend restitution by the Austrian Association of Folk Life or the Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art. The ritual object is not owned by the Association or the Museum, which is a condition for recommending restitution. The lender's title to the object cannot be established on the basis of a loan agreement concluded in 1911. According to Section 1462 of the General Civil Code (ABGB) prescriptive acquisition by the lender is not possible. The Board nevertheless believes that the overall context and aims of the Art Restitution Act should be borne in mind and that contact should be made with the descendants of Arthur Kohn in a suitable manner to inform them of the existence of the loan agreement and the possibility of terminating it.

Vienna, 30 March 2022

Univ. Prof. Dr. Clemens Jabloner (chairman)

Members

Univ.-Prof.in Dr.in Sonja Bydlinski, MBA
Assoz. Univ.-Prof.in Dr.in Birgit Kirchmayr
Ministerialrätin Dr.in Eva B. Ottillinger
A.o. Univ.Prof.in Dr.in Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber
Hofrat d. VwGH Dr. Franz Philipp Sutter

Alternate

Hofrat Dr. Christoph Hatschek

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