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## **CULTURAL VALUES OF THE MUSEUMS FROM SOUTHERN UKRAINE LOST DURING THE YEARS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

*- Abstract -*

The article discusses the loss of museums in the south of Ukraine during the Second World War. Valuable collections of Ukrainian relics that were in museums of Ukraine were exported as “trophy” to the territory of Nazi Germany. The selection and export process was controlled by special teams, which included not only the military, but also representatives of the scientific elite of the Third Reich. The question of the return of exhibits remains unresolved so far, which causes again and again to return to the designated topic.

*Keywords:* Southern Ukraine; museums; collections; exhibits; loss of cultural property.

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### **Introduction**

Museums have an important place in the cultural life of society, realizing their inherent protective function. The Second World War caused terrible losses to the historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine: some cultural objects died as a result of hostilities, the other was evacuated to the rear of the country and did not return completely after the re-evacuation. A significant amount of cultural property (archival, library, museum exhibits) was exported to Germany. At least 330 thousand museum exhibits and about 21 million storage units were removed from Ukrainian museums.

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### Formulation of the problem

The research topic is relevant, since the task of spiritual revival of Ukraine, determining prospects in all sectors of national culture, further development of democracy, national consciousness require focused work in the field of search and return of cultural values in order to transfer them to their rightful owners. The purpose of the article is to elucidate the features of the occupation regime of museum and historical values in southern Ukraine; elucidation of cultural and historical losses and the consequences of World War II for the further development of museum business in Ukraine. The territorial scope of the article is determined by the boundaries of the historical region of the southern part of mainland Ukraine.

In the modern administrative-territorial plan, these are the Nykolaev, Odessa, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia regions. According to the division of the period 1941-1944 – this is the general district (“Nikolaev”) of the Reichskommissariat “Ukraine” and part of the Transnistria governorate (Odessa and western regions of the Nikolaev region).

### Research Analyses

The problem of cultural and spiritual losses of Ukraine during political and military conflicts has always interested historians. Numerous scientific, historical, documentary works are devoted to it. Among the Ukrainian scientists who dealt with this problem should be named M. Koval<sup>1</sup>, who proved that “the attitude of the Nazi invaders to the values of Ukrainian culture was determined by the Nazi scale of” racial value “of the enslaved peoples, among which the Ukrainian, in fact, was no place”. To this galaxy of scientists we include the researcher S. Kot<sup>2</sup>, who works on the issues of displacement of Ukrainian cultural values. A part of the dissertation research recently was also devoted to the issues of national and cultural heritage of Ukraine during the Second World War. This study N.V. Shevchenko<sup>3</sup>, M. Dubik<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Koval, M. (1996). Pohrabuvannia ta znyshchennia fashystskymy zaharbnymy muzeinykh, arkhivnykh ta bibliotechnykh tsinnostei Ukrainy (1941-1944 rr.). *Povernennia kulturnoho nadbannia Ukrainy: problemy, zavdannia, perspektyvy*. Vyp. 6. P. 34-42.

<sup>2</sup> Kot, S. (1996). Problemy povernennia vtrachenykh muzeinykh tsinnostei v Ukrainu v konteksti istorii ta mizhnarodnoho prava. *Povernennia kulturnoho nadbannia Ukrainy: Problemy, zavdannia, perspektyvy*. Vyp. 6. P. 119-125.

<sup>3</sup> Shevchenko, N. (2008). Kulturno-osvitni zaklady Mykolaieva v period okupatsii. *Naukovi pratsi: Naukovo-metodychnyi zhurnal*. Mykolaiv: Vyd-vo MDHU im. Petra Mohyly. T.83. Vyp. 70. Istorychni nauky. P.142-147.

<sup>4</sup> Dubyk, M. (1996). Do istorii diialnosti natsystykykh ustanov v Ukraini pid chas okupatsii u 1941-1944 rr. *Povernennia kulturnoho nadbannia Ukrainy: problemy, zavdannia, perspektyvy*. Vyp. 6. P. 194-198.

etc. Among foreign researchers, who study the identified problems, are P. Grimsted, G. Boryak<sup>5</sup>, T. Sebta<sup>6</sup>. Various documents and personal information were included as sources for the writing of the article, including: the order of the Ministry of Occupied Oriental Regions of the Reich Commissioners of Ostland and Ukraine to preserve cultural and scientific values for export to Germany; correspondence between the headquarters management and the AWG of Ukraine regarding the work and use of Tile staff and Professor Kundert in Odessa<sup>7</sup>, etc.

### **Statement of the main material**

The origin and formation of museum institutions in Ukraine took place in the general vein of the development of museum business in the Russian Empire. At this time, most of the domestic museums were concentrated at church institutions and had a corresponding direction of their activities. The first assembly houses bore the imprint of social relations, reflected the spiritual, cultural and ideological interests of the ruling elite and often served as a means of strengthening its power.

In the eighteenth century, there was considerable interest among the educated elders in collecting and preserving monuments of Ukrainian antiquity and art (Poletics, Myklashevsky, Skoropadsky, Sudyenko, Hanenko, Lizogub, Apostles, Razumovsky, etc.). It was not yet a museum in a scientific sense, as the collections were for private use.

Museums as special institutions began to appear in the first half of the nineteenth century. These were mainly archeological, historical, local and art museums. During this period several museums of different profiles were opened, including Nykolaiv (1806), Feodosia (1811), Odessa (1825), Kerch (1826), Kharkiv – the first city art museum in Ukraine (1886), Kiev – City Museum of Antiquity and the Arts (1899). The main funds of these museums were archaeological materials. University museums also appeared, in particular, in 1807 at Kharkiv University (archaeological, zoological, mineralogical, museum of fine arts), 1809 – zoological at Kiev University; 1834-1837 Museum of Antiquities, Numismatic, Fine Arts and others at Kiev University, 1865 – Zoological cabinet at the Imperial Novorossiysk

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<sup>5</sup> Hrimsted Kennedi P. (1994). Nyshchennia ukrainskykh muzeiv, arkhiviv, bibliotek u roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny. *Pamiatky Ukrainy*. Vyp. 3-6. P. 92-105.

<sup>6</sup> Sebta, T. (1999). Dokumenty Ainzatsshtabu reikhsliaitera Rozenberha pro diialnist v ukrainskykh bibliotekakh pid chas natsytskoi okupatsii (1941-1944 rr.). *Naukovi zapysky: Zb. prats molodykh vchenykh ta aspirantiv*. NAN Ukrainy, In-t ukr. arkhheohrafii ta dzhereloznavstva im M.S. Hrushevskoho. T. 4. P. 398-412.

University in Odessa. An important reason for the founding of museums and libraries was also the rapid development of large cities due to industrialization<sup>8</sup>.

The southern region occupies a special place in the history of the Ukrainian museum. It is the southern lands at the beginning of the XIX century, it became the epicenter from where the waves of the museum movement dispersed throughout Ukraine. This is due to the rapid economic development of the Ukrainian South at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the growth of cities such as Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson and others, and the focus on newly developed lands of powerful scientific and cultural potential. Not the last role was played by the enthusiasm of the intelligentsia for science – archeology, and especially the archeology of antiquity, namely, the lands of the south of Ukraine provided an opportunity to join the study of this historical era<sup>9</sup>.

Without dwelling in detail on the history of the development of museum work, it is worth noting that in total in 1917 there were 36 museums in Ukraine. They played an important role in the preservation of cultural values, contributed to the dissemination of enlightenment of the Ukrainian people, its cultural development, the formation of national consciousness<sup>10</sup>.

The revival of Ukrainian statehood, the rise of the national movement during the national democratic revolution (1917-1921), of course, positively influenced the development of the museum. At this time, museums, which were created earlier, continue to operate, new museum centers, the first state monuments and protection institutions are appeared. The indicated period has become an important and fundamentally new stage in the transformation of the museum industry of Ukraine – at this time state regulation of the activities of museum institutions begins to be implemented.

In the 20 years of the twentieth century, only in Odessa, such historical building as: the Odessa State Art Museum, the Odessa National Art Museum, the All-Ukrainian Museum of Jewish Culture, Mendele Moher Sforim and more were founded .

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<sup>7</sup> *Perepyska mezhdru Upravlenyem shtaba y HRH Ukraini otnosytelno raboti y yspolzovanyia sotrudnykov shtaba Tyle y profesora Kunderta v Odesse* [Elektronni resurs]. Rezhym dostupa : <http://err.tsdav.gov.ua/1/webpages/61535226dzherela>

<sup>8</sup> Shydlovskiy, I. (2012). *Istoriia muzeinoi spravy ta zoolohichnykh muzeiv universytetiv Ukrainy*. Lviv : LNU im. Ivana Franka. P. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Kurchenko, T. (2011). *Formuvannia muzeinoi merezhi pivdnia Ukrainy u pershii polovyni XIX stolittia*. Kraieznavstvo. Vyp.4. P. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Tiurmenko, I. (2004). *Kulturolohiia: teoriia ta istoriia kultury*. Navchalnyi posibnyk / Za red. I.I. Tiurmenko, O.D. Horbula. Kyiv: Tsentr navchalnoi literatury. P. 254.

In the thirties of the twentieth century, the Ukrainian Museum underwent several heavy blows: the vast majority of museum experts were arrested on charges of “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism”. A number of museums, especially districts and regions, were liquidated<sup>11</sup>. There was even a fabrication by the organs of the GPU of the Ukrainian SSR the case of the so-called “Russian-Ukrainian Fascist Bloc”, which according to the investigation there were about 40 cells in different cities. Members were employees of museums and monument conservation institutions in Kharkiv, Kiev, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Poltava, Vinnitsa, Uman, Konotop, Berdichev, Myrhorod, Nizhyn.

Ukraine suffered the largest losses in its entire centuries-old history as a result of military operations and occupation during the Second World War. On the eve of the war, government bodies made significant efforts to export historical and artistic values to the deep rear. In accordance with the general plan for the evacuation of museums, the funds of the central and local museums were divided into three phases of evacuation (in terms of value)<sup>12</sup>. In total, from 22 to 26 museums from 174 (data for 1940) were exported to the rear areas of the USSR, that is, only 13 percent of their total number. These were mainly the museums of Kiev and several regional centers – Kherson, Odessa, Nykolayiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kharkiv, Chernihiv. Evacuated funds of Ukrainian museums were scattered across a vast territory.

Employees of the Odessa Museum of Western Art July 30, 1941 it was possible to remove from Odessa part of the funds of his museum (4 drawers) and the museum of Russian and Ukrainian art (11 boxes) with valuable paintings packed. According to various estimates, the number of exported masterpieces ranged from 500 to 750 works of art. Among them were paintings by Paolo Veronese, Guido Reni, DB Teopolo, D. Canaletto, A. Magnasco, D. Ternis, P. Brueghel, J. Brueghel, H. Holpain, P.P. Rubens, K. Bryullov, D. Levitsky, F. Rokotov<sup>13</sup>.

However, the actual circumstances of the evacuation of cultural property were significantly different from the schemes defined by the directives. The rapid onset of the war did not allow the implementation of what was planned. The evacuation of the funds of Ukrainian museums, archives and libraries in the eastern regions of the

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<sup>11</sup> Rudyi, H. (2010). Problema zberezhenia muzeinoi spadshchyny Ukrainy: za rezultatamy analizu materialiv respublikanskoi periodyky. *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. Vyp.6. P. 130.

<sup>12</sup> Akulenko, V. (2011). Pravovyi status evakuiovanykh z Ukrainy u skhidni raiony SRSR muzeinykh, bibliotechnykh i arkhivnykh tsinnostei pid chas Druhoi svitovoi viiny. *Zbirnyk nauk. prats*. Vyp. 19. P.9.

<sup>13</sup> Kalashnikova, V. (2010). Istoryko-kulturni tsinnosti Ukrainy v umovakh “novoho poriadku” (1941-1944 rr.): teoretychnyi aspekt. *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakultetu Zaporizkoho natsionalnoho universytetu*. Vyp. XXVIII. P. 242.

USSR took place in difficult wartime conditions, in an atmosphere of haste and confusion. Some cars were attacked by German aircraft, after which cultural values disappeared without a trace. Traces of others were lost for unknown reasons. The museum funds of 10 regions of Ukraine remained non-vacuumed. Less than half of the evacuated museum and archival valuables reached their destination – they were bombed or robbed along the way<sup>14</sup>.

The evacuation of Ukrainian cultural property was scattered across a vast territory that covered the Urals, Siberia, and Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). Ensuring their safety was extremely difficult. In addition, under conditions of insufficient control, the facts of theft of Ukrainian cultural property and their appropriation in places of storage in evacuation were indicative. Products made of precious metals and stones were taken out by special groups of the NKVD and did not leave any documents. The fate of many of these monuments is still unknown. Characteristically, before the retreat of the Soviet troops, inventory books and registration cards of many museums were destroyed, and after the liberation of Ukraine, the NKVD officers seized and destroyed pre-war stock documents and documents on the evacuation of funds of individual museums.

As for the German command – it carefully studied the future enemy in the prewar time. Therefore, they showed special attention to museums, archives and libraries. A special apparatus was formed, the task of which was to identify, preserve and prepare for the export of “trophy” cultural property to Germany. The following were involved in the export of cultural property: the “Künsberg Group”, which was directly subordinate to Ribbentrop and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The operational headquarters of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg was involved in the case, who was entrusted with the collection of information and accounting for all cultural values captured by the Germans. There were also specialized centers – the “Separate Headquarters of Libraries” and the headquarters “Fine Arts”. An important role in the context of preparing museum valuables for export was played by *sondershtabs*. They were engaged in individual branches of science and culture, and their employees were highly qualified specialists - scientists, doctors of sciences, professors. They conducted an inspection and assessed objects of culture and science, monuments of architecture and history, selected cultural objects for export to Germany, evaluating them not only from the point of view of importance for

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<sup>14</sup> Shchetnikov, V. (2012). Problema vyvezennia kulturnykh tsinnostei z Transnistrii u 1941-1944 rr. ta yikh povernennia u pisliavoiennyi period. *Naukovi pratsi istorichnoho fakultetu Zaporizkoho natsionalnoho universytetu*. Vyp. 33. P. 111.

fulfilling the tasks of the operational headquarters, but also of artistic or scientific value<sup>15</sup>.

Art exhibits, getting in Germany, ended up in different collections or museums. Most of the “captured” paintings were planned for the so-called “Museum of the Fuhrer” in Linz, which was never built<sup>16</sup>. Reichsmarschall G. Goering created a grand art gallery in his castle Karinhalle. Since the beginning of World War II in July 1944, 137 wagons with paintings, rare furniture, and jewelry from various European collections were delivered to the Nazi Reich.

In the official documents of the Reich, it was constantly emphasized that all actions to confiscate works of art, library and archival funds were carried out only for their “salvation” in the occupation zone, “collection of material” and a safe place at the counter, so that “they survived this war and remained for subsequent generations”.<sup>17</sup>

In Ukraine, the Nazis in the early days of the occupation robbed and destroyed the museum of Odessa, Poltava, Berdichev, Nikolaev, Kremenchug and others; irreparable damage was inflicted to the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, the ancient architectural masterpieces in Chernihiv were destroyed (Spassky Cathedral of the 11th century, Borisoglebsky Cathedral of the 12th century, Pyatnitskaya Church of the 12th century), architectural ensembles of Kharkov, Kiev and other cities; the invaders destroyed examples of statues, mirror cases, vases, shot paintings and books from machine guns.

The main working group of Ukraine of the Rosenberg Operational Headquarters was responsible for search and evacuation operations related to archives, libraries and museums in the occupied territories. Within this group there were several specially created teams and groups that conducted local search activities.

A separate place in this structure belongs to the working groups working in the south of Ukraine. The basis of this region was Odessa, Nikolaev Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions.

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<sup>15</sup> Smolii, A. (2011). Ukraina v Druhii svitovii viini: pohliad z XXI stolittia. *Istorychni narysy*. Red. kol.: V. A. Smolii, H. V. Boriak, Yu. A. Levenets, V. M. Lytvyn. K.: NVP "Vydavnytstvo Naukova dumka, NAN Ukrainy". Kn. 1. S. 584.

<sup>16</sup> Akulenko, V. (2011). Pravovyi status evakuiovanykh z Ukrainy u skhidni raiony SRSR muzeinykh, bibliotechnykh i arkhivnykh tsinnosti pid chas Druhoi svitovoi viiny. *Zbirnyk nauk. prats*. Vyp. 19. P.8.

<sup>17</sup> Zynych, M. (1999). Diialnist operatyvnoho shtabu A. Rozenberha z vyvezennia kulturnykh tsinnosti z SRSR. *Vitchyzniana istoriia*. Vyp. 4. P.159.

In November 1941, by order of the head of the Main Working Group "Ukraine" Franz Zaibot, a special unit "Southern Ukraine" was created, headed by Hans-Joachim Rudolph. First, Nikolaev became the place of stay, and later Kherson. Representatives of the Sondershtab "Nauka" special forces "Southern Ukraine" worked in Odessa.

At the first stage of the war, the "Künsberg group" was especially distinguished (a special SS battalion under the command of Sturmbannführer Eberhard Baron von Künsberg). His units moved along with the front line troops and were designed to identify, select and retrieve archival and library values intended for shipment to Germany.

In the first months of the occupation, the Germans withdrew hundreds of unique items from Odessa museums – 200 paintings, 80 porcelain items, 60 bronze items, 40 pieces of ancient weapons, 30 carpets, 10 ivory items and other museum valuables.<sup>18</sup> In total, more than 130,000 exhibits were removed from Odessa museums.

The museums of Nikolaev and Kherson were robbed. So, in December 1941, members of the "Southern Ukraine" working group in the Nikolaev History Museum organized an exhibition for German military personnel who have the right to choose any museum exhibits, leaving a receipt to the director.<sup>19</sup>

In the fall of 1943 the most valuable archaeological finds from the museums of Nikolaev (about 500 items in 6 boxes) were delivered by the representative of the special headquarters "Ancient History", director Remoli from Nikolaev to Koenigsberg and placed at the Institute of Ancient History under the supervision of its director professor La Baum.<sup>20</sup> Particular attention in the collection belonged to exhibits about the stay of the ancient Germans (Ostrogoths) in the territory of modern southern Ukraine. From the Kherson Historical Museum, the Germans took out more than 50 boxes of specially selected museum material. After the liberation of Kherson, in a note on the damage caused by the war, the museum director A.

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<sup>18</sup> *Perepyska mezhdru Upravlenyem shtaba y HRH Ukrayny odnosytelno raboti y yspolzovanyia sotrudnykov shtaba Tyle y profesora Kunderta v Odesse* [Elektronni resurs]. Rezhym dostupa: <http://err.tsdavo.gov.ua/1/webpages/61535226dzherela>

<sup>19</sup> Boitsov, M. (1998). Kartoteka Z Operatyvnoho shtaba "Reikhsliaiter Rozenberh". *Tsennosty kulturnykh na okkupyrovannykh terrytoryakh Rossyy, Ukrayni y Belorussyy. 1941–1942*. M.A. Boitsov T.A. Vasyleva. M.: Yzdatelstvo Moskovskoho unyversyteta.

<sup>20</sup> *Rasporiazhenye mynysterstva okkupyrovannykh vostochnykh oblastei reikhskomysaram Ostlanda y Ukrayny o sokhranenyu kulturnykh y nauchnykh tsennostei dlia vivoza ykh v Hermanyiu. Prestupnyye tsely - prestupnyye sredstva: Dokumenty okkupatsyonnoi polytyky fashystskoi Hermany na terrytoryy SSSR (1941-1944 hh.)*. M.: Hos-polytyzdat. 1963. P. 45.

Isakov stated: “The Kherson Museum of Art (in the premises of the historical department) should be considered non-existent”.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, the exhibits of the Zaporizhzhia Local History Museum were completely lost. It is interesting that during the occupation (1942-1943), archaeological excavations were conducted in the vicinity of Zaporizhzhya.<sup>22</sup> The Germans were primarily interested in the monuments associated with the “Aryan heritage” – the culture of corded ceramics and tribes of the Gothic Germans, who in the III-IV centuries created their own state in the Northern Black Sea. The materials found were intended to substantiate the claims of the Third Reich to the occupied Ukrainian lands and to support the theory of the supremacy of the “Aryan race”.<sup>23</sup>

According to the first official post-war data published in the newspaper Pravda (1948), the losses of Ukrainian museums after the war amounted to more than 40,000 exhibits. In 1987, the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR and the Ukrainian Culture Fund announced new loss figures – 130,000 items.<sup>24</sup>

At the final stage of the Second World War, to organize the process of returning valuable property, a special Office for the return of equipment, property and valuables (hereinafter referred to as the Office) was created under the SNK of the Ukrainian SSR. Among the tasks of this structure was the search and return of cultural, historical and scientific values that had been exported during the years of occupation. Also, employees of the Union Control Commission (hereinafter – UCC) were engaged in the search for cultural property. To assist the UCC in the search for the exported property, the authorized UCC of the Ukrainian SSR were sent: workers of the corresponding people's commissariats and central organizations.<sup>25</sup>

An investigation by the commission found that rare museum valuables were stolen from art museums of Ukrainian – Russian and Western arts by various officials during the occupation: paintings by Russian and foreign artists (Repin, Ivanov, Kuindzhi, Makovsky, Nesterov, Strozzi, Vassolini etc. ), antique art sets of

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<sup>21</sup> *Istoriia muzeiu. Khersonskiyi oblasnyi kraieznavchyyi muzei* [Elektronnyi resurs]. Rezhym dostupu: URL: <http://hokm.ks.ua/promuzey.html>

<sup>22</sup> Turchenko, F. (2013). *Zaporizkyi rakhunok Velykii viini. 1939–1945*. F. H. Turchenko, V. M. Moroko, O. F. Shteinle, V. S. Orlianskyi [ta in.]; F. H. Turchenko (nauk. red.). Zaporizhzhia: Prosvita. P. 215.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P. 216.

<sup>24</sup> Koval, M. (1996). Pohrabuvannia ta znyschennia fashystskymy zaharbynkamy muzeinykh, arkhivnykh ta bibliotechnykh tsinnostei Ukrainy (1941-1944 rr.). *Povernennia kulturnoho nadbannia Ukrainy: problemy, zavdannia, perspektyvy*. Vyp. 6. P. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Kalashnikova, V. (2010). Istoryko-kulturni tsinnosti Ukrainy v umovakh “novoho poriadku” (1941–1944 rr.): teoretychnyi aspekt. *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakultetu Zaporizkoho natsionalnoho universytetu*. Vyp. XXVIII. P. 243.

high-value furniture, antique china, statues, carpets. Among the stolen paintings are real works by Giordano, Caravaggio, Maratti, Lawrence, Dow, Bryullov, Shishkin, Kuindzhi, Grekov.

Most of the values found after the war are now stored in the special funds of the Hermitage, the Museum of Fine after Pushkin, State Historical Museum (Moscow). Similar funds were also created in some central ministries and departments of the USSR (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense, Archival Administration, etc.), as well as in the Union Academy of Sciences. For half a century, these trophy values have been hiding from the public, although among them there may be cultural monuments from museums of Ukraine.

### **Conclusions**

The fate of many relics remaining abroad is unknown. Even if the transportation routes and the current location of the museum exhibits are known, there are no documents confirming that the items were really stolen from Ukrainian museums. Many Ukrainian masterpieces settled not only in museum collections in Germany, but also in numerous private collections. The situation is aggravated by the fact that even organized exported goods from Ukraine were listed in German documents as “Russian” or “Soviet”.

On the other hand, the collections of many German museums in 1945 were exported to the USSR and other European countries. So the problem of restitution (return) of cultural property arose and which has not yet been completely resolved.

In the conditions of the existence of independent Ukraine, the question of returning lost cultural property was presented at the level of official state policy. An absolute achievement in this direction should be considered the creation and activities of special state bodies, which are entrusted with the task of implementing state policy on the return of cultural values of Ukraine during the Second World War. The task of returning cultural property to Ukraine continues to remain an important area of national interests and is maintained at a high state level.

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