

STANDARDISATION OF DATA ON THE ACQUISITION OF MUSEUM OBJECTS AS PART OF THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING THE PROVENANCE OF MUSEUM OBJECTS – AN EXAMPLE FROM THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

ALEKSANDRA VLATKOVIĆ,
MA

Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb
avlatkovic@emz.hr

The Ethnographic Museum was founded in 1919 as an independent Ethnographic Department of the then called National Museum. In the first years of its operation, the foundations of professional and scientific work were laid, primarily through the systematisation and professional processing of materials, the establishment of collections and documentation funds, and a system for managing museum documentation. Documentation on museum objects is kept in an inventory book, main and auxiliary file cabinets, and the documentation on the entry of objects into the Museum. The file system shows that, even at the beginning of the Museum's operation, efforts were made to structure data in order to enable easier accessibility and searchability of the collections.

Today, the holdings have more than 87,000 museum objects organised into 45 collections that include ethnographic material from the territory of Croatia, but also other European countries, mainly the wider South Slavic area, and objects from non-European cultures.

By participating in the *Pilot Project to Determine the Provenance of Museum Objects Confiscated During and After WWII*,¹ an attempt was made to determine whether and how many objects taken over during the war and in the post-war period became part of the Ethnographic Museum's holdings. I am involved in the *Pilot Project* as a documentalist at the Ethnographic Museum, which is why I approached the topic from that position. The main source of data in researching the topic was the inventory book of museum objects, which contains more than 88,000 records. Data on acquisition (form, source, notes) and the previous designation of the object were analysed. Given the relatively complex history of the objects' entry into the holdings, many objects have several other designations in addition to the inventory number that they received before or during their entry into the Museum, which are a valuable source of data because they indicate the origin of the object (Fig. 1). In addition to the inventory book, other documentation on museum objects (catalogues, documentation on the entry of objects) and archival materials (transfer records, order books) stored in the Museum were also used as sources. Some of the archival materials (records and similar documents related to the topic of the project) were not arranged, and during the work and research, the materials were unified, systematised and partly determined. In addition, materials

from the Croatian State Archives were also used (HR-HDA-512, Ethnographic Museum, from 1918 to 1951; HR-HDA-2117, Commission for Gathering and Protection of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities, from 1945 to 1950).

The paper provides an analysis of a group of data from the inventory book of the Ethnographic Museum, compared with the results of the research of available archival sources, and points to the importance of standardisation of terminology and data entry methods to ensure accuracy and consistency in searching museum databases, i.e., availability of information.

INVENTORY BOOK – DATA ANALYSIS

The transition to computerised museum documentation, with numerous advantages such as greater transparency and more efficient data management, has opened numerous questions and challenges.² One of the key challenges relates to standardisation that would enable fast, simple and comprehensive access to information. While processing museum objects by entering data into the database, all terms are entered into terminology control tables, including different forms of names that refer to the same term. Since, with the transition to computerised documentation, there was no agreement on the method of entry or the form of names for numerous data groups, they were entered into the databases unevenly. If the terminology tables are not administered and edited, access to information becomes difficult. This was confirmed by the search of the database in which the inventory book of the Ethnographic Museum is kept, conducted for the needs of the *Pilot Project* at the very

beginning of the research. The results of the initial search and the results of the research, analysis and comparison of data from the inventory book are presented below.

EASY INVENTORY BOOK SEARCH – KEYWORDS

In the first research phase, the database containing the Museum's inventory book was searched at several levels according to key terms relevant to the topic of the *Pilot Project*. The search included the acquisition data group (form, source, registration number, and acquisition note), the inventory data group, and data on the previous designation of the object. In the above data categories, the term "KOMZA,"³ the record numbers, and the names of institutions and persons entered as the source of acquisition, or as former owners, were searched.

The term "KOMZA" appeared in 24 records, but due to inconsistencies in the processing of objects, it was entered into the database in five different data categories: form of procurement, source of procurement, note on procurement, note on inventory, and information on previous designation.

The situation is similar with the data on the record number. Due to the uneven entry, this data was searched in several different ways. The search covered the period from 1939 to 1945. To achieve the best possible results, the year was used in combination with different versions of the term "KI" (space, dot, minus). The year was entered in the search in full and abbreviated form (e.g. "1939" and "39"). The two pieces of data were combined in the search by entering them in sequence, one before or after the other, with or without a space, separated by a dot, slash

or minus. The different forms of data on the record number were entered into the database in three data categories: registration number, purchase note, previous designation (Fig. 2).

This issue was also confirmed with the data on the source of acquisition, where the name and surname of the same person were recorded in several different versions. It was also noticed that objects that entered the Museum in the same way (source of acquisition, registration number) had different data on the form of acquisition recorded: *KOMZA, gift, storage, seizure, handover* or the data was not specified.

A search of the database conducted based on data on the number of records and the source of acquisition indicates that the holdings contain objects covered by the topic of the *Pilot Project*, and that there are more than 24 of them, as shown by the initial search of the database using the term “KOMZA.” Therefore, as the research continued, it was necessary to conduct a detailed analysis and comparison of individual groups of data in the inventory book, primarily data on the form of acquisition and data on the previous designation of the object.

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF DATA ON THE ACQUISITION OF OBJECTS AND PREVIOUS OBJECT DESIGNATIONS

Previous designations recorded on numerous objects from the holdings are a valuable source of data that point to their origin and testify to the complex history of the objects entering the Ethnographic Museum. Therefore, checking the designations in contact with the object and updating this data in the database, i.e.,

the inventory book is one of the activities planned during the implementation of the upcoming revision. By organising this data, the set of acquisition data for certain parts and units in the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum could be standardised, which would contribute to future research into the origin of objects both at the holdings level and in other contexts.

For the purposes of the research in this phase, data for 11,902 records with a previous object designation was extracted from the database into an Excel table from the total number of records (more than 88,000).⁴ An analysis and comparison of data relating to the previous designation and acquisition of the item (date of entry, source of acquisition, form of acquisition) was carried out and compared with those from the auxiliary entry book. The table was then supplemented with records that may have been missed in previous work and that relate to items relevant to the topic of the *Pilot Project*. The terminology in the table relating to the form of acquisition and record number was edited and standardised, and it was determined that 119 records can be linked to materials acquired during the war and post-war period. The remaining previous designations entered in separate records refer mostly to the “old acquisition,” i.e. to objects from the original collections or taken from the Museum of Arts and Crafts, then to objects from the Salomon Berger Assistance Fonds (PF) and the *Mogan Collection*.⁵

DATA MATCH: OBJECT – MUSEUM DOCUMENTATION – ARCHIVE SOURCES

As previously mentioned, the information on the form of acquisition in the

inventory book has not been consistently maintained. In 8564 records for museum objects that were inventoried or received from 1939 to 1958, 29 terms were recorded in the database as the form of acquisition, the most frequent of which were *purchase*, *gift* and *seizure*. The term *seizure* is mainly used for objects from the *Mogan Collection*. To determine or confirm the information on the form of acquisition, the results obtained from the previous research were compared with the available material from the documentation of the Museum and the Croatian State Archives. First, an attempt was made to establish a connection between the record for the museum object and the KOMZA records. Objects from the holdings are linked to several records, while some objects could not be linked to any of the currently available sources based on the available data. After conducting research into archival sources and analysing and comparing data, the total number of records from the inventory book that can be linked to materials taken over during the war and post-war period increased from 119 to 264.

In a certain number of cases, the connection between the objects and the records is very clear (for example, the records K I 39/1945, or I/39-45), while some of the entries could only be linked to the records after research and standardisation of individual data groups had been conducted. These entries mainly refer to the records by which the Ethnographic Museum took over objects from the Museum of Arts and Crafts. An example is the objects with the number 441/1944, which were linked through research of the documentation to the records stored in the Museum's documentation under

the number 457-1944. This minute refers to the file of the Office for Nationalised Property of the Ministry of the State Treasury, which is stated to have been entered in the registry of the Croatian State Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb under the number 441/1944. The second example refers to several objects that are connected to the record 104-1944, although they are not marked with that number. Based on the research to date and insight into the available sources, it can be assumed that this record includes objects from several different lists created from 1941 to 1943. The objects are marked with the number that is listed at the end of each line in the record list, and it could be concluded that the number was taken from the original list. This group of objects is connected to record 104-1944 thanks to a passing note about the return of several items from the Vinski family, which is recorded in the list of items titled *Crate / storage ET2*.⁶ A comparison of the data from this record with the archival materials stored in the Croatian State Archives that relate to the Vinski family indicates that the items of the Vinski family in the aforementioned record are marked "Jab."⁷

These examples are only illustrative and are the result of previous research and work on organising documentation, and further conclusions certainly require additional research.

INVENTORY STATISTICS

After conducting research, analysing and standardising terminology and checking other available sources, the number of records increased from the initial 24 to 264, which relate to materials acquired during World War II and the post-war period. The

results obtained indicate the importance of standardising data entry methods and terminology to achieve high-quality and accurate information.

Based on the data obtained during the research, inventory statistics were compiled, which show that until the 1990s, the inclusion of these objects in the Museum's holdings was more the exception than the rule (Chart 1). This is also evidenced by the note recorded in the list accompanying the record⁸ and in the inventory book. The note explains that the object is inventoried "as needed for scientific processing." The note was entered at the end of 1954 and, according to our current knowledge, it is the earliest inventoried object when it comes to the material acquired for the Museum during and after the Second World War (Fig. 3).

CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to draw attention to the importance of organising documentation, both archival sources and museum databases, to achieve greater consistency and easier accessibility of data and information about museum holdings. In addition to the numerical results mentioned in the text, it should certainly be emphasized that during the work on the *Pilot Project*, the documentation material related to the project topic was unified, organised and partly determined, and is kept in the Ethnographic Museum.

Attention was drawn to the importance of working on data standardisation, not only in terms of standardising terminology, but also in terms of the method of data entry. The text presents an example of standardising several categories of data from the inventory book that relate only to a part

of the Ethnographic Museum's holdings. The work on terminology as part of the *Pilot Project* prompted thinking about a methodology that could standardise the method of entry of certain groups of data at the Museum level and organise terms that primarily relate to the form, source and date of acquisition, document number and previous designation, but also to information about the previous owner. For further work on the determination of materials to be as high quality as possible, it is necessary to ensure an organised and uniform data system at all levels that would enable a high-quality and simple comparison of relevant sources. This requires work on organising museum documentation and archival materials in museums and other institutions, all with the aim of connecting data from different sources with those on objects as simply as possible.

NOTES

¹ Hereinafter the *Pilot Project*.

² In the Ethnographic Museum, since 2009, documentation on museum objects and activities has been maintained in the M++ software package, i.e. the newer version of Modulor++.

³ Commission for Gathering and Protection of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities.

⁴ Status as of October 31, 2023.

⁵ The *Mogan Collection* is the largest collection that entered the Museum during the war and post-war years. The heirs of the Mogan family were compensated in 1971, after which the objects from the Collection were gradually inventoried. For this reason, the objects are not shown with the numbers that I present in the text, although due to how the objects entered the Museum, the *Mogan Collection* is part of the *Pilot Project* theme.

⁶ Crate / Storage ET2 list (documentation of the Ethnographic Museum, 104-1944; 321.3.1944.).

⁷ The original document in the Croatian State Archives (HDA) is listed as 38/46; records 38/45⁷, 58/45⁷. The HDA also stores documentation related to the return of objects from the Vinski family, from which it can be further learned that the Museum of Arts and Crafts took over the objects during the war, and the connection is in files 1031-1942 and 132-1943 – the handover record of the County Prefect of the poglavnik, Jabukovac 35, 23 August 1943.

⁸ Record I/39-45, July 9, 1945.

IZVORI/SOURCES

Dokumentacija Etnografskog muzeja:

- glavna kartoteka
- inventarna knjiga Etnografskog muzeja
- inventarna knjiga Etnografskog muzeja (baza M++/Modulor++)
- pomoćna knjiga ulaska Etnografskog muzeja
- popis *Sanduk / pohrana ET2* (104-1944; 321.3.1944.)
- urudžbene knjige Etnografskog muzeja
- zapisnici 441/1944, 104-1944, K I 39/1945

Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA):

- Etnografski muzej, HR-HDA-512
- Komisija za sakupljanje i očuvanje kulturnih spomenika i starina, HR-HDA-2117

STANDARDIZACIJA PODATAKA O NABAVI MUZEJSKIH PREDMETA KAO DIO PROCESA UTVRĐIVANJA PODRIJETLA MUZEJSKE GRAĐE – PRIMJER ETNOGRAFSKOG MUZEJA

Sudjelovanjem u Pilot-projektu utvrđivanja podrijetla muzejske građe oduzete tijekom i nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata nastojalo se utvrditi jesu li predmeti preuzeti tijekom rata i u poraću postali dio fundusa Etnografskog muzeja i koliko ih je. U prvim godinama djelovanja Muzeja, osnovanoga 1919. godine, postavljeni su temelji stručnoga i znanstvenoga rada, ponajprije sistematizacijom i stručnom obradom građe, uspostavljanjem zbirki i dokumentacijskih fondova te sustavom vođenja muzejske dokumentacije. Iz sustava kartoteka vidljivo je da se već u početcima djelovanja Muzeja nastojalo strukturirati podatke kako bi se omogućila lakša dostupnost i pretraživost zbirki. Prelaskom na računalno vođenje muzejske dokumentacije otvorila su se brojna pitanja, a jedan od ključnih izazova odnosi se na standardizaciju koja bi omogućila brz, jednostavan i cijelovit pristup informacijama. U tekstu je prikazan primjer standardizacije za nekoliko kategorija podataka iz inventarne knjige Etnografskog muzeja koji se odnose tek na dio fundusa. Nakon provedenog istraživanja analizom i ujednačivanjem terminologije te provjerom drugih dostupnih izvora broj je od početna 24 zapisa povećan na 264 zapisa koja se odnose na građu preuzetu tijekom Drugoga svjetskog rata i u poratnom razdoblju. Predstavljenim primjerom u radu se nastojalo upozoriti na važnost sređivanja dokumentacije, i arhivskih izvora i muzejskih baza, u cilju što veće dosljednosti i dostupnosti podataka, odnosno informacija o muzejskoj građi.