

# PROVENANCE RESEARCH AND THE ART TRADE

Ed. Peter Wehrle

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## CASE STUDY

# THE ART COLLECTION OF KOMMERZIENRAT ISIDOR BACH – A RECONSTRUCTION APPROACH

While our main attention is naturally focused on the front of a painting, research into its provenance nevertheless begins with a look at the reverse. The wooden panel of Josef Wopfner's painting *Prozession am Walchensee* (fig. 1) shows fragments of a paper label from the Munich Galerie Heinemann on the back, a first indication of its provenance. The label includes the typographical numbering 11577 (fig. 2). Entering the so-called Heinemann number in the online database of Galerie Heinemann, which contains all the data found in the business ledgers and index cards of the former gallery (1872–1938), brings up a match with the entry for the Wopfner painting. In addition to technical details about the work and an illustration, the buyer of the work is recorded, namely Kommerzienrat Isidor Bach from Munich<sup>1</sup> (fig. 3). The date when it entered Isidor Bach's collection can thus be identified as December 22, 1916.<sup>2</sup>

### Biographical information on Isidor Bach

Isidor Bach, born in Fischach on July 1, 1849, was famous as the 'inventor' of ready-to-wear clothing in Munich<sup>3</sup> and as the founder of the eponymous men's clothing store on Sendlingerstraße in Munich. On December 25, 1874, the businessman, who was also known by his sobriquet 'Joppenkönig' ('Jacket King'), married Klara Selz, the daughter of rabbi Elkan Selz and Fanny, née Helbing, a Munich native. Klara, also called Claerchen, was Hugo Helbing's cousin; her mother Fanny was the sister of Hugo's father Sigmund.<sup>4</sup> The Bachs

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Fig. previous page: detail from fig. 1

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Fig. 1 : Josef Wopfner (1843–1927), *Prozession am Walchensee*, ca. 1895–1900, oil on panel, 15.7 x 28.3 cm.  
© Ketterer Kunst GmbH & Co. KG, Munich



Fig. 2: Josef Wopfner (1843–1927), *Prozession am Walchensee*, ca. 1895–1900, oil on panel, 15.7 x 28.3 cm, reverse (detail).  
© Ketterer Kunst GmbH & Co. KG, Munich

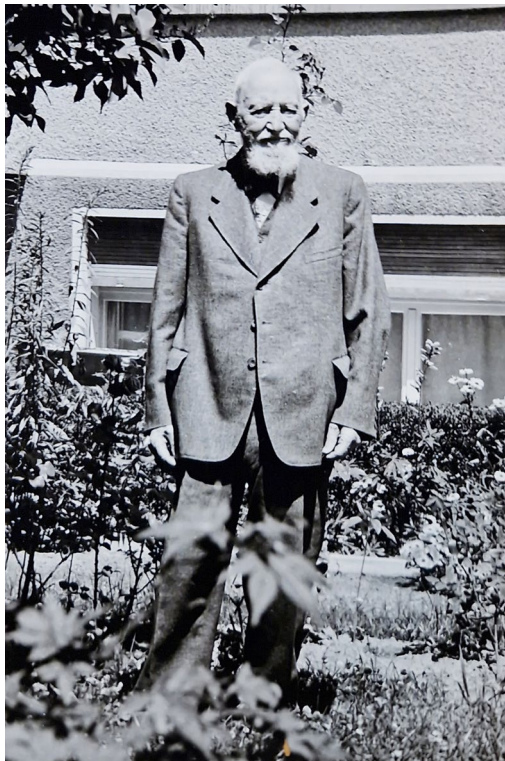


Fig. 3: Isidor Bach, undated.  
Image credits: private photo



Fig. 4: The Bach family at the engagement party of their youngest daughter Paula on April 8, 1915. Seated from left to right: Lisa Bach, Selma Kohn, Klara Bach, Isidor Bach, Otto and Traudl Holzinger. Standing from left to right: Alfred Bach, Karl Kohn, Paula and Berthold Weiss, Ella and Emil Neumann.  
Image credits: private photo

had six children<sup>5</sup> (fig. 4), of whom the eldest son Hugo died at the young age of 35 in October 1910, having caught a cold on a skiing trip from which he never recovered.<sup>6</sup>

Initially based in Augsburg, the flourishing clothing factory, which Isidor Bach ran together with his brother Hermann, opened branches in Munich on Marienplatz and on Sendlinger Straße as of 1878. Both Prince Regent Luitpold, and later his son Prince Ludwig visited the stores and were particularly impressed by the company's electric cutting machine.<sup>7</sup>

The usury proceedings brought against Alfred Bach, Isidor's son, who had been charged with price gouging in January 1919 and convicted in January 1922 attracted a great deal of attention, particularly in the radical right-wing press.<sup>8</sup> At the time, the prime target of agitation was Isidor Bach who was long retired, having retreated from the business in 1910. After Hugo's death, he had handed over the reins to his son Alfred and his nephew Carl, Hermann's son.<sup>9</sup> The reasons why Isidor Bach became a target may have been the fact that the business still operated in his name and that his first name Isidor was widely perceived as Jewish.<sup>10</sup> Owing to his high profile, Isidor Bach, at the age of 74, was among the hostages of the Beer Hall Putsch at Bürgerbräukeller in November 1923.<sup>11</sup>

Isidor Bach was appointed Kommerzienrat (commercial counselor) on May 16, 1908.<sup>12</sup> He was one of 103 commercial counselors in Munich of Jewish denomination,<sup>13</sup> as was Hugo Helbing and the brothers Hermann and Theobald Heinemann. The range of backgrounds



that commercial counselors could have was wide, but what the 1,850 Bavarian titulars had in common were the leading positions they held in their own companies.<sup>14</sup> As businessmen, industrialists, manufacturers and wholesalers, the commercial counselors belonged to a bourgeois elite that was characterized not only by their economic success, but also by their generosity in form of donations to charity, and a good relationship with their employees.<sup>15</sup> Prestigious residential buildings to demonstrate status were just as important to this group as collections of art objects for the interiors. The Munich art and antiques dealer Hugo Helbing was appointed Kommerzienrat on March 12, 1911 and was promoted to Geheimer Kommerzienrat on August 3, 1918.<sup>16</sup> The passion for collecting art of his fellow counselors surely brought him many customers, many of whom bought and sold their art at Helbing auctions.<sup>17</sup> Hand-written annotations in Hugo Helbing's auction catalogs also identify Isidor Bach as a buyer on several occasions. In addition, the businessman and his wife appeared as donors to a charity auction for the benefit of families of soldiers killed in World War I, which was held at the auction house Hugo Helbing on December 14, 1917 and the following days.<sup>18</sup> Social commitment had always been important to Bach, even before his appointment as commercial counselor. As part of the celebrations of their businesses 25th anniversary in Munich on December 5, 1903, Isidor Bach and his brother Hermann announced the establishment of a foundation with the objective to offer people help and support in cases of illness, distress or death.<sup>19</sup>

## The art collection – sources and state of knowledge

Sources on Isidor Bach's art collection are limited. As far as the author is aware, there is neither a collection inventory nor any documentation by the collector. The Gestapo's confiscation list from November 18, 1938, provides the best overview of the collection's volume.<sup>20</sup> According to the testimony of his daughter Paula, married Weiss, who witnessed the confiscation of the art objects, a removal van pulled up at the Bach's house on Mauerkircherstraße 29 in Munich the morning of the day of the confiscation. Two Gestapo officers carrying typewriters entered the apartment and took away numerous paintings, carpets and other works of art. Bach's daughter Paula objected to the confiscation of the property and demanded a copy of the confiscation list, whereupon, according to her own statement, she was threatened with violence should she make any further demands.<sup>21</sup> The list of confiscated property includes 31 paintings and engravings, as well as numerous faience wares, pewter objects, guild jugs, around eight Persian carpets and wooden sculptures. According to the list, a total of 65 objects were confiscated from Isidor Bach that morning without compensation, and some further 17 objects were documented as 'remaining' in Bach's house. The confiscated objects were handed over to the Munich Oberfinanzdirektion for safe-keeping, and most of them were kept in Beuerberg during the war.<sup>22</sup> Three oil paintings were given to the Städtische Galerie München on loan, namely *Uferlandschaft* by Hermann Baisch, a *Landschaft* by Joseph Wenglein and the painting *Heimkehr von der Weide* by Richard Zimmermann.<sup>23</sup> After the end of the war, the paintings by Wenglein and Zimmermann were on the list of objects belonging to Isidor Bach to be collected from the Central Collecting Point (CCP) in Wiesbaden. Only Baisch's *Uferlandschaft* got lost in the temporary storage



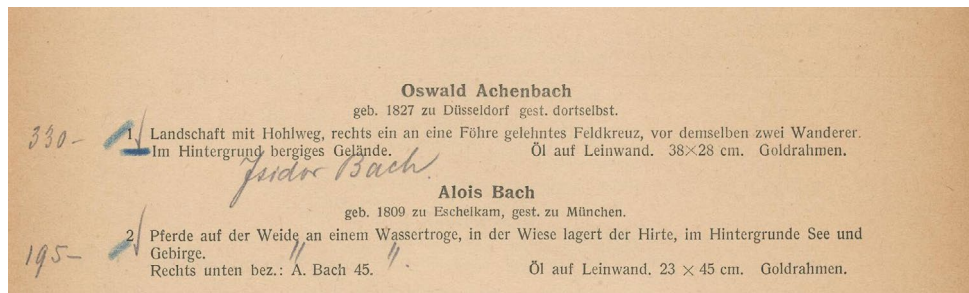


Fig. 5: Helbing, Hugo: *Ölgemälde moderner Meister: Sammlung Kommerzienrat Fritz Eckel in Deidesheim; Auktion in München in der Galerie Hugo Helbing, 19. Dezember 1916*, lots 1 and 2. Working copy of Marie Ducrue, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich (detail).

Image credits: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.56127#0005>

facility of the Städtische Galerie at Schloss Thambach, where it could not be recovered upon its evacuation in September 1946.<sup>24</sup>

The confiscation list and the works identified below show that Isidor Bach had a strong interest in landscape and animal pictures, as well as genre scenes. He mainly collected works by contemporary artists from Munich and southern Germany.

## Buyer at Hugo Helbing

To date, Isidor Bach has been identified as the buyer of five works at Helbing auctions. These were random finds, as only hand-written annotations in the auction catalog confirm Isidor Bach as the buyer of these works. There is no annotation in the auction catalog for lot 11, Nicolaes Berchem's *Landschaft mit Herde*, on March 26, 1914. However, a comparison of the entry for the lot and the property card for the Munich number (Mü-Nr.) 36061, suggests that this is in fact the work owned by Isidor Bach, since technique, dimensions and description of the subject match exactly.<sup>25</sup> A copy of the auction catalog of December 19, 1916,<sup>26</sup> features a hand-written note that identifies Bach as the buyer of a painting by Oswald Achenbach and another by Alois Bach<sup>27</sup> (fig. 5). Again, the auction catalog of June 11, 1912, identifies Bach as the buyer of a work by Franz von Defregger, another by Ludwig von Hagn and a third by Carl Spitzweg.<sup>28</sup> The present author was able to identify the Spitzweg painting as number 869 in the Spitzweg catalogue raisonné<sup>29</sup> (fig. 6).

Sales are also documented: A notification in file Ia 4242 of the Munich Oberfinanzdirektion dated July 30, 1948, on "eingezogenes oder für verfallen erklärtes Vermögen" ("confiscated or forfeited assets"), lists two positions of proceeds from the sale of works of art. The amount of 69.54 Reichsmark from a sale through Helmut Lüdke, Munich, was received by the Munich treasury, while another 1,500 Reichsmark went to the treasury in Berlin-Moabit-West from a sale of artworks through Hugo Helbing, Munich.<sup>30</sup> As the latter gallery's business records are considered lost or destroyed, no further information has been found to date. According to the Gestapo list, only a wooden figure of a *putto as stand* owned by

Isidor Bach was included in the inventory of goods on consignment that were present when Jakob Scheidwimmer took over the Galerie Hugo Helbing in 1941.<sup>31</sup> It has not yet been possible to clarify which works of art relate to the payments in the abovementioned files.

## Buyer at Heinemann Gallery

Notably, Isidor Bach also appeared as a customer of Galerie Heinemann. Both the Heinemann brothers Hermann and Theobald were also awarded the title of Kommerzienrat.<sup>32</sup> Their gallery's customer file mentions numerous other commercial counselors. The buyer's card index for Isidor Bach<sup>33</sup> (fig. 7) lists five purchases. In addition to the *Prozession am Walchensee* by Josef Wopfner, which prompted this research, Bach acquired the bronze *Faun* by Hans Schwegerle, as well as the oil paintings *Alte Bäuerin in der Küche* by Anton Seitz, *Kuhherde* by Friedrich Voltz and Adolf Hengeler's *Sommertag am See*.<sup>34</sup> The two works by Anton Seitz and Friedrich Voltz, which Bach acquired in 1913 and 1916 respectively, had previously been purchased by Galerie Heinemann at an estate auction of various painters and collectors at Hugo Helbing's on October 18, 1913.<sup>35</sup> None of the works can be clearly identified on the confiscation list or the property cards of the CCP. With the exception of the Wopfner painting, the whereabouts of the artworks are still unknown.

## Takeover and emigration

After the National Socialists came into power in 1933, the subsequent anti-Jewish campaigns caused Isidor Bach's business figures to plummet by more than a third between April and July of the same year. Customers were approached on the street or in the store and attempts were made to dissuade them from buying. For security reasons, some customers asked to have the company name on their shopping bag removed before leaving the store.<sup>36</sup> In 1936, the company was 'Aryanized' when it was taken over by long-time employee Johann Konen.<sup>37</sup> In 1939, at the age of 90, Isidor Bach emigrated to Switzerland to live with his daughter Gertraud (Traudl) in Montreux. After the death of his daughter's husband in 1943 and her subsequent emigration to the US, Isidor Bach moved in with his other daughter Selma in Bern, where he died on May 10, 1946.<sup>38</sup> The amount of the compulsory 'Degeo' (Golddiskontbank) charge as specified in fol. 99 in file 4829 of the Landesentschädigungsamt, suggests "daß zumindest ein Teil des Hausrats" ("that at least part of the household effects") was taken to Switzerland upon emigration.<sup>39</sup> It has not yet been possible to clarify whether the household effects included works of art.

## Restitution and unanswered questions

Documents from the Wiedergutmachungsbehörde Oberbayern<sup>40</sup> and the CCP Wiesbaden confirm that all of the art objects confiscated on November 18, 1938, with the exception of the abovementioned painting by Hermann Baisch, were made available to the heirs of



Fig. 6: Carl Spitzweg, *Plauderstündchen (Storchen-Apotheke)*, oil on cardboard, 39 x 33 cm.

© Walther Bayer / NEUMEISTER Münchener Kunstauktionshaus GmbH & Co. KG



Bach, Kom. Rat Isidor  
München

7392	<sup>1914</sup> M. Schwegeler "Frau" Bl.	80.-
12237	<sup>1913</sup> A. Leitz "Die Bäuerin d. d. Kuhle"	90.-
12240	<sup>1916</sup> F. Valtke "Kuhherde"	2400.- 1790.40
11577	J. Wappner "Prozession"	1600.- 1193.60
12416	Ad. Hengeler "Sonntags. Tee"	1400.- 3038.-

Fig. 7: Galerie Heinemann, Munich, Entry in the buyer's card index: Isidor Bach.

Image credits: Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Deutsches Kunstarchiv, NL Heinemann, Galerie, KK-B-6

Isidor Bach for collection. A document confirms that the objects were collected from the CCP in Wiesbaden by Walter Gross, an employee of the shipping company L. Rettenmayer GmbH, on October 6, 1950.<sup>41</sup> The question remains as to the fate of the other works of art acquired at Helbing auctions or from Galerie Heinemann, that do not appear on the confiscation list. Isidor Bach may have sold them or given them away. Perhaps they were on display in the homes of other family members at the time of the confiscation and were taken out of the country, or perhaps they are even still in possession of the descendants today.

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## ANNOTATIONS

- 1 Nuremberg, Deutsches Kunstarchiv (DKA), Estate Galerie Heinemann, file of unsold pictures, KV-W-797, <http://heinemann.gnm.de/de/kunstwerk-12691.htm> (last access on June 28, 2023).
- 2 Entry on Galerie Heinemann online, as note 1.
- 3 See Moser, Eva: *Von Bach zu Konen*. Munich 2011, p. 12.
- 4 Many thanks to Anja Matsuda of the Helbing Art Research Project for her kind information on the Helbing family tree and her willingness to provide further information!
- 5 The children were, in birth order and with their surnames, if married, Hugo, Selma Kohn, Gertraud (Traudl) Holzinger, Gisela (Ella) Neumann, Alfred (Fredl) and Paula Weiss.
- 6 Cf. family tree of the family written by Isidor Bach (unpublished).
- 7 Cf. Moser 2011, as note 3, pp. 6–8.
- 8 The Bach family successfully lodged an appeal against the verdict. On October 10, 1927, both the prison sentence and the fine were waived. See Moser 2011, as note 3, p. 12.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Cf. Walter, Dirk: *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt. Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik*. Bonn 1999, p. 102.
- 11 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 132.
- 12 See Krauss, Marita: *Die bayerischen Kommerzienräte*. Munich 2016, p. 400; cf. also the announcement of the appointment in the *Leipziger Monatsschrift für Textil-Industrie* of May 27, 1908, <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper/item/LN2MVQWTGSVYPAFBBYJI4WAJDSHAWHA3?issuepage=15> (last access on July 31, 2023).
- 13 Cf. Krauss, Marita: *Wege jüdischer Kommerzienräte in München nach 1933*, in: Krauss 2016, as note 12, pp. 285–292, here p. 285.
- 14 Cf. Krauss, Marita: *Bayerische Kommerzienräte - eine bürgerliche Elite zwischen Wirtschaft, Staat und Philanthropie*, in: Krauss 2016, as note 12, pp. 12–31, here p. 12.
- 15 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 16 Cf. Krauss 2016, as note 12, p. 484.

- 17 The list of donors to the auction for the benefit of families of soldiers killed in World War I on December 14, 1917, mentions 15 commercial councilors alone. See Helbing, Hugo: *National-Sammlung für die Hinterbliebenen der im Kriege Gefallenen. Katalog der gestifteten Kunst- und Wertgegenstände. Ausstellung im Kunstausstellungsgebäude am Königsplatz zu München. Versteigerung daselbst durch die Kunsthandlung Hugo Helbing, 14. Dezember 1917 und folgende Tage*, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.49299#0009>. See also Bendl, Eva: *Spendenfreude, Sammeleifer und Forscherdrang. Wirtschaftsbürger im Umgang mit Kunst und Geschichte*, in: Krauss 2016, see note 12, pp. 187–196, here p. 192.
- 18 See Helbing, Hugo: *National-Sammlung für die Hinterbliebenen der im Kriege Gefallenen*, as note 17.
- 19 Cf. Moser 2011, as note 3, p. 6.
- 20 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B 323/352a on fol. 34.
- 21 See The National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C. (NARA), M1946 Roll 51, pp. 193f., <https://www.fold3.com/image/270331571> (last access on August 15, 2023). This is the filing for restitution claims dated December 16, 1948 by the lawyer Dr. Karl Eisenberger on behalf of the heirs of Isidor Bach.
- 22 Restitution proceedings Alfred Bach against the German Reich and the State of Bavaria, Staatsarchiv München, WB Ia 2533 (1/2), (BA 169), fol. 15.
- 23 Cf. inter alia NARA M1946 Roll 114, p. 19.
- 24 Correspondence between the Directorate of the Städtische Kunstsammlungen München and the Office of Military Government for Bavaria, Fine Arts, Monument and Archives Section, NARA M1947 Roll 42, pp. 46–50.
- 25 Helbing, Hugo: *Ölgemälde alter Meister: aus dem Nachlass der Frau Gräfin Quadt-Wykradt-Isny, Tegernsee, aus dem Besitze von Siegfried Freiherrn von Reuss, Garmisch u. A.; Auktion in München in der Galerie Helbing, Donnerstag, den 26. März 1914*, lot 11, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.56452#0004>, and Property Card of Mü. no. 36061, available by entering the Mü. no. on [https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm\\_ccp.php?seite=9](https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm_ccp.php?seite=9) (last access on August 15, 2023) or with illus. NARA M1946 Roll 232, p. 1f., <https://www.fold3.com/image/312653917/312653917> (last access on August 15, 2023).
- 26 Cf. the auction catalog of *Ölgemälde moderner Meister: Sammlung Kommerzienrat Fritz Eckel in Deidesheim; Auktion in München in der Galerie Hugo Helbing, 19. Dezember 1916*, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.56127#0005>.
- 27 As far as is known, the painter Alois Bach was not related to Isidor Bach.
- 28 Cf. *Sammlung von Ölgemälden moderner Meister: aus dem Besitze des Herrn Professor Fr. J. Meder*, München, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.51779#0050>.
- 29 The property card for Mü. no. 31555 ([https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm\\_ccp.php?seite=9](https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm_ccp.php?seite=9) with entry of Mü. no. or <https://www.fold3.com/image/312479763/312479755>, both last accessed on August 15, 2023) (NARA M1946 Roll 262, p. 1) describes the picture as “Rococo society sitting behind houses”. The dimensions are specified as “40 x 33”, the technique is “oil on cardboard” and the identifying marks include “Prov. Meder”. See Roennefahrt, Günther: *Carl Spitzweg. Beschreibendes Verzeichnis seiner Gemälde, Ölstudien und Aquarelle*. Munich 1960, no. 869 *Plauderstündchen*. The reference in the catalogue raisonné to the provenance Meder as well as to the Helbing auction of June 11, 1912, lot 148 allows for verification. An annotated copy of the auction catalog identifies Isidor Bach as the buyer. The work was offered here under the title *Apothekerterrasse*. After leaving the CCP Wiesbaden, the trail initially went cold. In 2021, it was offered by a German auction house as *Plauderstündchen (Storchen-Apotheke)* and did not sell; see Neumeister, Munich: *Auktion 403, Winterauktion*, December 1, 2021, lot 395.
- 30 Archive file Ia 4242 / O 5210 - BA 169/3/II P, available at the Bundesamt für zentrale Dienste und offene Vermögensfragen (BADV), pp. 1–2.
- 31 NARA M1946 Roll 50, p. 188, <https://www.fold3.com/image/269979523?terms=bach,putto,germany> (last access on August 15, 2023), reference received from Anja Matsuda.
- 32 Cf. Krauss 2016, as note 12, pp. 482f.



- 33 Buyer's file Isidor Bach, Galerie Heinemann, Munich. Nuremberg, DKA, NL Galerie Heinemann, buyers file KK-B-&, Document ID: 15563, <http://heinemann.gnm.de/de/dokument-15563.htm> (last access on August 15, 2023).
- 34 An image of Adolf Hengeler's *Sommertag am See* can be found online in the Galerie Heinemann database, available at <http://heinemann.gnm.de/de/kunstwerk-4662.htm> (last access on August 4, 2023).
- 35 Helbing, Hugo: *Gemäldesammlung Prof. Albert Schmidt, München; ferner Gemälde aus den Nachlässen Prof. Franz Skarbina, Berlin, Kunstmaler F. Pernat, München etc. etc.; [Auktion in München in der Galerie Helbing, Sonnabend, den 18. Oktober 1913] – München 1913*, lots 196 (Seitz) and 249 (Voltz) each with illustration, see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.20121>.
- 36 Cf. Moser 2011, as note 3, p. 16.
- 37 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17.
- 38 See a typewritten family tree of the Bach family from 1944, started by Isidor Bach and continued at an unspecified date by Isidor Bach's grandchildren. The document was kindly made available to me by a descendant of Isidor Bach, for which I would like to express my most sincere thanks!
- 39 Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, LEA 4829, Isidor Bach, fol. 99.
- 40 Staatsarchiv München, WB Ia 2533 (BA 169).
- 41 NARA M1947 Roll 39, pp. 137–141, <https://www.fold3.com/image/231978538> (last access August 15, 2023).

## PROVENANCE RESEARCH AND THE ART TRADE

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