

The catholic St. Salvator Church in Berlin-Lichtenrade was inaugurated in February 1933 at the beginning of the transfer of political power to Hitler and the NSDAP. The furnishing of the sacred spaces was realised between 1933 and 1941 under the responsibility of two priests. The founder of the church, Monsignor Theodor Grabe (1866-1935), installed an iconographic art ensemble with a racial connotation in the apsis of the church. One part of this ensemble was a monumental painting made by Gebhard Fugel (1863–1939). He was a founder member of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für christliche Kunst” (German association for christian art) in Munich, a nationwide association, which united artists, patrons and clerics under a single roof. The painting of Fugel shows Christ and the holy Veronica as “Aryans”. Recording to the clergymen and the artists of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für christliche Kunst” (DGfchK) Grabe maintained a good contact. The DGfchK had been synchronized with the Nazi regime at the beginning of 1934. The research studies of the iconographic ensemble in the apsis of St. Salvator were the first indication of anti-Semitic attitudes in the context of this church and its interiors.

When Theodor Grabe died in September 1935, his chaplain Wilhelm Lütkehaus (1900–1980) continued the furnishing in the nave and in the aisle of the church. He worked together with another founder member of the DGfchK in Munich in this context, the architect Fritz Fuchsberger (1876–1945). Lütkehaus bought some art objects for the decoration of the sacred spaces from an art dealer who was a member of the parish. Information about the activities of this art dealer, named Rudolf Sobczyk (1893 – 1975), had been a desideratum in research. The book discovers his role in the Berlin art market between 1935 and 1945. Sobczyk especially traded with Nazi-looted art. The priest of the St. Salvator Church Pastor Lütkehaus sent 1936 the art objects that were bought by Sobczyk to Fuchsberger in Munich. These several objects were constructed to one ensemble, an altar to adore the Holy Mother. Also the painting “Vision of the holy Antonius” was donated to the parish by Rudolf Sobczyk in 1936 for the installation of the triumphal arc in the nave of the church. Previous, the painting had been property of the Jewish art dealer Samuel Bercovitz (1886 – 1971). The painting had been extorted from Bercovitz by Sobczyk and Lütkehaus. This was one way a parish participated in the anti-Jewish laws and Nazi-looted art came into a sacred space.

Sobczyk was connected to Jewish and non-Jewish experts of Berlins art trading community. He capitalized the political and racial prosecution of the German Jewish for his own profit when Samuel Bercovitz' art trading shop was “aryanized” by a non-Jewish art dealer. Rudolf Sobczyk adopted the part of the business relations to the German film production companies and also Samuel Bercovitz' connection to Hans Wendland who became one of the art middlemen of Nazi-leaders. Samuel Bercovitz had to escape from Germany in August 1936. His brother Paul Bercovitz, who was an art dealer and commission agent in art auctions as well, was murdered in the concentration camp Buchenwald in August 1938. Their brother-in-law Heinrich Ueberall, who established the art trading in Berlin together with the father of the Bercovitz-brothers at the beginning of the 20th century, was murdered in September 1939 in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen. The researches give some Jewish art dealers their names back and emphasize their significance for the art trading establishment in Berlin.

The book also presents the curriculum vitae of the beneficiary Rudolf Sobczyk. At the end of 1938 he operated in a “discrete” art trading shop which was installed in factory floors, including 1800 square meters. He worked free-hand for a start, but since 1938 he also bought objects at auctions organized by the regional finance office (Finanzamt Moabit- West). One example is the forced sale of the furnishing of Manor Büssow, the property of Marie Busch,

née von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy by the auctioneer Gerhard Harms in November 1938. It shows that in auctions objects of cultural value were devaluated to consumer goods. This procedure was also practiced by other auctioneers. Since the beginning of the deportation in 1941, Sobczyk bought the objects directly from the regional finance office (Oberfinanzpräsidium Berlin). At the end of 1941 Sobczyk had a clear profit of approximately 151000 Reichsmark. At the same time, the earning per year of the highest officers were about 11200 Reichsmark. And the art dealer's profit grew until 1943 to 240000 Reichsmark. Since the end of 1942, Sobczyk used the small synagogue next to the Synagogue Kottbuser Ufer as his storage and art trading shop.

The newly academic research is convinced that since 1937 in Berlin only a few objects of cultural value were auctioned. But the researches about Rudolf Sobczyk and about the Berlin trading by auctions demonstrate that objects of cultural value were strictly devaluated in many cases. These facts demand a new evaluation of the Berlin art trading in the period of so called Third Reich. In addition, Sobczyk's business connections to catholic priests show that Nazi-looted art reached the catholic churches and call for systematic provenance research regarding this fact.