

SIVIERO, MANAGER OF THE ARCHIVE: “THE STATE HAS STOPPED REQUESTING THE RESTITUTION. WE NEED TO LOOK IN RUSSIA.”

Thousands of works of art are still “prisoners of war”

TODAY is the centenary of the birth of Rodolfo Siviero, and who was, until his death in October 1983, Head of the Delegation for Restitutions. Our Country, our culture owe a lot to this great character, who, among a thousand difficulties of any type, brought back to the country works of art of huge historic and artistic value, unique in the history of humanity.

A special very important chapter is that concerning the spoliations and the lootings suffered by the Jewish communities and the Jews by the Nazis after September 8. Since 1947-48, Siviero worked with extreme dedication for the recovery and restitution of these assets, including the library of the Rabbinic College of Rome, with its 4000 volumes. Still, many other Jewish assets are missing.

The catalog titled “The Work to be refound,” which was provided by international agreements and was to serve at the same time as inventory and a work instrument, appeared many years later, in 1995, by the care of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Cultural Assets. The idea of a volume dedicated to the assets and to the Jewish works of art still missing could be a good starting base for a future work program. Following the publication of the aforementioned catalog, the Interministerial Commission for the Recovery of Works of Art was created by agreement between the Foreign Affairs and the Cultural Assets. The task of the Commission was to follow up on the files not yet completed, with an in-depth study of the documentation found in the archive of Siviero’s Delegation for Restitutions and conducting new investigations and obtaining additional documents. This work of research and location of the stolen works of art is far from being completed. There is research to be done in the former Soviet Union where the works stolen by the Nazis may have arrived and been deposited in the territories of Germany occupied by Soviet troops. The Interministerial Commission did for years a work that ranged in all sectors from the recovery of the works of art and diplomatic-cultural activity intended for the return to Italy of cultural assets illegally stolen from our artistic patrimony. Unfortunately, this precious Commission has not been renewed since 2007. Currently, at via degli Astalli in Rome, historic headquarters of Siviero’s office, there is an office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs named “Nucleo Conservazione Archivio Siviero” [Preservation Unit of the Siviero Archive] that receives both the archive of the Delegation for Restitutions and that of the Interministerial Commission. The work of Siviero and of the Commission is resumed with new momentum and with adequate means. It is necessary to create by law a lean permanent body with its own budget. Siviero had already presented in this sense a design of law, which had been approved by a branch of parliament but was immediately set aside after his death. I believe it is in the primary interest of Italian culture to resume Siviero’s work.

Maria Liberatrice Vicentini

(manager of the Nucleo Conservazione Archivio Siviero)