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## Perpetrators, victims, and art

*The National Socialists' campaign of pillage*

Between 1933 and 1945, privately and publicly owned works of art, books, and archives were extorted, "aryanized", "secured", and stolen, first in Germany, then throughout Europe. Special offices and organizations were involved and the victims of these campaigns of pillage were political opponents: union officials, socialists, freemasons, and priests. The Jewish population was hit especially hard. With the attack on Poland and the invasion of the Soviet Union, the peoples of eastern Europe, categorized as "racially inferior", were plundered. The National Socialist campaigns of pillage for cultural assets are not just a subject of historical research. They continue to hinder the search for mutual understanding within Europe to this day.

In Berlin, two major exhibits marked the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and recalled the postwar era. They reminded us of Germany's, and Europe's, predicament at the war's end: 55 million people dead, including 25 million civilians; countless cities more than half destroyed; and an all-pervasive hunger.

Both exhibits started with pictures and information about National Socialism and campaigns of persecution and murder. One series of images illustrated the "legalized" looting of Jewish property by the Nazi state.<sup>1</sup> An issue of *Newsletter for the German Population*, from 9 May 1945, mentioned one of the biggest private Nazi art thieves, former General Governor Dr Hans Frank. Quoting a TASS news report of 6 May 1945, it was reported: "In Mr. Frank's house, paintings and other art objects worth a total of 12.5 million pounds sterling were found; he had stolen these from Warsaw."<sup>2</sup> The documents on display touched upon one of the most far-reaching aspects of Nazi policies: the unscrupulous misappropriation of cultural assets, first in Germany, then in all of Europe. Given the aforementioned numbers of human victims, the looting of cultural artefacts has not been very prominent in the public debate about National Socialism. Nonetheless, Nazi art theft has become increasingly central to research in contemporary history, and especially the history of libraries, art, and archives.

### The state of research

Since the Allies were the first who tried to undo the consequences of Nazi looting, the first publications on the topic appeared in the English-speaking world. They were concerned with finding as many stolen works as possible, reuniting collections, and returning them to their rightful owners.<sup>3</sup> In the two Germanys, the issue was not considered relevant during the first years of their existence. The first German study came out two decades after the end of the war; remarkably, it was published simultaneously by Henschelverlag in East

Berlin and by Ackermann in Munich. No less interesting, it documented the losses of German museums on both sides of the inner-German border.<sup>4</sup> Thus, German museums were primarily interested in registering their own losses.

As early as 1963, however, Ruth and Max Seydewitz had published their book *Die Dame mit dem Hermelin* (The Lady with the Ermine), also at Henschelverlag.<sup>5</sup> In the ideological context of the German Democratic Republic's officially proclaimed antifascism, which hardly acknowledged any East German responsibility for events prior to 1945, this work of popular history, lacking precise references to sources, offered an overview of the Nazis' theft of art, illustrated its pan-European extent, and dwelled upon the role of certain individuals, from Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, and Reichsleiter Alfred Rosenberg to the Ancestral Heritage Research and Teaching Society (*Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft "Das Ahnenerbe"*). In 1972, Ruth and Max Seydewitz published another book on the same topic.<sup>6</sup> Both works were widely translated in other socialist countries.<sup>7</sup>

In the countries affected by Nazi looting, the memory of the losses remained vivid. But although the debate on the topic was intense, it was overshadowed by the ideological evolution of the Cold War. Shortly after the war, Polish art historians and librarians had begun to record the cultural assets the Germans had "secured", i.e. seized and transported to Germany<sup>8</sup>. Books published in the postwar period documented Polish intellectuals' struggle to have Poland's cultural treasures returned.<sup>9</sup> But for several decades, starting in the 1950s, the lack of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland, on the one hand, and the officially declared fraternity between Poland and the GDR, on the other hand, made it impossible to look for Polish cultural objects on German territory.<sup>10</sup> Things changed after the political upheaval in eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s: Updated catalogues of lost objects were published, and new initiatives were launched to search for them.<sup>11</sup>

In the Federal Republic, meanwhile, librarians, art historians, and archivists started debating their own professions' responsibility for the looting of cultural assets. The debate began cautiously in the 1970s and gathered momentum in the 1980s. In the 1970s, an important contribution was made to exploring public librarians' acquiescence and participation in "cleansing" libraries from undesirable literature;<sup>12</sup> in the 1980s, several authors studied German libraries' involvement in "expropriating" Jewish private collections.<sup>13</sup>

This line of inquiry reached a climax in 1988, when the Wolfenbüttel Study Group in Library History (*Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Bibliotheksgeschichte*) devoted its fifth annual conference to the history of libraries under National Socialism and followed up with another conference on the same topic in 1989. Attention focused on the politics of librarianship both in and outside Germany<sup>14</sup>, indicating the shift of interest from domestic policies to the looting of cultural objects in the occupied territories.

Art and archival historians in the Federal Republic took longer to face up to their own professions' involvement in Nazi lootings, not least because of art history's professional focus on protecting and preserving already acquired works of art and its specialization in centuries past. In 1995, the art history journal *kritische berichte* published a thematic issue on looted art, which included archaeology and ethnology and inserted Nazi art theft into a larger context of "capturing" museum objects.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, art historians' research on

the history of their own discipline was documented in a traveling exhibit and an accompanying publication.<sup>16</sup> In the same year, the Congress of German Archives (*Deutscher Archivtag*) was organized around the theme of "German Archivists and National Socialism."

English-speaking authors had already published several fundamental works on looted art by the mid-1990s.<sup>17</sup> Around 2000, provenance research, i.e. research into the exact origin of works of art, became more popular in Germany as well, concentrating on 1933–45 and especially on the fate of Jewish collectors.<sup>18</sup>

This line of inquiry was decisively influenced by the Washington Conference Principles. The Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, organized by the US Department of State and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and attended by 44 government delegations and 13 non-governmental organizations, met from 30 November to 3 December 1998.<sup>19</sup> The principles adopted by conference participants called upon the international community of curators and art historians to identify works of art seized by the Nazis, publicize information about them, and "achieve a just and fair solution". Since the adoption of the Washington Conference Principles, initiatives have been launched in many European and American countries — including Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States — to identify stolen works of art and find their owners. Information about these works is published on the Internet.<sup>20</sup> National and international conferences have facilitated exchanges between scholars from different countries,<sup>21</sup> and conference proceedings are published to make their findings widely available.<sup>22</sup> Historical exhibits have been devoted to looted art.<sup>23</sup> In December 1999, responding to the Washington Conference Principles' injunction to "develop national processes to implement these principles", the German cabinet, state governments, and municipal administrations adopted a joint statement.<sup>24</sup>

The past six years have shown that inter-disciplinary and international cooperation is indispensable. It has also become evident that research is focusing on two areas. On the one hand, there are now a large number of historical studies on the Nazi looting of cultural objects, examining the structure, agents, and targets of art theft from the point of view of its victims. This has given rise to very specific research guides aiming to help find stolen objects still kept in public collections.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the professions concerned have engaged in soul-searching; for historical reasons, this has mainly taken place in Germany, but also, increasingly, in Austria.

Given its history, Germany is facing an especially steep challenge to investigate the persecutions perpetrated both in the occupied countries and domestically. This has spawned an extensive literature on "Aryanization" policies in Germany, showing that the looting of cultural assets was flanked by a huge machinery of fiscal and emigration authorities, preservationists, and museum and library directors, who ensured a "smooth" utilization of cultural assets that had been "secured" and "Aryanized," i.e. confiscated, extorted, and looted. This is one of the aspects I am bracketing out in the following rough chronology of the main looting campaigns and in my account of their principal thrusts, agents, and victims. Nor shall I discuss the library and museum administrations set up in the conquered territories as part of the civil administration, even though they often contributed to the destruction, scattering, and loss of collections through their "cleansing" and "restructuring" activities.<sup>26</sup> In what follows I shall concentrate on organized, ideologically motivated looting.

## Nazi theft of cultural assets: The Reich, Austria, and the Czech Republic

The first victims of the Nazis' looting policies were their own citizens. A series of emergency decrees issued between February and July 1933<sup>27</sup> declared communists, social democrats, union officials — in short: all dissenters — to be public enemies. Their property could be confiscated in the interests of the National Socialist state.

Shortly after Hitler took power, the process of "forced coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*) included measures allowing for parties and trade unions to be stripped of their assets, including their book, archival, and art collections. Confiscated trade union libraries were turned over to the party archive of the NSDAP and to the German Labour Front, and later to the NSDAP's Main State Archive in Munich.<sup>28</sup> Books belonging to the Social Democratic Party ended up in the library of the Office of the Secret State Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei*amt, or Gestapo).<sup>29</sup>

Freemasons suffered the same treatment. After a first wave of arbitrary attacks, all lodges and grand lodges were dissolved by the summer of 1935. Their assets were confiscated and either sold or collected in so-called lodge museums. Library collections were concentrated in Berlin. By May 1936, there were already 500 000–600 000 volumes of Freemason literature at the main office of the SS Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD) in Berlin.<sup>30</sup>

In 1937, the Nazis began increasingly persecuting the churches. In December, they closed down the Apologetic Central Office of the German Protestant Church, the Confessional Church's information and publication office in Berlin's Spandau district. In January 1938, the Episcopal head office of Catholic Action was shut down in Düsseldorf. Together with libraries confiscated in Austria, the collections of both institutions were to be united in a "large Central Library for Research on the Church Question."<sup>31</sup>

The primary target of the Nazi persecutions and looting, however, was the Jewish population. The Jews were gradually disenfranchised: by the Law on the Restoration of Professional Civil Service of 7 April 1933; new severe restrictions added to a tax imposed for fleeing the Reich in May 1934; and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour of 14 September 1935. From April 1938, Jews were obliged to declare their assets; and the "Jewish property tax", introduced in November 1938, ruined countless Jewish families, forcing them to part with both simple family possessions and valuable collections.

The Eleventh Decree Supplementing the Reich Citizenship Law of October 1941, which made legal emigration impossible for Jews, and the "final solution of the Jewish question" adopted in January 1942 at the Wannsee Conference triggered a machinery which, in the course of the deportation and annihilation of the Jews, "utilized" their few remaining possessions to the last piece. Even German Jews living abroad, who had managed to save their lives by fleeing or emigrating, were affected by this process, since the Eleventh Decree deprived them of German citizenship. Their possessions, including libraries and collections left behind, were declared to be the property of the German Reich.

Noted collectors, such as Max Silberberg (d.1943 in Theresienstadt), Victor Klemperer Edler von Klemenau (d.1943 in Rhodesia), and Dr Henri Hinrichsen (d.1942 in Auschwitz), fell victim to these mechanisms of

discrimination, exclusion, and "liquidation". All in all, 170 000 German Jews lost not only all their possessions, but their lives.

After the annexation of Austria in March 1938, the incorporation of the Czech (Sudeten German) territories adjacent Germany, and the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in 1939, the measures of persecution were extended to the Jewish population of these territories.

Austria, in particular, became a testing ground for Nazi looting policies. A "book utilization office" specially created in Vienna collected and sorted hundreds of thousands of books belonging to Austrian Jews. Some were discarded, others were dispatched to the "Old Reich" and incorporated into German libraries.<sup>32</sup> A ruthless manhunt for Austrian Jewish art collectors was on.<sup>33</sup>

Looting in the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" was less drastic, partly because after the Munich Agreement, few in the Czech Republic had illusions about Hitler's intentions. Many potential victims fled in good time. Otherwise, there were comparatively few changes to the structure of libraries, museums, and academic institutions, and the amount of looting was therefore limited.<sup>34</sup> Just as in Germany and Austria, however, Jewish culture suffered devastating persecution.<sup>35</sup>

## Actors and Organizations

In Germany, the confiscations were at first organized by the Gestapo, which had been created out of Prussia's Political Police on 26 April 1933. Its task was to investigate and fight all "endeavours endangering the state". The SD had similar ideological aims: led by Reinhard Heydrich, it acted as the NSDAP's own intelligence and counter-intelligence agency. From 1936, the SD stepped up its activities and began analyzing the looted materials, not least to make "the Gestapo accept a degree of spiritual leadership by the SD."<sup>36</sup> Both Gestapo and SD were establishing a Central Library for the Study of the Opposition, with four sections: Generalia, Freemasons, churches, and Jews.<sup>37</sup>

On 27 September 1939, the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA) came into being. It combined two state agencies, the Gestapo and the Reich Criminal Police Office (*Reichskriminalpolizei*amt), with the party agency of the SD. Created by Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and placed under his command, it became the main instrument of Nazi terror: From mid-1941, it was charged with the annihilation of the Jews. At the same time, it organized the looting of cultural assets in Germany and the annexed territories. In particular, this concerned libraries and archives, and, in Austria, works of art as well. In January 1939, Himmler reported to the Reich Chancellery that his agency had confiscated artistic objects worth 60–70 million Reichsmark.<sup>38</sup>

In June 1938, Hitler had formulated the "Führer's proviso", which gave him the first call on stolen works of art, at first in Austria and the Czech Republic, and later in all of Europe. As of 21 June 1939, he named Dr Hans Posse, the director of the Dresden Art Gallery, his special envoy charged with collecting works for the "Führer's museum" he planned to build in Linz. The "Führer's proviso" was implemented under the supervision of Reich Minister Hans Heinrich Lammers, chief of staff of the Reich Chancellery, and Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, chief of staff of the party chancellery from May 1941 and Hitler's secretary from 1943.

After the annexation of Austria, two more art thieves made their mark: Arthur Seyss-Inquart, governor (*Reichsstatthalter*) of Ostmark, as Austria was called after annexation, and Dr. Kajetan Mühlmann, serving, among other positions, as head of the Art and Museum Department in the Ministry of Domestic and Cultural Affairs. As representatives of the German-appointed civil administration, they acted in the interests of the German Reich.

### Looting in Europe during the Second World War

Although Poland was the first country to fall victim to the Second World War, I shall first focus on looting in western Europe, since it is here that one of the most powerful organizations for looting cultural assets came into being, *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR), Rosenberg's own mobile task force.

Since January 1934, Rosenberg had been the Führer's representative in charge of supervising the NSDAP's entire system of political instruction and education. On 29 January 1940, he was given permission to prepare the establishment of a "Higher School" that was to become the central National Socialist university. The Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question was created in March 1941 in Frankfurt am Main as one of the future university's first departments. After the invasion of France, Rosenberg persuaded Hitler that a special organization should be put in charge of transporting "unclaimed Jewish property" and "cultural assets appearing to be valuable" to Germany. The ERR was created on 17 July 1940. The Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question was one of the main beneficiaries of the lootings carried out by the ERR. Staffed with over 100 specialists who had already served under Rosenberg before, the ERR looted over 50 Masonic lodges in France as well as the libraries of the *Séminaire Israélite de France* (founded in 1830) and the largest French Jewish book collection, that of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, shipping off the spoils to Frankfurt. The ERR's looting lists for Paris mention the libraries of the Rothschild family as well as the *Biblioteka Polska*, founded in 1839 and managed since 1890 by Cracow's Academy of Sciences, and the Turgenev Library, the biggest Russian émigré library in Paris, with over 60 000 volumes.

The Special Staff for Music (*Sonderstab Musik*) confiscated valuable music libraries and collections of instruments belonging to Jewish musicians, music historians, publishers, and collectors, including the composer Darius Milhaud, the pianist Arthur Rubinstein, and the pianist and harpist Wanda Landowska.<sup>39</sup> In France, the ERR also confiscated major Jewish art collections, including those of Alphonse Kann and David David-Weill. Cynically, the ERR installed its French headquarters in the library building of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* on rue La Bruyère, which had opened in 1937. A look at the ERR's organizational structure may serve to illustrate the scope of Rosenberg's ambitions. There were special staffs for the Fine Arts, churches, the east (focusing on eastern European émigrés), the Higher School's Central Library (with a focus on Jewish libraries), prehistory, racial policy, and music.

Western Europe was also where Special Commando Künsberg, named after Eberhard Freiherr von Künsberg, made its debut. A Secret Field Police Group subordinated to the Foreign Ministry, it was given marching orders for the Netherlands and Belgium on 15 May 1940, by Ribbentrop. Künsberg was charged with "securing" strategically important materials for the Foreign Ministry. With the help of the German ambassador in Paris, Otto Abetz, he was actively involved in confiscating works of art that belonged to Jews. By August 1940, Künsberg's units had collected 1500 paintings.<sup>40</sup>



While in France, the activities of the ERR led to conflicts with the territorial Wehrmacht commander in France and his Art Protection Force (*Kunstschutz*). In Belgium, the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*, or Sipo, as the Gestapo and Criminal Police were collectively called) and the SD worked hand in hand with the ERR. The Sipo and the SD carried out the confiscations, targeting the usual enemies (Freemasons, Jewish and socialist organizations), while the ERR was in charge of sorting and dispatching the looted objects.

The situation in the Netherlands was special, since Germany aimed to integrate the country into the Reich. There were fewer seizures and shipments of public collections. However, "enemy" libraries and archives were confiscated. These included the collections of the International Institute of Social History and the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, the *Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos* and the *Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana* (two of the greatest Dutch Jewish libraries), and the Masonic lodge of the Grand Orient of the Netherlands in Den Haag. Seyss-Inquart was named Reich commissar for the occupied Netherlands on 24 May 1940. His civil administration, Mühlmann's office (also under Seyss-Inquart's jurisdiction), and the Enemy Property Administration (*Feindvermögensverwaltung*) carried out confiscations of "enemy" art collections. These included the collection of Fritz Lugt, who had left the Netherlands in 1939, and that of the Jewish collector Alphonse Jaffé.

After the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece, special ERR units operated there as well. Italy, Germany's ally, was spared looting for some time, as was Hungary. In September 1943, however, the ERR did loot the *Biblioteca della Comunità Israelitica* and the *Biblioteca del Collegio Rabbinico Italiano*, two centuries-old Jewish libraries.<sup>41</sup> And by March 1944, the ERR was sending works of art belonging to Hungarian aristocrats and Jews to Germany.<sup>42</sup>

## Central and eastern Europe

The invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 started a predatory war of annihilation against the "racially inferior" peoples of eastern Europe, which left six million people dead in Poland and over twenty million in the Soviet Union, including three million and one million Jews, respectively. A statement by Hitler will suffice to illustrate the Nazis' attitude toward these peoples:

Poles may have only one master — the Germans. Two masters cannot exist side by side, and this is why all members of the Polish intelligentsia must be killed. It sounds cruel, but such is the law of life.<sup>43</sup>

In Poland, too, the looting of cultural artefacts started immediately after the invasion. The situation was special here, since Poland was completely stripped of its statehood and partitioned. One part was annexed to the German Reich, becoming the districts of Warthegau and Danzig–Westpreussen. The central part of Poland was named General Government on 26 October 1939, and was made up of four districts: Cracow, Lublin, Radom, and Warsaw. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, Galicia, i.e. eastern Galicia, was added as a fifth district. Already on 12 October 1939, Hitler had appointed Hans Frank as governor-general.

Different rules were applied on the different territories. In the annexed regions, Hermann Göring, prime minister of Prussia, aviation minister, and Hitler's deputy, was given full authority over all economic questions as plenipotentiary for the four-year plan. His special representative for gathering and "securing"

artistic and cultural treasures was Kajetan Mühlmann, who had already participated in the looting of Jewish-owned art collections in Vienna and in the Netherlands. On 19 October 1939, Mühlmann founded the Main Trusteeship Office for the East (*Haupttreuhandstelle Ost*, HTO) in Berlin for locating, administering, and appraising Polish public and private property. A decree entitled "Protective Measures for Monuments of Cultural History in Poland" had been issued earlier, on 10 October 1939. On December 1, an Office of the Trustee-General for Securing German Cultural Assets in the Annexed Eastern Territories was created as part of the HTO. It was directed by Professor Heinrich Harmjanz, head of the Ethnology Department of the Ancestral Heritage Research and Teaching Society (for more on which see below). Branches of the Trustee-General's Office were created in Katowice, Łódz, Poznan, and Gdansk. One after another, its staff looted museums, churches, and manors in the annexed territories. By May 1941, according to its own accounts, the Trustee-General's Office for the East had "secured" 102 libraries, 15 castles, and 21 collections as well as 1100 individual paintings and watercolours and several hundred engravings.<sup>44</sup> They also opened a "book collection point" in Poznan's St Michael's Church for confiscated public and private book collections.

A "Decree on the Confiscation of the Property of the Former Polish State inside the General Government" was issued on 15 November 1939, and a "Decree on the Confiscation of Art Objects in the General Government" on December 16.

Kajetan Mühlmann, a servant of two masters as it were, managed the confiscated collections in the General Government, including those of the National Museum, the Czartoryski Museum, Cracow University's Art History Institute, Cracow Cathedral, Warsaw's Royal Castle, the library of Warsaw University, the treasures of Sandomierz Cathedral, and the Museum of the Diocese of Tarnów.

In addition to Göring's Main Trusteeship Office for the East as well as Frank and Mühlmann, Himmler's RSHA was also active in Poland. An RSHA memorandum dated 8 October 1939, stated:

The Einsatzkommandos are asked to ascertain which Jewish, Catholic, Marxist, and possibly Masonic libraries are located within their area of operations.<sup>45</sup>

In Poland, the RSHA pursued its usual aims. In order to "study the enemy", it "secured" numerous libraries and transported them to the RSHA headquarters in Berlin, including parts of the political section of Cracow's Law Department, the libraries of the Ukrainian Institute and the Polish Parliament, the Judaica Library at Warsaw's Great Synagogue, the collections of the French, Danish, and Hungarian Institutes, and the remainders of the collection of the Warsaw-based Institute for Cooperation with Foreign Countries.<sup>46</sup> Ancestral Heritage was particularly active in Poland. Founded as a Society for the Study of Ancient Intellectual History — with Heinrich Himmler as one of the co-founders — Ancestral Heritage was looking for proof that the Polish territories had first been settled by Germanic peoples, in order to corroborate the superiority of the Germanic race and underpin Germany's "natural" claim to the Polish lands. With this aim in mind, it confiscated collections and holdings pertaining to ancient history.<sup>47</sup>



Harmjan and his deputy at the Trustee-General's Office for the East, Wolfram Sievers, were also, respectively, department head and executive manager of Ancestral Heritage. Coupled with their membership in the SS and their close ties to the RSHA, this provided a firm basis for their looting activities. Eventually, they "transferred" the collections of the Warsaw Archaeological Museum to Poznan. Valuable pieces, such as the Boroczyce gold medal from Warsaw's National Museum (still missing), were transported to the RSHA headquarters in Berlin.<sup>48</sup>

The intentional destruction of cultural artefacts in Poland deserves a separate discussion.

While at least some of the Polish collections confiscated by the Main Trusteeship Office for the East or looted by the General Government administration and shipped off by the RSHA and Ancestral Heritage were returned to Poland after the war via the Allied collecting points, many libraries and archives suffered a different fate. Of the 251 Jewish libraries that existed in Poland in 1939, which together held more than 1 650 000 books, and the 748 public libraries with a total of 860 806 volumes, 70 percent were lost by war's end.<sup>49</sup> The invasion of the Soviet Union gave the Nazis a much larger area to loot on. Five months after the invasion, the Wehrmacht had occupied a territory inhabited by around 40 percent of the Soviet population. The Reich Commissariat Ostland (*Reichskommissariat Ostland*), which included Tallin, Riga, Vilnius, and Minsk, and the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, with Kiev, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kherson, were established as civil administrations. The other occupied territories, near Leningrad, Moscow, and Kharkov, were ruled by the military administrations of Army Groups North, Centre, and South.

As a consequence, the Wehrmacht's organizations were now directly in charge of confiscating and shipping off cultural artefacts. The directors of the Army archives, Army libraries, and Army museums supervised the confiscation of archives and libraries, in particular. The most popular cargo, the legendary Amber Room from the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoe Selo near Leningrad, was sent to Königsberg.

The Special Commando Künsberg was active in the immediate vicinity of the front and Army Groups North, Centre, and South. It was searching for strategically important materials, such as papers of the foreign ministries, embassies, and delegations, on behalf of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories as well as the Foreign Ministry's Geographic Service and Information and Broadcasting Department. By late 1942, as the Wehrmacht's advance came to a standstill, stopping the expansion of occupied territories, the special commando was disbanded. Unsurprisingly, some of its staff members were transferred to the RSHA.

The ERR continued its looting activities in the Soviet Union. Rosenberg, whom Hitler named Minister for the Occupied Territories, created working groups for Ostland, Ukraine, and White Ruthenia. His staff began to weed out "Bolshevik" literature, collect archival materials needed for "genealogical" research, and making inventories of the collections with a view to concentrating them in a national library, a national archive, and a national museum in Kiev.

Eventually the ERR went about establishing a "Library of the East" (*Ostbücherei*). This included the émigré library collections confiscated earlier in France and the books of Minsk's Lenin Library. By 1 December 1944, the

Library of the East in Ratibor had catalogued over 100 000 books, with approximately two million more waiting to be classified.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the looting campaigns targeting specific groups of the population between 1933 and 1945, first in Germany, then in other European countries, reveals more similarities than differences.

There was institutional continuity. The RSHA confiscated "enemy materials" first in Germany itself, then in the occupied territories. The ERR was active in both western and eastern Europe, and the same goes for the Special Commando Künsberg and Ancestral Heritage. The same people were involved in these activities across the occupied countries, as illustrated by the cases of Seyss-Inquart, Mühlmann, and Künsberg. In all cases, the Jewish population was mercilessly persecuted and robbed.

But there were also differences. Whereas in France, the Army and its Art Protection Service tended to oppose the actions of the ERR and prevent it from shipping off cultural artefacts, no such agency existed during the Russian campaign. On 30 September 1942, Hitler issued a decree that put the ERR in charge of cultural artefacts in territories under both civil and military administration. At the same time, the military became increasingly involved in confiscations.<sup>51</sup>

While public collections in western Europe were mostly left untouched, no such rule applied in eastern Europe. Whereas the Brussels-based Trusteeship Office focused on estimating and liquidating "enemy property", meaning the possessions of Jews and individual political opponents<sup>52</sup>, in Poland the Main Trusteeship Office for the East and the general governor had access to all public assets. Paragraph 1 of the new Decree on the Confiscation of Property of the Former Polish State inside the General Government stipulated that

[a]ll publicly owned works of art in the General Government are to be confiscated to serve the execution of tasks carried out in the general interest, in case they are not already covered by the Decree on the Confiscation of the Property of the Former Polish State of 15 November 1939.<sup>53</sup>

In the Soviet Union, looting almost exclusively concerned publicly owned cultural assets, not least because most of the formerly private or church-owned collections had been nationalized after the October Revolution.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the definition of publicly owned works of art used in paragraph 2 of the above-quoted decree also included church- and privately-owned art collections. Paragraph 3 made it mandatory to declare any such works. While in the "Old Reich" and in western Europe, Jews were the main target of all persecutions, in eastern Europe the entire population was affected. This is why after the war many Polish individuals were looking for cultural artefacts that had been stolen from them.<sup>55</sup>

Other differences have been highlighted in several studies: the increasing volume of materials confiscated by the RSHA and the Special Commando Künsberg, the ERR's shift from the fine and applied arts to prehistoric objects, and the lack of interest in eastern Europe found among major "individual" art thieves.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, future studies should perhaps focus less on the specifics of each case and more on the numerous continuities in Nazi looting. Such an approach is more likely to help heal the wounds that still remain open, especially in Russia.

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- <sup>1</sup> Burkhard Asmuss (ed.), 1945. *Der Krieg und seine Folgen. Kriegsende und Erinnerungspolitik in Deutschland*, (Berlin 2005). The exhibition for which this catalogue was produced was held 28 April 2005 to 23 October 2005 at the German Historical Museum in Berlin.
  - <sup>2</sup> Maren Eichhorn (ed.), *Die Stunde Null. Überleben 1945* (Berlin 2005). The exhibition for which this catalogue was produced was held 8 May 2005 to 16 April 2005 at the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin.
  - <sup>3</sup> This includes reports by Allied MFA&A (Museums, Fine Arts, and Archives) officers published in the *College Art Journal* 1945–1947 as well as publications such as T. S. Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles. The Discovery and Restitution of European Art* (New York 1946) and Leslie E. Poste, "Books Go Home From the War", in *Library Journal*, 73, 1948, 1699–1704.
  - <sup>4</sup> Marianne Bernhard, *Verlorene Werke der Malerei. In Deutschland in der Zeit von 1939 bis 1945 zerstörte und verschollene Gemälde aus Museen und Galerien* (Berlin, München 1965).
  - <sup>5</sup> Ruth and Max Seydewitz, *Die Dame mit dem Hermelin* (Berlin 1963).
  - <sup>6</sup> Ruth and Max Seydewitz, *Das Mädchen mit der Perle* (Berlin 1972).
  - <sup>7</sup> By 1979, *Die Dame mit dem Hermelin* had been translated into Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, Estonian, and Romanian. *Das Mädchen mit der Perle* was published inter alia in Warsaw in 1986. In the GDR, the book went through four editions until 1985.
  - <sup>8</sup> Karol Estreicher (ed.), *Cultural Losses of Poland. Index of Polish Cultural Losses during the German Occupation, 1939–1944* (London 1944).
  - <sup>9</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz (ed.), *Walka o dobra kultury. Warszawa 1939–1945*. 2 vols. (Warsaw 1970).
  - <sup>10</sup> Uwe Hartmann, "Geschenke vom Brudervolk? Anmerkungen zur Rückführung von kriegsbedingt verlagerten Kulturgütern zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen", in Andrea Langer (ed.), *Der Umgang mit dem kulturellen Erbe in Deutschland und Polen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Warsaw 2004), 335–351; Andrzej Mezynski, *Biblioteki naukowe w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945. Wybór dokumentów źródłowych* (Warsaw 2003), XXIII.
  - <sup>11</sup> The catalogues of lost art are available both in print and on–line at: [www.polandembassy.org/](http://www.polandembassy.org/).
  - <sup>12</sup> Friedrich Andrae, *Volksbüchereien und Nationalsozialismus. Materialien zur Theorie und Politik des öffentlichen Bibliothekswesens 1933–1945* (Wiesbaden 1970).
  - <sup>13</sup> Ingo Toussaint, *Die Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg im Dritten Reich* (Freiburg 1982; second, revised edition: München 1984); Hans–Gerd Happel, *Das wissenschaftliche Bibliothekswesen im Nationalsozialismus. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Universitätsbibliotheken* (München, London, New York, Paris 1989). On the various ways libraries have dealt with their history, see Jürgen Babendreier, "Kollektives Schweigen? Die Aufarbeitung der NS–Geschichte im deutschen Bibliothekswesen", and Peter Vodosek, "'Reflex der Verdrängung'? Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte eines schwierigen Themas", in Sven Kuttner, Bernd Reifenberg (eds.), *Das bibliothekarische Gedächtnis. Aspekte der Erinnerungskultur an braune Zeiten im deutschen Bibliothekswesen* (Marburg 2004), pp. 10–22 and 23–53, respectively.
  - <sup>14</sup> Peter Vodosek, Manfred Komorowski (eds.): *Bibliotheken während des Nationalsozialismus*. 2 vols. (Wiesbaden 1989–1992).
  - <sup>15</sup> *kritische berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst– und Kulturwissenschaften*, 2, 1995.
  - <sup>16</sup> Nikola Doll (ed.), *Kunstgeschichte im Nationalsozialismus. Beiträge zur Geschichte einer Wissenschaft zwischen 1930 und 1950* [Catalogue for the travelling exhibition "Art History under National Socialism" held at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Bonn, 16 March to 29 April 2005, and Munich, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, 11 May to 15 June 2005] (Cologne 2006).
  - <sup>17</sup> Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa* (New York 1994); Jonathan Petropoulos, *Kunstraub und Sammelwahn: Kunst und Politik im Dritten Reich* (Berlin 1999); see also, Hector Feliciano, *Le Musée disparu. Enquête sur le pillage des oeuvres d'art en France par les nazis* (Paris 1995), English translation: *The lost museum: the Nazi conspiracy to steal the world's greatest works of art* (New York 1997).

- 18 Koordinierungsstelle für Kulturgutverluste Magdeburg (ed.), *Beiträge öffentlicher Einrichtungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zum Umgang mit Kulturgütern aus ehemaligem jüdischen Besitz* (Magdeburg 2001); Anja Heuss, "Die Sammlung Max Silberberg in Breslau", in Andrea Pophanken, Felix Billeter (eds.), *Die Moderne und ihre Sammler. Französische Kunst in deutschem Privatbesitz vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik* (Berlin 2001), 311–326.
- 19 Washington Conference Principles on Nazi–Confiscated Art, released in connection with The Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets, Washington, DC, December 3, 1998; [www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/hlcst/23231.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/hlcst/23231.htm).
- 20 See [www.herkomstgezocht.nl](http://www.herkomstgezocht.nl), [www.culture.fr/documentation/mnr/pres.htm](http://www.culture.fr/documentation/mnr/pres.htm), [www.nepip.org/](http://www.nepip.org/), [nationalmuseums.org.uk/index.php?pageID=spoliation](http://nationalmuseums.org.uk/index.php?pageID=spoliation), [www.restitution-art.cz/](http://www.restitution-art.cz/), [www.lostart.de](http://www.lostart.de).
- 21 The Second Hanover Symposium on Looted Jewish Book Collections took place at the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz State Library of Lower Saxony in May 2005, and a conference entitled "Future of the Lost Cultural Heritage" in Cesky Krumlov (Czech Republic) in November of the same year.
- 22 Koordinierungsstelle für Kulturgutverluste Magdeburg (ed.): *Museen im Zwielicht. Ankaufspolitik 1933–1945. Kolloquium vom 11. und 12. Dezember 2001 in Köln/ Die eigene Geschichte. Provenienzforschung an deutschen Kunstmuseen im internationalen Vergleich. Tagung vom 20. bis 22. Februar 2002 in Hamburg* (Magdeburg 2002); Grazyna Czubek, Piotr Kosiewski (eds.), *Displaced Cultural Assets. The Case of Western Europe and the Problems of Central and Eastern European Countries in the 20th Century* (Warsaw 2004); Grazyna Czubek, Piotr Kosiewski (eds.): *Cultural Assets and the Problem of Property. The Case of Central Europe after 1989* (Warsaw 2005); Mecislav Borák (ed.), *The Lost Heritage of Cultural Assets. The documentation, identification, restitution and repatriation of the cultural assets of WWII victims. Proceedings of the international academic conference in Brno 20.–21.11.2003* (Prague 2005).
- 23 Recently, e.g. *Le grand pillage. Nouvelles questions sur le Luxembourg et la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale / Ausgeraubt! Neue Fragen an die Geschichte Luxemburgs im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (The Great Pillage. New Questions on Luxembourg and the Second World War) in the Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg. [www.musee-hist.lu/page\\_88607.html](http://www.musee-hist.lu/page_88607.html).
- 24 The joint statement is available online at: [www.lostart.de/stelle/erklaerung.php3?lang=english](http://www.lostart.de/stelle/erklaerung.php3?lang=english).
- 25 Bundesbeauftragter für Kultur und Medien (ed.), *Handreichung vom Februar 2001 zur Umsetzung der Erklärung der Bundesregierung, der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände zur Auffindung und zur Rückgabe NS-verfolgungsbedingt entzogenen Kulturgutes, insbesondere aus jüdischem Besitz* (Berlin 2001); Nancy H. Yeide, Konstantin Akinsha, Amy L. Walsh, *The AAM Guide to Provenance Research* (Washington 2001); Veronica Albrink, Jürgen Babendreier, Bernd Reifenberg (eds.): *Leitfaden für die Ermittlung von NS-verfolgungsbedingt entzogenem Kulturgut in Bibliotheken*: [www.ub.uni-marburg.de/allg/aktiv/Leitfaden.pdf](http://www.ub.uni-marburg.de/allg/aktiv/Leitfaden.pdf).
- 26 Changes in library organization in the conquered Polish and Soviet territories produced artificial "duplicate copies", which were often discarded without further ado. See Anja Heuss, *Kunst- und Kulturgutraub. Eine vergleichende Studie zur Besatzungspolitik der Nationalsozialisten in Frankreich und der Sowjetunion* (Heidelberg 2000), 14.
- 27 "Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zum Schutze des deutschen Volkes" (Reich President's Decree on the Protection of the German People, 4 February 1933), in *Reichsgesetzblatt* (Berlin), Part I, no. 8, 6 February 1933, 35–41; "Gesetz über die Einziehung kommunistischen Vermögens" (Law on the Confiscation of Communist Property, 26 May 1933), in *Reichsgesetzblatt* (Berlin), Part I, no. 55, 27 May 1933, 293; and "Gesetz über die Einziehung volks- und staatsfeindlichen Vermögens" (Law on the Confiscation of Property Used for Purposes Inimical to the People and State, 14 July 1933), in *Reichsgesetzblatt* (Berlin), Part I, no. 81, 15 July 1933, 479f.
- 28 Heinz Braun, "Zum Schicksal der Archive und Bibliotheken der deutschen Gewerkschaften", in *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (IK), 1, 1998, [1]–36.
- 29 Werner Schroeder, "Strukturen des Bücherraubs: Die Bibliotheken des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes (RSHA), ihr Aufbau und ihr Verblei", in *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie*, 5–6, 2004, 316–324, particularly 316.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 31 Wolfgang Dierker, *Himmels Glaubenskrieger. Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS und seine Religionspolitik 1933/1941*. (Paderborn, München [etc.] 2004), quoted in Schroeder, "Strukturen des Bücherraubs", 318.

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- Grit Nitzsche, "Die Bücherverwertungsstelle Wien", in Regine Dehnel (ed.), *Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut* (Frankfurt 2006), 67–72.
- 33 In Vienna alone, Sophie Lillie has listed 150 families or individuals who had their collections taken away from them. See Sophie Lillie, *Was einmal war. Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens* (Wien 2003).
- 34 Czech officials responsible for restitution did, however, return 42 boxes of cultural objects to Prague in May 1946 alone. The cultural artefacts that whet the Nazis' appetite included the series of paintings by the Master of Hohenfurth, which were destined for the "Führer's museum" in Linz, as well as the collections of the castles of Konopiste, Roudnice, Opatowitz, and Hluboká. See Ladislav Cepicka, "Country Report. Czech Republic", in *Spoils of War. International Newsletter*, 5, 1998, 44–55.
- 35 Robert Luft, "Zur Bibliothekspolitik im Sudetenland und im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren", in Vodosek and Komorowski, *Bibliotheken während des Nationalsozialismus*, 461.
- 36 Quoted in Werner Schroeder, "Beschlagnahme und Verbleib jüdischer Bibliotheken in Deutschland vor und nach dem Novemberpogrom 1938", in Dehnel, *Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut*, 27–36, quote on 29.
- 37 On the objects catalogued by each service, see Werner Schroeder, "Strukturen des Bücherraubs", 317f.
- 38 See Petropoulos, *Kunstraub und Sammelwahn*, 113.
- 39 See Willem de Vries, *Sonderstab Musik. Music confiscations by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg under the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe* (Amsterdam 1996).
- 40 Petropoulos, *Kunstraub und Sammelwahn*, 167.
- 41 Stanislaw G. Pugliese, "Bloodless Torture: The Books of the Roman Ghetto under the Nazi Occupation", in *Libraries & Culture*, 3, 1999, 241–253.
- 42 Petropoulos, *Kunstraub und Sammelwahn*, 191. According to other accounts, Adolf Eichmann, who, as head of a RSHA special commando, organized the deportation of 440 000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, was also the one who initiated the dispatch of the Hungarian cultural assets. Significant portions of these objects are now located in Russia. See *Catalogue of Art Objects from Hungarian Private Collections. Katalog proizvedenii izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva iz chastnykh vengerskikh kollektsii* (Moscow 2003).
- 43 Quoted in Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German occupation. The Generalgouvernement, 1933–1944* (Princeton 1979), 75.
- 44 According to Anja Heuss, *Kunst- und Kulturgutraub*, 215. Ruth and Max Seydewitz quote similar figures based on a progress report from 2 May 1941, by an agent of the Trustee-General's Office. See Ruth and Max Seydewitz, *Die Dame*, 111.
- 45 Quoted in Andrzej Mezynski, *Kommando Paulsen. Organisierter Kunstraub in Polen, 1942–1945* (Cologne 2000), 72. Available in Polish as: *Kommando Paulsen. Pazdziernik–grudzien 1939 r.* (Warsaw 1994). ATTENTION: This Polish book concerns only 1939.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 47 On the history of *Ahnenerbe* and its activities in France and the Soviet Union, see Heuss, *Kunst- und Kulturgutraub*, 205–249.
- 48 Mezynski, *Kommando*, 72.
- 49 Jacqueline Borin, "Embers of Soul. The Destruction of Jewish Books and Libraries in Poland during World War II", in *Libraries & Culture*, 4, 1993, 445–460. Putting a figure on destroyed or missing art is notoriously difficult. Thus, in 1946 the Soviet Union estimated its losses at 564 723 objects from 73 museums, 100 million books, and 87 million archival files. See Natalia Volkert, *Der gegenseitige deutsch-sowjetische Kulturgutraub und die Restitutionsproblematik im Vergleich*, available online at: [www.initiativefortbildung.de/pdf/provenienz2004/volkert.pdf](http://www.initiativefortbildung.de/pdf/provenienz2004/volkert.pdf). More up-to-date figures may be found in the *Catalogue of Art Looted or Lost during the Second World War*, which now has over ten volumes. However, this catalogue does not always take into account restituted objects. More research is needed before anything can be said with certainty; *Svodnyi katalog kul'turnykh tsennostei, pochishchennykh i utrachennykh v period Vtoroi mirovoi voiny.* (Moscow, St. Petersburg 1999).
- 50 Marlene P. Hiller, "Bücher als Beute. Das Schicksal sowjetischer und deutscher Bibliotheken als Folge des Zweiten Weltkrieges", in *Das deutsche Buch in Ostmitteleuropa*, 1, 1995, 9–27, figures mentioned on 17f.
- 51 Apparently "seizures" by the army's archival and library services were also carried out in the Balkans. See Christina Köstner, "Bücherraub am Balkan. Die Nationalbibliothek Wien und der Belgrader Verleger Geca Kon", and Paul Gerhard Dannhauer, Stephan Kellner, "Hermann Gerstner (1903–1993) — ein schriftstellernder Bibliothekar als 'Ariseur'", in

Dehnel, *Jüdischer Buchbesitz*, 96–106 and 107–119, respectively. More research is needed to see whether the German Army initially observed higher standards in dealing with cultural objects, which would then have declined as the war progressed and the tide turned against the Germans.

- <sup>52</sup> Including the collection of the Belgian industrialist Hugo Daniel Andriess, who had fled Belgium in 1939. See Jacques Lust, "The Spoils of War Removed From Belgium During World War II", in Elizabeth Simpson (ed.), *The Spoils of War. World War II and its Aftermath: The Loss, Reappearance and Recovery of Cultural Property* (New York 1997), 58–63, in particular 61.
- <sup>53</sup> *Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouverneurs für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete* (Cracow 1939), 209.
- <sup>54</sup> Waltraud Bayer (ed.), *Verkaufte Kultur. Die sowjetischen Kunst- und Antiquitätenexporte 1919–1938* (Frankfurt am Main 2001).
- <sup>55</sup> Bundesarchiv, B 323/485 through B 323/487: Polen–Einzelfälle.
- <sup>56</sup> Heuss, *Kunst- und Kulturgutraub*, 345–357. On Posse and the "Führer's museum", suffice it to say that he did not suppose Polish collections would "add much to the German stock of high art (paintings and sculptures)". See Seydewitz, *Die Dame*, 39. The failure of the German invasion of the USSR prevented him from laying his hands on the great collections of West European art in Leningrad and Moscow. On the "Führer's museum", see Birgit Schwarz, *Hitlers Museum: Die Fotoalben Gemäldegalerie Linz: Dokumente zum "Führermuseum"*. (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2004).

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