



**Where are the libraries that were looted by the Nazis ?
Identification and restoration : a work in progress**

The magnitude of the looting due to the Nazi forces during World War II was revealed at the Liberation. Operations aiming at localization, return, and restitution of looted cultural goods were begun, notably in Western Europe, while the Soviet victors -- more often than others-- reckoned that such goods were legitimate « war trophies » because of the suffering endured. Quickly, all (and especially those who had been looted) were required to « turn the page » as if peace and life had to be accompanied by renouncement and an imposed amnesia. When new historical research made it possible to « remember », the looting of art works was the first to be examined because of its particular symbolic and financial power.

The brutal loots effectuated by the diverse Nazi forces, notably by Alfred Rosenberg's ERR, in all of occupied Europe touched all forms of expression, including graphic and written documents: books, archives, manuscripts, engravings, etc. At the Nuremberg trials, the French accusation gave an estimate of « ten millions books » seized in countries occupied by Nazi Germany and added that the figure was probably too low. Indeed, it is well underneath reality : In France alone, at least 5 million books, possibly ten, were taken from their legitimate owners by the Nazis during the second world war.

In recent years, historians have studied the logics, proceedings, modes and orders governing these massive looting. Their works have also shown the specificities of the Nazi looting comparing them to those that have usually accompanied the wars of yesterday and today, and the fate of the vanquished. Nazi looting obey, like all others, a logic of war, which is nationalistic, expansionist and politically repressive. However, they are particularly planned in advance, organized, massive, systematic and systemic. They are interested in the archives and libraries of ministries considered strategic, Slavic associations in France, radical groupings and personalities, whether socialist or communist, and especially freemasons. But first and foremost is their link with nazi anti-Semitism.

Starting in mid 1942 and accompanying the beginnings of the "Final Solution", the books seized concerned thousands of hunted, hidden, imprisoned and deported Jewish families whose private libraries are sent to Germany or abandoned in warehouses after being carefully sorted out. Taking these thousands of family libraries did not correspond to a strategy wishing to enrich German libraries but to the destruction of a culture, in order to accompany the physical elimination of people with the symbolic murder of their minds. These collections were often moved to new locations, during and after the war.

First sent to the Hohe Schule at the Ostbücherei and to numerous Nazis organisms after severe selections in occupied countries and in Germany, they were then sent elsewhere, displaced towards the East of the *Great Reich*. Annexed countries found certain looted libraries on their territory, while the soviets victors, deciding that it was legitimate to take the collections they found on the ground they conquered, embarked the collections to get behind the iron curtain. The return to democracy at the end of the 1980's did not always bring the expected restitutions.

There are still many holes in the history of looted collections. Only a part of the documents

were restituted -- after the war or more recently-- to their legitimate owners or to others. Where are the collections that were not restituted? Certain places of detention are known, but the collections were dispersed and traceability is difficult. Is it possible to better know where they now are? How can we invite concerned institutions -- or even individuals -- to think again about restitution of the collections they still detain? How have these documents been used? Have these collections contributed, paradoxically, during these seventy years to a better understanding of the cultural universe of individuals, or even of countries who suffered such spoliation? Or were the collections merely "things" possessed but not accessible? What has been the policy of countries that, becoming freed from soviet domination, discovered documents that had been looted elsewhere and taken from others? Did the construction of a unified Europe diminish the political use of a cultural good? What do we learn about the intellectual horizons of the legitimate owners? How can we reconstitute this partially lost Europe of the book? Will we be able one day to reconstruct these libraries physically or virtually?

These are some of the questions we will explore during the international colloquium organized by the *Gabriel Naudé Centre* of the *Ecole nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques* (ENSSIB), the *Institut d'histoire du temps présent* (IHTP, UMR CNRS Paris VIII), in co-operation with the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, to take place in Paris, **March 23 and 24, 2017**, at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* and the *Université Paris Diderot*.

Résumés (3000 signs /600 words) in French or English to be sent before **September 30 2016**, to the *Comité Scientifique* to the following address: martine2.poulain@free.fr
Papers will be given in French or in English. Simultaneously translation will be available.

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