

Actes numériques du colloque

« Où sont les bibliothèques spoliées par les nazis ?

Tentatives d'identification et de restitution, un chantier en cours »

23 et 24 mars 2017, Paris

The libraries in Norway during World War II and the story of how the Norwegian freemasonic Library ended up in a castel in the Czech Republic

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Kvanvig Gro. *The libraries in Norway during World War II and the story of how the Norwegian freemasonic Library ended up in a castel in the Czech Republic* [en ligne]. In : Où sont les bibliothèques spoliées par les nazis ?, Paris, 23-24 mars 2017. Villeurbanne : École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques, 2019. Format PDF.

Disponible sur : <https://www.enssib.fr/bibliotheque-numerique/notices/68750-the-libraries-in-norway-during-world-war-ii-and-the-story-of-how-the-norwegian-freemasonic-library-ended-up-in-a-castel-in-the-czech-republic>

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Où sont les bibliothèques françaises spoliées par les nazis ? Presses de l'Enssib, avril 2019.
<https://presses.enssib.fr/catalogue/ou-sont-les-bibliotheques-francaises-spoliees-par-les-nazis>

The libraries in Norway during World War II

and the story of how the Norwegian freemasonic Library ended up in a castel in the Czech Republic

Gro Kvanvig

My name is Gro Kvanvig. I work at Stiftelsen Arkivet, center for historical reflection and peace building, in Kristiansand in the southern part of Norway. The Center is located in the building who served as a Gestapo headquarters during second world war. It was a prison and interrogation center for Norwegian resistance members. Many of whom were severely tortured and punished by the Gestapo during the war. Today we use this dark history as a context for our work. Such as, research, teaching and documentation.

Since 2015, Stiftelsen Arkivet has together with the National Library of the Czech Republic been involved in a EEA-founded project called "Books discovered once again". This Project is based on over 300 000 confiscated books from the Second world war. This books are now in the possession of the National Library of the Czech Republics. The project has resulted in cataloguing over 16 000 titles. In addition to this, several activities have been launched. Such as: virtual and physical exhibitions, workshops, conferences and educational programs.

In this presentation I will speak about what happened to libraries and book collections in Norway during World War II and also look into Norway's somehow unique position during these years. Furthermore, I will speak about how the Norwegian Freemasonic library ended up in a castle in former Czechoslovakia and therefore became part of the project "Books discovered once again".

Destruction and book looting as an instrument leading to genocide

In 1821 the German romantic poet Heinrich Heine said: " Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings." It would take a little over a hundred years before his German compatriots in Nazi student organizations fired the first scene of burning books in Germany. For us who knows the continuation of the story, Heine's words become a frightening prophecy just some few years later.

At all times politicians and other authorities have tried to stop the spread of thoughts and ideas that on ideological or political grounds have been in conflict with their own. Burning and destruction of books and writings are not a new invention. These acts are not to be considered as individual performances, but as part of a pattern where the goal ultimately is to break down a social structure. The aim is not only to destroy the victim's thoughts, their histories and ideas. But ultimately, to exterminate the people. So, what happened with thoughts, ideas, books and libraries in Norway during the occupation? And is it a part of such a pattern?

Historical background

First of all, let me give you a brief introduction to Norwegian occupation history. Nazi-Germany invaded neutral Norway, along with Denmark, on April 9 1940. The Germans surprised the Norwegian and British defenders by capturing several strategic points along the Norwegian

coast. Norway was under German occupation until May 10th 1945. So, for little over five years Norway was occupied by the [Wehrmacht](#). Civil rules were effectively assumed by the Reich Commissariat of Norway, which acted in collaboration with the domestic Nazi regime led by [Vidkun Quisling](#) , while the Norwegian [King](#) and prewar [government](#) escaped to [London](#), where they acted as a [government in exile](#).

Censorship and confiscating in Norwegian libraries

Over hundred school libraries and 50 public libraries were destroyed by the German occupants in Norway. These libraries were located in [Finnmark, Norway's](#) most northern province. This destruction where a part of the Wehrmacht's scorched earth tactic to stop the Red Army in the winter of 1944/45. Besides this Norwegian public libraries were not subject to direct plundering or destruction, but they were put under a severe suppression and control.

Already the first day after the occupation the German Gestapo conducted raids on Norwegian publishing houses, bookshops and libraries to remove and destroy all examples of certain books that was banned in Germany. This was the start of a long process to Nazify the Norwegian society and remove all unwanted literature.

The list of authors and books that were banned was long, and became increasingly longer during the war years. The lists were originally German, but were adapted to Norwegian conditions. In November 1940, The German Reichskommissariat Norwegen began major seizures and decided that all Jewish literature and so-called emigrant literature was to be removed from publishing houses, bookshops and libraries. Books by about 80 authors were seized in these raids.

It was the German security police who supervised the libraries. They came on unannounced inspections. In addition, local members of the Norwegian Nazi-party, came on their own initiative to control that the libraries complied with the new provisions.

But even though the books were removed from the shelves, they continued to circulate among the public. Many libraries practiced a form of "patriotic lending", where the banned books were "loaned" to customers they knew before. This kind of book lending was practiced on "The Red library" in Rjukan. This was the largest library of labor- and Marxist literature in Norway. Several important titles were lent out on so-called "long-term loans" to local people.

Public libraries - From cultural to political institutions

The Norwegian public libraries went from being cultural institutions to becoming political institutions, during World War II. The Norwegian Nazi-party, NS, took over important directorships in public libraries and controlled the Nazifying of the libraries from within. The Norwegian Nazi party used the libraries as venues for their propaganda. At the same time as the "forbidden" books were taken from the shelves, they were filled up with new "approved" books. These books were mainly published by own NS-publishers. The libraries received several thousand volumes of Nazi literature which was ordered the best location in the library.

The original plan was to send the seized literature from the public libraries all over Norway to Oslo. But the logistics surrounding the transport of the books were not clarified. Therefore, the books were usually kept in the libraries own stores or magazines. In this way they were not damaged or destroyed. And they could be put back on the shelves after the occupation.

Many Norwegian libraries had to shut down their activity during the occupation. This was due to various reasons such as: staff shortages, problems keeping the premises warm, or that library premises got another use, as a schoolroom or meeting rooms. But despite this, Norwegian libraries experienced a sharp increase in lending during the war years.

No public libraries in Norway, apart from in Finnmark, were victim of directly plunder or destruction. One possible explanation to this may be the Norwegians unique situation within the Nazi racial ideology.

Nazi race-ideologists as Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg argued that Norwegians, as almost Germans, were among the superior races. Himmler had several visits to Norway where he studied the Norse mythology and considered the primordial Nordic as a "listed" race. This ideological attitude to Norway may have caused that they were more sympathetic to the Norwegian population than in other occupied countries.

The enemy's libraries

Although the Nordic was in a special position within the Nazi racial ideology, the Nazi's enemy groups: Jews, Marxists and freemasons met the same persecution in Norway as in other occupied countries.

As the Jewish minority in Norway was marginal, the Jews were not considered an intellectual threat to the Nazis. Before the occupation, it was a Jewish population of around 2100 people in Norway. Most of them belonged to the Jewish communities of Oslo and Trondheim. It was no significant libraries or book collections belonging to the Jewish minorities and no organized campaign in order to confiscate their books and writings.

The anti-Jewish policy was different in Norway than in other occupied areas of Western Europe. To maintain the tranquility of the population it was not initiated any major actions against the Jewish population before the "Law on confiscation of property belonging to Jews" dated 26 October 1942 and the following arrest of Jewish men. Followed by the arrest of women and children a few weeks later.

It was the Freemasons who were deemed as the Nazi Germany's spiritual enemy in Norway. They considered the freemasons as "the Jews extended arm", and they regarded them as a useful tool in the Jewish conspiracy of taking over the world domination.

In September 1942 Frans Six was visiting Norway to give a lecture about the dangers of the Masonic Order. Also Quisling emphasized that the Freemasons in Norway were considered a greater threat than the Jews. He spoke on this during a conference organized by the Institut zur

Erforschung where Judenfrage in Frankfurt in Mars 1941.

The Norwegian freemasonic library

The Norwegian Masonic order was dissolved on 20 September 1940. As a result, all lodges were closed and all assets seized. The Norwegian Masonic library, Norsk stamhusbibliotek, had a considerable collection of Masonic literature. The Norwegian, Eugene Nilsen, was in October 1940 hired by the German Security Police to catalog the Norwegian Masonic belongings. In March 1941 head of RSHAs Research Library in Berlin, Karl Burgmester was sent to Norway to survey the Norwegian stamhus library. He ordered to send the collection to Berlin. And it was send to Berlin in October 1941.

At the outbreak of the war the library contained around 6000 books. The freemasons themselves estimate that around 4,500 of these were sent out of the country.

In august 1943, the books were moved from Berlin to avoid a possible allied bombing of the city. Parts of the enormous book collection were located in the border area between Germany and Czechoslovakia, and Germany and Poland. Ancient castles in the countryside were used as depots. The Norwegian Masonic book collection was sent to the castle Furstenberg in Silesia.

In connection with the EEA project "Books discovered once again" masonic books from the Norwegian masonic lodge reappeared. At this moment there are a total of 12 books registered with the ex-libris of "Den store norske landslosje", which is the name of the Norwegian Freemasonic lodge. We believe the reason why the Freemasonic books were not send to Norway in the years after the war is because they accidently were taken for being German books.

Still a large quantities of books and writings from the Norwegian Freemasons is stored in different parts of Europe. Parts of the book collection has been returned to the Norwegian Freemasons. This included a large portion of books from Pozna in Poland. The Norwegian collection in Poznan was repatriated by the Norwegian masonic historian, Helge Bjørn Horrisland in 2010.

Summary

I have in this paper discussed whether Norwegian libraries and book collections were subjected to the same kind of censorship, confiscation and looting as in other Nazi-occupied European countries, and if this is part of a larger pattern that also includes genocide. Generally, one may say that the Nazi conduct towards libraries and book collections in Europe was more affected by vandalism and destruction than in Norway. I have in this article argued that this can be attributed to the special status Norway had in the Nazi race theory.

But despite what seemed as a calm conduct in Norway, the country experienced the same oppressions as other countries in Occupied Europe. Books were banned and they were seized. Libraries were increasingly used as political arenas to promote the Nazi ideology. Communists

and freemasons got their libraries and book collections seized. And the Norwegian Masonic library, experienced being transported to Berlin to become a part of Nazi research libraries.

Although there was no action initiated against any Jewish library in Norway, Norwegian Jews experienced, the same prosecution as the rest of the Jews of Europe. Jewish literature was banned and seized, and their own belongings were confiscated before they were arrested and deported. Of 2100 Norwegian Jews, 760 persons were killed during the Holocaust.