



Monument Men and Trophy Brigades: A Race to the Art

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Monument Men and Trophy Brigades: A Race to the Art

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Abstract

This thesis examines and compares two small military units within the Allied forces during World War II - the Soviet Union trophy brigades and the US Army Monuments Men. Both units recruited their members from the art world and were ordered by their respective leaders to find art looted and secretly hidden by the Nazis. Both units also operated within the same timeframe and geographical areas. However, the operations and orders of these two units expressed vastly different motivations. Through historical research and documents, this thesis will argue that the trophy brigades were organized and dispatched to Germany by Stalin to collect art in compensation and revenge for the human and cultural losses inflicted by the Nazis in their country. By comparison, research will also show that the Monuments Men were commissioned by FDR and the US government, partially for political reasons, but mainly by a genuine desire to protect, salvage and repatriate artwork looted by the Nazis in Western Europe.

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Introduction

Near the end of World War II, the US government and its military dispatched to Europe a newly formed organization called the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA). The men and women who worked in this unit were called Monuments Men (MM). This unit was the creation of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas – also referred to as the Roberts Commission which was established in 1943. The unit was tasked with saving monuments from military destruction, restoring monuments already damaged and salvaging art looted by the Nazis and returning it to their rightful owners. At the same time the Soviet government formed military units called the trophy brigades. During the last months of the war and immediately thereafter, the Soviet Union began massive removals of cultural property from territories occupied by the Red Army. Trophy brigades sent to the front lines were authorized or ordered by Stalin to locate and send back home whole collections of looted art whether that art was Russian, German or confiscated by the Nazis from other European countries.

These two military units were racing to be the first to salvage the same hoards of hidden Nazi-stolen art. However, although both organizations were operating in the same European arena and timeframe, their modes of operations and objectives differed. The purpose of my thesis is to compare the objectives of these two organizations. Why were the Monuments Men given the task of saving looted art treasures? Why did the United States authorities place so much importance on saving European cultural treasures from Nazi theft and military destruction and what did they hoped to achieve? By comparison,

how do these political objectives compare with the reasons Stalin dispatched their trophy brigades? What did the Soviets' hope to achieve by sending these brigades?

I will argue that the Monuments Men (MM) were genuinely motivated by a desire to save art and cultural monuments and in doing so preserve European cultural society. The MM were artists, art historians, and curators. Therefore, it is easy to believe their motivations were altruistic. As George Stout, leader of the Monuments Men stated, "These monuments are not merely pretty things, not merely valued signs of men's creative power. They stand for man's struggle to relate himself to his past and to his God."¹ My research will show the United States hoped returning their art and saving their monuments would boost European morale, which in turn, could speed up post-war recovery.

However, I will also argue that those in the US government and military who encouraged reparations, preservation and restoration had alternative political motivations; motivations against the Soviets, who although being a fellow Allied power, were increasingly being viewed with suspicion towards the end of the war. By returning this art to their rightful countries, FDR hoped to flex his political clout and demonstrate to the world the position he intended to hold after the war. As Eisenhower would demonstrate, returning stolen art to its rightful owner was good public relations.

Stalin, on the other hand, was motivated by restitution and revenge. He and others in his government wanted revenge against the Germans who were responsible for so much human and cultural losses in their country and restitution for those losses. Research written during and immediately after the war often accuses the Soviets of being

¹ Robert Edsel and Bret Witter, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street, 2009), 23.

motivated merely by greed. However, closer research will show it was greed motivated by resentment. Allied negotiations towards the end of the war, particularly the Yalta Conference, show the Soviet Union as being bitterly resentful towards the Germans. The Soviets wanted restitution for the unprecedented destruction on Russian soil and the human and cultural losses at the hands of the Nazis. The objective of the Soviet Union trophy brigades was institutionalized revenge and without any limitations or guidelines placed on them by their Allies they were able to get on with it.

Research and Methods

Because there is limited access to Soviet archives, primary sources on the establishment and objectives of the trophy brigades are difficult to obtain. However, from the post-war period until the present, the Russians have been vocal about their relationship to this art. Therefore, my thesis partially relies on the assumption that the motivation behind the Soviet trophy brigades is the same motives the Russians still have for keeping this art. In other words, how the Soviets felt about the art they “saved” during and after the war, is directly related to how the Russians feel about the confiscated art they still have today. The official Russian position today is similar to Stalin’s decreed conception that “to the victor go the spoils”: those “transfers” to the Soviet Union were carried out legally after the war as “compensation” to which Russia felt they were legitimately entitled, as opposed to Nazi illegal seizures and destruction of cultural property during the war.² In regards to the current state of Russia’s attitudes towards art

² Patricia Grimsted, “Spoils of War Returned: U.S. Restitution of Nazi-Looted Cultural Treasures to the USSR, 1945-1959,” *Prologue Magazine* 34, no.3 (Fall 2002), 58.
<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/spring/spoils-of-war-1.html>

restitution, past presidents, various Russian cultural ministers and museum curators, especially Irina Antonova, long-time director of the Pushkin Museum, have all been vocal on what this art represents to them and their country. Their refusal to enter into any meaningful discussion on returning this art, of which they still possess millions of pieces, exemplifies their continuing resentment.

Obviously, any research on the MM mentions the trophy brigades and vice versa. However, there has not been significant scholarly research directly comparing these two organizations for a variety of reasons. Primarily, in terms of the war as a whole, the subject of looted art restitution will always play second fiddle to the topic of human losses. Secondly, the MFAA and trophy brigades were the first of their kind. While the looting of art has a military tradition, the retrieval of looted art does not. Lastly, the units were small in comparison to the total military effort. There were approximately 345 personnel who served with the MFAA, including personnel from 14 different nations, American civilians, officers and enlisted men from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps.³ However, the number of on duty members never exceeded 35 personnel, forcing the Monument Men to operate in small groups of two or three members to visit each examined site or town.⁴

The Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, which was compiled in 1945 by the Roberts Commission, is an invaluable primary research tool. After the war, the report published all of the field reports and orders of the Commission and the MFAA.

³ “Monuments Men Foundation,” *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, November 2019, <https://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/the-heroes>.

⁴ Charles J. Kunzelman, “Some Trials, Tribulations, and Successes of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Teams in the European Theatre During WWII,” *Military Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1988), 56-60.

Considering how important the MM's work was, it is surprising how late after the war any biographical work of their deeds was published. For example, Craig Hugh Smyth, a member of the Monuments Men, believes he was one of the first to search military archives for research on his book, *Repatriation of Art from the Collecting Point in Munich after World War II*, which was published in 1988.⁵ In many ways, Lynn Nichols' *The Rape of Europa* (1994) and Hector Feliciano's *The Lost Museum* (1997) re-introduced Second World War art looting and its salvage to a modern audience, beyond academic circles.

From a practical standpoint, because historians have not had access to Soviet archives, it was only confirmed in the 1990s, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, that Russia still had an immense amount of art taken from Germany. We have articles and a book entitled, *Beautiful Loot*, by researchers Konstantin Akinsha and Grigorii Kozlov, to thank for this discovery. After accidentally stumbling upon Russian government archives documenting trophy brigade activities and orders, including previously unseen eye-witness accounts, these researchers were able to make significant claims pertaining to this point in their country's history and attest that much of the looted art was still in Russia's possession. Akinsha and Kozlov can also be credited with identifying and translating *Dobycha*, which was published in 1994 by the late Pavel Knyshevskii. Knyshevskii, a Russian military historian, had access to Communist Party archives at the beginning of

⁵ Craig Hugh Smyth, *Repatriation of Art from the Collecting Point in Munich after World War II: Background and Beginnings with Reference Especially to the Netherlands* (The Hague: Maarssen, 1988), 276.

perestroika.⁶ This is an excellent source to examine Stalin's wartime decrees pertaining to the trophy brigades.

It is important to note that when referring to Soviet cultural losses during the war, I will only be referring to art and monuments, not archival losses. There was a great deal of archival property misplaced during the war, especially in the Slavic countries. Although this type of loss is an enormous cultural and emotional blow, it is difficult to assign a monetary value to it and therefore, more difficult to 'compensate'.

Importance

Research in art looting salvage during the war is an important topic because it exposes evolving attitudes towards the spoils of war. Looting by victorious armies has been common practice as long as there has been war. The question of who is entitled to this art in Russia affects international relations even today – especially between Germany and Russia. The priority of salvaging art is also important in its relationship to Harvard University. George Stout, a conservator at Harvard's Fogg Museum, was a senior member of the MM and one of the first to advocate the importance of saving European art to the US government. Additionally, many of the university's faculty established The Harvard Group after the fall of Paris in June 1940. Professor Paul Sachs, a teacher in Harvard's Art Department, was one of the first to propose the safe-guarding of European art and architecture. The purpose of this group was to provide expertise on cultural

⁶ Konstantin Akinsha, "Stalin's Decrees and Soviet Trophy Brigades: Compensation, Restitution in Kind, or "Trophies" of War?" *International Journal of Cultural Property* 17, no. 2 (2010), 195.

matters during the war.⁷ American and foreign scholars compiled information about cultural areas, monuments, and objects in Europe, and eventually their efforts contributed to the work done by the Roberts Commission.

⁷ Owen J. Roberts, *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas* United States Government Historical Reports on War Administration. (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946), p 33.

Chapter I

Art Looting During Wartime: The History of Looting

The spoils of war have a military tradition as old as warfare itself. The world's museums are full of cultural art objects transferred from the vanquished to the victor. In 586 BC the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, sacked Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.⁸ In 70 AD, during the siege of Vespasian, the emperor's son, Titus, sacked Herod's Temple in Jerusalem.⁹ The Vikings raided England from 800 - 1000 AD and the crusades in the Holy Land started in 1096 AD and lasted 200 years. The famous horses of St. Marco Square are one of the most remarkable pieces of art that can be traced through the history of European wars and plunder. Thought to be ancient Greek or Roman work from the 3rd century AD, the horses were taken to Venice after the sacking of Constantinople in 1204.¹⁰ From there they were taken by Napoleon in 1797 and included in his triumphal parade through Paris in 1798. Napoleon, who would rule as Emperor of France between 1804 and 1815, led a campaign of conquest and collecting across all of Europe from 1796 until the end of his reign.¹¹ In fact, until 1940, Napoleon was the unquestioned record holder in the field of carrying off confiscated art.

⁸ Christian Widener, *The Temple Revealed: The True Location of the Jewish Temple Hidden in Plain Sight*. (Rapid City, SD: End Times Berean, LLC, 2020), 213.

⁹ Michael Livingston, "The Siege of Jerusalem," University of Rochester, Middle English Texts Series, 2004. <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/livingston-siege-of-jerusalem-introduction>.

¹⁰ Charles Freeman, *The Horses of St Mark's: A Story of Triumph in Byzantium, Paris and Venice* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 89.

¹¹ Patricia Rosenmeyer, *The Language of Ruins: Greek and Latin Inscriptions on the Memnon Colossus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 87.

The art Napoleon looted during his campaigns would eventually become the Louvre Museum. His campaign in Egypt is generally regarded as the beginning of Egyptology in France and influenced architecture and decorative arts throughout Europe in the 19th century.¹² Napoleon was so consumed with art booty that many of the treaties written with those he defeated included provisions to retain the art he captured. This is often regarded as a first attempt to lay a framework to legalize large scale looting; an argument the Soviets would use in 1998 when they legalized their own loot.¹³ It was only after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 and the terms of the Congress of Vienna, that many of the plundered masterpieces, including the horses, were returned.

The Hague Conventions

On December 29, 1943, General Eisenhower issued an order to all his commanders in the Italian arena. In it he ordered his troops to avoid the destruction of Italian cultural monuments wherever possible. As the order stated, "Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows." He further cautioned that, "In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs."¹⁴ This order was

¹² Lynn Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 2420, Kindle.

¹³ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 2419.

¹⁴ Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief, AFH to All Commanders, Subject: Historic Monuments, December 29, 1943, File: CAD 000.4 (3-25-43) (1), Sec. 2, Security Classified General Correspondence, 1943-July 1949, General Records, Civil Affairs Division, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, RG 165.

the first of its kind from a military commander and represented a significant milestone along a policy route that had been laid down over the course of 70 years.¹⁵

Although it was the first order of its kind, it was not the first time nations attempted to regulate war-time looting and destruction. The combatants in the Franco-Prussian war utilized alarming new developments in the technology of warfare. As a result, participants in a series of subsequent international conferences recognized the urgent need to influence military behavior. In 1874, European leaders decided to act together to bring to an end the historic practice of looting which had always expressed the victor's revenge upon the vanquished.¹⁶ At a Brussels conference a consensus was agreed that cultural and educational property, even where state owned, should be treated as private property and be exempt from seizure. Two more conferences at the Hague in 1899 and 1907 attempted to regulate the rules of warfare and stem its wanton destructiveness.

Convention No. 4, approved at the second conference, contained articles and regulations that became essential international law on the protection of property. Article 47, for example, forbade pillaging, while Article 56 specifically stated that the seizure or destruction of cultural institutions, historical monuments and works of art and science would be the subject of legal proceedings. The framers of the Hague Convention who wrote these rules were seeking to prevent not only the physical destruction of buildings dedicated to public worship, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments and

¹⁵ United States President, *The Hague Convention and the Hague Protocol: Message from the President of the United States Transmitting The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (the Convention) and for Accession, the Hague Protocol, Concluded on May 14, 1954, and Entered into Force on August 7, 1956* (U.S. G.P.O., 1999), viii.

¹⁶ Michael J. Kurtz, *America and the Return of Nazi Contraband: The Recovery of Europe's Cultural Treasures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

hospitals that were in the way of troop maneuvers, but also to protect the contents of these buildings from looters. European and non-European powers including the United States, Germany, Russia, France and Great Britain signed this agreement.

The work of these international conferences did little to alter the conduct of combatants in World War I. The Germans not only destroyed the Reims Cathedral but soldiers used church towers in Belgium and France for their artillery spotters. German soldiers also looted private homes indiscriminately stealing works of art as trophies. The Treaty of Versailles signed in 1919 made attempts to force the Germans to make reparations for works of art that were lost by insisting on the total restitution of treasures like the Ghent altarpiece. The provisions of this treaty established the principle of using art as reparations, as compensation for other destroyed works of art. This would be an important concept after World War II, particularly for the Russians, who had enormous cultural losses. Although, the Convention agreements reflected the enlightened international opinion towards the wanton destruction of warfare and the significance of art and culture in it, modern warfare deemed many of the Hague regulations impractical. Against this backdrop, in the 1930s the Nazis began their systematic campaigns of aggression against the Jews and the thief and destruction of art. After World War II, these Hague principles of reparations and restitution would have even greater significance in the context of the work done under the auspices of the Roberts commission and the MFAA.¹⁷ As the Allies accused Germany in post war military tribunals, “The defendants wantonly destroyed cities, towns, and villages, and committed other acts of devastation

¹⁷ Walter I. Farmer, *The Safekeepers: A Memoir of the Arts of the End of World War II* (Schriften Zum Kulturgüterschutz / Cultural Property Studies, 2000), 124-126.

without military justification or necessity. These acts violated articles 46 and 50 of the Hague regulations, 1907, the laws and customs of war, the general principles of criminal law as derived from the criminal laws of all civilized nations, the intern Penal Laws of the countries in which such crimes were committed, and Article 6B of the charter.”¹⁸

Nazi Looting

The displacement of art in the Second World War was unprecedented in a number of ways. Most significant was the scale and scope of objects looted. In the decade leading up to 1945, it's estimated that the Nazis stole one-fifth of all the artworks in Europe.¹⁹ Secondly, instead of merely taking what they wanted, the Nazis used logical, legal, and political arguments to justify the removals. Lastly, for the first-time armies had highly trained art specialists in the ranks. Led by Nazi philosopher and art theorist, Alfred Rosenberg and the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Task Force (ERR), the Nazis stole art pieces from across Europe, many destined for a proposed Führermuseum in Linz. The creation of the Roberts Commission and trophy brigades must be seen against a background of these unprecedented events.

When Hitler was made Chancellor in 1933, Rosenberg was made intellectual head of the Nazi party with the title of “Custodian of the Entire Intellectual and Spiritual Training and Education of the Party and of all Coordinated Association.” In *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1930, Rosenberg claimed that the Aryan Nordic race had produced not only the German cathedrals but also Greek sculpture and the

¹⁸ Various. Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945-1 October 1946, Volume 2. (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg), 55. Accessed October 2020.

¹⁹ Hector Feliciano, *The Lost Museum: The Nazi Conspiracy to Steal the World's Greatest Works of Art* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 312.

masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance.²⁰ For these and other reasons, the Nazis felt justified in their looting since in most cases they were merely taking back what they believed should be rightfully theirs. The Durer Drawings, for example, which were illegally removed from the Albertina in Vienna by Napoleon's chief confiscator in the early 1800s and sold to dealers, were considered by Hitler to be absolutely German property.²¹

As early as 1939, Dr. Otto Kummel, Director of the Berlin museums, and several other curators had already been dispatched to Europe by personal order of propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. The aim of this mission was to do some fast research on just what would be brought back. Hitler commissioned art historians to produce a volume of art looted from Germany over the centuries. The Kummel Report resulted in a 300-page list of everything they considered to have been robbed from or destroyed during five foreign wars in Germany for the last 400 years. It included collections the Nazis claimed were taken from Alsatian aristocrats during the French revolution, works smuggled out of Germany by dealers after 1919, and German jewelry melted down in various wars.²² In some cases the Germans were correct. Even today, European museums have art in their collections that has been controversially acquired - great art which curators and cultural ministers usually believe they are the only true caretakers of and fight against the repatriation of. The dispute over the Elgin Marbles is a classic example of this.

To support his theories on racial hierarchy, Rosenberg also wanted evidence of German superiority. A letter from Supreme Commander Keitel notified the army on July

²⁰ Nicholas. *The Rape of Europa*, 210-237.

²¹ Nicholas. *The Rape of Europa*, 1392.

²² Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 2397-2413.

5, 1940 that Rosenberg's underlings, the ERR, would soon be searching Holland's libraries and archives for documents "which are valuable to Germany."²³ They would also search for "political archives which are directed against us" and that the material in question would be confiscated in cooperation with the SS.²⁴ The resulting accumulation of books and documents was to be sent off to Rosenberg's Hochschule to be used in the training of future generations of purifiers.

The Nazis did not concern themselves much with museums in the West. By their reasoning, after the occupations they would own those collections anyways, as they would fall under the jurisdiction of German cultural ministers. The Germans even helped the Dutch build new bunkers outside the city to move their museum collections to. Fearing a British invasion, the German soldiers helped build a sophisticated concrete bunker near Castricum outside of Amsterdam. The Nightwatch, which had originally been evacuated to a castle at Medemblik early in the war, was moved to this bunker along with other national artwork.²⁵

However, the Nazis continued to confiscate Jewish works of art. In many instances, the Nazis attempted to circumnavigate restrictions on art looting stipulated in the Hague Convention by legal means. For example, in the countries they occupied the Nazis passed new laws stating that nationals who have fled their European country were no longer citizens, and that their property could be seized and liquidated. Under these new regulations, the Nazis pointed out that the possessions of families, such as the

²³ Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 1942.

²⁴ Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 1951.

²⁵ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 1967.

Rothschilds and so many others who had fled, were no longer the business of the French, who had themselves declared that they were no longer citizens.²⁶

According to a military tribunal after the war, Rosenberg had been put in charge of a systematic plundering of the art objects of Europe by direct order of Hitler dated 29 January 1940. On April 16, 1943 Rosenberg reported that “Up to 7th April, 92 railway cars with 2775 cases containing art objects had been sent to Germany; and that 53 pieces of art have been shipped to Hitler direct, and 594 to the defendant Göring.”²⁷ The report mentions roughly 20,000 pieces of seized art and the main locations where they were stored. The prosecutor at Rosenberg’s trial accused the defendant of glorifying the looting and offered up 39 leather bound tabulated volumes of his inventory as evidence. As the lawyer stated, “One cannot but admire the artistry of this Rosenberg report ... Of the 9455 articles inventory, there were included 5255 paintings, 297 sculptures, 1372 pieces of antique furniture, 307 textiles, and 2224 small objects of art. Rosenberg observed that there were approximately 10,000 more objects still to be inventoried.”²⁸ Rosenberg himself estimated that the values involved would come close to \$1 billion.

Nazis Looting and Destruction in the Soviet Union

In order to understand Russia’s resentment towards the Nazis, it is important to understand what the Germans did on Russian soil during the war and why they did it. Germany and Russia began to interact as nations in the 18th century, when the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian empire were formed, in 1701 and 1721 respectively. Prior to

²⁶ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 2516.

²⁷ Various. *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, 141.

²⁸ Various. *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, 141.

World War II, the two nations had a mostly harmonious relationship starting with the Napoleonic wars. This continued through to World War I, and resulted in mutually beneficial trade agreements in the 1920s.²⁹ Their relationship cooled in the 1930s as they fought each other during the Spanish civil war and again as the world raced towards WWII. For the purposes of this thesis, I will concentrate on German-Russian relations during the rise of Social Nationalism because, despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, there had been a growing German mistrust towards Russians and Marxism since the 1918 armistice ending World War I.

Hitler's decision to invade Russia was the product of the convictions and illusions of the dictator's demonic psyche. In part because he was convinced that Bolshevism had helped defeat Wilhelmine Germany.³⁰ In *Mein Kampf*, published in 1924, Hitler argues that for centuries, "Russia owed the source of its livelihood as a state to the Germanic nucleus of its governing class people but this nucleus is now almost wholly broken up and abolished."³¹ Hitler warns that Russia's new rulers, "belong to a race which combines, in a way or mixture, bestial cruelty and an inconceivable gift for lying, and which today more than ever is conscious of a mission to impose its bloody oppression on the world. Do not forget that the international Jew who completely dominate Russia today regards Germany not as an ally, but as a state destined to the same fate."³²

In an ominous foreshadowing, Hitler argues that if Germany was to reach its full potential it needs to expand to their 1914 frontiers and beyond. In other words, Germany

²⁹ J.W. Garner, "The Russo-German Treaty," *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1926, 116–123.

³⁰ Drew Middleton, "Hitler's Russian Blunder." *The New York Times*, 1981, pp. The New York Times, 1981–06-21.

³¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ludwig Lore (New York: Stackpole Sons, 1939), 273.

³² Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 276.

needs enough land to feed to its growing population - a direct threat to the Slavic countries to its east. Justifying what would eventually become known as the Lebensraum policy, Hitler states in December 1940 to a rally of young officer cadets, “Truly, this earth is a trophy cup for the industrious man. And this rightly so, in the service of natural selection. He who does not possess the force to secure his Lebensraum in this world, and, if necessary, to enlarge it, does not deserve to possess the necessities of life. He must step aside and allow stronger peoples to pass him by.”³³ As the leader threateningly continues, “When we speak of new territory in Europe today, we must principally think of Russia and the border states subject to her.”³⁴ Only then, he theorized, would the Slavs “retire to Siberia”, and provide Germans their needed space.³⁵

In the eyes of Hitler and the more radical Nazi chiefs, Lebensraum in the East would assure the Reich against a thousand years of economic want and military threat. Plans for a war of annihilation were outlined in the “General Plan for the East” drawn up by Heinrich Himmler, which called for the “removal” of 80 million people from Russia in order to allow for its colonization by Germans.³⁶ This document, which was to have been presented to Hitler upon the occasion of the final defeat of the Soviet Union, was to be the blueprint by which all of Russia would be turned into a colony to furnish raw materials and slave labor for Germany. It would also obtain the Lebensraum Hitler had been dreaming of since he wrote *Mein Kampf* in Landsberg Prison in 1924.³⁷

³³ Adolf Hitler, and Max. Domarus, *Speeches and Proclamations, 1932-1945 : the Chronicle of a Dictatorship* (Bolchazy-Carducci, 1990), 56.

³⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 273.

³⁵ Hitler, Adolf, et al. *Monologe Im Führer-Hauptquartier 1941-1944*. (A. Knaus), 1980, 40.

³⁶ David Crowe, *Stalin's Soviet Justice: 'show' Trials, War Crimes Trials, and Nuremberg* (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 163, Kindle.

³⁷ Peter Ross Range, “How Adolf Hitler Turned a Year in Jail into a Step Toward Power,” *Time.com*. January 26, 2016. <https://time.com/4192760/hitler-munich-excerpt/>

The Nazis had a well-documented hatred of the Russians and other Slavs and their intentions were clear from their first eastern invasion in Poland. At a dinner conversation with Martin Bormann and Hans Frank, Hitler declared that, “The Poles shall be the slaves of the greater German Reich.”³⁸ In an extraordinary speech to his highest commanders, delivered on August 22, 1939, just after he had agreed to sign the Russian treaty, he urged his forces to “act brutally...be harsh and remorseless ... kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of Polish descent or language in the coming invasion and extermination of Poland”³⁹ Aside from the horrific human losses, there was also a devastating amount of cultural theft and destruction in Eastern Europe. Although a certain amount of damage and looting are inevitable in the heat of the battle, the occupation of Poland soon foretold a frightening invasion plan for the Slavic countries. Two unusual elements were quickly evident: excessive destruction of cultural monuments, and singularly detailed knowledge of the locations of works of art.⁴⁰

Nazi atrocities towards the Slavs continued with the June 1941 invasion of Russia. The war against the Soviet Union was one of ideological and racial differences, and it provided for, among other things, the immediate liquidation of political commissars in the Red Army. The order was given in 1941 with the participation of the Army High Command (the OKH) and issued by the Wehrmacht High Command.⁴¹ General Franz Halder, "Troops must participate in the ideological battle in the Eastern

³⁸ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich; a History of Nazi Germany* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1960), 938.

³⁹ Richard C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939-1944* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 3.

⁴⁰ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 1249.

⁴¹ Berenbaum, Michael, Abraham J. Peck, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 273.

campaign to the end." On 17 July 1941, the Wehrmacht High Command declared that the Wehrmacht was to:

Free itself from all elements among the prisoners of war considered Bolshevik driving forces. The special situation of the Eastern Campaign therefore demands special measures [a euphemism for killing] which are to be carried out free from bureaucratic and administrative influence and with a willingness to accept responsibility. While so far the regulations and orders concerning prisoners of war were based solely on military considerations, now the political objective must be attained, which is to protect the German nation from Bolshevik inciters and forthwith take the occupied territory strictly in hand.⁴²

The viciousness of Operation Barbarossa was justified by Nazi party members, including Himmler who in 1941 described Russia as, "A population of 180 million, a mixture of races whose very names are unpronounceable, and whose physique is such that one can shoot them down without pity and compassion ... welded by the Jews into one religion, one ideology...."⁴³ This led to a barbaric form of warfare, which when combined with modern technology, resulted in horrendous violence. Soviet citizens were deliberately starved, executed in large numbers and deprived of property.⁴⁴ Today's estimates are that thirty million Soviets lost their lives during World War II: millions died in prison camps, had to endure forced labor or torture in concentration camps, were murdered in cold blood, or starved to death.⁴⁵

As the Nazis raced towards Moscow in the early days of their invasion of Russia, they also stole art. On the surface, they plundered Russia in much the same way as they stole from other European countries. The Kummel Report included a section of which

⁴² Berenbaum, *The Holocaust and History*, 502-504.

⁴³ Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 177.

⁴⁴ Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 467.

⁴⁵ Akinsha, Konstantin., Grigorii. Kozlov, and Sylvia. Hochfield. *Beautiful Loot: The Soviet Plunder of Europe's Art Treasures*. 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1995), x-xi.

Russian artifacts they wanted, where they were and how to acquire them. However, there was an important and deeper difference between the German looting of Russia and their looting of the Western European countries they occupied during the war. In France, for example, the Nazis took what they wanted with little destructive damage. This can partly be due to the little resistance they had from the French. However, in Russia, Hitler not only wanted to obtain Russian art which, again, he specifically felt conveyed German superiority or art he felt Germany was entitled to, he also wanted to decimate the Slavic culture.⁴⁶ In an attempt to erase Russia's cultural history, the Nazis destroyed monuments and stripped palaces, cathedrals, and museums.

According to Nicholas, any pretence the Nazis used to legally justify their looting in Western Europe was abandoned in Russia. Art confiscations were far less subtle and "correct" when pertaining to the sacking of Russia. The Nationalist Socialist fanatics did not bother with the velvet gloves they used to loot Western Europe, as Hitler told his army it was not necessary for the invasion of Russia to be conducted in a "knightly fashion."⁴⁷ Invasion policies for Russia would be the same as those applied to Poland - after their conquest, areas would be cleansed, exploited, and Germanized. Then the scholars of the SS Ahnenerbe would bring in their specialists to collect ancient artifacts and other scientific evidence of the superiority of the Germanic races and the inferiority of the Slavs.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Shlomit Steinberg, "Outlining the Kümmel Report: Between German Nationality and Aesthetics," European Holocaust Research Infrastructure, <https://www.ehri-project.eu/outlining-kümmel-report>.

⁴⁷ Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich; a History of Nazi Germany*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 830.

⁴⁸ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 3679-3709.

As in the West, the Nazis wanted art returned that they felt was rightfully theirs. In the East, Germanic attribution to this art was even more far-fetched and ambiguous than it had been in the West. The removal of the Amber Room in the Hermitage is an example of the Nazis taking back what they believed to be rightfully theirs. Although the panels were a gift from Prussian King Frederik William I to his ally Tsar Peter the Great of the Russian Empire in 1716, the fact that they were created by German baroque sculptor Andreas Schluter was enough justification for the Nazis to take them.⁴⁹ The room was dismantled by Von Kunsberg's troops, carefully packed in twenty-nine crates, and sent off to a museum at Königsberg.⁵⁰ Königsberg was Von Kunsberg's showplace for top Nazi gatherings to exhibit art confiscated from the eastern territory. When the panels were displayed in Germany in January 1942 they were described by the German press as "Saved by German Soldiers from the Destroyed Palace of Catherine the Great." Eventually the panels would disappear and be lost forever.

Another example was the famous Gottorp Globe, a miniature planetarium in which 12 people could sit and contemplate the arrangements of the heavens depicted on the inside. The globe had a tenuous connection to Germany. Although it had been specifically made for the German Duke of Holstein-Gottorp in the 17th century to be given as a gift to Tsar Peter III, it was taken back to Germany by the Nazis.⁵¹ The Nazis also looted the colossal altarpiece by Veit Stoss, which they removed from the Church of Saint Mary at Kraków. It had taken Veit Stoss ten years to carve the great work which

⁴⁹ Jess Blumberg, "A Brief History of the Amber Room," *Smithsonian Magazine* July 31, 2007. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-brief-history-of-the-amber-room-160940121/>.

⁵⁰ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 191.

⁵¹ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 3794-3798.

had been commissioned by the King of Poland in 1477.⁵² After the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis had carted it off, lock, stock and barrel, to Nuremberg, as they contended that, since Veit Stoss had been a native of Nuremberg, it belongs in the city of his birth.⁵³

The large-scale destruction in Russia after the June 1941 invasion was brutal. In Novgorod, the Nazis blew up the church of Saint Sophia, built in 1050 and filled with irreplaceable frescos and icons.⁵⁴ The German army destroyed 427 museums in Leningrad, Smolensk, Stalingrad, Novgorod, and Poltava. From a variety of sources, Monuments officers estimated that 375 archival institutions, 402 museums, 531 institutes and 957 libraries from Eastern Europe were looted or destroyed.⁵⁵

Everywhere in the USSR special attention was given to the trashing of the houses and museums of great cultural figures: Pushkin's house was ransacked, as was Tolstoy's Yasnaya Polyana, where manuscripts were burned in the stoves and German war dead were buried all around Tolstoy's solitary grave.⁵⁶ Even some Nazi officers were shocked by the destruction their army was causing. One local Nazi commander, upset that ancient tombstones on the King's Grave at Kolonka had been vandalized by "louts" who had scratched their names and swastikas on them, ordered his officers to instruct their troops that "similar desecrations shall not be committed again on monuments."⁵⁷ In 1944, the New York Herald described the scene at Peterhof Palace in St Petersburg to the world:

Now that the battle is over the countryside is quiet. The quiet is not peace but death. ... Brick dwellings, marble castles with granite towers are levelled to the ground or are battered heaps of debris and refuse. There

⁵² Arthur Burkhard, "Veit Stoss, German Sculptor," *Speculum* 10, no. 1 (1935), 31-41.

⁵³ Farmer. *The Safekeepers*, 131.

⁵⁴ Leslie I. Poste, *The Development of US Protection of Library and Archives in Europe during World War II*, (US Army Civil Affairs School, Fort Gordon, GA, August, 1964), 74.

⁵⁵ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 3833.

⁵⁶ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 9819.

⁵⁷ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 220.

aren't even the customary flocks of winter birds. ... I had neither seen nor heard anything like it in France after the World War. Only windblown tall reeds rising out of deep snow give one a feeling of some life within nature itself... all Peterhof is gone. It isn't even a ghost town like Kiev, Kharkov, Poltava, Orel or Kursk ... it is a desert strewn with wreckages from which, perhaps, has been blown away some of the most exquisite and most joyful art man has created.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Smyth, *Repatriation of Art from the Collecting Point in Munich after World War II*, 77-78.

Chapter II

Roberts Commission and the MFAA

“The person ultimately responsible for there being an MFAA at all, was George Stout, Harvard conservator. Yes, I think, none of us ever knew, and he was not one who would ever say so. A letter from Paul Sachs in the United States national archives names Stout as “the real father of the whole show” and designates the Roberts commission, from which MFAA stemmed, as his “brainchild.” His purpose was to preserve - preserve above all- and secondly to repatriate that displaced.” ... Monument officer Lt. Craig Hugh Smyth.⁵⁹

It was the world art community that first became concerned about the fate of Europe's treasures and this is especially true in the US. Although far removed from the battle, American curators and academics were getting disturbing reports from their European counterparts. One of the earliest Americans to raise the alarm was George Stout, Chief of Conservation at Harvard's Fogg Museum and the country's greatest expert on the techniques of packing and evacuation. The conservator had been in Paris and Germany in 1933 as a member of an international committee for the conservation of paintings.⁶⁰ As war approached, Stout grew increasingly alarmed by his correspondence with colleagues in Holland, Germany, and France. On December 8, 1942, Chief Justice Harlan Stone, Stout and other prominent members of the American art world contacted President Roosevelt. They asked him to support a plan for “the creation of an organization . . . for the protection and conservation of works of art and of artistic or historic monuments and records in Europe, and to aid in salvaging and returning to, or

⁵⁹ Edsel and Witter, *The Monuments Men*, 26.

⁶⁰ Ali Caron, “Fred Shipman, Monuments Man,” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, November 1, 2019. <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/shipman>.

compensating in kind, the lawful owners of such objects which have been appropriated by the Axis powers or by individuals acting with their authority or consent.”⁶¹

This plan, approved by FDR on June 23, 1943, and set up by the State Department, would eventually establish the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe. Members of the Commission were experts drawn from various American libraries and museums, including the Library of Congress and the National Gallery of Art. Justice Owen Roberts of the Supreme Court was selected to head the group, and as a result the commission is often referred to as the “Roberts Commission.”⁶² Six months later, the Roberts Commission, along with Stout, who was also a Navy reservist, urged the president to establish the ‘Temporary Archives Advisor to the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Sub-commission of the Allied Control Commission’.⁶³ The aim of this group, referred to as the MFAA, was protecting cultural treasures from the violence of warfare and returning stolen works to their rightful owners. The men and women who were recruited to work for this commission are referred to as Monuments Men.

The Commission established their headquarters at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. The original commission members were an impressive group, which included Archibald MacLeish, a former Librarian of Congress, Dr William Bell Dinsmore, President of the Archaeological Institute of America, Dr Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Dr Paul J. Sachs Associate Director of the Fogg Museum of Fine Arts of Harvard University, Herbert

⁶¹ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 2.

⁶² Caron, “Fred Shipman, Monuments Man.”

⁶³ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 2-3.

Lehman Director of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York. Volunteers also including John Walker, Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Art, Dr Sumner Crosby of Yale University, and Horace Jayne Love of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Aims of the MFAA

“Obviously, what we could accomplish, compared with what needed to be done, was necessarily token. But as a moral symbol it was, I believe, important.” ... Monuments officer, Lt. Bernard Taper⁶⁴

In its capacity, the Roberts commission served as a clearinghouse for information on war damage and art looting. The commission’s work helped protect many historical monuments and buildings, and assisted in the repatriation of millions of works of art and artifacts to their governmental and private rightful owners. Monuments Men also helped to prevent looted art from being used to fund post-war Nazism, and aided prosecution of war criminals involved with art looting by providing information on enemy personnel suspected of art looting to the War Crimes Commission and to the military government.

The Roberts Commission had two main functions. The first was to advise the War Department on the creation and operation of the MFAA section, which was established in December 1943. Specialist officers assigned to the MFAA were responsible for protecting works of art, cathedrals, archives, monuments, and other cultural sites in Europe from damage and looting. It was necessary these officers had specialist training

⁶⁴ Bernard Taper, “Investigating Art Looting for the MFA&A,” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 135.

and experience. They also investigated the disposition of looted art and helped return objects to the rightful owners.

The War Department had two conditions for potential MFAA officers. One, they already had to be members of the Armed Forces. This often meant transferring specialist personnel from one branch to another, a task easier to do during periods of occupation. Secondly, the War Department stipulated that the work of these new MFAA officers did not interfere with military operations.⁶⁵ From the onset this proved difficult. Even Eisenhower acknowledged this conflict in his December 29, 1943 memo which states:

If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the building must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase "military necessity" is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference.⁶⁶

As Monuments officer, Walter Farmer recounts, "Many commanders were sensitive to notices and moreover knew that they bore the full authority of General Dwight Eisenhower. Others pressed by the circumstances of war-time dismissed the Monuments officers as interfering nuisances."⁶⁷

As we will see in later chapters, this subordinate position held by MM in combat is directly opposite of the authority the trophy brigades held within the Soviet army. In the Soviet army the brigade members and their missions were given priority authority

⁶⁵ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 2-5.

⁶⁶ Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief, AFH to All Commanders, Subject: Historic Monuments, December 29, 1943, File: CAD 000.4 (3-25-43) (1), Sec. 2, Security Classified General Correspondence, 1943-July 1949, General Records, Civil Affairs Division, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, RG 165.

⁶⁷ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 22.

over the combat troops.⁶⁸ It was only after the disastrous battle of Monte Cassino in 1944 that it became clear that the MM needed to be given some type of authority. The battle for Cassino began on January 17, 1944, lasted six weeks and resulted in 16,000 Allied casualties. During Allied bombing on February 15, 1944, 229 bombers dropped 493.5 tons on Monte Cassino's ancient abbey. The US Army wrongly believed the monastery was occupied by German soldiers and as a result the abbey was demolished without any German casualties. In hindsight, the bombing of Monte Cassino was avoidable, and criticism from both sides over the battle was a blow to the 'hero' image of the US Army. After what would be the first significant test of Eisenhower's December 1943 directive, the US army realized it could only be truly successful if they made a concerted effort to protect monuments.⁶⁹

The Roberts Commission's second function was considered its most important assignment. The Commission was asked to recommend a set of principles and procedures regarding restitution. Commission guidelines stated, "Germany would be obliged to restore identifiable works of art and other cultural treasures; such restitution should be limited to identifiable property existing before German occupation; the existing governments of the countries where the property was formerly located should at first receive such restored looted property rather than the former owners individually."⁷⁰ Even though establishing restitution guidelines was a function of the Commission from the start, it was only after the Allied landings in France in July 1944, and an end to the war

⁶⁸ Marvin C. Ross, "SHAEF and the Protection of Monuments in Northwest Europe." *College Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (January 1946), 119-122.

⁶⁹ Robert M. Edsel, *Saving Italy: The Race to Rescue a Nation's Treasures from the Nazis*. 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 97-100.

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 12.

was in sight, that this role took on more urgency. Towards the end of the war the commission specifically stated, “All property taken to Germany during the period of German occupation should be considered to have been acquired under duress and therefore should be treated as looted property; a freezing control on the exportation and importation of works of art, books, archives, and other cultural property should be established by all European countries, neutral as well as belligerents.” The committee’s recommendations concerning restitution would form the basis of the State Department’s policies of restitution which were issued in the spring of 1945.

Not only was the Commission to recommend principles of restitution but they were also asked to provide the “machinery by which such restitution could be achieved.” In particular, the establishment of central collecting points. The Commission believed, “The establishment of Central Collecting Points in several cities in Germany to which movable works of cultural value were taken from wartime repositories was one step toward the implementation of the policy of restitution.”⁷¹ According to Monuments officer, Thomas Carr Howe Jr., “The actual restitution was to be made on a wholesale scale. Works of art were to be returned en bloc to the claimant nations, not to individual claimants of those nations. To expedite this mass evacuation country by country, properly qualified art representatives would be invited to the American occupied zone, specifically to the central collecting point at Munich, where they could present their claims.”⁷² As soon as US authorities approved these ownership claims, it was the responsibility of the representatives to transport the objects home. The chief merit of this system of fine arts

⁷¹ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 12-13.

⁷² Thomas Carr Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles; the Discovery and Restitution of Looted European Art*, (Indianapolis, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 2688.

restitution lay in the fact that it would relieve the American personnel of the burdensome obligation of settling individual claims. From the point of view of the receiving nations, the system had the advantage of accelerating the recovery of their looted treasures.⁷³

The Commission was also responsible for providing lists of treasures and monuments worth saving and where they were. For this assignment, the commission was greatly aided by civilian programmes such as the American Defense-Harvard Group and the American Council on Learned Societies. In fact, it was in academic circles on the East Coast that a plan first started for saving Europe's treasures. Within days of the fall of Paris in June 1940, a group of Harvard faculty and local citizens, eager to contribute to the war effort, established the American Defense-Harvard Group which worked as a clearinghouse for valuable expertise. Academic groups also helped supply the armed forces with hundreds of maps detailing important cultural centers of Allied and enemy countries.⁷⁴ These maps were in turn passed to the Army Air Corps and infantry units with lists of art treasures that must be spared damage when possible to avoid bombing and shelling historic structures during attacks.⁷⁵ This helped minimize damage to these treasures to the extent that military operations permitted. For example, in Italy the US Air Force used these maps to prepare reconnaissance photographs showing the most important historic monuments. With civilian assistance, the Commission also provided handbooks which were, "prepared and distributed to the military theaters for the use of Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives officers in the field and to aid them in the

⁷³ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 2700.

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 3-5.

⁷⁵ Ilaria Dagnini Brey, *The Venus Fixers : The Remarkable Story of the Allied Soldiers Who Saved Italy's Art during World War II*. 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 65.

preparation of the official lists of sites and monuments to be protected.”⁷⁶ These included instructions for the care and preservation of works of art, archives and records and provided them with a list of qualified, local civilians to assist military personnel when necessary.⁷⁷

MFAA Activities

“But there was also a little-known group of American and British men-museum directors, curators, artists, archivists, educators, librarians, and architects - who volunteered to save Europe’s rich patrimony. They became known as ‘Monuments Men.’ This middle-aged group of scholar-soldiers faced a seemingly impossible task: minimize damage to Europe’s single greatest concentration of art, architecture, and history from the ravages of a world war; effect repairs when possible; and locate and return stolen works of art to their rightful owners.” Robert Edsel, *Saving Italy*.⁷⁸

Although many of the Monuments Men published articles, books and memoirs after the war, it is still difficult to gauge their thoughts about the part they played through their pages. This is mainly because, as a whole, the Monuments Men were not a very self-congratulating group. George Stout, Stratton Hammon, and Thomas Howe, all of whom wrote accounts, write of their service years modestly. The most revealing information on the actions and motivations of the Monuments Men can be found in their field reports, which were compiled in detail in the *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas*, immediately after the war. What is evident from these sources is that the accomplishments of the Monuments Men were numerous and too many to mention. Their organization was small, their work was hard, and their task was huge, encompassing 3415

⁷⁶ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 20.

⁷⁷ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 5.

⁷⁸ Edsel, *Saving Italy*, 5.

monuments listed within a 560,000 mi.² area of the European continent, which averages 341½ monuments per officer.⁷⁹

Mainly, the MM followed US Army units into liberated towns where they scoured hiding places for stolen artworks, which they then stored in protected locations and prepared them for future repatriation. Through books, movies, and photographs, these are the activities most associated with the Monuments Men. For example, numerous photos and reports record the MM, attached to General Patton's Third Army, uncovering a vast hoard of art discovered in the Altaussee salt mine in Austria in May 1945. Here they found an estimated 6700 paintings and an undetermined number of sculptures and reliefs. Among the remarkable finds were Michelangelo's Bruges Madonna and the Ghent altarpiece.⁸⁰ They also discovered large caches stashed in other mines and Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany.⁸¹ Howe recalls that when the MM emptied one of these caves they found pictures, as well as "quantities of sculpture, hundreds of examples of the finest 18th century French cabinet work, tapestries and rugs; and the books and manuscripts of the Biblioteca Herziana in Rome - one of the greatest historical libraries in the world. Among the pictures, or canvases, were many from the Rothschild, Gutmann and Mannheimer Collections, including Rembrandts and other great Dutch Masters'.⁸² In *Salt Mines & Castles*, he further recounts, "We began arbitrarily with the big pictures, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, van Dyke, Rubens and Rembrandt. Many of them were from private collections in Holland, Belgium and France."⁸³

⁷⁹ Charles J. Kunzelman, "Some Trials, Tribulations, and Successes of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Teams in the European Theatre During WWII," *Military Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1988), 57.

⁸⁰ Janet Flanner, *Men and Monuments*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957. 278-279.

⁸¹ Richard J. Evans, "Art in the Time of War," *The National Interest*, no. 113 (2011), 23.

⁸² Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 2042.

⁸³ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 2050.

In the German town of Aachen, Monuments officer, Walker Hancock and his team fought through the rubble of the bombed town to discover a mine crammed with paintings and sculpture. In *Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany*, Hancock recalls, "By the lamp-light we could discern more than 400 paintings. Without making an inspection we soon discovered that Rembrandt, Rubens (whose birthplace was Siegen), Van Dyke, Delacroix, Lochner, Fragonard, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, Cranach, Hals and Renoir were among the artists represented. There were stacks of cases from the museums of Bonn, Cologne, Siegburg as well as Metz, which the Germans apparently regarded as a German city."⁸⁴

Although, the retrieval of looted art is what the MM were famously known for, the men also spent a great deal of time inspecting damaged, listed buildings and monuments. The *Report of the American Commission* records that, "The first task of the MFAA officers in the European theater was the inspection of sites and monuments, both to report any damage, and to take measures to prevent further deterioration of historic buildings or objects by initiating first aid measures."⁸⁵ While performing these tasks, many MM wrote of coordinating their restoration efforts with local citizens, native officials and local museum professionals. They described this aspect of their work as very satisfying as it fostered good relations with local communities. *The Report of the American Commission* quotes a field report from an unknown MFAA officer in Sicily, "The most rewarding aspect of the work of the advisers has not been the opportunity to repair in some small way the ravages which war has wrought on the treasures of Sicily; it

⁸⁴ Walter Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," *College Art Journal* 5, no. 4 (1946), 292.

⁸⁵ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 104.

has been in the human relations established. The basic hope of the Allied military government has been realized in harmonious collaboration between British and US officers both within the office and in dealings with other branches. On the side of the Italian administration, there has been a real appreciate of cooperation, and understanding of delays and denials, and a return of self-confidence and a hope for the future, which, in the still dark days through which Sicily is passing, has strengthened the hands and hearts both of the advisers and of the Italians themselves.”⁸⁶

This important relationship with locals was echoed by Monuments man, Deane Keller, who helped restore the ancient cemetery of Campo Santo in Pisa, an ancient cemetery bombed by the Allies in 1944. Keller organized fresco specialists from Florence, Italian soldiers, and local civilians to work with the Fifth Army and American engineers to rebuild the structure and save the historic frescos. Working together, the team secured the roof, making the building water-tight, preventing further deterioration.⁸⁷ Elsewhere in Italy, such as Naples and Rome, the MM philosophy was that helping to restore the cities’ centuries old art was one sure path to regenerating the cities’ social and emotional fabric. In Rome, after feeding the population and arresting the fascists, residents couldn’t wait to reopen their museums, theaters and concert halls. In August 1944, Monuments officer, Perry Cott, helped organize an exhibition of 46 Renaissance masterpieces, entitled “Exhibition of Masterpieces of European Painting”, that had been hidden in the Vatican for safety. It was a great success and a showcase of the Monuments Men’s dedication to safeguarding Italy’s artistic heritage.⁸⁸ The Italians who attended

⁸⁶ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 58.

⁸⁷ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 5160.

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Report of the American Commission*, 72-73.

were moved at seeing so much beauty that had gone into hiding for years. They began to feel that, perhaps, the end of the war was in sight.

As the war came to a close, many of the MM also expressed the hopefulness that might be achieved with working with Germans on restoration projects. As Hancock writes of the Germans, “They saw in our endeavors a motive other than the selfish greed that some of their leaders had shown in regard to works of art both in Germany and abroad. Was there, perhaps, in this virtual conference and common interest, the germ of something that might be made to work for world peace at least as effectively as the disciplinary measures upon which we now rest so much faith?”⁸⁹ Since the MFAA was a community of artists, curators, restorers and other members of the art world, they shared a love and appreciation of art. According to Monuments officer Edith A. Standen, this appreciation knew no borders; their motivation was to save art and monuments regardless of its origin. In the words of Standen, “I am sure that I speak for all MFAA officers when I say that the greatest priority to us was the well-being of works of art of all kinds and any ownership.”⁹⁰ Many also felt there was goodwill to be achieved by treating Germany's cultural heritage fairly. Monuments officer Bernard Taper wrote, “It has been gratifying to me that ours was an organization that was concerned with preserving Germany’s art heritage as well as restituting to other nations the things that Germany had pillaged from them. It was good, I thought, that amid all the sickening evidence of man’s depravity and destructiveness I should've had the opportunity to help preserve some of

⁸⁹ Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," 311.

⁹⁰ Edith A Standen, “Introduction,” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 122.

the things mankind had done that one could not only fail to contemplate but even take joy in.”⁹¹

Political Goodwill and General Eisenhower

Eventually, the Americans located 1400 repositories containing over 15 million items of loot and German cultural property.⁹² It is clear from the start that there was also political motivation behind the Americans’ salvage policy. When Stone argued to FDR the need for a committee to support the protection of fine arts and monuments in Europe, he also explained to the president the potential usefulness of the proposed commission in combating enemy propaganda, while boosting their own political goodwill.⁹³

It was not only the American Armed Forces that were concerned with their political image and reputations. The British also understood the value of the cultural preservation effort as a public relations campaign to ensure the good name of the British army would be preserved. The Italians had already charged the British with destruction of ancient Roman ruins in North Africa. This led to the appointment of Sir Leonard Woolley as Archaeological Adviser to the Director of Civil Affairs in the War Office.⁹⁴ Woolley, who would eventually be assigned to the MM, is also credited with helping convince the Allied powers of the “negative propaganda and political effects of the army’s destructive activities.”⁹⁵ In May 1944, the British formed the Committee for the Restitution of Works

⁹¹ Bernard Taper, “Investigating Art Looting for the MFA&A,” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 138.

⁹² Michael J. Kurtz, “The End of the War and the Occupation of Germany, 1944-52,” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 116.

⁹³ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7774.

⁹⁴ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 132.

⁹⁵ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 4637.

of Art, Archives, and other Material in Enemy Hands - also known as the Macmillan Committee.⁹⁶

In 1945 General Eisenhower approved a proposal to return at once, to each of the Allied countries overrun and ravaged by the Germans, at least one outstanding work of looted art.⁹⁷ This was to be done in his name, as a gesture of ‘token restitution’ symbolizing American policy with regard to the intended restitution of all stolen art treasures to the rightful owner nations.⁹⁸ This entire procedure, Roberts Commission member, Sumner Crosby urged, “must appear as an act of good will on the part of our armies.”⁹⁹ It was also felt that these well-publicized gestures, on the part of the Commanding General of United States Forces in Europe, would reaffirm our intentions to right the wrongs of Nazi oppression.¹⁰⁰

In September 1945, Belgium received the first token restitution. The great Ghent altarpiece by Van Eyck, found by the Monuments Men in the Altaussee salt mine, was the first item returned among the stolen Belgian treasures.¹⁰¹ In a historic moment, the American ambassador presented the panels to the Prince Regent on behalf of General Eisenhower.¹⁰² At the same time, James Rorimer was the first Monuments officer to receive the French Legion of Honour in a well-attended ceremony celebrating the return

⁹⁶ Bradsher, Greg. *Japanese War Crimes and Related Topics: A Guide to Records at the National Archives. National Archives and Records Administration*, 2000, 562.

⁹⁷ John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization, Providence, Rhode Island. John Nicholas Brown Papers. Hammond to JNB. September 14, 1945.

⁹⁸ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3364.

⁹⁹ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7854.

¹⁰⁰ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3370.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Rellihan, “Following the Ghent Altarpiece, the World’s Most Stolen (and Well-Traveled) Artwork,” *Condé Nast Traveler*, October 6, 2016. <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/following-the-ghent-altarpiece-the-worlds-most-stolen-and-well-traveled-artwork>.

¹⁰² Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3378.

of the stained glass windows of the Strasbourg Cathedral.¹⁰³ Other returns included a collection of numerous old masters recovered by the US Army to the Rijksmuseum in October 1945. Among the 140 masterpieces, returned by Monuments officer Craig Smyth, were six Veneers, nine paintings by Frans Hals, the Koenings Collection and seventeen Rembrandts, including the famous Night Watch.¹⁰⁴ The Rijksmuseum received the return of this national art with great fanfare, celebrated by an unprecedented lunch in the Rembrandt room of the museum.¹⁰⁵

The best example of the propaganda potential of returning artwork was the American Army returning treasures to Florence. As Monuments man Deane Keller described it, “The public relations importance of this recovery was enormous, and the fifth army - and anyone else who could get into the act - threw themselves into the arrangements for the return of the treasures with gusto.” Most celebrated was the return of the statue of Cosmo I to the city center, which was paraded by ox cart through the streets of Florence. As Keller reported, “A large and important undertaking in terms of giving pleasure to a people who have suffered and in establishing happy relations between these people and their present military governors.”¹⁰⁶

Operation Westward Ho

If there is one incident that exemplifies how the Roberts Commission and MM felt about art restitution it would be their opposition to Operation Westward Ho. On November 5, 1945 the commission was ordered by the State Department to ship a

¹⁰³ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7892.

¹⁰⁴ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3729.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7900.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 5138-5297.

selection of German works recovered in Europe to the US for 'safekeeping'. Cap. Walter Farmer, the officer in charge of the Wiesbaden Collection Point at the time, recounts that he received the following orders, "Higher headquarters desires that immediate preparations be made for prompt shipment to the US of a selection of at least 200 German works of art of greatest importance. Most of these are now in art collection point Wiesbaden. Selections will be made by personnel from Headquarters CMA European Theater who will assist in packing and shipment by motor transport to Bremen."¹⁰⁷

According to General Clay, Commander American Zone, and the War and State Departments, the selection of paintings were to be shipped to Washington to ensure their safety, to be held in trust for the people of Germany and to be returned when the German museums were fit enough to re-open. The U.S. justified this order on the pretence that inadequate storage conditions in the American Zone were incompatible to safe-guarding these valuable objects. As many skeptics pointed out at the time, the paintings that were sent to the United States were the type of art lacking in the National Gallery in Washington. As Clay, who opposed the transfer, accused the curators, "Their (the National Gallery's) representatives on an early visit talked about the possibility of obtaining these pictures either in reparations or in payment of occupation costs, and I am afraid their desire to increase the prestige of the National Gallery lies behind the measure. It is an attempt to hold the pictures now in the hope that events may so develop that they will never have to be returned."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Walter I. Farmer, "Custody and Controversy at the Wiesbaden Collecting Point," in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 133.

¹⁰⁸ Marion Deshmukh. "Recovering Culture: The Berlin National Gallery and the U.S. Occupation, 1945-1949." *Central European History* 27, no. 4 (1994): 411-39.

Monuments man Lt. Howe directly argues against accusations of poor storage conditions by stating that the three main collecting points “had been made water-proof months before and were now provided with sufficient coal to prevent deterioration of the objects during the winter months.”¹⁰⁹ Washington further justified this order by saying they were keeping these German treasures safe from further looting. However, as the MM argued, at this point the war was at an end and there was no risk to these paintings. In fact, Farmer added, “A mockery was being made of our entire operation. Not only was there no need to safeguard these paintings in the United States, but in transporting them on the open seas in the dead of winter these panel paintings and canvases would be exposed to the most pernicious climatic conditions that one could imagine.”¹¹⁰

Fearing that these 200 paintings would be the tip of the iceberg, the Monuments Men were unanimously against the US government bringing German art to the United States for any reason. On November 7, 1945 twenty-four of the thirty-two MM signed a document called the Weisbaden Manifest - an action that could have resulted in court-martial.¹¹¹ The remaining men send individual letters of protest. The Wiesbaden Manifesto is believed to be the “only protest of an official order lodged by American officers in the European theater” during World War II.¹¹² In part, the Manifest states, “We, the undersigned Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Specialist Officers of the Armed Forces of the United States, wish to make known our convictions regarding the transportation to the United States of works of art, the property of German institutions or nationals, for purposes of protective custody. No historical grievances will rankle so long,

¹⁰⁹ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3773.

¹¹⁰ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 57.

¹¹¹ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 3810.

¹¹² Roland Bailey, “Saving Private Rembrandt,” *World War II* 22, no. 2 (May 2007), 54.

or be the cause of so much justified bitterness, as the removal, for any reason, of the part of the heritage of any nation”¹¹³

The MM believed the plan soiled the image of the US being a restoration hero and jeopardized, not only the commission’s smoothly running restoration operation, but also any opportunity to mend relations with the Germans. They believed that the transportation of these works of art would establish a morally unjustifiable precedent. Many of the MM also reminded senior US officials that they were in the middle of prosecuting German individuals for the same ‘crime’.¹¹⁴ According to Farmer, “My emotions overcame me, and I wept with tears of rage and frustration. It seemed to me that everything that had been done to demonstrate the integrity of the United States government in the matter of its handling of German cultural properties would be discredited if this shipment took place.”¹¹⁵ In a letter to his wife, he writes, “We are trying Germans as war criminals for what we are now in order to do.”¹¹⁶

In December 1945, the paintings were shipped to the United States. On December 18, 1945, Howe wrote to the NYT, “The shipment of German old paintings to the United States is thus a project entirely separate from the main objectives of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section of the Office of Military Government - namely, the restitution of loot and the establishment of the German museums and other cultural organizations. To confuse the shipment, which was directed by the highest national authority, with what is now the routine work of preservation, identification and restitution performed by

¹¹³ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 66.

¹¹⁵ Farmer, “Custody and Controversy at the Wiesbaden Collecting Point,” 133.

¹¹⁶ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 66.

trained specialist personnel is to mislead our Allies and to underwrite the accomplishments of a small group of hard-working Americans.”¹¹⁷

Although the political climate in the US at the time could have favored more art shipments under the pretense of safekeeping, by January 1946 the story of the protest and the text of Wiesbaden Manifesto had been so publicly circulated that Operation Westward Ho could not continue with additional shipments.¹¹⁸ On February 6, 1948, as General Clay was preparing to turn over the US Zone in Berlin to the State Department, he informed the Department of the Army that conditions at Wiesbaden and Munich were sufficient to permit the return of these paintings. Clay and other military commanders also pointed out the excellent public relations value of a prompt restoration of these paintings to Germany in the face of the unbridled looting of art treasures by the Soviets.¹¹⁹ Colonel Theodore Riggs argued to the US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services “Any failure to return these articles now would be interpreted as an intent on our part to retain the items and in addition, would play directly into the hands of the communists with their constantly reiterated propaganda of American exploitation.”¹²⁰

Eventually, Truman did keep his promise to return the paintings when they could be more adequately housed in German museums. In 1949, after three years in America, involving a stay at the National Gallery in Washington and later a grand tour of American museums, the paintings were all safely returned to Germany museums not behind the Iron

¹¹⁷ Howe, *Salt Mines and Castles*, 4041.

¹¹⁸ Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 116.

¹¹⁹ Marion Deshmukh, "Recovering Culture: The Berlin National Gallery and the U.S. Occupation, 1945-1949," *Central European History* 27, no. 4 (1994), 411-39.

¹²⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate committee on armed services, hearings on S2439: A bill to provide for the temporary we can shin in the US of certain German paintings, March 4 and April 16, 1943, Washington, D. C.: USGPO. P 11.

Curtain.¹²¹ As Farmer recounts, “That protest saved my country from humiliation and embarrassment. I will always be proudest of the moment when I found the courage to stand up and shout we must stop this without thinking of the personal consequences.”¹²²

¹²¹ James J. Rorimer, *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War* (New York: Abelard Press, 1950), 232.

¹²² Farmer, *The Safekeepers*, 117.

Chapter III:

The Trophy Brigades: Yalta and Stalin's Decrees

“The German invaders want a war of extermination with the peoples of the USSR ... if the Germans want a war of extermination they will get it.” ... Stalin to his Generals on November 6, 1941.¹²³

At the Yalta Convention in February 1945, Soviet diplomat Vyacheslav Molotov stated that Soviet authorities had reached a figure of \$20 billion for the total reparations due to Russia. They suggested \$10 billion worth of property to be moved at once and the other \$10 billion would be paid annually over the next 10 years.¹²⁴ The three attending nations at the convention had pressing issues to decide: the terms of the German surrender, the future of Poland, the division of Berlin, and the roles France and other Allied parties should be given in the post-war administration of a defeated Germany. Consequently, the specifics of restitution were not a priority for the US or Great Britain. Although the US was not making claims for reparations and Great Britain was making minimal claims, they did acknowledge that the Russians deserved considerable compensation. As Edward Stettinius Jr, Roosevelt's aide at the Convention commented, “Eden observed that his government well understood the extent of the suffering and the need of the Soviet government and would, therefore, not be parsimonious in the apportionment of reparations to Russia.”¹²⁵ Even though the three nations agreed there

¹²³ George Ginsburgs, *Moscow's Road to Nuremberg: The Soviet Background to the Trial*. Law in Eastern Europe; No. 47. (The Hague; Boston; Cambridge, MA, U.S.A.: M. Nijhoff; Sold and Distributed in the U.S.A. and Canada by Kluwer Law International, 1996), 25.

¹²⁴ Edward R. Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians; the Yalta Conference*. 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), 1949, 2247.

¹²⁵ Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians; the Yalta Conference*, 3017.

should be significant reparations to Russia, they ‘tiptoed’ around the 20 billion amount. Historians suggest Roosevelt and Eden did not want to openly question Russia’s restitution figure, considering it more important to have Russia’s agreement on issues they considered more crucial. In other words, issues revolving around cultural restitution were lost in a maze of greater concerns. Regardless, it was decided a more detailed investigation into Russia’s compensation number would be discussed at a conference in Moscow later in the year.

Therefore, in the absence of any real resistance, Stalin immediately began issuing decrees ordering the expropriation of valuables from Germany. In terms of formal decrees concerning the formation of the trophy brigades, one of the problems that has always plagued researchers is access to Soviet war records, which remain unavailable to researchers. However, it is possible to piece together the gist of these decrees from various reliable, unofficial sources. One such source identified by Akinsha was the publication of *Dobycha* in 1994 by the late Russian military historian Pavel Knyshevskii, who at the beginning of perestroika had access to Communist Party archives.¹²⁶

Ten days after returning from Yalta Stalin signed a decree establishing the Special Committee on Germany, which would be responsible for the confiscations of valuables in the occupied territories. Signed on February 21, 1945, the committee was charged with supervising commissions created on every front to organize the collection of trophies.¹²⁷ According to Knyshevskii, the February 21, 1945 order was called, “Decree (postanovlenie) of the State Committee of Defense (Gosudarstvennyi Komitet oborony,

¹²⁶ Akinsha, Konstantin. "Stalin's Decrees and Soviet Trophy Brigades: Compensation, Restitution in Kind, or ‘Trophies’ of War?," 195.

¹²⁷ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 174.

GKO) No 7563 (top secret) on the establishment of permanent commissions at the operating Soviet military fronts and on orders for removal of industrial equipment and materials from Poland and Germany.” A second decree, signed four days later, was called the Decree of the State Committee of Defense (GKO) No 7590. Like the previous document, it too was top secret. This decree ordered the establishment of the Special Committee under the State Committee of Defense headed by Grigorii Malenkov. The new body was to coordinate the activities of the trophy brigades.¹²⁸

Knyshevskii lists further decrees ordering the removal “to Moscow for enrichment of state museums the most valuable works of painting, sculpture and applied arts and also antiquarian and museum valuables in quantities not exceeding 2000 items from the trophy warehouses in Dresden.”¹²⁹ The decree concerning Dresden, signed by Stalin on June 26, 1945, ordered the State Committee of Defense, to remove the Dresden State collection and its purpose was clearly expressed, “Give the order to the Committee on Arts Affairs of the Council of Peoples Commissars of the USSR (Comrade Khrapchenko) to remove to the repository of the committee in Moscow the most valuable artworks ... from the trophy storages in Dresden for the enriching of state museums.”¹³⁰ All decrees were personally signed by Stalin, which would be an important point in the 1990s when the Russian government debated the legal ownership of these very same treasures.

With these orders, preparations for robbing Europe were set in motion, and thousands of officials from state agencies and organizations were receiving orders to

¹²⁸ P. N. Knyshevskii, *Dobycha: Taïny Germanskikh reparatsiï* (Moskva:Soratnik, 1994), 9-10.

¹²⁹ Knyshevskii, *Dobycha: Taïny Germanskikh Reparatsiï*, 98-99.

¹³⁰ Konstantin Akinsha and Grigorii Kozlov, “The Discovery of the Secret Repositories,” In *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 164.

report for duty in the trophy brigades.¹³¹ Although this marked the first time the Soviets officially sent trophy brigades to confiscate art, it certainly was not the first time they expressed a desire for compensation - the concept of restitution, which motivated the missions of the trophy brigades, started well before this. In November 1942, the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of Crimes of the German-Fascist Bandits and their Accomplices and Appraisal of the Losses Incurred by Citizens, Kolkhozniks, Social Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR, was established to systematically compile reports that enumerated losses “in painstaking detail.”¹³² An abridged list for Kiev alone ran to three-and-a-half single-spaced pages. American Intelligence noted that the Soviets had simply stated that “the day is not far off when we will force Germany to restore the treasures of our museums and fully pay for the monuments of our culture destroyed by the Hitlerite vandals.”¹³³

Whether the Soviets were able to definitively catalogue their losses is a contentious point. Contrary to their claims, most historians agree there were many reasons they would have been unable to itemize the destruction and theft caused by the Nazis. Firstly, the country simply was not organized to undertake a task of this scope and magnitude, across its vast expanse. Secondly, because very few records survived the Russian revolution, the Soviets had no idea what treasures even still existed in the provinces. Thirdly, there are few records for the many museum treasures Stalin sold off in the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹³⁴ Therefore, although the commission started out

¹³¹ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 45.

¹³² Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 3974.

¹³³ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 3982.

¹³⁴ Oleg Krasnov, “How the Bolsheviks Sold off Romanov Treasures to the West,” *Russia Beyond*, November 2017. <https://www.rbth.com/arts/326830-lost-treasures-hermitage-kremlin-bolsheviks-sold>.

wanting ‘like for like restitution’, it soon became apparent this was impossible without knowing their losses, of which they would never have an accurate list. Without these lists of losses, the lists provided to the trophy brigades were merely shopping lists to facilitate restitution ‘in general’. It should also be noted that historians commonly agree that with a few exceptions, most of the Soviet’s losses were cultural monuments, not necessarily great works of art.¹³⁵

Concept of Soviet Restitution

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to determine when and where the concept of Soviet restitution started because it was that concept which motivated the dispatch of the trophy brigades. One important document that would have stoked an early fire of Soviet resentment towards the Nazi destruction was *The Molotov Paper on Nazi Atrocities*. Written by Vyacheslav Molotov, a Soviet politician and diplomat under Stalin, the paper was available in his own country and published in 1942 by the American Council on Soviet Relations in New York.¹³⁶ Molotov served as Chairman of the People’s Commissars from 1930-1941 and as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1939-1949.¹³⁷ His paper on Nazi atrocities was not only widely circulated in his own country but also sent to all foreign Ambassadors and ministers of countries the Soviet Union had diplomatic relations with. Although most historians feel Molotov’s paper is exaggerated,

¹³⁵ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 185.

¹³⁶ Vyacheslav Molotov, *The Molotov Paper on Nazi Atrocities*, (The American Council on Soviet Relations: New York, 1942), 8.

¹³⁷ Eric Phipps and Gaynor Johnson, *Our Man in Berlin: The Diary of Sir Eric Phipps, 1933-1937* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), xviii.

the atrocities he lists would have given birth to a nationwide ethos of revenge and restitution.

Molotov paper took pains to emphasize the criminal conspiracy that was at the heart of Nazi policies in the Soviet Union. The politician claimed that “Abundant documentary material at the disposal of the Soviet government testifies to the ... irrefutable facts proving that this regime of thunder and bloody terrorism against the non-combatant population of occupied villages and towns represents a definite system, devised beforehand and encouraged by the German government and German command, who consciously let loose among the officers and soldiers of their army the basest bestial instincts.” Molotov adds that “in their treacherous attack on the Soviet Union the fascist scoundrels made it their aim to destroy the great Russian people and its culture.” The paper accuses the German army of being involved in the “devastation and destruction of innumerable material and cultural values of our people, loss of the non-combatant population of their property accumulated by persistent labor ... and bloody massacres, the horrors of which the most horrible crimes ever known in human history fade into significance”¹³⁸

Molotov's paper goes from town-to-town documenting in extreme detail civilian deaths, and the destruction of villages, including houses, civilian property, factories, mills, schools, libraries, and hospitals. Molotov also stokes Soviet national pride by describing the bravery of their citizens during these attacks. One such citizen was Galkin, who Molotov describes as a modest, ordinary Soviet person who owns a printing press. When Galkin refused to set up the text of German leaflets, he was tortured but they could

¹³⁸ Molotov, *The Molotov Paper*, 8-9.

not break his will. Bleeding on the scaffold he shouted, “You won’t put the Russian people on their knees! The hour of vengeance will soon strike, and all of you will be throttled to the last man!”¹³⁹

Although it’s difficult to access the accuracy of Molotov’s report, the most important thing to take away from it is that it was used by the Extraordinary State Commission to justify compensation suffered by the Soviet Union. More recent research by Patricia Grimsted argues that, although there was a great amount to be resentful for, a lot of the Soviet resentment was based on false information. As the historian points out, “As time goes by, we can realize the extent to which much of the Soviet claims regarding massive losses from Soviet lands were exaggerated and must be re-interpreted.”¹⁴⁰ However, Molotov’s report and others like it reporting detailed Nazi crimes form a very powerful narrative. Whether it was an exaggeration or not, it would have been public knowledge before the trophy brigades were dispatched and attest to the rationale behind what the Soviet government and Russian art world felt was legitimate revenge and restitution.

Regardless the accuracy of Molotov’s book and others like it, at the very least the destruction in Russia was monstrous and real. If from the beginning the concept was restitution, then it appears to be a concept that came from the Soviet art world rather than the government. Because, as in the United States, it was the Soviet art world that first understood what was happening to Europe's treasures. As early as 1943, Soviet Academic Igor Grabar, established a committee called the Bureau of Experts with the

¹³⁹ Molotov, *The Molotov Paper*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *Trophies of War and Empire: The Archival Heritage of Ukraine, World War II, and the International Politics of Restitution. Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2001), 183.

purpose of compiling a list of art works in German territories which could be ‘acquired’ as restitution for Soviet cultural losses during the war.¹⁴¹ Grabar, one of the Soviets’ most celebrated Socialist Realist painters and a revered art historian, suggested that Soviet museums damaged by the Nazis should receive compensation in the form of equivalent art works from enemy collections. The government put him and a group of experts in charge of compiling lists of equivalents.¹⁴²

In the spring of 1943, Grabar proposed to Nikilia Shvernik, a career politician under Stalin and party secretary, that “Soviet museums damaged by the Nazis should receive compensation after the war in the form of artworks equivalent to their losses.”¹⁴³ As a consequence, a special division of the Extraordinary State Commission was formed with Shvernik at its head. Although much of the artwork destroyed or taken by the Nazis had little monetary value, Shvernik and his panel of experts on the Commission considered many pieces to be of priceless cultural value. For example, when commission member Nikolai Belekhov, head and chief architect of the State Inspectorate on the Preservation of Monuments of Leningrad, described how to value the destruction of a painting by the Russian realist painter, Repin, he urged the committee to consider the national value of the painting - “It is our soul. These masterpieces have no valuation because they are priceless.”¹⁴⁴ As Belekhov continued, “We must act according to our principal national interest. Let’s take, for example, the Wanderers group. They have never been highly valued abroad. In terms of artistic skill their works are questionable,

¹⁴¹ Akinsha, "Stalin's Decrees and Soviet Trophy Brigades." 195.

¹⁴² Geraldine Norman, “Stalin and the Spoils of War,” *Independent.co.uk*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/stalin-and-the-spoils-of-war-1588312.html>.

¹⁴³ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 28.

but as the manifestation of our cultural and political life it is a period of great importance.”¹⁴⁵ This highlights another problem for Soviet art experts - Soviet art historians had no access to western art auctions making it was nearly impossible for them to put an accurate monetary value on their art. The financial value they put on lost artwork often had no basis in reality.

At one of the meetings, it was even suggested there should be plans for a super museum in Moscow - similar to Hitler's plans for the Fuhrermuseum. Commission member, Topornin suggested such a museum should be stocked with art “received as part of the penalty imposed on enemy countries.”¹⁴⁶ The committee stated, “The German-fascist barbarians, who tried to annihilate Russian culture and destroyed many famous examples of Russian art, must be held responsible for their crimes. The museums of the Axis countries are full of wonderful masterpieces, which must be given to the Soviet Union as compensation. All valuables received from the Axis countries must be concentrated in one place and can play the role of a perfect memorial dedicated to the glory of Russian arms.”¹⁴⁷

It was more difficult to calculate losses for destroyed or damaged Soviet architectural monuments. In Novgorod, the Germans had torn down the 12th century Church of our Savior at Nereditsa. The ancient city of Pskov was greatly devastated, as well as the czarist palaces outside Leningrad. The churches, monasteries, and palaces of Chernigov, Mozhalsk, and Smolensk had been shelled and burned. The final version of the Committee’s list of ‘equivalents’ covered five countries: Germany, Austria, Hungary,

¹⁴⁵ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 51.

¹⁴⁷ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 34.

Romania, and Italy.¹⁴⁸ On February 26, 1945, the first trophy brigades of the Arts Committee of the Council of People's Commissars were dispatched to Germany.

Trophy Brigades Actions

The destruction caused by the Nazis was not a good precedent to set for the Red Army, which would soon be on German soil. After Stalin had established his special committee for Germany, all the ministries were required to send out brigades of "trophy" hunters to select suitable goods and ship them home. The Ministry of Culture's trophy brigades included theatre directors, art historians and musicians. During the summer and autumn of 1945, Stalin's officials systematically rounded up all the greatest art treasures stored in the Soviet-occupied sector of Germany and shipped them back to Russia. Twelve trains and three cargo planes carried roughly two and a half million art objects, books and archival documents to Moscow, Leningrad and elsewhere.¹⁴⁹ Museum collections and the property of German citizens were ransacked and hauled back as war booty, along with objects that have been bought or stolen by the Nazis in France and the Netherlands, seized in Poland or confiscated by Adolph Eichmann from Hungarian Jews bound for the gas chambers.¹⁵⁰ The haul was referred to as "trophy art". Russian retaliation was furious. Colin Woodard writes:

At first, Red Army commanders focused on recovering looted Soviet properties, which they found in enormous caches as they recaptured western Russia and Belarus, Poland. But as the scale of German looting became clear the mood turned darker. As armies advanced into Poland and Germany, special Trophy Commission units were dispatched to gather

¹⁴⁸ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 27-34.

¹⁴⁹ Geraldine Norman, "Stalin and the Spoils of War." 5.

¹⁵⁰ Kata Bohus, "Not a Jewish Question? The Holocaust in Hungary in the Press and Propaganda of the Kádár Regime during the Trial of Adolf Eichmann," *The Hungarian Historical Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, (2015): 737-772.

valuable movable objects of all kinds before general looting by regular soldiers commenced. In Berlin, they raided museums and repositories, starting with those in sectors that would soon be turned over to their Western Allies. Some 2.5 million objects were loaded aboard special trains bound for the Soviet Union, including masterpieces by Renoir, Manet, and Goya and the famous Priam's treasure of ancient Troy.¹⁵¹

The continued and deliberate refusal by the Soviet Union to disclose to its war-time Allies its actions regarding the massive amounts of cultural property it was removing from its zone, shows that the Cold War had, indeed, started before the real war was over.¹⁵² The fact that they removed the Pergamon Altar so hastily can be seen as a Soviet acknowledgment that their actions were not sanctioned by the other Allied powers, but were, in fact, in direct contradiction to those of the Allied Control Council.¹⁵³ The Pergamon Altar, which had the highest value on the Soviet's shopping list, was a huge Ancient Greek marble structure built around 180 B.C. It was rediscovered by German archaeologists in 1899, and displayed at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin since 1901.¹⁵⁴ When the war started, it took forty Germans four weeks to dismantle the altar and safely store in the Flakturm. When the Soviets found out that the British and Americans would again take over the sector of Berlin in which the Flakturm was located, concerns were raised because time was running out. "Amazingly, in only two days, three-hundred Soviet soldiers managed to move the marble pieces and put them on a train to Leningrad - a fate suffered by countless other works of art from Berlin collections."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Colin Woodard, "The War over Plunder: Who Owns Art Stolen in War?" *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 22, no. 4 (2010), 44-49. <http://www.historynet.com/the-war-over-plunder-who-owns-art-stolen-in-war.htm>.

¹⁵² Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 34.

¹⁵³ Lina M. Monten, "Soviet World War II Trophy Art in Present Day Russia: The Events, the Law, and the Current Controversies," 15 *DePaul J. Art, Tech. & Intell. Prop. L.* 37 (2004).

¹⁵⁴ Gossman, "Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelminian Germany," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 78, no. 3, (2006), 551-587.

¹⁵⁵ Monten, "Soviet World War II Trophy Art," 37.

Chapter IV

After the War: The Soviets' Continuing Resentment

“The problems with restitution reflected the broader clashes of great power interests and ideologies”¹⁵⁶ ... Michael Kurtz

On June 11, 1945, the Allied Commission for Reparations Conference was held in Moscow.¹⁵⁷ As previously mentioned, this conference was an extension of the Yalta Convention where no agreement on reparations was made. Sumner Crosby, representing the Roberts commission, recorded at the time, “The United States must prove to the world that we have no intentions of fulfilling Nazi propaganda and that we are sufficiently civilized not to engage in looting ourselves”¹⁵⁸ However, it should be noted that there were often disagreements between the Monument Men and other US representatives on reparations. For example, Edwin Pauley, who was sent to Moscow by Truman, as the U.S. Representative on the Reparation Commission, felt that the United States should get a major share of the \$20 billion worth of reparations which the big three had agreed to take from Germany and favored the use of works of art as a basis for reparations.¹⁵⁹ There was little in Germany that the United States wanted unless it was art or cultural property.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Michael J. Kurtz, “Nazi Contraband: American Policy on the Return of European Cultural Treasures, 1945-1955,” (Garland, 1985), 75.

¹⁵⁷ Hannu Heikkilä, *The Question of European Reparations in Allied Policy, 1943-1947*. Studia Historica (Helsinki, Finland); 27. Helsinki: SHS, 1988. 126.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7121.

¹⁵⁹ Farquharson, J. E. “Anglo-American Policy on German Reparations from Yalta to Potsdam.” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 112, no. 448, 1997, pp. 904–926. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/576698. Accessed 2 Mar. 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7121.

The Allied representatives had not been able to define precisely who would get what share of Germany's assets, or even which nations would be included; nor could they agree on exact definitions of restitution, war booty, or trophies. The French and Soviets could not even agree on what items there should be restitution for. For example, the French wanted restitution for damaged factories and other businesses while the Soviets were only interested in restitution for cultural treasures. In the end they agreed to start with cultural treasures and broaden the terms at a later date, allowing cultural restitution to begin in all four zones without being bogged down. Eventually, it became more and more obvious that each power would do as they please in its own zone.¹⁶¹ In fact, reports from American military officials confirmed that the Russians had already removed many priceless treasures from their zone of occupation and that they were making no effort to distinguish between German property and cultural objects looted by the Nazis from other countries.¹⁶²

At the end of 1945 the Allies met again in Paris to discuss reparations. As a sign of the Cold War that was to come, the Soviet Union refused to attend the conference. As they correctly argued any decisions made at the conference had no authority without the agreement of the Council of Foreign Ministers. As Kurtz writes, "Consistent with their wartime pattern, the Soviets never meaningfully engaged their allies and other states in resolving restitution issues. From the beginning, the Soviets considered Stalin's decrees as providing the legal justification for their actions in Germany. This pattern and attitude has remained in place until the present time."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 7383.

¹⁶² Myerowitz, Elissa S. "Protecting Cultural Property during a Time of War: Why Russia Should Return Nazi-looted Art." *Fordham International Law Journal* 20, no. 5 (1997), 1961.

¹⁶³ Michael J. Kurtz, "Nazi Contraband," 75.

What is certain is that reports of Nazi crimes against the Soviet Union continued to inflame and cement the country's resentment after the war. One such source, written in the same vein as Molotov's *The Molotov Paper on Nazi Atrocities*, was M. N. Nikitin and P. I. Vagin's, *The Crimes of the German Fascists in the Leningrad Region : Materials and Documents*. Published in 1946 and widely circulated, the book is an extremely detailed account of crimes committed in towns such as Pskov, Gdov, and Porkhov and the killings, torture and slavery in the entire region. As the writers express, "There is no more bloody page in the history of the nations than that which has been written by German fascism. The incursions of the vandals of all ages pale before the inhuman atrocities of Hitler and his gang."¹⁶⁴ Although, as in the Molotov book, it is difficult to ascertain the book's accuracy, it is immaterial because the Soviet people accepted it as truth. From the first page, the writers promise that the book, "... has been written on the basis of documents, verbal evidence, and letters of Soviet people who escaped from the clutches of the Hitlerite invaders. It tells the truth about the monstrous crimes which the Hitlerite savages committed during their temporary occupation of towns and districts of the Leningrad region."¹⁶⁵

Recent History

"The Germans committed terrible crimes in our country. The highest justice is on our side. We do not need to justify ourselves, we can dictate our conditions..." Irina Antonova, Pushkin Director, 1961-2013.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Nikitin, M. N., and P. I. Vagin *The Crimes of the German Fascists in the Leningrad Region: Materials and Documents* (London; New York: Hutchinson, 1946).

¹⁶⁵ Nikitin and Vagin, *The Crimes of the German Fascists*, 7.

¹⁶⁶ Akinsha, *Beautiful Loot*, 233.

In the 1950s, roughly a million-and-a-half paintings and objects were sent back to East German museums, but of the rest nothing was said or heard.¹⁶⁷ The issue of restoration is still a hotly debated issue, especially between Russia and Germany. Since the 1990's, there have been numerous restitution treaties between the two countries. However, in the absence of any enforceable international law regarding restitution, none of these agreements have achieved anything. As a former official at Russia's Ministry of Culture, Nikolai Nikandrov, confirmed in 1995, "In resolving the question of the removal of cultural property, it is inadmissible to put Germany and Russia on equal footing. Convinced that the art of Slavic peoples did not represent anything of value, Hitler's army deliberately and skillfully devastated our land. Germany was the aggressor. It's their responsibility for this international crime. The USSR is a state that was subject to aggression and therefore has the indisputable right to compensation for losses inflicted on it by the aggressor."¹⁶⁸

The issue exploded again in 1991 when the publication of *Beautiful Loot* exposed to the world that Russia was still in possession of millions of pieces of looted art. The official Russian position today continues to echo Stalin's decree conception that prompted the dispatch of the Soviet brigades. In 1997, the Russian Duma passed a law declaring all art taken from Germany and still in Russia was now legally government property.¹⁶⁹ With this one law, the Russian government legitimized those art transfers to the Soviet Union as being carried out legally after the war as compensation to which Russia was

¹⁶⁷ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill & London: The university of North Carolina press, 1996), 309-310.

¹⁶⁸ Nikolai Nikandrov, "The Transfer of the Contents of German Repositories into the Custody of the USSR," in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 120.

¹⁶⁹ Michael R. Gordon, "Russian parliament Overrides Yeltsin Veto Concerning Looted Art," *New York Times*, May 14, 1997.

legitimately entitled, as opposed to the Nazi's illegal seizures and destruction of cultural property during the war.¹⁷⁰

It is not within the scope of this paper to detail the ongoing legal disputes surrounding restitution of this art. However, it is crucial to make a correlation between Russia's current arguments for keeping this loot and the original motivation behind the trophy brigades - because Russia's excuses for not returning looted art today resonate with the reasons the trophy brigades took the art in the first place. Irina Antonova, the Pushkin director from 1961 until 2013, expressed her opinion regarding the ownership question in 1997, "Soviet troops saved these artworks, while the fascists wrecked ours . . . [w]e deserve some form of compensation."¹⁷¹ Antonova was at the Pushkin Museum when the Dresden collection originally arrived from Germany at the end of the war and her sentiments are an example of the hold that the war still has on the public memory. A great many Russian citizens agree with Antonova. As Grimsted states, "Russian Duma estimates as high as 86% of Russians are unwilling to consider restitution of cultural property to Germany and its war time allies."¹⁷²

One event at which the Russians were vocal about restitution was at an international symposium presented by the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts in New York in January 1995. This conference commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and it is evident by presentations made

¹⁷⁰ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *Archives of Russia Seven Years after : 'Purveyors of Sensations' or 'Shadows Cast to the Past'?* Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998, 214.

¹⁷¹ Seth A. Stuhl, "Spoils of War? A Solution to the Hermitage Trove Debate." *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Economic Law* 18, no. 1 (1997), 409.

¹⁷² Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Twice Plundered or 'Twice Saved'? Identifying Russia's 'Trophy' Archives and the Loot of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2001, 220.

by the attending Russians, that even decades after the war, many were still towing the same line the Soviets used in the 1940s. Valery Koulichov, Director of the Department of Restitution at the Russian Ministry of Culture stated at the conference, “Is there anything wrong with the idea of compensation for immeasurable cultural losses suffered by a nation in the wake of its occupation by an adversary army? Should that nation and its people be stigmatized for their desire to be compensated somehow for these losses?”¹⁷³ Koulichov’s sentiments are echoed by former Russian Cultural Minister, Mikhail Shvidkoi, “There is a certain desire to deal with the problem of losses only in terms of financial cost and value. In my view, this is wrong. The problem of the destruction or removal of artistic cultural property exists in a complex historical, political, and social - psychological Context.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Valery Koulichov, “The History of the Soviet Repositories and their Contents.” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 171.

¹⁷⁴ Mikhail Shvidkoi, “Russian Cultural Losses During World War II,” in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 71.

Chapter V

Conclusion

This paper compares the motives of the Monuments Men and trophy brigades; two units who were dispatched during World War II to carry out their government's policies on art salvage. Both units rescued art from dark, damp mines, castles and other Nazi hiding places. However, while the MM rescued it to return it to their rightful owners, the brigades were ordered by Stalin to bring the art home to the Soviet Union as reparations. The Soviets justified their orders as compensation and revenge against their losses in the war, while the Roberts Commission, MFFA and MM considered art restitution as the politically and morally right thing to do. In other words, while the Soviets wanted compensation in kind as victims of the Nazis, the US savaged art to return it to where it came from.

The Soviets dispatched the trophy brigades to find art in Germany that could be used as reparations. Their policies were based on their reality of devastating human and cultural losses'; both of which, once lost, cannot be replaced. As historians may argue, even if the motivation of the MM may seem more altruistic, that does not mean the Soviet's need for compensation is unjustified. Even if those losses were exaggerated by various sources, by the end of the war both the US and Great Britain agreed that the Soviet Union experienced the most crippling losses and acknowledged their resentment.

This thesis has also attempted to demonstrate how strong Russia's continuing resentment for their wartime losses is even today and how this resentment mirrors the

anger behind Stalin's trophy brigade decrees. In 2013, Russian president Putin replied to German chancellor Merkel's demand for the return of German art by stating, "Probably we should not start a discussion now because people will appear on the Russian side who would evaluate the damage done to our art during World War Two."¹⁷⁵ The only criticism that historians routinely agree on is the fact that the Red Army did not care whether the art they took from Germany was the property of the German government, or that of private collectors, previously looted by the Nazis in Western Europe.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, although reparations may have been justified, the fact that they were, in some circumstances, carting off twice-looted art made the Soviets looters themselves. Even those who advocate Russia's right to compensation agree that this situation must be rectified to reflect the losses of other Nazi victims.

The actions of the Monuments Men reflected a modern, moral attitude towards restitution in comparison to practices of historical conquerors like Napoleon. We can see this through the Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, field reports and other national wartime archives. We can understand through the memoirs and essays of the Monuments Men, such as Farmer, Howe and Smyth that their motives were altruistic and that they saw themselves as patrons of the art they saved. The Monuments officers' impassioned opposition to Operation Westward Ho also attests that they considered their mission a moral one.

¹⁷⁵ Andreas Rinke, "Merkel tells Putin Germany wants looted art returned," *Reuters.com*, June 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-russia-merkel-art/merkel-tells-putin-germany-wants-looted-art-returned-idINBRE95K0OG20130621>.

¹⁷⁶ Wilfried Fiedler, "Legal Issues Bearing on the Restitution of German Cultural Property in Russia," in *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, edited by Elizabeth Simpson (New York: N. H. Abrams, 1997), 175.

Many consider the actions of the Monuments Men to be the practical manifestation of the principles of Hague Conventions, to restored heritage to countries and cities that lay in ruins. To many Monuments officers this was true even if those losses were German. As Edsel, author of *The Monuments Men* writes, “To save the culture of your Allies is a small thing. To cherish the culture of your enemy, to risk your life and the life of other men to save it, to give it all back to them as soon as the battle was won.... it was unheard of, but that was exactly what Walter Hancock and the other monuments men intended to do.”¹⁷⁷

There are those who argue that Russia should return Germany’s art, by order of Hague Convention principles. However, this punishes Russia but not Germany for their wartime crimes. Either way, the reparations versus restitutions debates have continued since the end of the war and are likely to continue into perpetuity. What is certain is that both the Monuments Men and the Soviet trophy brigades felt justified for their actions with regards to the art they salvaged during World War II.

¹⁷⁷ Edsel and Witter, *The Monuments Men*, 254.

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