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Kenneth D. Alford. *Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection: The Looting of Europe's Art Treasures and Their Dispersal after World War II.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2012. 269 pp. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6815-7.

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Nazi art looting and its aftermath continue to provide fertile ground for scholars in many disciplines, including professional and amateur historians. A particularly prolific author in the latter category is Kenneth D. Alford, a retired banker and historical consultant for television. His latest book, *Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection*, adds yet another layer to the moral depravity, victimization, cultural loss, and detective work that make up the larger history of art in World War II. Alford bases his account on the recently available interrogations collected by S. Lane Faison on behalf of the Office of Strategic Services along with Property Art Cards from the Munich Collection Point, all of which are located in the National Archives. Introducing Faison's papers to a wider audience is the most important contribution of the book, but this considerable achievement is mitigated by the fact that Alford's work does not meet scholarly standards in several respects.

Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection makes two arguments. First, the preface describes Nazi art looting as different from previous episodes of looting because it was "officially planned and expertly carried out." The acquisition of art by all available means enhanced the "cultural prestige" of the regime while inadvertently exposing its intellectual constraints (p. 2). Alford does not pursue these claims much further, and in contrast to other excerpts from primary sources, he does not cite Faison's papers as their origin. Readers familiar with Jonathan *Petropoulos's Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (1996) may note the missed opportunity to connect Göring's interest in art to the broader question of how he and other leaders of the Third Reich articulated and adhered to Nazi art ideology. The second argument characterizes Göring's methods of collecting art as driven by an "all-embracing acquisitiveness" or greed, hidden behind a façade of propriety in his dealings, no matter how manipulative or criminal they were (p. 15). Göring also invested so much time in his collection that it became a distraction from his administrative duties, although Alford stops short of addressing his incompetence in military affairs as well. In any case, these are not original claims, as they have been documented extensively and effectively in such monographs as Lynn H. Nicholas's *The Rape of Europa* (1994).

Alford's subsequent narrative is organized both chronologically and geographically. The book summarizes Göring's prewar career before introducing his staff and art dealers in Germany. Throughout, it is evident that there was no shortage of people who hoped to profit from doing business with him and Adolf Hitler, his main rival in European art markets. The annexation of Austria in 1938 marked the beginning of their frenetic efforts to destroy most of Europe's cultural heritage while amassing art they considered worth preserving. For Göring, this meant primarily German and Dutch masters, lots of nudes, and the occasional altarpiece or statue. In the process, he frequently undermined the infamous Einsatzstab Rosenberg and diverted state resources, especially the German air force, for private purposes. Alford's account also shows how Göring, his agents, and other collaborators upended local economies as they were willing and able to pay exorbitant prices for artworks with occupation notes or barter items. While Paris was by far the most lucrative terrain for their exploits, the author systematically covers most of Europe, describing several national art markets and their most important dealers. Given his narrow primary source base, however, this approach can make for tedious, if not repetitive reading until his chronology reaches the end of the war. After listing Göring's considerable wealth, the final third of the book is devoted to his efforts to escape Berlin while preserving his riches. American soldiers finally captured

him in Bavaria and then managed to locate and catalogue most of the hidden artwork.[1] Alford concludes this sordid story with the equally tragic fate of Göring's art collection in postwar Europe. Many liberated countries simply failed to return looted art to its owners or their descendants. Jews whose property Göring and his ilk had confiscated were thus victimized once more, and the restitution claims that reached various courts after the end of the Cold War attest to the pernicious legacy of the Nazi regime.

Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection contains a wealth of factual information that enhances our understanding of Nazi art looting. However, newly available archival material did not yield new interpretive insights, mainly due to methodological shortcomings. For one, there is a noticeable lack of critical engagement with either primary or secondary sources. Regarding the former, Alford neither attempts to corroborate the interrogation reports on which his account relies nor questions the self-exculpatory motives of those who were interrogated. Since these were people within Göring's vast network of agents and dealers or Göring himself, their victims remain silent and decontextualized. As for secondary material, there is very little of it, and it is by and large outdated. To name just one example, characterizing Austria as the Nazis' "first victim" does not reflect the findings of more recent publications (p. 40).[2] Moreover, the footnotes only cover primary sources and do not show when and to what extent the author relies on such contentious works as Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or Albert Speer's and Emmy Göring's memoirs. Unfortunately, these problematic aspects of Alford's narrative are compounded by mechanical and stylistic issues. In addition to numerous typographical errors and incomplete citations, the use of the word "Jewess" as a description of a German art dealer's Jewish wife struck this reviewer as an example of linguistic insensitivity that could have been avoided with more thorough editing (p. 83). Overall, *Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection* demonstrates that the topic of looted art is as fascinating as it is complex. It still offers many opportunities for further investigation.

Notes

[1]. Some material in these chapters has been published in Alford's earlier work, *Nazi Plunder: Great Treasure Stories of World War II* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001).

[2]. Cf. Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus* 121, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 83-118.

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