RETURNING LOOTED EUROPEAN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE OFFENBACH ARCHIVAL DEPOT, 1945–1948

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Abstract

In 1944, Pierce Butler wrote, “ever since libraries have existed, war has been one of the chief agencies of [their] annihilation.”

The looting and destruction of cultural treasures during wartime is an established fact throughout Western history, including Greek and Roman times as well as during the Crusades, when empires stripped defeated nations of their cultural heritage. During the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century, Napoleon had an army of art commissioners who were ordered to locate and seize valuable cultural property, including whole libraries, for transfer to France. But the systematic Nazi confiscation of European cultural treasures in . . .

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