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Elizabeth Campbell Karlsgodt, *Defending National Treasures: French Art and Heritage Under Vichy*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011. xv + 382 pp. Map, tables, figures, illustrations, notes, bibliography and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8047-7018-7.

Review by Dominique Poulot, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

This book undertakes a study of the French administration of education and culture, and especially of museums, monuments and archaeology. The organization of the chapters is simple to understand, and follows a largely chronological order; the English is always clear, and the information is generally accurate and useful.[1]

Although it is a study of the Vichy government, because of the central role of Jaujard, general administrator of French museums, Paris is largely at the center of many developments. As the author concentrates on a portrayal of those heritage managers who were erudite civil servants, she sometimes omits to consider the men at the very top--she provides no view of how Vichy leaders such as Pétain, considered heritage questions--or the more general public opinion on the subject. Even if the title suggests that the book covers all facets of French heritage, only some aspects are in fact fully addressed. The place of folklore and the policies that were developed for its representation are not questioned, and the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions is only mentioned in passing. Natural heritage is treated a bit more closely (p. 109), but a complete survey would have touched upon such associations as the Ligue and Touring Club et cetera, especially as the idea of promoting tourism after the war was so repeatedly evoked in the administrative texts. Above all, it seems particularly unfortunate that the history of the activities of the Vichy administration concerning French art and heritage are never related to the idea of a "true France" and the xenophobia and exclusion it promoted.[2] For the Vichy regime, defeat wasn't the result of a military failure nor was it political. It was the logical result of the decay of French society, of the *complot* of the anti-France. It held true the necessity of regenerating society by identifying those actors who were truly responsible. The measures taken against these "enemies" were taken without any German pressure, as demonstrated by Robert Paxton and the new French historiography.

Unfortunately this means that the book cannot clearly demonstrate the different roles of the Vichy administration because it seems to conflate high-level administration, middle-range civil servants, and politicians too broadly.[3] For example, it is probably true to say that the 1941 law on museums, like the Carcopino law about archaeology, "reflected common ground among traditionalists, moderates and leftists who believed the state held a moral obligation to protect the artistic patrimony" (p. 100). But to say that "the politically moderate Jaujard and known communist sympathizer Billiet but also vichyste Admiral Darlan" all shared the same belief in the moral obligation to protect the artistic patrimony is a truism (p. 100). Yes, all French had (and have) a general patriotic will, they did (and do) not want to see their patrimony destroyed, but if we try to be more precise and to define what kind of patrimony conservatives and communists wanted to be honored, this is too simple.

The differences in responsibility for plundering, as well as the differences in what was a hierarchical administration are somewhat blurred, as illustrated by the repeated reference (in both the introduction and chapter nine) to a "friendly" letter sent in May 1944 by the curator and *resistant* Huyghe to the French art dealer Lefranc, who was trafficking with the Gestapo. This "revelation" is supposed to demonstrate the desire of French curators to take the best paintings from confiscated

Jewish collections for addition to the national collections, even if it meant dealing with the “bad guys.” The argument culminates in an ironic discussion of Jaujard’s merits, making them appear dubious, as the author evokes his successful career after 1945. But there is no evidence in the book that curators were guilty of any misconduct, other than being in charge of museums at a time of tragedy.

In fact, the author argues for a continuity of the French administration. The Vichy regime “accelerated a thirty-year trend toward centralized patrimonial policy” (p. 117), and the archeological reforms “reflect a common trend during the Occupation, in which a continuity of ideas from the Third Republic underlay the Vichy regime’s new policies” (p. 139). Chapter nine’s well-balanced conclusion could have been the general conclusion of the book: “The successful protection of French museum collections was the result of careful planning before the war, a truly heroic effort on the part of numerous French officials who evacuated works of art and watched over the far-flung depots throughout the Occupation, and the Germans’ willingness to postpone the ‘repatriation’ of works from French museums until the anticipated Nazi victory” (p. 260).

Both chapter seven, “Recycling French Heroes: The Destruction of Bronze Statues,” and chapter eight, “Endangered Local Patrimony,” are very good and well-grounded in archival work, especially in Chambéry (as previously partly published in *French Studies*[4]). However, they deal with the sense of heritage in France rather than its administration. Public opinion, and not the administration, nor the state is the focus here (the work by Pierre Laborie about the social representations under Vichy is duly cited in the bibliography). The author concludes that the selection of statues to be destroyed was largely made by local authorities and did not represent any deliberate manipulation of political symbols. Carrying out the program imposed by Paris and Vichy often resulted, as in Nantes, “in the confusion of competing Franco-German directives” (p. 189). In effect, the treatment of the statues was the result of many different agendas, actions and reactions—as the lack of workers sent to the STO (p. 146)—and not the logical and necessary result of a planned destruction of statuary celebrating leftist figures. But one wonders if the statement by Maurice Agulhon—that the statue-recycling campaign to satisfy German demands for nonferrous metal (as opposed to Göring’s first idea to confiscate church bells) was linked to the desire to end the *statuomanie* so much a part of the commemorative compulsion of the republic—was as erroneous as the author seems to think. The campaign was not only political, it was also related to aesthetic arguments, as right-wing art critics made clear. For Vichy, it was above all “a fortunate coincidence,” as Marcel Ravan, a critic of *Beaux-Arts*, wrote—one of the many wonderful quotations in the book (p. 154).

A lot of cultural developments during the Vichy era were in fact such “coincidences,” such as the plundering of Jewish art collections. The point the author made is that the curators “sought to exploit the liquidation of Jewish collections,” through “institutional opportunism” which seems perfectly true (p. 227). At the end of the discussions about the use of the right of first refusal (*préemption*) and the budgetary increase in 1941 and 1942 for the planned acquisitions of prestigious sequestered Jewish collections, she quotes Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton: “The focus was no longer Jews, but a patriotic defense of French national treasure. What pushed Vichy to near panic was its sense of powerlessness” (p. 210).[5] This desire to restore a modicum of French control seems to have been, as in a lot of other actions, absolutely central in the administration of heritage.

On the other hand, making a national profit from the circumstances is a story which is not specifically related to Vichy: big money and big paintings have demonstrated throughout the twentieth century, at the Louvre as well as other great museums, that, “notions of public and private blurred in the defense of *le patrimoine national*!” (p. 233). All curators try to fulfill their professional goals and to enrich their museums. In forging the hypothesis of a French “patrimania,” she might just as well be describing the *habitus* of any museum curator. Pierre Bourdieu, who had studied the French museums some thirty years ago, coined the term “disinterested rapacity.” All over the world, this profile of the civil servant in charge of national heritage and eager to increase the collections of

his or her museum at the expense of private collectors is more common than the book seems to express.

The same is true in the last chapter about “the Vichy legacy.” Echoing Hector Feliciano’s book, *The Lost Museum*, the author describes the French museum officials’ reluctance to admit their silence about Jewish collectors and sequestered artworks for nearly half a century.[6] The history of heritage management is the result, in France, of the famous efficiency of the French bureaucracy and of the legalism of top bureaucrats, *Normaliens* and other curators, and this peculiar national trait is probably underestimated here. This is clearly a shame for the institution, but it can be understood as part of France’s passion for cultural assimilation and the ideal of a national heritage. As the former Director of Museums, Hubert Landais, said to Hector Feliciano, “we never attempted to look for the owners. I realize how surprising that must seem.”[7] Happily, things are changing rapidly. For example, the Beaubourg Museum of Modern Art has removed three paintings by Fédor Löwenstein (1901-1947) from its inventory and recorded them in the register of *Musées nationaux récupération* because a curator discovered that these paintings, which were on display in the “salle des martyrs” of the Jeu de Paume, had been stolen from the studio of the artist, as was made clear by Nazi photographs and the Valland archives (p. 5).

#### NOTES

[1] There are some odd exceptions. On p. 43, Karlsgodt writes, “until the summer of 1940, the cultural professions employed a disproportionate number of Jews and communists” and on p. 208, when describing the Jewish statute of 1940, she writes that “this official Anti-Semitism was more cultural than racial.”

[2] For example, Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars Over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[3] There is a full study of Louis Hautecoeur as historian, journalist and ideologue of the French heritage by Antonio Brucculeri, *Du dessein historique à l'action publique. Louis Hautecœur et l'architecture classique en France* (Paris: Picard, 2007).

[4] Elizabeth Karlsgodt, “Recycling French Heroes: The Destruction of Bronze Statues under the Vichy Regime,” *French Historical Studies* 29/1 (January 2006): pp. 143-181.

[5] Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1981), p. 103.

[6] Hector Feliciano, *The Lost Museum: The Nazi Conspiracy to Steal the World's Greatest Works of Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 286. See the recent publication about the plundering by the Einsatzstab Rosenberg (E.R.R): Emmanuelle Polack and Philippe Dagen, *Les Carnets de Rose Valland. Le pillage des collections privées d'œuvres d'art en France durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Dijon: Éditions Fage, 2011).

[7] Feliciano, *The Lost Museum*, p. 286. See the recent publication about the plundering by the Einsatzstab Rosenberg (E.R.R): Emmanuelle Polack and Philippe Dagen, *Les Carnets de Rose Valland. Le pillage des collections privées d'œuvres d'art en France durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Dijon: Éditions Fage, 2011).

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