

THE Book Collector

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GOLDSMITH

Balthus

*Télémaque*

ZHENYA

Gulliver 

*Tenschert*



BASIE

*Galitzine* 

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TOOTLEOO

*Memories Pt 2*

EAST GERMANY

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WINTER 2021

# THE Book Collector

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# Hall of Mirrors

## The Antiquarian Book Trade in Communist Germany

MARK FUNKE



Karl and Edith Markert.

Source: der Archiv Freimaurerloge 'Minerva zu den drei Palmen'.

East Germany's international antiquarian book trade was a typical cold war game. Socialism and collective ownership on one side of a sealed border facing capitalism on the other side created an unparalleled opportunity for economic arbitrage. Various government actors lost no time in exploiting it in ways that may have been understood by the participants to be dubious, but without too much difficulty became acceptable according to the codes of behaviour prevailing in the chaos of post-war Europe. In that provenance is everything, the resulting flow of art, antiques and rare books from east to west was nothing less than a tragedy.

This article concentrates on the rare book trade into and out of East Germany during the post-war period. It is important to acknowledge that the books in circulation may not have been legally acquired to begin with.<sup>1</sup> During the 20th century, continental Europe endured wars, National Socialism, communism and occupation; many rare books were stolen, seized or smuggled multiple times.<sup>2</sup>

After World War II, the happenstance of German geography dictated divergent paths for rare books. In 1945, the Allies administered western Germany and the Soviet Union controlled eastern Germany. The American military, through the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section, established a massive central depot that processed 3.2 million books and returned more than 2.8 million books to over fourteen nations.<sup>3</sup> The primary goal of the Allies was no more nor less than to return books to their owners.

Books located in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SOZ) had a different fate. Returning private assets to their owners would have undermined the development of a socialist state. The Soviets took rare books – along with art and cultural objects – and considered them restitution for atrocities committed by Germany. For this purpose, trophy brigades seized and relocated hundreds of thousands of books from eastern Germany to the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

In the summer of 1945, the Soviets implemented comprehensive land reform in the SOZ. Large land holdings, including most castles of the former nobility, were expropriated. This covered not only land, but also the personal property of 7,160 private owners. An unknown, but large, number of rare books in private libraries were

1. Comprehensively addressed in Anders Rydell, *The Book Thieves. The Nazi Looting of Europe's Libraries and the Race to Return a Literary Inheritance* (New York: Penguin, 2017); reviewed in *The Book Collector*, vol. 68, no. 4, 388–91; provoked discussion, *The Book Collector*, vol. 69, no. 1, 111–13.

2. For example, Rydell, pp. 32–33, with the mindboggling statistic that 90% of Polish public libraries and 80% of Polish private libraries were plundered, lost or destroyed during the war.

3. Bettina Farack, *NS-Raubgut nach 1945: Seine Wege als Teil herrenloser Bestände und seine Auffindung*. Berliner Handreichungen zur Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft. Heft 417 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2017), pp. 16–17.

4. For example, trophy brigades seized 200,000 books from the Sächsische Landesbibliothek. Farack, p. 19.

thus transferred to collective ownership.<sup>5</sup>

Many former owners fled to the West. Frequently they hid assets underground, between double walls or in fake ceilings.<sup>6</sup> In the chaos that reigned, castles were subjected to illegal plunder by those living near them or state-sanctioned plunder through *Schlossbergungen*, the process of moving castle contents into sorting depots.

The Soviet authorities began transferring administrative responsibility to communist leaders in 1948 and in the following year, East Germany became a country in its own right with communist idealism as its guiding light. Institutions were established to distribute assets in a manner deemed best for the common good, a fundamentally different procedure from the Western legal framework whereby books were returned to their rightful owners. Situations quickly arose where actions legal under East German law could be deemed illegal from a western perspective. There was also a wider question of the morality of certain transactions.

#### *Import of Antiquarian Books*

Most writings on this subject only address the export of cultural goods out of East Germany and ignore the fact that there was also a concerted effort by the East German government to import and trade for books that it valued.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1977 the noted German collector Hans Stula wrote: ‘It is certainly not well known that East Germany, even when faced with substantial currency debts, was a confident buyer at western auctions... This was not a

5. Bernd Isphording, *Überlegungen zur archivischen Erschließung zum Zweck der Provenienzforschung am Beispiel des Teilbestandes, ‘Kunst und Antiquitäten GmbH’ im Bestand DL 210 des Bundesarchivs*. (Potsdam: Fachhochschule Potsdam, 2018), p. 54.

6. Some were successful at hiding assets. In late 1944, Prince Ernst Heinrich von Sachsen buried 80 kg of gold and silver heirlooms. These were rediscovered in 1996 and at the time valued at €12 million. Another example was that of the von Rothkirch family who in the 1940s built a fake ceiling in Castle Falkenstein to hide their family treasure. The family returned after the fall of the Wall and in 1991 broke open the ceiling where the treasure lay undisturbed. Klaus Behling, *Auf den Spuren der alten Meister: Kunsthandel und Kunstraub in der DDR* (Berlin: Bild und Heimat, 2018), pp. 133–47.

7. East German institutions were limited in their ability to acquire Western books. One solution was to trade books with West German institutions. See Björn Biester, *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte 1945 bis 1989*. 95. Deutscher Bibliothekartag in Dresden 2006 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), pp. 254–55.

**East Germany**  
**(Deutsche Demokratische Republik)**  
 1949-1990



East Germany: Deutsche Demokratische Republik 1949–1990. Author’s illustration.

one-way street.<sup>8</sup> German auctioneer Godebert Reiß has left a detailed account of East Germany’s attempt to acquire early editions of the Communist Manifesto. Moreover, the East German Institute for Marxism and Leninism was an important repeat customer for his firm.<sup>9</sup> It makes sense that important communist works should make their way into Iron Curtain countries where they were revered.<sup>10</sup>

8. Björn Biester, ‘Geschichte des Antiquariatsbuchhandels im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Literaturbericht 1997 bis 2012’, *Aus dem Antiquariat*, NF [new series] 11 (2013) No. 1, 28; quote translated by author. East German antiquarian dealers also visited ILAB’s Stuttgart Antiquarian Book Fair. See Heidi Karla, ‘Der Handel mit antiquarischen Büchern aus der DDR in die BRD’. *Das Loch in der Mauer. Der innerdeutsche Literaturaustausch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), p. 118.

9. Godebert Reiß, *Von Büchern und Büchernarren. Erinnerungen eines Antiquars* (Tübingen: Vincent Klink, 2016), pp. 59–65.

10. East Germany was interested in various communist objects. For example, they paid a West German dealer 450,000 Deutschmarks for a clock previously owned by Lenin. Behling, pp. 148–49. In 1961 the Lenin Library paid £620 at Sotheby’s, London, for

*Private Export of Antiquarian Books*

Prior to the Wall, which was built in 1961, the movement of antiquarian books occurred within a fluid grey market.

One of the most valuable books in East Germany was the so-called Giant Bible of Mainz, a 15th-century manuscript in elephant folio size now at the Library of Congress. The great Austrian-American dealer H. P. Kraus wrote in his autobiography:

[The Giant Bible of Mainz] came from the library of the Duke of Gotha. In the partitioning of Germany after World War II, Gotha became part of the eastern or Soviet zone. The library of the Dukes was claimed as national property. Nevertheless, a certain number of volumes had been smuggled out on the Duke's behalf... When I asked if [the Duke's representative] could sell me anything from the library, I was offered... a huge manuscript Bible...

Kraus purchased the bible, sold it to the noted American collector Lessing J. Rosenwald, and by 1952 it was on display at the Library of Congress.<sup>11</sup> Kraus's statement that the Duke's library was nationalised implies that East Germany would have considered the bible its property.<sup>12</sup>

The activities of Joachim Krüger are another example of the opaque operations of the period. This was the man who was described in the 1960s as the greatest book thief of all times. He was an East German antiquarian book dealer who compiled extensive catalogues without actually owning any of the books. He would

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forty-five pages of Tolstoy's letters. This was the Russians' first purchase at a London auction since the 1917 revolution (*The Book Collector*, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 269).

11. H. P. Kraus, *A Rare Book Saga* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978), pp. 122–23; Donald C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Book Collectors* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), the entry for Rosenwald, Lessing J., pp. 274–75; also discussed in Björn Biester, *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte 1945 bis 1989*. 95. Deutscher Bibliothekartag in Dresden 2016 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), pp. 251–52.

12. It is unclear whether H. P. Kraus's recollection is accurate, and even if it is, it raises complex legal questions beyond the scope of this article. Thank you to Michael North, Mark Dimunation, and Dr Stephanie Stillo, all at the Library of Congress, for reviewing the author's inquiries. For further information on the Giant Bible's provenance see: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bibles/interactives/mainz/provenance.html>; Frederick Goff, 'The Giant Bible of Mainz', *Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions*, vol. 9, no. 4, 169–70; and Dorothy Miner, *The Giant Bible of Mainz: 500th Anniversary* (Philadelphia, 1952).

steal the books as orders came in. In 1960 it was estimated that he had stolen over 20 million Deutschmarks of rare books. His greatest coup followed his appointment in 1950 as director of the Music Department at the East German Staatsbibliothek. In 1951 he loaded up several boxes of the rarest manuscripts, including those by Mahler, Mendelssohn and Wagner, and fled to West Berlin. In 1960 he was put on trial, where his defence was that he operated at the direction of the CIA. This was by no means impossible for after the war, there are several instances of the CIA employing German personnel to infiltrate the Eastern Bloc, something it did through the Gehlen Organisation, the entity for which Krüger alleged that he worked. Maybe he was a spy; maybe he was just a thief. What is unusual about his case is that his predecessor at the Staatsbibliothek had also left his post and fled to the American sector. Was this in some way part of an organised trail of smuggling? We will never know.<sup>13</sup> At any rate, Krüger gave some of the best stolen material to West German institutions, thereby putting them in an awkward position vis à vis their neighbour, from which they extricated themselves by claiming that these rare documents had to remain in West Germany because only there could they be cared for properly. Krüger spent only minimal time in jail and after his release in August 1961 disappeared without a trace. East German media described him as ‘representative of government sponsored immorality’.<sup>14</sup>

These two examples, the Giant Bible of Mainz and the extraordinary thefts by Krüger, support East Germany’s decision to construct the Wall. After it went up, it became significantly harder to export rare books without government involvement.<sup>15</sup>

13. East Germany first became aware of Krüger’s thefts in 1951 after Carleton Smith, director of the National Arts Foundation requested to view Beethoven manuscripts; Behling, p. 359. In 1968 Smith wrote ‘Music Manuscripts Lost During World War II’, *The Book Collector*, vol. 17, no. 1, 26–36. A cornucopia of research awaits those who explore this interconnectivity further.

14. Martin Hollender, ‘Joachim Krüger alias Dr. Krüger-Riebow: Bücherdieb, Antiquar und Agent im Kalten Krieg’, *Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); quote translated by author.

15. For example, in April 1989 a man from Eichwalde (East Germany) hid a 13th-century document in his underwear. He attempted to cross the border and East German border guards found the document. The man was arrested and sentenced to prison. Behling, pp. 331–34.



We now come to the tale of Edith Markert. She was the wife of the antiquarian bookdealer Karl Markert, who owned a world-class Goethe collection and died in 1969. Upon his death, she took over his business. In keeping with communist principles, East German law heavily regulated commerce and encouraged collective ownership. As a result, it became difficult to privately operate a bookshop. When an owner died or retired, generally speaking there was no automatic permission to continue the business. Moreover, it was almost impossible to establish a new business.<sup>16</sup> As for the export of rare books, that was under the exclusive purview of state-controlled entities which in general operated with the zeal of all such bodies. However, to all rules there are exceptions, of which Edith Markert was one, perhaps the most intriguing.

By what vein of human ingenuity Edith Markert managed to sell her husband's Goethe collection to the University of Albany without going through official channels has been described as a secret of the East German book trade.<sup>17</sup> But it was done. Insight into the acquisition file at Albany reveals that the university dealt exclusively with a West German bookdealer, who merely informed the institution that the prior owner was a 'widow'.<sup>18</sup> The real mystery is how the consideration for the bargain, the dollars, Swiss francs, Deutschmarks, or whatever currency was involved, reached the original vendor if the East German government was not involved.

### *Government Sanctioned Export of Antiquarian Books*

The East German government sold art, antiques and rare books internationally for dollars or Deutschmarks. This trade was a reaction to the commercial restraints that had been imposed by western governments.

#### The Coordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Controls

16. Specifically, in 1982, gross sales of the Antiquarian Collective were 84.28% of the entire East German antiquarian book market. All other dealers made up only 15.72% of the market. See Heidi Karla, p. 120.

17. Michael Eschmann, 'Die Leipziger Antiquarin Edith Markert (1927–2002)', *Aus Dem Antiquariat*, NF 18, (2020) no. 1, 23.

18. Ergo, the University of Albany acted legally and morally in the right. Thank you to Brian Keough at the University of Albany for locating acquisition-related correspondence from 1971.

(CoCom) was established by the Western Bloc in November 1949 at the request of the United States. Its goal was to prohibit Soviet-influenced countries from obtaining modern technology that could lead to further war. In practice, CoCom lists were broad, covering everything from industrial machinery to generic silicon wafers. West Germany imposed additional restrictions with the Hallstein Doctrine, which meant that it would regard as an ‘unfriendly act’ any action whereby other countries recognised East Germany as an independent country. As a result, East German currency was not convertible on the international market. Restrictions increased over time; to survive, East Germany had to obtain western currency – at any cost. By the mid-1980s, East German organisations that had been initially established with well-meaning socialist intent had morphed into expropriation machines.

A fundamental reason East Germany entered the rare book and collectibles business is that these items were not associated with communism and could therefore be traded. An incunabulum is not a communist manufactured good, but rather an item of historic German origin. Once sold at auction, passing through one or two western dealers, the provenance is obscured. An American collector need never know that it had once been sold by the East German government.

A government sponsored state antiquarian bookstore, known as the Antiquarian Collective, was established in 1959 with headquarters in Leipzig and branches throughout the entire country.<sup>19</sup> One of its purposes was to improve living conditions in East Germany by exporting books.<sup>20</sup> The Collective reviewed all antiquarian booksellers’ catalogues prior to their distribution. Where international antiquarian book sales were concerned, it would process them for

19. In German, *Zentralantiquariat*. Technically, it was a restructuring of the export department of K. F. Koehlers Antiquarium. That department was spun off into an independent company under the direction of the ‘*Volksbuchhandel*’, the people’s book trade. See Heidi Karla, p. 116.

20. Gross sales of the Antiquarian Collective allocable to export increased steadily over 1970 to 1979 from roughly 30 percent to 50 percent of its business. See Heidi Karla, p. 113.

a 10 percent fee.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the income derived, this was, of course, a further means of control.

After SOZ land reform, East Germany was overflowing with millions of abandoned and seized books. Processing and sorting could only be solved centrally. In 1953 the East German government established the Central Office for Scientific Old Stock, known as the Sorting Office, to take on this task.<sup>22</sup> The intent was to catalogue and distribute 'ownerless' books in a socially fair manner. The East German Staatsbibliothek had the right of first refusal over any books required for their collection. After their needs had been satisfied, books were sorted into three groups: those offered to other East German libraries, those to be pulped and those to be allocated to the Antiquarian Collective. This was no small task; between 1959 and 1989 more than six million books were processed by the Sorting Office.<sup>23</sup>

Employees of the Sorting Office and the Antiquarian Collective worked together closely. The implication cannot be avoided that the Collective was able to put pressure on the Sorting Office to provide it with valuable titles and thus to bypass the libraries. To what extent that happened is unclear. Of the books that were not pulped, libraries ended up with 18 percent and the Antiquarian Collective with 82 percent.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to obtaining books from the Sorting Office, the Antiquarian Collective obtained stock in at least three other ways:

1) Libraries of those who fled East Germany. Between 1952 and 1961 an average of 175,000 people left East Germany each year. When they abandoned their book collections, these were sent to the Antiquarian Collective. This provided less than 10 percent of

21. Export into Eastern Bloc countries was not administered by the Antiquarian Collective. See Heidi Karla, p. 116.

22. In German, *Zentralstelle für wissenschaftliche Altbestände*.

23. Dirk Sangmeister, 'Ein Akt der grossen Kulturbarbarei. Die systematische Zerschlagung historischer Bücherbestände der DDR', *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, no. 86, p.16, April 2002.

24. Hannah Neumann, *Die Weiterverteilung von NS-Raubgut nach 1945 und die Rolle der Zentralstelle für wissenschaftliche Altbestände*. 105. Bibliothekartag in Leipzig 2016, conference presentation; also see,

[https://provenienz.gbv.de/Zentralstelle\\_für\\_wissenschaftliche\\_Altbestände](https://provenienz.gbv.de/Zentralstelle_für_wissenschaftliche_Altbestände)

the Collective's acquisitions.

2) Seizure by customs. Books seized by East German border guards and customs agents were automatically sent to the Antiquarian Collective. Statistics are not available for this category.

3) By purchase from East Germans. The Collective operated five stores in Leipzig and fourteen other stores throughout East Germany. The 1984 Antiquarian Collective annual report explained that private acquisitions were of little financial consequence.<sup>25</sup>

The Collective was privatised in the early 1990s and continues in existence as an independent and unrelated company.<sup>26</sup> This is a challenge to researchers because the business records of the Antiquarian Collective have not been made public. Requests for insight into its business records have been denied.<sup>27</sup> There are reports that these records were 'lost' after privatisation.<sup>28</sup> An argument can be made that the Collective, as a former government sponsored entity, should be subject to the same archival obligations as any public institution.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that this will remain a theory only and that the extent to which the Antiquarian Collective actively participated in expropriation as opposed to operating as a 'normal' export-driven company will never be revealed.

The director of the Collective from 1976 to 1981, Jürgen Schebera, stated in 2005 that it had been an independent company within East Germany and as such did not differ from similar companies in West Germany. Under no circumstance, he continued, should the activities of the Collective be compared to the extortion that took place with antiques and artwork. The largest customer of

25. Werner Schroeder, 'Institutionalisierte Kulturgutverwertung. Die Beschaffungs- und Einkaufspolitik des Zentralantiquariats der DDR'. *Spuren suchen. Provenienzforschung in Weimar* (Wallstein Verlag, 2018), pp. 251–64.

26. The current day Zentralantiquariat Leipzig GmbH is not associated with the Antiquarian Collective that operated in East Germany.

27. Neumann; however, there has been some cooperation. In 1993 Heidi Karla obtained one binder of annual Antiquarian Collective reports from which she obtained statistics for her article (see footnote 8); In 2005 Björn Biester entered into written communication with former Antiquarian Collective director Jürgen Schebera (see footnote 30).

28. Biester *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte*, p. 252.

29. 'Das Zentralantiquariat als volkeigener Betrieb der DDR hätte anderen Archivierungspflichtigen nachkommen müssen.' Neumann.

the Collective from 1965 to 1989 was the antiquarian dealer Ulrich Keip. His position was as follows: ‘This was completely normal inter-German business, handled in a contractually proper way here as well as there.’<sup>30</sup>

With the individuals most closely involved with the Collective insisting that nothing inappropriate occurred, there the position must remain until further business records become available.

The export of art and antiques, into which category certain books might also fall, came under the exclusive purview of the unimaginatively named Art & Antiques Company.<sup>31</sup> Formed in 1973 as a separate corporation, it was *de facto* the East German government operating under the control of the Office of Commercial Coordination (CoCo), which was itself part of the Ministry of Foreign Trade.<sup>32</sup> For many years the director of Art & Antiques reported to Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, who also held the rank of Colonel within the infamous Ministerium für Staatssicherheit – the Stasi. Art & Antiques grew into a large company. In addition to storage facilities at its headquarters, it maintained ninety-seven warehouses and in 1974 assumed control of Antikhandel Pirna with another 111 warehouses. Between 1973 and 1989 Art & Antiques reported 430 million East German Marks in cumulative gross sales.<sup>33</sup>

Government guidelines to Art & Antiques give an indication of the type of antiquarian books that came under its ambit: ‘Books and other printed matter before 1700, especially incunabula as well as printed matter from the 18th to 20th centuries of particular rarity (bibliophile editions or antiquarian)’.<sup>34</sup> Of particular note is the fact that in 1987 the antiquarian bookdealer Johannes Wend transferred from the Antiquarian Collective to Art & Antiques, after which Art

30. Biester, *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte*, p. 252; quote translated by the author.

31. In German, *Kunst und Antiquitäten GmbH – Internationale Gesellschaft für den Export und Import von Kunstgegenständen*.

32. In German, *Kommerzielle Koordinierung*.

33. Anne Bahlmann, Falco Hübner, Bernd Isphording & Stephanie Klüh, *Findbücher zu den Beständen des Bundesarchivs. Betriebe des Bereichs Kommerzielle Koordinierung. Teilbestand Kunst und Antiquitäten GmbH (1974–2002)* (Berlin: Bundesarchiv, 2017), pp. 5–10; Günter Blutke, *Obskure Geschäfte mit Kunst und Antiquitäten. Ein Kriminalreport* (Berlin: C. H. Links, 1994), p. 155.

34. Blutke, p. 178; quote translated by the author.

& Antiques became far more active in the rare book business.<sup>35</sup>

Art & Antiques, working hand in hand with the Stasi, engaged in a countrywide plunder of collectibles.<sup>36</sup> This generally occurred under the auspices of tax evasion. Collectors and dealers would be assessed to pay a wealth tax or inheritance tax based on western fair market value. When these tax bills could not be paid, as was inevitably the case, the property would be seized and promptly exported.

The money trail is opaque and worthy of a spy novel. When western dealers came to East Germany to buy, they were expected to pay in cash. For larger purchases, payments were made in advance to accounts in Liechtenstein or Switzerland. CoCo, the parent organisation, maintained a numbered account in Switzerland for the benefit of Art & Antiques backed by assets of 20 million Deutschmarks in platinum and gold. East Germany's agent in Switzerland, identified only as E. B., was arrested by West German customs agents for smuggling 360 kg of gold.<sup>37</sup> E. B. then emigrated to Costa Rica and disappeared.<sup>38</sup> This unusual banking behaviour was deemed necessary by East Germany to circumvent cold war restrictions; similar procedures were also used to illegally purchase weapons.<sup>39</sup>

Western customers of Art & Antiques steadfastly maintain that everything was above board. The West German company Sabatier Antiquitäten GmbH bought an average of 3 million Deutschmarks of goods a year from Art & Antiques. The principal of the firm was a witness at German Bundestag hearings in 1993. His position was interesting: 98% of the acquisitions were of average quality and appeared to come from estates. He had no knowledge of important

35. Biester, *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte*, p. 255.

36. For example, in 1961 the Stasi implemented 'Aktion Licht' (Operation Light) in which they broke open unclaimed safety deposit boxes (which were numerous, since many owners had fled to the West). The contents, including many historical documents, were seized and sold. Behling, pp. 35–39.

37. i.e. 12,698 ounces of gold; a 2021 market value of \$22,856,400.

38. Behling, pp. 262–70.

39. CoCo maintained over 1,000 bank accounts around the world, some with balances as high as 200 million Deutschmarks. Financial details, including information on large cash deposits and weapons acquisitions, are described in *Deutscher Bundestag 12. Wahlperiode. Beschlußempfehlung und Bericht*. Drucksache 12/7600. Bonn, 27 May 1994.

cultural assets being sold.<sup>40</sup> In other words, these were completely normal business transactions.

In contrast to the Antiquarian Collective, Art & Antiques records are available to researchers. The federal archive of Germany houses 74.27 linear metres of Art & Antiques records covering 1974 to 2002. In 2017 the archive published a 759–page summary of these records.<sup>41</sup> Additional information is in the Stasi archive that encompasses an incomprehensible 111 kilometres of files. In 2020 the Stasi archive published a 666–page summary of records pertaining to East German cultural assets.<sup>42</sup> These extensive archives will provide valuable provenance information as they are analysed and digested.<sup>43</sup>

Reports on the German Bundestag hearings into CoCo and Art & Antiques are available online. These reveal that the West German spy agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), had at least fifteen informants holding various positions within CoCo.<sup>44</sup>

The director of CoCo, Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, provided the BND with significant documentation in 1989. The BND refuses to provide copies of these documents to the German Bundestag, even in closed sessions. When the committee asked the

40. Deutscher Bundestag 12. Wahlperiode. *Dritte Beschlußempfehlung und dritter Teilbericht*. Drucksache 12/4500. Bonn, 3 March 1993, pp. 52–54; Deutscher Bundestag 12. Wahlperiode. *Ergänzung zur dritten Beschlußempfehlung und zum dritten Teilbericht*. Drucksache 12/4832 (Bonn, 28 April 1993) p. 8.

41. Bahlmann *et al.*

42. Ralf Blum, Helge Heidemeyer & Arno Polzin, *Auf der Suche nach Kulturgutverlusten. Ein Spezialinventar zu den Stasi-Unterlagen* (Berlin: Der Bundestagbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 2020).

43. For example: Stasi surveillance photographs were recently used in legal proceedings to establish ownership of a valuable painting. Tom Mashberg, 'A Son Seeks Art Looted by the East Germans', *The New York Times* (27 November 2014).

44. Ingrid Köppe, *Abweichender Bericht der Berichterstatterin der Gruppe Bündnis 90/Die Grünen im 1. Untersuchungsausschuß* (1994), 6–43. Although this report was leaked in 1994 and is freely available on the internet, cited in numerous newspaper articles, and cited extensively in Behling's book, *Auf den Spuren der alten Meister*, it was never published by the German Bundestag which continues to view it as classified. In 2017 a formal request was made to make the report public, which was denied. See Deutscher Bundestag 18. Wahlperiode *Antrag Geheimhaltung eines Sondervotums von 1994 zum 1. Untersuchungsausschuß der 12. Wahlperiode zur Aufarbeitung der DDR-Geschichte (MfS/KoKo) des Bundestages nach über zwei Jahrzehnten aufheben*. Drucksache 18/12821 (Berlin, 20 June 2017).

BND whether it provided Schalck-Golodkowski and his wife with new identities, the BND denied it. Later, the committee discovered that the BND had in fact done this very thing – provided new identities. Germany's spy agency apparently lied to the German Bundestag.<sup>45</sup>

Horst Schuster was the director of Art & Antiques from 1973 to 1980 and – this is significant – was a spy for both the CIA and BND. Schuster was recruited by the CIA in 1965 and in 1982 was, at his request, extracted from East Germany by the BND. The BND also refused to turn over its Schuster files to the investigative committee.<sup>46</sup>

The highest reaches of German government were aware of Art & Antiques export activities. In May 1977 the BND circulated a memorandum explaining CoCo and Art & Antiques to the Federal Chancellor's Office, the Foreign Affairs Office and the Ministry of Finance and Economics.<sup>47</sup>

In any situation involving spy agencies, mere civilians will never know the truth. It may even be that no one person, even within the agencies, knows the truth. It may also be that beneath the various layers of evasion, distortion and dissemblance, the truth is no longer recognisable by anyone. Everything is a hall of mirrors.<sup>48</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The East German government is clearly culpable for orchestrating the mass export of collectibles. But we must remember that East Germany's actions were necessitated by cold war pressures, which were by no means insignificant. 'Saviour' or 'villain' is often a matter of perspective. In a communist society such as East Germany that valued the collective over private property, the activities of the Antiquarian Collective and Art & Antiques helped ensure that society remained solvent, something that was clearly beneficial to the

45. Köppe, pp. 22–26.

46. Köppe, pp. 28–33.

47. 'Meldung des Bundesnachrichtendienstes Tagebuchnummer 488/77, VS-Vertraulich, Kennziffer WIR M 0422/77 vom Mai 1977', printed in Behling, p. 175.

48. Another unusual report: The BND allegedly orchestrated the transfer of a villa to the spouse of a CoCo informant. How this was justified remains unclear. Behling, pp. 176–77.



people within the country. The arguments are familiar. Which is deemed right, usually depends on who has the upper hand. Western media has overwhelmingly concluded that East Germany engaged in ‘cultural barbarism’.<sup>49</sup>

Western dealers uniformly declare their innocence. They were dealing with willing buyers and sellers, that is to say the various East German governmental institutions. No one had been forced to do business with them. The transactions were therefore *de facto* legal under East German law. Private parties have a self-interest in not disclosing the full facts. Without more information, their culpability cannot be established. Addressing it, should it exist, is quite another matter. In any case, the issues involved cannot be easily weighed by those who were not party to the higher moral questions imposed by communism or the lower physical desires imposed by shortages of the means of living decently.

American and West German governments are far from forthright, but the record establishes that they knew all along what East Germany was doing. By inaction, they became enablers and are also at fault, maybe significantly.

Much is still unknown; East Germany’s international antiquarian book trade remains a chimera.

49. From the title of Sangmeister’s article, see footnote 23; similar bombastic language of ‘there is blood on it’: Rainer Erices, Nicola Kuhrt & Peter Wensierski, ‘Da klebt doch Blut dran’, *Der Spiegel*, 30/2014. For a measured tone that avoids reactionary language, see Biester, *Deutsch-deutsche Büchergeschäfte*.