Raiders of the Lost Art:  
The Monuments Men and Their Legacy

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Introduction

In the last several years, the stories of the Monuments Men have become more widely known. Lynn Nicholas’ seminal book on the fate of art in World War II, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe’s Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, was made into the highly acclaimed 2008 documentary of the same name.\(^1\) In 2010 and 2013, Robert M. Edsel published two books that focused exclusively on the plight and mission of the Monuments Men in Europe: *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* and *Saving Italy: The Race to Rescue a Nation’s Treasures from the Nazis* respectively.\(^2\) George Clooney brought the Monuments Men to an even larger audience in 2014 with his Hollywood fictionalization of Edsel’s *The Monuments Men*, starring Matt Damon, Bill Murray, and Cate Blanchett. As a result, many are now familiar with the Monuments Men of World War II and their mission to protect sites of cultural importance and to recover and return works of art stolen by Hitler and the Nazis.

As this paper will demonstrate, there is much more to the story of the Monuments Men than the recent Hollywood film. This paper will first focus on Adolf Hitler’s relationship with art and his grand designs for a super museum, or the Führermuseum, in his hometown of Linz, Austria. In order to fill the Führermuseum with the greatest artworks in Europe, Hitler quickly realized that he would have to steal from museums, collectors, and dealers. As the Nazis swept through Europe during World War II, they deliberately and systematically stole works of art from the conquered nations that would be suitable for the Führermuseum as well as private collections of the leading Nazi members like Herman Goering, Hitler’s second in command.

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As the Allies descended upon the Nazis at the end of World War II, the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA) of the Allied Army was formed. The men and women serving in the MFAA, known as the Monuments Men, were first tasked with protecting works of art and important cultural sites from the ravages of battle. At the end of World War II, with the Allied victory over the Germans, the MFAA effort was shifted to recovery in northern Europe, where the Monuments Men were charged with finding hidden Nazi caches of art and returning these works to their rightful owners.

This paper will also bring to light the Monuments Men’s efforts in Japan, a country that saw more bombs fall on it than any other during World War II. All of the recent attention on the Monuments Men focuses on the protection and rescue measures of the MFAA in Europe. Continually neglected are the efforts of the Monuments Men in Asia, a continent whose artworks and monuments not only needed protecting but were also subjected to destruction and damage.³

Finally, this paper will conclude with the ongoing legacy of the Monuments Men of World War II by discussing two cases of twenty-first century Monuments Men. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Colonel Matthew Bogdanos of the US Army was enraged by the looting and destruction of artworks at the Iraq Museum and formed a Monuments Men group. Like the MFAA in World War II, Bogdanos made it his mission to educate the US army about the importance of the art and sites in Iraq; his team also protected and recovered works of art.

The second case of a modern day Monuments Men team is taking place right now in Syria, a country whose artworks and monuments are being looted and destroyed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS]. To save what they can, Syrian archaeologists and laypeople are being trained to become Monuments Men.

**Adolf Hitler, the Führermuseum, and World War II**

Adolf Hitler was born in 1889 in the small provincial town of Linz, Austria. Growing up, Hitler had dreams of becoming a successful artist, and as young man, he applied for admission to the prestigious Vienna Academy of Art.⁴ However, he failed the entrance exam on two occasions and was denied admission, thus ending the eighteen-year-old’s dreams of becoming an artist. Hitler remained in Vienna, though, where he sold mediocre watercolors to tourists and tried to scrounge a living in the cosmopolitan town. In Vienna, a city known for its anti-Semitism, Hitler began to develop a hatred for the Jews. Hitler’s anti-Semitism was further fueled by the fact that many of the avant-garde artists of the Vienna Academy of Art were Jewish. Because these Jewish artists worked in a modern and abstract style, Hitler developed an intense loathing for modern art that would last for his entire life.⁵ In terms of Hitler’s personal

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³ I have submitted an article for publication on this subject in order to fill the lacuna in the research (“The Monuments Men in Japan”).

⁴ For this section, please refer to Nicholas (Chapter 1-3) and Fischer (Chapter 9) for more information. Julia C. Fischer, *How to Speak Art: Understanding Its Language, Issues, and Themes* (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2015).

⁵ This hatred of modern art would result in Hitler and the Nazis trying to eradicate modern art. After Hitler became chancellor of Germany, modern artists were discriminated against. The Nazis also stole works of modern art, putting them on display in the Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937. Some works of modern art were destroyed, but the Nazis quickly realized that the rest of the world wanted these modern
preferences, he was a philistine who preferred nineteenth century genre paintings of inebriated Bavarian monks and art that could easily express his nationalistic ideas.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler became the chancellor of Germany, at which time he began planning to transform his hometown of Linz into a major cultural center of the Third Reich. At the heart of Linz would be the Führermuseum, or super museum, that would rival the best museums of Europe like the Louvre, the Vatican Museums, and the Uffizi Gallery. The Führermuseum would be the biggest museum in the world, and it would house the best works of art from human history. The centerpiece of the Führermuseum would, of course, be Hitler’s own collection of paintings of German monks. Because he did not have sophisticated tastes, Hitler relied on art historians and experts to tell him which masterpieces the Führermuseum must have in its collection. Hans Posse, Hitler’s main art historian, began to compile lists of the works that the Führermuseum should have.

Filling the biggest museum in the world with the best art was not going to be cheap, and Hitler quickly realized that he did not have anywhere near the amount of money required to legally buy all of these artworks. Before the official start of war in September 1939, Hitler had already begun to target and plunder wealthy Jewish art dealers and collectors in Austria, including the Rothschild, Rosenberg, and Bloch-Bauer families. But even with works like Vermeer’s *The Astronomer* and Gustav Klimt’s *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, the Nazis still would not have enough of the world’s greatest artworks to fill the galleries of the Führermuseum. Therefore, as the beginning of World War II loomed, Hitler relied on Hans Posse’s lists of important artworks as he began systematic plans to loot the countries he and the Nazis would conquer.

World War II began on September 1, 1939, when the Nazis invaded Poland. Along with a hatred of Jews, Hitler and the Nazis also abhorred Slavic culture, and when they invaded Poland, the Nazis were set on eradicating the Polish people and culture. First, however, the Nazis would steal the specific items that they had on their lists of important art objects, including Leonardo da Vinci’s *Lady with an Ermine*, Raphael’s *Portrait of a Young Man*, and the enormous Veit Stoss Altarpiece.6 These works were immediately shipped off to the Third Reich to be hidden for the duration of the war in places like salt mines and castles. If the Germans had won, at the end of the war these works would have been taken out of hiding and installed in the Führermuseum in Linz and other important museums throughout the Reich.

After the invasion of Poland, European museums began to worry; they began preparations for the protection of their art and monuments. In the Louvre, canvases were taken off their frames, rolled up, and transported to chateaux and abbeys in the countryside to live for the duration of the war. The *Mona Lisa* was eventually evacuated in its own ambulance and would move around several times through World War II to ensure the safety of the most famous painting in the world. Other museums followed the Louvre’s lead, scouting out safe locations, creating evacuation routes, and stockpiling supplies so that when the Germans neared they would be ready.

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6 The first two paintings were part of the Czartoryski Collection in Krakow while the altarpiece was from the basilica of St. Mary’s in Krakow. Leonardo and Raphael were of course great Old Masters that needed to be represented in the Führermuseum. The Veit Stoss Altarpiece was actually made by a German artist in the fifteenth century; therefore Hitler believed that he should return the polychrome polyptych back to its country of origin.
In southern Europe, Italy had done everything it could in order to protect its art during wartime. In cities like Rome, Florence, and Venice (among many others), portable objects like paintings, altarpieces, and sculptures were rolled, wrapped, and transported to safer places like villas, monasteries, and abbeys in the countryside. But other masterpieces simply could not be moved, including monuments like the Column of Trajan, Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, and Michelangelo’s *David*. In these cases, the objects were often wrapped in cotton and then encased in sand, brick, and scaffolding to protect them as much as possible from the ravages of war.

Following the invasion of Poland, Hitler and the Nazis turned their attention to Western Europe, specifically Belgium and the Netherlands. Because these were not Slavic countries but were instead more Germanic, Hitler and the Nazis did not seek to destroy their culture. But Hitler nevertheless continued on his quest to acquire the greatest artworks on his lists, and as the Nazis advanced into Belgium, they took the Ghent Altarpiece from a St. Bavo Cathedral, among many other works.

For the next six years, from 1939-1945, Hitler and the Nazis would systematically plunder the collections and museums of Europe. When Hitler could not attain works legally, he changed the laws to suit himself, took objects by force, and plundered the nations he conquered. During the duration of World War II, the Nazis stole millions of objects. These artworks were taken back to the Third Reich, where they were hidden away until the end of the war. When World War II ended, and the Germans lost, the Allied army was faced with the huge task of recovering these countless objects and returning them to their rightful owners. This was just one of the many tasks assigned to the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program (MFAA). The men and women serving in this special section of the Allied army were known as the Monuments Men.

**The Monuments Men**

The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA) had its genesis in 1940 when the American Defense-Harvard Group was established in the United States. This group was comprised of well-respected museum directors, art historians, curators, and artists who were increasingly worried about the safety of European cultural monuments and treasures during World War II, especially following the fall of Paris to the Nazis in June of 1940. In 1943, the American Defense-Harvard Group recommended to Franklin Delano Roosevelt that he create “a corps of specialists to deal with the matter of protecting monuments and works of art in liaison with the Army and Navy.” Later that same year, Roosevelt founded the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (also known as the Roberts Commission), and the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA) of the

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8 The American Defense-Harvard Group was also concerned about the protection of America’s art and monuments, as they believed it was inevitable that the United States would enter World War II. When this happened, the American Defense-Harvard Group believed that the United States would be targeted, and possibly bombed, by the Germans.
9 Nicholas 211. For more on the American Defense-Harvard Group, see Nicholas 203-27.
Allied Armies was officially formed. On May 26, 1943, just ten days before the invasion of Normandy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower agreed that the protection of art should be high on the army’s list of priorities:

Shortly we will be fighting our way across the continent of Europe….Inevitably, in the path of our advance will be found historical monuments and cultural centers which symbolize to the world all that we are fighting to preserve. It is the responsibility of every commander to protect and respect these symbols whenever possible.

The men and women of the MFAA were commonly referred to as the Monuments Men, or sometimes the Venus Fixers, and they were predominantly artists, curators, and art historians from Allied countries. Following World War II, many of the Monuments Men would become leaders in the art world. Though their numbers were low when compared to the number of total troops, almost every museum in the United States had someone who was a Monuments Man in the war.

Initially, the Monuments Men began their work in Italy in 1943, where they compiled lists of its important monuments and works of art. These lists were compiled into thin, pocket handbooks that were distributed to every member of the Allied army, regardless of rank. For Italy, there were two to three regions for each handbook. These booklets were used to educate the Allies about what artworks and architecture were important so that the army did not loot or improperly billet in historically important sites. The Monuments Men also created annotated aerial maps that highlighted the major historical sites of Italian cities like Florence, so that Allied bombers would not hit priceless monuments during an airstrike. After a battle or bombing in Italy, it was the job of the Monuments Men to rush to that damaged or destroyed town and assess, inspect, and document any damage to monuments. If possible, the Monuments Men also tried to repair this damage.

Italy was in a unique position in World War II because it began as an ally of Germany before becoming its enemy upon the Allied invasion in 1943. In the beginning of the war, Hitler took advantage of this relationship and he set about to acquire many of the masterpieces in Italy for his own private collection and for the Führermuseum. For example, Hitler used his position of power to coerce Benito Mussolini, the Fascist dictator of Italy, to sell the Führer

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10 See the “Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas.”

11 General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Letter to Field Commanders prior to Normandy Invasion, May 26, 1944.


13 Hartt 5-6.

14 For example, the Monuments Men were extremely worried about the densely packed artistic treasures and buildings of Florence. An aerial map of the central district was made, marking out important sites not to hit like the Uffizi Gallery, the Duomo, and the Accademia (among many other buildings). In March 1944, the Allies dropped bombs on the Florence train station, which is just steps away from Santa Maria Novella and the Duomo. Because of the detailed aerial maps created by the Monuments Men, the bombers were able to miss completely historic monuments; this was one of the best examples of precision bombing in World War II.

15 For more on the Monuments Men in Italy, consult Brey 2010 and Edsel 2014.
priceless works of Italian cultural heritage, including the famous Diskobolos sculpture. From 1937 until the Allies invaded, Italy was forced to sell many of its priceless works of cultural patrimony.

In July of 1943, the Allies invaded Italy, beginning in Sicily and moving north up the peninsula. Two months later, Italy forsook its German ally and officially joined the Allied forces. The Allies chased the Germans up the boot of Italy; the Nazis were retreating back to the Third Reich. With the German and Italian partnership disintegrated, Hitler and the Nazis began to use other methods to acquire artworks. As they fled north, the Germans found repositories of hidden works and they took many of these, claiming that they were safeguarding them from any damage that the Allies would cause as the war progressed.16

As the German situation became increasingly dire, the Nazis began to get desperate and they stole objects more overtly. Priceless treasures were removed directly from museums like the Uffizi and Bargello in Florence. For example, five hundred paintings, including some by Botticelli and Titian, were haphazardly and carelessly placed on Nazi trucks, with little to no protection against natural elements. The Nazis then continued their retreat to Austria, with these works exposed to wind, rain, and sunlight.17

Following the Allied army north, the Monuments Men also made their way up the Italian peninsula. After a battle, an MFAA officer would rush to the site to record and document any damage to the monuments. As MFAA officer Frederick Hartt stated, “the duty of the army MFAA officers was to reach all important artistic objectives as rapidly as the progress of military operations permitted, make a complete survey of the condition of the monuments and collections in each town or village, and report at once on the findings.”18 If possible, the MFAA officer would try to repair any damage.

Deane Keller and Frederick Hartt were two of the most famous MFAA officers in Italy. Keller was a sculpture professor at Yale University, and from 1943-1945, he served as an MFAA officer in Italy, leaving his wife and son back home in Connecticut. Passionate about Italian art, Keller wanted to do his part in protecting its cultural treasures.

Today, Keller is regarded as a hero in the city of Pisa for his actions as an MFAA officer during World War II. In July 1944, Keller rushed to Pisa after forty days of intense Allied and Nazi fighting. Pisa is famous for its Campo dei Miracole, or Field of Miracles, which includes the cathedral, baptistry, the famous campanile, or Leaning Tower, and the Camposanto, or cemetery. While most people today go to Pisa to see the Leaning Tower, prior to World War II, most visited Pisa to see the Camposanto, which had walls covered with 40,000 square feet of frescoes.

When Deane Keller arrived in Pisa in 1944 to assess the damage, he found that the Leaning Tower (which had been used as a lookout by the Germans), cathedral, and baptistry had all sustained minimal damage though they were marked by shellfire. Tragically, though, the Camposanto was engulfed in flames. The beautiful and famed frescoed walls melted in the intense heat as the lead roof collapsed. While Keller tried to do what he could to save the Camposanto and its paintings, the damage was too severe. Today, restorations continue and

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16 The Germans waged in a war of propaganda and tried to make the Italians believe that the Allies were the ones who were adamant on stealing and destroying art; the Germans distributed films and newsreels that indicated as much.
17 Luckily, the Monuments Men were able to recover these five hundred paintings just twenty-five miles south of the Austrian border.
18 Hartt 6.
while you can visit the Camposanto, the frescoes are heavily restored but nevertheless remain mere vestiges of their former glory. For his efforts, some of Deane Keller’s remains were buried at the Camposanto upon his death in 1992.

Frederick Hartt was another important MFAA officer in Italy. An art historian specializing in Italian Renaissance art, Hartt was a professor at Washington University when he decided to serve in the army as a Monuments Man. Like Deane Keller, Frederick Hartt rushed to sites of battles to assess the damage. In addition, both Keller and Hartt were tasked with finding artworks stolen by the Nazis and returning them to their rightful place. Upon recovering the five hundred works stolen by the Nazis from major Italian museums, the Italians had the works returned to Florence with a celebratory parade.19

Meanwhile, in northern Europe, at the time of D-Day on June 6, 1944, there were only twelve Monuments Men in France. As in Italy, the MFAA officers were first tasked with assessing the damage caused by war. The destruction was severe in France, but the Monuments Men were not able to do much in terms of repair. Because of this, work initially consisted of making lists and inventories of all of the damage sustained in northern France. The MFAA officers then expanded their operations farther into the rest of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, where similar irreparable damage was found.20

At the end of the war, the work of the Monuments Men in Europe was far from over as they were tasked with the location and recovery of the millions of artworks stolen by the Nazis and try, when possible, to return these works to the rightful owners, or at least the descendants of the original owners.21 In Germany and Austria, the Monuments Men located caches of art in railcars, castles, and salt mines; more than one thousand hiding places were found in the first few years after the end of World War II.

Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria was one of the most important hiding places for the Nazis. The Monuments Men were able to recover the thousands of works stashed in the castle due to the brave efforts of Rose Valland, who was a French curator at the Jeu de Paume, an annex of the Louvre. The Nazis had taken over the Jeu de Paume and transformed it into the headquarters for the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), an organization that was responsible for organizing and cataloging all of the stolen art, before shipping the works to be transported to the Third Reich.

Unbeknownst to the Nazis, Rose Valland spoke German fluently. Valland blended into the background and eavesdropped on German conversations in the Jeu de Paume. At home, Valland then recorded what she had learned, writing what artwork had gone where. Her lists led MFAA officers to the Nazi cache at Neuschwanstein Castle in 1945, where it took the Monuments Men over a year to empty the castle of all of the Nazi loot.

But the largest cache of Nazi art was discovered in 1945, about fifty miles from Salzburg, at the abandoned salt mine in Altaussee, Austria. The Monuments Men had to travel about a mile into the mountain at Altaussee to reach the Nazi repository of art. Within the tunnels of the salt mine, the MFAA recovered more than sixty-five hundred paintings along with thousands of drawings, sculptures, and books.22 Many of these works were intended for display in the

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19 Hartt wrote a memoir about his time as an MFAA officer. See Hartt 1949.
21 Robert Edsel’s first book, The Monuments Men, exclusively focuses on the efforts of the Monuments Men in northern Europe at the end and after World War II.
22 Edsel 2006, 154. Michelangelo’s Bruges Madonna, Jan van Eyck’s Ghent Altarpiece, and Vermeer’s The Astronomer are just three of the major masterpieces recovered from Altaussee.
Führermuseum. Emptying the salt mine took more than three months. MFAA officer Thomas Carr Howe Jr. described his experience at Altausée:

We followed him [the miner] into the unlighted mine chamber. Flashlights supplemented the wavering flames of the miner’s lamps. Ahead of us we could make out row after row of high packing cases. Beyond them was a broad wooden platform. The rays of our flashlights revealed a bulky object resting on the center of the platform. We came closer. We could see that it was a statue, a marble statue, and then we knew--it was Michelangelo’s Madonna from Bruges, one of the world’s great masterpieces.23

At each Nazi cache, the Monuments Men followed the same procedure. First, security was established at the site. Next, the MFAA officers inventoried all of the works, and then the objects were packed carefully for transport. The Monuments Men, as always, had to scrounge up suitable packing materials to ensure safe travels for some of the world’s most precious masterpieces. Finally, vehicles had to be found to transport artworks to one of the Collecting Points in Germany. Depending on how large the cache was, it could take more than a year to empty a repository of its art and send it on its way to a Collecting Point.

MFAA officer James Rorimer was given the task of finding a suitable location for Collecting Points in Munich. Germany had been severely bombed during the war, so this was a difficult task. Ironically, two of the best-preserved buildings in Munich were the Führerbau and the Verwaltungsbau, Hitler’s office and the Nazi party headquarters respectively. Both became the Collecting Points in Munich; other Collecting Points were established in Wiesbaden and Offenbach.

Getting each Collecting Point ready to receive art was a laborious task. First, the building would have to be secured and cleaned. In addition to the massive cleaning project, each Collecting Point had to be stocked with office equipment and supplies. Because the Monuments Men would have to study each object carefully to determine what it was, and hopefully its owner, each Collecting Point had to have an exhaustive art reference library. Within each Collecting Point there also had to be a designated spot for receiving the art. Storage bins and shelves had to be constructed to store all of the works as well. Supply shortages continued, making the MFAA officers’ tasks even more difficult.

When a shipment arrived from somewhere like Neuschwanstein Castle or Altausée, the same procedure was followed. Each item was logged in and then studied to determine what it was, its country of origin, and its owner. For some works, this was an easy task. For example, the Ghent Altarpiece was universally recognized, and so it was easily returned to St. Bavo Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium.24 But for many other works, it was difficult, even impossible, to determine where it came from. When this happened, the artwork stayed at the Collecting Point and the MFAA officers were charged with protecting it.

Collecting Points also had to have a photography studio for these unknown works so that photographs could be taken and then distributed amongst the art world in the hopes that someone would recognize what it was and who it belonged to. In addition, restoration studios were added in the Collecting Points. Because many works had sustained some kind of damage from their

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24 In the case of the Ghent Altarpiece, a Monuments Men officer accompanied the polyptych on its flight home to Belgium.
transport, the Monuments Men had to try to conserve and fix these artworks.

By 1947, most of the Nazi loot had been found and transported to one of the Collecting Points. Many of the works, though, were of unknown origin. This meant that years after World War II ended, the Monuments Men were still working diligently to return works. In fact, the Collecting Points in Germany continued to function until September 1951, after which point the responsibility for the remaining unknown artworks was passed on to a German agency.²⁵

Today, hundreds of thousands of artworks looted by Hitler and the Nazis remain missing. In the last couple of decades, more and more restitution cases have come to light. With the end of communism and the dawn of the information age, looted artworks, cases of restitution will surely continue in the twenty-first century.²⁶

The Monuments Men in Japan

While the MFAA program began in Europe in 1943, during the midst of World War II, the protection of art in Asia took longer to get off the ground. In 1944, four years after identifying the important cultural treasures of Europe, the American Defense-Harvard Group began compiling lists of the most important monuments and artworks in Asian countries, including China, Indochina, Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and the Dutch East Indies.²⁷ After submitting the inventories of important cultural treasures of Japan to the War Department, the American Defense-Harvard Group then submitted to the Army Air Corps annotated maps of the three most culturally and artistically significant cities in Japan: Kyoto, Nara, and Tokyo. Handbooks outlining the location of artistic treasures and repositories of archives were also distributed to the Army Air Corps, along with larger maps of Japan.²⁸ By March 1945, experts in the field of Asian art, language, and culture were being indexed. By the end of 1945, four officers were specifically assigned to Japan and Korea, with others soon to follow, and the Monuments Men in Japan were officially active in the Pacific theater.

When the Monuments Men arrived in Japan after its surrender to the Allies in 1945, they found a country devastated both physically and emotionally by the war. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) officially took up the power in Japan “pursuant to an international agreement among the governments of the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”²⁹ General Douglas MacArthur was placed in charge in the General Headquarters in Tokyo. All cultural matters of SCAP were under the aegis of the Civil Information Education Section (CIE); the staff of CIE reported back to General MacArthur. The Arts and Monuments Branch (A&M) operated within the CIE of SCAP and was the equivalent of the MFAA in Europe.³⁰


²⁶ For more information on the Monuments Men in northern Europe, see Edsel 2006 and Edsel 2009.

²⁷ Of these countries, Japan is the only one that can match the European MFAA effort.


³⁰ I am using A&M Branch officers and Monuments Men interchangeably here.
The A&M Division’s office was in Tokyo. Along with the Chief, there was a secretary in the Tokyo office, the inspectors, and two Japanese clerks, who also functioned as interpreters and translators.\(^{31}\) In addition, the A&M inspectors worked in the field with Japanese representatives, who were all distinguished scholars; each Japanese prefecture had one of these representatives.\(^{32}\) Depending on the size of the prefecture, and the amount of art and historic monuments within it, a Japanese representative might be in charge of more than one prefecture.\(^{33}\) The A&M worked in conjunction with these Japanese representatives to show a unified front to the people of Occupied Japan, though the highest-level officials were always from the West. The Japanese representatives were also necessary because the Western scholars did not have the necessary language skills. In short, “no foreigner would have been enough of a connoisseur to make the necessary recommendations.”\(^{34}\) The experience of inspecting sites and artworks with a Japanese representative was valuable for the A&M officers, many of whom studied Japanese art and culture but had little hands-on experience, travel, or foreign language skills. Sherman E. Lee, an A&M Branch officer, stated,

For one relatively inexperienced and ill-informed about Japanese art, the opportunity to officially see and study in favorable conditions the registered objects of the country was unparalleled, before or since. I took every opportunity to avail myself of the chance, and such knowledge as I now possess I owe to our Japanese representatives in the field.\(^{35}\)

The A&M officers made inspection tours throughout Japan; these trips could last up to ten days before the officer returned to headquarters in Tokyo. Working in conjunction with Japanese government agencies governing art and culture on these inspection tours, the A&M was responsible for:

Initiation and recommendations regarding management and finance of numerous projects for protection, preservation, restitution, salvage, or other disposition of works of art, antiquities, cultural treasures, museums, archival repositories, historic and scenic sites, and historical and natural monuments.\(^{36}\)

During an inspection, one of the first responsibilities of the A&M Branch was to record the damage sustained during combat and military occupation. In areas like Kyoto and Nagoya, the number of works that the inspectors would examine was extremely high. In addition to

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31 Walter D. Popham was the first Chief of the A&M Branch in Tokyo upon its establishment in 1945. Popham was followed by George Leslie Stout, Howard C. Hollis, and Langdon Warner.
32 I am using A&M Branch inspector and A&M Branch officer as synonyms.
36 Scott 353.
investigating historic sites, monuments, and artworks, A&M officers also were responsible for examining national parks for any damage from World War II.

Following this, the Monuments Men prevented further damage to sites and artworks by prohibiting the military from billeting in important historic sites and looting their objects, because “if you let the occupying troops do what they would, they’d take souvenirs, they’d ruin the temples, the gardens, and so forth.” 37 A&M branch officers would frequently attend conferences and report on the status of their findings.

Next, the A&M officers were charged with “the location and security of any looted objects.” 38 Japan has a long history of looting its Asian neighbors, especially China and Korea. In modern times, the first documented Japanese looting occurred in 1900 when the Japanese snuck into the Forbidden City and proceeded to plunder artistic treasures, which were then immediately taken to Tokyo. Five years later when Japan added Korea as a prefecture, the Japanese army systematically looted the entire country and anything valuable in Korea was transported to Japan. With very few exceptions, these Korean artworks remain in Japan to this day, despite the repeated requests from the Korean government for their return. 39

Finally, the A&M branch wanted to increase the awareness of Japanese art amongst the Japanese. Many of the artworks that the Monuments Men inspected in Japan had never been displayed to the public. To rectify that, the A&M Branch supported exhibitions that were open and free to the public, thus making art accessible to everyone in Japan. The Americans “hoped to instill the political values of freedom, individualism, and democracy in the minds of young Japanese.” 40

One of the MFAA officers working in Japan was Lennox Tierney, whose background was in Asian art. Born in West Virginia in 1914, Lennox Tierney attended UCLA and then received a Master’s and Ph.D. in Japanese art. Because of Tierney’s vast knowledge in Japanese art, culture, and language, he was recruited to be an A&M officer, and in 1947, he was assigned to “MacArthur in Japan as a Commissioner of Arts and Monuments following the end of the war.” 41 In Japan, Tierney worked closely with MacArthur, advising the general on all aspects of Japanese art and culture and encouraging him to restore monuments that had been destroyed by the bombing. When needed, Tierney also worked as a photographer, documenting the destruction of important Japanese sites. In short, Tierney was “tasked with tracking down, cataloguing, and saving what he could of the artistic and cultural history of Japan shattered by World War II.” 42 Like the Monuments Men in Europe, Tierney attempted to return works of art to their rightful owners. When that was not possible, he brought the artworks to the national museum.

During his tenure as a Monuments Man, Tierney traveled throughout Japan. He was partnered with Isuu Noguchi, a Japanese-American sculptor. In his five years of service, Tierney

37 Steven Litt, “Cleveland’s own Monuments Man: Sherman E. Lee’s service in Japan benefitted the Cleveland Museum of Art.” The Cleveland Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), Feb. 6, 2014.
38 “Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic Monuments in War Areas,” 158.
40 Lowen 87.
42 Lindsay Whitehurst, “Utah professor was a real-life Monuments Man,” The Salt Lake City Tribune (Salt Lake City, UT), Feb. 2, 2014.
was able to save thousands of important works of art, not only paintings and sculptures, but other artistic media as well, including Japanese gardens, an important historic art form that has been in existence since antiquity. But Tierney was not always successful in his mission to save and preserve Japanese art. Some artworks, as was the case in Europe, were lost forever, destroyed in the massive bombing of the country. For example, Tierney met a Japanese tea master in Tokyo, who had an extensive collection of netsuke, which are “tiny intricate sculptures Japanese men used to store and carry vitamins and other small items.” Tierney went as far as to say that netsuke were the most important art form in Japan, even more significant than monumental sculpture. With the arrival of US forces, the tea master decided to hide his collection of netsuke, taking them to a farmhouse outside of Tokyo where he thought they would be safe from destruction. Unfortunately, this farmhouse actually ended up being near the center of the bombing and as a result, the priceless netsuke were destroyed. After serving as a Monuments Man for five years, Tierney went to Europe in 1952 to hunt down paintings stolen by the Nazis. Eventually he returned to the United States, where he was a professor of Japanese art history at the University of Utah. Tierney died in 2015 at the age of 101.

Perhaps the most famous of the Monuments Men in Japan was Sherman E. Lee, who prior to the war was an assistant curator at the Detroit Institute of Fine Arts. In 1944, he joined the navy, but ended up seeing very little action. While he didn’t engage in many battles, Lee was at least able to travel throughout the country and see the rest of Asia. Inspired by this, Lee joined the A&M program in 1946 to lend his expertise in post-war Japan.” After the War, Sherman E. Lee went on to become the curator of the Cleveland Museum of Art from 1958-1983, where he “helped build one of the most admired collections of Asian art in the west.” He also wrote a survey text on Asian art that is still being used in college courses today: A History of Far Eastern Art.

The Legacy of the Monuments Men in the Twenty-First Century: Iraq

More than sixty years after the end of World War II, many courageous people are still putting their lives on the line to protect art and monuments. An iteration of the Monuments Men was formed and called into action during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Prior to 2003, the archaeological community attempted to raise awareness of the potential danger an invasion would bring to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. Despite circulating petitions warning of the danger to artworks should the invasion cause chaos and looting at the museum, the world, for the most part, was not listening and not much was done prior to the invasion to protect the Iraq Museum, especially when compared to the myriad preparations that were done in World War II Europe.

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43 Whitehurst.
44 Litt.
46 The Iraq Museum is also sometimes called the National Museum of Iraq and the Baghdad Museum.
But that is not to say that nothing was done to protect the art and monuments in Iraq. Prior to the invasion, the US military was given a no-strike list that indicated monuments of cultural importance; these were not to be bombed.  

Meanwhile, archaeologist and anthropologist Laurie Rush, who was employed by the Army at Fort Drum in New York, began to design playing cards to educate members of the US military about the importance of Iraq’s cultural heritage. Rush stated that “since military personnel spent so much downtime handling them, they served as the ideal teaching tool.”  

About 40,000 decks of cards were given to US forces prior to the invasion of Iraq. Each suit had its own theme: diamonds were devoted to artifacts, spades educated the military about digs, clubs were reserved for issues of cultural heritage, and hearts were about winning hearts and minds.  

The goal of these playing cards was twofold. First, after learning that the military had built a helipad on the ancient site of Babylon, Rush knew that the military had to do something to prevent unnecessary damage to the thousands of sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. These playing cards were strategically planned to educate the military about the importance of sites and to prevent unnecessary damage. Second, Rush hoped that the cards would raise awareness and prevent illegal trade and smuggling of antiquities in Iraq.  

With the lists of important sites and educational playing cards distributed, the United States invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. At that time, museum officials were still present at the Iraq Museum. But as chaos ensued, the museum was abandoned and left empty of its employees from April 8 to April 16. During these short eight days, havoc was wrought on one of the most important museums in the world, which housed precious objects like the Uruk Vase and thousands of Near Eastern cylinder seals. An estimated 15,000 objects were stolen. Emphasizing the importance of these objects, which come from some of the world’s earliest civilizations, Donny George Youkhanna, the former director of the Iraq Museum, stated that “every single item that was lost is a great loss for humanity.”  

At the time of the US invasion, there was not a specific Monuments Men group that was formed. But this changed when marine colonel Matthew Bogdanos, who was in charge of an antiterrorist unit in southern Iraq, heard of the looting and theft of the Iraq Museum. Bogdanos, who received a degree in classics from Bucknell University and a law degree from Columbia University, was enraged by the destruction and theft. He stated that he “felt exactly the way the rest of the world did – outraged – when I heard of the looting in Baghdad.”  

Quick to action, Bogdanos got permission to form a Monuments Men unit to go to Baghdad to assess the damage at the Iraq Museum. Bogdanos’ Monuments Men unit was comprised of fourteen members who had extensive investigative experience.  

The team got to Baghdad on April 20 and immediately went to work at the Iraq Museum. First, the Monuments Men reestablished security at the museum so that the plundering of its objects would cease. Next, along with museum officials, the Monuments Men set about inventorying the missing objects, sending descriptions of these missing works to customs officials, auction houses, archaeologists, and police agencies worldwide. Finally, Bogdanos instituted a no-punishment rule for those who returned stolen objects. In other words, if you had

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48 Kaylan.
51 Poole.
stolen some figurines from the museum during the melee, you could drop off your stolen artworks without getting prosecuted. In short, “if you bring something back to the museum, the only question you will be asked is whether you would like a cup of tea.” Because of this policy, goods began to trickle back into the Iraq Museum, including the Uruk Vase.

About half of the estimated fifteen thousand objects stolen from the Iraq Museum were returned by the time the museum reopened in 2009. Thousands are still missing, including many cylinder seals. Bogdanos served two tours in Iraq and returned home to the United States in 2005. The same year, Bogdanos’ firsthand account of the Monuments Men’s efforts in Iraq was published: *Thieves of Baghdad*; profits from this book were donated to the Iraq Museum. Bogdanos now works in the New York district attorney’s office and leads an antiquities task force where he continues to investigate the thefts that occurred at the Iraq Museum. Bogdanos has made this hunt his life’s mission and stated that “until every last piece stolen from the Iraqi Museum has been recovered and returned to the Iraqi people, I will continue to be haunted by what is missing.”

The Legacy of the Monuments Men in the Twenty-First Century: Syria

Another version of the Monuments Men is active today in Syria, where the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is systematically destroying ancient sites and stealing antiquities to help fund their terrorist activities. The destruction happening in Syria is unlike anything that has ever happened in wartime because ISIS has the deliberate intention of wiping out archaeological sites and objects.

An extremist Islamic group, ISIS wants to create an Islamic state in the Middle East. The fundamentalist group does not like figurative imagery of any kind, even outside of the Islamic religion, and is intent on destroying any and all religious art because they believe it is blasphemous. In short, anything that is pre-Islamic is labeled as shirk, or idolatrous, and it must be destroyed. Anything that depicts a human is blasphemous and must also be destroyed. Not only does ISIS obliterate these objects, but they also record their actions so that the western world, and particularly the kuffar, or unbeliever, will be outraged. Videos are used to inspire other fundamentalist groups to act in the same way.

It has only been in the last few years that ISIS has been active in Syria. Troubles began in the Mediterranean country in 2011 when peaceful protests against the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, were met with government violence; this started a civil war in the country. As the army and the rebels fought, many historical sites and artworks were destroyed; this is an example of collateral damage not deliberate destruction. In the capital city of Aleppo, the city center, which is a UNESCO world heritage site, was 60% destroyed.

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52 Poole.
53 Unfortunately the Uruk Vase was badly damaged by the looters and was returned in about twenty pieces to the Iraq Museum.
54 Poole. For more on the looting in Iraq, see Lawrence Rothfield, *The Rape of Mesopotamia: Behind the Looting of the Iraq Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
55 Sometimes you will see ISIS referred to as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).
56 For more on Isis, see Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, (New York: Regan Arts, 2015).
In 2014, three years after the start of the civil war in Syria, ISIS came in and wrought more destruction and damage, not only to Aleppo but to the other cities and historic sites. Syria is home to six UNESCO world heritage sites, including Aleppo, Palmyra, Bosra, and Deir Semaan. Five of the six UNESCO sites have been excessively damaged by the civil war and ISIS. But Syria has hundreds more important historic sites within its borders, all of which are under threat or have already been harmed. The country is littered with remarkable Roman ruins since Syria was one of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, serving as a gateway to the east. But the history of Syria stretches even further back than the Roman Empire to over 10,000 years ago; the country is home to innumerable ancient sites.

All of the history and culture of Syria is of no interest to ISIS, who is intent on destroying its ancient cities. In September 2015, ISIS set about destroying the ancient Roman city of Palmyra. Described as the “Venice of the Sands,” Palmyra was one of the best-preserved sites of not only the Roman Empire, but all of antiquity – until ISIS came in. Because of its location on the eastern edges of the Roman Empire, Palmyra was a trading post and thus home to many cultures and backgrounds, making the art and architecture of Palmyra eclectic and cosmopolitan. But now, after ISIS’ destruction in 2015, Palmyra is an ancient city that has been reduced to rubble.

ISIS is not content to destroy monuments and culture. The extremist group has also targeted archaeologists. As Kristin Romey explains, an archaeologist is a kuffar, or unbeliever, and had “unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations and attempted to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims should be proud of.” Because of this, ISIS viewed Khaled al-Assad, the head of antiquities for the city of Palmyra, as a master of idolatry. ISIS executed the eighty-two year old archaeologist in September 2015.

In addition to the destruction of sites and objects, ISIS has realized that they can make money from Iraq and Syria’s art and have established a highly organized system of looting. By selling these objects, for which there is an avid market, ISIS is making money to fund their terrorist activities. Western countries, including the United States, have been buying these looted antiquities. In an effort to curb the sale of Syrian antiquities, President Barack Obama and the US government passed on April 13, 2016 “The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act,” which was intended to block the importing of Syrian antiquities.

As ISIS has ravaged their way through Syria and Iraq, there are many people that are doing what they can to help protect and preserve the cultural heritage of these countries. First, as in World War II Europe, 30,000 objects from Syrian museums were hidden to safer locations so that ISIS could not get at them. Khaled al-Assad, the archaeologist that was executed by ISIS, was one of the many people who helped move important objects to safety.

Perhaps most important, though, is the Monuments Men group that was formed in Syria in 2012 following the commencement of the civil war. Led by a former archaeology professor from the University of Damascus, the group likens themselves to the World War II Monuments Men.

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57 One of the most famous Roman cities was Dura-Europos, which stood as an outpost on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, giving the Romans access to Parthia and beyond.
59 Mark Strauss, “Archaeologist’s execution highlights the risks to history’s guardians,” National Geographic, Aug. 2015.
60 Deborah Lehr, “Protecting cultural heritage, one act at a time,” The Huffington Post, May 10, 2016.
Fine Arts, and Archives group of the Allied army. However, the Syrian Monuments Men have no affiliation with the army, which makes their job even more precarious than the MFAA during World War II. The group is comprised of about two hundred men and women, who are both expert and non-expert; some are trained archaeologists or academics while others are ordinary Syrians who are concerned about their country’s cultural heritage and want to do something to help preserve it. Since its inception in 2012, ten Syrian Monuments Men have been killed in action, emphasizing the dangerous nature of their mission.

The Syrian Monuments Men perform many similar tasks as their World War II counterparts. First, the Syrian Monuments Men rush to damaged areas to record and assess the damage to any monuments or objects. Because of twenty-first century technology, they are able to capture videos of the destruction on their cellphones if the conditions are safe enough. In addition to assessing and recording the damage, the Syrian Monuments Men try to perform emergency repair to objects whenever possible. Finally, they bury or otherwise hide objects from ISIS, recording the GPS location of the objects so that they can be recovered when safety has returned to the country.

The Syrian Monuments Men are also attempting to protect art from being illegally sold and looted by ISIS. Sometimes they act like antiquities dealers to take photographs of looted objects and record where they are going so that they can be recovered at a later time. Finally, the Syrian Monuments Men have the unenviable, and probably impossible, task of trying to educate rebel groups about cultural heritage and the importance of protecting Syria’s art and monuments.

Because of the extremely dangerous conditions in Syria right now, the Monuments Men must face snipers, bombs, and gunfire as they rush to assess the damage to art and monuments. This often has the effect of limiting what the Monuments Men can get done. Furthermore, the Syrian Monuments Men are faced with an extreme shortage of supplies, much like the MFAA in Europe. Recently, some of the Syrian Monuments Men have received training in Turkey from western organizations like the University of Pennsylvania’s Cultural Heritage Center and the International Council on Monuments and Sites. The training gives the Monuments Men “first aid for objects and sites.” For example, workshops showed the Syrian Monuments Men how to properly wrap fragile mosaics and sculptures in Tyvek before burying them and recording their GPS coordinates.

Not only is it important to save these monuments and art for future generations, since these objects are part of humanity’s collective cultural heritage, but if Syria is ever going to come through the civil war and the ravages of ISIS, the country will need to rely on cultural tourism to help bring it back from the brink of devastation. Thus by protecting the monuments of Syria, you are actually protecting the country’s economy as well.

**Conclusion**

Everyone knows the villains of World War II. But more important are the heroes and heroines, in particular the Monuments Men, who sacrificed their personal safety to save the priceless, irreplaceable works of European cultural heritage. In 2015, the Monuments Men received recognition for their service, when President Barack Obama awarded the Congressional

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Gold Medal of Honor to the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program of the Allied army (Figure XX).62

One does not want to dare to wonder what Europe and its treasures would look like if the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program of the Allied army had not been formed. Inspiring future generations about the importance of protecting cultural heritage, the legacy of the Monuments Men lives on today.

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