Kathy Peiss, information hunters.

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Kathy Peiss, *Information Hunters* Oxford University Press, 2020, ISBN 978-0-19-094461-2, hardback, 277pp

The author is Professor of American History at the University of Pennsylvania; her previous books have been about US social history. So why has she now written about, as the book's subtitle puts it, "when librarians, soldiers and spies banded together in World War 2 Europe"? As she makes clear, the reason is that she became intrigued by the story of her father, Reuben Peiss and his activities during the Second World War. The result is a fascinating (of slightly flawed) history of how librarians were co-opted into the US war effort – indeed, arguably they were not simply co-opted but rather pushed hard for their involvement.

The book is split into two broad areas. The first considers the role of librarians is assisting US intelligence agencies in getting hold of published, but difficult to obtain, technical, scholarly and popular media items both from within Germany and German-administered countries, and from neutral countries during the war. At times, their efforts were the stuff of spy stories when they used local contacts to obtain, copy (normally by microfilming) and then cataloguing the vast amounts of documentation they acquired. The second broad area considers the time from 1943 onwards when former Nazi-controlled areas fell into the hands of the allies, and how the librarian/intelligence/army teams both collected and shipped back to the USA key materials, but also tried to return looted materials back to their original rightful owners. In doing all this, a number of notable figures in pre-war and post-war US librarianship made their names, including Frederick Kilgour, Reuben Peiss himself, Eugene Power, Mortimer Taube and Jesse Shera. The historian Lucy Dawidowicz was amongst scholars in other fields who also made their reputation in these activities.

The author believes, I think rightly, that the efforts of those involved in the microfilming, cataloguing and indexing of the materials they handled paved the way for the post-war development of what is now known as information science. Thus, this book is an important contribution to the history of librarianship and information science.

This well-researched book is a gripping read – one wants to know what happened next; the author is also very good at describing the complexity and bureaucracy that those involved had to put up with, but also notes the strong support given to their work by key US military and intelligence leaders. The book is well supported by numerous photographs, an extensive set of references and a good index.

In sum, this is an extremely well researched and argued book, so why do I say the book is slightly flawed? This is because the book gives only the most passing references to British, French and Russian efforts to achieve the same aims (for example, Aslib only gets a cursory mention, despite its central role in equivalent UK efforts). Although covering other countries' efforts would have led to a longer book, it's a pity the author did not offer a more balanced view of the early history of information science. Despite this caveat, the book is warmly recommended.

Professor Charles Oppenheim