own argument that the Holocaust was the result of a pre-existing conviction among Germans that it was necessary to remove the Jews entirely from their society (140). Confino wants to distinguish his argument from Daniel Goldhagen’s widely rejected claim that longstanding hatred of the Jews made Germans “Hitler’s willing executioners,” both because Confino claims to reject deterministic historical arguments and because he thinks anti-Semitism was just one aspect of a larger complex of beliefs about race that defined the Nazi project. Nevertheless, in the condensed form in which it is presented in this brief essay, Confino’s conclusion suffers from some of the same weaknesses as Goldhagen’s argument. Among other things, he ignores the fact that, in spite of anti-Semitism, Jews had enjoyed considerable success in integrating themselves into German society (during the 1920s, half of all German Jews who married chose non-Jewish partners). He also says nothing about the numerous studies that have concluded that relatively few Germans shared the pathological Jew-hatred of Adolf Hitler and his closest Nazi followers. Ambition, fear, and conformity may explain the behavior of the millions of “ordinary men” and women (to cite the title of Christopher Browning’s influential monograph on German perpetrators) better than the assertion that they were all in the grip of extreme “anti-Semitic hallucinations” (128). The unconvincing nature of Confino’s effort to sketch out a new interpretive paradigm for understanding the Holocaust necessarily weakens the persuasiveness of his argument about historical explanation in general.

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In mid-October 2010, in a courtroom in Rome, Italy, the criminal trial of Marion True, former J. Paul Getty Museum curator, came to an end when the sitting judges accepted a motion to dismiss the case by True’s lawyers. The investigation and trial are described in part of Chasing Aphrodite: The Hunt for Looted Antiquities at the World’s Richest Museum. Readers may be glad to learn, however, that this book is much more than a legal procedural about the True case. The most important aspect of the legal case against True is the information uncovered about looting and antiquities trafficking that led Italian prosecutors to charge True and others. What the investigators uncovered is used by the authors to describe the operation of illegal antiquities trafficking not normally open to scrutiny.

The book’s story is about how some prominent art museums have condoned, or, at best, turned a blind eye to the destruction of archaeological heritage. The authors make the Getty Museum an example, but references to other promi-
nent art museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, indicate that this kind of behavior was common. The looting of sites is the beginning of a process that concludes in the elegant, fashionable homes of rich antiquities collectors, or the exhibit halls of some of the world’s most renowned art museums, such as the Getty.

The authors worked as reporters for the Los Angeles Times, where they researched and wrote a series of articles investigating the activities, governance, and finances of the Getty Trust and Getty Museum. Clearly the research and interviews that they and others at the Times prepared for those newspaper reports inform and provide much of the substance for the story they tell in this book.

Felch and Frammolino first introduce J. Paul Getty, the billionaire oil man. In addition to being a shrewd, successful businessman, Getty collected art, starting in the 1930s. His taste was eclectic, including a special interest in Greek and Roman antiquities. In 1953, Getty created the J. Paul Getty Museum as a not-for-profit art gallery and library for “the diffusion of artistic and general knowledge” based at his estate in Malibu, California. Upon his death in July 1976, it was learned that Getty had bequeathed most of his fortune to the trustees of the J. Paul Getty Museum to be used for its endowment. It is the development of the antiquities collection, fueled by the enormous inheritance following Getty’s death, that compels this book’s narrative forward.

Much of the Getty Museum’s collection of ancient Greek and Roman art was built through activities of its three antiquities curators between 1976, when the large endowment was created, and 2005, when Marion True resigned in the face of accusations of questionable financial dealings. During this period the Getty purchased outstanding examples of ancient art, but at a price beyond the substantial amounts of dollars paid. The full cost includes the destruction of the archaeological sites or portions of sites from which most of these art objects were removed. Such removals do not involve scientific archaeological methods and techniques with careful, detailed descriptions of the context of the objects as they were uncovered. Rather, objects are wrenched unrecorded from the archaeological matrix in which they have been buried for centuries. Information about the locations from which they are removed either is lost because it is not recorded or kept secret because to reveal this information exposes the crime of unauthorized and illegal removal.

The tragedy of looting is that the contextual information about objects recovered from archaeological investigations is necessary to interpret the function and history of the objects and this information is almost always destroyed by looting. The irony of looted art works is that their authenticity can never be certain. For example, the statue that gives the book its title may not be a representation of Aphrodite and the location where it was found remains uncertain (see chapters 6, 7, and 22). Another example described in the book is the Greek or Getty kouros, which may in fact be a forgery (chapter 4).

None of the Getty antiquities curators were accused of looting the archaeological sites themselves. But Felch and Frammolino, piecing together
information from interviews, uncovered documents, and investigations by Italian prosecutors, describe the entire process by which looted ancient art reached the museum. During the time period covered in the book, Getty’s antiquities curators brokered both sales and donations of looted art works to add to the museum’s collection.

In their epilogue, the authors characterize Marion True as “…a heroine in a Greek tragedy…” This may be an overdone allusion, meant to recall the antiquities that had such an effect on True’s personal life and were the focus of her professional career. Clearly her life, personal and professional, has been damaged by the legal case against her and her forced resignation from the Getty.

True did not open her files or give interviews to Felch and Frammolino, so her voice in the book is drawn from her writings, legal documents, and the impressions of others. They credit her with pushing the Getty to adopt policies designed to prevent the purchase of looted antiquities. Yet, they also note that True’s activities involved the purchase or donation of looted antiquities to the museum, and that she knew or should have known this. They describe, but do not critique, the excruciatingly drawn-out Italian legal proceedings that True was forced to endure. True does have two champions, and readers of the book and this review might be interested in their perspectives on her behavior and professional work. Malcolm Bell, a distinguished classical archaeologist at the University of Virginia, lauds True’s professional contributions in a Wall Street Journal Op-Ed (28 November 2005), and book review (2 July 2011). The articulate critic Hugh Eakin, writes in support of True in the New Yorker (17 December 2007), and the New York Review of Books (23 June 2011).

In the end, Chasing Aphrodite is much more than a book about the trials and tribulations of Marion True. Historians, archaeologists, museum professionals, and the museum-going public will find this a clearly written, detailed, well-documented, and engaging story. The tragedy is not about one curator; it involves professional staff members, department heads, directors, and boards of major American art museums who supported, and in some instances encouraged, the looting of ancient archaeological sites in order to obtain beautiful art pieces for their displays. We hope that such behavior by the officials who run these outstanding public institutions can indeed be referred to in the past tense.

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The U.S. government called for 50,000 volunteers for the army to prosecute the war against Mexico in 1846 and assigned quotas, based upon populations, to each state. In almost every instance, young men could not get to