

Deutsche Bank apologizes for dealing in victims' gold But report says no unequivocal record that directors were aware of source of wealth: [Daily Edition]

Henry, Marilyn; AP contributed to this report. **Jerusalem Post** [Jerusalem] 02 Aug 1998: 04.

▣ Abstract (summary)

NEW YORK - Deutsche Bank said that it "regrets most deeply injustices that occurred" after a historians' report revealed that Germany's largest bank had dealt in Nazi gold during World War II, including 744 kilograms in Jewish dental gold and wedding rings.

However, there was "no unequivocal record" that the bank's war-era directors "had knowledge of the origin of the {Nazi} victims' gold that was purchased from the Reichsbank," said the report issued Friday in Frankfurt by an independent panel of historians, including an Israeli.

But, one leading official, financier Hermann Abs, "was in possession of far-reaching contacts, and it is possible that he and perhaps other members of the board were aware of the existence of victims' gold," the report said. "Based on that, it is possible they were aware that the gold was originally the property of the victims of Nazi Germany."

▣ Full Text

NEW YORK - Deutsche Bank said that it "regrets most deeply injustices that occurred" after a historians' report revealed that Germany's largest bank had dealt in Nazi gold during World War II, including 744 kilograms in Jewish dental gold and wedding rings.

However, there was "no unequivocal record" that the bank's war-era directors "had knowledge of the origin of the {Nazi} victims' gold that was purchased from the Reichsbank," said the report issued Friday in Frankfurt by an independent panel of historians, including an Israeli.

But, one leading official, financier Hermann Abs, "was in possession of far-reaching contacts, and it is possible that he and perhaps other members of the board were aware of the existence of victims' gold," the report said. "Based on that, it is possible they were aware that the gold was originally the property of the victims of Nazi Germany."

The leader of Germany's Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, said the conclusion could have been more strongly worded.

"The people at the top, I think, all knew where the gold came from," Bubis told AP. "There was a conspiracy of silence."

The bank used its branches in occupied Austria and so-called neutral Turkey to channel its gold transactions - worth \$5 million in war-era values - with the Reichsbank.

According to the report, of purchases totaling 4,446 kilograms of gold, 744 kilograms was composed of dental gold, wedding bands and personal jewelry collected by an SS officer named Bruno Melmer.

Accounts bearing Melmer's name appear to indicate victim gold, according to numerous historians.

The panel found a "direct link" between 63 gold bars of victim gold that was smelted by Degussa during the war, and gold Deutsche bought from the Reichsbank, according to news accounts.

In June, US Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat released the second American report on Nazi gold, which said Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank obtained nearly \$1 million in victim gold.

Soon after the Eizenstat report, a class-action suit was filed in New York against those banks, and Friday's report - by five historians from Israel, the US, Britain and Germany - was seen as bolstering that lawsuit.

The panel consisted of Avraham Barkai, Gerald Feldman, Lothar Gall, Harold James and Jonathan Steinberg, the report's main author.

Deutsche Bank formed the panel itself after a German television report in December that the bank had bought Reichsbank gold robbed from Jews. The panel conducted its research using the bank's own microfilm records, the books of the defunct Reichsbank and files from Degussa.

The banks have said that their officials did not know of the gold's origins, but acknowledge the transactions.

"Of course these transactions took place," said Deutsche Bank spokesman Ronald Weichert. "This gold business was normal business during the war."

Another report, by another panel of historians, recently attempted to measure Nazi gold trade with the Swiss National Bank, which was the biggest single buyer of looted Nazi gold.

That panel said it had traced 119.5 kilograms of victim gold that was sent to Switzerland, but in that case, too, there was no evidence that the Swiss knew of the gold's origins.

The Swiss National Bank is also facing a lawsuit in the US. It has been argued that Switzerland helped prolong the war by trading with the Nazis and thus providing Germany with currency to buy war materials.

The German report said that Deutsche Bank earned about \$378,000 from the transactions with the Reichsbank, less than 0.15 percent of the bank's profit.

In a statement issued Friday, the German bank said it "fully acknowledges its moral and ethical responsibility for the darkest chapter of its history." It also said that it "regrets most deeply injustices that occurred.

Copyright Jerusalem Post Pub. Ltd. Aug 2, 1998
