

STANISŁAW LORENTZ

The first day of the trial

17 December 1946

Presiding Judge: – I hereby resume the hearing. I summon Professor Lorentz. You have been called in as an expert witness. Do you have any information on the destruction of Polish culture by the Germans during the occupation?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – Yes, I do.

Presiding Judge: – What are the sources on which you base your claim?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The sources are based on my own observations, as I remained in Warsaw or in its vicinity from the time the Germans entered the city and during the Warsaw Uprising, as well as on documents that were being collected in the Directorate of Civil Resistance [*Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej*], and finally, on works published during and after the war.

Presiding Judge: – I would like you to present a short detailed report.

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The operation for the destruction of cultural goods began when the occupation army entered the city, in October 1939, but it was based on guidelines and documents that had been prepared earlier, from as early as 1933, by specially established research institutes, in particular by the Ost-Institut in Berlin headed by Prof. ... [name missing] with the participation of numerous German professors, as well as by another similar institute in Königsberg. The method for the destruction of Polish culture, consisting in part in its plundering by the Germans, had already been developed during that time before the war.

The operations were conducted by all German bodies, not only by the authorities that were specially created to that end, both by the Cabinet of the General Government [*Regierung des Generalgouvernements*], as it was called, and by the local authorities, including those subordinate to the Warsaw district. The operation was conducted deliberately in all cultural fields: literature, theatre, music, museum collections, libraries, and monuments. It was a part of a broader operation which, since October 1939, the Germans had been calling the

operation against the Polish intelligentsia. It took the following forms: 1. the destruction of persons who created cultural goods, 2. the destruction of cultural institutions and organizations, 3. the destruction of all artistic and cultural production, 4. the destruction of that which no longer belonged to contemporary cultural life, but was a link to the past, which meant the destruction of all cultural and artistic collections. The operation went through various stages. It began with great intensity during the first months of the occupation, when one of the symbolic events was the initiation of the Warsaw castle's destruction – the Warsaw castle being a symbol of Poland's status as a state and its cultural independence, as declared by the German overseers – and ended in the last months of 1944 and January 1945, after the post-Uprising period of the destruction of Warsaw and its cultural goods.

Prosecutor Sawicki: – Concerning the destruction of cultural and artistic goods, were there any activities which were instigated by the cabinet and in which defendant Fischer [Ludwig Fischer – governor of the Warsaw district during the occupation] participated directly, as the prosecution claims? Could you, Director, limit yourself now to the parts for which you have indirect or direct information about defendant Fischer's activity?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The operation for the destruction of cultural goods was conducted via ordinances of the Cabinet of the General Government, allegedly on the orders of the Reich's central authorities, but the initiatives were to some degree launched by the local bodies. That's one thing. Secondly, local bodies carried out the operation. One example would be the destruction of the Warsaw castle. The decision, as the local authorities claimed, had been made in Berlin. It was implied that Hitler himself had taken it. However, the operation for the castle's destruction was carried out not by the central authorities, but by local ones, in particular by the authorities of the Warsaw district. Heidenberg, the head of the construction division in the Warsaw district, directly subject to the governor, was the direct overseer of the Warsaw castle's demolition, which started at the beginning of November 1939. It was he who supervised the works, who oversaw them directly on site, and who appointed German companies for the demolition, it was he who later decided what to do with the construction materials acquired from the castle's demolition. There is no doubt that the ordinance to use those construction materials for the conversion of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers' building into the *Deutsches Haus* [German House, a hotel combined with a casino] lay in the hands of the local authorities. That conversion of this historical Polish building for German purposes, partially germanizing its interior, was also initiated by

the Warsaw district, and not by the central authorities. What is more, one can assume that the local authorities took the initiative in the field of libraries, archives, particularly via the disastrous ordinance concerning the consolidation of the most valuable stocks from all Warsaw libraries in the Kasiński Library [*Biblioteka Kasińskich*]. The decisions were made by Witte, the curator of Warsaw libraries, a district official, and not by the authorities of the General Government. When Warsaw librarians wished to point out during the consolidation that it was extremely dangerous to concentrate, in a single building and in wartime, such invaluable items as all the manuscripts from the Załuski Library [*Biblioteka Załuskich*] – the most valuable collections of manuscripts and early printed books – as well as the engravings collections from the National Library, the University Library, the Rapperswil Library [*Biblioteka Rapperswilska*], and other libraries, they appealed to Abb, who was the director of libraries in the General Government. As it turned out, the decision hadn't been made by Abb, but by Witte. Despite the fact that Abb didn't give the decision, Witte, the Warsaw district official, completed the operation, and as a result, two weeks after the Uprising's failure, the collections were burned in their entirety in an operation conducted by the *Brennkommando* [burning unit]. That happened in mid-October 1944.

Prosecutor Sawicki: – Did the destruction of artworks follow a certain purpose concerning the Polish nation?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – It undoubtedly followed a purpose and was carried out in two stages.

Prosecutor Sawicki: – To what purpose?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The purpose was to destroy Poland's cultural heritage.

Prosecutor Sawicki: – Where was it supposed to lead the Polish nation?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – It was supposed to lead to a decrease in the general level of culture and the loss of the cultural goods on which a new Polish culture could be built after the damages of the war.

Prosecutor Sawicki: – In that case, as a part of the evidentiary hearing, I would like to present a certain German document originating from a direct subordinate of defendant Fischer. The document is meant to confirm the claim that has just been made by the

expert witness. I will read out only several paragraphs: "Propaganda division of the Warsaw district. Line of conduct towards Polish population. It is evident that no German office can promote Polish cultural life in any way. Cultural activity can be allowed to Poles only insofar as it serves primitive, entertainment goals." Further on: "Joint performances of Polish and German artists are forbidden. German actors have no right to perform before Poles. It is equally incompatible with German dignity to have Polish artists socialize with Germans after their performances. Everything that communicates artistic experience is forbidden to Poles. Polish music must be cleansed of marches, national songs and folk songs, as well as all classical works. The musical repertoire of a café needs to be approved. Staging more serious plays, even operas, is forbidden to Poles. Cultural weeklies and films are forbidden to Poles. All steps have been taken so that only light entertainment novels and short novellas are permitted. At the same time, it has been said that all that stimulates the erotic side should be allowed." I don't want to read the relevant paragraph, I will present the entire document to the Court because it is long. It is forbidden to print anything that resembles a worldview, even one's own books, and to let German books to be read. That has a deeper meaning. Atlases and maps should also be unavailable to Poles. I believe that this document is the best self-accusation and confirmation of the claim that we've heard a moment ago from the expert witness. Let me present the document that was presented by the Polish delegation in Nuremberg in accordance with the procedure in force before the Tribunal – it is a transcript from the interrogation of Professor Waclaw Borowy, and a document that was stolen from the *Kreisamt* in Radzyń and sent to London to be published in 1941. I request for this document to be included in the case files and made available to the defense. At the same time, as there are certain official matters planned for 6 o'clock, and the Tribunal has announced that we will be dismissed at 6, we kindly request to be given that possibility.

Presiding Judge: – Has the expert witness anything to add to his opinion? Could you describe in a few words the methods for the destruction of cultural heritage?

Expert Witness Lorenz: – The methods for the destruction of cultural heritage followed two paths. The first path, as I have mentioned, was the destruction of persons creating cultural goods. During the occupation, in Warsaw alone, around two hundred thousand artists from various cultural fields were killed by the occupation authorities. They were either shot down, or sent to camps. Among them, there were many of the most eminent artists in the fields of theatre, literature, the visual arts, and other fields of cultural life.

The second method consisted of shutting down all organizations and institutions, and seizing their property. Those ordinances were implemented with special circulars, and indeed, all institutions and organizations in Warsaw were completely destroyed both in terms of their structure and their property. Furthermore: the destruction of cultural heritage covered, among other things, two thousand five hundred book publications, in particular the works by Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Żeromski, seized in hundreds of thousands of copies and sent for recycling. The operation covered educational libraries as well. During the occupation, 90% of educational libraries' stocks in the Warsaw district were destroyed. The destruction rate was similar for reading halls and private book collections. In the field of archives, due to the archives' deliberate burning after the Uprising, in October and November, and then in December 1944, 4.7 million deeds, old books, and maps from all Warsaw archives were burned. The municipal archive was deliberately burned down in the last days of October 1944, a month after the city surrendered.

The Archive of Modern Records [*Archiwum Akt Nowych*] was burned down on 4 November 1944, deliberately, also after the insurgent activity had ceased. A similar fate awaited a part of the museum collections and almost all private collections. During the entire occupation period, private collections were being destroyed. All collections within the ghetto were destroyed, all collections belonging to people arrested were immediately seized. Later, after the Uprising, the remaining collections were burned. Only a small part could be salvaged. Concerning the institutions, all art schools, both academic and secondary, were closed. All libraries, archives, and museums were closed and remained inaccessible to Poles. Poles couldn't use library collections at all. As for the repressions, they were very wide-reaching in all fields, especially when it came to the creative arts, and the musical arts, which were of special interest to the Germans, in particular to Governor Fischer. Polish artists were forcibly brought to the concerts organized by the governor at the Brühl palace, in the Łazienki park, and in the governor's villa in Konstancin. German officials forcibly engaged eminent Polish artists for the concerts at the *Theater der Stadt Warschau* [Theatre of the Warsaw City]. As a result, many eminent artists were forced to remain in hiding in order to avoid repressions, unless the Germans caught them and sent them to the camps. One of the most well-known examples was that of Umińska [a violinist], who was ordered to perform at the *Theater der Stadt Warschau*. Umińska escaped before the concert and was forced to remain in hiding. There are many more such names that could be cited. All artists were obliged to register at

the *Propaganda-Amt* [Propaganda Office], since otherwise they were not allowed to pursue their profession. One of the conditions for the registration required the registered person to perform the functions mandated by the German authorities, and so possibly serve the propaganda. As a result, many artists didn't register, and so they were not only deprived of the possibility of pursuing their profession, but also exposed to repressions.

All art exhibitions were closed. The building of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts [*Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych*] was converted into the *Haus der Deutschen Kultur* [House of German Culture]. The museum stocks, tossed in winter into open vehicles with no packaging, were transported to warehouses. During the post-Uprising period, the conditions of the surrender were not met. One of these required cultural goods to be secured. To that end, immediately after the surrender, a Polish committee headed by Professor Zachwatowicz was organized, attracting hundreds of volunteers. All of them were deported from Warsaw, some of them to camps. An intervention regarding this matter in the second half of October was answered with the claim that the German authorities had already secured the cultural goods of any value. It was only two weeks later that a group of Polish scholars succeeded in getting a permission to secure cultural goods, but they were immediately told that everything in Warsaw would be burned, and only those works that had any value for German collections could be taken, while the initial condition saying that the collections would remain in Polish territory was not met. If they succeeded in salvaging the remains of the cultural goods, it was only because wartime circumstances and the Germans' retreat made it impossible for them to secure those remains. As for the Germans, they didn't conceal the fact that all buildings in Warsaw were intended to be burned. The operation was being conducted by the *Räumungsstab* [demolition squad], as it was called, which included also the Warsaw district officials who were directly subordinate to the defendant, and therefore the losses during that period incriminate the local administration as well as the army or police authorities.

Presiding Judge: – Does the expert witness know about occurrences in which private persons took exhibits from our museums and collections for private purposes on the orders of defendant Fischer?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – Yes, there was one time when defendant Fischer himself was in the National Museum [*Muzeum Narodowe*] and in my presence chose a gift for one of the German dignitaries who was leaving Warsaw. In several other cases, the district officials,

invoking the governor's decision, came and chose various objects, claiming that they were name-day gifts for local dignitaries, or gifts for dignitaries coming from the Reich. Such events occurred on the premises of the National Museum, but mainly on the premises of the Army Museum [*Muzeum Wojska*].

Presiding Judge: – What part of the collections was plundered in this manner?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – A number of museum and historical items were plundered. The items that passed into private hands have not been found.

Judge Rybczyński: – On whose initiative was the building of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts converted into the *Haus der Deutschen Kultur*?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – On the orders of the Head of the Warsaw district, and it was under the management of the *Abteilung der Propagandaamt* [Department of the Propaganda Office].

Judge Rybczyński: – Was Fischer's order invoked on that occasion?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The governor's order was invoked, designating the Society's building for conversion into the *Haus der Deutschen Kultur*. Moreover, they took a number of items from the National Museum to decorate that house, also invoking the governor's ordinance.

Judge Rybczyński: – Were the exhibits taken to decorate the German House?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – Yes, they were. The items that were taken away included furniture, carpets, and paintings from the National Museum, as well as from the collections of the Royal Castle in Warsaw that had been salvaged by the National Museum's employees in September 1939 and deposited at the museum. Paintings were also taken later on for the German House, for district officials in Konstancin, as well as for a number of other offices and officials' apartments in Warsaw.

Judge Rybczyński: – Have any of the removed items been returned?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – No, almost nothing from that group has been returned. Other items that did not survive included the national collections which were kept at the Royal

Castle and, upon the governor's permission, were privately dismantled by the district officials, Gestapo employees, officials from German institutions. That way, the national art collections in the library wing of the Warsaw castle were completely looted.

Judge Rybczyński: – Were there any interventions, attempts at preventing such a destructive operation, on the part of Polish scholars?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – A direct intervention first took place in the first days of November 1939. The personal intervention reached architect Heidelberg, who directly oversaw the works at the Royal Castle on the district's orders, and who actually presented at the time a written authorization from the governor to oversee the works at the castle. Heidelberg said that no delegations would be received by higher German authorities because the matter had been resolved definitively.

Judge Grudziński: – Could you explain the artworks being sent away from Warsaw?

Expert Witness Lorentz: – The transportation of artworks to the Reich began in the first days of October 1939. For three months and a half, a team of German scholars who had known Poland before the war operated in Warsaw, including Prof. Dagobert Frey from Wrocław. The team was headed by Doctor Müllmann in Kraków, and his brother Józef Müllmann instituted the branch office in Warsaw. That was the first stage of the looting. In this way, all of the Philatelist Museum collections, part of the National Museum and the Army Museum collections, and a number of private collections were sent away. The operation also covered some libraries. For example, this was when King Stanisław August's Cabinet of Prints was taken away from the University Library. The operation, headed by Józef Müllmann, was conducted by municipal library employees and by the district officials assigned to museum matters.

The second period of the great looting was after the Uprising. At the time, the looting was being conducted on the orders of the Cabinet of the General Government. The plunder was executed by police officers headed by Geibel and by the Warsaw district officials.

Only a part of the first batch of the looted collections could be recovered, the rest, as it seems, have to be regarded as lost forever.