



STANISŁAW LORENTZ

On 3 June 1946 in Warsaw, Deputy Prosecutor Zofia Rudziewicz interviewed the person specified below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Stanisław Lorentz
Date of birth	28 April 1879
Names of parents	Karol Ludwik and Maria
Place of residence	Warsaw, aleja 3 Maja 13
Place of birth	Radom
Religious affiliation	Protestant of the Augsburg Confession
Occupation	chief director for museums and for the protection of historical monuments
Relationship to the parties	none
Criminal record	none
Education	assistant professor at the University of Warsaw

Before and during the war I was the director the National Museum [Muzeum Narodowe] and thus, in connection with the position I occupied, I could observe Fischer's attitude towards cultural life and Polish cultural institutions.

This attitude was definitely hostile. He intended to methodically and systematically destroy the Polish cultural heritage. In witness thereof, I present the following facts:

1. Aiming at the destruction of cultural life in Poland, the Germans ordered the closing of all museums as early as in mid-October 1939. This was done by the Gestapo. At the same



time the predatory removal of works of art and antiquities began. After the civil administrative authorities had been constituted, cultural matters were handled by two departments of the district:

a. *Abteilung Wissenschaft und Unterricht*

b. *Propagandaamt*

– both of these were subordinated to Fischer. The administrative authorities did not reverse the regulation of the Gestapo. Museums remained closed; they were not allowed to carry out their statutory tasks, being limited to the role of warehouses, used by various German agencies.

2. The personnel of cultural institutions, in particular museums, was immediately reduced as a result of the district regulations, and later it was reduced further, so that only employees necessary for the supervision and performance of German orders remained.
3. Museums were thrown out of their premises or a part of the premises was taken away for military or civil purposes.

In December 1939 I was notified by the district that the Piłsudski Museum in Warsaw would be kicked out of its premises, and that its collection could be transferred to the National Museum.

I saw that this operation was personally supervised by Fischer, who gave three or four days for the move.

Fischer issued a disposition concerning the evacuation of this museum and stated that we were not allowed to take away a particular part of the [collection], since it should remain for the purposes of [furnishing] German offices. As a result of this regulation, German officers took a part of the collection to their offices, and stole another part away.

In the summer of 1940, the State Archaeological Museum [Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne] was kicked out of the building in the Łazienki Park complex. This happened upon an explicit order from Fischer, who established his residence there. The objects of historical value that used to be in that museum had already been stolen away by a team of two world-famous German professors: Petersen and Paulsen, who wore the Gestapo uniforms and had their offices in aleja Szucha.

In the spring of 1940 a considerable part of the National Museum building was seized to create SS warehouses there; later more and more premises were added to that, also for the purposes of the air forces. In 1940 a considerable part of the premises of the Army Museum [Muzeum Wojska] was seized for the purposes of the SS as well. This was done by the military authorities in consultations with the district authorities or with Leist.

In 1940 the Krasieński Museum [Muzeum Krasieńskich] was kicked out of its own building – it must be pointed out that the Germans divided the collections, in particular manuscripts and books, in such a manner that it was plain that they wanted to facilitate their future removal; they put the most valuable collections, manuscripts and drawings, in the Krasieński Library, in the University Library they stored foreign-language books, and in the National Library [Biblioteka Narodowa] – books in Polish.

4. All cultural associations were immediately dissolved and their assets and collections were largely stolen away. This meant the liquidation of societies whose operations could have helped to save buildings and objects of historical value, such as the Society for the Care of Relicts of the Past [Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości], the Society of History Lovers [Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii], and many others.
5. As early as in the autumn of 1939, the extermination of Polish cultural employees began to be carried out in various ways. The former director of the National Museum and the director of the Army Museum, Gembarzewski, was arrested, a man over sixty years of age, who shortly after his release died as a result of the conditions in prison. No reasons for the arrest were ever provided, which means that the arrest was of terrorist character. The National Museum superintendent F. Richling was arrested twice – the first time because allegedly he had not been acting obsequiously enough towards a Gestapo officer in the museum, and the second time because his voice in a telephone receiver had not sounded polite enough during a conversation with officers of the German municipal board; as a result of his two periods of imprisonment, Richling contracted a heart disease and died.

The National Museum warden, Doctor Wieczorkiewicz, was tortured and sent to Auschwitz (where he died); the warden of the Graphic Arts Department, Doctor Stanisława Lewicka, was sent to Ravensbrück.



The 70-year-old president of the Zachęta [Gallery], Brzeziński M.Eng., was arrested, and was being forced to tell where Matejko's painting *The Battle of Grunwald* [*Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*] had been concealed. He, however, did not say a word.

Many other employees of museums and historical monument protection agencies were arrested.

All of these arrests were carried out by the Gestapo, that is, by forces statutorily reporting to the district governor.

All of these operations were in violation of the provisions of the Hague Convention, which stipulates that museums and cultural institutions should preserve all their rights during occupation.

Fischer was also responsible for the plundering of the Polish cultural heritage. Looting commenced right after the German troops entered Warsaw. From the very moment the civil administration was established, district officials took part in this, even Fischer himself. Most often various collections from various museums were brought to the National Museum, which was treated as a reservoir where precious works of art were collected for the purposes of their future removal.

One German, Doctor Joseph Mühlman, was particularly active during the Warsaw looting operation; he reported to his brother, Kai Mühlman, who was Frank's secretary of state, but Joseph Mühlman consulted with Fischer regarding his actions.

I know this since he often said that he would not give a disposition until he had consulted Fischer.

Mühlman would often come to loot in the company of district officials. Thus, there was permanent cooperation between him and the district authorities. As a result of this operation, a great portion of the most valuable collections of the museums was removed from Warsaw to Germany.

The National Museum, the Army Museum, the State Archaeological Museum, the Krasiński Museum, the Philatelic Museum [Museum Filatelistyczne], the collections of the State Mint [Mennica Państwowa], the Belweder Museum [muzeum belwederskie], the collections of the Royal Castle [Zamek Królewski], of the Łazienki Park complex, of



the Presidium of the Council of Ministers [Prezydium Rady Ministrów] and many others were plundered.

Apart from Mühlman, various German offices committed acts of looting with the knowledge and consent of Fischer.

Working in the National Museum, I witnessed police, administrative, and military officers coming to the museum to select antiques, relying on Fischer's or Leist's written order.

Such orders were also often conveyed over the telephone. Such items as paintings, furniture, ceramics, fabrics, etc., were taken. They were used to decorate offices and private flats of German officials, or to be used by the Gestapo and the army.

Fischer took part in the looting personally as well; he would come to the National Museum to select items for himself or as presents for his friends.

In my presence in 1942, if I remember the date correctly, Fischer selected from the National Museum a gift for some dignitary, who was to leave Warsaw.

If owners of private collections were arrested, their entire assets were confiscated, taken over by the Gestapo and then often sold in Warsaw itself.

As one example of this I can indicate the confiscation of the excellent collection of Stanisław Dangel, after its owner had been murdered, and the plunder in Andrzej Rotwand's villa, whose splendid collection was stolen by German officials residing there.

A special operation consisted in the plunder of artistic assets belonging to persons of Mosaic religious affiliation or of Jewish descent, which began already in 1939. It was carried out by the police, as well as by military and civil clerks reporting to Fischer.

In 1940, upon the regulation of the *Transferstelle*, which was an office answering directly to Fischer, the collections of the Jewish Museum [Muzeum Żydowskie] were destroyed. Joseph Mühlman, as usual in agreement with the district authorities, brought a part of the Jewish collections to the National Museum, from where he was distributing and sending items to various German officials and German offices. This is how I know about the entire operation firsthand.

The destruction of the Royal Castle in Warsaw was also Fischer's doing.



To clarify the case, I attach my memorandum submitted to the Department of Recovery and Compensation of the Ministry of Culture and Arts [Wydział Rewindykacji i Odszkodowań Ministerstwa Kultury i Sztuki]. I wish to additionally emphasize the issue of the suspect's guilt. The demolition of the Castle began in 1939 and was carried out as a result of Fischer's direct instruction, on whose behalf the demolition works were managed by the architect Heidelberg, *Bauwat* in the Warsaw district.

Joseph Mühlman handled the removal of the works of art from the Castle. He acted in agreement with Fischer. He told me personally that he had gone to the Brühl Palace [Pałac Brühla], to arrange with Fischer what was to be removed and what would be taken by Fischer and his officers.

Fischer permitted the district and German municipal board officials to privately select whatever they wanted from the collection that had not been removed by Mühlman. Priceless collections were thus barbarically stolen and destroyed, since the officials, if they did not like something, would throw it to the ground and trample on it.

A few of my colleagues and I witnessed this, since at that time we were in the Castle continuously to rescue whatever could be rescued.

Fischer is responsible for the destruction of other historical buildings as well.

The Polish municipal board applied with the district authorities and with Leist, to have the historical buildings that had been damaged during the 1939 siege secured, but the answer was negative; neither architects and renovators nor any societies were allowed to save historical buildings.

On the other hand, certain Polish historical buildings were defaced, damaged, or desecrated as a result of their adaptation for German purposes. For example the Łazienki Palace was converted, upon Fischer's order, into his summer residence, the building of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers was converted, upon the initiative of the suspect, into the *Deutsche Haus*, the Belvedere Palace became Frank's residence, and Zachęta became the *Haus der deutschen Kultur*.

Polish emblems on historical buildings were ordered by the defendant to be destroyed already in autumn of 1939.

Buildings of historical value were desecrated by the manner in which they were used, for example the Copper-Roof Palace [Pałac Pod Blachą] was occupied by the gendarmerie. Works on the alteration of Polish buildings to fit German purposes were carried out upon Fischer's initiative, and were performed mainly by the district authorities.

Fischer is also responsible for the destruction of Warsaw after the uprising. According to the terms and conditions of the surrender agreement, cultural property was to be secured with the participation of the Polish party.

Podwiński (presently, as I believe, staying in Łódź, and employed at "Społem") was to be the head of the committee for the evacuation of the collections. The evacuation clauses were not respected by the Germans, however.

Since during the uprising, up to 16 October 1944, I was continuously in the building of the National Museum, I had the opportunity to ascertain that the Germans had evacuated a part of the collections to the Reich, and then they started to burn the city. Since all of Podwiński's efforts to have the surrender agreement respected regarding cultural property failed, together with Polish scholars I turned to Machnicki and Wachowik – the presidents of the Main Welfare Council [Rada Główna Opiekuńcza]. They arranged an audience for me with Fischer and Geibel, at that time the head of the Gestapo.

This audience took place on 1 November 1944 in the *Räumungsstab* in Wolska Street. Apart from Fischer, Geibel, Wachowiak, Machnicki, myself and Professor Zachwatowicz, it was attended by German administrative and police officers. I stated that we had in Warsaw priceless treasures of global culture, whose destruction would reverberate throughout the entire world. I demanded that all items of cultural value be secured and not be destroyed by burning, or – if it was impossible to secure them onsite due to military operations – I asked permission for the Polish team to evacuate and secure everything in Częstochowa and Piotrków.

Initially Fischer refused. Then – hearing that we were talking of items of great value – he consulted with Geibel and allowed a team of Polish scholars to engage in the removal of items of cultural and historical value from Warsaw. However, contrary to my demands, these items were to be evacuated to Germany and secured there. The authorities allowed evacuation only in freight wagons, whereby they gave us two weeks to complete the entire operation.



I got the impression that Fischer was driven by that greed which was characteristic of the Germans, and not by the thought of rescuing any cultural heritage.

I was forced to accept the conditions offered by Fischer and Geibel. Together with other scholars we created five groups, who day after day went to Warsaw to save whatever could be saved. Each of us received a pass and had to report at the *Räumungsstab* at Wolska Street every day. We got a gendarmerie escort, who accompanied us all the time. I managed to bribe the gendarmes, so I was able to move around the entire city. I went to Warsaw every day during the period from 2 November 1944 until 14 January 1945 and I saw how the city was being systematically destroyed by the Germans.

Fischer is responsible for this, since this operation was carried out by the *Räumungsstab* officers, who reported to him.

The operation was carried out methodically and divided between Fischer's and Geibel's officers. I saw the *Räumungsstab* officers taking machines, furniture, food supplies, valuables, linens, and so on from houses, and then the military under Geibel's command would burn the plundered districts. A greater part of Warsaw was plundered and burnt down this way after the uprising.

I tried to rescue whatever cultural property I could by illegally smuggling away a part of the collection of the National Museum, private manuscripts, works of art, etc. I was however able to rescue but a small fraction.

The greatest part was evacuated by Fischer and his subordinate, the head of the *Räumungsstab*, Doctor Rodik, to Germany, from where these items returned damaged and incomplete.

As to archives, a testimony may be given by Witold Suchodolski, the head director of the archives in the Ministry of Education.

As to destruction of libraries, a testimony may be given by Doctor Józef Grycz, the director of libraries in the Ministry of Education.