

Pociecha, Władysław

The Report of a Librarian. An Autobiography from the Period of the War (1 September 1939 - 18 January 1945)

Organon 25, 187-203

1995

Artykuł umieszczony jest w kolekcji cyfrowej Bazhum, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych tworzonej przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego.

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie ze środków specjalnych MNiSW dzięki Wydziałowi Historycznemu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

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Władysław Pocięcha (Poland)

THE REPORT OF A LIBRARIAN AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
FROM THE PERIOD OF THE WAR
(1 September 1939 – 18 January 1945)

Top secret

At the moment when mobilization was declared I stayed in Cracow where I was performing my duties at the Jagellonian Library. As a lieutenant of the levy in mass I expected to be called up to the military service. Since until the 4th of September I had not received any call-up and the Germans were coming upon, I decided to leave Cracow and in this way make myself available at any time for the Polish military forces. On that very day I started to walk towards Lublin, fully convinced that in Lublin there would be a reorganization of the scattered detachments and an incorporation into active army of the officers who had not been called up until then. My itinerary covered Mogiła, Koszyce, Skąpa and Nowy Korczyn. At the latter place I got the news that on the 6th of September the Germans occupied Busko and that there was an imminent danger for all of us to get cut off at any moment. So, I got across to the right bank of the Vistula river in the direction of Dąbrowa, and then I went north towards Szczuczyn, wherefrom I had to turn back in the direction of Mielec once again because Szczuczyn was in danger. Together with the retreating troops of the Polish military forces I made the next part of my journey through Kolbuszowa, Sokołów, Rudniki, Ulanów, Biłgoraj and Zwierzyniec. On the 14th of September, in a forest near Zamość we were attacked by the German advance parties. In view of the imminent danger we headed for Grabówka, Radoszyce, Turobin and Wysokie. On further way, outside the village of Giełczewo, we got to the front line, and we were captured by German patrols (Sunday, 17 September). Due to the bad state of my health and a strong fever (en route I had been wounded in the leg), the German lieutenant allowed me to stay in a peasant's house

at Stary Maciejów. To go back to Cracow on foot was something I could not even dream of (the wound in the leg festered causing fever), and there was no horse and cart willing to take an ill man. It was by chance only that on the 21st of September a peasant returning by horse and cart to his house agreed to take me with him to his dwelling place near Opatów at the price of 50 zlotys. And so, through Sławce, Studzianki, Józefów and Tarłów, on the 23rd of September I arrived to Dębowa Wola (that was the place where the peasant came from). On the same day still, my farmer gave me on extra charge the horses and the cart, due to which I was able to reach the city of Opatów. At Opatów an owner of a transport enterprise agreed to take me along with other people onto a platform going to Cracow (of course, I had to pay him a due sum of money). We went in the direction of Kielce, Jędrzejów and Miechów. On Wednesday, 27 September, at 1.30 p.m. I arrived to Cracow, exhausted by the fever so completely that only after two weeks I was able to get up and walk using a stick. In spite of this, on the 14th of October I reported myself at the Jagellonian Library to resume my duties. I was encharged with a task to guard and protect the collection from a theft and robbery done by the invader. I transferred to my house a precious set of the wood-engraver's boards (16th to 19th century), kept so far in the Printing House of the Jagellonian Library, protecting them in this way from falling into the hands of the German "Treuhänder". A few years later, when I was threatened with eviction, I deposited that set in a Technical-Industrial Museum in custody of Director Witkiewicz. When I was invited to participation in a "famous" lecture on organization of the university educational system, held by the German authorities on the 6th of November, my reaction was to start an agitation among my friends and colleagues, calling them to a boycott of this villainous comedy; I believed that to participate of one's own free will in a lecture delivered by the Nazi bandits (with the tragedy of Warsaw living so fresh in our memories!) humiliated in an obvious way our national pride. The same day in the afternoon Gestapo put the seals on the Library, but we were allowed to go home. In this way I escaped the fate of so many of the participants of this infamous meeting, who were taken to Oranienburg. In the period of 6 November 1939 to 1 July 1940 I remained at home as an unemployed, doing my scientific studies and collecting a benefit of 15 zlotys per month from the Department of Social Welfare. My living conditions were at that time very poor. Sustaining a numerous family consisting of 6 persons, I made a living of the sale of valuable objects (to mention, in particularly, a few gold chains, a gold lady's watch, and a few gold rings which belonged to my wife). Twice, due to the efforts of Director Kuntze, I was given a benefit in the amount of 800 and 400 zlotys.

In June 1940, together with Director Kuntze, we were asked by Director Gustav Abb, sent from Berlin as a general manager of all the libraries in Poland, if we were willing to arrange a transfer of the collection of the

Jagellonian Library from St. Anna's Street to a new building in the Mickiewicz avenue. Abb had warned us that there was a project to distribute the collection of the Jagellonian Library sending it to various libraries in Germany, and to place in the building of the Library, after proper adjustments, a broadcasting studio – the fact which he wanted to avoid and which made him put forward a proposal to make of the Jagellonian Library a new German Staatsbibliothek. After a debate with Director Kuntze we admitted the necessity of accepting Abb's proposal, to avoid a robbery of the collection and to prevent total destruction of the new library building. On the 1st of July, together with Director Kuntze, we assumed our duties and we established a list of the employees, Poles only, who in most cases had already been employed by the Jagellonian Library and by the Library of the Academy of Sciences. I was paid the prewar wages in an amount of 450 zlotys monthly, which was sufficient for a most modest living only. I did not avail myself of any type of the social or government-sponsored help, neither did I receive any parcels from abroad, which helped many of my colleagues in their maintenance. In spite of very hard conditions I did not neglect my duties and responsibilities in and for the Library. I prepared the respective plans and layouts, and I supervised the distribution and arrangement in the new building of the book collections from the Jagellonian Library, from the Academy of Sciences, from Academy of Mining, from the Academy of Fine Arts, etc. Then, with Abb's permission or without it, we started to transfer to the Library the collections of books from other university departments, from public institutions (e.g. the Central Pedagogical Library), and even from private libraries, especially from those which were owned by the university professors not present at that time in Poland; we also moved the impressions of the scientific societies, e.g. of the Society of the Lovers of Cracow (History and Monuments).

After consultations with my father-in-law I transferred from the Printing House of the University to the Library the remaining part of publications belonging to the Academy of Sciences and to the Scientific Society in Lvov. After half a year of the strenuous work we amassed in the Jagellonian Library almost all book collections kept in Cracow and not destroyed so far. We also saved all the published works of the Academy of Sciences. Under my guidance they were arranged properly, placed on the shelves in an underground hall of the Jagellonian Library, and protected from robbery by timbering with a padlocked entrance. During the transfer of books from the Academy to a new building of the Jagellonian Library I made a suggestion addressed to the Managing Board of the Academy that it might have been useful to deposit a part of the book collection (especially the university handbooks) in one of the storehouses in Cracow. In this way the Academy would have an opportunity to exercise free control over those books, using them either as a subvention for the scientific workers living in extreme

poverty, or as means to help the Academy students working for the secret University. My proposal was contradicted most firmly by General Secretary of the Academy of Sciences Professor Kowalski, and therefore I had to give up this idea, to avoid an accusation that I was acting from personal motives. Later on, it often happened so that professors and students were coming to me with a request to supply them with the necessary handbooks. In this matter I applied to Rector Szafer, and I suggested that in view of the difficulties made by the General Secretary, he should appoint one of the members of the Academy and authorize him to dispose freely of the publications deposited at our Library and let them be used by the secret University. Rector Szafer did authorize me to give out the books against receipt on his own responsibility, but I was not willing to take upon myself this task, not to give the impression that by insisting so stubbornly on putting the publications in practical use I was self-interested only. In fact it was really regrettable that the students working at the risk of their lives for the secret University could not get any sort of assistance from our most important scientific centre, while the Germans were given gratis the publications of the Academy, dispatched in quite a considerable amount to various scientific institutions in Germany, or even to be used by private persons, which was not opposed by the General Secretary who, at his own request, was performing in the Library a modest function of the junior library assistant.

When the Library had already been transferred to its new building, in December 1940 Abb asked me if, during a period of two weeks, I could arrange a main reading-room in the great hall of the Library on the first floor, and make it ready for the ceremonial opening of the Library. Leaving to my discretion the choice of works and their layout, he made one reservation only, namely that the Polish books should not be too conspicuous and that attention should be focussed mainly on the German scientific literature. I drew his attention to the fact that our former reading-room was of a general scientific nature and that it possessed books written in various languages. I also made it clear that it would be advisable to continue this trend now, and availing myself of this opportunity, I hinted that I could establish on the upper floor of the reading-room a separate Polish division which I would arrange myself already after the opening ceremony. Abb agreed, and thanks to that not only did I not remove even one single Polish item from the old stock kept in the reading-room, but I extended the Polish division to a size that had never been seen before. In the reading-room I placed, in particular, all the periodicals published by scientific societies, a large number of the Polish journals (among others, publications of the Baltic Institute and of the Silesian Institute, prohibited by the Germans), all sections of the Polish history grouped according to relevant problems (the history of law, the history of the Church, the history of art, of culture and education, the history of military science, regional history, etc.). In my efforts aiming

at the establishment of a Polish division I had in view the creation of a scientific system which might be used by the secret University and by those of the Polish scientists who had no right to use the Jagellonian Library. Moreover, in the reading-room I also arranged a separate department, headed under a very innocent name of "Ostfragen", where I collected the most important bibliography on our problems of Silesia, Pomerania and Slav territories in general. I expected it to serve as a basis for investigations carried out at that time very intensely by the secret Polish Government and regarding the possibility of a reivindication of our Western territories and East Prusia. Of course, I also took into consideration the question of the Eastern territories, and I devoted to that problem a separate sector, hidden in the sub-group called "Polen". Here, apart from the basic bibliography, I collected, first of all, a large set of the source materials, mostly of the Russian and Ukrainian origin, referring to the history of our Eastern territories and their relations with Poland until the most modern times.

Since I was appointed chief of the reading-room, as soon as I had it fully arranged, I started to look after the missing items. The enormous losses that we had suffered in our book stock due to a systematic destruction of the Polish books done by the German authorities, brought to my mind an idea that pretending we are making up for the books missing in the reading-room, we might be able to purchase not only these Polish works that were really missing (e.g. lent before the war and not returned) but also the second and third copies of the basic works, to make them available to other libraries and scientific centres which suffered losses during the war. Availing myself of the opportunity that emerged during Abb's absence, I ordered in the bookshops in Cracow and Warsaw quite a considerable number of these publications, paying for them the total of a few thousand zlotys. When Abb got the list of the newly purchased items, he was obviously stricken by a large number of the Polish books acquired for the Library, and since that time he forbade us to place orders without his approval. In the period when my possibilities of ordering the works for our Library were practically unlimited, I tried to get the items lacking in our book collection. I took into account all fields of knowledge, though my special consideration were the most neglected domains of mathematics, natural sciences, technics and medicine. Though Abb wanted us to buy only the "neuere deutsche Literatur", I kept ordering the works written in all the European languages, if only they could be purchased in the German bookshops. Of the scientific literature written in German I was taking into account only the most important and most fundamental publications of an international significance, like e.g. a handbook of physics including a few dozen of volumes, a handbook of neurology of the same size, a handbook of mental diseases, etc. In my task of supplementing the book collection, I was guided only by the needs of the Polish science, and to achieve this goal I established a contact with the

Polish professors from various universities. I was inviting them to conferences held at the Library and inquired what should be purchased in the first place from the branch of knowledge they represented. For the Publisher of the Polish Biographic Dictionary I bought the following biographic dictionaries: Danish, Norwegian, French, Italian, Belgian, Austrian, German, etc. I developed further the section of encyclopaedia, dictionaries, books on history and studies of religion (though Abb wanted it to be removed completely from the reading-room). Since, later on, Abb did not allow us to place any orders without his consent, I had to "fight" with him for every new item. For example, he crossed out from my list of acquisitions the newest, voluminous history of Spain by A. Ballesteros y Beretta: "Historia de España y su influencia en la historia universal", claiming that for the Staatsbibliothek it would be quite enough to have only the history of Spain written in German. So, I had to prove to him that the work was on the list of an exemplary catalogue of the books available in the reading-room of the University Library at Göttingen, and therefore our Library should possess it as well. Finally, he agreed and accepted my order. In this way I acquired for the Jagellonian Library a number of the valuable works, to mention only a complete set of *Archivio Storico Italiano* from 1842 to 1942, the work which none of the libraries in Poland possessed.

With time I exercised such an influence on Abb that he did not dare to contradict openly my orders and inspect my activities; he even gave me charge over the entire section of scientific information and propaganda exhibitions. Of course, this put me in a very awkward position. Fortunately, I always managed to get out of it safely, owing my success mainly to the fact that I was dealing with a new class of people, namely the Nazi "scientists" whose knowledge of the science was but very poor only. When I was expected to give information on some "tricky" problems which, when revealed, might cause harm to Poland or serve the Germans as a tool for adverse propaganda, I used two methods: either I provided them with materials supporting Poland and its theses, and hence inconsistent with what they wanted to get, or I was hiding the books which might have been used as a source of the information disadvantageous to us, placing them on the list of "vermisst" items, when the Library was not under our control. For example, when Abb wanted to boast before a dignitary from the Ministry of Education, sent from Berlin for inspection, about the Code of Baltazar Behem as an illustrious specimen of German culture in the territories of Poland, I proved to that gentlemen that the miniature paintings from that Code were a work of art made by Polish nobleman Szeliga-Żernicki, the municipal painter of miniatures, which was testified by the coat-of-arms Szeliga, placed on the front page, and by the initials J. Ż. under some of the miniatures. At the same time, I quoted the relevant information recorded in register books of the city of Cracow, where Szeliga-Żernicki was mentioned as a municipal

painter of miniatures at the close of the 15th century. Knowing in advance who and in what matter would come and ask me questions, I always had my answers ready and carefully selected according to the problem which was discussed. Of course, I had to act very prudently, not to raise any suspicions and let myself get involved into a trouble. For instance, I can relate the following incident. A high dignitary from Gestapo came to us with a demand to get him the works dealing with a history of the Polish political parties (socialist, communist, national democracy, etc.) and a list of their members and most active leaders; in this situation I hid all the reference materials (which, by the way, I had previously collected carefully myself in a reference reading-room), and I placed them as "vermisst", additionally stating that undoubtedly the workers from the Ostinstitut must have taken them away during the first year of occupation, which sounded quite probable. In this way, many times I could serve the Polish cause, not allowing the Germans to get hold of the materials which might have been used for an anti-Polish propaganda or for the persecution of Poles. There is no need to add here that this was the task particularly difficult and dangerous, requiring a lot of self-control and tact. Of an invaluable help was always in this matter the late Janina Kowatschówna, my assistant, an eminent librarian and a very broad-minded person, devoted with all her heart to the Polish cause. I shall never forget the moment when with a gentle smile on her face she was calling for my help when an impudent Nazi from SS was shaking his fists at her because he was not given the works he demanded.

A yet more difficult task was the organization of exhibitions. Abb, of course, wanted those exhibitions to perform the function of a strictly pro-German propaganda. How much trouble did it cost me to convince him that, being a great centre of the Polish intellectual culture, the Jagellonian Library did not possess works of this type, and that it would be much more advisable to show rather what did it credit, namely the mediaeval manuscript collection, and some precious albums. An exhibition of this type was arranged by me for the ceremonial opening of the Jagellonian Library as a Staatsbibliothek celebrated by Frank. I organized the exhibition with ulterior motives of revealing a strong influence of Romanesque art on the Polish culture, and therefore in the section of prints and manuscripts I put emphasis, first of all, on the relics of Romanesque origin. Obviously, the gloriously illuminated manuscripts roused admiration among the German dignitaries visiting the exhibition, and occasionally even the words of tribute paid to the Polish culture, which made the visitors forget the true purpose of the exhibition. Abb was complimented on this, while I was strengthening my position and gaining full liberty for my further activities which had as their main aim to paralyze all German propaganda in the Library. At the same time I took the liberty to do the things which seemed almost impossible in view of the maddening terror of Nazis reigning at that time in the territories of Poland.

And it happened so that the Jagellonian Library became probably the only centre in Poland where the anti-German propaganda was tolerated officially. For the reception of Hitler's nephew Förster, Gauleiter of Gdańsk, I organized – with full impudence, I must say, the Gdańsk exhibition which, without the slightest alteration, might equally well serve as a Polish propaganda exhibition for the “Day of the Polish Pomerania”. At the exhibition I showed, among others, a Latin brochure owned by a senator of Gdańsk from the 18th century, where it was clearly stated that Gdańsk always belonged to Poland and never to Germany (it was even emphasized in the title), not to mention various “Shields of Sobieski” and the like Polish stuff. For an exhibition organized on occasion of the Nazi training workshops held for the teachers from secondary schools, and prepared by me from the point of view of a development in the art of illustrating books and title pages, I compiled such reference materials (for a better contrast I confronted beautiful English and French illustrations with the worst possible German stuff, among others, with the disgusting Germania in a memorial book of the conquest of Paris in 1871) that the leader of training exclaimed to me: “Oh, how did the Germans lose their sense of aesthetics in an epoch of their military splendour!” And immediately she tried to convince me that she was enchanted by the English culture and knew England very well, to prove which she boasted in conversation with me of her knowledge of English.

In a similar way I solved the difficult problem of organizing an exhibition related with Frank's inauguration of the German Scientific Society in Cracow. As a subject of the exhibition Abb suggested the development of the intellectual life in Cracow over centuries but only in terms of an influence of the German culture on Poland. Indeed not add here that my position might have been critical if I did not consent to set my hand to this anti-Polish propaganda. Of course, I might have diplomatically fallen suddenly ill, but then the exhibition would be arranged by someone else, and I had every reason to fear that the new organizer would comply with the German wishes. That is why I preferred to choose the more difficult way rather and risk the organization of an exhibition according to the spirit of a Polish propaganda. Having thought this problem over, I adopted as a leitmotiv of the exhibition all this which might prove a preponderance of the Polish intellectual culture in Eastern and Central Europe over the German one, and its enormous power of assimilation in respect to the German element. So, starting with an erection diploma of the Casimir University, later Jagellonian University, I depicted the part which our University had played in the intellectual movement in Western Europe, its relations with Sorbonne in Paris, its participation in oecumenical council at Basle (with special emphasis put on the person of Paweł Włodkowic and his polemics with Knights of the Teutonic Order). Then, to accentuate an obvious contrast between the great and universal ideas emanating from the Cracow University and propagating to the West

and the propaganda of the German "Kulturträger" forcing their way to Poland in search of money, in a mocking way I disclosed the activities of "The Literary Society at the Vistula", founded by Konrad Celtis, giving as an example of the activities of this prototype of the later Nazis (most unfortunately still reckoned even by the Polish scientists among the "full of merit" pioneers of humanism in Poland) his libels on Poland and a letter written by Hasilina, a townswoman from Cracow, addressed to Celtis (in both Czech and German) in which she had poked fun at the German chauvinist and outlined him as an arrant rascal. I grouped the exhibits from the 16th century around the central personage of Copernicus, placing his scientific works and the related Polish dissertations, while of the German dissertations I chose only the most recent work by Professor Smauch, opened on this page where he admitted that the family nest of Copernicus in Silesia as well as the name of the Polish astronomer were undoubtedly of a Slav origin. In continuation I presented a struggle of the University against the tide of Germanism in the 19th century, putting forward the personage of Dietl whom I characterized as a great Polish patriot, expelled for his Polish nationalism from the University by the Austrian Government. I did it on purpose because the German propaganda often used the name of Dietl to show what effect the German culture had on Poland. So, when before opening of the exhibition it had been inspected by Dr. Eichholz, Head of the Faculty of Art and Science, he asked Abb with surprise: "Is it possible? Was Dietl a Polish patriot?" "Alas!" answered him Abb. "It can't be helped for quite often it happened so that the Germans who settled in Poland got under an influence of the Polish culture and turned out to be the Polish chauvinists." In the same way I illustrated the activities of the Cracow Scientific Society with its chairman professor Majer, and of the Academy of Fine Arts along with its founder Wojciech Stattler, a friend of Słowacki. A separate show-case was devoted to the achievements of the Polish Academy of Sciences, disclosing its most beautiful publications and emphasizing the versality of its interests (Sanskrit, texts written in the Romany and African languages, etc.). Proper inscriptions and statistical data emphasized in an obvious way the important part that was played by the Academy of Sciences as a most eminent scientific centre in Eastern Europe. The impact of the exposition arranged by me could be detected in Frank's speech in which he had to admit that the German element did succumb sometimes to an influence of the Polish culture, and therefore the main objective of the new Scientific Society in Cracow should be to consolidate the German scientific culture in a "German Cracow".

Paralyzing German propaganda right on the premises of the Jagellonian Library, I tried at the same time to render the Library's collection available to the wide circles of the Polish society, although the conditions under which I was working were extremely difficult, because one was allowed to use the

books only by the permission of German authorities (the warrants were issued by Abb or by his deputy), while an access to the Library was, by order of a delegate from the Ministry of Education in Berlin, guarded by the worst possible individuals from the, so called, Sonderdienst. Here, I have to mention one fact, namely that on the second floor of the Library building there was a seat of the "Ministry of Education" established in Generalgouvernement, and so we were literally inside the "lion's cave". Moreover, as everybody knows, there was an order prohibiting Poles to carry out their scientific activities which, as Abb had warned us, obviously referred also to the personnel of the Jagellonian Library. To check if those regulations were duly obeyed, Abb had his own spies, among others, a Brzóska – the librarian from Berlin. The spies were hanging around us like our own shadows, watching in an almost imperceptible way all our actions. And yet, with a bit of goodwill, the impossible could be made possible. Our Library became a centre of the Polish scientific and pedagogical activities and a seat of the clandestine patriotic movement.

In March 1941, at the time of the deepest general dismay, felt especially by the circles of our intelligence, the Polish authorities entrusted me with management of department of culture, science and art in the district of Cracow. Although I did not feel competent enough to take upon myself such responsibility, I thought that it was my duty as a citizen to accept the task and regard it as a foremost post on the front of the fight with Germans. Among various duties, very unpleasant to me, I also controlled the conduct and attitude of the staff of university teachers towards the German occupant and, acting in consultation with Rector Szafer, I tried to persuade the weaker individuals and restrain them from making the mistakes for which they might be suffering very seriously later on. In some exceptional cases only I was compelled to prosecute an action. I cannot relate here in more details my activities in this particular sphere; I only wish to emphasize one fact, namely that when, due to the pressure exerted by us, in 1942 the secret University was started at last, I was in permanent contact with its Technical Director Professor Małeckı. The students who attended the secret lectures contacted me through delegates appointed by the respective teams. In this way the secret lending library was functioning, serving both the University and the Polish scientific workers. To encourage to work and raise the spirits of various pessimists and those who lost their hope, I arranged for them a most convenient procedure for using our collection, including old prints and manuscripts. And to tell the truth, let it be said openly that my endeavours bore some very promising fruits. Even the most fearful ones, seeing my peace of mind and self-confidence, were plucking up their courage; they felt in the Library like in the old good Polish times, and even started to be "capricious". Sometimes I had in the Reading-Room up to 70% of the "illegal" readers whom, no matter what their age and position were, I had to lead by the

hand like children, instruct carefully what and how they should answer when enquired by the German officials, and to take care of them like a mother. For myself I chose a defensive position on the upper floor in the Main Reading-Room where every day I stayed from 8.00 or 7.30 in the morning until 6.00 in the afternoon without any lunch break, watching over the "herd of my sheep". We extended the scope of activities of the secret lending library so much that we were even bringing, under the false German names and at the Germans' charge, the scientific books from foreign libraries to be used by the Polish scientists, and the orders were signed by Abb himself! The most insubordinate "sheep" I seated by my side on the upper floor, to protect them from falling recklessly into the jaws of a wolf. For example, one of such readers was Professor Konopczyński. In spite of my instructions he felt in the Library like in his own house or in a reading-room for professors in the old times, which once almost brought us to a catastrophe. When professor Konopczyński, surrounded by a heap of books and papers and in deshabelle, was working by my side on the upper floor, suddenly appeared like the ghost of Banko, treading so softly that I was not able to see him on time, the famous Brzóska, and with a scowl on his face, pointing to Konopczyński, he asked me: "Who is he?" I answered him very quietly, not interrupting for a moment writing of my "Bona": "Professor Konopczyński." And Brzóska, spreading his hands: "And what is he doing here?" I turned slightly towards him, and breaking into a laugh I said: "And how on earth can I know what my readers are reading? Surely Professor Konopczyński goes deep into the heraldry" (behind his back there was a bookcase with the Polish heraldry). My self-confidence confounded Brzóska so much that he did not dare to ask Konopczyński in my presence to produce his warrant with permission to use the Library. It was like incessant dancing among the swords. In this tension of nerves and will I had been working for over four years! I saw many times that in this everyday struggle against the death and for life the decisive factor was the power of will and character; and good luck – of course! I shall not describe here hundreds of different situations full of danger in which I have found myself because of the functions performed. To give just one example, I am going to relate the incident which happened to me during Förster's visit. It was, as far as I can remember now, on Wednesday, and for that day I engaged the man who was supplying the secret press to our Library collection completed, at first, by the late lamented archivist from the Record Office of the city of Cracow Dr. Niwiński, the example of a quiet heroic worker devoted to the Polish cause during the war, and then collected for the Jagellonian Library by me. Förster's visit came upon us so unexpectedly that I had no time to warn the man not to come on that day to the Library. The main Reading-Room, in which I was just arranging an exhibition about Gdańsk, was separated from outside by the tables behind which were sitting the men from Gestapo armed

to the teeth. At that very moment the janitor announces a young man who wants to see me. I come out of the Reading-Room, and I can see a young student, very pale, standing with a parcel in his hand and attracting the attention of all the gentlemen from Gestapo. I break into a loud laugh (that was my usual trick), and extending my arm to get hold of the parcel above the heads of the sitting Gestapo men I exclaim loudly: "Splendid! You have come just in time!" Of course, "Herr Leiter des Lesesaales" who just a moment ago has been talking to the highest dignitaries commands respect among the gentlemen from Gestapo... and so cannot arouse suspicions. But if I did not manage to get there in time, and the frightened young man was cross-examined by Gestapo, the parcel with the secret press would fall into their hands, while I would have to bid "good-bye" to this world in the Montelupich prison.

One of my functions as a head of the department of culture, science and art was also a custody of the archives and museum collections. Of an invaluable assistance in the section of archives was the quiet but full of heroic devotion worker Dr. Marian Friedberg, to whom I entrusted that department, excluding from all possible cooperation Dr. Budka who was compromising himself at every step in his behaviour governed by a deadly fear of the Germans. For the custody of sacral monuments I appointed Rev. Professor Kruszyński. We were recording the monuments of art in Poland robbed by the Germans' the exact files with detailed descriptions and photographs were kept in the lower rooms of the Library building, in the section of Sonderdienst. The files included thousands of exhibits from all parts of Poland. Through my agent I managed to get only a list of the most important items. I asked my superior authorities to let me photograph on a film reel the entire collection (I had no financial means at my disposal). Unfortunately, in the head office they were so slow in making decisions that finally the Germans took away from Poland the whole files. On the other hand, we registered the archives belonging to the German authorities and German offices in my district, and acting in consultation with the Chief of the Security Service I prepared a plan of getting them under my control the moment the Germans would be retreating from Poland. Most unfortunately, however, at that decisive moment both our security service and the government failed us. In spite of this, I managed to steal by myself and under the German's eyes quite a considerable and most important part of the archives of the Central Statistical Office from the times of the Nazi occupation. In summer 1944, when the Germans were seized with panics because of the Soviet army approaching Cracow, the whole collection of the archives of the Statistical Office was heaped up in the Main Reading-Room of the Jagellonian Library, and the clerks from the Office were ordered to destroy some of the files and prepare the other for a dispatch to Germany. The chief of that Office, an

eminent member of the Nazi party, forbade me under personal responsibility to let anybody enter the Main Reading-Room, and he instructed his personnel to see to it that none of the acts got out of the Library. In spite of this, due to Mr Rog's assistance (the Polish Chief of the Office), I managed to take out the most important files and transfer them to a store-room of the Library. I had to carry myself with lightning speed the heavy brief-cases, various instruments and machines, because the few Library janitors whom I had called to help me, under no circumstances wanted to give me a hand for fear of getting under arrest. In May 1945 I handed those files over to the Main Statistical Office in Warsaw. When in summer 1944 Abb asked me to pack up the whole stock of the Main-Reading-Room, with intention of taking it away to Germany, I tried at all costs to prevent it. Yet, my acts of sabotage suddenly met with the resistance impossible to overcome. The janitors did not want to obey my orders in fear of the Germans, and they were working so eagerly that the major part of the new publications and a great part of the stock kept in the Reading-Room had already been packed when I conceived the idea of hiding the remaining empty boxes in a basement and telling Abb that there were no more boxes left for packing. But the janitors did not want to execute that order either, and only when I told them that later on they would be free to keep those boxes to themselves, they lowered them in hoists to the basement. I also managed to persuade the janitors that they could take out without any fear the books from the boxes which had already been packed, place them on shelves and put into the boxes again, that is, to do the same work all the time without proceeding any further, which should pass unnoticed by Abb who would see them occupied all the time in packing of the books. Due to this, until the moment when Abb escaped from Cracow only a part of the book stock from the Main Reading-Room had been packed in the boxes. At the last moment I wanted to save this part, too. I tried to persuade Abb that if the books were transported during the chaos which prevailed at the end of July 1944 due to a mass escape of the Germans from Cracow, they might get either lost or destroyed. That was my last conversations with Abb. Abb was sticking to his idea, and finally he told me: "After all, I am the one responsible for all this!" To this I answered: "Of course, you are responsible to your superiors, but I am responsible for it to Poland." "Poland exists no longer" – told me straight to my face the impudent German, turning crimson with anger. That was too much even for me, and although I usually tried to compose myself, I shouted breaking into an affected laugh: "Is it possible?! You have been for so many years in Poland and you know nothing about her existence! Maybe you don't know either about the existence of the Polish Government in London and about the Polish army fighting on all the fronts?" Listening to that Abb was quite stupefied, and after a while with a sneer,

still blushing, he stammered: "Well, so far we are the masters here, and I could as well get you under arrest immediately for what I have been told!" "Oh, I know it only too well" – I retorted – "that this is no problem for you!" Then Abb, not wanting to go too far, changed his tone all of a sudden, and assuring me that he would like us to part as friends, he started telling me about his various services rendered to the Library and about his last talk with Frank. But I got so irritated that the next day I did not come to the Library, and on that very day – during my absence – Abb ordered to take the packed boxes away to Pfeil's estate at Adelsdorf near Goldberg (10 km East of Legnica). Before his departure, on the 3rd of August, Abb dismissed the whole Library personnel, ordered the Library to be closed, and authorized Director Kuntze, me and secretary Marczyński to take care of the Library collection. Because Director Kuntze soon fell ill, it devolved upon me to watch the Library collection with a few janitors, under very unpleasant conditions. There were hordes of SS-men sweeping over the Library, near my office placed themselves the staff of "raiders" (Auffangstelle), near the entrance to the Library the Nazi guards were standing, and in the basement they kept people arrested during the street raids. To make things even worse, Eichholz who was staying on the second floor with his secretary, rumoured to have got indignant at the news of Abb's lawless flight, let us understand that Abb's orders were no longer valid and that there was no place for us in the Library. Finally, we managed to persuade him somehow that the Library collection could not be left unguarded, and he gave us new warrants, and even authorized us to open partly the Library. We were also allowed to re-employ a part of the old personnel, not bound to work in the construction of entrenchments. It was permitted to return books only, and only those who had special pass issued by Eichholz could use the Library. Of course, I did not stop even for a moment lending of books to the Polish scientific workers and students. I only warned them to have all the warrants in order because the guards from the Nazi party were examining them upon entering the Library. As a reason for coming to the Library everybody had to give the return of books, while the books that had been borrowed were taken out under coats, blouses, etc. Large batches of books I was taking home myself and distributing them among the readers. Because I got inside information that the Germans had placed mines under the main state buildings and, among others, also under the Jagellonian Library, to blow them out in case they should leave Cracow, I applied to the responsible authorities with demand to get the case examined by specialists and make the wires cut off, if necessary. Alas, my warnings were ignored and although, as it turned out later, no mines had been placed under the Library itself because after examinations the German specialists had observed that the underground passages were too narrow to place mines there,

various other buildings did have some mines laid underneath, and our "security" service did nothing to prevent what might have been of catastrophic consequences.

Under such working conditions I lived to see the Bolsheviks attack Cracow. In mid-January, when Cracow was heavily bombed, nobody came to work in the Library. Eichholz left on Wednesday, 17 January. In the Library building remained only mechanic Rybicki and janitor Knet. Left without any assistance, I was taking care of the building safety quite alone. If I am not mistaken, only janitor Sowa reported himself of his own will after he had been misinformed that the Library was on fire. There were few drunk Polish janitors from Eichholz's office prowling round the Library building and preparing themselves for robbery of the German supply of provisions stored in the Library. Feeling that the mischief was brewing, I ordered them to get expelled from the building, then I asked Knet and Rybicki to barricade the door, and I forbade under personal responsibility to take anything away. In this way I saved a large supply of provisions, which were later protected by secretary Marczyński and given to the University for distribution among its workers. In that period of a shameful robbery of Cracow done by the vulgar mob under the leadership of the profiteers from the times of the war, intelligence included, we had to literally repulse the attacks on the Library, into which the mob tried to break by means of ladders, when the original attempts to knock out the entrance door had failed. On the 20th of January I posted up on the door of the Library an announcement written in Polish and in Russian prohibiting anyone, except the Library personnel, to enter the Library building. By intervention of Rector Lehr-Spławiński some Soviet soldiers were posted at the entrance gate, and only then the first clerks and some of the janitors started to drop in. Finally, we saved from robbery the whole installation left by the Germans, the stock of medicines (we gave them to the management of the Polish hospitals), precious furniture and carpets (in majority taken over by the University). Then, Director Kuntze ordered to prepare an inventory of all the movables.

Throughout the whole period of the war I tried to raise through appropriate propaganda the spirits in the wide circles of our intelligence who so easily fell depressed. To achieve this goal, I used various means which cannot be discussed here in detail. Let me mention only that, among others, I used a prophecy of St Othilia from the 8th century. The text of this prophecy, published in Paris in 1915 with comments by the French scientists (the copy owned by the Academy of Sciences) was spreading in the duplicates which I prepared myself far beyond Cracow, reaching even Lvov (I sent it to Ossolineum). The prophecy, depicting in an astonishing way the present war and its duration (basing on the prophecy Director Tor appointed as early as in March 1944 the date of 6 June as

a beginning of the invasion, mentioned very distinctly in the prophecy and called "tempus invasionis"), had foreseen the total military defeat of Germany and liberation of the nations, victims to that aggression of bandits. At that time I did not neglect my scientific activities either. Between July 1941 and January 1945 I wrote four comprehensive volumes of a monograph entitled "Queen Bona", and I started volume V. I completed my work for the Eastern Institute, dealing with the national problems on eastern frontier. I prepared a monograph of Primate Łaski for the Art Publishing House, etc. I participated in the clandestine meetings of members of the Historical Commission of the Polish Academy of Sciences and in the meetings of the Polish Historical Society, organized by a group of the assistant professors of history attached to the Jagellonian University, who were meeting in private flats (Assist. Prof. Piwarski, Assist. Prof. Barycz, and Director Friedberg) to deliver the scientific papers and carry out discussions. The minutes of those meetings were prepared by Assist. Prof. Barycz. I performed my duties of a chief of the department of culture, science and art quite gratuitously, not receiving any governmental subventions. By intervention of Professor Zygmunt Wojciechowski (without my knowledge!) I was given from time to time from the funds which Rector Szafer had at his disposal an advance pay for my work on Bona. So, I usually lived under very lamentable financial conditions (my children were walking barefoot to the school), and I earned my living selling my furniture (a piano, an escritoire, etc.), porcelain, pictures (I sold the last work of my father made just before his death), clothes, dresses, etc. Apart from this, my income mainly consisted in very modest advance money paid by the Atlas Library (Director Piątek) on account of the fee for "Bona", which the Library bought from me. In the epoch of the raging profiteering, exploitation, thefts, swindles, and the decay of any principles, I wanted to give, in my own modest capacity, an example of the voluntary and disinterested sacrifice for our national cause. Throughout the war period I always declared myself against the organization of fairs, attending the clubs and cinemas, buying the German "reptile" press (especially the ill-famed "Goniec Krakowski"). I hid my eldest son from Baudienst and digging of the entrenchments, but I sent him to the front-line near Myślenice to fight against the German soldiers. I thought that to cooperate with Germans in any way meant the betrayal of the national cause. I did not belong to any political parties because I did not consider my work to be a stepping-stone for the future "career", but I regarded it as a fulfilment of one's common duty as a citizen to Poland. Therefore I tried to keep in the background as much as possible which, on the other hand, made the performance of my tasks much easier. I kept in my house the Poles actively engaged in political work who were persecuted by the Germans; for those who were searched by Gestapo I forged the false

Kennkartes and places of employment. In spite of so many tragic experiences and getting familiar, due to my activities, with an enormous misery of the disgraced human souls, I did not loose my faith in the restoration of our nation and in a better future. This inherent optimism was my power, while the only solace in the hard life was my scientific work. A bouquet of flowers handed to my by the scholars on my namesday was for me the best reward for all the hardships borne.